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OTHERNESS AND BELONGING IN "DEMOCRATIC EMPIRES": THE SYRIAN DIASPORA AND TRANSATLANTIC DISCOURSES OF IDENTITY, 1890s-1930s

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OTHERNESS AND BELONGING IN "DEMOCRATIC EMPIRES":
THE SYRIAN DIASPORA AND TRANSATLANTIC
DISCOURSES OF IDENTITY, 1890s-1930s

by

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ABSTRACT

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DISCOURSES OF IDENTITY, 1890s-1930s

Bryan A. Garrett, PhD

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2016

Supervising Professor: Kenyon Zimmer

This dissertation examines the arguments that Syrians in diaspora at the turn of the twentieth century used in constructing their group identity. It traces the transnational and transimperial discourses that centered on the pack-peddler mythology, or rather, it traces the diaspora intelligentsia's narrative for the business diaspora. Their narrative framed the business elites as the quintessence of upward mobility in the modern world. The historiography of this subfield has been separated into two camps: one that takes for granted the assimilation of the business class into Western societies, and the other that offers a more critical rendering of Syrian migrant entrepreneurship. This dissertation bridges the gap between the two by offering a cultural study of the meaning of wealth and mobility.

This study takes into account a broad array of analytical lenses through which to view the Syrian diaspora: migration studies, business history, the history of science and technology, medicine, disability studies, race and whiteness studies, while maintaining a critical eye toward cultural symbolism and meaning across time and space. It takes into account how the transnational movement of peoples, goods, and ideas, clashed with the emergence of nations-states and the continually shifting national identities underpinning them. The elites of the Syrian migrant community maintained vigilance in self-portrayal as they crisscrossed national borders and confronted agents of state institutions. They formulated various proto-national identities for the entire diasporic community that centered on the agenda of the intelligentsia, and fitted other members of the diaspora into that mold. In the process, Syrian migrants would play different imperial powers and nation-states against one another to maintain their group's social status and business connections. Moreover, they simultaneously committed to redefining the boundaries of the region that increasingly became to be seen as the "Middle East." By adopting modes of modern capitalism, rendering free-trade practices as intrinsically Syrian, and then exporting those practices to the imperial periphery in areas that included Madeira and the Philippines, Syrians attempted to "assimilate" to modernity. Syrian migrants, however, became enmeshed in a state of in-betweenness both in their adopted receiving societies and in their sending societies in the Eastern Mediterranean.

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INTRODUCTION

From the 1890s to the 1930s, Syrians migrated in increasing numbers to a variety of societies across the globe. Syrian migrants shuttled between colonial domains, imperial metropoles, and across nation-states enmeshed within this largely Anglophone dominated world-system of finance and white supremacist hierarchy of race politics and eugenics. Syrians confronted varying spaces of social and cultural interaction within each place they sojourned. They faced social obstructions and opportunities that were often more complex and ambiguous than the rigid racial categories under which state and imperial agents classified them.

The topic has a rich historiographical base, and benefits from an ever-expanding literature of critical inquiry. Most recently, Stacy Fahrenthold has shown how transnational discourses within the various migrant communities helped to establish a broader national identity and the foundations of the eventual nation-states in the Middle East.[1] Looking specifically into the Syrian American case, Sarah Gualtieri has extensively detailed the Syrian confrontation with whiteness and the benefits of racial belonging in the United States.[2] With a look into the long-

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[1] Stacy D. Fahrenthold, "Making Nations in the Mahjar: Syrian and Lebanese Long-Distance Nationalisms in New York City, São Paulo, and Buenos Aires, 1913-1929" (Northwestern University, 2014).

[2] Sarah Gualtieri, "Becoming 'White': Race, Religion and the Foundations of the Syrian/Lebanese Ethnicity in the United States," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 20, no. 4 (2001): 29–58; Sarah M. A. Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

term migrations back and forth from east to west, Akram Khater has explored how Lebanese migrants confronted issues of gender and class in new contexts and redefined these categories in the process.[3]

This dissertation has a deceptively humble aim. The overall goal is to deconstruct the dominant identity narrative produced by the Syrian American community between the 1910s and 1930s. Syrian Americans claimed Western categories of race, civilization, gender, and class in defining their migrant community. Syrians framed their "race" as a masculine bunch who came from an advanced civilization, were racially desirable within the Western racial taxonomy, and were steadfastly committed to making profits in the global system of finance that they helped to create. They framed themselves as the model migrant from a society deserving of recognition. These culturally constructed norms overlapped in a number of curious and interesting ways. As Gail Bederman has shown for broader American society, each of these claims was contested and conflicted, and equally so in the case of Syrians. That was especially the case for Syrians in American society.[4]

In other words, the Syrian migrant intelligentsia who created these categories framed a context where not all migrants were created equal. They

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[3] Akram Fouad Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

[4] Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 6–8.

excluded laborers, women, those experiencing disabilities, and other related ethnic groups from the tale of Syrianness. This narrative of belonging gained prominence beginning in the 1920s with publications by the pre-eminent scholar of Syria, Philip Hitti.[5] Later, Habib Katibah,[6] another scholar of Syrian extraction writing on the Syrian American community, carried the narrative torch into the 1930s. The story resurfaced in the 1970s and 1980s in historical literature on the Syrian American community. In the context of growing hostility to the Arab communities in the United States, Philip and Joseph Kayal,[7] Adele Younis,[8] and Alixa Naff[9] adopted the narratives popularized by Hitti and Katibah in the previous generation. Arab American studies have since adopted the premise that assimilation was an assured

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[5] See Philip Khuri Hitti, *The Syrians in America* (New York: G. H. Doran, 1924); Philip K. Hitti, "Syria's Place in the History of the World," *The Syrian World* 1, no. 1 (July 1926): 6–9; Philip Khuri Hitti, *Islam and the West: A Historical Cultural Survey* (Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand, 1962); Philip Khuri Hitti, *A Short History of Lebanon* (London: Macmillan, 1965); Philip Khuri Hitti, *Lebanon in History: From the Earliest Times to the Present* (London; New York: Macmillan, 1967).

[6] See Habib I. Katibah, "Syria for the Syrians: Under the Guardianship of the United States," *The Syrian National Bulletin* 1, no. 9 (February 18, 1919): n.p.; Habib I. Katibah, "Palestine of Religious Romance and Historic Realism," *The Syrian World* VI (December 1931): 9; Habib I. Katibah, "Syrian Americans," in *Our Racial and National Minorities: Their History, Contributions, and Present Problems*, ed. Francis J. Brown and Joseph S. Rouček (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1937), 426–35.

[7] Philip M. Kayal and Joseph M. Kayal, *The Syrian-Lebanese in America: A Study in Religion and Assimilation* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1975).

[8] Adele L. Younis, *The Coming of the Arabic-Speaking People to the United States*, ed. Philip M. Kayal (Staten Island, NY: Center for Immigration Studies, 1995).

[9] Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985).

fact, for obvious political and social benefits.[10] This dissertation also seeks to bridge the gap between the most recent historiography and those written before the 1990s. In that vein, what follows must critically deconstruct and reformulate the Syrian narratives of belonging and otherness.

The first step in breaking down the façade of the Syrian mythology requires proving or disproving its validity through documentary evidence. Which elements of the claim hold water, and which migrant stories did the narrative exclude or brush over? Next, the aim is to discover how the Syrian American intelligentsia filtered their claims through the prevailing discourses of their receiving society in the attempt to hybridize a narrative of belonging within a number of overlapping national and imperial contexts. The majority of the evidence considered comes from U.S. sources, though other national and imperial contexts are considered. This dissertation then takes this narrative and analyzes it in comparative context. How did the Syrian American narrative influence other communities throughout the diaspora? How have those external to the Syrian community in turn influenced the narrative? Did the narrative have equal gravity in the various nodes throughout the *mahjar* (diaspora, or migration)? Finally, the last section is devoted to uncovering the counter narratives that the dominant narrative obfuscates or fails to recognize

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[10] See, for instance, Sameer Y. Abraham and Nabeel Abraham, *Arabs in the New World: Studies on Arab-American Communities* (Wayne State University Press, 1983); Nabeel Abraham and Andrew Shryock, eds., *Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 2000).

for myriad reasons. Not all Syrian migrants fit into the tidy box of desirability that the community's intelligentsia spent so much effort in formulating. Who were these people? What can their experiences tell us about the broader Syrian diaspora or about the societies that they inhabited?

Methodology and Historiography

This dissertation borrows methodologies and approaches from a number of overlapping subfields and historiographical traditions. A global approach to history helps in seeking to understand how the integration of the eastern Mediterranean region, with a particular emphasis on Ottoman Syria, fit into the modern global economy. Such a foundation is necessary to grasp the routes through which Syrian migrants moved, and the motivations they may have had to do so. Economic and cultural macro-structures help in de-emphasizing the nation-state as the prime mover of history. Some of the first attempts to frame history on a large geographical and spatial scale came from the *Annales* school of thought and Fernand Braudel, who characterized the Mediterranean as a cohesive system where economics played a more critical role than the political motivations of the collection of independent nation-states and kingdoms surrounding the region. In Braudel's estimation, the Mediterranean system laid the foundations for, and even, drove the emergence of

an Atlantic system.[11] Immanuel Wallerstein would eventually extrapolate Braudel's Mediterranean model out to a global scale. He concluded that the world economic system and globalization were driving one another, tracing each through a unified economic system, or his world-systems theory.[12] Andre Gunder Frank, likewise, saw earlier examples for global economic systems when studying the Asian-driven economies antedating the emergence of the modern, European-dominant economic system.[13] Situating Syria and Syrians requires some understanding of how the region and its peoples functioned within the global economic framework.

Albert Hourani and Nadim Shehadi's edited volume on the Lebanese diaspora represents a noble and worthwhile attempt to account for the global dimensions of the, specifically, Lebanese diaspora.[14] However, it suffers from two shortcomings. First, framing the diaspora as "Lebanese" gives the work an overarching teleological character. Each contribution is framed from the perspective of peoples either bearing Lebanese passports or having come from

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[11] Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

[12] Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974).

[13] Andre Gunder Frank, *Reorient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1998).

[14] Albert Hourani and Nadim Shehadi, eds., *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration* (London: Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1992).

regions situated in present-day Lebanon. The perspective does not account for the social, economic, and political connections between the regions that eventually became Lebanon, a nation-state formed from the ashes of just one region within Ottoman Syria. These studies do little to account for the rest of the major cities and regions that once made up the rest of Ottoman Syria (or greater Syria). These areas were not as separate as the lines drawn across maps suggest that they were or are today. Second, even though the contributors convincingly covered numerous regions of the diaspora across the globe, the authors situate each study within the frame of nation-states, as either sending or receiving society. Collectively these works do little to frame the nation-state critically as a set of unfolding processes and dialogues – whether social, political, legal, racial, or any other frame of reference – rather than as an unchanging and timeless given. The collection is a step toward understanding the global foundations of the diaspora, but more work remains for historians to undertake.

Unified economic systems meant that there were structures in place, or in the process of formation, with the capacity for people to move as fluidly as money or goods. As Christiane Harzig, Dirk Hoerder, and Donna Gabaccia claimed in *What is Migration History?*, human movement has been the norm rather than the exception.[15] This dissertation constitutes a contribution to migration studies as a

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[15] Christiane Harzig, Dirk Hoerder, and Donna R. Gabaccia, *What Is Migration History?* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity, 2009).

field. It follows in line with such works as those by Jose Moya, whose expansive and erudite study situated migrants as individuals as well as cohorts, maneuvering within structures they helped create in the process.[16] Migration historians have shown that human movement was not a simple process. Mark Wyman detailed migration as not simply a mono-directional path from one place to another but a frequently circuitous voyage of perpetual returns.[17] Historians have framed Syrian migrants as a specifically business oriented movement. Allen Chun was correct in pointing out the problems in Weber's definition of migrant groups defined as "pariah capitalists."[18] Syrian businessmen, like Jewish and Chinese entrepreneurial migrants, were not simply peripheral to the growth of Western capitalism; rather they were an intrinsic and inextricable component making up the global economy. These "migrant middlemen"[19] fostered linkages within among the fellow members of the mahjar, or diaspora, and beyond.

Diaspora as a concept has become a contentious term in the recent historiographical debates. Is diaspora simply a product of the Jewish past? Can historians apply the term as a marker for identity to other national or racial groups?

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[16] Jose C. Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[17] Mark Wyman, *Round-Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880-1930* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993).

[18] Allen J. Chun, "Pariah Capitalism and the Overseas Chinese of Southeast Asia: Problems in the Definition of the Problem," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 12, no. 2 (April 1989): 233–56.

[19] Walter P. Zenner, "Middleman Minorities in the Syrian Mosaic: Trade, Conflict, and Image Management," *Sociological Perspectives* 30, no. 4 (October 1987): 400–421.

Can they use it as a unit of systematic analysis? Do members of a diaspora necessarily have to have experienced a period of persecution or exclusion in order to qualify under the umbrella term? Historians have used the concept to define a number of large migrant movements beyond the Jewish diaspora. Donna Gabaccia has shown how diasporas are complex sets of connections that, even when appearing as a unified whole from the perspective of the nation-state, must account for different migration movements during separate eras.[20] Robin Cohen has formulated a typology for diaspora as a unit of analysis, making the category accessible as a tool for inquiry over an adopted means to identity.[21] Stéphane Dufoix extended Cohen's typologies into a number of diasporic models with particular attention to specific qualities that each diaspora exhibited.[22] However, Rogers Brubaker criticized these attempts to broaden the usage of the term. He has made the argument that the analytical expansion of the methodology attached to diaspora has stretched the term beyond any stable meaning, making it essentially useless in critical study.[23] Diaspora proved to be, both as a unit of analysis and as a category of practice, a contested notion of identity – identity being another term

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[20] Donna R. Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000).

[21] Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2001).

[22] Stéphane Dufoix, *Les diasporas* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2003).

[23] Rogers Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 1–19.

Brubaker would similarly challenge as being too broad.[24] The tensions surrounding the venture to define diaspora as an academic term were equally contentious within the Syrian diasporic community. In the Syrian case, the migrant intelligentsia framed the parameters of the broader diaspora community in language that closely reflected their own celebrated values. In the process, they simply forgot to mention, or more likely actively chose to neglect, the elements within the diaspora they believed undermined their overarching diasporic narrative. This study maintains that the mahjar, as a system of self-understanding for Syrian migrants, played a critical role in how the diaspora defined itself, and as a result, tried to define a Syrian nation in the making.

This dissertation also borrows from postcolonial studies in its approach to the concepts of "belonging" and "otherness." Frantz Fanon examined the phenomenology of race and class, and concluded that these categories of subjugation dissolved into obscurity when extricated from colonial context. The colonial system represented the edifice of power that sought to keep the categories of race and class intact through governance and other systems of order.[25] Edward Said, likewise, has shown how the Western authority over the "Orient" developed

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[24] Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" *Theory and Society* 29 (February 2000): 1–47.

[25] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967); Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (Grove Press, 1994).

through an intricate system of imposed authorship. Scholars, artists, novelists, and political leaders have built structural echo chambers reverberating their own sense of expertise, and ownership of the other, regurgitating the discourses of power back to one another in the process. Even the footnote at the end of this sentence signifies the possibility of lapsing into the above-mentioned colonial mindset if left to stray too far from intense critical scrutiny.[26] In a related fashion, whiteness studies have attempted to contextualize the system of racial supremacy from the vantage of the oppressor. The field has a long heritage, dating back to W.E.B. DuBois. Recent authors, like David Roediger, have framed whiteness as a process, with a particular emphasis on migrant groups seeking incorporation into the white race in the United States. Whiteness was a socially constructed and historically expanding racial category.[27] Over time, ethnicities that were thought to be beyond the white race eventually also integrated into it. Thomas Guglielmo, contrarily, argued that broader, international systems of race made European migrant groups "white before arrival."[28] Gualtieri's look at the Syrian confrontation with the benefits and limitations of whiteness in the U.S. complicates the issue of whiteness. Syrians moved between identifying as either white or Arab depending on the social benefits

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[26] Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

[27] David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

[28] Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

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of the adopted identity, in a process Gayatri Spivak defined as "strategic essentialism."[29] That is, migrant groups could adopt and change their sense of identity whenever they saw benefits in the maneuvering.

This dissertation contains a section on disability as well. What disability history shows us is how societies have historically framed whom they considered normal and whom they excluded as not. As a field of study, it critically deconstructs categories of normality and the processes of exclusion that resulted from these fabricated hierarchies. Douglas Baynton has shown how medical professionals and politicians have used the language of disability throughout the American past as a means to justify and enforce inequality.[30] As Susan Burch and Michael Rembis stated so eloquently, "Disability is ubiquitous, yet it is also irreducible. Lived experiences of disability defy universalized or essentialized interpretations."[31] In short, the experience of disability changed from one location to another and from one era to the next. Sara Scalenghe has considered Burch and Rembis's call in her

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[29] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 3; see also Mary C Waters, *Ethnic Options : Choosing Identities in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

[30] Douglas C. Baynton, *Defectives in the Land: Disability and Immigration in the Age of Eugenics* (Chicago and London: University Of Chicago Press, 2016); Douglas C Baynton, "Defectives in the Land: Disability and American Immigration Policy, 1882-1924," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 24, no. 3 (2005): 31–44.

[31] Susan Burch and Michael Rembis, "Re-Membering the Past: Reflections on Disability History," in *Disability Histories*, ed. Susan Burch and Michael Rembis (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 1.

much needed critical analysis of disability in the Arab world.[32] However, what happens when one society imposes those categories of normality and exclusion upon another? Colonialism proved to be a powerful tool in projecting disability onto the cultural other. This study aims to provide another look into how disability developed in the Middle East, specifically in the interstices of East and West. Moreover, disabilities studies have adopted Kimberlé Crenshaw's methodological consideration of intersectionality, a similar project shared within histoire croisée.[33] Intersectionality helps fulfill the need to expand critically the academic "holy trinity" of race, gender, and class to account for disability as well, in the endeavor to understand how societal construction of one of the above categories both informs and reflects the others. Khater has already given an in-depth look into how migrants from Lebanon challenged traditional notions of class and gender when women entered the work force and chose to migrate. This dissertation aims to expand disability studies in the context of Syrian American migrations, a movement of both peoples and ideas.

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[32] Sara Scalenghe, "Being Different: Intersexuality, Blindness, Deafness, and Madness in Ottoman Syria" (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2006); Sara Scalenghe, *Disability in the Ottoman Arab World, 1500-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[33] Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989, 139–67; Baynton, "Defectives in the Land"; Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity," *History and Theory* 45, no. 1 (February 2006): 30–50.

We must also take into account the issue of assimilation as an imposed marker of the normal, much like ableness. Models of assimilation have gone out of fashion as a unit of analysis within academia. Traditional models of assimilation from American historiography fit migrants into mono-directional schema. From Thomas Jefferson to Ralph Waldo Emerson, early American thinkers conceived of a racial amalgamation paradigm for the United States. All migrants eventually moved toward greater inclusion until they shed the skin of their cultural heritage and emerged full-fledged Americans. In 1950 still, Chicago School sociologist Robert Park retained elements of this pervasive American ideology when suggesting that migrants would eventually and inevitably assimilate to an American racial mainstream. Long gone are the Chicago School facsimiles that modeled assimilation. However, models that are more recent have acquired greater nuance in determining how migrant groups situate themselves within society. For instance, Richard Alba and Victor Nee have accounted for the phenomenon of groups situating themselves between the mainstream society and other peripheral groups.[34] While they may always feel to be in a state of in-betweeness, they may also have the ability to situate themselves closer to the mainstream or the subculture depending on context. Ironically, assimilation as a social model, and the practitioners of that model, have themselves moved outside the mainstream of

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[34] Richard D. Alba and Victor G. Nee, *Remaking The American Mainstream: Assimilation And Contemporary Immigration* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

academic thought. That does not necessarily mean that the idea of assimilation as a category of practice is absent of any merit. One need only look at the talking heads and politicians on the television discussing issues of illegal migration to witness the staying power of such a concept in the popular imagination. Assimilation proved to be an issue for receiving societies as much as it was for migrant groups seeking acceptance within those societies. For the Syrian case, assimilation proved to be a real state that they believed they could very much achieve if only they framed themselves in the appropriate cultural language.

Part of that language centered on the issue of class. As E. P. Thompson defined it, "Class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs."[35] Thompson's notion of class encapsulates the spirit of the Syrian identity narrative. It was decisively based in a self-expression of class, and was an essential component in the process of convincing Americans that Syrians belonged in U.S. society. Syrian migrants attempted to use class to their advantage in other sending societies as well, with greater or lesser success depending on the context. In order to claim class as a component of belonging, specifically in the U.S. case, Syrians had to persuade the general population that they were the very

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[35] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963), 9.

manifestation of the story of upward mobility. Arriving in the U.S. as poor migrants, pouring out of the dank steamships' steerage, they claimed to settle quickly into the American archetype. Hard at work and committed to amassing small fortunes, many Syrian Americans would in fact become some of New York City's most successful businessmen.

Notions of race and class also informed the Syrian process of defining nation in the diaspora. The Syrian case was an instance of a group defining itself across various national boundaries. Any study of the phenomenon must also take into account the transnational approach to history. Transnational history, similar to global history, informs us that nation-states did not develop in a vacuum, and that we must consider each within the context of other nation-states. Moreover, transnational history implores us to move beyond framing history within the hermetically sealed histories of nation-states. As Ian Tyrrell proclaimed, "the nation itself is produced transnationally."[36] Thomas Bender added that in the context of "globalization, multiculturalism, and diasporas, clearly our experience does not match … nationalist assumptions … To go beyond the nation is not necessarily to abandon it but to historicize and clarify its meaning."[37] Transnational histories not only attempt to move beyond the nation-state as the container of history, but also

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[36] Ian R Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation : United States History in Global Perspective Since 1789* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 3.

[37] Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 4.

seek to contextualize the nation-state as a process of history. As Fahrenthold has suggested, the process of nation building did not naturally occur within the territories that would eventually make up the nation-state of Syria and Lebanon. Rather, Syrian and Lebanese migrants contributed to making the *mashriq* (homeland) in the mahjar (diaspora, or migration).[38]

Another point to keep in mind is that in addition to all of the schools of historical thought above, a study of the Syrian mahjar must account for the various migrant movements and attempts at identity formations within a number of distinct yet overlapping imperial contexts. Syrian migrants settled and sojourned in a number of empires and republics across the globe. Wherever they went, however, the formal and informal structures of empire awaited them or followed them. Ann Laura Stoler has worked extensively on detailing how the rule of empires emanated from indoctrinating imperial subjects in the modes of imperial authority, including racialized, gendered, and class-based systems of authority. Empires like other structured forms of authority and force socialized and categorized peoples with categories of inclusion and exclusion.[39] However, empires also represented systems of economic function as well. Syrians confronted imperial boundaries in both the

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[38] Fahrenthold, "Making Nations in the Mahjar: Syrian and Lebanese Long-Distance Nationalisms in New York City, São Paulo, and Buenos Aires, 1913-1929."

[39] See Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997); Ann Laura Stoler, *Haunted by Empire : Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

mahjar and the mashriq. The United States treated Syrians differently when they

resided in the metropole as opposed to those operating in the imperial periphery.

John Darwin has attempted to outline the political economy of empire, defining the

"British World-System"[40] of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as an economic

structure dominated by political outreach. Essentially, it is another word for

informal empire, which largely coincided with the emergence of the modern global

economy. This historiographical tradition connects again to the model of the

modern global economy according to Wallerstein. While the above is in no way a

complete consideration of each of these respective fields, this brief recounting of

methodology and approaches should give the reader a better indication of the

challenges in bringing Syrian migration studies into broader academic

consideration.

Structure and Outline

In broad terms, the following sections follow the suggestions outlined by

Harzig, Hoerder, and Gabaccia in their proposed "systems approach" to migration

history. The three sections broadly map according to a macro, meso, microscale set

of analyses. These broad generalizations should serve as signposts for the reader.

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[40] John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830-1970* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

However, each section and its component chapters also rely on analysis that maneuvers between the global, national, and local.

Section I situates the eastern Mediterranean within the macro-economic structures of the modern global economy. Integration proceeded over the course of centuries. The interconnections between European and greater Syria proceeded, in fits and starts, from the sixteenth century into the twentieth. By the nineteenth century, the two regions approached a high degree of economic and political integration. French and English industries purchased large amounts of raw materials from Syria for their factories in Europe, or relocated branch factories to the eastern Mediterranean. The French and English empires also negotiated financial and political concessions with the Ottoman Porte in Istanbul. They also extended protections to various minority groups within the region, and not just European merchants or settlers.

Chapter 1 gives a brief recounting on how the Eastern Mediterranean provinces of the Ottoman Empire began to integrate into the larger economic processes shaping the emerging global economy. Capital flows and the shipments of finished goods and raw materials opened new trade routes that allowed people to move more freely between Ottoman Syria and the rest of the world. Advances in transportation technology increased the speed of movement and decreased the time necessary in moving between destinations. Moreover, maritime transport became cheaper, presenting less of an economic hardship on migrants, which in turn

allowed them to move more freely between societies situated across the globe. In short, integration into the modern global economy laid the foundations for the Syrian diaspora.

Chapter 2 focuses on the Syrian migration to the United States. The U.S. node of the Syrian migrant constellation concentrated on the point of entry at Manhattan Island, New York. Many of the migrants remained near the processing center at Castle Garden, and later set up peddling operations in the region. They marked the First Ward neighborhood of "Little Syria" in Manhattan. Hemmed in by Washington Street on the west, Rector Street to the north, Battery Place to the south, and Broadway on the east, the neighborhood housed commercial storefronts, warehouses, import-export exchanges, and even their own financial institutions, extending credit l to the community's startup enterprises. Little Syria was a self-sufficient migrant colony in the heart of the nation's economic capital. Syrian successes in the city helped to give rise to the pack-peddler mythology among the community's intelligentsia. The narrative portrayed the migrant experience as the prototypical American success story; Syrians dragged massive packs door to door selling dry goods, accumulated some capital, and then invested their earnings to expand their small-scale operations into large transnational firms.

While certain Syrian migrants achieved great success and became wealthy merchants in New York, the story does not account for the variety of experiences within the mahjar. What the narrative also does not reveal is the number Syrians

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stuck in the pack-peddler profession, or those who worked in textile mills and other industries, or those too poor to afford their next meal. The second part of Chapter 2 presents the obverse of the pack-peddler mythology in an attempt to shed some light on those excluded from the American dream.

As a group, the chapters that make up Section II represent the meso-level of this document's analysis. Each is an examination of the attempts to impose identity onto Syrians either of the mahjar or in the mashriq. Chapter 3 details how a number of societies set about racializing Syrians in their midst. In regions as diverse as South Africa, Haiti, Panama, Mexico, New Zealand, and Australia, nationalists were committed to defining and outlining the boundaries of those who belonged within the nation. In most cases, Syrian migrants had a derogatory identity imposed upon them, fashioning them into an undesirable and foreign object infiltrating the harmonious national body. These society-specific, imposed identities were especially harmful when conceived of at the confluence of the nation and the state. Concerns over national belonging informed the various states' procedures outlining the rights of citizenship and those who was to be debarred from entry. Syrians experienced a level of restriction similar to that faced by Chinese migrants and indentured servants from the Indian subcontinent. Empires complicated the matter. When Haiti debarred Syrians, the U.S. intervened on their behalf. In the Middle East, the French and British empires outlined new territorial demarcations within

the boundaries of former Ottoman Syria after World War I, assigning new national identities, and passports commensurate with the new borders.

The following chapter takes a closer look at the various discourses of racialization in the Unites States. Outlining the socio-legal barriers Syrian migrants confronted in American society. What were the arguments Americans made for and against Syrians in the country? Two strains eventually developed. One represented the Presbyterian, progressivist line of thought that placed Syrians within a category of desirability. Their would-be patrons determined that Syrians needed protection from abusive empires, protection from misguided religious ideology, and to enjoy the freedom of self-determination. Another set of Americans saw in Syrian migrants the decline of civilization: violence, lechery, and poverty. American international and immigration policy also actively redefined the geographical nature of Syria itself. The U.S. participated as a prime agent within the discourse that resituated Syria outside of the Asiatic barred zone for migrants. The process eventually resulted in the development of the very idea of a "Middle East." Syrians still confronted immigration quotas, and the American judicial system struggled to define whether or not Syrian migrants could naturalize in the U.S., and under which conditions they could be denied. Chapter 5 considers the intersections of race, class, and disability. The emerging field of medical experts framed disease and disability as factors inhibiting migrant entry into the national body, while missionary doctors

imposed notions of normality on the periphery. Each contributed to how Western society framed Syrians, both in the mashriq and in the mahjar.

Section III represents the micro-level, the individual/community level, of analysis. Up to this point, careful consideration has been given to how Syrians were made the other in a number of societies, but how did Syrian migrants actively participate in the processes of identity formation? Chapter 6 details how the Syrian migrants defined the Syrian "race" in the mahjar. They adopted and adapted Western ideas in developing a group identity that placed Syria and Syrians at the very crossroads of civilization. In short, the intelligentsia of the Syrian mahjar framed Western civilization as a product of the Syrian contributions to the world. Science, trade, and civilization itself would not have been possible without the contributions of the Syrian ancestors, the Phoenicians. Through the positive narrative of race Syrians made the claim of belonging within the Western taxonomy of race and the hierarchy of civilizations. These notions were repeated through histories of exploration and conquest, and overlapped with the pack-peddler mythology that championed the entrepreneurial spirit in the modern global economy.

There were negative aspects to these arguments as well, as evinced in Chapter 7. Of all the chapters of this dissertation, Chapter 7 represents a total deconstruction of the pack-peddler mythology and the economic and racial structures upon which its authors based it. While Syrians positively identified

themselves through the story of civilization, they also projected their status against those less fortunate. Syrian businesses operating within the expanses of the American empire used the imperial structures to their advantage, for a time at least. Syrian firms in Madeira and the Philippines subjected women embroidery and lace workers to harsh conditions and meager pay in the search of turning a profit. In the process of defining Syrian-ness, Syrians committed to othering groups over whom they gained power. The tales of these women, as well as Syrian women toiling in the textile mills in the U.S., remained absent from the narrative of assimilation.

A Few Notes on Terminology

I employ the term "Syrian" to describe these migrants in the vast majority of cases. Syrian was the term with which they chose to identify their community in the narrative paradigm. It served to represent notions of race and civilization. Frequently referring to these agents as "those from greater Syria" or "greater Syrians" proves to be needlessly wordy. Calling them Lebanese in cases where the migrants came from Mount Lebanon proves to be a teleological narration. That also remains the danger in using Syrian as a marker for these migrants. It should not be confused exclusively with present-day passport holders of Syrian nationality. There was no Syrian nation-state at the time under study.

Mahjar signifies the migration outside of Ottoman Syria. I use the terms "diaspora" and "migration" interchangeably with mahjar. On the opposite side of

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the migration equation, mashriq signifies the "homeland" or sending society. It is synonymous with ideas of Ottoman Syria or greater Syria, though each of the latter terms were context derivative. All of them should be considered umbrella terms for the geographical space encompassing the present-day nation-states of Lebanon, Syria, Israel/Palestine, Jordan, and Iraq. Granted, Ottoman Syria refers to this region under Ottoman control, and greater Syria is a synonym for that region after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. That is not to confuse greater Syria, the territorial abstraction, with "Greater Syria," which signified both the political philosophy calling for an independent Arab nation in the area, and the short-lived manifestation of that state under Emir Faisal. One must also account for the emergence and use of the term "Middle East." Sections of this work attempt to contextualize the term as a historical development from the period under study.

I have chosen to eschew the terminology of "Arabic-speaking migrants." Calling the subjects of the study Arabic-speaking migrants also entails its share of problems, for a host of reasons. The term does not accurately portray the religious or racial characteristics of the Syrian diaspora. Residents of greater Syria spoke in multiple languages including Arabic, Kurdish, Circassian, Turkish, Armenian, Assyrian, Syriac, Hebrew, Yiddish, and a variety of European tongues introduced by migrants and imperial regimes. While most Syrians were Christians who did speak Arabic, the Maronite clergy also performed the liturgy in Syriac. Syrian migrants also very quickly adopted the languages of their receiving societies, as

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evinced in the numerous periodicals they produced from the new places they chose to call home. Many were hybrid publications, including both European languages and Arabic. Moreover, Arabic-speaker as an analytical term represents so broad a temporal and spatial swath that the researcher could use it to indicate a near limitless cohort of heterogeneous peoples. It can indicate a person forcibly removed from West Africa as a slave in the nineteenth century just as easily it can classify a wealthy Syrian or Egyptian entrepreneur in New York a century later. Again, Syrian is preferred in most instances given that the migrant community itself used the term extensively at the time. They used it in the context of promoting the "Syria idea;" that is, a proto-nationalist awakening among Syrians before the emergence of pan-Arabism. "Syrianism" as a concept also reflects the tenets of the Syria idea. Sometimes these terms appear interchangeably.

The reader should bear in their mind that both "Arab" and Syrian" as national or racial categories necessarily gloss over the heterogeneous nature of the people they claim as constituencies. The peoples of greater Syria expressed themselves in numerous and sometimes conflicting ways. Take for example the issue of religion. Regional inhabitants professed both Sunni and Shia Islam. The latter branched into traditions respecting the occultation of different imams, whether Sevener or Twelver variants. There were also a number of Christian groups, including Catholics in both Latin and Uniate varieties including Melkite, Syrian, Armenian, Chaldean, or Maronite (the latter predominating in Mount

Lebanon). There were also Gregorians, Assyrians, Protestants, Jews (both Sephardic and Ashkenazim) Alawites, Druzes, and Bahai.[41]

Note on Transliteration

For Arabic transliteration, I use the IJMES system for names or places not commonly found in Western texts. I have tried to maintain the purity of terms through the system with a specific eye toward temporal and cultural context. Therefore, I use Zahleh as opposed to Zahlé or Zaḥla for the Lebanese city زحلة and Homs rather than Ḥimṣ for signifying the Arabic transliteration of the West Syrian city, حمص . This should be acceptable given that this text aims to satisfy a primarily western audience, though I hope it can easily move beyond that limitation. Alternatively, I use Anṭūn Sʿāda rather than Antoun Saadeh or Antun Saada because he remains relatively unknown in the United States, but Ameen Rihani as opposed to Amīn al-Rīḥānī, given that the Syrian American press frequently used the former spelling. Like the rest of this manuscript, switching between older and newer transliteration configurations represents the degree of cross-pollination between east and west that Syrian migration facilitated. It also exhibits the different

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[41] For a description of the various religions and languages of greater Syria, see Daniel Pipes, *Greater Syria: The History of an Ambition* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 16–18.

conventions used during different eras that shaped Western understanding of Arabic language and the Arab people.

PART I: SYRIANS IN THE MODERN GLOBAL ECONOMY

Chapter 1: Situating "Syria"

In order to understand the conditions that helped bring about the large-scale migrations from Ottoman Syria between the 1890s and 1930s, some background on the different eras of economic and political integration proves useful. The Syrian migration makes little sense without first some recollection of the integration of the Eastern Mediterranean into the global system occurring during that time. Emerging economic linkages between Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean grew alongside expanding infrastructure that connected the two regions and their markets. Steamships and railroads provided the arteries through which goods flowed. The new connections also allowed people to move with greater rapidity and for far less money. The rapid growth of the modern industrial economy created not just a speedier movement of capital and goods, but also of people and ideas. Syrians set out to pursue new financial opportunities across the globe when the economy of their home society flagged. In the process, they established vast networks linking nearly every region on the globe, and began to formulate a group identity in dialogue with the societies they came to know.

1.1 Ottoman Syria and Economic Integration

From the end of the fifteenth century, shifting tides in the system of world trade tied the Ottoman economic system to ever expanding European exploitation of emerging transatlantic networks. The well-worn tale of Vasco de Gama's sea journey beyond the Cape of Good Hope and the southern tip of the African continent on to resource-rich India represents just the beginning of how European exploration brought an ever-expanding global exchange in people and goods. European merchants circumvented Ottoman ports, which formerly served as intermediaries in the trade with East Asia. While the new sea routes provided new entry points for European merchants with the East, they did not necessarily weaken trade ties between the Middle East and East Asia. This movement did however alter the balance of trade between Europe, the Ottoman Empire, and other parts of Asia. Moreover, European merchants began to import fewer finished goods from Ottoman ports though the trade in raw materials from Asia continued though the Eastern Mediterranean.

According to the regional Mediterranean model Fernand Braudel illuminated, European merchants also began to pay for those goods with new sources of wealth mined, or stolen, in the Americas. Europeans introduced American gold and silver into the by Mediterranean economy by the end of the

sixteenth century.[42] The resulting inflation signaled the emergence of new political dynamics within the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman currency had been, for a long time, subject to fluctuations, however. Before Napoleon's Egyptian invasion, Ottoman governed Egypt had access to Sudanese gold. Frequent infusions of the rare metal led to currency vacillations. Other factors destabilized the currency situation in the empire as well. When overland traders traveled from east to west through Ottoman lands, they frequently deposited hard currency as payment for poll taxes in local trade along a number of caravan routes. Both instances channeled foreign currency and precious metals through the empire, making Ottoman currency susceptible to large injections unaccounted precious metals and in a continual state of volatility. Volatility helped bring about greater competition for local resources and the need to control local trade and taxation in order to maintain political stability.[43]

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the imperial Ottoman state functioned on a system based on decentralized authority and backed by regional forms of capital. Istanbul maintained a minimum of loyalty to the Porte through regional control by granting the power to tax state-owned land. At that time, the Ottoman government issued the right to collect surplus from agricultural land,

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[42] Zvi Yehuda Hershlag, *Introduction to the Modern Economic History of the Middle East* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1964), 8; Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 501, 566–570.

[43] Hershlag, *Introduction to the Modern Economic History of the Middle East*, 8; Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1998), 78–80.

typically to members of the cavalry (*sipahis*) whom the Sublime Porte hoped would

use as a means to mutual support. Sipahis sold agricultural surplus that the landless

peasant farmers (*fellaheen*) supplied them, and sold that surplus to local merchants.

Sipahis then typically used the profits to finance their personal militias in order to

project regional authority for the Ottoman state and maintain the local order.

Sipahis also remitted a portion of the tax back to Istanbul. The system functioned

by financially tying the military to the sultan in a decentralized fashion, while also

projecting central authority outward. It also served to feed the coffers of the

Ottoman treasury in addition to providing working capital for the sipahis, in theory

satisfying both parties.[44]

The adoption of modern military strategy, alongside the emergence of a

growing class of regional merchant financiers, demanded that the Ottoman center

augment their system of political arrangements. Infantry began to supplant the

traditional slave troops (*kapi kullari*) and sipahi military elite when the Empire

adopted modern methods of war to successfully compete with the more effective

forces of the European nation-states. The rise of the infantry also made the sipahis

expendable, both as a military entity, and eventually as local power brokers as their

influence waned. With the decline of sipahi influence Istanbul began to auction off

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[44] Hershlag, *Introduction to the Modern Economic History of the Middle East*, 39; Roger Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800-1914* (London and New York: Methuen, 1981), 10–15.

the right to tax lands (*iltizam*) to the highest bidder, a novelty that allowed members of the merchant class and other interested parties of financial means to enter the fray as tax-farmers (*muqataʿjis*). Some even received the right to collect taxes in perpetuity, as was the case in certain areas of Mount Lebanon, creating new power dynamics.

The muqataʿjis essentially replicated the sipahi system, using profit on surplus agricultural goods sold to local merchants to build military forces. They then used those militias to enforce their claims to regional authority. Sometimes muqataʿjis borrowed from local merchants to pay for the militia contracts when they did not receive enough income from local taxes. As a result, the merchant class tied itself intimately to the interests of the tax-farmer. Creditors had a stake in ensuring that each local power broker maintained control so that they could repay their debts. The system of borrowing and dependency on loans trickled down to the families working the land that supplied the taxable harvest. The fellaheen usually borrowed from muqataʿjis at the beginning of the sowing season, a practice that essential indebted them further to the tax-farmer. The fellaheen were being squeezed on both sides of the equation: working on credit before the sowing season and taxed after the annual harvest. Local artisans faced a similar tax system while the merchant class, largely responsible for issuing the credit that kept the tax-

farmers in power, was essentially left to their own devices. Muqataʿjis were unlikely to harass the men who funded their rise to power.[45]

The new political system proved to be not altogether unstable, but also not without conflict. Tax-farmers had to maintain a semblance of control by constantly renewing contracts with the Porte, while simultaneously fighting off challengers by funding expensive militias. Newcomers posed a threat to regional authority when they attempted to wrest control from the previous muqataʿjis, either by buying out the iltizam or breaking the muqataʿjis' hold on local control with physical force of their own. Competition between muqataʿjis increased the need to fund even larger standing military forces as both real and symbolic gestures for projecting their power to the region's people (among whom they were usually unpopular because of financial subjugation). They also began to spend increasing amounts of money on their personal estates as symbols of their regional control. Opulent houses were meant to confirm the local elites' elevated status and double as a means of controlling the population. Local spending wars had the undesirable consequence, at least from the position of officials in Istanbul, of draining tax revenues from the central treasury so that the regional power brokers could fund their local rivalries. Moreover, the Porte's desire to insure iltizam contracts influenced officials to ask for a portion of the projected tax revenue up front, when they awarded contract,

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[45] Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800-1914*, 18–19; Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920*, 24–25.

rather than after the seasonal harvest had been sold. Each of these developments increased the muqataʿji's need for quick access to credit. Muqataʿjis increasingly turned to merchants and other moneylenders to fill the financial gap. Creditors had a stake in making sure that their debtors stayed in power long enough to fulfill their financial obligations. Those on the bottom of the agricultural power dynamic, the fellaheen, also began to turn to merchants for credit to escape the cyclical borrowing from the tax farmer. The system perpetuated regional rivalries between families but also maintained the veneer of Ottoman authority throughout the empire. The new arrangements also served to empower the growing moneylender and merchant classes.

Early nineteenth century attempts to reform the complicated system were uneven at best. The Ottoman attempts to centralize power through a series of reforms were predicated on building a modern, paid military force, which would simultaneously weaken the traditional kapi kullari slave army and project Istanbul's power into the imperial periphery. Building a modern military required economic reforms as well; the Sublime Porte instituted a new treasury alongside the old, and began to appoint old tax farms to government officials appointed directly from Istanbul rather than strictly auction them off. The old muqataʿjis were resistant to acquiesce their newfound power, however, as they kept more of their tax revenues from the Porte to build even more formidable local armies than the central government could field. The destabilizing development ultimately challenged the

central administration's regional influence while draining the much-needed revenue to field an army that could ensure Istanbul's reach into the imperial periphery.

The Egyptian invasion of Ottoman Syria destabilized the political and economic systems that had developed into the nineteenth century. Muhammad Ali, representing the new power in Egypt after the Napoleonic campaigns ousted Ottoman administration there, instituted a set of measures that strengthened central administration at the expense of local power brokers after his armies invaded Syrian in 1831. The Egyptian regime extended reforms similar to those implemented in Egypt rather than leaving the Ottoman system intact. His son Ibrahim, the new regional governor of Syria, maintained many of the Ottoman muqataʿjis but subjected them to stricter government oversight. He established municipal councils to circumvent the local power brokers' influence. He also used the large Egyptian standing army and the threat of military violence from the center as insurance that the muqataʿjis continue to submit their tax payments to the new Egyptian overlords. Ibrahim also encouraged the drive toward modern agriculture in Syria. Direct loans from the central government to local fellaheen stimulated the growth of monoculture in cash crops, which included mulberry trees in Mount Lebanon, tobacco in Latakia, as well as cotton and wheat in the northern and southern regions of the Syrian hinterland. The Egyptian forces withdrew from the region in 1840, however, under the threat of British retaliation on behalf of the Ottoman Empire.

With Ottoman authority once again restored, the political and economic situation largely returned to the status quo. Muqataʿjis retained a great degree of regional autonomy, as they again became the driving force underpinning the tax-farming system that supplied the majority of funding to the central treasury while simultaneously maintaining local order with militias. The brief Egyptian interlude did however initiate the regional shift to monoculture that would ease the transition of Syria into the global economy.[46]

The brief period of Egyptian rule had also opened Greater Syria to a resurgence of European trade within the region, an interest that would not abate for decades to come. Open harbors in favor of previous Ottoman policy favoring monopolies allowed an ever-increasing number of steamships to disembark in port cities including Beirut, Sidon, and Alexandretta. Britain and France in particular began to integrate the Eastern Mediterranean into the European-dominated global economic system as a site of re-export. British and French merchants carried Syria's silk and cotton back to Lyon and Manchester to feed the rapidly expanding industrial sector, powered by these European cities' growing textile mills. European merchant houses expanded their interests in the Levant's coastal cities during the first half of the nineteenth century, and by the 1850s began to penetrate inland to

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[46] Adel Beshara, ed., *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood: Histories, Pioneers and Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 2–3.

cities like Damascus and Aleppo, which had relatively large populations and markets that European merchants eagerly sought to integrate into the global system.

Local Syrian merchants and moneylenders also facilitated these early steps of economic integration, connecting European merchants with local suppliers and dealers. Steamships and railroads began to connect the old caravan and riverine routes from inland Ottoman Syria to the coastal port cities. New trade arteries formed a vast network connecting Alexandretta, Sidon, Beirut, Zahleh, Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo to the Mediterranean in the west and the Persian Gulf in the East. European merchants further enhanced their new position when the Ottoman government allowed Europeans to dominate judicial councils charged with overseeing local mercantile exchanges. Where local merchants had previously staffed the councils, and used their position in shoring up their own financial situation, European firms used the power of oversight through the Commercial Tribunal to make binding decisions regarding trade disputes, and make themselves an integral component of the expanding global trade with Syria.[47]

Europeans penetrated the Ottoman economic structure through concessions known as "Capitulations." Economic historian Zvi Yehuda Hershlag traced the etymology of this term to Roman law. Capitulations were a series of "chapters," or legal addenda, granting concessions to European governments and merchants in the

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[47] Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920*, 30.

Ottoman-controlled domain. But the term also carries the dubious and suggestive double meaning that foreshadowed the Ottoman economic downturn of the 1870s and 1880s.[48] The first Capitulation agreements between the Sublime Porte and European powers dated back to at least the sixteenth century, but would become steadily more one-sided arrangements during the second half of the nineteenth century. European agents negotiated favorable customs duties for European industrial exports that made foreign goods cheaper and more accessible than regional products. Local finished goods were still subject to internal customs with much higher rates than those imposed on European imports. Europeans also dominated the banking institutions that provided the startup capital infrastructure. European bankers lent to other European firms to lengthen railroad networks into the Ottoman interior, thereby extending the European-dominated steamship trade routes further inland to market cities in the Syrian interior.

From the 1850s to the 1870s, the Ottoman administration also borrowed from the European firms to fund their military campaigns against Russia, and against rebellions in the Southeastern European periphery. In order to pay the interest rates on the European-backed loans, the imperial government took out additional loans, further plunging the Empire deeper into debt and eventual bankruptcy by 1875. With pressure from European governments and foreign

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[48] Hershlag, *Introduction to the Modern Economic History of the Middle East*, 42–43.

investors, the Ottoman regime established the Administration of Public Debt and agreed to the Muharram Decree of 1881. As a result, the Ottoman Porte turned over revenues to European creditors to fund the Empire's debt, much of which they derived from selling monopolies on salt and tobacco to European firms. The Banque Ottomane, an institution financed with British and French capital, along with Austria's Kredit Anstalt, took control of Regie de Tabacs in 1883, and provided the foundation for the Public Debt Administration. Moreover, the Banque Ottoman and the Deutsche Bank had significant investments in railroad companies.[49] The French hold on tobacco only intensified when France, under the League of Nations, established mandatory governments in the Levant after World War I. French authorities criminalized the sale of tobacco outside of officially sanctioned channels, punishing smugglers with fines and prison sentences.[50] Tobacco remained a prized commodity, however, especially among the mahjar communities. It was commonplace to find vendors' ads for "Egyptian," "Persian," and "Turkish" tobacco in the leading newspapers and journals throughout the diaspora. Sales in the mahjar may have provided the only outlet for the Syrian tobacco trade, legal or illegal, as European control of the market intensified during the 1920s, making the legal tobacco trade in Syria a strictly European affair.

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[49] Ibid., 47–48, 64.

[50] Ibid., 61–68.

European lenders had not only assumed massive debts within the Ottoman administration during the second half of the nineteenth century, but had also penetrated local markets. Some acquired land tracts as concession for extending railroads into the Syrian interior, or for expanding industrial production by agreeing to build new cotton and silk mills on the land. Foreign land ownership had previously been limited by authority of the Ottoman Porte, but new arrangements made European land ownership in Ottoman territories commonplace in the nineteenth century. Newly empowered and emboldened, European firms employed local workers as wage laborers in their factories, and some landholders employed Ottoman Syrian peasants as sharecroppers. The European merchants extended the credit to fellaheen for supplies, just as the local lenders had done in prior times. The new system of wage labor tied Syrian families to the crests and crashes that characterized the global market. It also tied them to an unfamiliar exchange of labor for hard currency, rather than to the tax-farming system based on social obligation and tradition characterizing the Ottoman system. Most importantly, as Akram Khater has thoroughly explored, heavy European investment in silk production helped to bring about a number of profound changes in Syrian society, stemming from the new social, political, and economic currents that undermined traditional forms of patriarchy.[51]

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[51] Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920*, 31–42.

The integration of Mount Lebanon into the global system of trade went hand in hand with growing European influence in the region's political administration. Tensions that emerged in Mount Lebanon beginning in 1858 between the largely landless peasants and the landed muqataʿjis eventually developed into a broader series of sectarian confrontations between Druze and Maronite factions across greater Syria by 1860. The fact that some of the muqataʿjis were Druze overlords in predominately Maronite regions fanned the flames of religious conflict from what had originated as a struggle over taxation and peasant land tenure. The Druze massacre of Christians in Zahleh in 1860 punctuated the conflict. The sectarian strife also provided a symbol for Christians in Mount Lebanon. They would later integrate the story of the massacre as a marker of regional identity and justification for Lebanese independence from a majority Muslim Syria. European powers also took notice of the sectarian struggle, and intervened in the conflict, headed by France. French leaders claimed an ancient right to protect the region's Catholic population due to the European nation's long history of Roman Catholic heritage and connection to the papacy(s). France dispatched a contingent of troops to Mount Lebanon to restore order where they believed the Ottoman authorities were unable to enforce public order or, even worse, assisted in massacring Christian civilians as they had done in Damascus.[52]

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[52] Rodogno, *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815-1914* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 111–114; Charles Henry Churchill, *The Druzes*

French authorities justified their involvement in the region as necessary to protect Mount Lebanon's Christian population, particularly the Catholic faithful, from future reprisals. Alongside Russia, Prussia, Austria, and Britain, France helped establish the Règlement Organique of 1860-1861. Mount Lebanon's administration was broken up in an attempt to create a political sectarian "balance" that reflected the heterogeneity of the population, with a council made up of representatives of the various religious sects of the region and headed by a Catholic *mutasarrif* (governor) appointed from Istanbul by the Ottoman Sultan. Moreover, the agreement broke down the old muqataʿjis system in Mount Lebanon and sought to replace it with a system of regular taxation. Christian citizens were to be granted an exemption from being drafted into Ottoman military service. European involvement did institute a relatively stable period from 1861 to the opening of World War I known as the "Long Peace," but also established French influence in the region that would last until 1946.[53]

The new semi-autonomous political situation European powers helped usher in for Lebanon also helped Beirut develop into the active center for transnational and intraregional Syrian trade. Specifically, the port city became a

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and the Maronites under the Turkish Rule from 1840 to 1860 (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1862), 174–206.

[53] Joseph Abou Nohra, "L'Evolution Du Système Politique Libanais Dans Le Contexte Des Conflits Régionaux et Locaux (1840-1864)," in *Lebanon: A History of Conflict*, ed. Nadim Shehadi and Dana Haffar-Mills (London: I. B. Tauris, 1988), 42–46.

critical financial and economic linkage between France and Syria. Silk factories in

Lyon desired cheap and abundant supplies of raw silk from the Eastern

Mediterranean to feed the growing industrial center. The expansion in the number

of steamships coursing across the Mediterranean provided more space for cargo.

More capacity meant more competition for fares and consequently drove down

shipping freight rates. A similar growth in Syrian railroad construction hastened the

economic forces that were creating a unified regional marketplace with a growing

transportation network that included the Chemins de Fer Ottomans d'Anatolie, the

Berlin-Baghdad Railway, and the Hejaz Railway. Other rail projects linked Beirut

with Damascus and the rest of southern Syria through the traditional market city

Zahleh. Railroads linked major cities in Anatolia with the Syrian periphery,

connecting Beirut to Aleppo and the Syrian north through the garment

manufacturing centers of Homs and Hama. It remained cheaper and faster,

however, to ship silk cocoons and thread from Beirut to France by sea rather than

overland to the factories located in Damascus, in particular. When the Ottoman

government agreed to reduce export customs from the long-established 8% to 1%

in 1868, the move only increased the importance of Beirut as a major commercial

hub for the flow of raw materials and agricultural goods to Europe.[54] Europeans

had greater access to increasingly cheaper raw materials and labor.

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[54] Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800-1914*, 116–117.

The transnational flow of capital specifically drove the Levantine silk industry. While Syria originally served predominately as a source of raw materials for industrial silk manufacture in Lyon and Marseilles, the Eastern Mediterranean would eventually become the site of substantial industrial growth as well. European merchants established the earliest large-scale industrial silk facilities in the region beginning in the nineteenth century. Each facility contained a number of steamers to prepare cocoons to be spun into thread, and the factories also implemented European-style machines (handlooms) capable of producing a tighter, stronger thread than the traditional methods that the local spinners employed. It should be noted that these factories functioned alongside the traditional cottage industries rather than fully supplanting them. Full mechanization did not take hold until after World War I. Local producers quickly followed the new industrial model in addition to the traditional putting-out system, creating over one hundred factories by the turn of the twentieth century where there were only a handful in the 1860s. European investment largely funded the enterprise. French manufacturers essentially outsourced factories and labor from Lyon, where a series of worker strikes interrupted workflow during the nineteenth century. Local intermediaries could foster relationships with peasant families to ensure steady access to local sources of wage laborers. With increasing frequency these factories employed single women. Women proved to be cheaper laborers, accepting lower wages than men, and industrialists claimed that the women workers were also more industrious

than their male counterparts. Supposedly, women were more willing to toil in the oppressive and sweltering silk factories than men, who chose to preserve their honor and traditional gendered role of farming the land, as Khater has convincingly argued. Essentially, Syrian women proved to be a more pliable workforce for French industry. They had no ties to organized labor and worked for a fraction of the cost of a French worker.[55]

European capital dominated the sericulture system in the region, funding the fellaheen who expanded mulberry plantations. The millions of trees they planted produced the leaves that provided silkworm fodder. Mulberry cultivation expanded in the wake of a series of disease outbreaks that attacked French plantations in 1850s and 1860s. The American Civil War also curtailed American raw materials used in European textile production. While the extra income granted Levantine peasants some semblance of short-term economic independence, the fact that they eschewed wheat for mulberry necessitated that food imports outstrip locally grown sources. Short-term gains were tied to two important trends changing the economic identity of the Levant. First, imports and exports relied increasingly on the global market rather than local and regional exchange, especially in Mount Lebanon. Second, both factory and farm became reliant on European capital for

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[55] Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920*, 31–38; Arthur Ruppin, *Syria: An Economic Survey* (New York: Provisional Zionist Committee, 1918), 46–47.

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expansion in times of rising prices. Peasant farmers sought out European investment to expand their mulberry farms just as the silk factories employed European finance to expand productivity; and while the local merchants and moneylenders were able to gain increased access to land, the former muqataʿjis were never fully displaced within the new political dynamic. Traditional elites were able to maintain a significant hold on lands as well, disguising them as religious holdings, or simply purchasing them outright or on credit.

As recent scholarship has argued, new economic channels and expectations of increasing financial independence influence the modern era of Levantine migration rather than the intermittent moments of sectarian strife or instances of perceived government oppression.[56] Access to jobs meant access to wages, and access to wages meant the ability to acquire objects they typically did not have access to before their newfound prosperity. Syrians experienced their first tastes of upward mobility before ever stepping foot on a ship to leave the country. Economic integration of the region and an increase in industrial jobs ensured that fact. When times got tough, however, Syrians began to look to other lands for opportunities to supplement the gains they had once experienced at home.

Fluctuations in the Ottoman Syrian economy stemmed from the region's connection to global markets. European merchants brought cheap imports into the

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[56] Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920*, 20–21.

region until the 1850s, when the local markets experienced a period of global equalization. The Ottoman focus on agriculture over industry, both in political and economic terms, ushered in a period Sevket Pamuk and Jeffrey Williamson have labeled Ottoman "de-industrialization."[57] Manpower focused on the products of the land, while women provided the tedious labor for spinning and weaving at home or in the factory. The economy stagnated in the 1860s following the end of the American Civil War and improved trade routes through the Suez Canal, then rebounded slightly in the 1870s.[58] The Sublime Porte dissolved internal customs by 1874, which served to hasten the connection of local markets to the larger global market. The move revived major economic hubs in greater Syria. Aleppo, Damascus, and Homs (styled as the "Manchester of Syria") began to rebound from depressed markets the cities suffered in the 1860s and early 1870s.[59] Another economic downturn in the 1890s, punctuated by the Baring Crisis, convinced a number of the business-minded Ottoman Syrians to seek their fortunes in the diaspora rather than at home.

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[57] Sevket Pamuk and Jeffrey G. Williamson, "Ottoman De-Industrialization 1800-1913: Assessing the Shock, Its Impact and the Response" (Working Paper, NBER Working Paper Series, March 2009), accessed March 27, 2016, http://www.nber.org/papers/w14763.

[58] Ruppin, *Syria: An Economic Survey*, 18.

[59] Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800-1914*, 172–173.

1.2 The Syrian Mahjar

From the 1890s through the 1930s, Syrian migrants settled or sojourned in nearly every corner of the world. In descending order of total migrant populations, they chose to settle in Brazil, Argentina, the United States, Mexico, and Australia. Syrians moved to areas as diverse as West Africa, East Africa, the Caribbean, East Asia, and India. There were relatively few places where they did not go.[60] In the process they confronted new social and cultural dynamics completely foreign to those they were accustomed to in Ottoman Syria. They faced an Atlantic-wide web of social hierarchies that ranged widely in their receptions of Syrian migrants and sojourners. Some understood Syrians as part of a larger "Asian peril,"[61] whereas others considered Syrians to be fully integrated (and integral) elements of national polities on both sides of the Atlantic. Syrians' standing also remained volatile within the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent European administered post-World War I mandates that replaced the Ottoman administration in the region. In essence, Syrian migrants were consistently confronted with ever-changing societies.

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[60] For an indication on the variety of locations where Syrians migrated, see Hourani and Shehadi, *The Lebanese in the World*; Hitti, "Syria's Place in the History of the World."

[61] See Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Grace Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican: Global Migration, Localism, and Exclusion in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012); John Kuo Wei Chen and Dylan Yeats, *Yellow Peril!: An Archive of Anti-Asian Fear* (New York and London: Verso, 2014); Madeline Yuan-yin Hsu, *The Good Immigrants: How the Yellow Peril Became the Model Minority* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015).

Sometimes they chose to cross borders, and sometimes they had no choice but to let borders cross over them.

How receiving societies treated Syrians ranged from discrimination based on racial theory to xenophobic hostility based in broader economic or shifting political poles. Such patterns of discrimination eventually dissolved into varying degrees of indifference leading up to the worldwide depression of the late 1920s and 1930s. But sustained prejudices persisted longest in areas where Syrians were able to claim racial superiority over the indigenous populations, and where they presented an economic threat to other local entrepreneurs and business elites. This was the case in predominately black societies like Haiti and West Africa.[62] Responses to Syrian migrants ranged by society. Such divergent outcomes resulted from the fact that mahjar Syrians confronted many different political regimes and state apparatuses during their period of migration and settlement, primarily situated between the 1890s and 1930s. As receiving nations reimagined the boundaries of their constituencies and territorial reach, as they implemented passport controls and medical stations to screen migrants at ports and border stations, or in short, began to realize the possibilities and limitations of the nation, Syrians likewise set out to

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[62] See for instance, H. L. van der Laan, *The Lebanese Traders in Sierra Leone* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975); Brenda Gayle Plummer, "Between Privilege and Opprobrium: The Arabs and Jews in Haiti," in *Arab and Jewish Immigrants in Latin America: Images and Realities*, ed. Ignacio Klich and Jeffery Lesser (London and Portland: Frank Cass, 1997); Andrew Arsan, *Interlopers of Empire: The Lebanese Diaspora in Colonial French West Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

(re)create a national identity, and eventually, a political state. That process unfolded in the mahjar as much as it did in the mashriq.

What resulted from migrant discourses of belonging and otherness was the Syria idea, or Syrian racial identity. The Syria idea and the Syrian race were two different overlapping notions. One specified claims to a geographical space and civilizational past, the other to a specific racial type. Each borrowed from the other. The so-called "Syrian problem" represented the other side of the identity discourse, or rather, the negative aspect of Syrian identity imposed by external critics onto the Syrian community that they perceived to be incompatible with their own society. Following World War II and its aftermath, the Syrian "problem" and the Syrian race both largely faded into the shadows of historical obscurity. The work that these ideas performed in social and cultural terms no longer made sense in a global context that shifted dramatically after the onset of the Great Depression in the 1930s. Moreover, the Syria idea began to fade in the mashriq as well, as national independence movements in the Middle East emerged. In Syria and Lebanon, these resulted in what Elizabeth Thompson has called the "successor states" to the imperial colonies that came before.[63] The Ottoman and French legacies remained firmly imprinted on the region in its reorganized social hierarchies, political institutions, and economic linkages. In this sense, the Eastern Mediterranean

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[63] Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 50–56.

became another node in the larger Syrian mahjar where national identity and territorial sovereignty were still very much fluid concepts.

The birth of the new Syrian nation required a new national polity. Elites appealed to republicanism in order to prevent the tyrannies they had previously experienced under imperial rule. New political organizations also responded to the growing pan-Arab movement(s), based in the idea of an Arab race rather than a strictly Syrian racial identity.[64] Syrians abroad also began to adopt new senses of national belonging, and helped produce new national narratives alongside Syrians in the Eastern Mediterranean. A diaspora-wide dialogue on the nature of Syrian-ness emerged from the ashes of World War I. In the mashriq, Syrians appealed for national recognition and independence from imperial regimes, a project that only materialized in 1946. They hoped to redefine the territorial borders of the nation while refashioning its cultural boundaries and ethnic identity. The later call for Pan-Arab cooperation swept away most of the support that had previously favored Syrianism in Ottoman Syria, the former being a movement inspired by Middle Eastern notables who preferred regional Arab cooperation in forming free, and specifically Arab, states. After World War II, the Middle East entered a period

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[64] For a diverse survey on the topic, see Malik Mufti, *Sovereign Creations: Pan-Arabism and Political Order in Syria and Iraq* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996); James L Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); R. Stephen Humphreys, *Between Memory and Desire: The Middle East in a Troubled Age* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999); Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*.

where the new Arab states were frequently pinched between the political poles of the Cold War powers, as well as the nonalignment movement which, under strong Middle Eastern leaders such as Egypt's Gamal Abdul Nasser, asserted an Arab path to international recognition based in ideas of decolonization and Arab nationalism.[65]

But what happened before the dominant Arab cultural and political reorganizations of the twentieth century? Between the 1890s and 1930s, mahjar Syrians were concerned with entry into numerous societies, and once there, in defining the legal parameters within which they could stay, eventually naturalize, and participate in the life of the nation. This meant that they also consistently ran headlong into conflicts over the composition of broader, national bodies in a number of distinct locations across the globe. In short, migration and settlement brought issues of belonging to the forefront of mahjar Syrians. Rogers Brubaker has delineated the "politics of belonging" into internal and external categories.[66] For migrant groups in particular, internal belonging accounts for how communities are accepted within receiving societies and the varying degrees to which they can gain access to national institutions and the various benefits provided by that nation-

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[65] For Nasser's philosophy in his own words, see Gamal Abdel Nasser, *On Non-Alignment* (Cairo: Information Administration, 1966).

[66] Rogers Brubaker, "Migration, Membership, and the Modern Nation-State: Internal and External Dimensions of the Politics of Belonging," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 41, no. 1 (Summer 2010): 61–78.

state. In this sense, belonging can be both formal and informal, ranging from individual experiences in public spaces to the process of filing the legal paperwork for citizenship. External belonging, on the other hand, accounts for groups whose population maintains large cohorts that continue to live outside of the nation-states where they claim some form of membership. In terms of a broader transnational diaspora, the Syrian mahjar exhibited both qualities: Syrians faced a distinct set of challenges and experienced degrees of belonging within several host societies, while also claiming and constructing the national edifice of their Syrian national home while in the mahjar. Mashriq and mahjar political and social movements were in some degree reciprocal and connected, according to Brubaker's framework. In other words, these movements of people and ideas influenced one another, whether by filiation or contestation, from different points across the Syrian diasporic constellation.

Citizenship represents a clear path to societal acceptability and full participation in the nation-state. Irene Bloemraad, Anna Korteweg, and Gökçe Yurdakul have further suggested using a "four dimension" approach to defining citizenship that accounts for the combination or strain between the varying degrees of "legal status, rights, (political) participation, and a sense of belonging."[67] The

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[67] Irene Bloemraad, Anna Korteweg, and Gökçe Yurdakul, "Citizenship and Immigration: Multiculturalism, Assimilation, and Challenges to the Nation-State," *Annual Review of Sociology* 34 (2008): 155–56.

following chapters focus on these dimensions of citizenship and belonging within three periods of transatlantic Syria, both as a diaspora and as a nation-state in the making. The Syrian experience follows a three-phase trajectory in terms of belonging between "East" and "West." Syrian migrants experienced a period of general societal rejection before World War I, with a brief interlude of contested belonging (both internal and external) during the war. As Ottoman subjects, Syrian migrants sojourning in Allied colonial possessions, or those being surveilled by affiliated state agents in various receiving societies, were classified in many instances as "enemies of the state." Meanwhile, those who remained in the mashriq were starved and brutalized by Ottoman forces; agents of the same enemy state they were purportedly aligned with. Afterwards, Syrians witnessed a post-war collapse where they were identified with an outsider status, both in the Middle East and among Allied nation-states and empires. Nations generally were more receptive to accepting Syrian migrants where full socio-political integration required that they largely abandon any claim to Syrianness. Their experience was consistently tied to the narrative of belonging that Syrian elites had created, which centered on ideas of civilization, race, and economic viability. Receptivity to the narrative proved to be society specific. In other words, sometimes these elements worked in Syrian migrants' favor, but sometimes these claims worked against arguments for inclusion in receiving societies by suggesting Syrian otherness rather than belonging.

Syrian migrants consistently challenged externally imposed renditions of their Syrian-ness, in unique ways that varied in each location, but all of which drew on a much larger transnational discourse. In the process, Syrians also formulated a national self-understanding within the context of their diaspora. The Syrian migrant experience therefore reveals the interplay between the micro (local), meso (national), and macro (global) levels of interaction, and requires an appropriately multiphase analysis.[68] The Syrian experience hinged on the interplay between the global and the local, between transnational structural shifts and the local experiences. Syrians responded to, as well as helped to create, economic changes, taxonomies of race, and notions of Western civilization that reflected their own experiences and reception within receiving societies. In addition, each nation-state fostered particular circumstances that impinged upon the above processes. National receptivity hinged on the interplay between societal norms, national mythologies, and laws aimed at hindering or facilitating migrant relations with the receiving society. This dimension, like the global, takes into account political economy.

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[68] For a detailed examination of the implications of this three-tiered system of analysis, specifically in relation to migration history, see Harzig, Hoerder, and Gabaccia, *What Is Migration History?*

Chapter 2: Syrian Businesses and Workers in New York City

When an increasing number of Ottoman Syrians chose to migrate beyond the Eastern Mediterranean beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, they did so less out of economic necessity or political persecution, though those factors probably contributed in motivating an undisclosed number. Rather, as recent scholarship has pointed out, many chose to migrate in order to maintain the financial position they had achieved during the early years of the global economic penetration in the Levant.[69] Economic equalization and global depressions during the 1870s and 1890s led many to seek opportunities elsewhere. Combined with return migrants' tales of riches across the Atlantic, it is easy to understand why a number of Ottoman Syrians chose to follow in their neighbors' footsteps.

2.1 The Syrian American Business Community of New York

New York emerged as a popular destination for Syrians in their search to accumulate wealth. Syrian migrants set up shops on the southernmost tip of Manhattan Island, in the city's First Ward, not far from the area's immigration center, Castle Garden, which served until the 1890s as New York City's entry point for seafaring travelers before the U.S. government implemented the more famous station at Ellis Island. New York City newspapers later christened the area that

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[69] For instance, see Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920*.

developed northwest of the Battery and Castle Garden "Little Syria" for the dense concentration of new migrants from the Eastern Mediterranean. New arrivals did not have to travel far from the point of entry to come into contact with other Syrian migrants in the city. Syrian migrants established an economic hub in the United States' financial capital that would eventually develop connections with other Syrian migrant communities across the U.S. and beyond.

This new class of migrants framed the successes of their banking institutions as measures of the community's achievements in their adopted societies. While banks naturally served the community's economic needs, they also became a symbol for exchanging cultural capital as well. In Argentina for instance, the Syrian migrant community framed the Banco Sirio-Libanés as a symbol the community's opulence justifying their belonging in Argentine society.[70]

In New York, the Faour Brothers' "Syrian Bank" provided capital to the community's entrepreneurs, who later extended credit to pack peddlers. The peddlers then used the credit to purchase products from the creditor, or affiliated firm, before setting out to ply their door-to-door trade in the regions outside of the city. The Faour family migrated from Hadath al-Jebbeh, a city to the north of Mount Lebanon and populated predominately by Maronite Christians when the Faours left in late nineteenth century. Brothers Daniel, George, and Dominick initially

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[70] "El Banco Sirio-Libanés Conforme Afianza Su Existencia Penetra En Las Capas Financieras de La República," *El Eco de Oriente*, March 23, 1935.

migrated to Boston in 1888, before ultimately deciding to settle in New York shortly thereafter.[71] The family quickly became a pillar within the Syrian diaspora and also within broader New York society. Members served the community in social roles outside of the bank as well. Daniel Faour served as treasurer for the Syrian Mount Lebanon Relief Committee and was a member of the Lebanon League of Progress, the Syrian American Society, the Syrian-American Club, and the Knights of Columbus.[72] These mutual-benefit organizations provided avenues to submit remittances to Ottoman Syria after World War I, in addition to providing reputable avenues to promote the image of the Syrian migrant as a contributing member of American society overall.

Convincing Americans that Syrian migrants belonged in business-savvy New York meant rooting the migrant cause in the city's financial foundation. The Faours' finances grew alongside the importance of New York as a international economic center. They represented one of four of the major banking and brokerage firms in Little Syria that also included Pedro Caram and Company, Petrus Saad and Brothers, and Elias and Abdoo. In 1891, D. J. Faour and Bros. (Figure 1) established their New York headquarters, at an early stage in the Syrian migration to New York.

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[71] Younis, *The Coming of the Arabic-Speaking People to the United States*, 131–132.

[72] "Obituary of Daniel J. Faour," *New York Tribune*, June 2, 1919.

المخزن العمومي والبنك

— او محل —

دانيال يوسف فاعور واخوانه

تأسس سنة ١٨٩١

❋ هو بقدمة المحال التجارية ❋

يتاجر بالبضائع العمومية مع كل العالم ٠ ومنه البنك السوري الوحيد ٠ يشتري ويبيع اوراقًا مالية ونقودًا
من جميع الاجناس ويسلف دراهم ويسحب بوالص على اقوى المصارف تقبض «غب الاطلاع»
والخواجات فاعور اخوان ثم وكلاء لاكبر شركات بواخر ويقطعون اوراق اسفر الى كل الجهات ٠
فيكنك مخابرتهم عندما يلزمك شي٠ مما يقع في دائرة اشغالهم المنهى عنها في محابرتهم تفيد فائدة عظيمة

D. J. FAOUR & Bros.

Established 1891.

The Leading Syrian Banking & Cmmercial House for home and Foreign Trade.

R. R. & S. S. Ticket Agents.

63 Washington St.   New York City.

Figure 1: "D.J. Faour & Bros.," *Dr. Abdou's Travels in America and Commercial Directory of the Arabic Speaking People of the World* **(1910)**

The Faour family helped establish the capital necessary to expand Syrian American trade from its base in New York to other nodes in the trade diaspora. The family business expanded over the next few decades to include a nearly global reach in trade, and within the span of a generation became the primary lending institution for the merchants located in New York's Little Syria. The Faours would eventually claim a transnational operation that traded in practically all goods, ranging from

small amounts of Maracaibo and Savanilla coffee beans grown in Venezuela, to becoming the largest Syrian American supplier of general goods in South Africa for a time.[73]
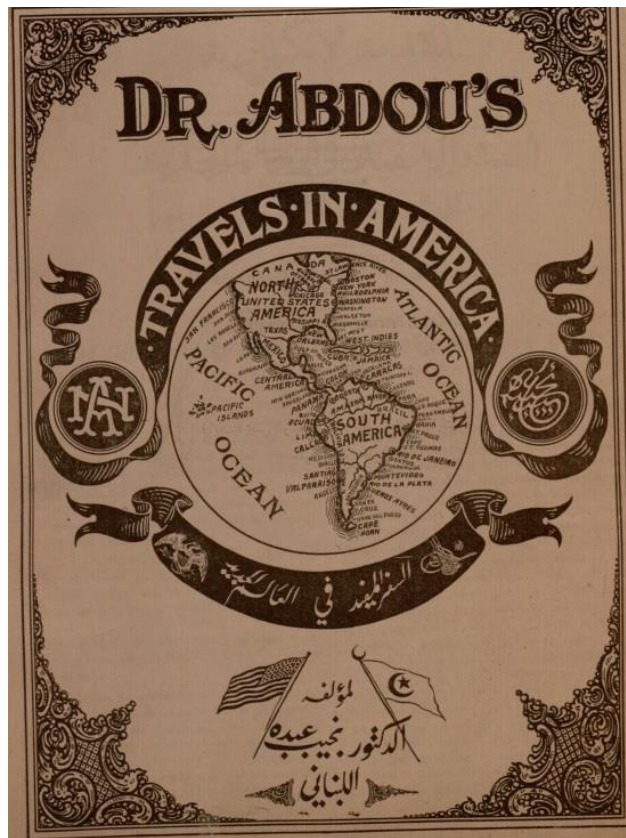
Figure 2: Frontispiece to Abdou, *Dr. Abdou's Travels in America and Commercial Directory of the Arabic Speaking People of the World* **(1910)**

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[73] Nagib Abdou, *Dr. Abdou's Travels in America and Commercial Directory of the Arabic Speaking People of the World* (New York: Nagib Abdou, 1910), 411. Abdou's publication represents the first available business directory for the Syrian American community in New York. It was printed in English and Arabic and also included business directories for all Syrian migrant communities in the world.

Their transnational organization employed agents operating in West and South Africa, India, Central and South America, as well as Cuba, the Dutch East Indies, France, Great Britain, Mexico, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico.[74] By 1919, Faour and Bros. had been awarded a triple-A credit rating among U.S. firms located in New York and maintained capital in excess of half a million dollars, a sizable increase of over twice the amount that the firm reported just two years earlier.[75] Trade restrictions resulting from World War I proved a boon to the Syrian migrant trade, but would also create new political dimensions that rippled across the diaspora. Daniel died that same year, just as the company was expanding its influence throughout New York's Little Syria and the Syrian mercantile mahjar.

As Louise Seymour Houghton wrote in the reform-oriented journal *The Survey* in 1911, Syrian American businessmen frequently funneled their profits either into remittances to their relatives back in Syria, which their families increasingly used to send goods back to the U.S., or reinvested that profit in real estate within the receiving society.[76] While the amount the Faours sent in remittances to Hadath al-Jebbeh remains unclear due to a paucity of sources, what sources are readily do reveal just how the family used profits derived from their

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[74] *Export Register of Leading Export Houses of the United States*, vol. 3 (New York: Export Manufacturers of U.S. Inc., 1919), 148.

[75] *American Exporter: Export Trade Directory*, Fifth Edition (New York: Johnston Export Publishing Company, 1917), 79.

[76] Louise Seymour Houghton, "Syrians in the United States II: Business Activities," *The Survey* 26 (August 1911): 665.

credit and lending services to acquire new properties and expand the footprint the company and of Little Syria more generally. They expanded their New York base of operations after experiencing a period of rapid financial growth between founding the company in 1891 and the end of World War I.

Originally located at 63 Washington Street, the Faours relocated in 1917 to a much larger facility comprised of 81, 83, and 85 Washington Street. The City of New York assessed the collective value of the three addresses at $95,000. The company also purchased real estate located at 78 and 80 Rector Street that had a combined value of $83,000. The Faours bought other lots in Little Syria, including 96 and 102-104 Greenwich Street, worth a total of $111,000.[77] Moreover, Daniel Faour served as the president for the affiliated Stellar Jewelry Company, a business that declared a working capital of $25,000.[78]

Faour and Bros. was not an average storefront, but rather, the crown jewel of the Syrian American business district. It provided the example for what Syrian migrants in America could attain. If they committed their working lives to mercantile endeavors, embodied by the community as "descendants" of ancient Phoenicia, a community that styled itself as the world's oldest trading collective, and married this notion to the American entrepreneurial ethic, then any measure of

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[77] *The City Record, Supplement; Assessed Valuation of Real Estate, 1912*, vol. 40 (New York: New York City Department of Citywide Administrative Services, 1912), 4.

[78] *The Jewelers' Circular* 74, no. 24 (July 18, 1917): 71.

success was possible. Many members of that imagined Syrian racial community chose to reside in the land of the Protestant ethic; a nation inhabited by citizens bound by the code of self-reliance, hard work, and aspirations to upward social mobility.[79] Syrians businessmen, like the Faours, naturally fit within the American paradigm.

The Faours rented space to like-minded merchants that had migrated from Ottoman Syria seeking their fortunes in New York. In 1909, the facility located at 81-85 Washington Street housed a number of vendors and manufacturers with connections to diverse locations throughout Ottoman Syria, including the Mount Lebanon mutasarrafiyya. The Faours' tenants were mostly lace and embroidery merchants, but also included a baker from Egypt, who may also have originally been from Syria. The building most likely served as a space for the merchants to display the intricate lacework samples and other products to prospective buyers. The merchants would have kept most of their merchandise in offsite warehouses situated across the Syrian business district in Lower Manhattan, or they sold on consignment, delivering their wares once they arrived either from production facilities located in New York and New Jersey, or from further afield in Madeira or the Philippines, a topic that is covered in greater depth in Chapter 7.

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[79] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1930).

The Washington Street address provided a space for a number of lace and kimono merchants from Homs including Naser, Katen and Nahass; Kamal Khouri; Shohfi, Alexander and Company; Murad and Rasheed Merhige; and Halabi and Haddad (who maintained their offices next door at 87 Washington Street). Lace and kimono merchants from Aleppo (the Hakim Brothers), two merchants from Zahleh (Sabaʿ Nasrallah and Khalil Dibbs), two with connections to Beirut (Toufiq Mattar and Fadoul Menassa), and a lace merchant from Marjʿuyun (Toufiq Farhood) also plied their wares there. That Syrian American entrepreneurs from a variety of Syrian manufacturing cities arranged themselves within such close quarters serves to illustrate not only just how integrated into the global economy each of these localities was, but also sheds some light on the degree to which the diasporic business community was willing to cooperate to control the flow of a particular segment of boudoir goods, household wares, and personal items.[80]

The Faours become an intrinsic link in the Syrian American traffic of goods, and also served to facilitate the movement of people. Beyond banking and brokerage services, the firm also maintained a ticket agency in New York City.[81] Such an endeavor served two functions. First, ensuring a steady connection between sending and receiving society guaranteed the ease of movement between both for

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[80] S. A. Mokarzel and H. F. Otash, eds., *The Syrian Business Directory*, First Edition, 1908-1909 (New York: Al-Hoda, 1908).

[81] Ibid., 18.

goods and people. Sojourners could readily return to the Levant and invest their earnings by expanding their operations or making improvements to their family home. It was common practice for Syrian migrants to undertake new home construction projects upon their return, as evinced by the new red-tile roof (or "American" style) houses that mushroomed in the Levant after the turn to the twentieth century.[82]

Steamships also allowed families to stay connected. The quicker transportation between continents allowed for young migrant men to send for wives, or families to reunite on either side of the Atlantic. Individuals and families could readily move between North and South America, Europe, and the Eastern Mediterranean. A consistent flow of migrants also maintained a vibrant and growing mahjar community in a number of locations across the globe. However, what may have been a more important motivation for the Faour firm and their affiliates in assuring the flow of new migrants was their need to expand their base of operations. Recent arrivals needed work, and peddling presented the most accessible option for newcomers. The New York firms extended lines of credit to peddlers, who in turn used the money to purchase dry goods from the Foaurs or affiliated firms. Adele Younis collected stories of pack peddlers heading west to every state in the union, with their wares in tow, sometimes even crossing the

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[82] Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920*, 15, 120.

Pacific. The peddlers of this network were the middlemen (and women) between the large New York houses and the American consumer. In an age before the widespread availability of telephone communications, face-to-face sales linked smaller American cities and rural purchasers with the Big Apple and the wider world represented in consumer goods.[83]

What Younis does not inform us on, however, is the negative side of the story. Buying dry foods from firms on house credit made the pack peddler dependent on the banking house. They were not the independent, self-reliant businessmen popularized in the Syrian business narrative. Their situation was more akin to the Syrian fellaheen who relied on lines of credit from the muqataʿjis or local merchant lender. If these peddlers continued west, all the way to Hawaii and East Asia as Younis indicates, then they could not have repaid their loans, at least in the short term. Many of them probably fled further west to escape the reach of the New York bankers, seeking independence from the migrant patriarchy, in a new place where they might be able to settle or regroup with their newfound earnings and fellow migrants.

It is far too easy to become enamored with the stories of success that the Faour Brothers provide. Theirs is a narrative that perfectly exemplifies the peddler-to-entrepreneur myth that attracted many Syrian Americans to the peddler trade.

[83] Younis, *The Coming of the Arabic-Speaking People to the United States*, 126–132.

They did however suffer a number of setbacks that would eventually bring about

the demise of the company. Some of those were misfortunes any business might

face. The firm suffered a number of armed robberies, including one on July 17,

1922, when two men entered the facilities and "bound and gagged the cashier,

looted the cash and securities and escaped."[84] Other setbacks proved too large to

overcome. They represented structural fault lines that sent ripples across the global

economy. Like many New York business and banking operations, the Faours were

not immune to the onset, beginning in the 1920s, of rising national tariff barriers

and the global economic depression that interrupted the previous era of free trade.

By the early 1930s, the Faour Brothers could no longer maintain their operations.

The State of New York absorbed the firm alongside a number of other banks that

had become insolvent. The state's Superintendent of Banks took possession of

Faour Brothers property and holdings in 1933, to be turned over to the much larger,

and more viable, Irving Trust Company for liquidation. The Faours appealed the

decision in 1934, but ultimately lost both their appeal and the business they had

been building since 1891.[85]

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[84] "Bandits Raid Safe," *The Evening Star*, July 17, 1922.

[85] In re Faour, Circuit Court of Appeals, Second Circuit. 72 F.2d 719 (2d Cir. 1934); Gary Richardson and Patrick Van Horn, "Intensified Regulatory Scrutiny and Bank Distress in New York City during the Great Depression" (Working Paper, NBER Working Paper Series, June 2008), 22, accessed June 7, 2016, http://www.nber.org/papers/w14120.

The story of the Faours reflects a similar trajectory that fellow Syrian migration to the U.S. followed more generally. Syrian migration to the Americas peaked between the 1890s and 1930s. Afterwards, the movement of cash via remittances and the movement in people slowed to a trickle. *The Syrian World* reported on a 1928 report by the Bureau of Economics in Lebanon which found that formerly strong remittances back to the region following World War I had been reduced to a mere pittance.[86] Just four years later, in 1932, the large Syrian banking firm in Beirut administered by Kiryakos and Zuhair entered bankruptcy.[87] A few months later, *The Syrian World* closed its own operations in New York, following the death of editor Naoum Mokarzel. New forms of immigration legislation, newly erected tariff barriers, and the global economic downturn changed the economic and social dimensions of the Syrian diaspora.

Trade had served as the touchstone for the Syrian American assimilation narrative. The community's intellectuals fashioned the story of American assimilation on a generalized Syrian entrepreneurial past.[88] From this perspective,

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[86] "Emigrant Remittances in Two Years," *The Syrian World* 2, no. 11 (May 1928): 55.

[87] "Syrian Bank Bankrupt," *The Syrian World* 6, no. 7 (April 1932): 75.

[88] Humphreys, *Between Memory and Desire: The Middle East in a Troubled Age*, 60–82; Asher Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia: The Search for Identity in Lebanon* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 7; Arnon Groiss, "Communalism as a Factor in the Rise of the Syria Idea in the 1800s and the Early 1900s," in *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood: Histories, Pioneers and Identity*, ed. Adel Beshara (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 30–53; Carol Hakim, *The Origins of the Lebanese National Idea, 1840-1920* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2013), 152–156.

Syrian migrants arose en masse from pack-peddlers to business owners, and eventually became proprietors of multinational import-export exchanges, all in the spirit of upward mobility, living out the qualities of the Protestant Ethic, and exhibiting the features of the glorious Phoenician past. In the U.S., Syrian migrant networks radiated from the modern "global city"[89] of New York outward, connecting the American metropole to markets beyond North America. By the 1980s, historian Alixa Naff had institutionalized the pack-peddler mythology as a perfect marriage between the Syrian migrant and the American "entrepreneurial Eden."[90]

But this view is problematic. The "pack-peddler to businessman," or the "Protestant Ethic narrative," does not neatly account for the Syrian laborers at the Glen Falls Cement factory in upstate New York, or the Mahlouf family of farmers on the Oklahoma plains. It also ignores individuals like John Rami, the fifteen-year-old Syrian boy killed at bayonet point during the labor standoff at Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1912. Those obscured vignettes tell a more complex story of the diaspora. Accounting for gender, class, and disability reflects realities that make the pack-peddler narrative into the mythology it claimed not to be. They flesh out the nuances of the narrative. Alternative stories represented prosperous

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[89] Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[90] Naff, *Becoming American*, 2, 330.

businesswomen like Emma Maloof, a well-known Syrian American who produced handmade lingerie items for high-profile Americans. When the famous Jewish American poet Dorothy Parker shopped on New York City's Fifth Avenue in the 1930s, she splurged her large Hollywood script-writing checks on big-ticket items: "She ordered $628.45 worth of hand-made lingerie from Emma Maloof in New York and $80.03 worth of perfume from Cyclax of London."[91] Women like Maloof played a number of integral roles in the Syrian American community. They, too, were not easily accounted for in a Syrian migrant narrative that focused more on the masculine pursuits of exploration and conquest. Many Syrian women also initiated chain migrations to the Americas to find work or husbands, a daring move that challenged traditional gendered hierarchies back in the mashriq.[92]

The pack-peddler mythology proves to be more complex than its framers baldly proclaimed it to be. By the late 1930s, Syrian American elites had embraced assimilation within the American context of cultural pluralism. By 1937, Katibah envisioned the community as "pilgrims" from one of the earliest of the world's civilizations to its most recent and opulent one across the Atlantic.[93] As products of ancient Semitic civilizations that antedated the recent Anglo-Saxon cultural

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[91] John Keats, *You Might as Well Live: The Life and Times of Dorothy Parker* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 182.

[92] Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920.*

[93] Katibah, "Syrian Americans," 426.

efflorescence, Syrians had integrated into the modern global economic system long before it centered in the North Atlantic. These views both reflected and refracted the modern race theories and civilizational schema that were prevalent at the time.[94]

Just as they tailored their own identity, Syrian American businesses also objectified exotic goods for an American audience. They framed their Asian wares in an Orientalist context that reveals how Syrian American businessmen adopted and applied imperial strategies of objectifying "the other." Syrian American merchants advertised and sold Oriental items – including laces, rugs, and kimonos – alongside cigarettes alternatively labeled either "Egyptian," "Turkish," or even "Persian," and "authentic" religious goods from the "Holy Land." Just as exoticism sold goods, "auto-Orientalism,"[95] or the process of highlighting their Syrian background, produced an exotic (yet safe) Syrian American middleman who bridged the "Orient" with American consumers in the West. Alternatively, Syrian American intellectuals would equally use that distinction, more intricately

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[94] Debbie Challis, *The Archaeology of Race: The Eugenic Ideas of Francis Galton and Flinders Petrie* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013); Bruce David Baum, *The Rise and Fall of the Caucasian Race: A Political History of Racial Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Paul A. Kramer, "Empires, Exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons: Race and Rule between the British and U.S. Empires, 1880-1910," in *The American Colonial State in the Philippines: Global Perspectives*, ed. Julian Go and Anne L. Foster (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 43–91; Anthony W. Marx, *Making Race and Nation: A Comparison of South Africa, the United States, and Brazil* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Marouf Arif Hasian, Jr., *The Rhetoric of Eugenics in Anglo-American Thought* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996).

[95] Christina Civantos, *Between Argentines and Arabs: Argentine Orientalism, Arab Immigrants, and the Writing of Identity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 22.

distinguishing between "Asian otherness" and "Syrian in-betweeness," to propel the Syrian American community closer to constructions of whiteness at the expense of the Asiatic other.[96] Syrian American firms in Madeira and the Philippines thus objectified Asian labor for their own economic and social benefit in the U.S.

2.2 Syrian American Laborers and the Underbelly of Desirability

Katibah's laudatory remarks about Syrian American prosperity suggested that many within the migrant community witnessed a measure of economic success and upward social mobility by the 1930s.[97] Even in the midst of the global depression in 1931, those who presented themselves as the wealthiest and more respectable elements of Syrian migrant society in New York organized opulent dinner balls for the Syrian Golf Club to alleviate the doom and gloom of the looming financial crisis. The Syrian civilization narrative even retold the story of nodes within the migration network, fixing them into themes amenable to the essence of the American Dream. The *Syrian World* announced Marseilles, a critical node in the Syrian migration network, as an uninterrupted trading colony established by the Phoenicians. Not only was Marseilles Phoenician, but it served as the oldest known "seaside resort" for the ancient leisurely classes. Sure the Syrian ancestors knew how to work and make money, but they also knew how to

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[96] Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*.

[97] Katibah, "Syrian Americans."

relax. Relaxation was an equally important element in projecting wealth. As it was for the Phoenicians centuries before, Marseilles remained an important thoroughfare for Syrian elites.[98]

The beggars, laborers, and non-educated Syrian migrants stood as a stark contrast to the story of upward social mobility and the pack-peddler narrative. Many of the successful migrants were Western educated, Protestant converts, or managed to incorporate themselves into the economic channels linking the Eastern Mediterranean and U.S. The financially needy among Syrian migrant society created a tension within the group's story. In order to attain the veneer of desirability outlined by claims of belonging within the taxonomy of races, of civilizational ascension through interpretations of the Phoenician past, and rendering their community as productive members of a larger capitalist society, the economically desperate and social outcastes had to be dragged into the upper echelons of Syrian-ness whether they wanted to be or not. Syrian elites maintained their narratives of desirability while attempting to keep the perceived problem of their "lower classes" contained within the Syrian community. If these members of the community who had been left behind could be elevated then the entire Syrian race followed. If not, there was no better way to deal with the unproductive and

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[98] "World's Oldest Resort Founded by the Phoenicians," *The Syrian World* 5, no. 7 (March 1931): 51–52; "Syrian Golf Club Holds First Dinner," *The Syrian World* 5, no. 5 (January 1931): 49–50.

undesirable elements than to write them out of the group narrative. Social uplift could be attained, but only through the forced ascension of the whole race, its civilization precedents, and aspirations in attaining citizenship in the United States and among the modern community of nations.

One New York organization dedicated to such uplift, the Syrian Ladies Aid Society (SLAS), provided services to the Syrian migrant community in the city. The SLAS was a Brooklyn-based community organization working in and around the largest suburban Syrian community outside of Little Syria. Founded in 1907, SLAS aimed to "help their less fortunate compatriots, not only upon their entry to Ellis Island, but beyond that port of entry into this vast … New World." The women of SLAS provided supplemental funding and services to those new migrant and members of the Syrian American community that upward mobility seemed to merely bypass. The community's unfortunate few remained destitute while the businessmen and their families accumulated wealth and status. These ladies of leisure, some of them wives to respectable entrepreneurs in the community, endeavored to play the motherly role to the greater racial group. They sought to raise the rest of the Syrian "race" to the post-war levels of prosperity many other Syrians savored. As a relic of the twentieth-century American mainstream, the SLAS represents the continued bifurcation of class and ability in a society

convinced of racial worthiness. It reveals the deep intersections of gender, class, ability, and race in larger American society.[99]

While the mere existence of the SLAS suggests a degree of upward mobility and belonging in the U.S. for a certain class of Syrian women, it also obscures as much as it reveals. The story celebrates the successful over the invisible minorities within the Syrian community: the "sick and needy." In a flyer to their donors, the SLAS related six of the "neediest" cases within the local Syrian community. In one case, a Syrian industrial worker had been so badly burned that he could no longer work, and could not provide a level of subsistence for his wife and five young children, all of his dependents children being under the age of four years. Another family suffered the same fate when their father could not work due to treatment of his lung ailment. In another instance, a ninety-year old man living alone in a dank, New York basement could not afford to buy groceries. The SLAS insured his subsistence with a $5.00 monthly allowance.[100]

Industrial society helped produce a new Syrian working class. It also helped establish a needy and dependent Syrian class. A significant enough Syrian presence in the textile industries in the northeastern states of the U.S. prompted the Industrial

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[99] Pamphlet, "Syrian Ladies Aid Society, 70th Anniversary," in the Syrian Ladies Aid Society Records, IHRC NRE, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota.

[100] Donation Circular in the Syrian Ladies Aid Society Records, IHRC NRE, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota.

Commission to announce as early as 1901 that the "creation of a Syrian-American proletariat" was "apparently an assured fact."[101] In the increasingly industrialized U.S., larger families could contribute to the household's subsistence, just as young Syrian women had entered the Levantine mills during the nineteenth century to help their families make ends meet. Children also made up a growing contingent within the American labor force during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Syrian experience in the U.S. was not exceptional in that regard. Numerous Syrian children entered the textile mills of the American northeast as bobbin boys. Barefooted and inexperienced, they were susceptible to the grinding machines the factory workers nicknamed "devils," machines transformed when worker personified the technology they perceived to be unfeeling and cold, much like mechanized industry as a whole. Machines and militias alike assaulted workers. Other Syrians risked lung disorders when they began the dangerous work of mining. Still others entered steel mills. As evinced in the above examples given by the SLAS, entire families suffered when one member could not return to work.

In many ways, the perpetuation of SLAS well beyond World War II overturned the notion that need had disappeared from the American mainstream. Even into the 1940s, the organization felt compelled to respond to public criticism that economic need itself threatened the fiber of American life. The mainstream,

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[101] U.S. House, *Reports of the Industrial Commission on Immigration*, 57th Cong., 1st sess., 1901, H. Doc. 184, 442.

and the Syrian population within it bought into the idea of the "American Dream," the Horatio Alger-influenced, bootstrap-inspired notion that every willing person could (and should) ascend the ladder of social mobility via hard work and economic savvy. Yet the needy recipients of SLAS aid provided evidence that the "Dream" narrative was in fact a dream, and perhaps even a nightmare for many others laboring within the United States.

New York's garment industry has had its fair share of reported abuses, from the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire to the images of strike violence taken by Lewis Hine. Evidence that women and children suffered abuse at the hands of garment makers and other industrialists began to sway popular opinion. Syrian success in the lace and embroidery industries also fostered negative press. The American media saw Oriental despots in some Syrian industrial managers. In March 1928, a story of abuse surfaced from the Syrian garment district. Along New York's Rector Street, "Reports spread quickly among the office girls of the district that some girls were found in the rear of a Syrian lace shop bound and drugged."[102] The story reflected popularized orientalist tropes. Syrian men, the Oriental despots of the lace industry, were prone to indulgence, licentiousness, and "white slavery." They preyed on the weak for profit.

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[102] "Syrians of New York Refute Slander," *The Syrian World* 2, no. 10 (April 1928): 60.

In 1901, the Industrial Commission's Report on Immigration outlined the advance of the Syrian population in the U.S. The U.S. government estimated that 25,000 Syrians were in the country in 1900, out of as many as one million Syrians who had left the Levant in search of new opportunities outside of Ottoman Syria.[103] While the Syrian migration network was still relatively young at that time, Syrians' numbers within the continental U.S. would nearly double to 41,404[104] by 1910, and grow to 89,971 in 1919.[105] Syrians had already established a global network of movement and settlement throughout the Americas and reaching into East Asia. Syrian migration networks initiated predominately within the region of present-day Lebanon. America's Protestant Christian missionary presence in the region, dating back to the middle of the nineteenth century, ensured that the local population could gain access to a socially and economically beneficial Western education, and most vitally for their success in the U.S., attain proficiency with the English language. More importantly for initiating their movement however, tapping into the network that the Presbyterian missionaries provided gave Syrians a preexisting migration system that linked the Eastern Mediterranean to the Americas across the Atlantic.

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[103] U.S. Congress, House, *Reports of the Industrial Commission of Immigration*, 57th Cong., 1st Sess., 1901, H.Doc. 184, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1901), 442.

[104] Louise Seymour Houghton, "Syrians in the United States I: Sources and Settlement," *The Survey* 26 (July 1911): 488. Houghton based her numbers off of U.S. Department and Labor reports from 1908.

[105] Hitti, *A Short History of Lebanon*, 62–65.

Once in the U.S., Syrians established patterns of behavior that the Industrial Commission outlined as class hierarchies.[106]

The Commission spotted an emerging class division within the Syrian American population, based in how the migrants interacted with American institutions. Wealthier Syrians had their children educated in missionary boarding schools, and once settled, set out to peddle dry goods in a vast network of merchant colonies and family sales forces. From the nativist perspective, peddling represented an acceptable enterprise, if the wily salesperson did not squander their earnings. If merchants saved their money, they could use it for reinvestment in respectable storefronts. The "lower" class of Syrians mimed the model established by their more respectable and desirable countrymen. They saw the benefits of American education for their children and the relative wealth of American households. The Industrial Committee reported that within one month of arrival however, many Syrian migrants had their children accepted into philanthropic educational facilities by claiming familial need, while the parents set about begging from door to door in the guise of peddler. Well-to-do Syrians frowned on the questionable methods that their fellow sojourners employed to turn a profit in the land of promise.

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[106] U.S. Congress, House, *Reports of the Industrial Commission of Immigration*, 442.

As early as 1888 one young Syrian migrant, Salama Gooberen, gave her accounting of the Syrian class divide when she testified before the U.S. House committee investigating illegal contract labor. Gooberen's family originally resided in Beirut before joining the earliest wave of Syrian migrants in leaving for the Unites States. Responding to their questions without a translator, the committee reacted with surprise that she had learned English there before migrating to the U.S. A number of schools under the direction of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) taught English and Protestant Christianity. Salama had learned English at an English-language school in Beirut, and though it is not clear from her testimony if the school was Presbyterian, it is likely it was. Presbyterians made up the vast majority of American ABCFM missionaries. There were other indicators that suggest her integration into the Presbyterian network, which also explain her class preferences in her testimony.

Some background on the presence of American missionaries in the Near East should prove useful here. Congregationalists in the U.S. established the ABCFM in 1810 to minister to those beyond the pale of Protestant Christianity, in the hope that the world's population would be properly prepared for the inevitable second coming of Christ. This organization later opened its ranks to include Presbyterians, who would focus their proselytizing activities on educational ventures in the Near East. Within ten years, American missionaries Levi Parsons and Pliny Fisk ventured to the Holy Land to proselytize among Muslims, Jews, and

(more importantly) Eastern Christians who, while not considered "saved," were recognized as salvageable. Upon the foundations laid by Pliny and Fisk, missionaries established an Arabic-language press in Beirut by the 1830s, and three decades later founded the Syrian Protestant College (SPC, later rechristened the American University of Beirut, or AUB) in the same city.[107]

Backed by wealthy philanthropists and the ABCFM, the Syrian Protestant College became a node within an intricate and enduring web of transnational Presbyterian connections. American philanthropists Henry Morgenthau, and the Dodge family – both William Earl Dodge, Sr. and Jr., as well as Cleveland H. Dodge and Bayard Dodge[108] – supported Protestant missionizing in Syria, the formation and administration of the SPC/AUB,[109] and took up the leadership of the American Red Cross and relief effort in Syria during and after World War I. The Dodges amassed their financial fortune in mining – specifically copper – and were among the few industrialists who unceasingly lent their support to trust-busting President Woodrow Wilson. A fellow Presbyterian, Wilson could rely on the Dodge family's financial backing during his election campaigns. And while the Dodge

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[107] A. L. Tibawi, *American Interests in Syria, 1800-1901: A Study of Educational, Literary and Religious Work* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).

[108] "Syrians Give Dinner to Dr. and Mrs. Dodge," *The Syrian World* 2, no. 6 (December 1927): 55–56; "Pres. Dodge Expounds Mission of A.U.B.," *The Syrian World* 2, no. 4 (October 1927): 58–59.

[109] For instance, Cleveland Dodge contributed $500,000 to help establish the SPC, and Bayard Dodge later became the president of the AUB. See "Our Contributors," *The Syrian World* 1, no. 2 (August 1926): 44.

family provided an American ally recognizing the "Syria idea," it was ultimately President Wilson who provided Syrians with the language of, and desire to attain, self-determination in the post-war world.[110]

The Syrian Protestant College established networks that facilitated the transfer of particularly Western variants of Christianity and Western-centric knowledge systems to students in Syria. Religiously converted students in turn began "proselytizing for modernity,"[111] thereby granting legitimacy to the idea of an independent Western-oriented Syria that fit into the worldview of their philanthropic overseers.[112] These converts were exposed to a peculiar alchemical blend of Western liberalism, notions of progress and civilization, and Western reconstructions of the Oriental past. The SPC's library granted students access to a carefully selected array of works on ethnology, history, linguistics, and philology. Presbyterian donors and philanthropists thereby funded the assemblage of a Western literary corpus on Syrian soil—a physical transplantation of information with epistemological repercussions. In short, "Eastern" students learned to view the

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[110] For a general overview on the influence of Wilson's rhetoric of national self-determination following World War I, see Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[111] Betty S. Anderson, *The American University of Beirut* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 6.

[112] For a transatlantic perspective on philanthropy as a means to legitimacy (or "respectability") for both funders and recipients, see Thomas Adam, *Buying Respectability: Philanthropy and Urban Society in Transnational Perspective, 1840s to 1930s* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009).

Orient through a "Western" lens. The idea of territorial "Syria" can be traced back to Greco-Roman demarcations rather than the Arab or Islamic past.[113]

When Salama and her sister arrived in New York the two shortly became philanthropist Olivia Sage's object of fancy. Sage, the widow of New York robber baron Russell Sage, inherited and distributed tens of millions of dollars from her deceased husband. A Presbyterian by faith, she provided a temporary allowance and living accommodations to the Gooberen sisters. The sisters later found work in an embroidery shop before being persuaded by Sage's benevolent circle of women in New York to enter a new line of work: to contribute to the Syrian Mission of the Presbyterian Church. Though the goal of the mission in Syria aimed to uplift the Syrian population through a program of liberal education and conversion to protestant Christianity, the American wing evolved into an organ to convince Syrians to remain in their home society rather than migrate to the U.S. In line with this goal, Gooberen painted the Syrian population as one largely undesirable for U.S. immigration.

The committee's chairman, Michigan Representative Melbourne Ford, seemed intrigued by the then small Syrian migration of the 1880s. Ford served under the fiftieth U.S. Congress, the same government that had amended the

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[113] Lamia Rustum Shehadeh, "The Name of Syria in Ancient and Modern Usage," in *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood: Histories, Pioneers and Identity*, ed. Adel Beshara (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 17–29.

Chinese Exclusion Act to prevent all Asian migration. Syrian entry into the U.S. represented a trickle of obscure Asian migrants rather than a deluge of the feared Asian hordes. The committee was more interested in determining whether Syrians intended to stay, and if so, if they could contribute to American society. Syrians were more of a novelty than a threat to the national body. When Ford pressed Salama on her connection with migrant contract labor from Syria, Gooberen responded that in general the common Syrians "don't know how to do anything at all."[114] They were largely unskilled, or lied about having any marketable skills or trades before being revealed as incapable of the work they had been employed to do. As a member of the Syrian Mission, Salama had committed to dissuading the "undesirable" migrants from going to the U.S. and sullying the image of the Syrian in a foreign society. She "wrote three or four times in the newspaper to Syria, and we wrote letters to churches, and to the bishops and priests, telling them to speak to them and say that we don't like them to come. We hate our country people, and we don't like them to come here [to the U.S.]."[115] When Ford asked Gooberen to justify her anti-immigration position, she responded that Syrian migrants "don't come to work good work; they come to beg; they come to go around, and they carry a basket with pieces of rosary, and if the women don't buy them they will ask for

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[114] U.S. House, *Importation of Contract Laborers*, July 25, 1888 Hearing (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1889), 245.

[115] Ibid.

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money, and they beg from them."[116] Salama insisted that Syrians were savvy enough to peddle religious wares to a population seeking anything from the Holy Land. Religion had persuaded many Americans to visit Syria as a religious destination. Syrians had learned to prey on the trade of faith in the U.S. as a result. The most undesirable of the population had managed to mix religion and commerce into a unique blend of American entrepreneurship.

While the two models represented above outline Syrian economic activity as centered on the act of peddling (or in many cases begging), another economic development in the U.S. gave sojourners an alternative to the lifestyle of the "nomadic" salesperson. By the turn of the century, the number of Syrians in the US industrial sector began to increase noticeably alongside the industrial output of the country. In the Massachusetts cities of Lawrence and Worcester, as well as in Paterson, New Jersey, cities where textile mills provided jobs to swelling migrant populations, Syrians began to enter into the industrial workforce. The Dillingham Commission claimed as many as 15-20%, or approximately 3,750 to 5000, were associated with the textile mills nationally by 1901.[117]

Syrian laborers in the mahjar have become a bit of an elephant in the room for academic researchers. It is not that this elephant is particularly small, but it happens to be very good at hiding. It is well known that there were Syrian workers,

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[116] Ibid.

[117] U.S. Congress, House, *Reports of the Industrial Commission of Immigration*, 445.

but evidence of their daily lives has proven to be scarce. This may be due to the fact that these workers left behind few documents. Oral histories may prove useful in excavating these cultural memories, but many of the individuals from the period under study have long since passed. Nevertheless, Syrian laborers do surface, from time to time, in the documentary evidence. By piecing together the moments when they do, we can begin to get a clearer picture of where they lived, worked, and struggled on a day-to-day basis.

Syrian laborers participated in the Lawrence, Massachusetts Strike of 1912. They were also involved with the leadership of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). In a light-hearted moment of comradery, IWW founding member and strike leader "Big Bill" Haywood mingled with the various nationalities present at Lawrence. "He began to eat at their homes, devouring heaping plates of spaghetti and Turkish shashlik. After dining with Syrians, he was offered a hookah, which he smoked until his beefy face turned pale."[118] Syrian workers were one among many ethnic groups involved in the strike. While the IWW presented a united front to the local textile mills, the strike committee organized the workers into halls based on nationality.[119] The division eased the flow of information. Each hall had

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[118] William Cahn, *Lawrence, 1912: The Bread and Roses Strike* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1980), 147.

[119] Testimony of Arturo Giovanitti, in "United States v. Haywood, et al., August 7, 1918," 10720-10721, folder 2, box 116, Industrial Workers of the World Collection (hereafter cited as IWW Collection), Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit.

representatives to the strike committee as well as their own national committees. These representatives relayed the committee's announcements and daily news to the national halls in their respective native languages.[120]

Syrians maintained a prominent role in the strike committee. Joseph Shaheen, a local grocer, presided over the committee for the Syrians and served as the treasurer for the strike committee. When the U.S. government brought the IWW strike leaders Joseph Ettor and Arturo Giovannitti to trial for instigating violence at the Lawrence Strike, the prosecution accused Shaheen of embezzling funds for the defendants' personal use.[121] The prosecution found discrepancies in Shaheen's accounting to the sum of $16,375.68 out of the total $62,685.41 in IWW receipts. The government's lawyers claimed that the IWW used the missing funds "illegally" when they funded the transport of children out of Lawrence and as "salaries" for the strike leaders. When pressed on the matter, Shaheen responded simply that he merely "did what he was told to do."[122]

In an even more serious case, militia members called in to contain the strike killed a "Syrian boy." As Haywood characterized the violence at Lawrence, "There was some three of the strikers killed, one of them Anna Lopezzi, who was killed by a policeman, and John Rami, a Syrian boy, a drummer, I think, in the Syrian Fife

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[120] Ibid.

[121] "Lawrence Strike, 1912," 20-21, folder 1, box 128, IWW Collection.

[122] Ibid., 23.

and Drum Corps stabbed by a militiaman with a bayonet." [123] The other victim was Italian immigrant Valentino Modestino. Neither Rami's Syrian-ness, nor his youth, made the event a national headline. Rami's murder was essentially a non-factor outside of the impact it created among the strikers.

One of the reasons Syrians were near invisible at Lawrence may have been due to the way the IWW framed the strikers as a unified body against the abuses of capitalism. Haywood characterized the role of the organization at length:

> The IWW covers only one of the many activities of its members on the job, the job is an international thing. For instance, the boss, say take Standard Oil Company, the Standard Oil Company works in the United States, Canada, Mexico and Russia. It has no flag. John D. Rockefeller has a flag. The owners of the oil trust are American citizens, but on the job there is no flag. On the job there is no nationality because nationalism of theirs is merely – is rather a social than an industrial thing. There is no creed – you may have creeds as social beings but they have not got any creed on the job…There is no color on the job…Those are all social lines while the other lines…are industrial. [124]

For the IWW, class proved more important than race. In the 1918 trial against Bill Haywood, the court asked James Elliot of Fresno, California if there were any "Asiatics, Japanese, Hindoos [sic] … in that vicinity?" and if there was "any anti-Asiatic sentiment?" [125] Elliot responded in the affirmative to both

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[123] Testimony of William D. Haywood, in "United States v. Haywood, et al., August 10, 1918," 11177, folder 2, box 117, IWW Collection.

[124] Testimony of William D. Haywood, in "United States v. Haywood, et al., August 1, 1918," 9685, folder 1, box 115, IWW Collection.

[125] Testimony of James Elliot, in "United States v. Haywood, et al., August 3, 1918," 9994, folder 4, box 115, IWW Collection.

questions before adding, "There was against those that were in business…none against those that would work for wages … He was no good when he went into business."[126]

The witnesses that testified before the congressional investigation into the strike at Lawrence did not actively attempt to paint Syrians there as communist, syndicalist, or terrorist. The majority of the testimony from police officers and city officials only characterized Syrians as "foreign." Because they were foreign, the possibility remained that they could have sentiments leaning toward communism, syndicalism, or the politicized violence associated with anarchists, but later examples of Syrian worker discontent bordered on the radical fringes of industrial espionage. Other examples painted Syrians outside the industrial worker mainstream ethic.

If the Massachusetts strikes at Lawrence represented how Syrians participated alongside fellow workers and began to change Americans' general reception to strikes in general, other examples of working class discontent reveal the high levels of racial resentment still felt by Syrians' co-workers. In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania women workers walked out of the Tioga Silk Mill when the floor manager refused to remove two Syrian girls from the line.[127]

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[126] Ibid.

[127] "Tioga Silk Mills Strike," *The Columbian*, March 20, 1902.

In the autumn of 1920, the U.S. Bureau of Investigations initiated a case surrounding a prolonged strike at the Glen Falls Cement Company in Saratoga County, New York. The region's rich limestone deposits made Glen Falls a primary center for cement production. The Glen Falls plant employed 175 workers, many of them migrant laborers. Around fifteen percent of the labor force, twenty-five men, were of Syrian descent. The Syrians primarily worked as packers, filling uncured cement into bags for shipment and storage. This not insignificant number of Syrians in the labor force became more pronounced when the local sheriff reported to Bureau agents in Albany that an undisclosed number of the plant's former Syrian employees had been implementing a plot to "blow up" the plant in the midst of the ongoing strike.[128] The radical plot came out of the situation surrounding the strike itself. The workers coalesced around a shop union, but the leadership of the organization remained disorganized after the president resigned. The union aimed to secure the bread-and-butter labor issues: reduced hours and increased wages. With the union's leadership in question, management took advantage of the fortuitous situation. They declared the plant a closed shop and advertised in the local paper for new hires after the Labor Day holiday. The Syrian contingent responded with the threat of destruction of property. One Syrian in

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[128] Alleged Threats to Blow Up Glen Falls Cement Plant at Glen Falls, N.Y. by Striking Employees, Roll 945, Case No. 211445-1, Bureau Section Files, 1909-21, Investigative Reports of the Bureau of Investigations 1908-22, NARA.

particular surfaced in the Bureau's investigation, a "Mr. Norman," whom witnesses placed at the center of the conspiracy. He bragged to his neighbors and close associates that he planned to destroy the plant with the superintendent inside. When Bureau agents questioned those close to Norman, they discovered that the instigator may have been full of bluster, and not fully committed to the act of industrial espionage. The Bureau did decide however, to employ their own Syrian agent to infiltrate the ranks of the strikers.

There are other examples of Arab American involvement in labor. George Addes, a Midwesterner with Syrian ancestry, helped found the United Auto Workers (UAW) in Detroit, served as the organization's secretary-treasurer, and later assisted in associating the UAW with the CIO labor union in Detroit and Dearborn.[129] Arab Americans also served on the side of business interests, sometimes in a role directly opposed to laborers. One Allie Said served as an enforcer for the notorious Ford Service Department during the Battle of the Overpass in Dearborn in 1937, and may have even attacked Addes there.[130]

The above examples represent a mere sample of the Syrian proletariat that the U.S. government saw developing after 1900. It should be unsurprising that the Syrian intelligentsia excluded the Syrian laborer from their pack-peddler narrative,

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[129] "Executive Board Minutes, May 7-12, 1936," 1-5, folder 1, box 1, The George Addes – UAW Secretary-Treasurer Collection (hereafter cited as the Addes Papers), Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit.

[130] Testimony, 1939, 1-2, folder 3, box 94, Addes Papers.

an exclusion that has bedeviled academics ever since. Workers stood as an antithetical example to the pack-peddler mythology of upward mobility. While the brief examples above give some indication into the Syrian migrant among the class of industrial laborers, they are in no way a total examination of the subject; these vignettes should serve as an opening for further research.

PART II: RACIALIZING SYRIANS

Chapter 3: Racialization in the Diaspora

The vignettes presented in this chapter illustrate this larger, transnational story of the Syrian mahjar experience. The documents upon which they are based represent the point where the British and American empires, as well as Syrian migrants, confronted the crystallizing states on the imperial periphery. What follows is not an attempt to retell all mahjar experiences or even cover all locations within the diaspora. Even Albert Hourani and Nadim Shehadi's great (both in size and analysis) volume, devoted specifically on Lebanese global migration, has proven to be a primer for further scholarship rather than the final word on a subject with such a vast scope.[131]

The following chapter is an attempt to better understand just how Syrian migrant communities were seen as a connected group across global and national frames of reference. That is, members of the Syrian diaspora attempted to construct multiple identities within a larger, overlapping, racial and proto-national identity. Identity formation occurred within each community, across those communities, and was imposed by actors external to the diaspora. The Syrian American community played a major role in maintaining a broader dialogue across the mahjar, both between members of the larger Syrian migration and between various governments.

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[131] Hourani and Shehadi, *The Lebanese in the World*.

More specifically the New York newspaper, *The Syrian World*, and its editors and readers, maintained information networks across the global Syrian diaspora. For example, Edward S. Kerachi, a South African born Syrian, lauded the American press for maintaining connections within the mahjar.[132] Kerachi represents just one voice among Syrians in the diaspora who saw the New York community as a voice for the whole. The New York community exhibited tremendous transnational reach and promoted its importance as an instrumental transnational organ underpinning the larger transatlantic movement of people and ideas. If one is not careful in looking for Syrians in the past, Syrian migrants can almost fade from view (leading to the ever pervasive narrative of assimilation, or at least becoming invisible within a given society). While the stated goal of *The Syrian World* was to maintain the Syrian racial identity, other communities outside of New York frequently exhibited different aims and goals, specifically the pro-French forces in Buenos Aires, a topic that will be taken up below, and more completely in Chapter 5. Moreover, forces external to the mahjar played a particularly important role in how Syrians formulated national identity abroad. A three-fold analysis therefore also incorporates how the imperial policies of Britain and France affected nationalist movements in the region of greater Syria, in addition to how European policies in

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[132] "Syrians of S. Africa Proud of The S.W.," *The Syrian World* 3, no. 6 (December 1928): 46–47.

the Middle East affected, and responded to, social and political movements within the mahjar.

In outlining the transatlantic Syrian mahjar experience, and the emergent Pan-Syrian political movements during and after World War I, I rely on the theoretical frameworks proposed by Michel de Certeau[133] and Pierre Bordieu.[134] My analyses consider aspects of "cultural production" and "cultural consumption," combined with exchanges between economic and cultural capital. Following de Certeau's "productivist model," I identify the demarcations between two distinct cultural exchanges. The first details the interplay between socio-legal frameworks employed by European and American powers, and how the Syrian mahjar performed degrees of self-understanding and expressed desires for political autonomy during and after World War I. The second demarcation (which is the subject of this chapter and the next) explores how fissures developed between the transatlantic narrative that Syrian elites (educators, journalists, and political activists) crafted, and the various regional barriers that the majority of Syrians confronted in everyday life.

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[133] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xi–xxiv.

[134] Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," *American Sociological Association* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 14–25; Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 46–58.

Educated mahjar elites based their understanding of the larger "Syrian" community on overlapping notions of race, civilization, and economic success. The view-from-above that mahjar Syrians created for the transnational community relayed a tidy representation of the modern, desirable Syrian. Views from the ground however, transmitted a different experience. For receiving societies, the distinctions between "alien friend" and "enemy," "Turk" and "Syrian," "Syrian" and "Lebanese," "Christian" and "Muslim," as well as between the various Syrian Christian sects, were often blurred and confused. Receiving societies sometimes saw no single racial entity nor unified Syrian civilization, and when they did envision a uniform Syrian identity, they perceived Syrians as a threat to economic prosperity or prevailing social norms. Moreover, how societies constructed various modes of understanding Syrian-ness always tied economic capital interminably to cultural capital. In other words, economic viability pointed to racial superiority and vice versa. Yet, in practice, sometimes the two did not neatly intersect. Capital exchange produced different results when considered from outside the Syrian community or from within it. Certain receiving societies sometimes framed Syrians' clamoring for upward mobility as a positive good, for instance in the U.S. and Argentina, while other societies and their state agents maintained the perception that Syrian economic prosperity created a societal menace, undermining the indigenous population's ability to elevate themselves within their own social circumstances. The culturally produced view from the street, or the various loci of

the broader Syrian migrant experience, created a different set of possibilities. Each of these nuanced renderings formed a larger, global experience of the Syrian mahjar, and served to complicate and undermine the culturally produced view from above that the diaspora's elites had so carefully groomed beginning in the 1910s.

Atlantic societies were bound within a broader political economy of the "British World-System" or "Second Atlantic" economy, so these categories carried weight beyond the collectivity of nations and empires and into local circumstances. Sarah Gualtieri's exemplary study shows just how Syrian migrants confronted categories of race, civilization, and broader societal receptivity in the United States,[135] but hierarchies were not specific to the U.S. Receptivity to Syrian identity varied by region even if the overarching racialization of "Western" societies did not. Overlapping and conflicting systems of social, political, and economic circumstances complicated the mahjar experience when taking different nation-states and imperial entities into larger account. This and the following chapter look into the society specific discourses of race and how racialized notions of belonging played out for Syrians in the U.S. and other sites in the diaspora. The following examination offers a glimpse into the larger, transatlantic context Syrians confronted in establishing themselves as a part of the "Western" world.

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[135] Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*.

3.1 An Early Test Case in Pre-World War I South Africa

Like numerous other migrant groups, Syrians entered a complicated system of labor exchanges and capital flows within the globalizing modern economic system. The Syrian mahjar experience in South Africa intersected with indentured labor regimes that abused Indian workers in the region, and the emergence of anti-Indian legislation in early twentieth century. This prejudicial legislation and social outlook set the context for Mohandas Gandhi's early reform work in South Africa. Young Gandhi represented the vanguard of a social and political campaign to combat discrimination in the English colonies within the Global South. As Gandhi fought to have the South African government consider Indians as "civilized men in a civilized country,"[136] Syrians likewise struggling to be included within the national body there.[137] Turkish officials goaded British and South African ministers to reconsider the position of Syrians within the British Empire, given their status as Ottoman subjects. Immigration legislation classified both Indians and Syrians under the umbrella category of "Asians," who were subjected to registration requirements, annual residential poll taxes, and restrictions placed on their

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[136] Mahatma Gandhi, "Letter to 'The Times,' August 27, 1909," in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 10 (New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India, 1999), 48.

[137] Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, "The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism," in *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century South Africa*, ed. Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido (New York and London: Routledge, 1987), 33.

ownership of land. Land ownership in South Africa ultimately defined whether or not an individual could apply for naturalization.

At the beginning of 1911, the Union of South Africa began formulating a new bill to expand its immigration policies. Ottoman diplomats were not alone among foreign agents issuing complaints to British officials regarding the restrictive migration legislation within the Empire. The Japanese Consul General in Australia had censured immigration restrictions in British colonies ten years prior, in 1901. The consul's main issue with immigration restrictions centered on the requisite language test officials imperial officials administered to migrants upon their arrival. Following the so-called "Natal formula" established in 1897 to control the flow of "Asiatic" migrants to that South African region, additional British colonies adopted restrictions based on two criteria: first, that migrants must possess property equivalent to £25, and second, that they must exhibit proficiency in English comprehension, a requirement later amended to include other "European languages."[138] The Japanese official argued that the Japanese language should be elevated in status, equal in merit to European languages as the official tongue of a "civilized," imperial people, on par with either Russian or Turkish.[139]

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[138] David FitzGerald and David Cook-Martin, *Culling the Masses: The Democratic Origins of Racist Immigration Policy in the Americas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 152–55.

[139] F. A. Huttenback, "The British Empire as a 'White Man's Country': Racial Attitudes and Immigration Legislation in the Colonies of White Settlement," *Journal of British Studies* 13 (1973): 111, 123–124.

The Japanese case would set a precedent for future consular appeals. Channes Bey, the Turkish Consul stationed at Johannesburg, would later make the same case in arguing for Syrian inclusion in South Africa. He concluded that the Arabic spoken by Syrian migrants should be considered just as "European" as Russian or Turkish, alluding to certain political and cultural considerations through international geography and philology. The comparison between Syrian and Japan had lasting appeal. Talcott Williams made a similar argument in the introduction to Philip Hitti's seminal academic work on Syrian Americans published in 1924: "If Syria were an island-land, instead of being in for four thousand years a thoroughfare of conquering peoples, swept by many tides, it would be, in its place, as striking an example of progress as Japan."[140]

Thirteen years prior to Williams' proclamation, in January 1911, Channes Bey wrote to Jan Smuts, then acting Secretary of the Interior for South Africa, requesting a private audience to discuss a series of questions concerning the status of Ottoman Syrians in the region. The Ottoman consul accompanied his request with an outline of grievances on behalf of Ottoman subjects in South Africa. He followed this list with a series of rebuttals against what he perceived to be the flawed logic used by South African legislators when they had formulated the draft bill on new immigration restrictions. First, Channes confronted the issue of South

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[140] Hitti, *The Syrians in America*, v.

Africa officially labeling Syrians as "Asiatic." He attempted to systematically dismantle the imposed Syrian identity with a diatribe against South African ministers' conflation of geography with nationality. He insisted that his audience should consider the Ottoman Empire as a specifically "European" empire, like England or France. Being situated only partially in Asia Minor, its inhabitants included myriad religious groups and races. Channes insisted that the Ottoman Empire was not simply an Asian empire made up of Asian inhabitants. Therefore, like Russia, the Ottoman territory should be considered European rather than Asian, despite the fact that the territories of both the Russian and Ottoman empires extended well into "geographical Asia." In this instance, the issue was not simply one of racial identity, but of Ottoman imperial pride and international legitimacy within the British system of geopolitics.

Channes extended his argument even further and included a linguistic element to his geographical argument. He insisted that the "Syrian language" (Arabic) is composed of the same alphabetic characters as Ottoman Turkish. Language departments at Universities in France and Austria considered Ottoman Turkish a European language, he urged, while Arabic continued to be erroneously excluded from the European family of languages. As we will explore in the following chapter, philologists considered Arabic a Semitic language and not European. Using the Arabic language as a marker of Syrian identity created a whole host of issues; namely, that the Syrians had abandoned the Phoenician alphabet of

their claimed ancestors, while Europeans maintained a connection with it through their claimed Hellenic roots.[141] When the inhabitants of Syria adopted Arabic, they by consequence abandoned the language of their proto-national past.

South Africa had accepted other Semitic languages as a marker of European-ness previously. The South African governing authorities had already defined Hebrew as a European language, but in their taxonomic formulations, according to the Ottoman diplomat Channes, South Africa had neglected to consider that both the Jewish and Syrian races came from the same region within a "European" empire. When Channes spoke of language, he hoped to hit a particularly poignant note with the Volksraad. Language maintained a particular relevance for the early Afrikaaner national movement in the late nineteenth century, where Dutch and English had been the language of the administration.[142] Channes appealed to the South African ruling class's sense of political liberalism, from one "civilization" to another.[143]

The Ottoman diplomat ran head first into the bureaucracy of the British Empire. Representatives of the Governor-General of the Union of South Africa,

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[141] Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia*, 3–4.

[142] Marks and Trapido, "The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism," 15.

[143] "Turkish Consul in Johannesburg to Secretary of the Interior of South Africa," January 26, 1911, TNA: CO 879/108/1, 114-115. For the correspondence over Ottoman subjects in South Africa, I employ the page numbering system from the original printing of the volume entitled; *South Africa: Further Correspndence (1911) Relating to Questions Affecting Coloured and Native Races* (Colonial Office, 1913).

Herbert Gladstone, responded to Channes that he should address his concerns through "proper diplomatic channels," claiming that the Governor-General could not respond directly to the Consular Corps regarding "general political questions" according to regulations set by the Cape Immigration Act of 1906.[144] By mid-February, Channes Bey reiterated his concerns regarding three issues to the office of the Governor-General. First, the Ottoman consulate had received news that the South African government began to implement barriers at the various entry points into the country. Reports indicated that South African officers prohibited Ottoman subjects from entering the country. Second, the Ottoman government protested any ban on Ottoman subjects from acquiring property in South Africa. As a means to not only status and wealth, but naturalization, land ownership retained a significant meaning in South African society. Third, Channes Bey wanted clarification for the government's reasoning behind regulations that, to the best of his knowledge, barred children of Ottoman nationals from attending South African schools.[145] Rather than responding to each of the enumerated grievances outline above, South African officials chose to respond only to what they perceived were the flawed elements of the Ottoman diplomat's racial interpretations in relation to geographical circumstances. They refrained from elucidating specific points.

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[144] "The Governor-General to the Secretary of State," March 11, 1911, TNA: CO 879/108/1, document 970, p. 68.

[145] "Turkish Consul in Johannesburg to Governor-General of South Africa," February 13, 1911, TNA: CO 879/108/1, document 970, p. 69.

Syrian exclusion emerged in other political theaters as well. Ahmet Tevfik Pasha, the Turkish ambassador to the British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey, submitted an official response along the "proper" British diplomatic channels. He presented two lines of argumentation to reports of Syrian exclusion in South African legislation and practice: one set on unraveling the logic that Asia represented a broad demographic human type based on shared geography, and the second upon linguistic considerations, similar to the misgivings Channes Bey had expressed in his earlier grievances. The similarities in the two Ottoman diplomats' arguments represent an early attempt on behalf of an imperial regime to consistently identify Syrians as a collective body. Later Syrian American thinkers would adopt and adapt elements of Tevfik Pasha and Channes's arguments.

Tevfik Pasha had rejected the Asiatic category wholesale, as he claimed that it was founded solely upon territorial considerations rather than any attempt to recognize a shared "Indo-European" culture. He implored British Foreign Secretary Edward Grey to explore the flawed logic that such divisions suggested, including the close-mindedness he perceived it took to reject even considering the deep ethnographic shifts that had taken place in the Levant over the course of century's worth of history. Such a hole in logic would lead one to conclude, according to the Pasha's rhetoric, that the "Israelites" were also indeed Asiatic.[146] Why were Jews

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[146] "The Turkish Ambassador to Sir E. Grey," February 28, 1911, TNA: CO 879/108/1. Ahmet Tevfik Pasha served alternately as the Turkish Ambassador to the United Kingdom and as Grand Vizier (the highest Ottoman ministerial office) in Istanbul following the Young Turk

eligible for inclusivity while Arabs were not? The argument that Israelites or Jews, as a "Semitic race" employing a Semitic language, belonged among the civilized races would have equal bearing for Syrians in the diaspora. British officials rejected linguistic considerations, however, just as ethnologists were also moving beyond language as an accurate marker of race. Rather than attempting to create a new identity for a whole constituent group within their empire, Ottoman officials were, in reality, expressing concerns over the possibility that the Natal immigration formula was just another step in introduce more "draconian" government policies excluding migrants from the Eastern Mediterranean.

The "*dispositions draconniennes*"[147] to which Tevfik Bey alluded, directly referred to the exclusionary 1885 South African law, which blocked "so-called coolies, Arabs, Malays, and Mahommedan subjects of the Turkish Dominions."[148] At the end of the nineteenth century, the Volksraad denied Ottoman subjects in South Africa certain rights afforded to other migrant nationalities through the Transvaal Law No. 3. Entitled "Coolies, Arabs, and other Asiatics," this section of the 1885 immigration law placed certain restrictions on specifically Muslim Ottoman subjects. The South African laws represented a peculiar alchemy of restrictions based on interchangeable categories: language, geography, religion.

Revolution in 1909. He would also be the last Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire at the conclusion of World War I.

[147] Ibid.

[148] Law No. 3, 1885, TNA: CO 879/108/1.

The laws oscillated between restricting Arabs, Muslims, and Asians. No clear logic appeared to govern the laws.

Asiatic exclusion from full participation in South African life brought widespread unrest. The same conditions also inspired Gandhi to fight the Transvaal Gold Law of 1908, which used similar language in excluding Indians from rights to land ownership. In this instance, Tevfik Bey took these restrictions as a direct attack on Syrian migrants from the imperial periphery whatever their sectarian slant. The Ottoman diplomat found the restrictions especially archaic by 1911, when the law was expanded to block all "Asiatics" from acquiring Burgher rights and eligibility to own land. A year earlier, South Africa had become a semi-autonomous, self-governing colony within the British Empire, predicated upon a racial caste system antedating the notoriously abusive apartheid regime that reigned from the 1940s to the 1990s.[149]

The Volksraad, formerly the Afrikaner legislative body, had been reconfigured in 1910 as an exclusively, racially white, lower house within South Africa's parliament. When the Ottoman diplomats petitioned the South African consulates regarding the issue of race, he expressed special aggravation when South African officials informed him that such correspondence must go through "diplomatic channels" rather than through the consulate. The South African

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[149] Graham Leach, *South Africa: No Easy Path to Peace* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 86.

Governor-General, Viscount Herbert Gladstone, had stonewalled the minister with bureaucracy and red tape from the British imperial regime.

The episode also reveals how the imperial regime's interpretation of subject classes different from the newly empowered Afrikaner elites in South Africa. For British colonial officials at Whitehall, British protection should be extended to include subjects considered central to imperial rule: in this instance, upper-caste Indian princes, and economically viable "Arab merchants." Colonial officials maintained that close ties with Indian nobility facilitated smooth relations within the empire, specifically between the South African and Indian colonies, one as labor supplier and the other as labor hungry. A class of viable merchants also ensured a network kept the continual flow of goods to all parts of the colonies. Conversely, the largely Afrikaner Volksraad ministers and members of the South African Republic sought to exclude any migrants or settlers who migrated from beyond the realm of European provenance. Broadly encompassed within the loose geographical, yet culturally constructed category of "Asiatic," Indians, Chinese, and Ottoman subjects were *en toto* prevented from political or social integration. Their claims to land remained limited, though they were free to choose where they settled. Even if the South African and London ministers could not agree on the role of this legislation initially, they did in turn both deny manipulating the laws for the benefit of Ottoman subjects after 1911.

Though experts posited that both groups who used Semitic and Aryan languages belonged within a larger coalition of Aryan nations, and consequently also within the Caucasian race, Syrians and Indians were excluded from participation in South African national life and land ownership due to their point of origin – Asia. Accepting what David Roediger calls the "messiness of racial order"[150] that holds ethnic groups in a state of "in-betweeness," or racial abeyance, Syrian and Indian migrants to South Africa (itself a middle ground geographically speaking, one where whites hoped to reconstruct European dominance) were distinguished further, due to the migrant's place of origin or their linguistic capacity. These categories were simply metonyms for race. Racial belonging could not be distilled into solely one quality. Ottoman officials struggled to provide a uniform identity for Ottoman Syrians, and as we will see in Chapter 5, the Syrian American intelligentsia likewise struggled in that venture. In fact, making race an easily identifiable and predictable category worked against its use as a means to exclude. For racial taxonomies to hold sway, certain races contributed certain functions to society, even if some remained "more equal" than others did when it came to full civic participation.

Given how the Indian independence movement loomed large on the world stage, it should come as no surprise that the transnational Syrian press maintained

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[150] Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 12–13.

interest in the Indian experience against British colonial authority. Sumayah Attiyeh, a prominent female leader of the Syrian community in New York, later invited one of Gandhi's companions to speak the Syrian community on her experiences in struggling for civil rights in the British Empire.[151] The Syrian experience in South Africa remained closely aligned with regional concerns over Indian immigration and citizenship, but the Syrian diaspora experience also intersected with India in other ways. Some captured Ottoman soldiers of Arab origin were relocated to British prison camps in India by 1914, though contact with the indigenous population was likely minimal. The British authorities were instructed to keep the prisoners segregated from the general population in order to prevent possible collusion.[152]

South Africa has a long history mired in the issues of race and citizenship. The place of Ottoman Syrian migrants to the region has not received the type of academic attention that the topic deserves. This brief section is in no way a definitive survey of the scant materials on the subject, but hopefully will serve as a point of departure for direly needed future scholarship on a topic that has essentially been overlooked to this point. The available documents at the British National Archives in Kew provide an ambiguous view of the status of Syrians in South Africa. The following sections on how Syrian migrants experienced belonging and

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[151] "Indian Speaker Guest of Syrians," *The Syrian World* 6, no. 3 (November 1931): 56.

[152] "Viceroy to London Office," December 30, 1914, TNA: FO 383/88.

otherness in other Atlantic societies during the period provide a clearer picture of the broader diasporic experience, and how receiving societies created distinct narratives racializing Syrians in their midst.

3.2 Syrian Identity and Belonging during WWI

The question of how Syrian nationality overlapped with Syrians' official political status as Ottoman subjects became an even more pressing issue for British imperial officials during World War I. National polities and state governments participating in the war erupted in an outpouring nationalist fervor predicated on the dual notions of safeguarding civilization while maintaining imperial acquisitions. Over the course of the prolonged and bloody conflict, nationalist uprisings began to challenge imperial regimes and clamor for international recognition. Especially in regions of the crumbling Ottoman Empire, numerous ethno-national fronts challenged the old imperial order. It should then come as no surprise that the issue of Syrian national affiliation and racial identification spilled into the international arena, not only as a topic among Syrians worldwide, but also among each faction in the global conflict. While one historian has called the Pan-Syrianism of the time "possibly the most disregarded topic of Middle Eastern history in the twentieth century,"[153] the topic's seeming lack of coverage has less

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[153] Pipes, *Greater Syria: The History of an Ambition*, 7.

to do with oversight than with the tendency for authors to read Pan-Syrianism into a broader Pan-Arab framework.[154] As we have seen above, Syrian-ness and Arab-ness, while related, did not necessarily neatly overlap. The topic has experienced a bit of an upsurge in interest in the twenty-first century following the recent events that have engulfed the modern Syrian nation-state since 2011. Pan-Syrianism emerged as a transnational political movement during World War I in response to the abuses of the Ottoman government in the imperial periphery. Syrian identity intersected with issues Syrian political maneuvering and their imposed status in receiving societies in a number complex of ways.

Beginning in December of 1914, soon after the opening salvos of the war, the delicate political issue of collective Syrian status first surfaced in regions beyond the zones of military conflict. British officials across the empire questioned whether or not Syrians should be considered wartime neutrals or Turkish nationals, and consequently, enemies of the Crown. The British Foreign Office struggled to establish a wartime formula that could effectively determine the likelihood Ottoman subjects would present an imminent threat to British sovereignty in any part of the world. Members of Foreign Office scrambled to detail a general solution, ultimately coming to the conclusion that Syrian racial and religious considerations should be considered the most important identity markers used to judge an

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[154] Humphreys, *Between Memory and Desire: The Middle East in a Troubled Age*, 64–67.

individual's likeliness to resist Ottoman authority. National status, based loosely in formal citizenship, did not accurately represent ethnic or religious loyalties. A Turkish passport did not necessarily mean the carrier retained loyalty to the Ottoman regime. Conversely, an Ottoman Syrian resident within the British Empire could be an Ottoman spy. The British Foreign Office concluded that what Syrians held in their hearts and minds would influence their wartime actions more strongly than any prior political affiliation with the Sublime Porte in Istanbul. The British government would eventually determine that the Syrian population had no real filial linkage with the Turkish wartime government.

In the British system, politics and economics functioned hand-in-hand. Syrian migrants would mirror this arrangement in their expressions of self-identification. Even during wartime, trade remained a significant aspect of the Syrian mahjar experience. The British Foreign Office initiated correspondence with Governor George Le Hunte of Trinidad and Tobago over rumors that he had interfered with Syrian trade on the islands. Le Hunte responded that the rumors were just that, mere speculation, and that the colonial authorities in Trinidad had only required Syrian migrants to register with the colonial authorities there.[155] Shortly afterwards, in January 1915, the Privy Council issued an Order in Council creating the "Aliens Restriction (Consolidation) Order" to deal specifically with the

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[155] "George Le Hunte to Edward Brothers," December 30, 1914, TNA: FO 383/88/513.

issue of Ottoman subjects, residing or sojourning on the periphery of the British Empire. The Order's initial iteration permitted that "A registration officer may, subject to the general or special instructions of the Secretary of State, grant to a Turkish subject resident in his registration district, who is shown to his satisfaction to be by race a Greek, Armenian, or Syrian, or a member of any community well known as opposed to the Turkish régime, and to be a Christian, a certificate of exemption."[156] Syrians were to be officially considered "alien friends" as opposed to "alien enemies."

What began as a simple exchange with a regional governor eventually elicited a larger undertaking by the Foreign Office. Combined with the Porte's "misapprehension that all Turkish subjects in the United Kingdom and in His Majesty's Overseas Dominions have been interned,"[157] British authorities undertook an empire-wide census to locate all Ottoman subjects. Secretary of State for the Foreign Office, Sir Edward Grey, petitioned regional authorities in Canada, Australia, and South Africa to give accounts regarding the ratio of total Ottoman subjects resident in the territories versus those interned for various reasons.[158] The Secretary also suggested rewording the language of the working copy of the Aliens

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[156] "Order-in-Council, Aliens Restriction (Consolidation) Order," January 3, 1915, TNA: FO 383/88/1150.

[157] "Edward Grey to United States Consul in Aleppo, Jesse B. Jackson," July 21, 1915, TNA: FO 383/88/94729.

[158] "Treatment of Non-Turkish Ottoman Subjects in the Colonies," January 7, 1915, TNA: FO 383/88/2159.

Restriction Order that he then forwarded to the governors of each location, emphasizing religion over race. He insisted that the word "Christian" come before any mention of racial origins or the term "Syrians."[159] Syrians were to acquire proof of their Christianity to avoid being detained by the police. Those who identified as Catholics and Maronites could attain certification from the French Consul while Melkites and Greek Orthodox could attain verification through the Greek Consulate.[160]

This was not Edward Grey's first brush with the question regarding Syrian racial status in the imperial periphery. He had already been deeply involved in the Syrian question in South Africa four years previously. In 1915, Grey would single-handedly redefine the primary attributes of desirable Syrians within the empire. Religious identity and opposition to Turkish rule seemed sufficient qualities to affirm alien friend status for Syrians. Philanthropists in the United States also extended the wartime olive branch to Syrians through fundraising campaigns and aid activities, including a day of recognition for Syrians and Armenians at the Hero Land exhibition in New York. Unlike in the U.S. court system, where lawyers at first succeeded in arguing for Syrian eligibility for naturalization with religious affiliation as the core determinant, racial considerations based in ethnological expertise became the primary determining factor for naturalization. The American

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[159] "Andrew Bonar Law to Henry Lambert," January 15, 1915, TNA: FO 383/88/2159.

[160] "J. F. Henderson to Horace Rumbold," January 8, 1915, TNA: FO 383/88/2840.

situation will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapter. What is significant here is that in both American and British empires, wartime security required less stringent proof for Syrian desirability. Eligibility for citizenship and incorporation in the national body were not the primary concerns during the conflict. Extending protection to Syrians in need did not mean having to incorporate them into Western societies.

To dispel Turkish paranoia over rumors that interned Ottoman subjects suffered poor treatment, the British government later extended the census to include all British domains. The wartime census marks a truly modern, scientific demarcation based in surveillance and registration. France would again take a global census on Syrians, but their intent would be quite different from the British undertaking, as officials in the post-war setting were looking to establish distinct polities for separate Lebanese and Syrian Mandates.

British wartime records indicated that registration officers found only a few thousand Ottoman subjects residing or sojourning in the formal possessions of the British Empire. In the British Isles, 460 resided in England and Wales, 29 in Scotland, and a mere four in Ireland.[161] Police interned 94 of the total 460 Ottoman subjects. The numbers that the governors of the imperial periphery returned for tabulation varied. South Africa reported that only 111 (of an undetermined total)

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[161] "Turkish Subjects Residing in the United Kingdom, Uninterned," July 8, 1915, TNA: FO 383/88/91142.

were interned. Australia reported neither total figures nor any interned. New Zealand registered 431 total Ottoman subjects residing in the islands during 1911, with only one taken to an internment camp after the onset of the war. The Governor of New Zealand telegrammed the Colonial Office in July that "Turkish subjects in New Zealand are practically all Syrian hawkers and dealers in fancy goods and are harmless."[162] Governor General Sydney Buxton of South Africa reported five Ottoman subjects interned out of a total population of 566. The Union of South Africa had maintained the policy "that all Christian and Jewish subjects of the Turkish Empire have been exempted from internment but otherwise Turkish subjects are dealt with in the same manner as German and Austrian civilians,"[163] that is, as enemy aliens. Wartime conditions made religion the marker of comity in South Africa rather than strictly race or geography. Canadian officials arrested 142 out of that country's population of 1,813 Ottoman subjects. Colonial authorities in India did not offer any numbers before the findings were relayed to Ottoman officials.[164] Other reports indicated a predominately Christian Syrian presence in Gambia, Gold Coast, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone with no reported cases of

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[162] "Governor-General Arthur Foljambe to Andrew Bonar Law," July 13, 1915, TNA: FO 383/88/94729.

[163] "Internment of Turkish Civilians in South Africa," July 7, 1915, TNA: FO 383/88/90620.

[164] "Internment of Turkish Civilians in New Zealand," July 13, 1915, TNA: FO 383/88/94729.

internment.[165] The Foreign Office indicated in their final report of July 21, 1915 that fewer than seven percent of Ottomans in the British Empire overall were subject to internment, and justified internment on a case-by-case basis. "In all cases where Turkish subjects have been interned the reason has been that, if they had been left at liberty their actions would have been a source of danger to the state."[166] As a side note, the seven percent figure is also interesting in that Philip Hitti claimed seven percent of Syrians in the United States volunteered for the U.S. Army during World War I.[167] To trust these numbers would mean it might have been equally likely that a Syrian migrant could be friend or foe, at least in the calculus of the Allied powers, thus explaining the seriousness with which wartime governments approached the situation. In essence, state statisticians could quantify Syrian loyalty. Evidence suggests that the British respondents had a reason to be concerned. A number of the individuals arrested had ties to the Turkish military or were Arab revolutionaries.

The British government reciprocated Turkish demands. They threatened to hold personally accountable all Ottoman officials maltreating English nationals while simultaneously attempting to assuage Turkish concerns that those interned did not suffer unfair treatment. The report specified that "subjects interned in a fort

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[165] Ibid.

[166] "Edward Grey to United States Consul in Aleppo, Jesse B. Jackson," July 21, 1915, July 13, 1915, TNA: FO 383/88/94729/15.

[167] Hitti, *The Syrians in America*, 102; Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 102, n. 18.

in Kingston…as well as all other Turkish subjects interned in Canada, are well clothed and in comfortable surroundings and are fed in exactly the same way as are Canadian soldiers."[168] Moreover, according to the British documentation, "neutral" U.S. consuls routinely visited the camps to ensure favorable conditions.

Turkish interest in the treatment of prisoners stemmed from the Sublime Porte's concerns over whether or not to allow British and French nationals to leave Ottoman-held territory. British internments, while predominantly determined on a case-by-case basis, more generally singled out members of the "Turkish race" and Syrian Muslims as threats to imperial security and the British war effort. British administrators focused their attention on their Asian colonies as sites of possible unrest. In Hong Kong, they chose to deport rather than to imprison the elderly "Mahomed Pasha Kamal…an ex-admiral in the Turkish Navy and a political exile" for stirring "anti-British sympathies [that] alienated the local Moslem community."[169] Another Ottoman subject, one specifically designated "Syrian," had been detained in Hong Kong. The colony's governor, Francis Henry May, reported that the Syrian, "Rozrook Oudish," had been discovered distributing anti-British literature through the mail to a Manila based newspaper.[170] In Bombay,

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[168] "Edward Grey to United States Consul in Aleppo, Jesse B. Jackson"; "Governor-General of Canada Prince Arthur to Andrew Bonar Law," July 10, 1915, TNA: FO 383/88/93989.

[169] "Andrew Bonar Law to Henry McMahon," June 30, 1915, TNA: FO 383/88/84237.

[170] "Governor Francis Henry May to Foreign Office," January 1915, TNA: FO 383/88/24635.

India, colonial administrators blocked the former Turkish army captain Sheik Salim al-Khayyam from leaving the colony. British spies had determined that he presented a threat to the political order in Iraq, being "still mediaeval in his knowledge," [171] and a "loyal" Ottoman spreading dissent, and they decided instead to pay the Muslim activist a monthly stipend and keep him under surveillance in the India rather than deport him to the Middle East.[172] Police forces also detained "Sayyid Muhammed Mutlaq" after receiving reports that the Arab Mullah intended to extend jihad from the Arab Peninsula into India.[173] However, the vast majority of Syrian migrants and sojourners within the British Empire were not determined to be security threats, and therefore not arrested. For the time being, at least in the wartime British imperial context, Syrians inched closer to whiteness (e.g. civil, Christian, mercantile) and away from otherness (e.g. Turkish/Arab, enemy, Muslim, or rebel).

How western powers distinguished between Turkish administration and ethnic Ottoman subjects reflected a broader shift within the Ottoman Empire during the war. Rising anti-Turkish sentiment in both Syria and among Syrian communities abroad strained relations with the Turkish government. The Syrian

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[171] "Copy of the Report from the Commission of Police, Bombay," April 23, 1915, TNA: FO 383/88/82395.

[172] "Sheikh Salim Al-Khayyam," June 23, 1915, TNA: FO 383/88/82395.

[173] "Secretary to the Government of Bombay to Secretary of the Government of India," February 22, 1915, TNA: FO 383/88/54722.

community residing in Egypt circulated reports that the Ottoman regime had instigated a plan of liquidation against the population of the Syrian provinces. In reality, a combination of conscription, military requisitioning of supplies, and blockades by both Allied and Central powers led to a state of near total deprivation. A clandestine British agent in Syria reported that an estimated 80,000 Syrians had already died due to Turkish "persecution." Scholarship since World War I has placed the victims of famine in the range of 350,000 to 500,000 across greater Syria, with approximately 200,000 civilian casualties in Mount Lebanon alone. While British authorities claimed these numbers were exaggerated at the time, the rumors had already impressed mahjar Syrians, and brought about a brief interlude of greater camaraderie between Syrian Christians and Muslims. The upswing brought out new appeals for a multi-ethnic, religiously tolerant, and decisively anti-Ottoman Syrian society in the crumbling Ottoman imperial periphery.[174]

3.3 The Tenuousness of Belonging in Latin "Ameerka"

The victorious European empires eventually dismantled Ottoman Syria into geographical units that would become six distinct nation-states. For many Syrians in the mashriq and the mahjar, a Syrian racial category began to emerge, via the mahjar press. Even so, the foundations for erasing the category as a powerful base

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[174] Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon*, 20–23.

for self-understanding had already been laid following the postwar peace settlement. While British and French immigration policies influenced Syrian movement in Latin American countries, these policies had little bearing on how Latin American societies imposed Syrian-ness from outside the communities. Following the post-war settlement, under the League of Nations mandate system, distinct Syrian and Lebanese national statuses were guaranteed under French protection. While these proto-nation-states awarded some status to their citizens, the receiving societies in the Americas and throughout the Atlantic still questioned what Syrians were. Were they a distinct racial group? Were they desirable as possible future citizens?

The notion of a unified diasporic experience is just as misleading as the idea of a unified Latin America. For the sake of analysis, this chapter groups Latin American republics together to form a larger geographical setting outside the territorial claims of the British, French, and American empires. Large Syrian communities in Argentina, in the cities of Buenos Aires, Córdoba, and Tucuman, stood as the South American antipode to the U.S. communities. New York and Buenos Aires represent what Saskia Sassen has labeled "global cities."[175] City-dwellers were more concerned with the transnational movement of peoples, goods, and capital than with specifically national interests. New York and Buenos Aires

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[175] Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*.

served as major economic nodes in the Syrian diaspora. Syrian Americans deeply pronounced the merits of mercantile innovation and profit in the U.S., as the previous chapters have shown. Syrian Argentines likewise made it their mission to show just how deeply they had integrated into the economic framework of the region. Syrian intellectuals and politicians formulated a narrative of upward mobility and popular profiteering as the country entered a period of industrialization during the late nineteenth century. Argentine society confronted similar notions of civilization and race that proliferated North American and European cultures. In a cultural sense, the popular sentiment at the turn of the century was that the Argentinian future pivoted on a delicate balance between civilization and barbarity. One led to the future, the other to decadence. Different migrant groups could represent either end of the spectrum during different political periods. In 1919, nativists and political conservatives viewed migrants as agents set out to unravel the previously stable period of civilization.

Syrian migrants in Argentina envisioned themselves as fellow vanguards protecting civilization. The Syrian press in Argentina celebrated the Banco Sirio-Libanés (Syrian-Lebanese Bank) as a symbol of the extent to which they had integrated into the economic life of the country. In its highest symbolic form, the bank represented the Syrian community's move to exchange cumulative financial capital for cultural capital. Under the leadership of Moisés Azize, a native of Hama, Syria, the bank became a symbol for the community's integration into Argentine

life.[176] Syrians participated fully in the economic sector, with critical investments in the nation's industry and agricultural sectors. The Syrian Argentine press extrapolated the economic involvement into a portrayal of how the banking institution and community integrated themselves as part of the nation's cultural fabric. As such, the bank represented the community's recognition of the national mythology of belonging through a fiction of upward mobility,[177] as much as it was an actual entity for capital investment and initiating day-to-day transactions. The Syrian migrant press had situated the community as an integral component within the narrative of upward mobility in Argentina just as the Syrian American press would make social mobility a critical component of Syrian identity in the U.S.

Ingratiating themselves to the Argentine receiving society required that members of the Syrian community situate themselves within the national ethos as well. They blurred the lines between the Syrian and Argentine landscapes, seeing in one the other and vice versa. Syrians viewed the cedars of the northwestern region of Córdoba as the same as those in Lebanon. Córdoba resembled the "land promised to the sons of the Conquistadores," a role that Syrian migrants eagerly

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[176] "El Banco Sirio-Libanés Conforme Afianza Su Existencia Penetra En Las Capas Financieras de La República."

[177] For a study of urban migration that challenges the narrative of upward mobility in Argentina, especially in the city of Córdoba, see Mark D. Szuchman, *Mobility and Integration in Urban Argentina: Córdoba in the Liberal Era* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980).

inhabited.[178] They envisioned themselves as the sons of the conquistadores, the first arrivals in the Spanish conquest of the New World. With the mythology of the *gauchos* (cowboys) on the *Pampas* (the frontier), Syrians formulated an effort to weave themselves into the national narrative, projecting the free-spirited life under the cedars of Lebanon onto the free-roaming gauchos on the Argentine Pampas.

Syrian participation in Argentina was not merely literary. During the 1930s, the *comunidad sírio-libanesa* (Syrian-Lebanese community) expressed a high degree of political participation at the national level. The community by-and-large aligned itself with the radical President Hipolito Yrigoyen. As president of Argentina, and leader of the Unión Cívica Radical (Radical Civic Union, or UCR), Yrigoyen had implemented universal male suffrage in 1912, reached out to the working class through syndicalist unions, and more generally promoted his agenda to integrate the common man more intimately into the political process and the country's economic sphere by extending suffrage. He expressed the desire for better political and infrastructural integration for regions on the periphery as well, in order to create a thoroughly national vision of Argentina. His plans were ultimately undone by the worldwide depression that began in 1929, which inspired members

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[178] "Córdoba, Tierra Prometida a Los Hijos de Los Conquistadores de América," *El Eco de Oriente*, March 9, 1935.

of the Argentine military and political conservatives, who longed for the return to oligarchy, to oust Yrigoyen in 1930.[179]

Even though their ethnic identity remained, at best, undetermined in official documentation, where they were designated as either "sírio," "libanés," "otomano," "árabe," or more commonly, "turco," the turco epithet in particular held sway in popular culture. The imposed "turco" identity inspired anti-immigrant polemics, even in film, well into the 1940s. *Corazón de Turco* (1940) and *El Comisario de Tranco Largo* (1942) represented "turcos" as greedy and stubborn but ultimately in possession of hearts of gold. These artistic representations relayed the supposed, integral character of the turco migrant, whose naturally icy heart was still susceptible to the thaw of compassion.

The Perón regime officially recognized Syrians as equal members in Argentina by the 1950s, a formal status undermined when the community became linked, by dint of shared ethnic origins, to the neo-liberal reforms of the Lebanese-descended (and popularly reviled) President Carlos Menem, whose policies dragged the Argentine economy into ruin beginning in the 1990s.[180] Broader

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[179] Joel Horowitz, *Argentina's Radical Party and Popular Mobilization, 1916-1930* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 115–116; Geoffroy Laforcade, "Straddling the Nation and the Working World: Anarchism and Syndicalism on the Docks and Rivers of Argentina, 1900-1930," in *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1870-1940: The Praxis of National Liberation, Internationalism, and Social Revolution*, ed. Steven Hirsch and Lucien Van der Walt (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 332–348.

[180] Sofia D. Martos, "The Balancing Act: Ethnicity, Commerce, and Politics Among Syrian and Lebanese Immigrants in Argentina, 1890-1955" (University of California, Los Angeles, 2007), 306.

Argentine society responded negatively to the Syrian Argentine community, who may have finally attained formal equality, but remained far from attaining substantive cultural equality within the nation. The "turco" epithet, and the association with Menem, still endured.

Syrian migrants also confronted immigration restrictions in other Central American republics, including Panama. Between 1904 and 1909, the Republic of Panama had passed legislation restricting "Chinese, Turks and Syrians" from legally entering the country. In March 1913, the government expanded the law to include "North Africans of the Turkish Race."[181] Agencies assisting in the traffic of these restricted races faced financial and criminal penalties. Ship masters violating the measure were to be fined 500 Panamanian balboas (B/.) for each person from among the above races, and those convicted of smuggling any member of a prohibited race faced prison sentences up to one half a year for the first offense and up to one year upon a second conviction. Migrants illegally entering the country were to be "condemned to labour on the public works for one year."[182] The legislators intended to slow the rate of illegal immigration and the lucrative market that had developed around smuggling illegal migrants. The government built in exceptions for migrants that had entered the country before 1904. All Syrians living in Panama before the government enacted the law had to provide proof of residence

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[181] "C. Mallet to Edward Grey," April 22, 1913, TNA: FO 141/741/3.

[182] Ibid.

in the form of a certificate issued by the provincial governor of the migrant's place of residence.[183] Governors could consider granting exemptions on a case-by-case basis to individuals who owned property, a commercial business, or to those who had participated in lucrative agricultural endeavors.

Much of the 1913 legislation focused on requiring individual Syrians and Syrian associations to register with the appropriate government authorities. For example, Article 24 required ethnic associations to register with the state and pay a quarterly fee ranging from B/. 100 to B/. 1,000. Such regulations made associations responsible to state and civic authorities, entities that in turn kept a close eye on the membership rolls and financial exchanges of each organization. Article 39 of the 1913 legislation mandated a census for all male members of the enumerated "restricted races" as outlined in the law. As in 1904, all residents of the respective races were required to apply to their provincial governors for permission to stay in the region. Each male head-of-household had to submit papers verifying the biographical information for each dependent family member, as well as provide detailed records outlining their original journeys to Panama, including the ship's name, and proof of employment as evidence against the possibility that they might become a vagrant after landing.[184] In 1926, the Panamanian Republic again

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[183] "Decree of the National Assembly of Panama, Law No. 50 of 1913, Relative to the Immigration and Associations of Chinese, Turks, Syrians and North Africans of the Turkish Race," March 24, 1913, TNA: FO 141/741/3, document 24110.

[184] "Decree No. 44 of 1913 of the National Assembly of Panama, Establishing Regulations in Furtherance of These Provisions of Law 50 of 1913 Which Relate to the Immigration of Chinese,

expanded the country's legislation barring Asian migrants. Panama included Syrians among undesirables migrants alongside "Japanese, Chinese, East Indians, [and] Negroes…without respect to race or color."

The editors of *The Syrian World* believed that the law was a symptom of legal and social barriers shared across all Atlantic societies. In particular, the restrictions Syrians suffered at the hands of the Haitian government rustled the magazine's editors. Syrian Haitians had been subjected to a number of government programs and legislative attempts to curb migration and settlement. Even though the U.S. reversed the anti-Syrian laws after occupying the island nation in 1915, the antipathy had left its mark. The anti-Syrian legislation in Haiti provided a foundation for other Caribbean and Latin American societies to create similar legislation. It also served to prepare the Syrian mahjar press to confront anti-immigration challenges by reaching out to competing imperial powers for a guarantee to protect their rights in contested regions.

In 1903, the Haitian government passed the Syrian Exclusion Act. Enforcing the legislation created an international situation that prompted U.S. foreign diplomats to take quick action. Syrian exclusion created social disruptions that spanned the tenure of three U.S. Secretaries of State. Elihu Root and William Jennings Bryan inherited the sticky Syrian situation after John Hay's demise in

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Turks, Syrians and North Africans of the Turkish Race," March 24, 1913, document 35988, TNA: FO 141/741/3, document 24110.

office. The Haitian government turned a blind eye when mobs threatened the security of the Syrian community. Popular sentiment had turned exclusion into expulsion. The U.S. government intervened when it deemed it necessary to protect naturalized Americans of Syrian background. The United States offered protection from expulsion for U.S. citizens, but they could not extend protection to all Syrian Haitians. However, many of the Syrian residents of Haiti looked to capitalize on this political loophole by forging naturalization papers. The Haitian scheme was just the tip of a larger forgery practice that proved to be a common and lucrative practice among Syrian migrants. However, the burden of proof for exposing fraudulent nationalization papers fell on the Haitian government rather than American administrators.[185] This meant, in essence, that all Syrians claiming protection of the American government would receive protection until the Haitian government could prove that the person in question was not naturalized.

It is a wonder that any Syrians continued to reside in Haiti. Not only did the country embark on a program of debarring Syrian migrants, but it also attempted to expel those already residing in the country. The situation once again resurfaced when the Haitian government entered into a period of political revolution and tumult beginning in 1911. President Leconte initiated a plan to rigorously enforce

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[185] "The Acting Secretary of State to Minister Powell," March 22, 1905, in U.S. Congress, House, *Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, Contagious Diseases among Immigrants*, 66th Cong., 3rd Sess. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1921), 536.

the 1903 law anew in 1912. In addition to excluding new arrivals, Leconte's administration also supported a program of government harassment on top of local forms of persuasion to pressure Syrian residents to leave of their own volition.[186]

During his few months in office between 1912 and 1913, the Haitian President Tancrède Auguste singled out the Syrian community expelled from the island as a hotbed of political dissent. He believed that Syrians previously expelled had resettled in Jamaica and fomented a rebellion from across the Caribbean. Newly resettled and carrying a grudge against the government that had forcibly removed them from their adopted home, Auguste feared that the Syrian population in Jamaica was secretly funding a rebellion to topple the Haitian government from the distant safety of Kingston.[187] President Auguste told the American Ambassador to Haiti H.W. Furniss that "all Syrians are bad," to which Furniss proclaimed "No more so than all Haitians."[188] Each was informed by their own racial prejudices. This was not the only instance where government officials or members of the polity in Caribbean nation-states cast blame on itinerant Syrians. When Auguste died in office in May 1913, the new Haitian President Michel Oreste changed position, and guaranteed protection for what he viewed as the "beneficial" Syrian business on the

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[186] "The American Minister to the Secretary of State," March 25, 1913, in U.S. Department of State, *Papers Relating to Foreign Relations of the United States, 1912-1913* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1920), 577–579.

[187] "The American Minister to the Secretary of State," February 25, 1913, ibid., 575–576.

[188] "The American Minister to the Secretary of State," March 25, 1913, ibid., 577–579.

island.[189] However, in keeping with the 1903 law, he did not allow any new migration for people of Syrian origins, except naturalized Americans. Oreste's new position sought a middle ground between the American diplomats who sought to protect Syrian Americans and the Haitian population hostile to new Syrian settlement. However, Oreste's administration maintained that a contingent of expelled Syrian Americans had been in contact with the former President Antoine Simon, who had been deposed in 1911 before Auguste took office, and had participated in planning a change in government in Haiti from Jamaica.[190] In disbelief, the U.S. consul in Kingston contacted the major banking institutions in Jamaica's capital and determined that no large funds had been transferred through those institutions, and that any accusation of funding a rebellion was unwarranted.[191] Were the Syrian migrants to Haiti in such control of the nation's political situation? A deeper study into the political situation is certainly warranted. But the Haitian government's continual obsession with Syrian migrants masked a broader societal antipathy toward Syrian business and peddlers with suspicions of revolution and traitorous behavior. The language of revolution carried weight in a predominately black nation where settlers and peddlers from a self-proclaimed

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[189] "The American Minister to the Secretary of State," May 29, 1913, in ibid., 581.

[190] "The American Minister to the Secretary of State," July 25, 1913, in ibid., 582–583.

[191] "The American Consul in Kingston, Jamaica, to the Secretary of State," September 12, 1913, in ibid., 584–585.

"white" racial group attempted to elbow into the markets of the island's black business elite.

The mahjar press characterized the Syrian migrant experience in Caribbean and Latin American societies as unfairly framed by receiving societies as a competition for local resources. The prejudices that Syrian migrants faced in Panama were motivated by "Professional jealousies" due to "the Syrians' success in their mercantile undertakings"[192] irrespective of the benefit such activities might provide to the nations where they resided. Rather than ligatures of transnational trade, societies perceived Syrians as itinerant parasites. Syrian migrants frequently confronted societies bent on misconstruing their own sense of identity, foisting upon them an identity of pariah capitalist wherever they chose to reside, much like their commonly derided Chinese counterparts.[193] Through "a misconception of their true ethnology,"[194] receiving societies categorized Syrians outside the white race, outside of the civilized peoples, and outside of productive members of modernity. Syrians were a part of the Asiatic hordes. For the Panamanian case, the rhetoric and the reality proved much more complex, and a case in point.

When the Panamanian government decided to make Syrian, Lebanese, or Palestinian disembarkation a criminal action punishable by confinement and $500

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[192] "Discrimination against Syrians," *The Syrian World* 1, no. 5 (November 1926): 39–40.

[193] Chun, "Pariah Capitalism and the Overseas Chinese of Southeast Asia: Problems in the Definition of the Problem."

[194] "Discrimination against Syrians."

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bail, the transnational Syrian press coalesced to appeal to the French government for protection. Imperial protections had proved useful in prior circumstances for Syrians abroad, particularly when under American protection. U.S. Secretary of War, Elihu Root, had previously extended American protection to naturalized American Syrians sojourning in Haiti when the government threatened them with expulsion in 1905. The U.S. had even offered protection in cases where Syrians had claimed citizenship through fraudulent papers, or if they had claims to outstanding debts held in the U.S.[195] Syrian Americans hoped that they could galvanize the same sentiment with France after U.S. involvement in Panama elicited a different response from that in Haiti. American support was difficult to acquire given the U.S. government's pro-Panama stance and shipping interests in the isthmus.

The Syrian press in the U.S. reported that the "official" reason behind Panama's anti-Syrian legislation was based in Syrians' supposed challenge to Panamanian national sovereignty. It is interesting to note that such a press release seemed unnecessary in the case of Haiti. Whatever the case, the Panamanian government viewed the transnational Syrian community living in both Panama, and Columbia more specifically, with suspicion. Panamanian officials claimed that some Syrian sojourners had been enlisted in the Columbian military during the

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[195] Plummer, "Between Privilege and Opprobrium: The Arabs and Jews in Haiti," 89; Jacques Nicolas Léger, *Haiti, Her History and Her Detractors* (New York; Washington: Neale Publishing Company, 1907). Léger claims that the Haitian legislation was styled on American concerns behind anti-Chinese legislation of the U.S.: hygiene and economics.

Panamanian revolution and threatened to complicate affairs between Panama and Columbia. Having been independent from Columbia for only five years, Panama's government believed that the relative ease with which Syrian migrants could cross national borders could conceivably challenge the nation's sovereignty in the future.[196] The government could not police the new national borders to prevent potential revolutionaries and freedom fighters from entering.

Most Syrians who chose to migrate during the period between the 1890s and 1930s chose Brazil as their new home. Only Brazil drew more Syrian migrants than Argentina, the United States, and Mexico. In spite of a large population better able to absorb the Syrian influx by the twentieth century, Brazil did not always welcome Syrians. In January 1928, the Brazilian House of Representatives informed the French High Commissariat of its new legislation, created to restrict Syrian and Lebanese migrants seeking admission. Brazil joined Panama and Mexico in embracing new forms of exclusion aimed directly at Syrians. Members of the Brazilian Parliament vigorously debated the bill. While the Syrian community of Brazil had numerous supporters in the Sao Paulo government, those advocating exclusion carried the day. As in West Africa, the Caribbean, and other Latin American countries, many Brazilians believed that Syrians contributed only to the commercial sector of the economy, and not necessarily in a democratic

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[196] "Discrimination against Syrians in Panama," *The Syrian World* 3, no. 6 (December 1928): 57.

fashion. Rather than perceiving this contribution as barrier excluding other Brazilians from trade, the government's ministers wanted the country's labor force to focus its attentions on agriculture. The Syrian population then presiding in the country "should be considered sufficient for the purposes of promoting trade,"[197] but offered little in the way of agricultural development. Depending on the circumstance, Syrian reception ranged from suspicion to mere indifference.

The Syrian experience in Mexico proved to be an equally complex interaction of the power of (mistaken) identity and political retribution. Under President Plutarco Elías Calles, the Mexican government instituted a massive financial barrier for Syrian and Lebanese migrants attempting to enter the country. Starting in 1929, Syrian and Lebanese migrants were required to have 10,000 pesos (or "the equivalent of $5,000") in their possession upon arrival in the country. This development left New York-based mahjar papers *Al-Hoda* and *The Syrian World* at a loss. They had difficulty understanding and fully explaining Calles' intent. The newspapers' editors pondered numerous reasons for the discriminatory legislation, but winnowed their estimations down to two speculations. Conspiracy theories suggested that one of Calles's close political allies had been bribed by Syrians, and had been exposed, or that Calles himself was a descendent of Syrian migrants. The Mexican press and his political opponents savored the possibility that the president

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[197] "Brazilian Ban on Syrian Immigration," *The Syrian World* 2, no. 10 (April 1928): 58.

was "of Syrian extraction." His harsh response to Syrian migrants could therefore have been aimed at hushing political opposition, as the Mexican president refused "to show any partiality towards his kinsmen." The mythology surrounding Calles's mysterious childhood complicated the likelihood that either of these possibilities were entirely accurate.[198]

Calles's controversial background has since seeped into cultural memory and more recent biographical retellings of the Mexican revolutionary's past. Some authors take his Syrian background as an unalterable fact. Popular renditions claim Calles's father, one Elías, migrated from Syria to Texas onboard the *USS Supply* during the 1850s. National myth presented him as one of the original camel drivers recruited by then Secretary of War Jefferson Davis for his infamous U.S. Camel Corps, to be stationed in the American West. Shortly after his arrival, Elías abandoned his post and fled to Sonora, Mexico where he became a farmer, took the name Calles, and later married a woman of Yaqui descent. The two eventually had the child, Plutarco, who eventually became Mexico's future president.[199]

The question remains: if Calles came from Syrian roots, then why would he respond so harshly to his fellow Syrians? While the popular narrative sounds

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[198] "Exclusion in Mexico," *The Syrian World* 3, no. 9 (March 1929): 41.

[199] Gary Paul Nabhan, *Arab/American: Landscape, Culture, and Cuisine in Two Great Deserts* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2008), 19; Oliver Vickery, *Harbor Heritage: Tales of the Harbor Area of Los Angeles, California* (Mountain View, CA: Morgan Press, 1979), 70.

romantic, its adherents achieve such narrative poignancy at the expense of evidence. The embellished story of his past omitted certain critical information concerning Elías's family background. Plutarco Calles' father, Plutarco Elías Lucero, was actually a descendent of a Catholic noble family originally from La Rioja, Spain. The younger Plutarco was orphaned at a young age and was later raised by his paternal aunt, taking the adoptive name of her husband, Calles, who happened to be a dry goods seller just as so many Syrian sojourners throughout the Atlantic. At his Baptism, the presiding priest considered Plutarco illegitimate, as his parents were absent.[200] Yet, the story of his Arab ancestry prevailed in popular memory. His political opponents derisively christened him "el turco." The Latin American racial slur had two potential meanings. First, that Calles genuinely came from a Turkish (or Syrian) background. The second possibility was that Calles's opponents used the term as a commentary on the president's tendency to act more like the image of the Asiatic despot rather than the nationalist reformer he proclaimed to be. Neither seriously suggested that he was of Syrian extraction. His opponents suggested something far worse; that Calles resurrected the worst abuses of Asiatic despots. Calles's antagonists claimed that his anticlerical reforms and

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[200] Stephen J. C. Andes, "Singing for Cristo Rey: Masculinity, Piety, and Dissent in Mexico's Cristero Rebellion," in *Mexico in Verse: A History of Music, Rhyme, and Power*, ed. Stephen Neufeld and Michael Matthews (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2015), 213 ff. 45; Jürgen Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles and the Mexican Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 2; Michael S. Werner, *Concise Encyclopedia of Mexico* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), 58.

open persecution of Catholics came from his Arab (and possibly Muslim) heritage rather than any progressive political outlook.[201] In essence, then, Calles' "foreignness" explained his Spartan domestic policies. The Turkish moniker rose to prominence in 1920s and 1930s Mexico, as "el turco" became a symbol for tyrannical abuse, ostracized in both rebel song lyrics and popular political jokes.[202]

The amorphous Turkish/Arab (versus Syrian or Lebanese) racial category remained a contentious identity marker in Mexico. Well into the 1930s, the imposed identity had real-world implications for migrants who confronted financial barriers based in political discrimination. This discrimination ultimately inhibited their movement and settlement within Mexico. The Calles episode illustrates how complex political wrangling and individual identity led to socio-legal obstructions to Syrian movement. Moreover, the Mexican example complicated the mahjar narrative produced by Syrian American elites. As we will see in Chapter 4, Mexican and U.S. doctors would begin to blame Syrian migrants for the rising rates of trachoma, especially among illegal border crossings between the two countries. Prejudices against Syrians took multiple forms beyond mere economic jealousies. Throughout the Atlantic, discrimination rooted more deeply into other aspects of

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[201] Andes, "Singing for Cristo Rey: Masculinity, Piety, and Dissent in Mexico's Cristero Rebellion," 212–213 ff. 43.

[202] Samuel Schmidt, *Seriously Funny: Mexican Political Jokes as Social Resistance*, trans. Adam Schmidt (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2014), 132.

the constructed Syrian mythology, incorporating elements of race and civilization that mahjar Syrians attached to mercantile endeavors as forms of cultural capital.

3.4 Experiences of Otherness in Africa and the South Pacific

Syrians in the French colony of Senegal found themselves in a complicated situation. They had to negotiate their place in Senegalese society, maneuvering between the overbearing tendencies of imperial politics on colonial subjects and the hostile reception given them from the indigenous population. Syrians abroad saw the French imperial apparatus as a familiar foe. They denounced how the French authorities intervened in all aspects of Syrians' lives. First, France interfered with the Syrian homeland through its colonial mandatory government. French authorities, moreover, sought to limit Syrians' economic activities outside the Levant. The French imported Armenian, Senegalese, and Moroccan workers to assist, in part, in reestablishing the agricultural sector in the Levant.

In the black Senegalese population, Syrians saw an equally familiar other. Syrian sojourners elevated their social standing within the larger imperial structure by claiming whiteness. They conceived of their race as the safeguard of civilization, and claimed civilization as the moral agent of westernization. "We sought our fortunes in the wilds of Africa and there unfolded the banner of trade which are the standards of civilization, and through this means brought the African savages into touch with products and influences of the modern world, but what was our reward

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for rendering the signal service to ourselves and to civilization? We were laid open to the danger of expulsion by collective action on the part of French interests on the grounds that we were 'undesirable'!"[203] In the end, Syrians recognized their commercial success not simply as a financial boon to the community, but as the foundations of their trouble with the Senegalese population. The Senegalese were less interested in the products of the West than in sharing in the fruits of commercial interaction: profit.

Successful Syrian entrepreneurs had begun to slowly squeeze Senegalese merchants from the market. In response, "French bankers and traders" applied pressure to the Governor General and local authorities to inhibit Syrian movement inland into the indigenous sectors. In May 1928, French authorities in Senegal placed legal restrictions on Syrians in the colony, requiring all Syrian merchants to return to the coastal ports from the interior within fifteen days or face prosecution. The Syrian press instead believed such acts to be "persecution." Legal restrictions on plying their wares directly inhibited the expression of Syrian identity. Syrians saw themselves as the locomotive force behind global trade, and trade as the foundation of civilization. French intervention both inside Syrian and in Senegal prohibited the free flow of people and goods, and Syrian commentators saw the French imperial intervention as an attempt to hinder the flow of civilization itself.

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[203] "French in Senegal Persecute the Syrians," *The Syrian World* 2, no. 12 (June 1928): 51.

Government meddling prevented humanity from flowering, but more importantly for the Syrian diaspora, such acts prevented Syrians from attaining what they believed to be their full cultural potential and economic profitability.[204]

Beyond the Atlantic, in New Zealand, Syrians confronted the same overarching anti-Asian sentiment faced in numerous other nations. Deep in the Pacific region, another set of territories brandished anti-immigration acts, based in ideals of racial purity and xenophobia. New Zealand's anti-immigrant laws ushered a period of immigration restrictions, first barring Chinese migrants, but later growing into a general set of Asian exclusion laws. By definition, Asian exclusion also barred Syrian migrants from entry. New Zealand passed its earliest immigration restrictions into law during its late colonial period in 1881 with The Chinese Immigrants Act. The law acted as a head tax for shipping agencies permitting Chinese passengers among their fleet. Ships disembarking in New Zealand after 1881 were allowed only one Chinese passenger for every ten tons of the vessel's total tonnage. Authorities imposed a £10 fine for each Chinese passenger recorded in the ship's register over the ratio limit. Nonpayment meant the ship could be legally impounded in the severest of circumstances. Any Chinese migrant entering New Zealand without evidence that they or the shipping company

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[204] Ibid., 58–59.

had paid the fee would be required to pay £10 on arrival. The British Empire later expanded the fine to £100 in 1896.

Subsequent legislation passed in 1899 augmented the Chinese Immigration Act with provisions that further prevented non-British subjects from entering the colony. New Zealand's anti-immigration legislation became more pronounced after the former Victorian colony became a self-governing dominion within the British Empire in 1907. In the same year, Chinese migrants entering the country were required to pass a literacy exam, much as Asian migrants were required in South Africa. Twelve years later, in 1919, the New Zealand government passed the Undesirable Immigrants Exclusion Act, which barred entry to former citizens of Germany and Austria-Hungary during World War I. While the act did not pinpoint Asians as undesirable, its passage signifies New Zealanders' willingness to create a category of otherness, similar to the South African legislation, which clearly restricted certain alien classes from admission to the islands.[205]

Not until the 1920s did New Zealand enter a period of immigration restrictions predicated on keeping the islands racially white. In comparison, Australia had gone in the complete opposite direction and had already opened its policies by 1920 with the Nationality Act. Syrians did witness some semblance of success in Australia in arguing for their racial desirability and belonging. Iskander

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[205] See James H. Liu et al., eds., *New Zealand Identities: Departures and Destinations* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2005).

Alam, Australian-born to parents from Beirut, defended Syrian eligibility for naturalization as members of the white race. As a member of the Labour Party, he rose to prominence as a Senator and Honorary Judge in New South Wales.[206] Responding to the new bout of immigration legislation in New Zealand in 1928, the mahjar Syrian press reflected popular sentiments that Syrian migrants were being improperly categorized as part of the "Yellow Peril." The press issued the same claims that had become familiar terrain by that point: governments misconstrued Syrians as racially Asiatic simply because Syria lay in Asia, and that receiving societies "discriminated against [Syrians] mainly for their success in commercial competition" and "particularly [in] Latin-American countries."[207] The editors of *The Syrian World* likened the situation of Syrians in New Zealand to the prior Syrian experience in the U.S. Syrian Americans had taken their fight for naturalization to the courts (a topic that will be covered in depth in the following chapter). Aware of this precedent in a legally constructed "white" nation, Kareem E. Alexander, a Syrian in New Zealand, petitioned the paper for information on how Syrians successfully arbitrated their status in the American federal courts. As a result, Joseph W. Ferris, a Syrian lawyer in New York, began reviewing the U.S. court cases for arguments that could be applied to possible future Syrian litigation

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[206] "A Syrian Politician in Australia," *The Syrian World* 1, no. 2 (August 1926): 60.

[207] "Syrians of New Zealand Face Crisis," *The Syrian World* 2, no. 8 (February 1928): 52–53.

in New Zealand.[208] Immigration restrictions in the U.S. and New Zealand shared many features. Both were predicated on the maintenance of white racial purity of the populations, and as both nations had been founded on the British legal system, both sets of laws could be challenged in the courts. New Zealand would not pass liberal immigration policy, devoid of any racialized language, until the 1970s.

3.5 An Imposed View of the Mahjar from Above

The Syrian mahjar experience proved to be as diverse as the societies in which the Middle Eastern migrants settled or sojourned. Receptivity to Syrian migrants ranged from restrictive legislation and outright hostility on one end of the spectrum to varying degrees of acceptance and even veneration at the other end. A transnational view of the diaspora helps to reveal how polities or nation-states accepted or rejected Syrians in their midst, as well as the reasoning behind their various positions. As we will see, their claims to "whiteness" and "civilization" created favorable responses in the United States, and to a degree within Argentina and the British system, but had led to unforeseen upheavals in other societies, including Haiti and Panama. The comparatively advantaged position Syrians created in the U.S. and Argentina gave those communities a more powerful voice in the struggle to define the Syrian (and Lebanese) nation. Racial inclusivity

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[208] Ibid.

however, remained uneven. In regions lying outside dominant Anglo-Saxon racial hierarchies, such as the various Latin American republics, the turco epithet persists even until today. Meanwhile, the shift in communities identifying as Arab rather than "racially" Syrian has created a situation where the Syrian race has largely faded from view, even in the United States where it once had beneficial aspects. Syrians were not strongly pulled to (or did not have the choice to identify with) either blackness or whiteness. Instead, they maintained a more pronounced state of "in-betweenness" on a more complicated scale of ethnic outsiders and indigene, caught up somewhere in the myriad racial taxonomies, associated legislation, and popular sentiments they confronted across the globe.

Chapter 4: Racialization in the United States

Contemporary American, European, Syrian, and Syrian American scholars have viewed the "Syria idea" according to modern categories, as a monolithic, if not entirely cohesive set of intellectual principles at a given point in time. Post-modern criticism, however, provides an invaluable lens through which to reevaluate the Syrian nationalist discourse as self-assertion of modernity. According to literary critic Edward Said's paradigm-shifting critique *Orientalism*,[209] the modern notion of Western-centered civilization began to crystalize by the middle of the nineteenth century. Said's schema builds upon Michel Foucault's demarcation of "modernity"[210] as a culturally constructed notion composed within a "Western" context as a distinctive geographical and cultural unit, and details how the formulation of Western modernity emerged from complex discourses relating ancient history to modern experience in a teleological fashion.

This cultural bifurcation, in turn, projected supposedly persistent superstitions onto the Orient in contrast to the increasingly scientifically minded Occident. In short, the west became the hermetically sealed West by othering the East. Moreover, the marriage of modern philology with Social Darwinism provided the framework for European scholars to lay claim to desirable ancient civilizations.

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[209] Said, *Orientalism*.

[210] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

The western past lay in the Greco-Roman epoch. With western advances in science and medicine, these thinkers simultaneously distanced the "advanced" West from the superstitious and decadent Orient. According to Foucault's cultural archaeology, modern philologists began to consider the West as an evolutionary development born of the Indo-European linguistic moment. Within this overwhelmingly accepted model, Indo-European languages diffused originally from the Indian subcontinent, through the (Greek) Eastern Mediterranean, and eventually into (Latin and Germanic) Europe. When isolated and categorically studied, each linguistic styling provided insight into the thought processes of its speakers. Language thus became the cultural expression of whole races and nations.

Just as linguistic families could be categorized into subsets within a hierarchy of evolutionary development, so too could the various language speakers. The Semitic tongues of the Orient, as mere expressions of environmental memory, could thus be broken free from the traditional concept that they were divinely inspired, and moreover, could be compared against Indo-European expressions. Western thinkers separated the Indo-European caste based on the attributes of will and action that were allegedly reserved for the "West." For Said, this meant that Europeans (and later, Americans) set about constructing two distinct and mutually exclusive cultural heritages through the supposedly objective study of language and race, defined as either East or West. The latter represented progress while the former remained mired in political, economic, and cultural stagnation. This marked

the birth of the Western concept of Orientalism, which provided a litmus test for judging the relative advancement or backwardness of nations, peoples, or whole civilizations.[211] Said therefore demonstrated how Orientalist scholarship crafted the category of the "West" in juxtaposition to the "East": "us" versus "them;" "belonging" versus "otherness;" "modernity" versus "antiquity." However, he overlooked competing visions of the civilizational progress of the Orient produced by "Oriental" subjects. Middle Eastern migrants within Western societies also contributed to these conversations on language and race in defining modernity, civilization, and culture.

While Europeans contributed most prominently to the Orientalist canon, Americans also exhibited interest in Eastern culture, whether strictly academic or based in popular curiosity. Both focused attention on a broader sense of shared religious heritage. The ABCFM had a presence in Ottoman Syria since 1810s, establishing a Presbyterian missionary network in the region and a number of English-speaking schools, including the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut. While missionaries remained interested in the region and sought to convert the local population, a growing sense of broader American interest in the region emerged

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[211] Ibid., 288–294; Said, *Orientalism*, 22, 99–100, and 132–133; Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier, eds., *Competing Visions of World Order: Global Moments and Movements, 1880s-1930s* (New York: Palgrave, 2007); for a study on the emergence of modern categories in the tacitly "Oriental" world, see Huang Xingtao, "The Formation of Modern Concepts of 'Civilization' and 'Culture' and Their Application During the Late Qing and Early Republican Times," *Journal of Modern Chinese History* 5, no. 1 (2011): 1–26.

from the mid-nineteenth century until the first Syrian migrant arrivals in the U.S. near the end of the century.

Broader interest with the Near East emerged in the United States as early as the 1840s, with the foundation of the American Oriental Society in Massachusetts.[212] Writing for popular audiences, travelogues, including Mark Twain's *The Innocents Abroad* (1869), brought the mysterious Orient into the parlors of American households. When discussing how the typical Syrian houses were covered with camel manure, Twain quipped, "It is thoroughly Syrian, and that is to say that it is ugly, and cramped, squalid, uncomfortable and filthy."[213] He maintained, moreover, that Syria had "not changed any since those days [of Christ], in manners, customs, architecture, or people."[214] His American audience may not have wanted anything less than fossilized remnants of the past, readily accessible in their own Bibles, and he delivered the message through the language of the "modern," distanced in time and space from the stagnant Orient. In other words, Syrian culture represented the antithesis to properly understood civilization. Syrians were "filthy" and backwards. Their race and culture had not been dragged

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[212] Said, *Orientalism*, 99.

[213] Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad: Or, the New Pilgrims' Progress* (Hartford, Conn.: American Publishing Company, 1869), 503.

[214] Ibid., 503–504.

into the modern world alongside the West.[215] Twain's barbs did not stop with the austerity of the Syrian environment, however. He also criticized Orientalism when he "poked satiric fun at those religio-romantic tourists who travelled up and down the Holy Land gushing forth exaggerated and unbridled sentiment about its unmatched beauty and undying glory."[216] In a sense, Twain's witticism reflected two competing narratives of the Syrian emerging in the U.S.: one wholly devoted to repairing the image of Syrians for suspicious Western audiences; and the other devoted to maintaining a conception of Syrians as backward people from a politically chaotic and culturally stagnant land. Both narratives were instrumental in constructing an American form of Orientalism that increasingly centered on the Syrian sojourner in their own back yard.

By 1900, the American political analyst, military strategist, and progenitor of U.S. imperialism Alfred Thayer Mahan had begun to incorporate what would come to be recognized as the Middle Eastern region into his geopolitical formulation of the world. Mahan's understanding of the naval-centered empires of ancient Greece and early modern Britain provided a model for an emerging American empire. The Persian Gulf, as the crossroads of the world, played a critical

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[215] Winfried Fluck, "American Culture and Modernity: A Twice-Told Tale," in *Theories of American Culture; Theories of American Studies*, ed. Winfried Fluck and Thomas Claviez (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 2003), 65–82.

[216] Katibah, "Palestine of Religious Romance and Historic Realism."

role in Mahan's newly prescribed role for the U.S. in the world.[217] Mahan foresaw

the American maritime policy that would come to dominate U.S. intervention in

the region by the late twentieth century and into the twenty-first. In a similar vein,

for the British historian and Orientalist H.A.R. Gibb, the Arab world had to be

reintroduced into the modern world system of politics and capitalist enterprise,

increasingly dominated by European empires. Long at the crossroads of East and

West, the Middle East had over time succumbed to economic and cultural decline

as the West circumvented the region. No longer did Western trade have to flow

through the Middle Eastern tariff barriers *en route* to Asia.[218]

Other contemporary Western scholars echoed Gibb's sentiments, of which

Syrians were fully aware.[219] Syrian historian Philip Hitti recognized in 1926 that

from "the time of Alexander the Great to Julius Caesar down through the ages to

the time of Napoleon, all those who dreamed of a world empire found themselves,

sooner or later, fighting for the possession of the neck of land on the eastern shore

of the Mediterranean Sea."[220] But it was Gibb's Orientalist version of decadent

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[217] Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Problem of Asia and Its Effect upon International Policies* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1900); see also Clayton R. Koppes, "Captain Mahan, General Gordon, and the Origins of the Term 'Middle East,'" *Middle Eastern Studies* 12, no. 1 (January 1976): 95–98.

[218] See H.A.R. Gibb, *Whither Islam?: A Survey of Modern Movements in the Moslem World* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1932).

[219] Reverend W. A. Mansur, "An Introduction to Syrian World Politics," *The Syrian World* 3, no. 5 (November 1928): 8–14.

[220] Hitti, "Syria's Place in the History of the World," 6.

Islam and the socially stagnant Arab World that carried weight in the West. Only though the new global economic system favoring the West could the Middle East be fully integrated into the modern world. In its direst form, some historians have continued to promulgate this notion, that only through a commitment to progress and modernization, fully adopting Western notions of the world, could the East enter into the family of modern nations. They continue to peddle this vision under the guise of Dependency Theory.[221] Throughout the early twentieth century, Americans' understanding of the region centered on the role of Syria and the roles that Syrians played in unfolding global affairs versus the shared religion past of Judeo-Christianity.

Beginning in 1911 however, when it became clear that Syrian migration to the U.S. was not simply a novel curiosity, but the beginning of a growing movement, American authors began to confront the situation with a determination to understand its causes, its possible consequences, and the very nature of the Syrian people. Missionary-author Louise Seymour Houghton attempted to bridge the gap in Americans' understanding of Syrians, both at home and abroad. While American missionaries examined the Syrian experience overseas, those within the United States remained unknowledgeable, even negligent, of the Syrian experience in America. Houghton, an experienced Protestant missionary abroad, penned a four-

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[221] See, for instance, James L Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

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part series funded by the Carnegie Institution for the social-reformist journal *The Survey*, on the transatlantic experience of Syrians. Houghton's goal was to better acquaint Americans with Syrians by exposing the "needs and spirit of the great company of these Orientals."[222] She began her series on "Syrians in the United States" by explaining their diaspora, claiming that the Syrian's "Phoenician blood" made him "a born wanderer."[223] However, with the rise of Syrians' economic prosperity in the Ottoman Empire, combined with their protected status as Christians, Syrians became the target for Druze and Muslim reprisals. The resulting civil wars in the 1860s drove many from their homes in the Mount Lebanon region of Syria, a series of events still recognized as "push-factors" for Syrian migration.

When discussing the first Syrian migrants to the United States, therefore, Houghton created a foundation myth for the community. She retold the experience of the first two "Syrian" sojourners in the U.S. by dividing them into disparate categories: geographical and racial. The first, Gregory Wortabet, was an Armenian born to missionaries working in Beirut, who arrived in the U.S. in 1855. The second, Sahli Sabrinji, was the first recorded "racially" Syrian migrant to the U.S., who later returned to Syria and assisted ABCFM missionary Cornelius van Dyck with an Arabic translation of the Bible published in New York. Van Dyck relied on another young Syrian, Butrus al-Bustani, to print and disseminate this translation

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[222] Houghton, "Syrians in the United States I: Sources and Settlement," 481.

[223] Ibid.

in Beirut. Bustani would later promote the Westernization of Syria and help initiate the Syrian side of the dialogue with the west in defining the Syrian race.

More importantly though, what Houghton provided to American audiences was a potent symbolic origin of Syrian migration through her account of the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. There, at the first World's Fair hosted in the United States, celebrating one hundred years since the American Revolution, "a few Syrians, chiefly traders from Jerusalem…brought olive wood articles and other curios. These [Syrians] went back, but their stories of fabulous profits fired the imagination of their people."[224] Houghton's diaspora genesis tale tied together two important streams of the Syrian immigrant narrative: first, that by being merely exposed to the wealth of the U.S., with its "streets-paved-with-gold," early Syrian visitors returned home to proselytize to their fellow countrymen with tales of the lavish riches achievable through the Protestant Ethic in America; and second, that the Syrian's natural proclivity to participate in trade predisposed him to travel within the broader system of transatlantic trade networks.[225] Both Syrian descendants and scholars would later invoke this same narrative to explain the subsequent Syrian migration to the U.S.[226] Moreover, Houghton found in the early

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[224] Ibid., 483.

[225] Ibid., 487.

[226] For a select survey of texts including the "Centennial" foundation mythology, see Abraham and Abraham, *Arabs in the New World: Studies on Arab-American Communities*; Naff, *Becoming American*; Michael W. Suleiman, "Early Arab-Americans: The Search for Identity," in *Crossing the Waters: Arabic-Speaking Immigrants to the United States Before 1940*, ed. Eric J Hooglund (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987), 37–54; Alixa Naff, "The Early

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Syrian migrants a much more palpable characteristic that made them ideal settlers in the U.S. When they departed from villages elevated high in the harsh environment of Mount Lebanon, on the fringes of Western civilization, these future Americans had already developed a rugged disposition and independent character so highly desirable in a nation whose foundation mythology rooted American-ness deeply in the notion of frontiers, popularized by Frederick Jackson Turner in the 1890s.[227]

4.1 Fantasy, Myth, and the Frontiers of Western Civilization

In many ways, Syrian migrants shared the fantasy of the American past that located the civilization paradigm within the national story of the U.S. Syrian mythmakers found a receptive audience in the American population interested in the provenance of not only "Western civilization," but in the transatlantic connections between Old World and New, from the moment of first contact between Europe and the Americas antedating the Columbian Exchange, to the new

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Arab Immigrant Experience," in *The Development of Arab-American Identity*, ed. Ernest N McCarus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 23–35; William Charles Sherman, Paul L. Whitney, and John Guerrero, *Prairie Peddlers: The Syrian-Lebanese in North Dakota* (Bismarck, N.D.: University of Mary Press, 2003).

[227] Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962); Richard Hofstadter and Seymour Martin Lipset, *Turner and the Sociology of the Frontier* (New York: Basic Books, 1968).

industrial migrations at the turn of the twentieth century.[228] Some Americans proved to be more receptive than others to the new proponents of Syrian influence on Western civilization. Since the advent of the notion of "Manifest Destiny," Americans had considered the United States as the natural and spiritually endowed heir to lead the procession of civilization west.

The U.S. served an exceptional cultural function within a perceived system of civilizations. In particular, the U.S. ensured the continued westward procession of progress and civilization across the globe. New theories emerging among social scientists in the U.S. reinvented the source of Old World civilization in the New World. Rather than placing European explorers on the pedestal of American founders, Thomas Crawford Johnston, one of many late nineteenth-century polymaths driven by scientific inquiry,[229] in 1890 presented a largely speculative lecture before the Geographical Society of California entitled simply: "Did the Phoenicians Discover America?" His findings must have created some stir, as he reprinted the text for a wider readership in 1913. This work initiated ongoing correspondence between the author and other preeminent geologists and

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[228] See for instance Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972).

[229] Beyond anthropology, Johnston studied pharmacology in Pennsylvania, and gave lectures on volcanology and the geology of New Zealand. See John M. Maisch, ed., "Pharmaceutical Colleges and Associations," *The American Journal of Pharmacy* 14 (1884): 231; Thomas Crawford Johnston, "The Volcanic Region of New Zealand," *Bulletin of the Geographical Society of California* 1 (1893): 3.

anthologists in both England and the United States.[230] Johnston's small pamphlet placed Phoenicians at the center of the birth of Native American culture. He claimed, among other controversial assertions, that "the American continent was discovered by the Jews and Phoenicians and populated by them in conjunction with the Scythians and Thracians of South Eastern Europe, and that the communication so established between the Asiatic and American continents continued throughout a period of probably 300 years."[231]

How could this "truth" have eluded so many previous scholars, only to become apparent to Johnston in the 1890s? Johnston presented a seemingly innocuous solution. The Phoenicians, he claimed, had jealously guarded this valuable secret for centuries. Being prudent and pragmatic traders, they simply desired to prevent other maritime entrepreneurs from invading their commercial space. Johnston saw evidence of their arrival on the American continent prior to European "discovery" during the fifteenth century in a number of places. Aztec myths of a great flood, their intricate pyramid ruins, and sun worship all alluded to a connected past with the ancient Near East. Johnston's version of American history complimented the teleological arc in American scholarship that incorporated the

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[230] Though I have not accessed the above-mentioned correspondence at this time, it is currently available at the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland.

[231] Thomas Crawford Johnston, *Did the Phœnicians Discover America?: Embracing the Origin of the Aztecs, with Some Further Light on Phoenician Civilization and Colonization. The Origin of the Mariner's Compass. The Original Discovery of America.* (San Francisco: Geographical Society of California, 1890), xvii; and the later publication, Thomas Crawford Johnston, *Did the Phoenicians Discover America?* (London: James Nisbet & Co., Ltd., 1913).

Americas as the culmination of Western civilization. In this case, Johnston integrated the Americas into a system of civilizations before the era of European exploration and domination. The foundations of unfolding Western civilization had predated the arrival of the inheritors of Greco-Roman antecedents, the European explorers, and dated back to all of civilization's ancestors, the Phoenicians.

Radical claims surrounding the idea that ancient Phoenicians explored and settled in the Western hemisphere were not specific to North American scholars, and these renegotiations of the past continued to surface well beyond Johnston's controversial hypothesis and into the twentieth century. An expedition into the Amazon led by renowned Brazilian explorer General Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon and a particular Dr. Barbosa in 1929 concluded, after stumbling upon sets of inscribed "hieroglyphs" in the region, that Phoenicians had built a settlement there "4,000 years or more ago."[232] Still later in 1931, the *New York Times* and *The Syrian World* reported on the lifelong project of the Venezuelan politician Dr. Rafael Requena. He posited that migrating ancient Egyptians, who had initially inhabited the mythical island of Atlantis, later left their endangered island home for South America and there initiated a new branch of civilization. The editors of *The Syrian World* concluded that these Egyptian settlers must have relocated through Phoenician shipping networks since "Egyptians were never a sea-faring people."[233]

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[232] "Phoenician Traces in South America," *The Syrian World*, November 1930.

[233] "Egyptian Civilization in Venezuela Reported," *The Syrian World*, February 1931.

Claims such as these (however wild and insupportable) represented a broader set of speculations regarding the ancient civilizational foundations of their author's emerging nation-states. Their pursuits oftentimes intersected with scientific inquiries that included racial classification, archaeological excavations, and reinterpretations of the past through the study of anthropology and its related fields, such as ethnology. Such notions implicitly rooted Syrian migrants, who proudly espoused their connection to the Phoenician past, in fertile cultural soil. Syrian Americans adopted and even exaggerated these fantasies. Particularly during the 1910s and 1920s, educated Syrian Americans began to challenge the demarcations of East and West through arguments based on notions of language, race, historical geography, and Biblical exegesis. Syrian American scholars cohabited an intellectual space where the "Syrian race" was categorized alongside ancient Semitic groups who were accessible only through historical documentation, primarily in the form of religious scriptures.[234] Syrians educated by Western missionaries in European-style schools in the Middle East, the intellectual heirs of the scholars who first circulated these arguments around the Atlantic, began to systematically challenge notions of difference between the White, Indo-European West, and the Semitic-speaking Levant.

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[234] Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 21–23.

4.2 Court of Public Opinion I: Syrian Americans and Public Displays of Violence

The media played a critical role in alienating the Syrian population from the American mainstream after a series of violent clashes erupted, from the suburbs of Brooklyn to the Battery Park district of New York City. Internecine violence within the Syrian community spilled out onto the streets of New York's Lower East side. A series of riots broke out during the autumn of 1905 in response to struggle between old-world, Orthodox Syrians, and their progressive counterparts. U.S. newspaper reports laid the blame at the feet of Bishop Raphael Hawaweeny of the Orthodox Church, who had been consecrated in Brooklyn, New York. Hawaweeny maintained a large congregation of Syrians in the Brooklyn area. On the evening of September 18, 1905, the Brooklyn police arrested Hawaweeny and some members of his congregation following a "pistol battle on Pacific Street."[235] Another Syrian, Adach Koate, had suffered a gunshot wound to the leg during the suburban skirmish. In addition, one officer accused Hawaweeny of having drawn a handgun on him when the officer attempted to detain the Bishop. The local court held the Bishop and his coterie for $1000 bail each, pending trial. Police charged the group with a conspiracy to lead an armed attack on the Brooklyn home of "Nahum

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[235] "Assassins Are after Him, Says Bishop in Riot," *The Evening World*, September 19, 1905, evening edition, 10.

Makarzeo…a Syrian editor,"[236] before the situation devolved into open combat. The "Makarzeo" name in print was most assuredly the *Times* reporter's mistaken attempt to identify Naoum Mokarzel, the high-profile editor of the popular Syrian American newspaper *Al-Hoda*, and a "bitter enemy of the Bishop."[237] Hawaweeny also maintained a reported feud with *Meraat al-Gharb* (*Mirror of the West*) editor Najeeb Maloof.[238]

While in detention however, Hawaweeny began to spin an even more intricate tale of intrigue and attempted murder to explain his aggressive behavior that September night on the streets of Brooklyn. According to the Syrian Bishop, the entourage accompanying him that September evening was acting as his bodyguards. Hawaweeny claimed that one of his enemies among the Syrian community had hired two men to murder him, and that he required constant protection each time he entered the public sphere. That was the reason he was out among a group of parishioners during the fracas. He was not intending to lead an assault, and claimed that he did not have a gun in his possession that evening; that the police officer had been lying all along. As strange as the events had unfolded according to the officers of law, the motives involved in the affair, according to Hawaweeny and his supporters, were even more obscure.

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[236] Ibid.

[237] Ibid.; see also Michael W. Suleiman, "The Mokarzels' Contribution to the Arabic-Speaking Community in the United States," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 71–88.

[238] Naff, *Becoming American*, 224–225.

The Syrian community of New York remained in a constant state of agitated abeyance for the next few weeks. The tensions exploded on October 24, 1905, when violence erupted on Washington Street on the Lower East Side. The event became national news when papers across the U.S. ran the story in the following days. "Reserves from three police precincts were hurriedly summoned to the lower end of the city to quell what threatened to be a serious riot in the Syrian quarter."[239] The American media characterized the riot as a hand-to-hand battle in the streets.

A consortium of Syrian merchants in the city had kept city lawyer Charles G. F. Wahle on retainer to protect the business interests of the community. He had determined that the troubles brewing within the Syrian quarter from September into October of 1905 had become a detriment to the Syrian businesses on the Lower East Side. Wahle, later the magistrate of the "Tombs" Court, or City Prison located in Lower Manhattan, closed the court the day after the October 24 riot in order to work with the New York District Attorney William Travers Jerome to find some resolution for the violence consuming the Syrian community. He warned that the Syrian powder keg was as dangerous as the Tongs of Chinatown, another community that preferred to dispense justice internally rather than relying on legal intervention from the local authorities.

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[239] "Riot in Syrian Quarter," *The Ohio Democrat*, November 2, 1905.

Wahle believed the plot was not to assassinate Syrian men, but was taken up by the mainstream press as a means to hinder Syrian business. Violence kept patrons from the merchants, who refused to maintain high stocks of goods for fear of going into the red. The violence, however, proved to be all too real. Anywhere between four and six people in the Syrian quarter were reported to have suffered minor wounds from blunt and bladed instruments. Ameen Goryer, the editor of the *Al-Mohajer* Syrian magazine, submitted a rebuttal against how the *New York Times* presented the Syrian riots as a natural outgrowth of a minority community out of control, and his critique was reprinted in the *New York Tribune*. The editors of the *Tribune* must have been very pleased to use the opportunity to print the protest against their competition, but it is strange that the paper waited until November 6 to publish the letter they had received October 30.[240]

Historian Alixa Naff, like the Syrian community at the time, portrayed the riots as one misconstrued by the New York news media. Just as Goryer, she insisted that the media made the conflict about religious warring factions, specifically about Hawaweeny's war with the Syrian American press.[241] The events created a new environment in New York of skepticism regarding Syrian migrants. Houghton's 1911 articles in *The Survey* represented an early attempt to rehabilitate the image

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[240] "Wants Jerome to Probe the Syrian Riots," *The Evening World*, October 24, 1905; Ameen Goryer, "Most Syrians Deprecate Riot," *New York Tribune*, November 6, 1905.

[241] Naff, *Becoming American*, 224–225.

of Syrian migrants overall. Her work also presaged the emergence of Syrian American intellectuals. After 1911, a growing impetus in the community to reframe the Syrian race and civilization produced a number of treatises and responses to American critiques that continued well into the 1930s. These works will be taken up in greater detail in Chapter 5.

The only definitive conclusion that can we can draw from the Syrian conflicts of 1905 is that the Syrian colonies of New York attempted to contain the fight within the community. The violence unleashed in each of the riots occurred in the predominately Syrian quarters located in Manhattan and Brooklyn. The New York media reported that only Syrians were involved in the disorder, and the police only filed criminal charges against Syrians. Those who managed to escape were likely hidden in Syrian homes within the quarter. If we are to take Goryer's assessment of the riots at face value, we can glean important information about the makeup of the rioters themselves. Goryer claimed that the New York media had only made the situation worse by alienating the Syrian elites. The elites of the community made up the largest cohort of members of the Syrian community that could read the American papers, and were thus the intended victims of press manipulation. For Goryer, the real culprits were the uneducated masses, illiterate of English, and uncaring of how the events reflected on the community. Goryer framed the events as products of economic class rather than sectarianism. He also insisted that if the Syrian community had a police force of their own, rather than

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relying on the city police, they would have been able to resolve the situation internally instead of having the situation where the riots made the disturbance a matter of public spectacle. The American media looked onto the events as products of racial blood feud, or rather, the results of Syrian men attempting to retain a sense of honor, which ultimately resulted in violence. Both sides desired to identify the situation as internal to the Syrian community. The events served to isolate the Syrian community rather than to integrate it into New York society.

4.3 Court of Public Opinion II: Philanthropy and the Syrian Cause in WWI

While the Syrian riots of 1905 brought opponents of the Syrian migration to the public sphere, the circumstances of World War I revealed the community's advocates. Military mobilization provided Syrians with an avenue to argue for inclusion within the proposed grand alliance of Western empire-states. Perceived as natural enemies of the increasingly abusive Turkish regime, Western allies began courting Syrians both in the Middle East and in the diaspora. This courtship represented a broader international realignment of national and racial interests, wherein previously "Western" entities were being stricken from the family of civilized nations. By 1917, former U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt exclaimed that Austria-Hungary and Turkey "were not nations … They are racial tyrannies by certain national castes which in each case represent only a minority of the total population. Neither democracy nor civilization is safe while these two States exist

in their present form. Turkey should be driven from Europe: the Armenians and Syrian Christians and Jews and Arabs should be freed."[242]

The wartime "Hero Land" exhibition in New York represents a rather concrete representation of this emerging relationship. From November 24 through December 9, 1917, American politicians and philanthropists, a majority of them women (including First Lady Edith Wilson) helped organize a fundraising fair in New York City with the goal of supporting the Allied war and relief efforts throughout war-torn regions of Europe and the Middle East. Billed as the "Greatest Spectacle the World has Ever Seen for the Greatest Need the World has Ever Known,"[243] Hero Land attracted swarms of New York City spectators in spite of the oppressively cold winter weather and long waiting times outside the entry to the Grand Central Palace exhibition hall. "We call this Hero Land," Governor Whitman of New York exclaimed upon the grand opening of the event, "but the real Hero Land is where brave men are giving their lives for the most holy cause in which men ever fought."[244] The exhibition joined together notions of Christian crusade and altruistic outreach, manifesting in a particularly patronizing sensibility.

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[242] "Jusserrand Is Guest of Pennsylvanians; Members of Historic Society Honor French Ambassador Waldorf; Notables Laud Nation; Col. Roosevelt, Senator Lodge and Others Say France Is Imperishable," *The Sun*, December 9, 1917.

[243] "Hero Land Opening a Blaze of Beauty," *New York Times*, November 25, 1917, 20; "Prepare for Hero Land," *New York Times*, November 11, 1917, 8.

[244] "Hero Land Opening a Blaze of Beauty."

The structures of the spectacle embodied the intellectual partitions in architectural form. Organizers converted the multiple floors of the Grand Central Palace into a warfront simulacra, complete with a fully-functioning British tank, a captured German U-boat (renamed the *U-Buy-A-Bond*), the remains of a crashed German zeppelin, motion pictures from the warfront, and personal memorabilia from the trenches of Europe. The exhibits also included numerous concession booths and theme restaurants based on nations and races.[245] Arab presence at the bazaar took two forms: a day devoted solely to supporting Armenian and Syrian relief for the devastating famine brought on by Ottoman mismanagement and allied blockades, and an entire section devoted to replicating the look and feel of the streets of Baghdad. Each represented one side of the Orientalist impulse: cultivating a patronizing relationship over suffering refugee populations who shared a stake in the story of Western civilization, and constructing a visual approximation, or mental projection, as it were, of the Middle Eastern city within the walls of a New York City structure.

In the preceding weeks Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, of the famous Vanderbilt family, had led the ticket drive across the city by day, while at night the renowned Greenwich Village artist converted the third floor of the Grand Central Palace into a veritable scene from "Arabian Nights."[246] The "Bagdad" portion of

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[245] "Hero Land to Show French Battlefield," *New York Times*, October 28, 1917, 21.

[246] "Prepare for Hero Land," *New York Times*, November 4, 1917, 18.

the bazaar exhibition quickly became a fan favorite, with its "gathering of beautiful women," and entryway flanked by two parrots who screeched at the audience when they approached.[247] Alongside Vanderbilt Whitney's jovial representation of an Oriental wonderland safely under British occupation, the Armenian and Syrian committees staged replicas revealing the horrors of war suffered by their countrymen "with photographic accuracy," showing "the ravages of the Turks and Syria laid low by the Hun."[248] The exhibition portrayed Syrians as innocent victims of the Asiatic hordes.

The exhibition netted over $571,000 in profit, which, according to the Executive Chairman of the project, John Moffat, represented a world record for an "allied bazaar."[249] The results were short of the committee's stated one million dollar goal, however.[250] Nevertheless, the Hero Land event represented a broader movement of Western altruism directed at the desirable, yet in many ways helpless and persecuted, Syrian subject. Americans responded, as did both the French and British counterparts, largely through Christian missionary enterprise and financial assistance rather than direct political intervention aimed at enduring the aid made it to the most needy. The proceeds were to be used for global wartime relief efforts,

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[247] "Hero Land Greets French Ambassador," *New York Times*, November 27, 1917, 13; and Beverly Gordon, *Bazaars and Fair Ladies: The History of the American Fundraising Fair* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 157–159.

[248] "Hero Land to Show French Battlefield."

[249] "Hero Land Profit $571,438," *New York Times*, January 16, 1918, 9.

[250] "Hero Land to Show French Battlefield."

including ongoing relief work in the crumbling Ottoman Middle East, but the military situation made the stated objectives more difficult to obtain.

The Armenian and Syrian Relief Committee (ASRC), under the direction of copper mogul and future Syrian Protestant College president Cleveland Dodge, launched an all-out war on Turkish aggression in the region with a nationwide newspaper advertisement campaign featuring a photographic portrait of the infant refugee named "Shushan." Unable to defend herself against Turkish barbarism, and in need of food, the innocent, angel-faced white girl needed help from the benevolent West. The ubiquitous ASRC ads featuring Shushan represented the childhood face of the Armenian and Syrian population suffering at the hands of the failed Turkish imperial parentage. Only new patriarchal orders could step into the void created by violence. While acting President of the American Red Cross, Cleveland H. Dodge persuaded President Wilson to requisition the *USS Caesar* to carry foodstuffs and medical supplies for delivery to Syrian and Armenian refugees produced by the famine conditions.[251] These goods could not initially reach recipients in time to alleviate their suffering. Rumors circulating within the Syrian community in Egypt placed casualties from famine upwards of 80,000 souls.

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[251] "Are Syrians Unpatriotic?," *The Syrian World* VI (June 1932): 42–46.

Conservative estimates in the British Colonial Office found that 3 to 4 Syrians died daily in the Mount Lebanon region from starvation as early as 1916.[252]

4.4 Legal Ramifications of Geographical Exclusion and Inclusion

Many Syrian sojourners in the U.S. experienced direct confrontations with the national laws. Practical applications of legally defined racial categories to Syrians in the American judicial system remained haphazard and uneven, as academic definitions and demarcations of race were not fully detailed until greater numbers of Syrians began to arrive in the United States, especially after the American Civil War. According to the U.S. Naturalization Act, adjusted to include black citizens in 1870, only "aliens being free white persons" were eligible to become naturalized citizens in the United States.

From the first cases on naturalization – or "racial prerequisites cases"[253] – between 1909 and 1915, to the creation of the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act in 1924, Syrians confronted the American court system with numerous attempts to redefine their status in U.S. society through the judiciary. In December 1909, the Northern District Court of Georgia determined that for the case of Costa George

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[252] "Letter from Cairo Syrians to American Consul in Cairo," May 26, 1916, TNA: FO 141/664.

[253] This term was originally designated by Ian López and later adopted by Sarah Gualtieri, the latter of whom specifically focused on the cases on Syrian citizenship. See Ian Haney López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*, 10th Anniversary Edition (New York and London: New York University Press, 2006), 2; Gualtieri, "Becoming 'White': Race, Religion and the Foundations of the Syrian/Lebanese Ethnicity in the United States," 3.

Najour, Syrians should be considered as "belonging to what the world recognized as the White race."[254] The following month, in January 1910, a Massachusetts Circuit Court based its confirmation of Syrian status in the U.S. on early ethnological studies with *In re Mudarri*, confirming that Syrians had been "long admitted to citizenship"[255] as members of the white race. The Syrian Maronite Tome Ellis, who had migrated to Oregon from the Syrian region of Palestine, was similarly determined to be white of "Semitic stock," and moreover Caucasian. The court concluded, that Syrian migrants were eligible for citizenship, if not altogether considered "white," through the application of the foremost ethnological thinkers, including Augustus Keane and Daniel Brinton.[256] As mentioned above, the Dillingham Commission would apply Keane's and Brinton's works in redefining racial qualifications for U.S. citizenship in 1911. Yet while their findings would clearly place Syrians within the category of desirable, Syrians' status in American would not go unchallenged in the years leading up to World War I.

By 1913, the U.S. courts began to shift course when determining Syrian naturalization applications. Infamous federal judge (as well as amateur historian and genealogist) Henry Augustus Middleton Smith of South Carolina single-handedly attempted to redefine the American judicial categorization of Syrians in

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[254] Joseph W. Ferris, "Syrian Naturalization Question in the United States: Certain Legal Aspects of Our Naturalization Laws, Part I," *The Syrian World* 2, no. 8 (February 1928): 5.

[255] Ibid.

[256] Ibid., 6.

the U.S. over the next ten years. Smith would circumvent scientific determinations of citizenship eligibility with his own formulations of judicial precedent and attempted to antedate previous court rulings by basing verdicts in his own interpretations of the original intent of the framers of the Naturalization Law of 1790. His 1913 findings in *Ex parte Shahid* assessed Syrians based on Smith's interpretation of how the nation's founders might have perceived the group in the language and social categories of the late eighteenth century. Smith rejected Shahid's arguments based on two factors: color and geography. Neither American political leaders nor U.S. citizens from the 1790s, according to Smith, would have recognized Shahid as a white person, and consequently they would have been ineligible for naturalization. For Smith, the late-eighteenth-century concept of whiteness entailed European descent and skin tone that would be identified as obviously "white" by a contemporary, who very likely would have also descended from European stock. He rejected the ethnologists' categories of "Caucasian" and "White" races as purely hypothetical jargon. Judge Smith ruled similarly in *Dow v. United States* in 1915, only to have his ruling overturned when the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals returned to the precedent of determining race and eligibility through ethnological racial categories.[257]

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[257] Ronald Fernandez, *America Beyond Black and White: How Immigrants and Fusions Are Helping Us Overcome the Racial Divide*, Fourth Edition (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 28–30; Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 57–64; Joseph W. Ferris, "Syrian Naturalization Question in the United States: Certain Legal Aspects of Our Naturalization Laws, Part II," *The Syrian World* 2, no. 9 (March 1928): 18–24.

In 1917, U.S. legislators broached the topic of race again through the geographical dimensions of nationality. Western countries had previously grappled with the question of Syrian nationality during World War I (a subject I will take up in subsequent chapters). Were Syrians alien enemies and agents of the Ottoman regime or potential allies struggling under the Turkish yoke? In the United States at least, these considerations were clarified by United States Code, Title 8, which distinguished an area equivalent to the present-day concept of the "Middle East" from that of the rest of "Asia." (See Figure 3).
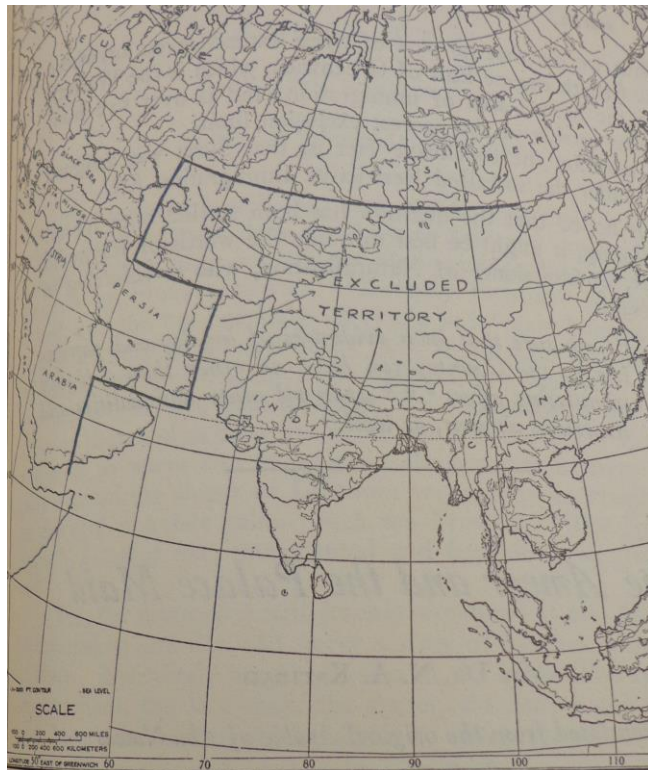
Figure 3: Map "Asiatic Barred Zone," *The Syrian World* **2, no. 9 (March 1928)**

All areas east of the line, including India, China, Mongolia, and Japan, remained "Asian" and part of the regions making up "Excluded Territory" for migrants seeking American citizenship. The geographical majority of Persia and Arabia (along with the entirety of Syria, Iraq, and Turkey) inhabited a new space neither European nor strictly Asian. Congress's new delineations made Syrians unquestionably eligible for naturalization in the U.S., at least from the perspective of the nation's legislature.[258]

None of the above developments prevented Judge Henry Smith from one last attempt to bar Syrians from American citizenship. In 1923, Smith rejected an application by Syrian migrant F.W. Basha based on Smith's previous design of "congressional intent." The court, however, eventually did accept Basha's application, adhering to the 1917 redefined geographical restrictions.

Following the passage of the Johnson-Reed Act in 1924 Syrians were subjected to the national immigration quota system. The act limited Syrian migrants to 125 per year, compared to 233 from Turkey as well as 100 from Palestine, once considered together as Ottoman territories. Although their overall numbers were limited via official U.S. government legislation, Syrians had been redefined as an eligible population within America. The floating imaginary line on the map between West and East began to reflect the mutable cultural boundary that pro-

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[258] Ferris, "Syrian Naturalization Question in the United States, Part II," 23.

Syrian intellectuals had challenged during the previous decades. Syrian Americans experienced some success in the U.S. court system, due in part to the intelligentsia's efforts to paint Syrian migrants as foundational for civilization and the global economy, whether ancient or modern. However, the social and political climate that limited all migrants to the U.S. also hindered Syrians' attempts to migrate legally to the country.

4.5 American Skepticism in an Era of Immigration Restriction

When the National Origins Act resurfaced before the Senate for debate in 1927, Pennsylvania Senator and co-author of the original 1924 law, David A. Reed, promoted as an attempt to keep out the "trash of the Mediterranean,"[259] and included Syrians among the Levantine, Turkish, and Southeastern European groups among the undesirable. The Syrian community emphatically responded to Reed's remarks. Protests and rallies broke out in Boston and Lawrence, Massachusetts.[260] The Syrian paper in New York, *Al-Hoda*, criticized Syrian societies in the U.S. for not confronting the political situation unleashed by Reed. The Syrian American press called out the collective societies' "pseudo-leaders" as political wannabes seeking the limelight when the political waters remained calm but shirking their

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[259] "Syrians as Trash," *The Syrian World* 3, no. 11 (May 1929): 43.

[260] "Syrians of Mass. Protest Insult," *The Syrian World* III, no. 11 (May 1929): 50–51.

duties to protect the interests of the community when the scene turned turbulent.[261]

Editors of the Syrian American periodical *Al-Shaab* added their disillusionment with the American Congressmen continued to reveal what they could only conceive of as "helpless ignorance" regarding the illustrious Syrian race and its contribution to past civilization that the community's media and scholarly contributors tried to articulate so carefully during the first quarter of the twentieth century.[262] Kahlil Bishara reminded the readers of *The Syrian World* that Reed could only be comparing the Syrian community, not against other communities in the U.S., but against the community's own illustrious past from "two, three, or four thousand years ago, when [they] were busy, on a gigantic scale, laying down the foundations of this wonderful American civilization." Moreover, Bishara chided that while Reed masked his race sentiment in the guise of Anglo-Saxon race superiority, African Americans in the southern U.S. thumbed their collective noses at the Senator, considering him as merely "white trash."[263]

The National Origins debate was not the only Syrian confrontation with the U.S. political system. Other American politicians attacked the Syrians in the nation's midst. Father Charles Coughlin, the populist radio personality, was quoted as telling the Detroit media that Syrians were unpatriotic for shirking their duty to

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[261] "Syrians as Trash."

[262] "Status of Syrian in America," *The Syrian World* III, no. 11 (May 1929): 43–44.

[263] Kalil A. Bishara, "A Clergyman Answers," *The Syrian World* 3, no. 12 (June 1929): 44.

serve in the U.S. military during World War I. In an editorial from June 1932, *The Syrian World* quoted Syrian-born Princeton Professor Philip Hitti's response to Coughlin's accusations. "Among the foreign born," Hitti wrote in 1924, "the Syrians hold an enviable war record ... about 7 percent of the whole Syrian community served in the United States army,"[264] while in war industries "a Syrian foreman of a gang of rivet drivers broke with his gang a world's record by driving 2,805 oil-tight rivets into the hull of a steel ship in a nine-hour stretch."[265] Taken alongside Ward's Arabic-language text on Syrian American service in two previous wars – the Spanish-American War and World War I – the Syrian war record seemed indeed irrefutable.[266]

Syrian migrants faced a wide range of imposed identities. Some imaginative social scientists placed Syrians (or Phoenicians) at the origins of the Columbian Exchange, while others believed Syrian immigrants to have been violent or even "trash," fitting the migrant group into a worldview that vilified immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century. Philanthropists popularly perceived the former Ottoman region, and its peoples, as worthy of monetary aid and moral support during the years of World War I and its aftermath, even if they did so in a

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[264] "Are Syrians Unpatriotic?," 45.

[265] Ibid., 46.

[266] Gabriel E. Ward, *The Syrian Soldier in Three Wars* (New York: Syrian-American Press, 1919). Stacy Fahrenthold has also recently contributed insightful additions to the study of the Syrian American war record.

patronizing fashion at times. As these discursive processes over Syrian identity played out, the region increasingly became associated as a geographical liminal space. The "Middle East," a novel territorial demarcation, lay somewhere between east and west, modern and ancient.

Chapter 5: Diseased Syrians: Trachoma, Tuberculosis, and Madness

The Syrian American intelligentsia based the Syrian identity in a narrative of race, civilization, and economics. As Chapter 4 outlined, these thinkers framed Syrians as a desirable "Semitic" subcategory within the racial taxonomy that benefitted whiteness, based in a paradigm of civilizational ascendance in a Western-oriented history of development. In that distorted view of history, Syrian Americans claimed that over the course of thousands of years, Syrians, as descendants of the Phoenicians, had committed themselves to free trade and open migration that formed a consistent arc to the modern era. Syrian Americans used the narrative as a discursive tool to educate the American populace about the migrant community, but in so doing, masked certain aspects of the Syrian migrant experience conveniently from view. It completely overlooked the Syrian migrants who were turned away at the gates to the United States, and does so intentionally.

Syrians suffering from various diseases undermined the narrative's underlying eugenicist tenets. Those disabled by the eye disease trachoma, in particular, became the subject of a racialized discourse in the U.S. and Europe that framed migrants bearing trachoma as part of a mass invasion from a cultural and civilizational backwater. The emerging field of medical experts and immigration officials would initially frame trachoma as a "foreign" disease that necessitated strenuous examination at ports where migrants entered into the national body. U.S.

immigration officers turned back approximately ten percent of Syrian migrants between the 1890s and 1920s.

Trachoma, at its most basic level, begins as a bacterial infection, but can lead to blindness in the most serious cases. The infection causes a granular protrusion to form on the eyelid. If left untreated, the granular conjunctiva is left to scratch the cornea; the eyelid may turn out and cause irreparable damage to vision. It spreads easily between people in overcrowded environments and under poor hygienic conditions through contaminated objects or by exchanging discharge from the eye.

While the disease is now well understood and easily preventable, its cure eluded doctors for years. Reading the modern attempts to understand and prevent disease makes clear the transnational dimensions of the phenomenon. For missionaries and medical experts in the field in the Middle East, the prevalence of disease justified their presence in the region. The people of greater Syria needed, as it were, modern guidance and assistance from the West where "traditional" tactics and techniques had failed. That so-called need could later be extrapolated into the forced political guidance that outlined the mandate system and greater European involvement in the region following World War I. As a civilization not quite on par with the self-proclaimed advanced societies of the West, the peoples of greater Syria were not quite ready for self-rule.

Sara Scalenghe's work on disability, and in particular, her analysis of eye disorders within the Ottoman Empire before 1800, reveals how accepting the broader society had been toward those experiencing blindness and trachoma.[267] As disability historians Susan Burch and Michael Rembis have argued, those living with disabilities had experiences as vast as the disabilities they possessed, but the societies in which these individuals lived also framed the context of disability in different ways as well. While certain actors within their respective societies sought to understand or even cure their condition, whether those agents were doctors, religious figures, or any other manner of person claiming expertise on the matter, they framed their response to the disabled in culturally specific terms.[268] In the case of disorders of the eye, Ottoman society held the blind in high esteem, and the disabled were frequently integrated into respectable segments of society as "Qur'an reciters, philosophers, lexicographers, Hadith transmitters, poets, and rulers."[269] Sight was not a necessary physical sense in a culture that maintained a strong attachment to oral traditions. Visual disabilities were especially prominent in the Ottoman Empire as well. In the eighteenth century, one Scottish observer estimated that roughly one out of every six Syrians in Aleppo suffered from some disease of

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[267] Scalenghe, *Disability in the Ottoman Arab World, 1500-1800*.

[268] Burch and Rembis, "Re-Membering the Past: Reflections on Disability History," 1–2.

[269] Scalenghe, *Disability in the Ottoman Arab World, 1500-1800*, 53.

the eye.[270] In greater Syria, blindness and trachoma were markers of normality rather than outliers considered beyond the norm.

Western views of trachoma from the nineteenth and twentieth century, on the other hand, rendered the disease in a very different light. The prevalence of trachoma intersected with issues of race as a determining factor, or even led to the view that racial inferiority was a consequence of the disorder. Hypotheses of the transmission of trachoma generally fell into two conceptual notions of the disease. One view isolated trachoma as strictly a biological condition affecting all "races." The other view looked for racial precondition for the disorder before considering strictly medical ones. While adherents of the former found no definitive proof for racial predispositions for trachoma, those making the argument still used the language of race in defining the disease. This fact may account for the staying power of racial terminology when defining the disease and migrant classes afflicted with it.

The emerging field of professional scientists and medical doctors imbued the disorder with elements from fields outside of medicine alone. Experts considered social and cultural notions such as "race" and "civilization" as determinants for the disease, and as a result, reached beyond trachoma's purely physiological characteristics in defining the phenomenon. The first generation of

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[270] Ibid., 54.

professional experts struggling to understand trachoma, did not simply characterize the disorder as just another infectious disease that disabled on an indiscriminate basis – in fact, many scientists before the twentieth century were unsure if trachoma was indeed infectious – but conceived of it as an entity knowable and traceable through pseudo-scientific methods. As a result, using racial background and civilization declension as qualifiers to determine the supposed origins of the disease represented certain "modalities of knowledge," to borrow from Foucault's concept of "power-knowledge."[271] In a number of circumstances, these medicalized notions of race and civilization influenced and overlapped with what Said has outlined as Orientalist constructions of the "other."[272] It should come as no surprise then, that modern medical scientists discovered high rates of trachoma among migrant groups determined to be undesirable, including those from Eastern Europe (such as Russian Jews) and the Mediterranean, as well as Asians more generally.

In their medical investigations, Western scientists grappled with the incomprehensible, initially fitting trachoma into systems of knowledge predicated on cultural and social characteristics alongside purely biological concerns. Scientists included considerations of race, class, and civilizational taxonomies as indicators for contraction and outbreak, before eventually settling on a solely

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[271] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, Second Edition (New York: Vantage, 1995), 27.

[272] See Said, *Orientalism*.

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medical consensus based in epidemiological transmission of the disease. Tracing

back its proliferation to Egypt, concerned medical practitioners and theorists placed

the scene of the crime at the crossroads of civilization, of east and west, worlds

conceptualized as either modern or ancient. Considered by the West as a cultural

and geographical distinctive group, Syrian migrants also became a focal point at

the heart of modern anxiety over trachoma.

Medical practitioners situated the emergence of trachoma during the

modern era, however, at a much more specific point in time and contact between

east and west.[273] In 1789, during the genesis of the modern French nation-state,

General Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Egypt with a large contingent of the French

army. Around twenty thousand of Napoleon's troops contracted the eye disorder

and carried the disease back with them back to France. Quickly after their arrival

in 1802, the condition reportedly spread to the larger population, where it came to

be known in popular parlance under the derogatory designation "Egyptian

Ophthalmia"[274] (a dubious title still used today). While specialists considered that

trachoma might have existed in Europe before 1802, only after the disease struck

the military arm of a modern government did it garner serious national (and

international) attention. Trachoma served as one of the first diseases to attract the

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[273] Howard F. Hansell, M.D., "Trachoma, Clinically and Socially Considered," *New York Medical Journal* 85, no. 11 (1907): 486–88.

[274] Julius Boldt, *Trachoma*, trans. J. Herbert Parsons and Thomas Snowball (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904), xi.

considerable reach of the modern nation-state, with all of its bureaucratic efforts and centralized resources. The national attention it garnered precipitated broader interest in classifying and treating trachoma through an emerging transnational class of professionals in the fields of medicine and science. Experts across Europe, North and South America, and the Middle East circulated their findings and hypothesis in medical journals and at medical conventions.

Medical doctors began to look for both physiological causes and consequences of trachoma, as well as possible preconditions for the disease that they might be able to trace with assistance from methods prominent in the fields of sociology and anthropology. As a result, trachoma also created, or rather reinforced, social fissures within modern nation-states and across international lines. One specialist suggested using trachoma outbreaks as a "reliable index to the social, economic, and cultural status of the district affected."[275] In other words, experts framed trachoma as a disease of the "lower orders," or the undesirables of society. Practitioners framed the disorder in complete opposition to modernity itself: "Industry, frugality, sobriety, culture, and cleanliness are the chief enemies of trachoma. It simply cannot live in *modern* communities and will not thrive in *modern* surroundings."[276] Upward mobility, social desirability, and hygiene

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[275] Aaron Brav, M.D., "Trachoma as a Sociological Index," *American Medicine* 20, no. 1 (January 1914): 43.

[276] Ibid. emphasis added.

complemented each other; while undesirability, cultural declension, and disease fitted together and provided the type of insalubrious environment that made trachoma's proliferation inevitable.

Ophthalmologists from both sides of the North Atlantic made trachoma a topic of discussion at annual international conferences on medicine. For example, trachoma served as the main topic of discussion at the Tenth International Medical Congress of 1890 in Berlin. Before the turn of the century, the emerging class of medical experts searched for answers to the riddle trachoma presented them. Early scientific theories situated the disorder through the modern lens that blended together social and medical science. Peak interest in the disease coincided with the new waves of migration out of southern and eastern Europe and the Mediterranean. An emerging debate in the early years of the international congresses brought race to the forefront of modern understandings of trachoma. Medical theorists found a significant place for Syrians within that context. They would eventually divide into two camps that established two theories regarding etiology, or rather, the causes of trachoma within various population groups.

Modern western understanding of the disease resulted from transatlantic medical dialogue, with experts in France pioneering the study of trachoma. The call for scientific precision in understanding the disease stemmed from the French nation-state's attempt to quantify and contain the outbreak among the French military. As mentioned above, the French army suffered from trachoma outbreaks

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after the Napoleonic campaigns in Egypt at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The military continued to be a hotbed for the rampantly infectious eye disorder. Over the next century, a growing field of specialists attempted to get at the root causes of the trachoma. Dr. Paul Chibret of Clermont-Ferrand, France, founded and chaired the Ophthalmological Geography section for the French Ophthalmological Society in the 1880s. Still a mysterious disease in a young field of study, trachoma demanded any tool available in the scientific community's limited arsenal. Chibret's unique construction of ophthalmological geography represented one of the earliest attempts to classify the eye disorder. He emphasized a combination of physical anthropology and microbial biology. Chibret developed a three-fold categorical system that determined the disease's etiology by establishing: 1) the *germ* or microbe; 2) the surrounding *terrain* or soil, (which included considerations of the person's race, occupation, alimentation and temperament); and 3) the regional climate in which the disease proliferated.[277] He claimed that the disorder could not survive in altitudes above two hundred meters, and concluded that the "Celtic race" did not exhibit the disorder due to their tendency to reside in the higher altitude regions of Europe.

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[277] F. B. Eaton, "Study of Ophthalmological Geography as Regards Trachoma," review of *Report to the French Ophthalmological Society, 1896* by Paul Chibret, *The Ophthalmic Record* 6 (1897): 41-44.

This altitude theory on trachoma steadily lost ground to the racial theory of trachoma. Beginning in 1876, Dr. Swan Burnett of Georgetown University presented a racial explanation for why African Americans seemed resilient to the disease. Studying the black population in the U.S., Swan Burnett surmised that altitude alone could not account for the anomaly that American "negroes" rarely exhibited the disorder. Blacks and whites inhabited the same spaces, particularly in the South, but he concluded that only whites seemed to contract the disease. Moreover, the majority of African Americans in the late nineteenth century U.S. lived in regions of relatively low altitude. By the 1890s, Burnett's racial antecedents had all but left elevation as prime determinant behind, and brought the issue of race to the forefront of the discussion.[278]

In his widely reviewed 1895 report based in statistical study while in Constantinople, Dr. E. Van Millingen warned his international colleagues about the impartial nature of trachoma infection and contagion.[279] Millingen insisted that trachoma seemed to have no racial proclivity. "All races" he concluded "are equally susceptible to the virus of trachoma. An immunity for certain races does not

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[278] Jean-François Schémann, *Le Trachome: Une Maladie de La Pauvreté* (Marseille: IRD Éditions, 2008), 101; Swan M. Burnett, "Racial Influence in the Etiology of Trachoma," *The Medical News* 47, no. 21 (November 22, 1890): 542–43.

[279] E. Van Millingen, "The Statistics of Trachoma," *Annales D'oculistique* 114, no. 2 (August 1895): 179–97. The author's name is inconsistently spelled in the written record. In some texts his name is cited as "Van Milligan" while in others he is referred to as "Van Millingen." I have chosen to incorporate the latter as he published under that spelling.

exist."[280] Instead, medical practitioners should consider the disease a consequence of the patient or subject's hygienic practices rather than their place of origin. Even though Millingen denounced the use of race as an indicator in trachoma susceptibility, he continued to use the language of race when framing the disease's tendencies. He was a product of his times after all. Millingen refuted Burnett's claims on black racial immunity to trachoma, arguing that Ottoman subjects of African descent frequently showed signs of trachoma.

Nevertheless, Chibret stood steadfast by the racial etiology of trachoma, indicating that most American slaves came from what he described as the "pure races" of West Africa. Most Africans in the Ottoman realms, Chibret claimed, had originally migrated from Northeast Africa. Semitic migrants in the Horn region of the continent had introduced the racial predisposition for trachoma within the black population before the indigenous African population, now composed of mixed blood types, migrated into other parts of the Ottoman Empire where trachoma was prevalent.[281] It was the mixed-blood Semites that accounted for the problem; Syrians, Jews, and Arabs among them. A number of experts in the field settled on the notion that "Semites" and "Asians" were the main carriers of the disease, so

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[280] Ibid., 179.

[281] Henry Power, "Diseases of the Eye," in *The Year-Book of Treatment, 1897* (Philadelphia and New York: Lea Brothers, 1897), 377.

much so that one expert claimed that it was "without doubt that the yellow race is by far the most receptive"[282] to trachoma.

The scientific findings outlined a geographical space roughly equivalent to the regions from which the New Immigrants originated at the turn of the century. Millingen's findings singled out high-rate areas that were recognizable as loci for undesirable migrant populations. He found trachoma "endemic" in "Egypt, Syria, and Finland,"[283] and found frequency rates in Turkey at 60%, Africa at 85%, and Central Asia at 90%, as well as disproportionately high rates in southeastern Europe. After presenting his statistical findings to the scientific community, his international audience maintained the value of correlating race, national origin, and class with the disease. Responding to Millingen's findings in the *Annales d'oculistique* journal, Dr. Schreiber of Magdeburg, Germany cited prolific rates of trachoma infection among Polish migrants in Saxony. Professor Herman Knapp of New York and Dr. Lucien Howe of Buffalo cited similarly disproportional rates of infection among and Polish and Italian migrants, and Jewish migrants from Poland and Russia to the U.S.[284] Medical practitioners provided the basis for blurring popular and political considerations with the scientific understanding of the disease. Their prejudices also conflated trachoma's correlation with its causation. Rather

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[282] F. B. Eaton, "Study of Ophthalmological Geography as Regards Trachoma," 43.

[283] Millingen, "The Statistics of Trachoma," 179.

[284] Ibid., 188–189, 192.

than looking into the racial origins of the migrants affected with trachoma, these medical professionals might have had more success in investigation the condition under which these migrants traveled to determine the factors contributing to the disease. Crowded steerage quarters and ports of entry provided favorable conditions for the spread of trachoma.

Did race and place cause the disease, or did experts look at each of those qualifiers to find instances of the disease? In short, race and class provided a convenient indicator for determining rates of trachoma infection when other forms of scientific scrutiny proved insufficient or underdeveloped. Growing scientific results showing significant trachoma rates in mountain regions of Italy and Hungary further discredited Chibret's early altitude theory, but they also focused on population groups largely considered undesirable in the U.S. and Western Europe. The issue continued to dog the medical community. As late as 1914, Aaron Brav of the Lebanon Hospital in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, still felt compelled to challenge the prevailing racial qualification in trachoma tests. Studying Native Americans across the U.S., Brav concluded that there were no racial predispositions for trachoma infection. Overcrowded or inadequate housing alongside poor hygiene were to blame for trachoma, not the Indians' racial makeup.[285]

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[285] Brav, M.D., "Trachoma as a Sociological Index."

By the early 1900s, trachoma specialists had established a historical narrative that placed the proliferation of trachoma at the moment of contact between East and West. The Ancient civilizations in Greece, Rome, and Egypt had displayed some knowledge of the disease, and sixteenth-century European accounts placed Egypt at the epicenter of the disorder when the various European armies returning from the region brought the eye ailment back to the West. In their attempts to understand the disorder, some scientists and medical professionals set out to trace the history of trachoma in civilization. Others looked to cast the blame for the frequent outbreaks squarely on the shoulders of the growing migrant flows.

One leading British practitioner, J. Herbert Parsons, conveyed in 1904 that "Trachoma in England at the present day is an alien disease, imported by aliens, propagated amongst aliens, and handed on to the native population by aliens."[286] Because many of the migration routes to the U.S. ran through England and France at one point or another in their journey westward, Parsons warned his English compatriots that their country was "indeed acting as a Trachoma filter-bed to the United States."[287] The problem stemmed from the fact that British inspections were more rigorous for outbound vessels than ships entering English ports. The British merchant shipping acts in effect from 1894 to 1897 required all crafts embarking from English ports to undergo thorough inspection for contagious disease. Medical

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[286] Boldt, *Trachoma*, ix.

[287] Ibid.

officers at ports were given the authority to inspect all passengers in steerage, as well as the ship's crew, for both mental and physical disabilities, and given authority to hold vessels at dock in perpetuity upon failing inspection. "Transmigrants," or those claiming only temporary sojourn in England on their way to another ultimate destination, were allowed to disembark upon the assurance that they would indeed do so only on a temporary basis.[288] England's uneven enforcement capacity with migration created the conditions for the nation to become what Parsons considered a "filter-bed" for those moving on to the U.S. Transmigrants frequently fled onshore detention houses or ships to settle in England, as they were loosely policed, and British immigration officers were in effect culling the masses before ships disembarked for America.

The rise in trachoma rates brought the disease to the forefront of the British consciousness and persuaded the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration to introduce the Alien Immigration Bill to the House of Commons. The act was an attempt to curb the spread of infectious diseases into England by preventing infected travelers from debarking in England.[289] The 1905 British Aliens Act made British migration legislation commensurate with active laws in the U.S. Rather than allowing unmitigated transmigrant disembarkation, medical officers were

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[288] U.S. Senate, *Emigration Conditions in Europe*, Report of the Immigration Commission, 61st Cong., 3rd sess., 1911, S. Doc. 748, 82-83.

[289] Boldt, *Trachoma*, xxxvi.

empowered to debar migrants and sojourners based on four qualifications: their lack of economic means, whether they were considered a "lunatic or idiot," or had a "disease or infirmity" that made the individual "likely to become a public charge," or moreover, if the migrant had a criminal record in either receiving or sending society.[290] Trachoma was just one of many considerations British agents had to consider.

The British Empire's experiences in India and Egypt had originally brought the disorder to the attention of British colonial officials and medical practitioners, just as France confronted trachoma after the military returned to the country from their expedition in Egypt. Most war theaters, barracks, and camps throughout the Empire experienced some degree of trachoma outbreak. If the ports of entry became the locus of enforcement, then the Poor Law schools became de facto sites where experts observed the disease. In the ragged facilities, specialists traced the spread of the disease to poor ventilation and overcrowded conditions. In England, as in the U.S., two competing theories divided experts between focusing on race and national origin versus environmental factors. Were racial groups to be targeted and systematically debarred from entry or treated, or were situation issues like overcrowding and hygiene to be targeted in the attempt determine the sources of trachoma and how to prevent the spread of the disease in the future?

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[290] U.S. Senate, *Emigration Conditions in Europe*, Report of the Immigration Commission, 61st Cong., 3rd sess., 1911, S. Doc. 748, 82.

Across the Atlantic, some American experts placed the blame for the rise of the disease squarely on the shoulders of people by-and-large considered racially and socially inferior, including Native Americans, African Americans, poor whites, and immigrants. Dr. Burton Chance, reporting from a "Military Point of View" on behalf of the U.S. Army, indicated how the disease disproportionately afflicted military personal. However, hidden within his surgical attempt to understand trachoma, Chance revealed tendencies to equate the disease with otherness and inferior civilization. For instance, while Chance leveled claims that the French military suffered from periodic outbreaks, he traced the origin of the pestilence to black colonial African soldiers. The disease was always indiscriminate with its victims, but the practitioner discriminately placed the blame on regions popularly considered racially inferior or imperial peripheries.

In the context of U.S. domestic policy, Chance claimed the disorder originated from the first arrivals of Irish migrants to the U.S. in the 1850s, and later with "the admission into this country of immigrants of the lower orders from eastern Europe, Asia Minor, and the Mediterranean provinces, Arabia, Palestine, and Egypt, as well as from parts of Prussia and Russia," [291] after which the disease spread at epidemic proportions. Chance also traced indigenous population groups

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[291] Burton Chance, M.D., "Trachoma in the Camps and Hospitals of the Army: A Brief Survey of the Subject from a Military Point of View," *Transactions of the American Ophthalmological Society, Fifty-Fifth Annual Meeting* 17 (1919): 151–52.

with high rates of infection, specifically the poor white communities residing in the Appalachian region. While the doctor recognized that trachoma infected "both extremes of life" on social and economic scales, Chance clearly placed the origin of the disease on classes of migrants recognized as inferior, and seen through the lens of race and class. While he did not specify Syria within his list of regions from which migrants arriving in the U.S. carried the disorder, Chance's selection of territorial swathes triangulated the region of the Eastern Mediterranean as a hotbed for trachoma, which it was, but not because of race.

Official U.S. reports verified the assumption that Syrians would likely be carriers for the disease.[292] More significantly, such assertions would categorically place Syrians squarely alongside other racially and socially questionable, if not altogether undesirable, migrants as late the 1920s. Carrying trachoma reinforced this category from a professional, medical perspective. In other words, clinically diagnosed disability buttressed notions of racial inferiority and challenged ideas of civilizational worthiness. If the disease could originate in these regions, then these peoples were not necessarily civilized to begin with. Their cities were expected to be overcrowded, scientific knowledge to be in its infancy, and by default, hygienic practices to be deficient. Only after their arrival would their diseases, born of the conditions of these atavistic societies, spread to other Americans.

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[292] U.S. Congress, House, *Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, Contagious Diseases among Immigrants*, 26.

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Fear of the disease had become a national sensation. The invasive inspections practiced by immigration agents and medical professionals on individuals entering the US had become well known as a symbol of intense examination. One U.S. newspaperman quipped in 1908 on an unrelated topic that "Congressman Teale…has some queer ideas about some things…scrutinizing me until I felt like an immigrant being inspected for trachoma."[293]

U.S. immigration officials looked to extend the protective barrier of examination centers into Europe in an attempt to slow the influx of trachomatous migrants before they would have a change to get to American port cities. In 1905, special investigator to the immigration service, Dr. Maurice Fishberg, was tasked to inspect the steamship companies stationed throughout Europe. He initiated his investigation at the height of the trachoma scare in Europe and the U.S. The main concern in the U.S. was that Russian Jews and Eastern Mediterranean migrants were spreading the disease to white Americans. As a New York physician and physical anthropologist, Fishberg had a background in race theory that colored his understanding of migration. The doctor had built his career by focusing on Jewish ethnology foremost, placing the Jewish "race" alongside Armenians and Syrians, and questioning whether those communities could assimilate to the white race and

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[293] "Letters from a New Congressman's Wife," *Evening Star*, January 19, 1908.

the Anglo-Saxon family that dominated the U.S. and British empires.[294] He would later apply racialized thinking to the new immigration inspection process. Opponents to the racialized immigration controls in the Jewish American community were adept in pointing out, "As a matter of fact the trachoma bugaboo is one that has been compelled to work overtime by the immigration restrictionists."[295]

Many Syrians and other migrants of Eastern Mediterranean origin traveled through Marseilles, France on their way to the Americas. According to testimony for the U.S. House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, migrants in Marseilles "from the Levant, Poland, and other central European countries [were] subject to inspection, bathing, and fumigation of their effects."[296] Fishberg's immigration report, however, concluded that Syrians migrating through Marseilles were also subject to scam artists. One Anton Fares of Marseilles circulated a newspaper in Syria that included large ads offering to cure trachoma sufferers before they embarked on their journey to America. The Syrian migration agent

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[294] See Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 237; Mitchell B. Hart, *Social Science and the Politics of Modern Jewish Identity* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000), 158; Maurice Fishberg, *The Jews: A Study of Race and Environment* (London: Walter Scott Publishing, 1911), iv; Maurice Fishberg, *Materials for the Physical Anthropology of the Eastern Jews* (Lancaster, PA: New Era Printing, 1905).

[295] Cyrus L. Sulzberger, "Immigration Restrictions: Its Fallacies," *The Menorah, A Monthly Magazine for the Jewish Home* 40, no. 4 (April 1906): 196.

[296] U.S. Congress, House, *Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, Contagious Diseases among Immigrants*, 20.

proposed two options to would-be travelers suffering from trachoma: either attempt

to be smuggled into Mexico and cross illegally through the porous border of the

southern U.S., or pay for eye treatments in order to legitimately enter through New

York's rigorous inspection process. Unfortunately, for some of those Syrian

migrants who overwhelmingly chose the second option, the treatments Fares

offered only alleviated trachoma symptoms on a temporary basis. Fares had set up

an elaborate scam. He operated through a network connecting boarding houses and

doctors to treat migrants for eye disorders, whether they had the any disease or not.

A newspaper exposé from the period accused Fares of fraudulently misleading his

patrons. He offered treatments until they could no longer afford to pay, at which

point he refused them further service.[297] The episode also sheds some light onto the

growing Syrian migration into Mexico as a means to circumvent stricter border

controls through the legal networks of migration to the U.S.

A U.S. Commissioner-General's Report from 1908 focused on the Syrian

migration through Mexico. Many of the migrants chose the route with the goal of

avoiding the rigorous inspection process in the U.S. A passage from the report is

worth citing at length here:

> The influx of Syrians by way of the Mexican border is a matter of long
> standing, and represents now, as it has for several years past, a constant
> attempt on the part of members of this race to secure entrance to the United
> States through Mexico, as a result either of being refused passage for

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[297] "Immigrants Patched Up, Trachoma Getting In," *New York Tribune*, December 18, 1905.

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Atlantic ports of the United States or through advices given by unscrupulous individuals at various rendezvous of immigrants in Europe to the effect that the route to the United States via Mexico, while longer and more expensive, afforded the surer means of ingress into this country. A very large percentage of Syrian arrivals at Mexican border ports are found to be suffering with the disease of a contagious character, or to have been suffering from same at some time in the past; and practically the entire remainder is made up of aliens who have been told by runners in Europe that they were afflicted with some excludable ailment, when, in reality, no disability of such character existed. Syrian immigration by way of the Mexican border is therefore, likely to continue…[298]

At the annual meeting of the American Public Health Association held in Mexico City in 1906, Dr. Lorenzo Chavez of Mexico claimed that the trachoma epidemic then afflicting the country was due primarily to the recent influx of Syrian migrants. Many of them were looking to cross the border into the U.S. at the loosely patrolled border crossings in Texas and New Mexico.[299]

During the early years of the twentieth century, politicians, immigration officials, and the media maintained a level of anxiety over the eye disease, sometimes playing on Americans' fears that trachoma was invading the country's shores and infecting the national population on an epidemic scale. During the summer of 1906, the serving U.S. Commissioner General of Immigration, Frank T. Sargent, reported ten deportations per day due to trachoma infection, and fines on

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[298] U.S. Congress, Senate, *Reports of the Immigration Commission: Emigration Conditions in Europe*, 61st Cong., 3rd Sess., S. Doc. 748, 1911, 105–106.

[299] Lorenzo Chavez, "Trachoma in Mexico," *Public Health: Papers and Reports Presented at the Thirty-Fourth Annual Meeting of the American Public Health Association* 32, no. 1 (December 3, 1906): 230–37.

steamship companies surmounting $8,000 due to the illness.[300] For his part, however, Sargent attempted to allay the fears that trachoma presented an irreversible epidemic on American shores.

The news media had successfully driven the popular uproar surrounding the maligned and largely misunderstood eye disorder. Sargent's job was to convince the U.S. government and the American people that trachoma did not present the severe threat to the nation that the papers cautioned, but it was also up to Sargent to offer tangible proposals to curb the possibility that migrants infected with trachoma would enter the U.S. altogether. While rates of U.S. immigrants exhibiting symptoms of trachoma increased, the increase correlated with an overall general increase in migration nationwide. Trachoma was not an epidemic increasing exponentially. The rate of infection had remained relatively static. Rather than feed the irrational fears of the American public – fears that represented anti-immigration sentiment justified in contemporary medical understanding rather than medical knowledge informing public opinion – Sargent presented a logical alternative to the current system of inspection and debarment. The Commissioner General proposed expanding the U.S. marine hospital service, charged with

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[300] "Trachoma on the Increase," *New York Tribune*, August 23, 1906.

inspecting migrants to the country, to points of embarkation beyond the borders of the U.S.[301]

The Dillingham Commission's report on immigration, six years after Fishberg's and five years removed from Sargent's, revisited the same issues within the immigration service. Syrians continued to cross the frontier between Mexico and the U.S. unabated. Their illegal immigration through the porous southern border ensured that trachoma entered relatively unchecked into the national body. The commission's report traced the point of European departure for most Syrians at Marseille, France. The city's migration officers retained so many migrants in makeshift facilities that the American report called Marseille "practically a detention camp for Turks, Syrians, and other people of southeastern Europe."[302]

A U.S.-led investigation of steamship agencies in southern France provided more insight into the Syrian migration experience. Most companies refrained from involvement with Syrian migrants because the high likelihood that they were carrying diseases made the trade unprofitable, that is, unless the agency resorted to smuggling or extortion. U.S. legislation from 1903 made the steamship companies financially liable for migrants barred due to mental or physical "defects." One steamship agent claimed that seventy percent of Syrians exhibited symptoms of

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[301] "Denied as Baseless; Trachoma Not Epidemic at Ellis Island," *Evening Star*, August 16, 1906.

[302] U.S. Congress, Senate, *Reports of the Immigration Commission: Emigration Conditions in Europe*, 105.

trachoma before embarkation. The Fabre Line shipping to and from France refused to issue steamship tickets to anyone from the Eastern Mediterranean until they presented a medical certificate assuring a clean bill of health. The entire certification process was practiced in-house, each link in the chain employed by the Fabre Line. The agency maintained a medical staff to certify migrants' health, including an eye doctor who specialized in diagnosing and treating cases of trachoma. The Fabre certification process appeared more legitimate than Fares' network of would-be doctors and boarding houses, but rejection rates still reached nearly thirty percent for Syrians departing Marseille through Fabre.[303]

The French Academy of Medicine protested the French government's willingness to allowance French companies to admit and treat trachoma sufferers in Marseille. The large migration of Syrians and Armenians infected with the disorder had not only turned the French port, situated on the Mediterranean Sea routes, into a refugee camp of stranded migrants. The disease had also become prominent in one migrant "quarter of Paris"[304] as well, as some of the migrants made their way inland, sneaking away from the facilities or meeting up with family in the nation's capital.

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[303] Ibid., 106.

[304] U.S. Department of Labor, *Reports of the Department of Labor, 1914* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1915), 517.

By 1914, the U.S. Department of Labor promoted greater cooperation with French and British authorities in preventing Syrian transmigrants infected with trachoma from using European countries as staging areas for eventual migration to the U.S. The Department remained apprehensive, however, that once denied entry into the U.S. Syrians would only replace European way stations with those located in Central and South America, where inspection processes remained relatively inadequate in comparison to U.S. and European standards.[305] The United States had not yet reached out to the regions to the south in an attempt to jointly coordinate immigration policies and entrance standards.

5.1 Return Migration and Tuberculosis

Trachoma was not the only disease that had transnational dimensions in the Syrian diaspora. Syrian migrants also carried tuberculosis, a disease that can be difficult to diagnose at times, freely across national borders in North America and the Eastern Mediterranean. The ominousness of Syrian tuberculosis could be felt on both sides of the diaspora. In the United States, the death of a nameless Syrian girl would provide the spark for a medical doctor to reform the treatment of the disease. In the Levant, the broader society stigmatized return migrants who brought the disease back with them.

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[305] Ibid., 516–517, 520.

Tracing disease networks of return migrants further complicates the historical narrative of return migration. Mark Wyman[306] and Akram Khater[307] have shown in some detail the influence migrants had in their sending society upon their return. Before their return, these migrants had been exposed to or participated in democratic government, were frequently under the pressures of the rigorous work schedules of industrial production, and had adopted western modes of dress and appearance. They stood out when they went back to homes marked by tradition, or that had culturally changed in ways different from the migrants themselves. More significantly, return migrants took back with them money they had saved during their stint in the U.S., savings they often used to expand or upgrade their property back in their sending society. They bought land or improved homes on existing family plots. They also relayed stories that their countrymen took to heart, and may have motivated others to follow their example. These ranged from tales of adventure, to narratives of the daily grind and fast-paced nature of American factory work or the manic bustle of the modern city.

Syrians had been accustomed to the factory system, especially in relation to lace and embroidery and their connected industries in cotton and silk spinning, as we have seen in Chapter 1. What Wyman pointed out, and Khater may have

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[306] Wyman, *Round-Trip to America*, 6–7, 31–34, 74–76.

[307] Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920*, 108–127.

overlooked, is the negative light that diseased migrants who returned home cast on their stint in America. Wyman's brief discussion on Italians who transmitted tuberculosis is quite telling. Migrants returning to Italy carried what became known as the "American sickness" to locals in Italian towns. The vast majority of Italian return migrants diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1910, 700 out of 857, sailed from North America.[308] The episode highlights how diseases, just like people and ideas, did not necessarily have to travel in one direction across the Atlantic, or any other region, for that matter. Diseases followed migrant networks and moved from east to west just as easily as they moved from west to east.

While Americans and Europeans considered Syrians a prime carrier population for trachoma to the West, Syrians also carried tuberculosis back to Syria from the U.S. At the turn of the twentieth century, many Syrian return migrants who had been exposed to "consumption," or tuberculosis, during their sojourn, took the highly contagious disease back to their receiving society. Trachoma had created a completely new class of undesirability in the U.S., where local communities vilified Syrian Americans as carriers. Tuberculosis created a situation that reversed the narrative of Syrian desirability. In the U.S. they were feared to be carriers of trachoma, but Syrians blamed them for bringing in a foreign contagion as well. They were unwelcome on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1907 alone, the Dillingham

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[308] Wyman, *Round-Trip to America*, 85.

Commission counted 5,880 Syrians admitted to the U.S. and 1,700 leaving the country, a ratio of 3.5 to 1.[309] Fear of return migrants swelled to epidemic levels that mirrored the transmission of the disease.

Indigenous treatment for tuberculosis remained rudimentary. The infected were treated as "lepers," and the larger population shunned the afflicted from society. Fear and anxiety over tuberculosis drove Syrians to violence as they stoned the diseased where they found them. A missionary doctor in the region relayed the story of a New York newspaperman, who upon returning to Syria was driven from his mother's home when the community discovered that he may be infected with the disease. The group coalesced at the family's home, demanded he be turned over, and chased him out of town. They stoned him as he fled into the wilderness, reportedly forced to live in a tree outside of town until eventually he gained admission to the region's only sanatorium near Beirut. An American missionary woman experienced the same threat of violence when the local population discovered that she also carried the dreaded fatal disease.[310]

Dr. Mary Pierson Eddy established the Ottoman Empire's first tuberculosis sanatorium near Beirut in 1908. Eddy was the first missionary woman granted protection by Sultan Mehmed V to practice medicine in the Ottoman Empire, an

[309] U.S. Congress, Senate, *Reports of the Immigration Commission: Emigration Conditions in Europe*, 40.

[310] "Consumptives Stoned in Syria," *The Medical Times* 38, no. 4 (April 1910): 127.

accomplishment that the ABCFM relished. Eddy and the ABCFM reasoned that the local reactions to the disease were too brutal to be ignored, and as the disease began to spread with the increasing number of return migrants at the turn of the century, demand for modern methods of treatment outstripped the meager medical capacity of the region.[311] The complex consisted of "eighteen rooms and a group of tent houses for open-air treatment of men patients."[312] The tent houses were mainly used to treat Bedouins, who were accustomed to residing in light, open-air structures. There also may have been a cultural element involved in their choice to remain outside the main facility. They could come and go as they pleased, and were not directly subject to the hospital's matriarch.

Eddy's sanatorium catered to the local population as well as migrant groups travelling through the area. The project represented the culmination of the Eddy family's outreach in Mount Lebanon. Eddy's family had been in Syria since the middle of the nineteenth century. Her father, William W. Eddy, had initially traveled to the Eastern Mediterranean in 1851 as part of a Presbyterian contingent working under the supervision of the ABCFM mission in Syria. He served as secretary for the Board of Trustees of the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut, and remained there until his death in 1901. The Presbyterian Church and national news

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[311] *The Eighty-Third Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America* (New York: n.p., 1920), 431.

[312] *The Woman's Medical Journal* 18, no. 9 (September 1908): 197.

media celebrated Mary Eddy's contributions to the region. Eddy helped transfer American Protestantism and medical knowledge to the region as a member of the Women's Missionary Society, the Washington-based Church of the Covenant, and the U.S. National Association for the Study and Prevention of Tuberculosis.[313] She also translated medical texts on tuberculosis into Arabic. As a pioneering woman doctor and missionary, she simultaneously advanced women's participation in foreign proselytism and medical service. Because she was a woman, she could circumvent the patriarchal restrictions of Syrian society, and treat local Syrian women who were not able to meet with male doctors due to social and religious conventions. The Western confrontation with various disabilities in the Near East produced its own complicated set of Orientalist narratives. These were not simply based in the impositions of colonialism and imperialism, but also served to empower certain individuals in relation to others, reorganizing categories and power dynamics in the process.

5.2 East, West, and Insanity

The study of Western attempts to practice charity in response to insanity in Syria must take into account responses to disability in a colonial context. Franz

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[313] *The National Association for the Study and Prevention of Tuberculosis, Transactions of the Eleventh Annual Meeting, Seattle, Wash., June 14-16, 1915* (Baltimore, MD: Williams and Wilkins, 1915), 399.

Fanon once wrote of the European colonial mindset in North Africa that the outsider's perception of the native environment, or where the Westerner sees "the veiled women, the palm trees and the camels [that] make up the landscape, the *natural* background to the human presence of [Europeans] … colonization is a success when all this indocile nature has finally been tamed."[314] Institutionalizing mental illness represented just one of the many forms of colonial rationale that Western practitioners exported to the Arab world in their attempts to quantify, categorize, and to actively "know" their foreign surroundings. It functioned in the tensions of colonial belonging and otherness, that is, between turning indigenous forms of systematic otherness into imposed notions of colonial belonging, and in turn, established forms of indigenous belonging into perceived otherness. The undertaking required Europeans and Americans to distinguish between notions of modern and pre-modern, tradition and progression, in remaking the field of medical treatment and transplanting it in the Eastern Mediterranean. In the process, they objectified and sought to nullify local practices of treatment and disabled identities. They aimed to replace these with their own versions of practice and identification.

In the Levant, just as Fanon pointed out in his North Africa example, the growing number of migrant medical practitioners that represented the emerging field of scientific expertise began to categorize what Fanon labeled the "natural"

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[314] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 250.

environment, inscribing their own prejudices into the landscape and the region's peoples. The power of the medical expert emanated from the process of "knowing," which was based in imposing hypothetical hierarchies of otherness onto pre-existing social structures in Syrian society, and reorganizing each in terms according to the new Western taxonomies. Their reorganization embodied the legacies of Enlightenment, and later, modern thought. Modern, rational colonization and the scientific practice of modern medicine went hand-in-hand in their exertions to delineate and resolve disease and disability against notions of normality and ability. The missionary impulse to proselytize and the attempts to reform society through medicine were two sides of the same colonizing coin. Diseases, like superstition or ancient religious practices, were not simply conditions to be tolerated, but represented sets of abnormalities that could be understood, contained, or perhaps even cured. Just as with trachoma and tuberculosis, intellectual disability became a focal point for the medical missionaries who sought to impart Western norms on the foreign landscape of Syria.

Western doctors who initiated medical practice in Ottoman Syria aimed to provide humane treatment for "lunatics" in the region. In order to treat the disorder, they would first have to unmoor it from its local affiliations, or what Fanon had referred to as the perceived "natural" or cultural embodiments of the Arab world. Missionary journals from the late nineteenth century fixated on the perceived abuses that people with intellectual disabilities suffered in Syrian society. These

publications portrayed pre-existing forms of regional treatment as inhumane and backwards: shadowy reminders of the pitfalls along the surface of Western progressive history before the emergence of the asylum. European and American medical experts had begun to isolate those they labeled as "demented," "insane," or "lunatics," all variations on what historian Patrick McDonagh classifies under the umbrella term "idiots,"[315] in asylums on a regular basis during the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, the broader Syrian society responded to people suffering from intellectual disabilities along a broad continuum, ranging from tolerance to scorn. Many continued to roam freely in public spaces during the nineteenth century, with little to no afterthought, and those who did were often subjected to open harassment and outright hostility.

Western journals relayed tales of lunatics shackled to manacles in a state of isolation. Others were treated as holy fools or demoniacs.[316] The narrative of the holy fool maintained traditions rooted in religious scripture and practice, and its adherents ranged from the medieval Byzantine Orthodoxy to the affiliated Eastern rite churches in sites across Eastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean up through the nineteenth century. Historian Sergey Ivanov characterized a holy fools

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[315] See Patrick McDonagh, *Idiocy: A Cultural History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008).

[316] James S. Dennis, *Christian Missions and Social Progress: A Sociological Study of Foreign Missions*, vol. 2 (New York, Chicago and Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1899), 389; McDonagh, *Idiocy: A Cultural History*, 129–135.

as "someone whose *behaviour* is no different from that of a madman … yet who is accorded notably high *status* in society [who] voluntarily takes upon himself the mask of insanity in order that he may thereby conceal his own perfection from the world."[317] Questioning the legitimacy of madness where individuals exhibited actions associated with the insane would have been tantamount to questioning the will of God for those who believed in the phenomenon. Classifying mental disability according to religious categories would then have made differentiating a person suffering from mental disability indistinguishable from a holy fool who practiced mimicking such actions in a fashion attributable to insanity. As a result, any attempt to treat a person exhibiting the features of madness circumvented the religiosity of the individual.

On the other end of the religious spectrum, some Syrians perceived those people suffering or exhibiting mental disability as physical hosts to a demonic presence. Missionary journals from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries lamented how Syrian religious leaders responded to the demoniac in their midst. Both Muslim ʿulamā (notables) and Christian priests performed exorcisms to forcibly remove the evil spirit, at times keeping the person locked away in "dark, damp, and filthy places, caves or vaults, in some convents, where they are fettered

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[317] Sergey A. Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, trans. Simon Franklin (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1, 7.

in heavy iron chains."[318] Missionaries also noted that "Mohammedans are generally not as cruel to this class of people as are the native Christians,"[319] a sentiment that historian Scalenghe later echoed. An article in the *Literary Digest* from 1896 provided two examples of abuse at a Maronite monastery. In one, Maronite monks chained those exhibiting insanity in a Lebanese cave that had acquired the reputation for exhibiting healing powers. The monks shackled patients in the darkness and whipped them until they were convinced that they had driven out the spirits or until the visage of Saint Anthony, the patron saint of the cave and adjoining monastery, appeared to the sufferers and freed them from both physical and spiritual bondage. Freedom typically came in the form of death. In another, the author relays how monks beat the subject over the head with a boot while uttering incantations to drive out the spirit. One can only surmise how many unfortunate victims died during the process. Western reformers felt compelled to castigate the process that frequently ended only following the death of the subject.[320]

It is no surprise that foreigners perceived the rituals with a great deal of suspicion. Missionary reformers championed alternatives to treatment appropriate to their own sense of religious ethics and scientific practice. The primary reformer

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[318] Theophilus Waldmeier, "Proposed Home for the Insane in Syria," *The Missionary Review of the World* 20, no. 8 (August 1897): 614.

[319] "The Demented in Syria and Palestine," *The Literary Digest* 14, no. 3 (November 21, 1896): 92.

[320] Ibid.

advocating the Syrian asylum, Theophilus Waldmeier, a Swiss Quaker missionary who had proselytized in both Ethiopia and Syria, set out to establish a "lunatic asylum" near Beirut during the 1890s. Waldmeier's institution would eventually house, in relative isolation, people suffering or exhibiting mental disabilities from throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. Waldmeier established his asylum in Brumana, a few miles outside of Beirut. He did so in coordination with the British Syrian Mission and the Bethlem Royal Hospital, an early pioneering institution in the treatment of the insane, after making a tour of institutions in Europe and the United States.[321]

Medical practice reified scientific expertise. By isolating, defining, and prescribing both disease and cure, Western medical experts sought to ensure their irreplaceable function as modern miracle workers in what they perceived to be an intellectually stagnated Syrian society. Serving at the head of the vanguard of the Western movement to confront insanity in Ottoman Syria, Waldmeier brought European medical techniques to the Eastern Mediterranean. Emboldened by their righteous claims based in modern scientific methods, Westerners like Waldmeier and Eddy represented the vanguard of medical reform, even medical reimagining, in the Middle East. As medical missionaries, they could categorize Syrian sufferers

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[321] "Lunacy in Syria," *The Lancet*, March 20, 1897, 825–26; J. T. Gracey, "International Missionary Union: Fourteenth Annual Meeting," *Woman's Missionary Friend* 29, no. 1 (46-48): 47.

as medical abnormalities but also innocents who deserved treatment that was more "humane".

5.3 Westernization of Syrians

By the turn of the twentieth century, Syria had experienced a rather pronounced degree of Westernization through forms of medical practice and associated modern views on the world. Combined with economic integration and political penetration, greater Syria had been thoroughly drawn into the socio-economic and political systems dominated by Western taxonomies, whether racial, political, or religious. Syrians in both sending and receiving society would have been familiar with the various tropes of medical science, racial hierarchy, and "proper" business practice as markers of civilization and modernity. After Houghton's 1911 treatise on the Syrian community in New York, Syrian Americans entered their voices into the dialogue on the nature of the Syrian race and civilization within the context of Western imperial society and the global economic system.

PART III: SYRIAN IDENTITY FORMATION

Chapter 6: Positive Identity Formation

Syrian Americans desired to find a place of belonging in the United States and the world. They had experienced a degree of racialization that migrants confronted beyond the gates welcoming them, only conditionally and haphazardly, into the nation. Confronted by migration quotas, the dignity of the federal courts, and the eyehooks of the medical examiner, Syrian migrants remained in-between sympathetic and antipathetic American opinions of the community. In order to rally truly behind their allies, Syrian Americans had to formulate an identity that projected the qualities of their community most admirable to the American mythology. In the process, they began to express the qualities of the Syrian national body. These narratives were fictions that the Syrian migrant intelligentsia borrowed from a supposedly collective past and shared future.

A contingent within the Syrian American intelligentsia responded to the main theorists on race who wrote during the late nineteenth century, including Archibald Sayce and Augustus Keane. Their theories provided the foundations upon which the Dillingham Commission would formulate its racial taxonomy for United States immigration and labor in 1911. Kalil Bishara, Ameen Rihani, Naoum and Salloum Mokarzel, Kahlil Gibran, Abraham Rihbany, Habib Katibah, and W. A. Mansur – poets, newspapermen, polemicists, reverends, and politicians –

carefully crafted responses to the contemporary racial discourse attempting to define the Syrian "nation." They employed the language of race, civilization, exploration, commerce, and religion in the attempt to place Syrians among the world's most advanced peoples. For them the United States represented all of the same qualities of modernity that they expressed within the Syrian race through the Syria idea.

The Syria idea was an ideology embedded with contradictions. According to its devotees, Syrians were both old and new. They could claim the ancient Phoenicians or Canaanites just as easily as the apostolic community, medieval Arabs, or modern Western civilization. They shifted easily between notions of progression and tradition, of religion and secular science. While each of these facets bolstered their Syrianness, they at times also exhibited shifting attitudes toward the viability of Syrian identity, reflected by their varying degrees of allegiance to the notion in different times and different social and political contexts.

They practiced what literary theorist Gayatri Spivak has labeled "strategic essentialism;" that is, Syrian migrants constructed an identity that was mutable as long as it provided some form of social capital. Syrians adopted that most American philosophical trait, pragmatism, approaching their identity politics with practicality. While Syrian Americans usually self-identified as "Syrian," they could also borrow strategically from Arab culture, or claim belonging to an Arabness that they held to be distinct from Syrianness. The contradictions in their identity

formulations do not end there, however. Sometimes Syrian American authors presented Arabness as a marker of a grand medieval epoch, a historical tradition that their Western counterparts would have readily recognized. Such a rendition of the past considered the Arab present proof of cultural backwardness or an indication of stagnation reflected in the Arab people's inability to move beyond their "traditions." Arabs once had science and technology, but in their blind decadence, they somehow as a people lost their previous knowledge and were unable to fit into the modern world as a result. Conversely, Arabness provided a new identity when Syrianness failed to carry the gravity in political capital it had once stimulated. Arabness provided an outlet for cultural and political expression, especially in the Middle East, once the reality of a neighboring Jewish state threatened to divide the former Ottoman Syria periphery. Arab identity provided a shared sense of belonging when its adherents committed to othering Jewishness as a component part of that identity. The Syria idea, however, continued to hold some sway even during the rise of modern pan-Arabism and Arab nationalism. Anṭūn Sʿāda would carry the idea from the Americas to the Middle East in the attempt to establish an independent Syrian nation-state.

6.1 The Syrian Race in the History of Western Civilization

The discourse over the place of Syria in the modern world bubbled up from the ferment of new contacts between East and West initiated in the nineteenth

century. Western missionary ventures brought Ottoman Syrians into direct contact with Western cultural norms. Butrus al-Bustani had been educated by American missionaries rather than in the traditional Syrian *madrasa*, or religious school, and later converted from the Maronite faith to Protestantism. Bustani had collaborated with Cornelius van Dyck in translating the Bible into Arabic in the 1860s, and would later champion Western notions of progress and civilization in promoting what he hoped would become the foundations for a unified, and politically liberal, Ottoman Syria. In his attempt to reintroduce the cultures of East and West, Bustani looked for features that each shared and held in high regard. Bustani chose science as the marker for the advance of global civilization. As the one-time guardians of science and civilization, al-Bustani argued, Arabs were uniquely predisposed to retake the foremost position in the modern world. Arab societies could regain their proper place by borrowing only what was necessary from Europe in the process; they did not, as it were, simply have to ape the West. Arabs would not have to accept Western culture whole, but could choose those aspects they deemed compatible with their own. Although later Syrian American critics would claim otherwise, Bustani represented a point of departure in Syrian discourses of modernity that later intellectuals would follow.[322]

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[322] Houghton, "Syrians in the United States I: Sources and Settlement," 483.

Syrians in the mahjar, likewise, interjected their voices into the conversation on the place of Syrians in the modern world. The issue both united and divided mahjar communities. On the eve of World War I, the Reverend Kalil Bishara of the Presbytery of Baltimore issued *The Origin of the Modern Syrian* (1914), a polemic on the racial and national origins of the Syrian peoples.[323] Bishara published the work at the behest of New York publisher and editor of the Arabic-language daily newspaper *Al-Hoda*, Naoum Mokarzel.[324] Mokarzel's own position within the Syrian community of New York experienced a major shift associated with the editor's clear political reversal over the future of the "inseparable twins," Syria and Lebanon. While Mokarzel initially supported the call of "Syria for the Syrians," he would eventually promote an independent Lebanon, under French supervision, in order to separate the predominately Christian population from the large Muslim Syrian population he considered enemies of Western civilization.[325] He would even become the candidate a contingent of Lebanese notables nominated for the office of president on the young Lebanese Republic, and also garnered some support among the migrant population in the Americas.[326] Mokarzel's departure from

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[323] Kalil A. Bishara, *The Origin of the Modern Syrian* (New York: Al-Hoda, 1914).

[324] Hani J. Bawardi, *The Making of Arab Americans: From Syrian Nationalism to U.S. Citizenship* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 118; Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 92–93.

[325] "Demand Political Recognition of Lebanon," *The Syrian World* 2, no. 8 (February 1928): 62.

[326] "A Great Syrian Leader Passes," *The Syrian World* 6, no. 7 (April 1932): 15; "Lebanon Occupied with Presidential Elections," *The Syrian World* 6, no. 4 (December 1931): 47–49.

united Syria developed within a broader Syrian movement for national autonomy, of which Bishara's text represented a crucial starting point.

Figure 4: "Naoum Mokarzel," *The Syrian World* **6, no.7 (April 1932)**

Printed in both Arabic and English, *The Origin of the Modern Syrian* reached out to a broad, multilingual audience. The book launched just as the U.S. federal courts began mulling over the territorial considerations and supposed racial origins of Syrians as a basis for determining their eligibility for American citizenship. As we have seen in Chapter 4, when considered together, these court cases helped establish the legal precedent that limited naturalization to those

immigrants whom the "common" American would consider "white."[327] Bishara therefore aimed to influence the "common knowledge" of Americans, a people whom he claimed "personified 'Common Sense.'"[328] Bishara's treatise served as the heuristic document to project claimed elements of Syrian identity to the American court of public opinion, issues directly relevant to the Syrian citizenship cases pending in U.S. courts. In order to sway the courts' interpretation of common knowledge, Syrian Americans first had to influence the "common" American's perception of Syrians in their midst.

Bishara penned his polemic within an American context in which Syrian Americans straddled the fault line separating the categories of "unfit" and "assimilable." Documentation from the early twentieth century regarding Syrian Americans suggests that two narratives were emerging on the community: one vilifying them as social deviants; the other venerating them as desirable Americans, or at the very least, worthy of American empathy. New York City's newspapers painted Syrians as barbarians in the new capital of Western civilization following the Syrian riots in Battery Park and Brooklyn in 1905. Members of the local Maronite and Orthodox congregations poured onto Washington Street and the surrounding area of Manhattan to battle out the dispute. Prone to violence and disease, Syrians threatened the health of the national body. The 1905 episode

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[327] Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 4; 74–80.

[328] Bishara, *The Origin of the Modern Syrian*, 4.

proved to skeptics that Syrians were unable to assimilate due in part to their inability to move beyond the religious and ethnic divisions that they carried with them from their sending society.

However, not all Americans maintained the stance that Syrians represented a societal nuisance. Even those living in New York City at the point of Syrian critical mass found redeeming qualities in the migrant community. Civic leader Kenneth Widdemer saw Syrians through the lens of positive eugenics: Syrians exhibited racially desirable physiological features appreciated by other Americans, and were welcomed into the broader national community. When the local newspaper, *The Sun*, published an exposé on the Syrian community entitled "Washington Street: The Real Melting Pot" in 1917, the paper quoted Widdemer's sentiments on Syrian and Irish weddings. "The Syrians are a remarkable people," he exclaimed; "They are clean and they have a knack for getting on. They rarely stop here long. A year or so and then they move on to better surroundings. The Syrian girls are as a rule pretty. The Irish boys fall for them. It is an excellent combination. The two peoples seem to amalgamate well. Some of the prettiest and healthiest and smartest babies in the district are children of Syrian mothers and Irish fathers."[329]

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[329] "Washington Street the Real Melting Pot," *The Sun*, October 21, 1917. By this point of the twentieth century, the Irish had been integrated into the American category of whiteness, see Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995).

It was left to Syrian Americans and their supporters, however, to create an argument for Syrians' racial belonging within their receiving society, and in the process, to formulate justifications for how territorial Syria represented a worthwhile addition to the modern system of nation-states. The Syrian experience lay somewhere in-between the academic arguments rooting Syrian-ness in the civilization of the ancient Phoenician past, social acceptance within U.S. society, and the socio-legal constructions of race produced in American judicial precedent that ultimately decided Syrian viability for American citizenship and belonging. First, the Syrian American intelligentsia had to convince everyday Americans that they belonged in the United States.

6.2 Peculiarities of Ethnology: Race, Language, and the Human Form

Syrian authors constructed a narrative of belonging based in race "awakening."[330] The long shadows cast by the racialized Anglo-American imperial regimes made the language accessible and necessary. In tracing the contours of the Syrian race, Syrian American authors traced their history back to two monumental features of past civilization: the Phoenician merchants of the ancient world and the foundational epoch of Christianity. While ethnographic surveys of ancient civilizations were likely beyond the purview of the common American citizen,

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[330] Reverend W. A. Mansur, "Modern Syrians' Contributions to Civilization," *The Syrian World* 4, no. 5 (January 1930): 7–13.

many Americans did have some knowledge of the Eastern Mediterranean through their intimacy with Christian scripture, as well as through the more popularized forms of Classical Greco-Roman literature. In popular discourse, modern racial categories were superimposed over ancient ethnicities recorded in religious scripture. Scripture spoke to the nature of race and ethnicity and vice versa.

Kalil Bishara's early attempt to enter into the field of popular American literature questioned the Syrians' place in the world. Bishara helped set into motion a broader Syrian academic discourse meant to place Syrians within a narrative of American society based on a broader framework of "civilization." The author's self-proclaimed goal was to determine "the racial identity of the modern Syrian."[331] Even during a period of racial "awakenings" based in cultural interpretations as well as critical biology, such an undertaking was more difficult than would first appear. The practice of ethnology attempted to get at the root of race, and proved over the course of time to be a dead-end offshoot of the larger emerging field of anthropology. The Syrian American intelligentsia that included Bishara contributed to the foundling science's emerging discourse.

Beginning with James Cowles Prichard's *Researches into the Physical History of Mankind* (1813),[332] ethnologists advocated a comparative study of

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[331] Bishara, *The Origin of the Modern Syrian*, 6.

[332] James Cowles Prichard, *Researches into the Physical History of Mankind* (London: n.p., 1813).

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human racial characteristics that considered races being both separate and distinct. Ethnology grew opposite the purely "descriptive" approach of ethnography.[333] Paul Broca had stated it more succinctly: Ethnologists study race while ethnographers study people.[334] As a comparative, inherently racially biased pseudo-science, ethnology lent itself to discourses of power built upon hierarchical racial taxonomies and the language of modern human progress. Augustus Henry Keane and Archibald Henry Sayce stood as two of the foremost ethnological theorists advancing the field in the late nineteenth century.[335] In the early twentieth century, the Dillingham Commission listed American anthropologist Daniel Brinton, supplemented by Keane's works, as the principal bibliographic entries on ethnology and racial theory inspiring their findings on race, absent any linguistic considerations.[336]

Conversely, Bishara undergirded his own treatise with Sayce's earlier exposition entitled *The Races of the Old Testament* (1891), which focused primarily on ethnological surveys of the various peoples inhabiting the geographical space of Syria during the ancient past. *The Origin of the Modern Syrian* delineated "The Prehistoric Syrian" from "The Historic Syrian," and distinguished both from the

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[333] Augustus Henry Keane, *Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896), 166.

[334] Ibid., 4.

[335] Archibald Henry Sayce, *The Races of the Old Testament*, Second Edition (Oxford: The Religious Tract Society, 1893); Keane, *Ethnology*.

[336] U.S. Senate, *Dictionary of Races or Peoples* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1911), 9.

"modern" Syrian, who emerged culturally only after the Ancient Greek epoch, the Arab conquest, and the medieval Crusader kingdoms. Other Syrian American scholars, taking into account the religious beliefs of their Syrian subjects and American audience, would later divide the ancient and modern periods in the region with the life of Jesus as the temporal axis.[337]

Bishara began his ethnological survey of the ancient Syrians with an examination of the biblical record. Ancient Syrians were a group, he admonished, that his readers should consider the model of racial whiteness; in fact, he argued, they were "shining white…the aboriginal Syrians were pure Caucasian blondes of Aryan, Semitic, or Aryo-Semitic stock."[338] The above categories betray Bishara's tendency to perceive race in a haphazard fashion, as he alternated between primarily philological (Aryan) and ethnological (Semitic) classifications. The idea of Semitism had complex roots. Sayce had previously remarked that philology and ethnology cross-pollinated to create the hybrid idea of a "Semitic Race," which reflected more a linguistic group than a purely racial community.[339] However, where the messiness of race blurred scientific boundaries between language and ethnology, Bishara sought to clarify with the use of geography. He placed Syrians

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[337] For instance, see Abraham Mitrie Rihbany, *The Syrian Christ* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1919).

[338] Bishara, *The Origin of the Modern Syrian*, 9.

[339] Sayce, *The Races of the Old Testament*, 69–70; the line of thought distinguishing race from language also extended to Anṭun Saʿada's vision of the racial foundations of Syria produced during the 1930s. See Saʿada, *The Genesis of Nations*, 50–52.

within an ethnographically defined set of boundaries, or rather, a "Semitic world," stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Nile. This geographical model was also largely mirrored in Sʿāda's "Natural Syria" some decades later, when Sʿāda claimed that this specific region should come under the administration of an independent Syrian state.[340] For Bishara, and later Sʿāda, the region remained synonymous with the idea of a historically and geographically contiguous Syria. Even after numerous invasions into the region during the ancient period, according to Bishara, the Syrian Semitic stock remained virtually unaffected. He considered the Babylonian invaders of the seventh century BC to be Semites, and though the later Egyptian invaders introduced an "Asiatic" element into the alchemy of blood lineage, they were a cohort he ultimately considered "white."[341] Most significantly, Bishara claimed Phoenicians to be the ancient ancestors of the modern Syrian stock, a distinction that advocates for an independent Lebanese nation-state would later claim for themselves, eventually sheering Lebanese identity from the larger Syrian racial and cultural past.[342] Ultimately, Bishara conceded that Syrians were an "Asiatic" people – an argument that had led the U.S. government to initially bar

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[340] For Saʿada's geographical parameters for his vision of the future Syrian state, see Saʿada, *The Genesis of Nations*.

[341] Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987); Challis, *The Archaeology of Race: The Eugenic Ideas of Francis Galton and Flinders Petrie*, 5. When Bernal claimed that the Egyptians were racially black in the 1980s, it created quite the stir in academic circles. Egyptian whiteness can be traced at least back to Sayce in the 1890s. See Sayce, *The Races of the Old Testament*, 82–83.

[342] Bishara, *The Origin of the Modern Syrian*, 8–12.

Syrian migrants from further entry during a period defined by anti-Asian sentiments throughout the Atlantic world. However, Bishara dug deeper into ethnic and historical geographies to reveal the accepted boundaries of Asia as irrational: not only were Syrians racially "white," they were also descendants of the Caucasus Mountains, ancestral home of the "Caucasian race," which happened to be in geographical Asia.[343]

Beyond his immediate arguments for Syrian racial inclusion in the United States, Bishara advocated a larger Syrian identity based in Biblical exegesis in addition to the ethnologies of classical history. He justified the Syrian past in scriptural genealogies, ancient imperial narratives of conquest, and renditions of the ebbing and waning of ancient empires. The genealogical history of Syrians began with the Horites, or the Horite contemporaries the Canaanites, whose existence Bishara claimed just as certain as the Israeli Kingdom of David neighboring these Syrian ancestors. Biblical scholarship claimed the historical Judaic past as authentic, and as a result, the kingdom's ancient contemporaries were likewise unquestionably components of civilization's past. Syrian American scholars following Bishara's literary footsteps also considered the ancient Phoenicians who eventually scattered throughout the Mediterranean, connected by extensive trade networks, the model of civilization that followed.

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[343] Baum, *The Rise and Fall of the Caucasian Race: A Political History of Racial Identity*; Bishara, *The Origin of the Modern Syrian*, 40.

Bishara simply put a Syrian-centered spin on a well-established Western

tradition. At least as early as the 1720s, religious philosophers in England began

exploring the origins of Biblical nations in attempts to pen world histories. At the

turn of the nineteenth century for example, the mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg

explored the "first nations" of the Bible, and Presbyterians in the late nineteenth

century adopted and perpetuated the same historical narrative. Explicating world

histories based on the genealogies of ancient civilizations of the Bible had a long

transatlantic history.[344] The socio-legal ramifications that resulted from applying

these racial castes to groups between the racial categories of solely "black" or

"white" were just beginning to take shape.

6.3 Perpetuating Religious Civilization through American Activism during World War I

Religion also provided an essential aspect of Syrian claims of civilization

and participation in the modern Western world. With his 1916 publication, *The

Syrian Christ*, the Presbyterian Reverend Abraham Rihbany aimed at providing an

American audience with a thorough retelling of the spiritual legacy of the Syrian

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[344] For a sample of literature featuring exegetical genealogies, see Richard Cumberland, *Origines Gentium Antiquissimae: Or, Attempts for Discovering the Times of the First Planting of Nations* (London: n.p., 1724); Siegmund Jakob Baumgarten, *A Supplement to the English Universal History* (London: n.p., 1754), 188–191; Emanuel Swedenborg, *Arcana Coelestia; Or Heavenly Mysteries* (Manchester: n.p., 1816), 302–304; John Campbell, "The 'Hornets' of Scripture: As Connected with Jewish and Egyptian History," *The Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review* 16 (October 1875): 677–92.

nation and highlighting the Syrian contribution to civilization through shared religious values. He did so by laying claim to not only a Christian exegetical expertise, but to a Syrian cultural expertise as well. Only Syrians, he argued, could really know Jesus. With his religious background, and focus on the reclamation and progress of Syrian racial identity, Rihbany represented himself as the ideal cultural ambassador to this esoteric knowledge.[345] Through an auto-Oriental viewpoint, he represented Syria and Syrians in the language of Oriental stagnation.

Rihbany painted an imaginary landscape of a Syria scattered across time and space. Frozen in time, the "Oriental" birthplace of Jesus remained an unchanging region within a modernizing, industrial world.[346] Rihbany intentionally represented historical and present Syria as one and the same. The perfection of mankind, and thus civilization, had to be traced through the spread of religion from Syria, to Europe and America, and back again. After all, Rihbany converted to the Presbyterian brand of Christianity from his Orthodox upbringing while still a young man in Syria. His own religious experience mirrored the historical arc he ascribed

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[345] Rihbany, *The Syrian Christ*, 6.

[346] On this theme see also Joan Peters, *From Time Immemorial: The Origins of the Arab-Jewish Conflict over Palestine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984); Norman G. Finkelstein, "From the Jewish Question to the Jewish State: An Essay on the Theory of Zionism" (Princeton University, 1987). The issue became a bone of contention in the 1980s when Finkelstein refuted Peters' findings that Palestine had been an empty and unchanging land before the contemporaneous Jewish and Arab migrations to the region during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The argument has been used to justify the absence of Arabs before modern Jewish settlement just as Syrian American authors previously used the notion of immutability to show their presence at the time of Jesus. Ussama Makdisi, "Reclaiming the Land of the Bible: Missionaries, Secularism, and Evangelical Modernity," *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 3 (June 1997): 680–713.

to the growth of global Christianity with Protestantism at the center. The narrative only made sense once missionaries returned the "pure" Christianity back to the Holy Land. In the end, Rihbany's Syria reflected three distinctive cultural aspects: one familiar to early-twentieth-century travelers from the West and their religious American counterparts; a reflection of scripture; and the overlapping experiential space that the Syrian sojourner left behind for America. All three were entwined, according to Rihbany, who set out to navigate the complexities of these worlds for his "Yankee" audience.

With his self-proclaimed knowledge and expertise regarding the "original intellectual and social environment of this sacred literature" of the Bible, Rihbany hoped to place American readers of scripture within an Orient that would reflect their culturally constructed expectations. Syria was a land of religious shrines, sites of religious pilgrimage and the practice of *incubation*,[347] the site of the Orthodox "mother church," of hoary shepherds, of vengeful blood feuds, of the spiritual parables and religious didactics.[348] In short, Syria remained the land recognizable from the Bible. That is, the author played to sentimental religious expectations

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[347] Fatima Mernissi, *Women, Saints and Sanctuaries* (Lahore: Women's Resource and Publication Centre, 1987). "Incubatio" is a practice of entering into a dream state at a local saint shrine in order to attain guidance from the saint. It is a pre-Islamic practice dating back to at the least the time of Herodotus, who claims the act was particular to the Nasamonean tribe of Cyrenaica in North Africa, or modern Libya. Herodotus claims the tribe also practiced clan polykoity. More recently, the saint tombs have become sites of female agency, where women control the shrines and either permit or block entry to practitioners.

[348] Rihbany, *The Syrian Christ*, 12, 37, 107, 140.

while offering himself as the *dragoman* (guide) for a religious pilgrimage in the unchanging, holy East.[349] A divine figure who "belongs to all races and all ages," Jesus first and foremost, Rihbany insisted, "was a Syrian of the Syrians."[350] He wanted Americans to consider Syrians alongside a specific religious figure set in a specific geographical space.

Rihbany hoped that religion, as a marker of equality, would take root in the American and broader Western imaginary. Religion had been the justification for French intervention in the region from the 1860s onward, and the sectarian violence in the region following World War I justified the eventual demarcations into separate mandates. Moreover, the American presence in Syria began with missionary enterprises and the founding of the Syrian Protestant College (or SPC, later the American University of Beirut). As we have previously seen, Louise Seymour Houghton also used Syrian religious variety as a means to introduce Americans to the broader complexities of Syrian society and the mahjar experience in America. Yet, religion proved to be the least successful argument within the arsenal of the Syrian mahjar. While U.S. courts once considered Christianity as a marker for naturalization, they later rejected it in favor of racial or geographical categories.[351] As a result, advocates of the "Syria idea" increasingly predicated their

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[349] Nancy Stockdale, *Colonial Encounters among English and Palestinian Women, 1800-1948* (Gainsville: University of Florida Press, 2007), 18–33.

[350] Rihbany, *The Syrian Christ*, 3–4.

[351] Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 67–69.

arguments on the panoply of race, nation, economic ingenuity, and geography. The last proponents of the Syrian idea and its form of Syrian nationalism would take on a decidedly secular tone during the 1930s. Religion would only re-emerge as a primary consideration among Syrians when the continued growth of Jewish settlement and the founding of Israel threatened to unbalance previous sectarian balances. However, it did not reemerge in the guise of Christianity that Syrians had previously championed. Instead, pan-Islamic movements would provide the counterweight (alongside Arab, rather than strictly Syrian, nationalism) to a Jewish Middle Eastern state.

Figure 5: Left: "Ameen Rihani in Arab Costume," *The Syrian World* **4, no.3 (November 1929); Right: "Ameen Rihani,"** *The Syrian World* **3, no.9 (March 1929)**

In the years leading up to World War I, Syrian Americans had employed a Christian identity to place their population within broader Western civilization, and as a means to activate American sympathy for Syrian suffering during the war. Many hoped to cultivate popular support for U.S. intervention against the Ottoman Empire. These war efforts mobilized pre-existing Syrian American organizations to get their message out. One leading figure, Ameen Rihani (Figure 5), had moved to the United States during the early Syrian migrations to the West. He settled in New York in the late 1880s, where he sought to set up a Syrian Liberation Committee with administrative assistance from the author-poet Gibran Kahlil Gibran.[352]
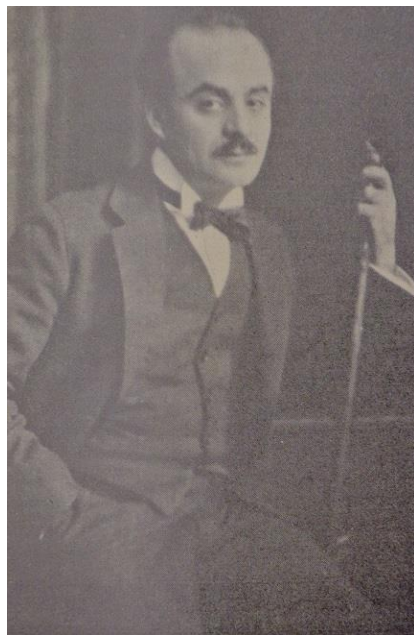

Figure 6, "Khalil Gibran," *The Syrian World* **5, no.8 (April 1931)**

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[352] Bawardi, *The Making of Arab Americans*, 118.

Rihani also produced numerous philosophical and theological treatises that ultimately led to his disaffection with the Maronite Church, and fostered his realignment with a Protestant, transcendental philosophy in line with that of his friend, Kahlil Gibran (Figure 6). Rihani also used his prominent standing in the Syrian American community to nurture reform in Syria. Described by the *Syrian World* as an Anglophile in an attempt to align the Syrian cause with British global objectives, Rihani spent considerable effort traveling and giving lectures in Europe, the U.S. and the Middle East in the attempt to create consensus among power brokers in the three regions over the future direction of the Arab world.[353] Through media connections and membership in various Syrian committees, including the Syrian Relief Committee and the Board of Foreign Missions, Rihani would eventually advocate for post-World War I Syrian autonomy with international protection provided by the United States in order to prevent European military encroachments and political partitioning in the Eastern Mediterranean. He desired a new Syria unified and tolerant across ethnic and religious lines, rather than the one that would emerge: divided into ethnic and religious factions under imperial control conceived of as "mandates."[354]

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[353] "Rihani Coming to the United States," *The Syrian World* 3, no. 5 (November 1928): 54; "Ameen Rihani's Lecture Acclaimed in London," *The Syrian World* 3, no. 6 (December 1928): 53; "Rihani's Lecture in London," *The Syrian World* 3, no. 7 (January 1929): 38.

[354] Bawardi, *The Making of Arab Americans*, 55–56.

Not all Syrians in the diaspora advocated for Westernization or independence. While European empire-states and Western intellectuals aligned with sympathetic voices within the mahjar to argue for the integration of various permutations of Syria into the system of global nation-states, some prominent Syrians resisted this transition. These critics in the diaspora were skeptical of their contemporaries' attempts to assimilate modern categories of nation-state, race, and empire into practice. In its most extreme form, such discontent with modernity culminated in the rejection of nationalism in favor of true cosmopolitanism. In particular, noted author Kahlil Gibran wholly rejected the nationalistic aims of Syrianism as a hopeless aping of European modernity. He insisted that Syria had its own traditions and past, completely different from those of European civilization. Any alignment with hegemonic Europe simply undermined Syria's rich (and spiritually Christian) past. He argued further still that even the European fascination with the nation-state during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was without any spiritual basis, and when applied to the Syrian case made little sense. Europe had only succeeded in dividing the Syrian population, exploiting ethnic and religious differences as a means to gain influence among various sects. Any Syrian attempt to replicate such aspirations would prove doubly hollow without first establishing a foundational shift in Syrian identity. Even aspiring to American citizenship seemed to Gibran to be a misguided attempt to play the imperial game of forced devotion to the singular identity imposed by the

nation-state. Rather, Syrians must rely on themselves to integrate into a broader cosmopolitan realm of individuals, beyond the confines of national belonging or subservience to what he surmised to be the "corpse" of any state.[355] In essence, Gibran conceived of a modernity wholly distinct from that of the western nation-state. Or rather, Gibran rejected the modes of assimilation available to Syrian Americans within U.S. society. He was a transnational idealist in the age of increasingly powerful nation-states.

Despite his protestations, Gibran only represented a minority position within the Syrian diaspora community. While Gibran scoffed at the corpse of the state, Habib Katibah promoted a decidedly nationalist position. He helped to spread the idea of "Syria for the Syrians" through the *Syrian World* and political pamphlets, where he explicitly advocated Syrian autonomy in the modern system of nation-states. For him, an independent Syria could best be nurtured under the supervision of the progressive and democratic United States. Like other promoters of the "Syria idea" during the 1910s and 1920s, Katibah maintained a stance that Syria (including present-day Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, and Jordan) must remain intact, especially against any further imperial wrangling by European powers in the

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[355] See Wail S. Hassan, *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Layla Maleh, *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009) for Gibran's criticisms of the mimetic qualities of the various Syrian movements; and Khalil S. Hawi, *Kahlil Gibran: His Background, Character, and Works* (Beirut: Arab Institute for Research and Pub., 1972), 154–157, discusses Gibran's critique of the nation-state.

region. This position only amplified after the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which was popularly perceived as a guaranteed British protection for a Jewish homeland in the colony of Palestine. Katibah responded by directing his focus toward the new Palestine situation as a dire threat to a unified Syria. He continued struggling for the regional cause, but redirected his efforts to maintaining Arab predominance in the Middle East following the prolonged Jewish settlement in Palestine, and the Syrian revolt of 1925-1927, which failed to wrench the region from French mandatory control after regional forces brutally suppressed the uprisings.[356]

The "Syria Idea" maintained the preeminent political position within the diaspora literature produced during the 1910s and 1920s, and Katibah helped shape and develop it within the U.S., most notably, with his call for *Syria for the Syrians*.[357] One of his main aims with the pamphlet was to disabuse English-reading audiences of the notion that Palestine and Syria were separate geographic or demographic entities. Katibah blamed Western Christians for having spiritually partitioning the Holy Land from the rest of Syria. He also confronted the issue arising from Jewish migrant settlements in the region. "Before the exile" he argued, "Jews had intermixed with their Semitic neighbors." Katibah noted that even Herodotus, the father of the Western historical tradition, designated Hebrews as the

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[356] See Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon*.

[357] Katibah, "Syria for the Syrians."

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"Syrians of Palestine." His interpretation of this ancient source reflected, yet again, Syrian intellectuals' tendency to blur the boundaries between past and present for the sake of recognizing civilization. However, Katibah's critique directed against the emerging Zionist position recognized a new political dynamic in the region. "Syria for the Syrians" became a focal point in the transnational discourse aimed at elevating the Syrian position in the Middle East, specifically against the rise of Zionism. "Zionism to the Syrian," the author asserted, "is a vital economic and political danger which threatens to drive him from his home, and which runs directly against his national aspirations."[358] He rhetorically implored his readers: "Why should we Syrians play the role of the Jew which he abhors and be dispersed in his place over the world?"[359] What the author failed to mention was that the very nature of Syrian identity that he and his political allies promoted was firmly rooted in the idea of diaspora.

This anti-Zionist stance intensified during the political apex of the Syria Idea at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. In the wake of the conference, Katibah asserted that Zionism represented a "direct" threat to the health of an emerging national group in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East. Katibah's argument placed Zionism in direct conflict with the "Syria Idea," or nationalist Syrianism. Self-created Syrian experts on the ideology, including Rihany, Rihbany, Hitti,

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[358] Ibid., n.p.

[359] Ibid.

Katibah, and Bishara, nurtured the Syria idea as a more sophisticated and internationally desirable alternative to the Zionist idea. In this light, Katibah tried to undermine the Zionist movement as a philosophically confused, entangled bundle of mutually exclusive polarities: religious ideology versus sectarianism; "racial [versus] political unity."[360] For him, the Zionist movement - as a disorganized, multivalent, politically charged set of assumptions undergirding Jewish settlement in Syria - threatened the economic and cultural unity that Katibah claimed existed in the region up to the very point that the Zionist element introduced conflict into Palestine. Rather than maintaining a distinct identity apart from the rest of "geographic" Syria, all of the coastal regions and urban centers (including those in the Palestine region) remained economically enmeshed within a complex web of commercial relations. Jerusalem, just like Beirut, remained dependent on Haurān grain from the interior to feed its inhabitants. Interior regions relied on the flow of finished goods from the ports at Beirut and Jerusalem, and the Lebanese silk trade expanded Syrian maritime markets westward to Europe and beyond.

Katibah further argued that Syrians should not perceive their racial and national connectedness as simply based on regional economic interdependence imposed by the global economic system. Rather, Syrians maintained a unified and

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[360] Ibid.

distinct cultural heritage as well. The cultural and economic merged to create a uniquely Syrian character. To make his point, the author selectively employed large portions from the historical geography written by Scottish theologian George Adam Smith. Smith became an intellectual staple in the Syrian polemic arsenal, when authors employed historical arguments in advocating for Phoenician (read Syrian) trade networks as the ligaments holding together ancient (read modern) civilization. These arguments essentially placed Phoenicians, and their Syrian posterity, at the foundations of the modern capitalist economic system. Whereas Phoenicians were the merchant class of the old world, "modern Syrians" were "becoming the merchant princes of modern times."[361]

George Adam Smith, a Scottish Presbyterian exegete and historical geographer focusing on the Holy Land and surrounding regions, perceived Syria to be the nexus for the spread of Christian (i.e. "Western") civilization the world over. The region housed the northernmost Semitic peoples, who for Smith exemplified "the great middlemen of the world…carriers between East and West, [the] mediary between God and man."[362] Syria, the land of Ancient Arameans, early Christians (including Paul), and Arab Muslims, stood as the truest manifestation of earthly and spiritual liminal spaces. It was the universal "intermedium" straddling both

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[361] Mansur, "Modern Syrians' Contributions to Civilization," 11.

[362] George Adam Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land: Especially in Relation to the History of Israel and the Early Church* (New York: Hodder and Stroughton, 1902), 5.

time and space: the crossroads of ancient and modern civilizations, the incubator of Abrahamic faiths, and the geographical confluence of the entire earth. Syria functioned as a "bridge," not only for goods and populations, but for the transmission of knowledge across and beyond the confines of the region. Being situated "between Asia and Africa," Syria witnessed the ebb and flow of civilizations, each with their own vanguards and administrations that inhabited the area. Smith also characterized Syria as a "refuge" for the innumerable people displaced by the pendulum swings of civilizations, religious empires, and vast commercial networks, each of which sent exiles, converts, and opportunists scurrying to the security of the Syrian expanse. Smith described a "Middle Ground" of spatial geometry similar to that which historian Richard White used to define the Great Lakes region of colonial America.[363] However, temporally, Smith's Syria had a complexion that can only be represented by teleological synchrony: all Syrian/Phoenician history existing as a one-dimensional point, a legacy of rich tradition, but also a symbol of promise and progress. Smith called this the Syrian "intermedium," a spatial and temporal object found at the confluence of civilizational aspiration and cultural achievement.

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[363] White defines the Middle Ground as a point where cultural systems collide and produce new forms of accommodation and meaning. See Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), xxv–xvii.

Syrian authors began to adopt George Adam Smith's religiously tinged historical geographies and borrowed his notion of the Syrian "intermedium" when penning their polemics on racial origins and modern Syrian attributes. Salloum Mokarzel, editor of *The Syrian World*, echoed Smith's sentiments in 1926, proclaiming that Syrians were indeed "atavistic."[364] That is, the "modern Syrian presents a palpable example of the soundness of theory of atavism in that he is playing in our times the role that was enacted four thousand years back by his ancestors the Phoenicians."[365] Modern Syrians maintained the diverse networks of movement, the desire to partake in commercial endeavors, the adventurous spirit, the romantic fervor, and the unrestricted sharing of intellectual culture and civilization that their forebears had originally brought to the Mediterranean. Syrians in the diaspora extended these supposed racial qualities from the Mediterranean base to all corners of the globe. Presbyterian Reverend of Syrian origins, W. A. Mansur (Figure 7), also borrowed from Smith when the former made the claim that "modern Syrians are carrying forward the means of civilization: high standards, beneficial commerce, progressive living."[366] In Mansur's writings, the Syrian race was a masculine, civilized, and profitable race.

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[364] Salloum A. Mokarzel, "Atavism," *The Syrian World* 1, no. 2 (August 1926): 39–41.

[365] Ibid., 39.

[366] Mansur, "Modern Syrians' Contributions to Civilization," 11.

Figure 7: "W. A. Mansur," *The Syrian World* **5, no.4 (December 1930)**

Such a people needed a guiding light to make the project of the mahjar possible in the mashriq. For Katibah only the U.S. could quell the rampant sectarianism between Maronite and Druze, especially prevalent in Mount Lebanon. While aspirants of Lebanese independence had been aligned with French and pro-Syrian factions with the British, the two political groups should agree on accepting the United States as regional guardian, according to Katibah and his allies. America would serve the role of protector and disrupt the chain of European interference in the Near East. Alfred Thayer Mahan had expressed similar sentiments almost twenty years earlier, but was motivated more by American political interests in the region as a crucial node in overseeing global trade and access to Asia. "The protection and guardianship of America over Syria," Katibah wrote in ominous

tones, "from an international point of view, will be the wisest step she would take after this great war."[367] Nevertheless, he lamented that American representatives present at the post-World War I peace conference at Versailles refused to cooperate with European representatives until President Wilson and the U.S. Congress came to terms on their future actions following the war. In hopes of expediting the process, Katibah offered up the advantages to an American presence in Syria: as a civilized culture with a long past, and a territory surrounded by friendly regimes, Syrians would need no heavy political, military, or economic intervention on America's part. The region had already experienced economic integration and some forms of modern industry. Its people could coalesce to form a representative government. Moreover, the absence of any foreign threats meant that a sizable defensive force was simply unnecessary. With the leadership of Syrian Americans, the country would eventually enter into the system of civilized nation-states. Moreover, the region was a "veritable earthly paradise" that should lure future vacationing Americans or those on religious pilgrimage. Unfortunately for Katibah and the pro-Syrian factions at the conference, they were promoting ideas to wolves in sheep's clothing. French and British interests in the region superseded each of Katibah's points.

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[367] Katibah, "Syria for the Syrians," 19.

6.4 The Legacy of the "Syrian Race" in the U.S. and the Levant in the 1930s

By the 1930s, Syrian Americans had largely become an invisible ethnicity within the panoply of American taxonomies. They ceased to be a distinct racial group within the broader American family of racial types absorbed into the larger "white" racial classification. While the Syrian racial category was losing cultural capital for the Syrian American community in the mahjar, it had already begun to emerge as a political force in the Syrian homeland. The Syrian race provided a theoretical building block for the Syrian national movement in the mashriq. The Syrian Americans meanwhile aligned themselves within the broader political and social movement of American "cultural pluralism," an idea that would make up the core of Franklin Roosevelt's Democratic coalition and the broad reach of the New Deal.[368] Syrian American authors began to write ethnic treatises within this new cultural context. Habib Katibah contributed a section on Syrian Americans to *Our Racial and National Minorities* (1939). The book stands as a monument to the shift in the language of whiteness. It is a collection of chapters representing American ethnicities, rather than distinct racial types, inspired by cultural pluralism and the broad ethnic coalitions of the New Deal.[369]

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[368] Russell A. Kazal, "Revisiting Assimilation: The Rise, Fall, and Reappraisal of a Concept in American Ethnic History," *The American Historical Review.* 100, no. 2 (April 1995): 442.

[369] Katibah, "Syrian Americans."

As mentioned above, the racial situation in the Middle East shifted in quite the opposite direction from the discursive shift then taking root in the United States. During the 1920s, in response to the perceived threat of a Jewish state in the Middle East and continued European intervention in the region, the "Syrian idea" began to fracture under the pressure of new geopolitical pressures. Pan-Arabism provided an outlet for these pressures with the prospect of a broad Arab coalition to prevent further fragmentation of the Middle East. It did not win, however, unanimous approval within the mahjar. As late as 1928, *The Syrian Eagle* decried Pan-Arabism as merely "a dream [that] only occasions derision on the part of liberal thinkers and men of extended vision … [I]t is obvious that the so-called Arab civilization is as distant from modern civilization as the East is from the West, and the people of Syria and Lebanon have nothing in common with the people of Arabia whether in customs, principles or psychology."[370]

Former adherents to the Syria idea, including Katibah, began to lean more towards the Pan-Arab cause when the Syria idea collapsed under the weight of a prolonged period of European imperialism in the Levant following World War I. Katibah, the author of the "Syria for the Syrians" pamphlet, later helped to establish the Arab National League in New York among the large diaspora population

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[370] "Arab vs. Syrian Civilization," *The Syrian World* 2, no. 11 (May 1928): 47; Editor Salloum Mokarzel maintained a section devoted to compiling pertinent issues from other Syrian American journals and newspapers. Here he cited issue of Arab and Syrian civilization in *The Syrian Eagle*.

already in place. Following in the footsteps of the Syrian American press and specifically Syrian cultural clubs in the U.S., the National League sought to introduce the broader American public and U.S. political establishment to the newer, Arab-centered framework for political and cultural issues. The organization represented a clear shift toward aligning Arab identity with political advocacy after the "Syria Idea" failed to carry its previous political currency. The new situation allowed for a specifically Syrian nationalism within a broader Arab cultural context. In good American fashion, Katibah approached this shift pragmatically. He abandoned the "Syria Idea" once it had lost its political potency in the U.S.[371]

An equally important characteristic of cultural pluralism, for Syrian Americans in particular, was how the abandoning the prior racial categorization helped lead to the eventual disappearance of the Syrian race within the American framework of civilization. The disappearing act occurred just as Americans began redefining the nature of the nation. Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism* explained civilizational (that is, European and American) development through rational processes outside of race. More specifically, Weber described how "ascetic" versions of Protestantism gave rise to capital enterprise as means to avoid the moral temptations arising from idleness. Weber imagined "Occidental" culture as a marriage between economic and religious forces rather than a racially based

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[371] For a detailed overview of Habib Katibah's involvment in Syrian political advocacy, see Bawardi, *The Making of Arab Americans*, 3–4, 32, 108, 160.

culture that inherited the black-white dichotomy of forced labor. Only after 1930 was his work widely available to an English-language audience in America. For American Syrians, the nomadic character that spread the Phoenician blood was not indicative of vagrancy, but a product of their religious convictions, married to mercantile endeavors. In short, they mirrored Weber's progressive rendition of history that claimed the unbending trajectory of global capitalist spirit and civilization ultimately terminated in the West with the rise of the United States and the entrepreneurial spirit inherent in the American national character.

Many Syrian scholars perceived no disconnect between ancient Phoenician trade and the advent of modern Syrian capital networks. For them, the idea that Europeans somehow invented the modern capitalist system in the interim seemed anathema. Western renditions of history outlined the Syrian trajectory of "progress toward civilization" as a relatively flat and unchanged past, all the way from the ancient up to the modern period. Europe and the Americas, on the other hand, had reflected a steady climb upward toward more "civilized" forms of economics, religion, and governmental structures.

Syrian nationalists in the mashriq adopted notions of the Syrian character established in the mahjar. Called the "Architect of Syrian Nationalism,"[372] Anṭūn

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[372] Adel Beshara, "Antun Sa'adeh: Architect of Syrian Nationalism," in *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood: Histories, Pioneers and Identity*, ed. Adel Beshara (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 341–63.

S'āda, the founder of the long-standing state majority Syrian Nationalist Party, determined to see the formation of a post-colonial, modern, secular Syrian nation-state in the first half of the twentieth century. S'āda formalized his variant of the Syria idea in *The Genesis of Nations* (1937), a synthetic work of social science that aimed at systematizing prevailing conventional wisdom on human evolution, race theory, and political science within the context of a new Syrian nation, a nation that the author hoped would crystallize in the not so distant future. S'āda even traced the precursors of the modern social sciences he put into practice all the way back to the ancient Phoenicians, a people he claimed specifically "the first people to travel for exploration and science."[373]

The story of the ancient Phoenicians summed up the masculine and racial character of the proto-national Syrian body. Beginning with the voyage of "Hanno the Carthaginian Phoenician" to the Senegambia River complex in West Africa in 520 BC, the Phoenician explorers marveled at the "men and women whose bodies were covered with hair and whom the interpreters called 'gorillas.'"[374] On that voyage the Phoenicians, and according to the author all of mankind thereafter, began to distinguish between the upper and lower order of primates. Categorization initiated during the ancient epoch set the foundations for the biological and racial taxonomies that Western sciences would follow in the modern period. Without

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[373] Sa'ada, *The Genesis of Nations*, 33.

[374] Ibid.

Hanno there would have been no Sayce and Keane. Without Sayce and Keane, no Dillingham Commission, and no need to articulate the finer points of the Syrian race. The earliest forms of proto-science emerged in the four thousand years of Phoenician globe trekking. His rendition of the past followed a well-worn formula of finding the ancient in the modern that so many mahjar Syrians had established before him. Sʿāda took a different position on the role of religion in the Syrian past, however. For a number of Syrian authors in the mahjar, religion proved the place of Syrians in the context of Western civilization. For Sʿāda, civilized man regressed during what he called an intermediary period of religious superstition. The continued drive to explore outside the home rather than inside the spirit defined Phoenician (read Syrian) ingenuity. The drive to migrate exhibited by the heirs of the Phoenicians was ultimately what allowed all of humanity to finally take on the scientific quantification of biological specimens and geographical variations, a practice initiated by the Phoenician exploration of foreign spaces. Only once mankind had rooted its understanding of the universe in the modern scientific method did humankind finally finish what the Phoenician wanderers had begun thousands of years before.

Sʿāda envisioned Syria within the large family of civilized nations, reading the region's past into a broader set of political and social parameters making up the modern world. The author saw much of this modern global order through the interconnections of diaspora. Like his Phoenician ancestors, Sʿāda experienced the

diaspora personally, a set of life experiences that ultimately helped galvanize his vision for Syria while in exile from his Syrian homeland during extended stays in Brazil and Argentina. He witnessed how race affected the political structure of the United States, sneering at how Syrian Americans struggled to have their whiteness affirmed by the general population of the country.[375]

Sʿāda perceived his topic, the nation, as an exemplification of "community" writ large; it was "broader and more complex than any other"[376] formulation of human organization. National leaders invariably struggled to maintain the nation's sovereignty, in part by championing the community's *raison d'être*, whether that identity remains based in "some historical fact or some real or fictitious example from history, or some religious or racial propensity [or sometimes] a conflict of theories within the nation itself."[377] Sʿāda scrutinized the prevailing national theories promoted by Pascal Mancini, M. Ivanov, Ernest Renan, and Émile Durkhiem. Navigating between the theories of his predecessors, he concluded that the nation was more than its rigid constituent parts. It was not simply a unity of race or origin, a set of traditions or customs, a unified language, a religion, a spiritual essence, or defined by geographical boundaries. It was the next step in human evolution.

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[375] Ibid., 45–48.

[376] Ibid., 257.

[377] Ibid., 258.

Sʿāda's text provided what he believed to be the theoretical formulation for the Syrian nation, rooted deeply in the notion that the Syrian race provided just one (albeit necessary) cornerstone for the modern Syrian nation-state. The entirety of *The Genesis of Nations* reflects that aim. He begins the treatise broadly with the emergence of humanity in general, and proceeds with a narrative of how man evolved into distinct social groups. Such an accounting supported the intellectual disconnect between humanity's racial origins (ethnology), and later developments into disparate linguistic groups (philology). In the end, Sʿāda rejected any color-coded scheme for racial categorization, and instead promoted a delineation of races based solely on a civilizational axis between "primitive and advanced" societies.[378] Syrians, through their claimed Phoenician roots, had always been squarely rooted in the latter.

He also rejected the religious argument of the Syrian nation, instead claiming that religion was "incompatible with nationalism and the formation of the nation."[379] Instead, the nation must be seen as "a human group leading a life of unified interests, united destiny, united psycho-material factors in a particular country with which it interacts in the course of development to acquire characteristics and features that distinguish it from other groups." The components of the nation must evolve and change over time, and as the modern world grew

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[378] Ibid., 57.

[379] Ibid., 287.

closer together, there would ultimately be no need for national divisions. This last

point of emphasis, in particular, reflected Sʿāda's diasporic identity. Citing French

racial thinker Arthur de Gobineau and ancient Greek philosopher Plato, Sʿāda

traced the elements that led to the advent of the modern nation to the historical

example of the "Canaanite Deception or the Canaanite Sin."[380] The derogatory

visage of the Canaanite Sin masked the redeeming elements embedded within the

definition itself. The Canaanites' sin had been their adherence to a "spiritual bond"

of patriotism that linked together all Canaanites/Phoenicians despite the vast

territorial expanses of their political and economic imperial domain. Sʿāda

implored the modern Syrians in diaspora to follow the example of their Canaanite

predecessors. Nationalism proved to be the religion that Sʿāda chose as the central

pillar of Syrian identity rather than Christianity or Islam. The shared sense of

identity that had flowered in the diaspora had been what made them unique, and

these communities' embracing the national belonging of their chosen host societies

made them intrinsically indistinguishable from the population groups where they

decided to settle. Both mashriq and mahjar buttressed the Syrian nation, and the

nation provided the final bulwark against ultimate destruction of the entire people.

Sʿāda's devotion to nationalism, a devotion with much the same fervor as a

religious zealot, also directs the reader to question the viability of a Syrian nation-

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[380] Ibid., 296–298.

state. He implicitly directs the reader to question whether the new Canaan could be threatened by the new Israel. Could Syria, both in diaspora and in the Middle East, survive a new wave of potential Israelite aggression? Sʿāda placed the future Syrian state on a collision course with developing geo-political currents in the Middle East, currents that would drag the region into new directions after two world wars. Arab nationalism provided an alternative narrative to Zionism and the formation of the Israeli state, and the legacy of imperialism created the foundations for the further crumbling of "Geographical Syria" into what historian Elizabeth Thompson has called the "successor states" of imperial patriarchy. Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Iraq, and Syria were established as new nation-states, in some cases headed by ethnic or religious minorities.

Sʿāda's connection with later Arab nationalism designs appear complex, and it is difficult to determine any direct linkage between his thought and those that developed in the decades following his death. He maintained that Syrians and Arabs were two completely different groups from different regions, though they may have intermingled from time to time.[381] For Sʿāda, there was no transition from Syrian racial identity and national aspirations to full-fledged Arab nationalism. The two remained wholly separate. What can be concluded from Sʿāda's writings is that he believed that Syrian nationalism should maintain Geographical Syria as a unified

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[381] Ibid., 268–269.

whole. Only though unity could the region provide an alternative to Zionism in the

Eastern Mediterranean. He would go so far as to claim that the Jews were not a

racial or national entity, but rather a "synagogue and a culture."[382] As with Syria,

he believed that religion was not a necessary component for a national body.

Moreover, Sʿāda confronted the growing unease among many in the mahjar that

Lebanon should seek a different path, distinct from other regions that made up

Ottoman Syria. Ghanem and his adherents had promoted an independent Lebanon

from the period immediately following World War I. In order to undermine the

program of the Lebanese nation-state, Sʿāda set out to dismantle the national

narrative at the base of national identity. Sʿāda attacked the belief that Lebanon,

and Lebanese in diaspora, were the true racial and cultural descendants of ancient

Phoenicia. This argument had undergirded the claim for a Lebanese state wholly

independent of Syria or any Syrian confederation in the region. Sʿāda however, was

careful in making the distinction between the historical and racial roles of

Phoenicians, and preferred to see Canaanites, a larger category of ancient ethnicity,

as the ancestors of modern Syrians. Phoenicians, then, were subsumed within a

broader Canaanite past. Canaan gave a geographical and racial preponderance to

the inland Syrian region over the coastal areas of ancient Phoenicia. Lebanon too,

should be considered part of the larger Syrian nation. The theory placed Lebanon

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[382] Ibid., 274.

within a larger, Syrian whole, both geographically and racially, undermining attempts to separate the coastal region from greater Syria. Sʿāda's vision never came to fruition.

6.5 A Direct Course to Civilization

According to the civilization paradigm, the four thousand plus years before the rise of the "modern Syrian," originating with their Phoenician and Canaanite ancestors, had paved the way for the integration into a definitively "modern" world. Adherents of the "Syria idea" had attempted to integrate Syrians within a narrative that espoused the modern moment as a culmination of racial, national, religious, and civilizational advances. The "Syrian race" belonged within the larger white racial family. Its greatness was ensured by the long history of racial intermixing that the region's inhabitants had experienced over the course of time. Ironically, while this racial admixture guaranteed its survival and superior qualities, it did not prevent the race from remaining specifically Semitic. Syrian thinkers had created a racial fail-safe with such a dualistic, pragmatic (if oftentimes contradictory) stance. As an intrinsic element of the white race, Syrians deserved recognition in both receiving and sending societies. They had attained eligibility for citizenship within the United States through an active engagement with the nature of the academic understanding of ethnology and by struggling to maintain those standards through the American courts. They also hoped to project their newfound status abroad and

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confirm Syrian belonging on the international stage. As such, the Syrian region should be integrated within the larger family of imagined civilized nations. The Syrian region had been the birthplace of Judaism and Christianity, the religious traditions that undergirded the entirety of Western civilization as a whole. Moreover, the Syrian ancestors had provided the commercial framework for global trade and the flow of ideas upon which the modern epoch had been established.

The Syrian stance did not only adopt the predominant paradigm of modernity, it turned the paradigm on its head. Syrians argued that they were not simply placing themselves within a complex system of civilization based in social, economic, and political progress, in an act of mimesis, or simply adopting the prevailing paradigm. Instead, Syrians claimed that they were, in fact, the system itself. Through their collective past they had constructed the foundations of the modern world. Unlike the rest of Western civilization, which had to struggle to progress toward civilization over time, Syrians had given rise to civilization itself. "Atavistic" members of the "intermedium," their trajectory toward progress had been flat for over four thousand years. Syrians had walked with Christ. They were the creators of modern capitalism. They created the biological categories that contemporaries now used as the foundation of science and racial thought. How could these latecomers then take it upon themselves to try and categorize those giants who had created the very categories themselves?

Chapter 7: Syrian Othering

Syrian American intellectuals framed the Syrian story set in the context of empire. Phoenician, Babylonian, Egyptian, French, British, American; the Syrian crossroads had been the site of conquest and respite from conflict. The shifting tides of governance in the region had been one of the key ingredients that gave the people and culture their unique heritage. Syrian migrants also moved along the circuits of the various empires. In the American Empire in particular, they settled in the economic metropole and along the peripheries. That imperial story was conflicted, contested, and contradictory. Sometimes the narrative framed empire as a beneficial good, as was the case of the United States. Syrian entrepreneurs accumulated immense profits earned within the American empire, and protections offered by the United States. Sometimes the Syrian narrators framed empire an oppressive evil, as was the case with France and the Ottomans. Syrians experienced a relatively peaceful coexistence within the Ottoman Empire until the outbreak of World War I. The ethnically motivated violence of the war and the subsequent calls for self-determination changed that relationship. Depending on which side Syrians took, they either championed the presence of the British and French in the Levant, or derided them as colonizers. The imperial narrative was not simply a binary, but each position changed over time and by context. This chapter will confront those conflicting stories.

In reconstructing the place of Syrian migrants in the American empire, Syrian American business directories have proven to be invaluable source materials. These bilingual documents allow the researcher to reconstruct the state of businesses in New York City, as well as a number of other American cities, and trace their connections to various markets. These documents provide the names of firms, their respective proprietors, and their place of business. Comparing the documents across time, we can see how each of these businesses expanded or contracted by following the address printed. We can equally see how each firm accumulated real estate by cross-referencing their title in public documents. Moreover, when businesses changed location from a low rent district to a high rent one, which was the case for a number of Syrian American firms in the 1910s and 1920s, we can conclude an uptick in trade that precipitated such a transfer. The documents also give an indication of the connections of mahjar business ventures with their home society, printing the entrepreneur's hometown in the Arabic script. One document, the *Syrian Business Directory* (1908),[383] gives a particularly clear indication as to how each firm connected to the sending society. It also reveals the degree of economic integration in the region. The embroidery and lace merchants, in particular, represented cities and towns across greater Syria. They did not only come from one area. Instead, the regional diversity reveals a high degree of

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[383] Mokarzel and Otash, *The Syrian Business Directory*.

cooperation between firms devoted to a single collective enterprise across present-day national boundaries.

The Syrian American firms in New York grew markedly during the first half of the twentieth century. Habib Katibah exclaimed that it was the expansion of the Syrian textile, import-export exchange into the markets of "Florence, Funchal, La Pue, and the Philippines"[384] after World War I that proved the Syrian's ability to fulfill the American dream of upward mobility through commerce. Mokarzel and Otash's *Syrian Business Directory* from 1908-09 included 67 dealers listed under "Oriental Goods." The section included a broad category of "Laces, Embroideries, Needle Work and White Goods, etc," which included separate categories for kimono and dressing sack manufacturers (where 24 vendors were listed). Most of these businesses were situated along Washington Street, Rector Street, and Broadway in the Lower Manhattan business district.[385] Arida and Andria's *Syrian American Directory Almanac* indicates the degree Arab American businesses had expanded in New York by the 1930s. The almanac's categories likewise shifted, including a "Decorative Linens and Laces" section that listed 114 independent dealers, 86 lingerie dealers, a separate section for negligées with 44 other dealers (which also included Kimono sellers), and 31 under "Laces and Embroideries."[386]

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[384] Katibah, "Syrian Americans," 432.

[385] Mokarzel and Otash, *The Syrian Business Directory*, 13–15, 17–23.

[386] *The Syrian American Directory Almanac* (New York: Arida & Andria, 1930), 62–74.

By 1930, Middle Eastern business had already branched out from the three main locations of Little Syria in 1908 to neighborhoods across Manhattan and Brooklyn. Many of these dealers had linkages across the globe, including the Philippines and Madeira.

For the Syrian American intelligentsia writing the group narrative on identity, the successful lace and embroidery dealers verified the pack-peddler mythology. The pack-peddler mythology worked hand-in-hand with the Horatio Alger narrative of rags-to-riches upward mobility so central to the mythology of United States. Anyone could accumulate wealth if they only worked hard enough. Syrian racial claims rooted that ability within the very essence of their community. They had always been merchants, and claimed to be predisposed to free market capitalism. Those claims, knotted economics to race. In order to ascend the socio-economic ladder they also had to ascend the racial ladder. The Syrian American narrative was not just a story of racial belonging, but in practice an enactment of race superiority. Syrian American entrepreneurs built wealth at the expense of Madeiran and Filipino women in the factory, and thus climbed the socio-economic ladder. By othering these groups and reading them out of their own racial narrative, Syrian Americans attempted to ascend to whiteness. Just as Syrians in the diaspora were asserting their identity at the expense of imperial subalterns, those in the Middle East were being subjugated to the desires of imperialists in Europe to expand their reach into the Levant. The confrontation and contests that follow are

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the first attempt to bring to light and parse out those complex relationships developed within the context of empire.

7.1 Syrian American Business Presence in Madeira

Both the Syrian American intelligentsia of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the early historians of Syrian American migration, frequently pointed to Syrian American business enterprise in Madeira as a contributing factor in the community's success in global trade and therefore civilization as a whole. This narrative served two purposes: it bought those Syrian entrepreneurs, like the Faour family, a place within the pantheon of American success stories, and consequently, elevated the entirety of the Syrian American community as members of a collective capable of replicating that success. The narrative provided the basis for belonging in the commercially focused United States. It also placed Syrians firmly within the new, globalized industrial economy. In order to understand more fully the role Syrian Americans played in the Madeira embroidery trade, we must first look into the background of the island's integration into the global market economy, and the development of the embroidery industry there.

Just as in the Eastern Mediterranean, industrialization crept into Madeira as a component part of expanding empires and their associated business interests. Portuguese colonists began settling on the island of Madeira during the fifteenth

century. Other than a brief British occupation in the early 1800s, Madeira remained under Portuguese administration until the late twentieth century. The largest island of an archipelago situated off the coast of northwest Africa, Madeira provided a desirable location for transnational trade as well a strategic location for the naval operations of European empires. It served mainly, however, as an entrepôt for industry and agriculture between Africa, Europe, and the Americas. The island garnered a reputation namely for its wine, but also for its growing embroidery industry by the late nineteenth century. It was also a tourist and rehabilitation destination for travelers of means, and would become increasingly important as a coaling station as ships funneled coal to the island at an accelerated rate at the turn of the twentieth century. The total number of ships reported at the capital city, Funchal, nearly doubled between 1894 and 1903 from 673 to 1,397 (858 British vessels compared to 289 German vessels). By the end of the above period, coal accounted for 33% of all imports into Madeira, followed by wheat from the U.S. and South America (17%), corn (12%), and cotton and woolen articles (10%).[387]

At the turn of the twentieth century, both Ottoman Syria and Madeira entered into a period of contestation in the global economy. Both became trade destinations desired by imperial competitors. German capital began to supplant

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[387] Board of Trade, Great Britain, "Yarns and Textiles: Portugal, Madeira," in *The Board of Trade Journal, October to December, 1901*, vol. 35 (London: Truscott and Son, 1902), 269; Bureau of Manufactures, U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, "Madeira," in *Commercial Relations of the United States with Foreign Countries, 1904* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1905), 800–801.

local investment and production in Portuguese Madeira, as well as in Syria. As outlined in Chapter 1, European investment in Ottoman infrastructure, including transportation, the tobacco monopoly, and the manufacture of woven goods, had begun to change the patterns of production and consumption throughout Ottoman Syria. German investors likewise began to increase trade and investment with Madeira in the 1880s, effectively challenging British traffic with the island by 1903. British trade had accounted for roughly seventy-five percent of Madeira's exports in 1883, and the United States imported no articles from the island during the same year. By 1903, Britain's share of Madeira's exports had fallen to just 26% of the total, while Germany's share had risen to 32%. The U.S. emerged to account for a mere 2% of Madeira's exports. The island's exports largely consisted of the regional Port wine (76%) and embroideries (10%).[388]

As the older European empires began to lose their hold on longtime possessions, new imperial regimes swept in to spread their spheres of influence. Germany challenged Portuguese authority on the island, following a colonial policy that also attempted to circumvent French influences in Morocco by supporting the sultan there. By 1906, the German government began demanding a number of concessions from the Portuguese, even threatening to pursue naval maneuvers on

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[388] U.S. Department of State, *United States Consular Reports*, September 1883, vol. 33 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1883), 609; Bureau of Manufactures, U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, "Madeira," in *Review of the World's Commerce* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1906), 112–113.

the Tagus River outside of Lisbon if Portugal did not hand over control of a Madeiran hotel and grant German traders priority on the island. Portuguese officials promptly wired the British government in the hope that the empire's competing interests would persuade the Admiralty to take action. The English did respond, much to the chagrin of German officials. Just as they had sided with the French in the Morocco crisis, England sided against Germany with the crisis unfolding in Madeira. The British dispatched their Atlantic fleet to the Portuguese coast to check the German threat. Despite German protestations to Portuguese representatives, the Germans rescinded their demands for concessions in Madeira. Germany and Portugal returned to the political arena to determine their trade agreements, settling on a treaty to lower duties on Madeira Port wine in 1908. They also arranged for rebates on re-exports, which essentially nullified duties on finished embroidery imports to the German Reich.[389]

While the U.S. was a relatively junior trading partner with Madeira, and embroidered goods were still a young industry in 1900, embroidery would eventually become the most valuable American import from Madeira. Buyers had already begun to favor Madeira's embroidery over the island's famous Port wine during the nineteenth century. The industry would boom during the early years of

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[389] "German Designs on Madeira," in *The New York Times Current History: The European War*, vol. 15 (New York: The New York Times Company, 1918), 331; Bureau of Manufactures, U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, *Customs and Tariffs of the German Customs Union*, December 25, 1902, revised June, 1911, vol. 7 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1911), 7.

the twentieth century. Most sources indicate that Elisabeth Phelps, a British businesswoman, introduced embroidery to the inhabitants of the island in 1856. The Phelps family owned a large vineyard and winery on the island, which employed a significant number of the local inhabitants. The Phelps estate, like the majority of vineyards on Madeira, suffered catastrophic losses due to the *oidium tuckeri* fungus that attacked the island's vineyards. Not only did the disease hit the vintners' bottom line, it also put a number of local inhabitants out of work. Phelps thought embroidery would serve as a means to supplement the losses. She believed that a new industry would assuage the slacking winery while also providing a means of livelihood (and perhaps also a method of distraction) to the local workers who were no longer needed in the fungus stricken vineyards. In the seventy years between 1862 and 1923, islanders employed in embroidery manufacture increased many times over, from a paltry 1,000 in the 1860s to an estimated 50,000 by the 1920s. U.S. Consul to Morocco, Maxwell Blake, reflected on the growth of the industry, where early examples "consisted chiefly of festoons, handkerchiefs, and entre-deux, but later doilies, table and umbrella covers, underwear, blouses, children's clothing, lingerie, hats, and finally, elaborately worked robes were attempted, the skill of the people always keeping pace with the fashions which regulate the export

demand."[390] The one time makeshift industry had developed into the island's main export within the span of two generations.

British merchants began integrating Madeira into the global economy as a site of re-export, shipping to the island raw materials that local workers later finished and imported back to England. The early twentieth-century embroidery system eventually employed as many Madeiran women as there were people then living in the island's main population center, the capital city of Funchal. As a result, the embroidery industry had effectively integrated the majority of Madeira women into the global economy, and in the process, tied a large portion of the island's livelihood to one industrial export. At the turn of the twentieth century, German firms, following the British model, began to pry the trade out of English hands. One consular report indicated that production had become almost exclusively German by 1904. German firms used exclusivity contracts to establish a virtual monopoly on the island. American firms also began to squeeze into a small portion of the embroidery market, but these were by-and-large firms specializing in importation rather than in vertically integrating all aspects of production for re-export like the British and German merchants practiced. From June to December 1911 alone, however, embroidery exports to the U.S. outstripped the only other product of

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[390] U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor Bureau of Manufactures, "Lace Industry: Madeira," in *Monthly Consular and Trade Reports, February 1907*, vol. 317 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1907), 172.

significance catering to American tastes, Madeira wine, by a margin of 9 to 1 ($89, 046 to $10,093).[391]

The large-scale European trade with Madeira largely collapsed after the onset of World War I. Wartime governments focused production capacity and supply chains toward militarization and civilian necessities while rationing luxury items like imported wine and embroidery. Vacationers also practically ceased traveling to the island's resorts. War did allow American merchants to step into the trade vacuum. Near the end of the war the U.S. Consul in Funchal, Graham H. Kemper, reported that American merchants had established a foothold in half of the firms of the island, while British, Portuguese and Swiss firms had supplanted the German firms that had previously dominated trade. Kemper believed that American investors could expand their influence in both import and export traffic where the German mercantile firms had collapsed.[392]

American enterprise, and Syrian American capital in particular, would eventually become the driving force behind the Madeira embroidery and linen market. New Syrian American import-export firms opened offices and storefronts in New York City during the war. In 1918, Fayadh Jabara opened a new Madeira

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[391] Ibid., 172–173; Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, U.S. Department of Commerce, "Portugal," in *Commercial Relations of the United States with Foreign Countries, 1911* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1913), 41; Desmond Gregory, *The Beneficent Usurpers: A History of the British in Madeira* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1988), 104.

[392] U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor Bureau of Manufactures, "The Island of Madeira," in *Supplements to Commerce Reports, Review of Industrial and Trade Conditions in Foreign Countries in 1917 by American Consular Offices* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1919), 8–10.

embroidery office with his brothers Rashid and Benyamin on Fifth Avenue, in the Midtown area near Madison Square Park. F. M. Jabara and Brothers were one of a number of Syrian American businesses that were beginning to leave Little Syria's "main street" on Lower Manhattan's Washington Street for the glitz and glamor of Fifth Avenue, New York City's prime thoroughfare for retail real estate. They did however maintain a separate warehouse on Greenwich Street that housed the firm's large stocks of imported, handmade pieces.[393]

Syrian merchantmen found a market that was reminiscent of the earlier silk and cotton industries prominent during the nineteenth century in Ottoman Syria: piecemeal production of embroidered goods by a largely female workforce producing cheap handmade items, largely within the home, that could be re-exported for tremendous profit. Lace workers toiled in the home for staggeringly low wages. On average, these women made only a few cents for a day's labor. With virtually no protection from venture capitalists, the vast majority of the women on the island were tied inextricably to the boom and bust cycle of the global economic system, and specifically to consumer markets in the United States. Madeira essentially became one large American factory for handmade linens. By the 1920s,

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[393] *Notion Trade Topics* 52, no. 2 (February 1918): 50.

American firms accounted for seventy-five percent of the traffic in embroidered goods from the island, many of them in Syrian American hands.[394]

Just as in Syria, the global market forces that had brought boom and bust to sericulture and silk textiles brought fortune and hardship to the U.S.-Madeira exchange. The inflated market of the 1910s that profited Syrian American business in New York collapsed by war's end, when open sea-lanes gave merchants access to markets previously limited due to the conflict. As a result, firms with operations in Japan and other East Asian locations began once again to flood the global marketplace with cheaper wares. S. W. Eells, who later served as the U.S. consul to Funchal following the war, claimed that Madeira was the only available source for table linens and other related fancy goods during the conflict. The postwar return to free trade opened up shipments to and from the island, but also meant that Madeira importers would have to contend with new sources of handmade embroideries and linens from across the Pacific. In many instances the Syrian American firms chose to establish branches in new markets to supplement the decreasing profit margins of their Madeira exports.[395]

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[394] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Finance, *Tariff Act of 1921: Hearing before the Committee on Finance*, 67th Cong., 1st sess., 1921, 177-178.

[395] Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, "Textiles, Madeira Embroidery Shipments to Decrease," in *Commerce Reports*, June 19, 1922, vol. 2, no. 25 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1922), 754.

Firms devoted to importing foreign-made goods would also have to navigate new political tides changing the profitability of trade on the U.S. domestic front. American politicians began to promote protection for American industries and farmers who saw their profits shrink following the war. The Republican-controlled U.S. Congress passed the Emergency Tariff of 1921 and later the Fordney-McCumber Tariff of 1922, with the objective of alleviating the falling prices plaguing American produce and finished industrial products. Postwar trade normalization had been unkind to American farmers and industries. Moreover, American importation of finished embroideries and lacework had also stagnated. Demand for Madeira and Philippine lacework decreased, likely emblematic of flagging American income. While lawmakers intended the protective tariffs to mitigate the free-fall in prices of American goods, they also had the unintended consequence of hurting some U.S. firms, primarily import-export exchanges.[396]

The Fordney-McCumber Bill (H. R. 7456) changed the economic equation for trade valuation. New York lawyer Thomas M. Lane made the discrepancy his central theme when he argued on behalf of the Madeira exporters of New York City before the Senate Finance Committee in the summer of 1922. Lane represented the major American suppliers of Madeira lacework including the Madeira Embroidery

[396] Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, "Textiles, Reducing Madeira Embroidery Workers' Wages," in *Commerce Reports*, May 22, 1922, vol. 2, no. 21 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1922), 470.

Company, Leacock and Company, Charles Streb, the N. J. Richman Company, and the vast collection of firms under the auspices of the Madeira Importers Association, which represented twenty Syrian American firms.[397] Most of the companies under the Madeira Importers Association umbrella still conducted business in Little Syria along Washington, Greenwich, and Morris streets. One of the firms, Shalom and Company, represented the Sephardic Jewish interests from the neighborhood on Allen Street on the Lower East Side. The Mallouk family of Damascus, as well as the Hamrah and Bardwil Brothers of Zahleh, had experienced substantial profits that allowed them to establish storefronts on posh Fifth Avenue. The Madeira Importers Association represented not only Syrian American business connections to the island, but also the vast majority of New York firms trading in Madeira embroidery.[398]

Lane argued that the new legislation threatened to reverse the dominant position in the Madeira embroidery market that American firms had spent the past fifteen years building. He pleaded his clients' case before the Senate Finance Committee, where Senators Porter McCumber and Reed Smoot served. McCumber

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[397] The firms included the Mallouk Brothers, Elias Mallouk and Brothers, the Mallouk Corporation, Habib Mallouk and Company, Saydah Importing Company, Alexander J. Hamrah and Company, Kemal Katen and Company, the Funchal and Embroidery House, F. M. Jabara and Company, the Madeira Trading Company, Bardwil Brothers, Joseph Balesh and Brothers, Massabni Brothers, M. N. Abualy, Shalom and Company, Dweck and Hafif, Tweel Importing Company, Amin Samara Company, A. M. Salany and Company, and Azoon and Bonany.

[398] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Finance, *Tariff, Schedule 14, Sundries: Hearing before the Committee on Finance*, 67th Cong., 2nd sess., 1921, 4165.

and Smoot each co-authored two of the more significant tariffs of the early twentieth century, and represented the best and brightest economic minds serving in the American Senate. Lane presented a three-pronged argument in defense of the Madeira exporters that included protecting the nature of the embroidery market, the benefit that the market held for the U.S. overall, and (most importantly) the financial repercussions that the new tariff rate presented to American importers. The lawyer framed the U.S.-Madeira embroidery market as an essentially American enterprise despite the fact that the workers producing the goods were not American citizens at all, nor did they benefit from any U.S. labor protections. Lane played up the American investment in the island as a political good. By displacing German capital with investment from the U.S., American firms had replaced the previous monopoly with their own. Moreover, the U.S. government reaped close to $2 million from the annual customs dues, according to Lane's figures. If the authors of the new tariff measures wanted to protect American industry, then they were only doing so at the expense of other "American" industries. The tariff would effectively dismantle a mutually beneficial relationship in between an American economic colony and New York firms in order to preserve already flagging domestic industries.[399]

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[399] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Finance, *Tariff Act of 1921: Hearing before the Committee on Finance*, 67th Cong., 1st sess., 1921, 183-185.

Lane framed H. R. 7456 as a complete departure from U.S. tariff practices dating back to 1890. From the McKinley Tariff until the proposed bill, hand embroideries and related articles had been bound to a 60% duty, based on a ratio formulated on the articles' foreign valuation. Lane calculated the figure equivalent to a 22.5% rate according to American valuation upon sale to the consumer. The 1922 proposal would instead require an importer to pay a 37.5% *ad valorem* duty according to the American valuation of the article upon sale in the U.S. Lane argued that this would place the customs on embroideries at between 100% and 135% of the value, making it nearly impossible for importers to turn a profit. While Lane's math may have been questionable, his intentions were clear. Maintaining a system of foreign valuation placed control of the market squarely in the hands of the import-export exchanges. American firms controlled warehouse stocks and worker compensation through cartels and gentlemen's agreements. The Madeira Importers Association represented one such collective of like-minded businessmen. Their collective actions could influence government officials who were tasked with regional valuation of markets and goods. The Fordney-McCumber Tariff, however, took a significant element of power away from these firms, placing instead an emphasis on the American and foreign consumer markets.[400]

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[400] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Finance, *Tariff Act of 1921: Hearing before the Committee on Finance*, 67th Cong., 1st sess., 1921, 183-185; U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Finance, *Tariff, Schedule 14, Sundries: Hearing before the Committee on Finance*, 67th Cong., 2nd sess., 1921, 4162-4165.

Like other American industries, the embroidery market had diminished after the conclusion of World War I. American embroidery importers in Madeira began to hold on to stocks with the hopes that postwar demand would eventually return to pre-war and wartime levels. When those dreams failed to materialize immediately, the importers struck in the one sector where they could turn the balance in their favor. They proposed to reduce the already low wages they paid to embroidery laborers on the island. Cutting wages, bulk importation, and shrinking profit margins portended the embroidery importer's state of affairs for the following years. Ultimately, the onset of the Great Depression would disrupt their trade and drive many of the firms into bankruptcy in the 1930s.[401]

Syrian American entrepreneurs did, however, during their short foray in dealing Madeira embroidery and lace, create new structures that influenced cultural forms. Not only did Syrian migrants export goods, they also exported forms of authority embedded in the capitalist structures that they embraced and expanded. As Akram Khater has pointed out, industrialization presented new opportunities for women working in textile industries in Lebanon. This also resulted in challenging traditional gender roles, but in turn created new avenues for gender empowerment. The society looked down on workingwomen, but these women also had a higher

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[401] Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, "Textiles, Reducing Madeira Embroidery Workers' Wages," 470.

degree of control over their lives. They could freely migrate and helped support their families. When Syrian Americans followed capital flows to Madeira, they likewise provided new avenues for women laborers to elevate their economic standing in society, but equally subjected these women to new abuses of capitalist patriarchy. The Syrian American cartels could control wages and hours, and manipulated pricing to extract the greatest profit while simultaneously making labor less valuable to the actual worker. In short, Syrian American entrepreneurs gained status in American society at the expense of laborers in another. Making the pack-peddler mythology a reality and ascending the social ladder in the United States meant climbing on the backs of those made invisible by the assimilation narrative. Syrian American businessmen repeated the process that they had perfected in Madeira and re-exported it to the Philippines.

7.2 Syrian American Business Presence in the Philippines

In his formative study on Middle Eastern migrant businesses in the Philippines, historian William Gervase Clarence-Smith presents a list of seven major embroidery firms operating in Manila in 1927.[402] One of the proprietors, Juan Ysmael, had roots dating at least back to the foundations of American control in the Pacific archipelago. Ysmael established his firm in 1898, just as U.S. forces

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[402] William Gervase Clarence-Smith, "Middle Eastern Migrants in the Philippines: Entrepreneurs and Cultural Brokers," *Asian Journal of Social Sciences* 32, no. 3 (2004): 26.

wrested control of the Philippines from Spain. With headquarters in the archipelago's central port city of Iloilo, Ysmael would eventually extend his Philippines operations with offices in Manila, Cebu, and Tacloban. The company linked the Pacific archipelago to markets in the Caribbean, trading in a number of household and business items, and goods from textiles to farm machinery. Those items included china, silverware, jewelry, watches, clocks, fountain pens, typewriters, cash registers, and toys, as well as leather goods, dyes, paper, perfume, soap, silk, cotton, wool, and even agricultural machinery.[403] A number of advertisements from trade journals of the era promoted Ysmael, alongside fellow Middle Eastern merchant in Manila, A.T. Hashim, as a progressive entrepreneur who sold western goods like Star Brand shoes and Palmolive soap and cosmetics.[404] The Ottoman businessman would later establish an American branch in the financial district of New York with assistance from native New Yorker, and former treasurer of the Philippine province of Negros Oriental, Edward McCreary. Together in 1918 they established a branch office in Midtown Manhattan near Madison Square.[405] Ysmael received the highest possible credit rating from the New York junta of bankers and held capital comparable to that held by the Faour

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[403] *Export Register of Leading Export Houses of the United States*, 3:365.

[404] *The American Chamber of Commerce Journal* 2, no. 9 (September 1922): 34; "In the Philippines They Walk on Stars," *Boot and Shoe Recorder* 51, no. 22 (August 28, 1907): 45.

[405] "Alumni Notes," *Cornell Alumni News* 21, no. 8 (November 14, 1918): 94; U.S. Department of War, Bureau of Insular Affairs, *Acts of the Philippine Commission* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1907), 415.

brothers. The move represented the global nature of the migrant economic networks. It also reveals that the flow of goods and finance did not necessarily move across just one ocean, or in just one direction.

Another firm originating in the Philippines that later moved into the Battery area of New York in 1916, the Jureidini Export Co., traded in lingerie, underwear, shoes, and hats, and even held patents on certain articles.[406] The Jureidini Company linked the North American financial center with pre-existing offices in the Philippines as well as to company branches in Egypt and Brazil. It was a relative newcomer to the Syrian community in New York and held approximately $100,000 in assets. The firm specialized in "Japanese and Syrian products,"[407] which presumably included silk goods such as kimonos and lacework.

Other firms followed the reverse trajectory, branching out from North America into the Philippines. Their operations expanded in the Pacific after the conclusion of World War I, when Asian markets became more accessible. American demand for Asian goods had not flagged during the war, and a number of Syrian American firms looked to capitalize on the return to normalcy. One of those companies, the Bardwil Brothers, headed by the brothers George and Amin from Zahleh, took the opportunity to expand their operations into China and the

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[406] *Index of Patents Issued from the United States Patent Office*, 1920th ed. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1921), 1193.

[407] *American Exporter: Export Trade Directory*, 113.

Philippines. The company moved into the Victoria Building; a new, twenty-story structure located in New York City on Broadway, just a few doors down from the Ysmael Company.[408] The Bardwil Brothers had preexisting ties to the broader business community of New York; they had previously joined the Merchants' Association of New York in petitioning the city to expand investment in publicly owned port facilities. They hoped to stem the rising tide of private ownership of New York's industrial waterfront.[409] The company employed Salim Dowaliby to tour its new Asian factory networks in China and the Philippines. Dowaliby had previously partnered with fellow Zahleh native, Najib Maloof, in a New York firm specializing in laces and embroideries. The company later split up, with the Maloof children setting up boutique lingerie shops on Madison Avenue, while Dowaliby chose to cooperate with another firm with ties to Zahleh. In 1921, he spent seven months on the Philippines preparing the Bardwil factories, where "Careless and inefficient workers turned out poor garments," [410] for the anticipated uptick in manufacture following the wartime lull in trade.

Another American firm, headed by Elias Mallouk and his brother Salim, expanded its stakes in Madeira embroidery to the Pacific. They were members of the Madeira Importers Association, but the firm later extended its trade operations

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[408] *Dry Goods Economist* 71, no. 3777 (November 25, 1916): 49.

[409] *Bulletin of the Merchants' Association of New York* 8, no. 10 (March 10, 1919): 3.

[410] "General News of the Trade," *The Corset and Underwear Review*, July 1921, 109.

into the Philippines. U.S. customs had already begun to cut into the Madeira cartel's profits. By contrast, the U.S. maintained a relatively open exchange with the Philippines, providing a site for Syrian American firms to refocus the lace and embroidery production that had made the Madeira enterprise so profitable initially. These examples of Syrian American business expansion into the Philippines suggest how firms coordinated in cornering a lucrative market, just as they had in Madeira.

Their involvement also reveals how business operations challenged social hierarchies as well. Tracing the movement of lacework goods and embroideries reveals new developments in the global economy, as these goods flowed from the American imperial periphery to the center; transferred, in many instances, by migrants aspiring to the American middle class, and conspicuously appropriated by American middle-class consumers who desired to exhibit their proclaimed class sensibilities through the act of consumption itself. In many cases, those on both sides of the commodity exchange were women: female Filipino needle workers on the imperial periphery, Syrian sojourner merchant women who served as ligatures between the imperial periphery and metropolitan consumers – the ambassadors of commerce who functioned at the interstices of public and private, at the front door

of American households – and the middle-class women of the American metropole.[411]

As Katibah had claimed, Syrian Americans' trade in the Pacific, and their use of Asian laborers in linen production, allowed Syrian American trade to meet the growing desire for these wares in the domestic U.S. market. It also made the Syrian American program a decisively modern undertaking. Cheap labor created imitation goods that filled a growing niche in a market disrupted by war. Katibah also remarked of this critical moment for Syrian Americans, "The development of the embroidered linen and lace industries which is still largely controlled by the Syrian merchants of New York, reads like a modern version of Sindbad the Sailor."[412] Like Sindbad, the Syrian American was equally a modern intermedium: masculine, able-bodied, vivacious, adventurous, and affluent (and eventually both Western and white).[413] The image of Sindbad, like the representation of the pack

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[411] Lori Anne Loeb, *Consuming Angels: Advertising and Victorian Women* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Margaret Finnegan, *Selling Suffrage: Consumer Culture and Votes for Women* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Anne M. Cronin, *Advertising and Consumer Citizenship: Gender, Images and Rights* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000); Maggie Andrews and Mary M. Talbot, eds., *All the World and Her Husband: Women in Twentieth-Century Consumer Culture* (London and New York: Cassell, 2000); Ann Heilmann and Margaret Beetham, eds., *New Women Hybridities: Femininity, Feminism and International Consumer Culture, 1880-1930* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004); Tammy C. Whitlock, *Crime, Gender and Consumer Culture in Nineteenth-Century England* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2005); Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin, eds., *Material Women, 1750-1950: Consuming Desires and Collecting Practices* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2009).

[412] Katibah, "Syrian Americans," 431.

[413] Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989); Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*.

peddler, also masked aspects of gender, class, race, and ability within the Syrian American experience.[414] While the adventurous entrepreneurs ascended the social ladder, they did so at the expense of laborers and ethnicities they perceived as inferior. That inferiority is inscribed into the narrative by the very absence of the subaltern classes that the economic elites used to propel themselves.

Katibah's focus on Sindbad the adventurer redirects us from peripheral characters to the hero of a story of mobility. In this real-world version of Sindbad, those peripheral characters were Filipinos: women in the periphery and men in the metropole. Under American oversight, the lace and embroidery industries of the Philippines were integrated into the global economy on an industrial scale. Syrian American merchants and industrialists participated in this trade, which at once opened up the Philippines for larger revenue streams, but also objectified Filipino women, like Madeiran women before them, within the context of American empire.[415]

Philippine lace hit the U.S. marketplace during the St. Louis Exposition in 1904 and increased in popularity during subsequent exhibitions.[416] Many

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[414] Cronin, *Advertising and Consumer Citizenship: Gender, Images and Rights*; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995).

[415] "The Singer at the Front," *The American Carpet and Upholstery Journal*, June 1902, 73.

[416] William P. Wilson, *Universal Exposition, St. Louis, U.S.A., 1904: Philippine Exposition* (St. Louis: The Official Catalogue Company, Inc., 1904).

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Americans had become familiar with the trade by the 1910s, and Philippine lace became a popular item by 1920s, growing from a niche market into a $4 million trade by 1919.[417] *The Filipino People*, a bilingual, anti-annexation journal published by future Filipino President Manuel Quezon in Washington, D.C., envisioned the Panama-Pacific Exposition of 1915 as a platform to introduce Filipino lacework to a global audience. He promoted the goods as cheaper Asian alternatives, and as a way to fill the gap in demand for lace in the U.S. created by European production shortfalls due to the upheavals of World War I.[418] From 1915 to 1918, the lace trade from the Philippines to the U.S. expanded by nearly 600%.[419] Much of the success of the industry relied on the integration of lace working and embroidery into the mandatory primary education system introduced in the Philippines in 1910. Children were required to spend four years on vocational training alone. Fancy laces and embroidery and other housekeeping skills were supposed to imbue Filipino women with Western sensibility while also providing them with marketable skills and self-sufficiency. Filipino girls were required to

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[417] O. Garfield Jones, "Education and the Future of the Filipinos," *The American Review of Reviews* 64 (September 1921): 409; Earle William Gage, "Lace Making in the Philippine Islands," *Dry Goods* 18, no. 12 (February 1918): 57.

[418] "The Philippines at the Panama Exposition," *The Filipino People* 3, no. 7 (March 1915): 4–7.

[419] *Census of the Philippine Islands*, vol. 4 (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1921), 674.

reach proficiency in lace making and needlework before matriculation.[420] By 1921, 800,000 of the 1.3 million school-aged children in the Philippines were enrolled in primary school, many of them producing export-ready goods.[421]

Fancy goods produced under the auspices of the Bureau of Education had reached windfall levels by 1921. The Bureau became so successful in the lace and embroidery market that private firms petitioned the Governor General of the Philippines to establish a special committee to investigate new ways to regulate its advantageous position. The insular trade had grown to squeeze private firms out of the market. The committee resolved to fix prices on finished goods produced by students in the vocational schools. While private firms had to account for regular business overhead, such as facilities upkeep, wages, material, etc., the Bureau gained a competitive edge by circumventing wages and paying for raw materials only. The Bureau of Education had an endless supply of unwaged laborers to fill contracts, and when obligations could not be met, the Bureau would "put out" their contracts to affiliated subcontractors in local cottage industries.[422] And, whether they were purchasing student-made pieces for pennies on the dollar or were part of

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[420] *Report of the Governor General of the Philippine Islands to the Secretary of War, 1919* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1920), 94; Dean C. Worcester, *The Philippines: Past and Present*, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1914), 927.

[421] Jones, "Education and the Future of the Filipinos," 408.

[422] *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year Ended June 30, 1912*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1913), 438; "Recommend Price-Fixing Committee for School Embroideries," *The American Chamber of Commerce Journal* 11, no. 3 (March 1922): 18.

the consortium of private firms appealing for market regulation, ten prominent families of Middle Eastern origin had established import-export firms in Manila alone by the late 1920s.[423]

We should be careful to note that not all Syrian Americans in the imperial periphery whole-heartedly supported the American education system there. Najib Saleeby, a former U.S. military surgeon who served in the Caribbean during the Spanish-American War, and a Moro ethnographer, criticized the Bureau of Education for making English-language instruction mandatory. Saleeby's objection stands as a reminder that these groups were not monolithic. He did not however criticize the system of unpaid wage labor that benefitted the lace and embroidery dealers.[424] While Saleeby objected to the language aspects of American schools in the Philippines, the products of the education system still reached American shores unabated.

An analogous campaign to prime the marketplace emerged in popular women's magazines like *Harper's Bazaar*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, and *McEvoy Magazine*.[425] Even the professional (and male-oriented) *Science* magazine ran an

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[423] Clarence-Smith, "Middle Eastern Migrants in the Philippines: Entrepreneurs and Cultural Brokers," 447.

[424] Timothy Marr, "Diasporic Intelligences in the American Philippine Empire: The Transnational Career of Dr. Najeeb Mitry Saleeby," *Mashriq & Mahjar* 2, no. 1 (2014): 78–106.

[425] *Harper's Bazar*, January 1916, 75; "Industrial Education in the Philippines," *Ladies' Home Journal*, May 1913, 64; "Industrial Education in Philippines," *McEvoy Magazine*, December 1912, 267–68.

article in 1912, claiming that American-led vocational education in the Philippines offered sheer "educational value" while simultaneously providing a "remunerative occupation."[426] Popular magazines reassured American women that they could feel comfortable purchasing affordable and readily available goods that tastefully reflected their own lifestyle, because they were also contributing to Filipino vocational education, teaching the women proper gendered lifestyles, and helping to expand the Philippine economy as a result.

Lacework on garments allowed emerging middle-class American women to inscribe their bodies with the fruits of imperialism and the spread of global capital exchange.[427] Exotic embroideries and laces were increasingly easy to come by and more affordably attained, especially when produced by newly integrated – and poor – workers on the imperial periphery. In this instance, Filipino-produced lacework, and embroidery-embellished undergarments, outerwear, and household fancy goods became the new imperial consumable. The frugal consumer was linked interminably with the humble producer, each exuding desirable qualities of the progressive woman. The Filipino women toiled in the closed-off spaces of the private realm of industrial production while the American consumer purchased said goods from the privacy of the home, or a "safe" public shopping arena.

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[426] "Industrial Education in the Philippines," *Science*, September 27, 1912, 396–97.

[427] Andrews and Talbot, *All the World and Her Husband: Women in Twentieth-Century Consumer Culture*, 3, 31.

In their advertisement for kimonos, laces, and "Oriental Goods," Bayouth and Razook of New York depicted a woman at her bureau, placing a call on a still-rare pedestal telephone (Figure 8).[428]

٢١٧ COMMERCIAL DIRECTORY. – U.S. AMERICA • الدليل التجاري – الولايات المتحدة الاميركية ٢١٧

— هلو سنترال
— اعطني ٢٧١٤ ركتر
— هذا محل بيوض ورزوق؟
— نعم
— ارسلوا لي كيمونا
كام ملائكة وموضه
عجميه وارد كم
— حاضر

كيمونا حرير
ارابيان لايس
من كل القياسات
محصور على حسابنا
كل في لايس
وكل البضائم الشرقية

يوض ورزوف

BAYOUTH & RAZOOK
35 Broadway   New York City
Manufacturers & Importers of Kimonos, Laces & Oriental Goods.

Figure 8: "Syrian Home Shopper," *Dr. Abdou's Travels in America and Commercial Directory of the Arabic Speaking People of the World* **(1910)**

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[428] Abdou, *Dr. Abdou's Travels in America and Commercial Directory of the Arabic Speaking People of the World*, 217.

Safely seated at home without hat or petticoat, the woman reaches the phone operator, "Central," from behind the veil of modern technology, her voice broken into electronic pulses and reassembled for the receiver. The advertisement is accompanied by a dialogue situated to the side of the main image where the woman caller asks to be connected to the company of Bayouth and Razook. After being connected, the seller's voice on the other end of the line explains the benefits of ordering by phone, and the ability to return items that do not meet the consumer's expectations. All of this could be done from the comfort and privacy of home, beyond the gaze or hustle and bustle of the public sphere. The ad portrays middle-class women as disabled by status: hindered by their limited ability to move between public and private spaces. Telephone- and mail-ordering gave the woman in the ad another alternative to enable her through consumption. The Syrian American marketplace facilitated these new interactions. Gendered labor and gendered consumption promoted by the Syrian American businessmen represent the contradictory nature of the narrative they championed.[429]

Filipino women producing wares for American consumption were also consuming the mores of American culture. Vocational education aimed to educate women in gendered roles while simultaneously giving them skills to produce goods marketable in the expanding global exchange. By tapping into the lace and

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[429] Burch and Rembis, "Re-Membering the Past: Reflections on Disability History."

embroidery produced by the American schools in the imperial periphery, Syrian American entrepreneurs became agents of empire. While women laborers adopted American modes of education, women consumers were also producing new expressions of gendered culture, just as the sellers of those goods participated alongside consumers in producing cultural expectations of women's appearance and action. More simply stated, what women bought reflected the identity they desired to exhibit, and in some instances, what women made reflected the identity it was hoped that they would adopt. From the vantage point of the global economy and American imperial commodity exchange, we see a straight line from material production to consumption. From the bottom-up, the cultural exchange shows quite the opposite: the material producer became the cultural consumer, and the material consumer became the cultural producer.[430]

By the 1930s, as Katibah had proclaimed, many Syrian Americans had woven their way into the fabric of everyday American experience. Whether typified as the model of upward mobility, modernity, and whiteness, or the toiling peddler, the Syrian middleman (and woman) helped bring a whole host of affordable household goods into the homes of American consumers. In this sense, the ethnic mythology holds a kernel of truth. Yet, the entrepreneurial mythology still hides the complex ways that gender, race, class, and ability intersected in the imperial

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[430] Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

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periphery across imperial subjects. Each ethnic group was not merely an isolated particle moving between "assimilation" and ostracism. They became entangled in a complex web of societal expectations, gendered norms, and imperial desires. We would be wise to remember this when discussing Syrian migrants today. How we understand past experiences of Syrian migrants (many of whom, it should be noted, would today identify more as Lebanese nationals than as Syrians) could serve to bring deeper context to current discussions concerning American involvement in Syria, and the Syrian migration and refugee crisis. The relationship between the United States, its peoples, and the Syrian American experience, both nationally and in a larger imperial context, can help us understand the deep roots of those entangled pasts.

7.3 The Collapse of the Independence Movement and the Fading Vision of a Syrian Nation

Just as Syrian migrants used the framework of empire to further their business interests in Madeira and the Philippines, intervention by empire-states in the Middle East also began to fragment the possibility of an independent Syria. Wartime alliances faded into local jealousies following the conclusion of World War I. Postwar settlement negotiations began in earnest after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1919. The defeat of Turkish forces and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire opened the door for British, French, and even the possibility for

American intervention in the old Ottoman periphery. Syrians throughout the mahjar eagerly clamored to have their voices heard as the victorious regimes came to terms with how to handle the post-Ottoman Middle East. A number of parties issued competing claims for the administration of postwar Syria. These claims only complicated the political competitions unleashed by equally contentious imperial desires to bring the region under mandatory governments.

During the Paris Peace Conference, Syrian representatives began to elaborate two distinct visions for the future of the region. These political views would leave in their wake two bases for national identity that undermined the notion of the Syrian race as a distinct racial entity. One sought to separate the region of Lebanon and the Lebanese people from the whole of former Ottoman Syria. This, in effect, surgically excised the civilization argument of the Phoenician past from Syria, and made it a wholly Lebanese marker of identification, using Phoenicianism as the foundation as the national mythology for a greater Lebanese state. The other argument aligned greater Syria to a larger Arab civilization and broader Arab independence movement coming out of the war. While competing factions sought influence in Paris with various claims to national recognition and competing offers of imperial protection, ultimately these two visions of the Syrian future won the day, at least on a temporary basis. Multiple parties scrambled to be recognized as the official representatives for mahjar populations in the periphery, and represent the Syrian nation in diaspora at the peace conference.

Competing factions sprung up, arguing alternatively for French or British

oversight in the region. They would also have different ideas as to how the region

of Ottoman Syria should be, or not be, divided after the war. A contingent of Syrian

Christians from the fertile farming district of Hauran, a region in the south of Syria

near present-day Amman, Jordan, petitioned the Paris Peace Conference through

the British Brigadier-General Gilbert Clayton, who was then stationed in Cairo,

Egypt. The Hauran community desired British protection as the guarantor of their

rights, while the "various contending sects" of Syria battled for control of the region

during the Paris deliberations.[431] Chekri Ganem, a Francophile newspaper editor

and playwright, would become one of the most notorious players in the Syrian

drama as talks played out during the Peace Conference. He would head the "Central

Syrian Committee" in Paris, and promote the aim of a secular state. Claiming to

speak on behalf of the Argentinian Lebanese and Syrians through the organization

La Union Siria (The Syrian Union), Ganem demanded Lebanese and Syrian

independence, albeit under French protection, as the desired product of the Paris

Conference.[432] He and his political allies presented the idea that Lebanon had a

history and culture distinct from the rest of greater Syria, and as a result supported

the French-backed idea to separate Lebanon from the rest of Ottoman Syria. The

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[431] "General Gilbert Clayton to George Curzon," April 17, 1919, TNA: FO 608/106/8202.

[432] "Reginald Tower to Arthur Balfour," March 17, 1919, TNA: FO 608/106/8711; see also, William I. Shorrock, *French Imperialism in the Middle East: The Failure of Policy in Syria and Lebanon, 1900-1914* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 7.

shift in political philosophy combined several notions: France's role as protector of the region, the Christian majority of Mount Lebanon and its surrounding regions as a polity for a new, homogeneous nation-state, and the view that the pan-Arab movement represented the new onslaught of Asian hordes on the borders of the civilized Western world.[433] Moreover, he argued, that although Lebanese throughout the mahjar wrote in Arabic, even the Arab language was an invasive species.[434] The Lebanese were a distinct culture and deserved a separate nation-state.

The peace talks were a transnational political phenomenon. A number of mahjar communities throughout the world weighed in on the matter, and in sometimes contradictory fashion. They employed ethnic political organizations in their attempts to have their voices heard at the deliberations. The pro-French contingent, represented by La Union Siria, would not go unchallenged by the broader mahjar community, however. Ganem's political and ideological opponent, George Sawaya, a Harvard-educated poet and political activist who headed the Partido Patriótico Árabe (Arab Patriotic Party) in Buenos Aires, presented a British-backed alternative as a counterweight to Chekri Ganem's French protectorate.

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[433] Jim Gooch, "'Building Buffers and Filling Vacuums': Great Britain and the Middle East, 1914-1922," in *The Making of Peace: Rulers, States, and the Aftermath of War*, ed. Williamson Murray and Jim Lacey (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 257–58; Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia*, 91–92.

[434] Franck Salameh, *Language, Memory, and Identity in the Middle East: The Case for Lebanon* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 175.

Sawaya aimed to create a coalition among Syrian Orthodox Christians and Muslims in order to help establish an independent Arab state within the territorial boundaries imagined by the Greater Syria platform.[435] Sawaya would later support Faisal's claim to establish an Arab kingdom in the Middle East, although his supporters failed to garner formal recognition for an independent Arab state during the Peace Conference deliberations.

Syrian migrants in Australia chimed in too. The Syrian Orthodox and Melkite leadership in New South Wales petitioned the residing Governor Walter Edward Davidson to forward a request for British protection over postwar Syria. Barring British protection, the Syrian Australian community would accept the arguments promoted by Habib Katibah and the Syrian League in New York for setting up a system of American protection over the larger Syrian region. Their main concern revolved around the French design for separate Mandates in Lebanon and Syria.[436]

The British and French, however, colluded with a set of secret arrangements divvying up the region even before the conclusion of the war. With the secretive Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916, French and British ministers arranged to divide

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[435] See María del Mar Logroño Narbona, "The Making of a Lebanese Pan-Arab Nationalist in the Argentine Mahjar," in *Politics, Culture and the Lebanese Diaspora*, ed. Paul Tabar and Jennifer Skulte-Ouaiss (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 228–44.

[436] "William Edward Davidson to George Curzon," March 6, 1919, TNA: FO 608/106/10302.

greater Syria into spheres of influence. Outcry was fierce when details of the meetings surfaced in public. The arrangement became further complicated by growing fear that the Balfour Declaration not only called for a Jewish state in Palestine, but that if such an arrangement came to pass, it would only lead to an inevitable partition of Palestine from Syria.[437] With the possibility of separate Lebanese and Palestinian settlements, greater Syria seemed like a lost cause. A number of petitioners hoped that the British and American governments would either come together, or at the very least, individually maintain a Greater Syrian confederacy with a semi-autonomous Lebanon as a constituent member.

No pan-Syrian proposal other than Faisal's gained much momentum during the peace process. Competing factions made it possible that only two major political options would remain open to all involved: either greater Syria would remain intact, or Lebanon must become independent. Mahjar Syrians the world over united to support postwar proposals. The conflict between the two camps rippled across the diaspora. Members of one U.S.-based community questioned the integrity of religious leadership in Aleppo. On behalf of the Arab Union Committee of Boston, Muhammad Rustum Haydar, a descendent of Shi'ite parents and member of the British/Hashemite camp at Paris, implored the British Foreign Office to intervene against Maronite Patriarch Elias Howayek (Figure 9) and the pro-French faction.

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[437] Shorrock, *French Imperialism in the Middle East*, 6.

The Patriarch of Antioch supported the plan to establish an independent Lebanon at the conference in Paris.[438] Supporters of the independent Lebanon movement based their arguments in a separate Lebanese national narrative, one predicated in part on the 1860 Druze massacres visited on Maronite Christians in Mount Lebanon, which had initiated French intervention in the region. Howayek stood at the vanguard of the movement.

Figure 9: "Patriach Elias Howayek," *The Syrian World* **6, no.5 (January 1932)**

Howayek had been a controversial figure during World War I. Turkish authorities in Syria under regional wartime administrator and Secretary of the Navy, Jamal

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[438] "Jacob Nemer to Muhammad Rustum Haydar," May 20, 1919, TNA: FO 608/106/10796.

Pasha, had aimed to remove Howayek from his position with the justification that he was a revolutionary undermining the Empire's local sovereignty. As we have seen in Chapter 1, regional autonomy had been a long-standing phenomenon in Ottoman Syria. During the war, the Turkish administration redefined local rule as treason. After suffering wartime political setbacks, Howayek had designs to protect the shrinking Maronite minority in the Mount Lebanon region under the auspices of Catholic French protection. The patriarch's position aligned with long-term French interests centered on protecting religious minorities in Mount Lebanon, a role the French government claimed dated back to the mutasarrif settlement of the 1860s.

Howayek was a respectable and integral figure within Syrian American communities, however. He had maintained considerable influence in the Maronite communities of New York and Buenos Aires, specifically, having overseen the formation of the regional diocese in each city. In a letter to the new Secretary of State of Foreign Affairs, George Curzon, on behalf of "Syrian Arabs," Rustum Haydar asked Curzon to stand firm against pro-French attempts to undermine the proceedings of the Peace Conference. The International Committee called to establish an Arab state in the Middle East.[439]

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[439] "Arab Union Committee to Rustum Haydar," May 20, 1919, TNA: FO 608/106/10796.

The New Syria National League of New York, meanwhile, expressed concerns over rumors that French forces were mobilizing to occupy Syria, and supported a British-backed regime under Prince Faisal, the Hashemite Arab from the Hejaz, who had previously helped lead the campaign against the Ottomans in Arabia during the war. The organization claimed to represent the mass of Muslims in Syria, who comprised a majority of the population that would stand against French intrusion. The New Syria National League also maintained connections with the Syrian community in Egypt through the Kalaf brothers. Nesib Kalaf functioned as the mouthpiece for "undivided" Syria in the U.S., while his brother Najeeb operated in Mansurah, Egypt, and relayed information from the like-minded Syrian Moderate Party in the east.[440] Ultimately, the Hejaz Committee provided a British alternative to the French Mandate. If numerous mahjar political committees could not control the situation in Paris, perhaps they could affect some change by returning to their sending society.

An American Mandate also seemed to be a real possibility following the King-Crane Commission's 1919 report on Syria, which gauged pro-British and American sentiments among the region's Sunni majority in the hinterland. Wilson envisioned the commission as an endorsement on the local populations' desire for self-determination, but commissioners found support for U.S. oversight among

[440] "New Syria National League Statement, 'Syria for the Syrians, Independent and Undivided Under American Guardianship,'" April 7, 1919, TNA: FO 608/106/12277.

local populations throughout the regions of former Ottoman control. Nevertheless, American support for direct intervention in the Middle East withered on the vine when the Senate, which had recently come under control of isolationist-minded Republicans headed by Henry Cabot Lodge, blocked similar designs for American mandates in Kurdistan and Armenia proposed by Wilson in the spring of 1920.[441]

The political activists who formed the Syrian Congress framed the last attempt to create a Greater Syria during the postwar political vacuum. Eighty-six men from throughout the region came together at the Syrian Congress, beginning in 1919, in an attempt to maintain political unity across the former Ottoman Middle East. The French governing authorities in the region condemned another thirty-two pro-unity "conspirators" to death.[442] Members of the Syrian Congress traveled to Damascus from throughout greater Syria, in regions situated in present-day Jordan, Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey. They represented a diverse ethnic and religious leadership that aligned Shiite, Druze, and Christian factions, among other smaller sects. The movement also drew Arabs hoping to prevent Palestine from becoming a Jewish state under British Mandate. Al-Nādi al-ʿArabī (the Arab Club) of Palestine threw its support behind the Pan-Syrian movement and Syrian

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[441] Paul C. Helmreich, *From Paris to Sèvres: The Partition of the Ottoman Empire at the Peace Conference of 1919-1920* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1974), 28–30.

[442] "Lt. Colonel Easton to General Headquarters Middle East in Cairo," October 10, 1920, TNA: FO 141/446/1, document CR7402.

Congress.[443] The political organization aimed to keep Palestine within a larger Syrian confederation, whatever the coalition's ultimate aims may have been. As a united front, the members of the Syrian Congress presented the one remaining opportunity for realizing the geo-political dimensions of Greater Syria. The movement had transnational dimensions as well. George Sawaya wanted to represent the diaspora wing of the Greater Syria movement in the Americas from his home in Buenos Aires.[444] However, the program was doomed to a short life, at least initially.

Attempts to build a lasting greater Syrian nation-state were ultimately crushed by European imperial forces. In March of 1920, the Syrian Congress declared Emir Faisal King of Greater Syria. The following month, the postwar victors essentially confirmed the Sykes-Picot arrangement of 1916 at the peace conference at San Remo. French and British representatives divided former Ottoman domains into French and British spheres of influence. France took control of the four major cities of Homs, Hama, Aleppo, and Damascus, which they would redefine as the western frontier between Mandate Syria and modern Turkey and Lebanon.[445] French forces had arrived in Lebanon as British forces began military

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[443] Mark A. Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 221.

[444] Logroño Narbona, "The Making of a Lebanese Pan-Arab Nationalist in the Argentine Mahjar," 233.

[445] Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire*, 247–50.

evacuations from the area, a process they completed by the end of 1919. After taking possession of the region, the French military and intelligence corps quickly rooted out any Syrian revolutionaries or anti-French elements. Gouraud's forces outnumbered the united Syrian forces three to one, and promptly won a decisive victory at Maysalūn Pass in July 1920, which effectively ended the period of Greater Syria.[446] The Faisal experiment and all the designs of a free Syrian or Arab state had quickly risen and fallen. Within a period of five years, European empires had shifted their interpretations of Syrians from "alien friend" during the war with Turkey, to imperial subversives in the interim, and eventually settled on framing Syrians as not quite advanced in terms of civilization and in need of imperial guidance before they could attain independence.

The territorial, ethnic, and religious diversity of the pro-Syrian faction suggests that imperial desires increased fissures within the larger pan-Syrian movement, rather than preventing regional rivalries, as the European imperial rhetoric claimed. The imperial calculus relegating Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Transjordan, and Mesopotamia to the status of League of Nations Mandates created, as American President Wilson exclaimed, a land grab among postwar victors. Peacetime political maneuvering also produced reverberations within the Middle East and on the international stage. New categories of Mandate governing

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[446] Gooch, "'Building Buffers and Filling Vacuums': Great Britain and the Middle East, 1914-1922," 258–60.

structures categorically situated former imperial possessions into European protectorates. Ottoman possessions in the Middle East were subject to League governance, just as other colonial spoils in Africa and the Pacific came under international rule.

The victorious allies used the Versailles Conference as an official seal of approval to gobble up and divvy out among themselves the former German and Ottoman domains piecemeal. France and Britain took major territorial concessions in Cameroon, Tanganyika, and Togoland in Africa as "Class B Mandates." The League of Nations considered these regions slow to political development, and of lower status than the Class A, or former Ottoman, territories. Class A territories were characterized as advanced societies, but not quite eligible for self-rule. Mandatory governments undermined Wilson's calls for national self-determination in the areas that were formerly the imperial peripheries of wartime enemies. Requiring European oversight suggested that Syrians, as a whole, could not be considered members of the highest echelons of civilization. In racial terms, they were not on equal status with Europe, or even to Japan as a number of elites had previously attempted to claim. The Japanese Empire had also benefited from the post-war settlement, receiving Mandates in the Pacific. Syrians were not ready for nationhood, and they were "not quite white."[447] The European powers more easily

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[447] See Matt Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006). While Wray employs the phrase "not quite white" to

classified African and Pacific regions as non-white, and consequently unfit for self-government. Differentiating between Class A and B mandates suggested a division between the Middle East, Africa, and Pacific islands, but in reality, each region was subjected to the encroachment of European imperialism in practice.[448]

The political situation in Syria was as much about migrant movement as it was about international politics. Concerns over postwar return migration to the Middle East emerged when British officials sought a solution to twenty-five Assyrians in Mexico seeking return to Baghdad. Authorities noted that British standards for granting travel papers had been, up to that point, too strict. French and Italian agents were granting passports with relative nonchalance compared to their British counterparts, an attitude that enabled some former Ottoman subjects to easily travel back to their regions of origin, but would also have profound implications on postwar settlement in the region.[449] British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour noted that this peculiar circumstance had dissuaded Jews, Syrians, and Arabs from applying for passports through official British channels, and to instead seek succor from "other Allied Powers" who were more willing to provide the appropriate documentation upon request.[450] The British government still

describe poor rural whites in the US, I expand the term to incorporate "white" racial types on the periphery of Western civilization and its related cultural archetypes.

[448] Helmreich, *From Paris to Sèvres*, 26–27.

[449] "Grant of Passports to Individuals of Ottoman Nationality," April 26, 1919, TNA: FO 608/106/8376.

[450] "George Curzon to Alfred Balfour," April 24, 1919, TNA: FO 608/106/8376.

regarded Ottoman nationals broadly as "enemy subjects," and only considered passport applications on a case-by-case basis. Balfour, however, expressed his willingness to concede issuing passports to former Ottoman subjects in Middle Eastern regions controlled (or to be controlled by) British forces, a determination that would concentrate British attention on the Mesopotamian region and Palestine rather than Syria and Lebanon.[451]

The British consulate in Mexico City petitioned the Foreign Office on the question on how migrants could apply for Jewish nationality in Palestine following petitions from the local Jewish Mexican population about returning to the Middle East. Consulate-General Norman King reported a situation where French consuls in Mexico City and New York were freely offering passports to "Palestine Jews," or Jews who had previously migrated from Ottoman Syria, in an attempt to undermine British authority in the formerly Ottoman region.[452] France used its consulates in the U.S. and Mexico as propaganda centers spreading the French plan for postwar settlement in the Levant. France guaranteed protection to Syrians wherever they resided, and adopted a policy allowing consuls to give conditional passports where Syrians agreed to French protection. They refused passports to travelers returning to Syria unless they signed a statement supporting French

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[451] "Louis Mallet to George Curzon," May 1, 1919, TNA: FO 608/106/8376.

[452] "Consulate General of Mexico City Norman King to George Curzon," March 20, 1919, TNA: FO 608/106/9288.

protection in the region. British authorities recognized that the newly revealed French policy would effectively create a pro-French political bias in Syria.[453]

In response, the British Foreign Office sent a broad set of instructions to British consuls in Guatemala, Caracas, Bogota, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Santiago, Lima, Quito, and La Paz on the issue of passport controls. Passports were to be offered to "Syrian Arabs and Palestinian Jews" or "friendly natives of occupied Turkish territory" on an individual basis. Authorities were to issue passports only for the course of a single voyage. The new British regulations in the Americas did not necessarily open the door for easier or large-scale transnational movement.[454] While these passport regulations aimed to counterbalance French policies intended to make Lebanon independent from larger Syria, they also set into motion debates over the parameters of Syrian identity and nationality. Following the Lausanne Conference of 1922-23, the Ottoman Empire with all of its capitulations and complicated religious arrangements, had officially ended. Residents in (and migrants from) former Ottoman Syria would have to select a new national identity aligning with the successor states of the Empire. Would they take

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[453] "Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs George Curzon to Director of Intelligence Major General William Thwaites," March 20, 1919, TNA: FO 608/106/9288.

[454] "Cypher Telegram from Foreign Office to Representatives at Guatemala, Caracas, Bogota, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Santiago, Lima, Quito, and La Paz," June 7, 1919, TNA: FO 608/106/12213.

a new French passport as a Lebanese or Syrian citizen? Would they claim to be a

citizen of Turkey, or seek a British passport from Iraq or Jordan?

CONCLUSION

By 1929, a full decade after the post-war settlements, the editors of *The Syrian World* had begun to accept the new status quo of the mandate system. The post-wart settlement had officially separated Syria and Lebanon into distinct quasi-nation-states. While an independent Syrian state had not materialized following the war, the situation could have been worse for the adherents of Greater Syria. The people may not have had a nation, but the nation had a people, and "the people" had expressed a racial identity. Working within the framework of the empire had proven beneficial to Syrian American businessmen and the Syrian racial mythology. The community's entrepreneurs had reaped vast rewards from transnational ventures in Madeira and the Philippines under the protection of the American flag. If the imperial situation could provide such material benefits in the mahjar, then perhaps it could prove useful as a protective veil in the mashriq.

Salloum Mokarzel's 1929 article in *The Syrian World* encapsulated the mahjar experience over the past decades. He wrote on the independence movements fermenting in Syria, Palestine, Haiti, and the Philippines. Mokarzel's elegant words introduced the reader to the possibility of a shared identity that presaged the coming age of alterity in the setting of decolonization. "The Syrians are Orientals. So are the Palestinians and the Haitians who are African Orientals, and the Philippinos [sic] who are Asiatic Orientals, and in the countries of all these peoples there are now disturbances and conflicts. Hauran only bides her time to make new demands

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and embark on new wars. Damascus seeths [sic] as a boiling caldon [sic]. In the Philippines there is unrest and unconcealed dissatisfaction. In Haiti there are strikes and bloody encounters."[455] Any sense of shared experience or identity among the "Orientals" stopped with their shared desire for eventual independence.

Mokarzel continued his piece by castigating the Haitian and Filipino decolonization movements. Empire, specifically American empire, provided discernible benefits. The United States had occupied Haiti since 1915 and the Philippines since 1898. According to Mokarzel, neither society had experienced anything but stability since. He derided their "perverted understanding of liberty," and denigrated their "demand for independence on the grounds of fanaticism and ignorance."[456] An independent society, whatever the cost or benefit of such, was not necessarily the "best" society. In a global system of clearly defined hierarchies and racial taxonomies, World War I had only proven that powerful states and races preyed upon the weak. The United States had proved in the aftermath of such a conflict that it was a benevolent nation that only sought to protect its neighbors from the gaze of the world's lascivious empires. Keeping out European empires was the raison d'être of the U.S. For Mokarzel, Haiti and the Philippines were the primary pieces of evidence that justified his argument that the U.S. was a truly

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[455] "Syrian and Palestine, Haiti -- Philippines," *The Syrian World* 4, no. 3 (November 1929): 42.

[456] "Syrian and Palestine, Haiti -- Philippines."

benevolent society. The U.S. had given each colony stability in a troubling world. Stability in a turbulent world trumped national destiny. National destiny would inevitably come to the fore, even if it had to experience a period of dormancy. In the end, Mokarzel admitted that mandates were the preferred system of governance for those societies unfit for full independence. While Filipinos and Haitians may not have realized the benefits of benevolent imperialism, Syrians could provide the evidence. Being a more advanced society, according to the metrics of Western civilization espoused at the Paris Conference, Syrians stood as guardians of the white race. In Mokarzel's estimation, mandate governments had proven to be effective forms of stable rule in Haiti and the Philippines just as they had proven to be in Syria and Lebanon.

The editors of the Syrian American magazine could not have chosen two finer examples to prove the benefits that American empire offered Syrian migrants. These two island colonies also proved to be on polar extremes of the Syrian migrant racial experience. In Haiti, Syrian commercial ventures and claims to racial whiteness threatened the status quo. Syrian successes in business threatened the viability of indigenous entrepreneurship, squeezing out local businessmen by integrating a transnational supply chain in the hands of Syrian migrants. Moreover, Syrian "whiteness" undermined the national narrative and structure of the black republic. As we have seen, in the cases presented in the preceding chapters, when Syrians were threatened with violence or expulsion in Haiti the United States

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intervened on their behalf. In the Philippines, Syrian entrepreneurs used the imperial school system as an avenue to attain cheap embroidered and lacework goods that they resold for high profits. Syrian American elites framed the Filipinos as ethnic patsies. Filipino labor filled the coffers of the New York City import-export firms. Filipino laborers in positions of subservience and social inferiority also justified the identity mythology of Syrian civilization and adventure. There was no masculine "Phoenician" adventurer, seeking spoils in faraway lands, without Filipino (or Madeiran, or Syrian for that matter) women's labor. When global capitalist operations opened Syria to the larger world market it also made travelling the world more accessible and quick. Syrian migrants settled and opened businesses in regions throughout the world. The boom and bust markets of modern capitalism also opened up new avenues for people to abuse one another, and it opened up avenues for people to use the disparity in financial position to justify their station in life. The Syrian American mythology was predicated on such sentiments.

The Syrian American experience was as exceptional as they proclaimed it to be. The mythology that rooted the Syrian people in the Phoenician epoch dovetailed perfectly into the story of America and the new global epoch of democracy and free trade. Like other Americans before them, echoed in the reverberations of the nation's mythological ethos, Syrians left their place of origin and redefined themselves in a new land. Only through hard work, self-reliance, and

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a hint of fate, could Syrian Americans (like all Americans) struggle to achieve their manifest destiny. If Syrians assimilated in America, they did so by pretending that the abuses practiced by the few made up for the apparent unfitness of the many. The success of the community's elites gave the community as a whole license to be American, more so than the invisible minorities that they had expunged from their collective memory in order to fabricate their racial narrative, whether those forgotten were Syrian, Madeiran, Filipino, or of any other extraction.

To borrow a term from Eric Goldstein, the "price of whiteness"[457] for Syrian migrants was staggering. Becoming white meant exploitation, whether the migrants were on the receiving end or accomplices to abusive business practices. Another price was exclusion. Syrian migrants faced being turned away or returned to their host society at a rate of nearly ten percent. Most of those turned away were suffering from trachoma or feared to have been carriers of the dreaded eye disorder. These examples provide a disturbing counterbalance to the pack-peddler narrative championed by the Syrian migrant intelligentsia.

While this dissertation provides insight into the Syrian diaspora of the past and how individuals within the diaspora conceived of Syria, it leaves many unanswered questions about the state of the region in the twenty-first century and beyond. As nebulous as Syria was at the turn of the twentieth century, it is again

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[457] See Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006).

disjointed at the turn of the twenty-first. The region has become the site of a long a bloody civil war that has spilled out into an international proxy war. What is Syria today? Is it a nation-state with clearly defined territorial boundaries and polities? Does the Alawite minority regime under Bashar al-Assad speak for all of the region's peoples? How could it when it also commits to bombing campaigns in the country's major cities, destroying even hospitals and homes. Who then can speak for the people? Al-Nusra Front or the assorted rebel groups? Perhaps even the so-called Islamic State?

If we are to take voices into account, then perhaps we should start with the individual voices that are scattered in a new diaspora, forced by the violence of the civil war to flee the war-torn region. As these Syrian refugees relocate into camps and sojourn in other nation-states in Europe and the Middle East, many voices within these host societies have expressed concern that they have opened their doors to backwards "terrorists" and "rapists." The pleas on both sides present a new set of social and cultural problems to resolve. It is my sincerest hope that this dissertation sheds light on the past legacy of Syrian migration, and that it may provide context, if not possible solutions, to the problems Syrians and their hosts face today.

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