

Lebaneseness – a tool for business and social ascension

A large segment of the Brazilian population today is of Lebanese origin and is concentrated mainly in the economic hub of São Paulo. Comprising of several million individuals, this population was formed by successive waves of immigrants; the first dating back to the last quarter of the 19th century. It has experienced remarkable entrepreneurial success, and as a consequence has witnessed an outstanding sociological phenomenon of upward social mobility from within its ranks. Initially these people were a population of *mascates* (hawkers), who subsequently diverted their activities, in particular, to commercial entrepreneurship. Its members are now deployed, horizontally, in almost all fields of economic activity and, vertically, have climbed the ladder into the highest spheres of economic, social and even political life.

Today the Lebanese entrepreneurs of São Paulo, which are part of the local Lebanese collectivity, often claim and manifest their attachment to their *Lebaneseness* - which is defined as a component of their own identity. Such an attachment is not only emotional. Indeed, many entrepreneurs use their multidimensional *Lebaneseness* to: develop and maintain their professional networks, cease entrepreneurial opportunities and push for their social or political ascension. Moreover, the modern and contemporary history of Lebanon has left its mark on numerous Lebanese families whose members are spread across the five continents. Such transnational family structures are representative of an inter and transnational Lebanese network. The observations which were collected throughout this study suggest that the network of Lebanese entrepreneurs of São Paulo constitute one of the components of a Lebanese diaspora.

The aim of this paper is to understand how *Lebaneseness* has been put to use by Lebanese entrepreneurs of São Paulo, all generations combined, in their business affairs. The findings of this study also delineate how the inter and transnational structure of Lebanese families contributes to the development and the maintenance of transnational Lebanese links especially among entrepreneurs. And finally, after defining the notion of diaspora, light will be shed on whether or not the object of this study constitutes a component of the Lebanese diaspora.

The lecture will be presented by Dr. Elsa El Hachem

Time: Friday 25 April, 2014 from 4PM –5.30PM

Venue: LAU, Orme Gray Building, Room 518