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The Acquisition of Extra-Territorial Citizenship among Lebanese in Argentina

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Lorenzo Cañás Bottos[3] and Tanja Plasil[4]

As we finish writing this article in May 2022, Lebanon is undergoing general parliamentary elections. For the second time in history, Lebanese citizens living outside its territory are allowed to vote. A worldwide campaign led by different governmental as well as civil society organizations has resulted in a threefold increase in diaspora voter registration in comparison with the previous elections. Whereas in 2018 just under 80,000 persons had registered to vote, in 2022 this number climbed to a little over 225,000, or 6% of the total electorate (Dagher, 2022). The Lebanese diaspora has been formed by different migratory waves starting from the late 19th century, spreading throughout the world. For South America alone, rough estimates evaluate people of Lebanese descent at around 4 million in Brazil (more than in Lebanon itself), and 1 million in Argentina (Hage, 2021). Only a minority of these have retained or reobtained Lebanese citizenship. Despite the South American diaspora being one of the largest demographically, it had the lowest number of registered voters for both elections (as well as the lowest growth in participation between elections: 4,183 individuals in 2018 and 5,587 in 2022). The Lebanese diaspora in Argentina did not manage to achieve the threshold of a minimum of 200 registered voters to administer an overseas voting station in 2022.[5] Although we are not concerned here with a decrease in participation, this event presents us with the opportunity to examine the process of acquisition of extra-territorial citizenship among the descendants (of the second and third generation) of Lebanese immigrants to Argentina.

Bourdieu (1994) reminds us that thinking the state always runs the risk of being thought by the state, as most of our categories of thought are themselves the product of the state and inculcated through state institutions. Even more so when addressing concepts central to the constitution and consolidation of the modern state such as citizenship and nationality and its derivatives like national identification or national identity, and nation-state. These categories are themselves

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5 In 2018 the threshold was reached and a polling station opened.

the fundamental conceptual building blocks in state construction, and states themselves have been privileged actors in their definition, use, and even their conflation.

Our analysis is built upon a clear distinction between citizenship and nationality. We consider the former as a legal, contractual bond between a state and individuals, regulating rights and duties: what Brubaker (1992) calls "formal citizenship" and Joppke (2010) qualifies as "light citizenship." We appraise the latter as the subjective (but also collective) and emotional expression of belonging to an imagined political community. This community is imagined as both limited and sovereign (Anderson, 2006: 7). Both citizenship and nationality enact acts of closure and establish means and limits to the incorporation of outsiders. The nation-state requires these nations for purposes of legitimation, it acts on their behalf (Brubaker, 1992; Gellner, 1983). The state also legally and formally defines on which grounds citizenship is to be obtained and how nationality is to be built (through different institutions like public schooling and military service, census, cartography) (Anderson, 2006; Cañás Bottos, 2015; Gellner, 1983). Since it instils its own definitions of nationality and citizenship on its members, it is no surprise that in the eyes of the state, as well as of the citizen, the strong overlap between the nation and the citizenry might create the illusion of identity between them, bringing one to use the terms interchangeably. Furthermore, states often work towards demanding loyalty that is subjectively perceived as a duty to the extent that nationals might consider appropriate to die for their fatherland or "*dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*" as the Roman poet Horace would have it. This should not weaken the analytical distinction between these two concepts as they designate distinct but also interacting social processes at work that are worthwhile distinguishing analytically (Cañás Bottos, 2008a and b).

The sedentariness of the state (emerging from its territoriality) sets it at odds with human mobility of different types and scales, but this is particularly the case with international migration. The management of territorial borders regulating objects' and people's fluxes as well as the management of membership closure in the face of immigration are ways to cope with the challenge of human mobility into its territory. At the same time, the state resorts to extra-territorial citizenship when it considers the community it represents lies beyond the territory it controls (Cañás Bottos, 2015; Cook-Martin, 2013; FitzGerald, 2000; Brand, 2006; Pogonyi, 2018).

Here we are concerned with the different strategies states deploy for the construction of nationhood and citizenry in the context of immigration and emigration. In a first part, from the perspective of the receiving state, we track down how a state (Argentina), just after the process of territorial consolidation, proceeds to the imagination of a nation as a concrete ideological project, which is then transformed into citizenship through legislation and policy for the promotion of immigration. In a second part, we focus on sending states and examine the current extra-territorial citizenship in Lebanon in the light of numerary practices, as well as through the motivations of potential citizens to become Lebanese. We focus on heritage and horizon to

think citizenship practices as they relate to Levantine[6] immigrants to Argentina, their descendants, and the relationships established with modern-day Lebanon. We are particularly interested in the moment of transformation from foreigner to national and from non-citizen to citizen. Heritage and horizon frame our case in a broad sense as temporal orientations: heritage as a relationship to the past, whereas horizon suggests a relationship to the future, an aspiration that orients towards a particular action.

We begin by taking a snapshot from the end of the 19th century by exploring the migratory process from the Levant to Argentina. Within the context of Argentine state consolidation and nation building, we examine some of the structures that enabled the immigration, integration and transformation of Levantine immigrants into Argentine citizens and nationals, as well as the process of detachment from their homelands.

A second snapshot is taken at the beginning of the 21st century: while many descendants of Lebanese immigrants in Argentina have lost connection to the land of their ancestors, there is a small but active group that locates its heritage in Lebanon and Lebanese culture, and for whom achieving extra-territorial citizenship offers a future horizon. This is accompanied by a campaign sponsored by Lebanese organizations to promote the acquisition of citizenship for the descendants of Lebanese emigrants. In short, we show how different configurations and evaluations of heritages and horizons are set to play by different actors in the long intergenerational process of loss and re-acquisition of citizenships and nationalities.

This article is based on a one-year period of ethnographic fieldwork carried out during 2014 in several Argentinean cities and rural villages (including Buenos Aires, Rosario, Mendoza, Tucuman, Salta, Santiago de Estero). We took part in festivals, meetings, church services, events, cultural performances and private gatherings. We interviewed close to a 100 people in mostly individual interviews lasting between one and four hours. We handed out questionnaires during the annual youth meetings of descendants of Lebanese immigrants in the cities of Rosario and Tucuman (fifty-two respondants) and we analysed official statistical and legal sources in Buenos Aires. Since our fieldwork we have been following several online forums of the Lebanese diaspora in Argentina via Facebook and other social media channels.[7]

Building a Nation of Immigrants

Argentina, like many "new world countries" shares a *settler colonialist* (Wolfe, 1999 and 2006) quality in its invention, imagination, legal constitution, and concrete formation. After its independence from the Spanish Crown in 1816, the settler colonialist ambition was militarily

6 We use the term Levantine to refer to populations coming from territories of contemporary Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel and Palestine before their consolidation and independence.

7 A follow up fieldwork was planned for 2020 but had to be cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

expressed in the Conquest of the Desert of the 1870s, which added vast territories (which the Spaniards had previously not obtained) wrestled from the hands of the indigenous populations. *Conquest of the Desert* is an oxymoronical misnomer with *conquest* implying a pre-existing population, whereas *desert*, denotes its absence, a variation of the *terra nullius* theme. The driving idea behind the conquest was to clear the land of previous, indigenous populations that were not perceived as a potential part of the nation, to then *colonize* the territories for immigrants that were meant to *settle* down and to form the new citizens of Argentina.

The Argentinean state used an active immigration policy, recruiting potential new citizens overseas in order to populate the country according to the predominant idea of "to govern is to populate" (Alberdi, 2005).[8] The imagination of the country as one of immigrants has been one of the main guiding fictions in the construction of the Argentine nation (Devoto, 2009; Schneider, 1996; Shumway, 1991) and it is juridically expressed in the preamble to the Argentinean constitution of 1853, which stated that the same rights would count "for us, our descendants and for all men in the world who wish to dwell on Argentine soil" (Constitution of the Argentine Nation, 1853). This openness towards immigration was paired with a clear vision of who these new citizens of Argentina should be. In article 25 of the Constitution, it is stated that "the government shall encourage European immigration."[9] These immigrants were to be actively procured with the sending of immigration agents to Europe, and supported in their journey to Argentina. However, not all immigrants were equally desirable building blocks of the new nation. Immigrant populations were unofficially hierarchized in order of preference, and some groups were seen as unwelcome:

> "Arabs fell outside the desirable category and thus posed a particular challenge because, while not banned from entering most Latin American countries until the late 1920s, they were also never expected to migrate." (Klich and Lesser, 1998: 6)

A government emissary of these times who had visited the Middle East described the latter unfavourably:

> "These people cannot get used to the heavy work that we need the immigrants for. They are weak and come from a race with different customs and beliefs." (Akmir, 2009: 17)

However, undesired as they might have been in the receiving country, immigrants from the Levant (today Syria and Lebanon) went to Argentina in large numbers.

Meanwhile, the citizenship law of 1869 (Congreso Nacional de la República Argentina, 1869) granted Argentine citizenship via *jus soli*, or after two years of residence, which could be shortened through the performance of special educational, industrial, economic, or military

8 Juan Bautista Alberdi was one of the architects of Argentina's first constitution of 1853.

9 This article promoting European immigration still exists in the constitution of 1994.

services to the nation. The prevalence of *jus soli* meant that offspring of those immigrants would immediately and automatically be considered citizens of the Republic. Juan Alsina repeatedly expressed his dissatisfaction with the low numbers of adults who underwent the process of citizenship acquisition (Alsina, 1900, 1910). Far from citizenship being a restrictive technology to enforce boundaries and to keep immigrants out, it was perceived as a tool for integration and nation making:

> "This is the doctrine that we Argentines uphold: assimilated immigration incorporated to the nation to participate in the duties as well as the rights of citizenship: in order for the nation to have a definite political character according to our representative, republican and federal regime and perfect cohesion; factual equality among all inhabitants; unity in patriotic feeling; public action under the same ideals, and in common agreement with the political ends proposed in the Constitution." (Alsina, 1910: 183)

This juridical incorporation into the legal body of the nation was accompanied by a strong emphasis on cultural assimilation and *Argentinization.* We can see here the state-promoted conflation of citizenship and nationality. The state pushed this assimilation strategy via the education system, transforming:

> "The elementary and secondary curricula into a nationalistic education emphasizing Argentinian history and geography, national civic duties, moral teaching based on the cult of Argentinian heroes, Spanish language and Argentinian literature." (Archetti, 1999: 33)

The main focus of the assimilation strategy was therefore not the immigrants themselves but their children (Alsina, 1910: 196) already citizens by virtue of *jus soli*, they now had to be made into Argentine nationals through the public schooling system and conscription.

From the Levant to Argentina – a Process of *Argentinization*

The territories now under the aegis of the Syrian and Lebanese states were ruled by the Ottoman Empire from 1516 to 1917, then by Allied Administration (French and British). Lebanon then became a French protectorate in 1920 until its independence in 1943.

Levantine emigration to Argentina began during the second half of the 19th century during the last decades of the Ottoman Empire, fleeing religious persecution and poverty. Official immigration summaries show that categories changed over time. Thus, we find categories like "Turcos," "Otomanos," "Arabes" or "Turcos y Otomanos en General" or "Griegos y Turcos" (Oficina Sectorial de Desarrollo de Recursos Humanos, n/d). Most immigration officers put the label "turco" on people from places as different as Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan and even Armenia. Given the fact that most immigrants entered with Ottoman papers this makes sense, still it was perceived as offensive by many immigrants who were now named after the people who had persecuted them. Even though the states of Lebanon and Syria gained independence half a century ago, the term "turco" is still used in Argentina today (for further

details on labeling see Cañás Bottos and Plasil, 2017 and 2021). This official categorization took hold also in everyday life and popular representation. Many of our research participants were referring to the "turco" label as being either offensive or the product of mere ignorance. The term "Sirio-Libanes" (Syrio-Lebanese) later took hold as a more appropriate term, although not without contestation as we will see later.

Quantifying the number of Lebanese immigrants based on immigration records is difficult, due to the lack of political continuity of sending entities, as well as issues of categorization and aggregation (Bestene, 1988). Between 1871 and 1976 the category "turco" registers 222,882 entries, and 109,681 exits, giving a balance of 113,201 (own calculations based on Oficina Sectorial de Desarrollo de Recursos Humanos, n/d). Bestene (1988) calculates a positive balance of 2,672 Lebanese for the period 1920-1950 (in 1920 the category Lebanese starts appearing in the Argentine records, two decades before its existence as an independent state).

Many future immigrants were convinced to undertake the journey by "*comisionistas*" (Akmir, 2009: 10) who travelled the countryside of Syria and Lebanon on a regular basis, convincing many to follow the call to the new world. Often, they were told that they would be brought to one destination and ended up at a completely different one (like Buenos Aires instead of New York, see also Akmir, 2009: 15). The journey was long, hazardous, and costly. We even heard of stories of ancestors missing a travel companion or relative in a stopover port, never to be seen again.

Many immigrants from the Levant had their names changed throughout the migratory process, as one of our research participants jokingly said: "*You entered the boat as Hussein and came off as Joaquin*." In addition to misspelling and misinterpretations of Arab names by immigration officers, there were multiple motivations behind active name changing like avoiding detection by Ottoman authorities or increasing possibilities of acceptance upon arrival. During our conversations, our research participants would often mention the original names of their ancestors. Some changes were literal translations into Spanish: "Haddad" became "Herrero" (blacksmith), "Habib" became "Amado" (loved one), and "Naim" was changed to "Estrella" (star). "Khouri" became translated as "Cura" (priest) or transliterated as "Juri." Meanwhile "Rajij" became "Ralli" and "Moujir" a very German-looking "Muller" (both owing to the way Argentines pronounce the double "l"). Some were named after their town of origin while others received completely arbitrary names:

> "*My last-name is Hanono, well, who knows... my grandfather came alone at the age of eight and that is what they called him*."

After a hazardous journey, renaming and registration in Argentina, Levantine immigrants were often met by stigmatization and rejection.

> "What was most probably a pre-existing racial prejudice fed into socioeconomic issues that could then be veiled as racial concerns, such that the factors of ethnic and economic threat became mutually reinforcing." (Civantos, 2006: 10)

Immigrants from the Levant were often viewed not only as racially inferior and religiously suspect, but also, they did not align with the labour profile expected at the time: agriculture. Most immigrants from the Levant opted to become small-scale merchants in the cities and peddlers in the countryside (*mercachifles*). From Buenos Aires and other commercial centres like Rosario, the Levantines moved all over the country, but especially in the North. Why would they move to the hot and arid North of the country? "*It looked like home*" some of our research participants half-jokingly told us. There are more explanations for this than geographical similarity. According to Bestene (1988), being latecomers in Argentina, they had greater chances to develop businesses and to flourish outside the already existing centres, where most of the more appealing economic and social positions were already taken by others.

Upon arrival, new immigrants were dependent on relatives or friends already living in the country as there was only limited State support. Immigrants helped each other by giving newcomers credit and supplies and teaching them to trade. Moreover, in the absence of state-run social services, immigrants co-created their own social/welfare institutions in the form of social clubs and immigrant associations (usually formed after their place of origin or religion). These provided education, healthcare, networking and job opportunities, mutual help, translation services and possibilities of linking with hometowns, etc. In Buenos Aires, one can still find the Colegio San Marón, Club Libanés, Hospital Sirio-Libanés, and Club Sirio-Libanés, to name a few. In the city of Rosario there are Orthodox and Melquite churches, the Colegio San Jorge, as well as the Casa Libanesa. These organizations were formed originally along regional lines with certain degree of ecumenism in religious terms. However, as Klich shows, local organizational life was not isolated from social processes in the origin countries:

> "As in other parts of Latin America, the atmosphere of harmonious coexistence between Argentina's Jews from Arab countries and their Christian and Muslim counterparts, as well as between the latter two and the larger Ashkenazi-dominated Jewish community inevitably became an early casualty of the Arab-Israeli wars." (Klich, 1998: 2)

As a consequence of these wars, the religious cleavage took precedence over commonalities related to culture and place of origin, many Mizrahim (Oriental) Jews left the "Arab" associations to join Jewish ones. Lastly, the function of these associations and clubs has changed through time as their members became assimilated into society and some of their original functions became obsolete or were covered by the national and provincial state. Their focus is now that of preservation and promotion of heritage.

This focus on heritage is recent. Even though over time Levantine immigrants integrated and were assimilated in the Argentine society (like other immigrant groups), initially they had to overcome many hardships and prejudices. During our fieldwork, we heard many stories of Syrians and Lebanese being ridiculed for their heavily accented Spanish. Being "turco" was seen as a burden by many, and one strategy for assimilation was the refusal to teach Arabic language to the new generation to avoid the generational transmission of stigma. This process of a-culturation and assimilation was also sped up by the fact that most immigrants were young

men who then took local wives or wives from different immigrant groups, further reducing the possibilities of the transfer of Arab language or culture to their children (this is confirmed by the masculinity ratios of available statistics, own calculations but also see Bestene, 1988). Many of our older research participants told us that when they were children, they were embarrassed to be seen together with their relatives wearing traditional clothes. Furthermore, many originally Orthodox or Maronite Christians sent their children to Catholic schools and attended mass in Catholic churches "*because it was easier to just go to the Catholic church around the corner*." One of our research participants told us:

> "*And there is the bad side of the cultural story — in the beginning they were not accepted, they were seen as 'bichos raros'*[10] *due to their language and names and therefore the language was not transmitted. My father spoke Arabic at home until he went to school, but once they went to school they got integrated in Argentine society and culture and lost their language. It was not per se seen as bad but the majority was Italian and Spanish with a related language and so the Arabs were seen as 'bichos raros'*."

The same was true for many immigrant groups as Scobie (1964: 134-135) describes:

> "Ironically, however, the children of these immigrants, who dreamed so longingly of Europe, violently rejected the European connections. Although citizens by the fact of their birth in Argentina, psychologically they needed to assert their 'Argentinism'. They consequently sought to shed all traits, which could link them to the foreign land. Sometimes they even refused to speak their parents' tongue."

In other words, the State, with its strong emphasis on assimilation together with a discriminatory public opinion, led the descendants of Syrians and Lebanese to adapt as quickly as possible. The citizenship acquired by *jus soli* had to be followed up by the incorporation of a certain national identity. The horizon of Argentinianness thus depended on the abandonment of ancestral heritage.

However, despite occupying the lower ranks of immigrant desirability, many Syrians and Lebanese managed to climb up the social ladder through commerce, politics, the armed forces and the diplomatic ranks (Jozami, 2002). The best-known example of this is probably Carlos Saul Menem (1930-2021), the son of a Syrian immigrant, who became Governor of the province of La Rioja, National Senator, and then President of the Republic (1989-1999). However, to reach the presidency, he had to convert to Catholicism, as until 1994 it was a requirement for holding that office. Nonetheless, he was buried in the San Justo Islamic cemetery, next to his son.

We have shown how the immigration process was linked to the generational shedding of cultural heritage in order to assimilate and eventually succeed in upward social mobility. In the

10 Lit. strange bugs.

next paragraph we will look into how Lebanese immigrants' descendants are rediscovering and re-evaluating their heritage, which becomes a new horizon.

Being Lebanese, from Lost Heritage to Horizon

Throughout our fieldwork we encountered a broad spectrum of positions vis-à-vis Lebanese ancestry: from ignorance, indifference, mild curious interest, different degrees of involvement in Lebanese-oriented cultural activities, to desire and obtention of citizenship. For a long time, Syrians and Lebanese shared (and many still do) many institutions and clubs (examples are the Club Sirio-Libanes or the Hospital Sirio-Libanes in Buenos Aires). This, however, started to change during and after the Lebanese civil war (1975 to 1990) and the subsequent occupation of Lebanon by Syria. Today, descendants of Lebanese immigrants who have become actively engaged in rediscovering their Lebanese heritage, and transforming it into a horizon, chose sides and identify themselves as Lebanese rather than Syrio-Lebanese. Many participants in Lebanese organizations see FEARAB (Federation of Argentine Arab Entities), which coordinates a variety of associations in Argentina, as a Syrian-sponsored entity. Several of our research participants went to great lengths to explain the differences between themselves and "Arabs," claiming heritage from the ancient Phoenicians, although this was also contested and moderated. A participant and leader in different organizations of Lebanese orientation in Argentina explained to us:

> "*What happened is that at the JUCAL*[11] *there was a group that denied being Arab […]. 'We are Phoenicians, we are Phoenicians' […] they would say. And I was telling them: 'you are inserting yourself in a debate from the 1950s. This debate took part in Lebanon in the 1950s, 1960s'. I will not tell you I am an Arabist because that is a debate from the 1970s […]. We belong to a regional space, and the preamble to the Lebanese constitution states 'Lebanon is an Arab state in identity and association'. […] We like to say we are different, we have to defend our sovereignty from Syrian aggression, as well as Syrian discourse that speaks of a Great Syria […] and then sometimes I go talk with the youth of the Syrian club and they tell me: 'You are an invention of the French.' Granted, the French delineated our borders, but you cannot deny that Lebanon has been a refuge for the Druze and for the Maronites from the 1,500 onwards. We have a different identity, but we are not something completely different. We are not extra-terrestrials.*"

The main significant other, against which boundaries are drawn, is Syria. A boundary which is compounded by the geopolitical situation and fear of being conquered. Meanwhile highlighting or downplaying cultural differences as well as claims of discrete or common origins, follow the ebb and flow of larger processes with roots beyond Argentina. A member of the Lebanese foreign service commented on the complexity of the institutional landscape in Argentina and their internal fights (which also complicated the consulate work towards the citizenship

[11] Juventud de la Union Cultural Argentino Libanesa, the Argentine youth branch of the WLCU-World Lebanese Cultural Union, see below.

campaign). Furthermore, as Skulte-Ouaiss and Tabar (2014: 146) observe for the Lebanese diaspora in the US, Canada and Australia, divisions in Lebanon are often adopted and amplified in the diasporas. Lebanese associations are also quite varied in origin and orientation:

> "*My father was president of the Asociación Unión Islámica de Rosario during the 1980s. That was strange, a Druze as president. There were plenty of Druze that were involved in the Unión Islámica because they could not find their place in the Sociedad Libanesa de Rosario. If you check the list of members of the Sociedad Libanesa de Rosario in 1928, you will find that the great majority are Christians. So, a bit in opposition to the Sociedad Libanesa and the Club Argentino Sirio that was also Christian because it was integrated by people from Homs, a Christian city, they built the Unión Islámica to group the remainder, the pariahs. During the 1980s-1990s things changed and the Lebanese that were in the Unión Islámica migrated to the Sociedad Libanesa and integrated themselves to that institution… my father was later treasurer of the Sociedad Libanesa… At some point Saudi Arabia funded the maintenance of the building of the Unión Islámica, but not long ago they left them on their own. I don't know what is happening there now.*"

Even a cursory look at a handful of institutions reveals how alternating lines of cleavage are used to define participation in an institution (at some point a religious contrast is brought to the surface, while nationality might be brought at another time). There is also a parallel constructed between language of "migration" and "integration" to mark institutional change in a way comparable to migrating between countries. This shows their insertion in global networks involving different competing states looming on the horizon. There are also agglutinating international organizations. At the time of our fieldwork there were two "World Lebanese Cultural Unions." One run by the Lebanese ministry of foreign affairs which is usually led by Muslims, the other was an independent Christian one. Both had local branches in Argentina as well as youth sections.

As mentioned above, the social clubs and youth organisations had to reorient their activities to survive. No longer centred by their former mission of offering practical help to support an immigrant community of shared origin in a foreign land, they evolved to provide and promote arenas for the development and practice of Lebanese cultural heritage. To give a concrete example, the Sociedad Libanesa in Rosario hosts an Arab restaurant, a banquet hall, a barbeque restaurant, a Lebanese folkloric dance school that includes dance teacher training, Arabic language courses, football championships for children and youth (they have a small football pitch in their backyard). They host the CAIIL (Centro Argentino de Investigación sobre la Inmigración Libanesa, Argentine Research Centre for Lebanese Immigration) which organizes cultural events as well as aiding in the citizenship campaign. At the time of our fieldwork, they hosted the local beauty pageant to select the Argentine representative that would participate in the "Miss Lebanon Emigrants", joining representatives of different countries of the diaspora in Beirut, which was also transmitted via MTV. They are also regular hosts of the national meetings of UCAL (Union Cultural Argentino Libanesa, local branch of WLCU), and the "Encuentro Nacional de Formación" (the national meeting of leaders of JUCAL). They organize guided tours to Lebanon trying to visit the ancestral towns of those participating. They

also participate as representatives of the immigratory "collectivity" in a variety of activities organized by the government of the city of Rosario to celebrate diversity like "Fiesta de las colectividades," or "La noche de las colectividades." During our fieldwork it was a privileged place for social interaction, networking and participation. We could see parents bringing their children to different activities, having a coffee and *nargileh* (water pipe) with friends (and researchers) or attending one of the many meetings of the different commissions. With different types of activities for the different age groups, the club had become a buzzing hub that captured people's free time in a family-friendly environment surrounded by Lebanese iconography and orientation (the hanging flag, a bronze cedar plaque made from old keys donated by members, posters of Lebanon, etc.).

Despite the variety of potential activities, food and dance are the two most common practices promoted by the associations and are also the ones that attract the most attention and participation. They provide important revenue streams while broadening their public exposure. A few community leaders told us about their frustration when faced with the reduction of heritage to just food and dance, and about the challenges of going beyond food and dance:

> "*What we try with the youth club is to get the young to value the history of their grandparents. If you just come here to dance at one point you will get tired of it and at some point, the food will be boring as well, but this all changes once you know the power of your grandparents. What they did does not have a price, what they lost is an obligation for us all. Loving our roots makes us better Argentines.*"

The argument chains magical thinking through blood ties, moral duty towards ancestors' deeds and affective reasoning to pre-empt exclusivist nationalist narratives. This seems in line with the results of our survey. In our questionnaire we asked people to connect Lebanon and Argentina to words that came to mind. Lebanon was associated with origin (*origen*), blood (*sangre*), roots (*raíces*), desire (*deseo*), heart (*corazón*) and love (*amor*) while Argentina was connected to fatherland (*patria*), nationality (*nacionalidad*), land (*tierra*) and birth (*nacimiento*); the word pride (*orgullo*) was used for both. Here one can see that while the perception of Lebanon was one of heritage, nostalgia and love — citizenship by blood (*jus sanguinis*) — Argentina stood for the nation and the fatherland — citizenship by birth (*jus soli*) — and that respondents were proud of both. The sentiments for one country are not exclusive or contradicting with sentiments for the other. Furthermore, they mirror the logic of attribution of citizenship by each of the states. These same themes are articulated by one of our research participants:

> "*Where does Argentina enter in me as being Lebanese? I tell you this: my father was born in Lebanon, he decided to become Argentine, he saw it as land of opportunities, he loved Argentina and he died here. I have these two things — I cannot deny my Lebanese blood, I am of Lebanese blood — I have absolutely Lebanese blood, inside me there is no gram of Italian or German, nothing [...] so I have a strong bond with the place my grandparents came from, my name came from, my face, my tastes, etc. […] So, today I feel absolutely Argentine and absolutely Lebanese, which is not a contradiction.*"

First, we have to acknowledge the common conflation between nationality and citizenship, even to the point where the mode of citizenship attribution is mirrored in the mode of national self-identification. Indeed, this respondent displays two main accepted principles in the grammar of nationality and citizenship: place of birth and blood (*jus soli* for Argentina, *jus sanguinis* for Lebanon). The claim of non-contradiction of absolute belongings evidences an awareness of the exclusivism often demanded by nationalist narratives (although not in the cases discussed here). In short, the survey and this interview fragment evidence an alignment between the citizenship principles and articulations of feelings of identity.

In one of our surveys we brought to the Lebanese organizations, we asked if people had or would like to obtain Lebanese citizenship. Of a total of fifty-two respondents, thirteen had already obtained it, thirty-tree did not have it yet but would have liked it or were in the process of obtaining it, six were not interested. Only people affiliated with a local Lebanese club and therefore more interested in the possibility of citizenship than most others filled in the questionnaire. It is however clear that the acquisition of citizenship is an objective of those who partake in the activities of the associations. It is now time to explore the social and legal context of possibility for Lebanese extra-territorial citizenship.

From Lebanese State Formation to Extra-territorial Citizenship

Before examining Lebanese citizenship adoption by Argentines of Lebanese descent, we provide a brief contextualization of citizenship practices in Lebanon and how the Lebanese state was built. Lebanese citizenship was defined by the Decree Number 15 of 1925[12], while Lebanon was under French protectorate. Article 1 establishes attribution of Lebanese citizenship via both *jus sanguinis* (but only via paternal line) and *jus soli* (provided the incumbent had not acquired another citizenship, or that the nationality of parents is unknown). Articles 5, 6 and 7 are then dedicated to the different conditions under which women may obtain, lose, and regain citizenship due to marriage. Indeed, the possibilities of transmission of citizenship are unequally distributed between men and women. Whereas both can transmit it via marriage (combined with residence of one year in Lebanon) only men can transmit citizenship by descent. In article 3, which states the conditions for foreigners to naturalize and acquire Lebanese citizenship, there is no mention of the need to renounce their original citizenship. This means that since the diaspora by definition does not reside in Lebanon, the foreign citizenship of its members is no hindrance. It also means that they need to track and prove a direct male line of descent to a Lebanese citizen. In practice, this last point refers to a male individual registered in the 1932 census (see Maktabi, 1999).

12 Decree No 15 on Lebanese Nationality including Amendments [Lebanon], 19 January 1925. URL: https://www.refworld.org/docid/44a24c6c4.html

The National Pact of 1943 (which is undocumented) established a division of power according to confessional lines, where the President is to be Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of the house a Shia Muslim. Such division was an attempt at "translating" the confessional demographics of the 1932 census (the last one to date) to the sphere of institutionalized state power.

However, as Maktabi's (1999) analysis shows, this dominance was the result of how the Maronite ruling elite, lacking a demographic majority, played the numbers game to retain control. The Maronites succeeded in having the emigrant population registered in the census. Christians were overrepresented in the emigrated population, counting 20% of the total Lebanese citizenry, while non-Christians a mere 4% (Maktabi, 1999: 2337). Throughout the years, with higher emigration and lower reproduction rates, Christians saw their demographic weight under constant attrition.

Fast forward to the Lebanese civil war (1975-1989). The state lacked an effective monopoly of force, with militias associated roughly along communal and confessional lines but also subject to external forces and alliances. The participants were the Lebanese Front, a coalition of mostly Maronite Christian militias with support at different times from Israel and Syria (both states occupying Lebanese territories at some point); the Amal Movement, formed by Shia Muslims with support from Iran; the Lebanese National Movement, a combination of Sunni Muslims and the secular left in alliance with the Palestine Liberation Organization, and with support from Iraq, Libya, Syria, and the Soviet Union. Peace was achieved with the Taif Agreement of 1989. Some of the measures included the reduction of Christian political influence in the legislature, and by making the prime minister (Sunni) depend on the legislature instead from the president (Maronite Christian). It also dismantled the militias which became political parties.

In 2015, a law (Law 41) was approved in Lebanon, providing a framework for securing citizenship, while imposing a ten-year time window (until 2025) for accepting emigrants' citizenship claims. This set up a race to recruit citizens from the diaspora. To acquire Lebanese citizenship, one has to prove he/she descends from a patrilineage stemming from a man registered in the 1932 census. This perpetuates the androcentrism of the 1926 citizenship law. Regional attribution of votes is done according to the geographical registration of the family in the census, and not according to current registered residence of the citizen. Votes from the diaspora, are therefore linked to the constituency of origin of the direct male ancestor registered in the census. It is with this background, that the current overseas citizenship campaign must be understood, as a continuation of the "numbers game."

The International Recruitment Campaign

Since about 2011, the Maronite Foundation in the World has been actively promoting citizenship among the descendants of Lebanese emigrants through social media, and personal meetings making use of churches, as well as governmental and local immigrant organizations.

It also provides help and guidance during the citizenship acquisition process. A well-informed research participant mentioned that some of the Argentine-based organizations successfully campaigned to the Lebanese government to appoint an ambassador who would prioritize the citizenship campaign. This was the sole instance of potential influence that the Lebanese diaspora in Argentina had over Lebanon that was mentioned (for a comparative analysis of influence of the diaspora in Lebanon see Skulte-Ouaiss and Tabar, 2014).

The documentation the Maronite Foundation offers through its webpage highlights the benefits for the applicant[13]. Its opening letter reads: "Dear Lebanese around the world, Good greetings from the land of your ancestors, from the land of our Majestic Cedars" and ends "This is not a marketing or commercial solicitation of any kind and is totally free to you." The documents are available in English, Spanish, Portuguese and French, but not in Arabic. The document on benefits is divided in five sections: "Business and Financial Rights," "Personal Advantages," "Consular Rights," "Social Rights" and lastly "Political rights." Notice the ordering, which is also accompanied by a decreasing space dedicated to the enumeration of said rights, thus business and financial rights occupy a whole page, whereas social and political rights share the last half-page among them. The business and financial rights include the characterization of Lebanon as a fiscally desirable place. Even the section on "personal advantages" is entirely of financial nature: "Capitalize your entrepreneurial rights to establish businesses or own properties in your homeland, Lebanon." Then are listed the rights to invest, own property, benefit from free-trade agreements between Lebanon and many Arab countries. It is interesting that the group most insistent on the Phoenicianness and non-Arabness of Lebanon, and that understands Lebanon as a Christian enclave entrenched in a hostile Arab world, then turns this connection into a potential financial opportunity. The Phoenician heritage, (which was repeatedly cited by our research participants as an essential part of their heritage, providing them both with an explanation for their mercantile orientation, as well as with a boundary with the rest of the Arab world) is embraced and brought to the modern world of global capital: Lebanese citizenship is presented as a means toward obtaining financial advantage.

In Argentina, FUNLAC (Fundacion Libanesa Argentina Cristiana) is the local organization in charge of the citizenship program. For the campaign, a Maronite priest, who holds a copy of the Lebanese 1932 census database, travels throughout Argentina recruiting potential citizens during self-organized meetings or community organized events. A veritable promoter of heritage, he also does what some have called "the detective work" of trying to find all the necessary links, retracing changes of nationality and confession, names and last names, until finding the direct male ancestor registered in the 1932 census. The FUNLAC website claims: "There are no risks nor drawbacks… To be a Lebanese citizen has only rights and benefits."[14] Afterwards they immediately clarify: "To obtain citizenship does not imply the obligation of

13 https://maronitefoundation.org/MaroniteFoundation/en

14 https://www.funlac.org.ar/docs/ventajas-y-derechos.php

having a Lebanese passport, therefore there are no risks when travelling abroad, like the United States or Europe." This pre-empts a potential post 9/11 based objection, a risk which was explicitly mentioned by our research participants who complained about having been treated like terrorists upon entering the United States. They also present a more personalized and intimate message, more in tune with the local conditions: one of knowing one's own roots, history and rights. This more intimate emotional aspect is what most of our research participants highlighted. Only a handful of our more than 100 research participants had any property in Lebanon, and even fewer expressed interest in considering a permanent move. Furthermore, the issue of a possible financial benefit was never mentioned. Its acquisition is rather seen with a sense of duty rather than pragmatism as one of our research participants explained:

> "*In 2001 [referring to the economic and political crisis in Argentina] the Spanish and Italians sought their citizenship not because of their roots or blood but because they wanted to go to Europe — that is logic and normal [...] but for us it is different — the region has great tribal, religious problems and problems for women — Lebanon is in a zone that is problematic. It is not strange that we want to have that kind of citizenship — we do not do it for comfort […] but today the quest for citizenship is mainly motivated by the Maronite Mission because, as far as I understand, the politics in Lebanon are confessional and religion is treated like the political fundament, so the Maronite Mission is not just looking for lost sons but it is a political question of the minority […] because before they were the majority and today not. So, their search for nationality among the diaspora has to do with this need […] it is for there not for here.*"

The contrast between the pragmatic, self-interested approach attributed to the acquisition of Spanish or Italian citizenship (attribution which is sociologically confirmed by Cook-Martin, 2013; González Bernaldo and Jedlicki, 2012), with the moral and affective reasoning behind the acquisition of Lebanese citizenship is also reflected in the language used. Whereas Lebanese mention "citizenship", based on a sense of duty towards the land of the ancestors, aiming at restoring a past demographic religious balance, for pragmatic applicants to double citizenship the aim is to "get an Italian passport" (Cook-Martin, 2013: 24) that would open up life possibilities in the EU. Furthermore, in this case, an additional passport is considered to be "just a paper" (Cook-Martin, 2013: 97), a representation which brings to mind what Joppke calls "citizenship light," a conception of citizenship as a resource having little subjective personal and affective load (2010). Moreover citizenship is reduced from membership in a political community with rights and duties, to the holding of an object that can secure easier travel and settlement in Europe.

This impression is aligned with FUNLAC's website which states: "To register as Lebanese Citizens allows us not only to meet our roots, but also to secure a multi-confessional country, with Christians and Muslims in equilibrium."[15] Besides, the lack of pragmatism enhances the

15 https://www.funlac.org.ar/docs/ventajas-y-derechos.php

symbolic value of the achievement. In many of our interlocutors we perceived a sense of pride in the acquisition of Lebanese citizenship. It was seen as a manifestation and public recognition of their own felt identity (not unlike the Hungarians analysed by Pogonyi, 2018) even a sign of their commitment to the plight of their ancestors. Concomitantly, on cases of highly involved individuals whose ancestry could not be verified, the disappointment was deeply felt, like the case of the following young woman:

> "*We tried but they did not find the family in the register — we went to the embassy last year and were working with XXX and are investigating the male line but we did not find them. […] It was such an anguish when we did not find them in the register and I spoke to [gives first name of the Ambassador], and then to XXX, the consul — and they did not find them. […] Then I searched for my grandfather on mother's side and the consul asked me why — and I told him: I know I cannot get citizenship. […] Even if I cannot get citizenship at least my uncles and cousins could get it. But we could also not find them. […] When I left the door XXX passed by and asked me: hey, what happened, you do not look well. and I said: No, I do not feel well because they could not find my family in the register. And I started crying*."

The previous excerpt shows the affective importance of citizenship evidenced in the anguish and crying, as well as in the (failed) attempt at securing citizenship for her relatives. The use of the ambassador and consul's first names signifies an attempt at demonstrating closeness in her personal relations with them. It also shows the consequences of the androcentrism of the 1926 citizenship law which is still carried on to the 2015 legislation on citizenship in Lebanon, as women cannot transmit citizenship to their children. In an interview we held with a member of the Lebanese foreign service, he unconvincingly answered that the female restriction was to limit claims to citizenship by refugees settled in Lebanon.

There is also an important number of people who, although they might participate in Lebanese oriented activities, are not interested in acquiring Lebanese citizenship. Some see it as an unnecessary competition for emotional ties with Argentine citizenship, as the leader of a non-Christian association told us:

> "*The double citizenship is a conflict for us — that is why the idea of the double citizenship does not work: there are way fewer [descendants] than what they say. […] Of the supposedly 4 million Arabs here, there are less than a 1,000 who have applied […]. The ambassador told me that I should take the citizenship, but for me it is a principle to not do it. I did not teach the Lebanese anthem to my children — they only need one anthem, one flag. [...] One thing is love, another is reality — they have to be loyal to just one, like a husband to his wife. […] This project [the citizenship campaign] is already there since 2011 and nothing [has come out of it]*."

Here we see a blend of issues behind the refusal to acquire Lebanese citizenship: From sectarian politics in Lebanon, to the process of integration into Argentina. The mentioning of the overinflated diaspora figures highlights the apparent negative results of the campaign. His principled position of a single nationality echoes exclusivist discourses of nationality as well as

Scobie's (1964) remarks on descendants' rejection of past ties as quoted above. However, there are also more nuanced grounds for rejections of citizenship:

> "*If you ask me now if I would like to travel to Lebanon? I do not know — it attracts me a lot, one day I will go. […] But like a few years ago I went to Europe and not to Lebanon, I wanted to go to Europe, not Lebanon […]. I came back, went to Brazil, not Lebanon […] the culture attracts me, not the country. […] Or like the people of FUNLAC now, who search for your family and all and search for the citizenship […] they asked me but I did not want to — I am not Lebanese, I am Argentine I am of this descendance — o.k. in reality I have four — the only passport I would like is the European one, to travel more freely in Europe, nothing more […] just a touristic question, not more, because I do not feel Spanish — except for Real Madrid which came from my grandfather, who was a fanatic, a member of the club. Other than that, nothing.*"

An interest in a culture does not necessarily translate into a feeling of belonging or interest in citizenship or the country, even with the recognition of descent. This challenges some of the community leaders that see the promotion of cultural activities as a means to generate increased interest in nationality and citizenship. However, for convenience sake the research participant quoted above would welcome "a passport" and furthermore "European" (neither citizenship nor nationality because he does not feel "Spanish"). He is not excluding inherited affections (he has got some for a football club), but they are not enough to trigger an interest in potential citizenship.

Throughout this section we have contrasted the multiple motivations of the descendants of Lebanese immigrants to acquire (or not) extra territorial citizenship with that of different governmental and non-governmental Lebanese and Lebanese-interest organizations. Whereas the former focused on an affective relationship towards heritage, the latter (especially Lebanon-based) insisted on the instrumental and pragmatic aspects of Lebanese citizenship.

When Heritage Becomes Horizon: The Shedding and Acquisitions of Citizenship and Nationality

Due to the territorialized nature of nation-states, human mobility across their territorial borders poses challenges to both the definition of the citizenry and the nation. We have shown some of the dilemmas that lie behind the translation into practice of abstract imagined nations. The invention and construction of the Argentine nation was based on a combination of settler colonialist and ideological melting pot projects that privileged immigration over pre-existing populations, and population from the European North over others. In Argentina, an explicit juridical and social program was deployed for the making of national subjects out of immigrants and their descendants. The centrality of immigration and assimilation for Argentina and its concomitant use of *jus soli* for the attribution of citizenship can be contrasted with the Lebanese genealogical practices expressed in *jus sanguinis* as a proxy for confessional orientation which was combined with numerary practices to sustain a multiconfessional equilibrium.

We have shown how, from the Argentine State perspective, the heritage of past citizenships and nationalities of immigrants were first hierarchized then misrecognized. What had already started during the migratory process with the changing of names, and misrecognition of group belonging, was followed by the practices of assimilation and integration, which led to a process of shedding of cultural heritage. For the descendants of the immigrants, Argentine citizenship is unproblematically ascribed through *jus soli* to be followed by cultural *argentinization*. The horizon of Argentinianness depended on the abandonment of ancestral heritage.

In contrast, it is precisely the heritage traced through the idiom of blood and genealogy (*jus sanguinis*) that the Lebanese state highlights as the requirement to become a citizen. The possibility of Lebanese citizenship for its diaspora is predicated on the demonstration of a genealogical link and on the previous existence of cultural identification that motivates this process. For those in the diaspora, to be able to translate those demands bureaucratically, requires the pre-existence of a strong motivation, of structures of feeling towards Lebanese heritage. The horizon of citizenship is only achievable through the rediscovery of heritage, as to go through the citizenship process, the applicant must trace his genealogy, document each linkage and recover his/her ancestors' original names, spellings and places of origin that were changed or erased in the migratory process: to build an "ethnic capital" (Mateos and Durand, 2012). However, we have found a lack of alignment between how citizenship was being promoted and the actual expectation of latent extra-territorial citizens. In most cases our research participants highlighted their motivations for obtaining citizenship more out of a personal quest, be it for connection, respect, or out of duty to ancestors, or some preference towards the Lebanese culture, that is, more due to a perceived heritage, than to the concrete civil rights and financial benefits that Lebanese citizenship might confer. While the Argentines of Lebanese descent were looking for an affective and ethnicized citizenship (in line with the *jus sanguinis* principle of Lebanese citizenship), the Lebanese based organizations were offering a "light," instrumental citizenship focused on financial benefits. It was the Argentine based organizations that highlighted the heritage and cultural aspects, as well as the contribution to the demographic composition of Lebanon. It was the search for confirmation of heritage and not the obtention of pragmatic benefits that the Lebanese diaspora in Argentina was looking for, when embarking on the recovery of citizenship. And in this process, their heritage became their horizon.

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