ARAB WORLDS BEYOND THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

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Chapter 1

Turcos and *Chilestinos*

Latin American Palestinian Diaspora Nationalism in a Comparative Context

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In 2019, El Salvador elected as president Nayib Bukele, a 38-year-old former mayor and business owner of Palestinian heritage. Bukele became El Salvador's first ever millennial president, but not its first Palestinian president; that milestone went to Tony Saca, president from 2004 to 2009. The 2004 election which brought Saca to office, in fact, was notable, in that both of the major party candidates, Saca and his leftist opponent Schafik Handal, were Palestinian.

Bukele's landslide victory in 2019—he won with a first round majority in a three-way race— put to rest doubts about his electability as an outsider. This identity, which he conspicuously cultivated with his relentless social media presence, had three parts. First, as a political outsider: as mayor of first Nuevo Cuscatlán and later San Salvador, he ran with the left-wing FMLN, but later broke with the party's leadership, was expelled, and ran with a smaller right-wing party. His victory was the first for a third-party candidate in the country's postwar period marked by a deeply institutionalized two-party system. Second, an economic outsider: Bukele was a successful business owner, running a Yamaha dealership in the exclusive San Salvador neighborhood of Escalon, among other properties. However, he did not come from *las catorce*, El Salvador's famous fourteen families which made up the historical business oligarchy, to whom business owners, such as Bukele, were viewed with suspicion as new money upstarts. Third, a cultural outsider: despite the history of Palestinian Salvadoran participation in the country's politics at the highest level, rumors abounded of Bukele's religious identity. Although Bukele is a self-professed Catholic (reflecting the vast majority of Palestinian Salvadorans—indeed Latin Americans of Arab descent generally—who are

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Christian, largely Orthodox or Catholic), his father was the imam of the San Salvador Mosque and a leader of the city's small Muslim community. Bukele had been photographed praying in a mosque in Mexico City, leading to "secret Muslim" rumors about the candidate. Such rumors might have been politically disqualifying in a country as overwhelmingly Christian as El Salvador. A smear campaign by his rival to the right, purporting to expose Bukele's secret faith, took on comical proportions, including a doctored photograph depicting the candidate wearing "Muslim clothing." The photograph turned out to be of Bukele at a costume party, dressed as a Jedi Knight from Star Wars, complete with a plastic lightsaber (*Última Hora*, 2018).

Yet while both Saca and Bukele have publicly acknowledged their Palestinian heritage, their expressions of Palestinian nationalism have been muted. Among Latin American countries, El Salvador has had unusually close ties to Israel cemented in the years prior to the country's 1980–1992 civil war, when 83 percent of the Salvadoran government's arms imports came from Israel (SIPRI 1980). El Salvador maintained an embassy in Jerusalem before the United States moved its embassy to the city, and was the last country to move it to Tel Aviv, during the Saca presidency. Saca's family name also adorns a plaque at Plaza Palestina in San Salvador, the inauguration of which provoked criticism from El Salvador's small Jewish community for featuring a map of the pre-1948 British Mandate of Palestine. The dedication of a second plaza by Palestinian community leaders provoked harsh criticism from the Israeli embassy due to its designation as Yasser Arafat Park, with the installation of a bust of the PLO leader nearby. Nevertheless, Saca was the preferred candidate for Israel supporters in the 2004 election given the support of his opponent, Handal, and his leftist party, by the PLO (Jewish Telegraph Agency, 2004).

Bukele, for his part, has spent his political career distancing himself from any politically problematic aspects of his Palestinian identity. He has downplayed his father's Muslim faith— noting that his father converted to Islam as an adult and describing himself alternately as Catholic and not religious. And he has emphasized his support for Israel, including prior to his presidency. As mayor of San Salvador (and all-but-declared presidential candidate), Bukele visited Jerusalem as an invitee to the International Mayor's Conference. During the visit—co-organized by the American Jewish Congress and viewed by the Palestinian press as an effort to delegitimize the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement (Fallas 2019)—he prayed at the Western Wall, visited the Yad Vashem Holocaust museum, and emphasized the Sephardic Jewish roots of his wife at a meeting with his Jerusalem counterpart (Ahren 2019). Previously, in San Salvador, Bukele had met the mayor of Bethlehem to less fanfare, at a private gathering of twenty people. The meeting was friendly and lasted forty minutes (Valencia 2018). Among Latin American

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leaders, Bukele enjoys unusually warm personal relations with Donald Trump. For all Salvadoran leaders, maintaining friendly relations with Israel is instrumental for two more important political considerations: first, winning the support of the country's growing Evangelical Christian population (approaching the size of the Catholic majority) and especially the politically influential Tabernáculo Bíblico Bautista Amigos de Israel mega-church; and second, securing favorable policies from the United States.

The ambivalence of El Salvador's two Palestinian presidents toward questions of Palestinian nationalism is reflective of that of the Palestinian Salvadoran community as a whole, and that of neighboring Honduras, a country with an even larger Palestinian community. Of Latin America's estimated half million people of Palestinian ancestry, the vast majority reside in three countries: El Salvador, Honduras, and Chile—the country with the largest Palestinian-descended population, and the only one which can be described as having an active and politically salient Palestinian nationalist movement. How political attitudes and expressions can vary within the same broader diaspora—indeed, sharing not only the same religious profile (largely Christian), the same period of migration (1880s to 1920s), and even the same geographic origin (principally Bethlehem)—is worth examining. A comparative historical analysis suggests that in Chile, the greater degree of pluralism, with a more diverse political and occupational profile of the Palestinian community, has allowed for greater success in constructing a Palestinian nationalist movement than in Central America.

WEST FROM BETHLEHEM

Among Arab diaspora communities in Latin America, Palestinians in Latin America are a relatively understudied community in comparison to the more numerous Lebanese and Syrian descended populations which make up the majority of Arab Latin Americans in larger countries like Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico. Other Levantine Latin Americans are well-known throughout the region and have reached the highest positions of power. They include presidents like Argentina's Carlos Menem, Brazil's Michel Temer, Colombia's Julio César Turbay, Dominican Republic's Jacobo Majluta Azar, Ecuador's Julio Teodoro Salem, Abdalá Bucaram, and Jamil Mahuad, and Paraguay's Mario Abdo Benítez, as well as businesspeople such as Mexico's Carlos Slim and celebrities like Colombia's Shakira and Mexico's Salma Hayek.

Likewise, scholarship on the broader Arab diaspora of Latin America is extensive and cross-disciplinary, including history (Klich and Lesser 1998, Civantos 2006, Alfaro-Velcamp 2007, Karam 2007, Hyland 2011), cultural studies (Hu-DeHart 2009, Alsultany and Shohat 2013), and international

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Table 1.1 Profile of the Palestinian Diaspora in the Top Three Countries by Population in Latin America

	Chile	*El Salvador*	*Honduras*
Population	350,000	65,000–100,000	280,000
Origin	Bethlehem, Beit Jala, and Beit Sahour	Bethlehem, Beit Jala, and Beit Sahour	Bethlehem, Beit Jala, and Beit Sahour
Period of immigration	1880–1930	1880–1922	1876–1930
Areas of concentration	Patronato, Santiago	San Salvador and Sonsonate	San Pedro Sula and Atlantic coast
Industries	Architecture and design, banking, higher education, law, media, medicine, real estate, retail, textiles	Banking, construction equipment, food products, furniture, media, retail, textiles, tobacco products	Banking, biofuel, coffee, food products, media, retail, textiles
Notable families	Abdala, Abumohor, Chahín, Chahuán, Hasbún, Hirmas, Jacir, Jadue, Kassis, Littin, Massis, Meruane, Said, Saieh, Salah, Sumar, Tarud, Yarad, Yarur, Zalaquett	Bahaia, Barake, Bukele, Daboub, Handal, Hasbún, Hirezi, Jacir, Kattán, Nasser, Saca, Safie, Salume, Samour, Sedán, Simán, Zablah	Abud, Abufele, Asfura, Atala, Bendeck, Canahuati, Facussé, Gabrié, Handal, Jaar, Kattán, Kawas, Larach, Mitri, Musa, Nadal, Nasralla, Saybe, Siryi, Siway, Yuja, Zablah
Political leaning	Mixed	Right*	Right*
Nationalist sentiment	High	Medium-to-low	Low

*With certain high profile exceptions such as El Salvador's late Schafik Handal, FMLN military and political leader and Hato Hasbún, former FPL guerrilla and later minister of education under Mauricio Funes (2009–2014), and Honduras' Salvador Nasralla, presidential candidate of the Anti-Corruption Party.

Source: Amaya Banegas 1997, Baeza 2014, González 1993, Klich and Lesser 1998, Raheb 2012, Valencia 2018, Zahdeh 2012, and author's estimations

relations (Amorim 2011, Amar 2014), while that of the Palestinian diaspora specifically is more limited. Notable exceptions include González's *Dollar, Dove, and Eagle* (1993), Amaya Banegas' *Los árabes y palestinos en Honduras 1900-1950* (1997), Raheb's *Latin Americans with Palestinian Roots* (2012), and Baeza's "Palestinians in Latin America" (2014), although earlier scholarship has considered the community, albeit instrumentally, with regard to the Arab-Israeli peace process (Glick 1959, Sharif 1977, Abugattas 1982, Bahbah 1986, Karam 2013).

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The relative obscurity of Latin America's Palestinians is in part a matter of numbers and geography, which are linked. As the much larger Lebanese-Syrian population settled into major cities and in Latin America's larger countries (Buenos Aires, Argentina; Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil; Barranquilla, Colombia; Mexico City and Veracruz, Mexico; Caracas, Venezuela), newly arrived Palestinian migrants moved further from these established Arab communities to avoid competition with more established Lebanese and Syrian merchants. As a result, Palestinians came to be a majority among Arab migrants only in countries with relatively small Arab populations: Chile, Peru, Honduras, and El Salvador.

This relative isolation from the broader Arab community built strong endogenous bonds in business, social, and family relations (intra-community marriage was the norm), creating Palestinian identities lasting multiple generations after arrival, even after descendants no longer spoke Arabic and largely assimilated into receiving country society.

Reinforcing such tight social networks were several shared characteristics including period of migration, religious faith, and geographic point of origin. In comparison to Palestinian diaspora populations elsewhere created by multiple migration waves, Palestinian Latin Americans have a largely uniform background: overwhelmingly Christians from Bethlehem and surrounding villages of Beit Jala and Beit Sahour who migrated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and made their livings as merchants—first as itinerant vendors, later as store and factory owners. This diaspora can thus be described more specifically as a Bethlehem diaspora in Latin America—one which by now greatly outnumbers the population of its home community (today roughly 25,000).

Palestinian migration to Latin America began in the 1870s and 1880s, under the Ottoman Empire, earning the new migrants the inaccurate and pejorative moniker *turcos*, or Turks. That many were fleeing Ottoman—and by extension Turkish—oppression of their homeland was an irony not lost on the new arrivals. The peak of the migration wave, in 1910, succeeded a new military conscription law of 1909 which motivated many Christian families to send their military-age children abroad to avoid forced service to the new Young Turk regime (Caro 2010). World War I followed, sparking more waves of migrants facilitated by their newly settled relatives in the Americas.

In both South and Central America, the new arrivals gained a reputation—not always positive—for business acumen. This created resentment, in some cases violence (the "War of the Comb," an anti-Arab pogrom in Curitiba, Brazil), and discriminatory laws. In 1921, El Salvador declared Arabs and Chinese as "pernicious" races, and in 1933, the dictator Maximiliano Hernández Martínez barred all immigration of Africans and Asians, naming specifically "new immigrants from Arabia, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, or

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Turkey, generally known by the name *turcos*" (Valencia 2018). Such laws barring entry on the basis of nationality mirrored similar laws in the United States (the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882), Colombia (an 1887 law banned Chinese migration, later expanded to include Syrians and then all "Orientals" by 1913), and other countries (Dolan 2020).

Compounding legal restrictions on immigration to Latin America were those on return migration to Palestine. In the post-Ottoman Empire, the establishment of a new Palestinian nationality by British Mandate authorities in 1925 placed new visa restrictions on emigrants, for whom circular migration between the Americas and Palestine had been easy and frequent under Ottoman nationality. Many Palestinian migrants were unable to obtain documentation required to establish legal residency or Palestinian nationality; many became stateless. Those who left under the Mandate were unlikely to be able to return. The formation of the State of Israel in 1948 not only ended legal Palestinian nationality but gave finality to the one-way nature of Palestinian emigration. While previous generations of migrants to Latin America had planned to work and save money to return to Palestine in retirement, and many did, this was no longer an option.

Thus, despite discrimination and social marginalization, Palestinian migrants to Latin America had little choice but to settle in their new homes. Marriages outside the community increased. Children became monolingual Spanish speakers. Families Hispanicized their names: Al-Farid became Alfredo, Yamil became Emilio (Zahdeh 2012). And although shunned by the entrenched business elites, Palestinian merchants became more established, and came to corner the then-underdeveloped markets of retail business, while national business owners concentrated their wealth in land and commerce in cattle and agricultural export goods. As the expansion of Palestinian-owned businesses spurred diversification of investment into manufacturing and banking, the *turcos*—for whom the still-pejorative term had evolved from signifying poor peddlers, carrying products by mule, to *nouveaux riches* (Baeza 2014)—reinvested their financial capital into social and political capital, electing community members to local office by the 1930s and national office by the 1950s.

Bukele embodies this trajectory: the grandson of Christian Palestinians from Bethlehem and Jerusalem who migrated as Ottoman nationals in the early twentieth century, he pursued a political career after his success in business, owning El Salvador's Yamaha franchise and directing an advertising company. The political persona he successfully built is that of a wealthy outsider, at war with the hegemonic two-party system. If he believes his trajectory was at all hampered by his background, he does not express it, telling *El Faro* "It doesn't bother me if they call me *turco*, although I know some continue to use that word in a pejorative manner" (Ibid).

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Despite a broadly shared identity, however, South and Central America's Palestinians exhibit divergence in their political makeup, with consequences for diaspora nationalist movements. As the following sections will elaborate, the relative political pluralism of Chile's Palestinian population—by far the largest in Latin America—contrasts with the more uniformly conservative and business profile of Central America's, despite notable exceptions. As a consequence, Chile exhibits a far more pronounced and organized nationalist movement within Latin America's Palestinian population.

The *Chilestinos*

It is nearly accidental that Chile became the top destination for Palestinian migrants to Latin America, due to both push and pull factors. By the late 1800s, largely Christian Palestinians escaping unemployment and Ottoman discrimination of religious and national minorities, such as the *jizya* tax on non-Muslims,[1] end of the millet system, and rising Turkish nationalism, and lured by then-booming economies in the Americas, left for other destinations in both North and South America. Though the United States remained the top destination of choice, the migration wave coincided with a period of selective encouraged migration policy in Chile. Seeking to both develop its mining and agriculture sectors and "improve the race," Chile encouraged the immigration of Europeans—principally British and Germans—to industrial cities like Osorno and Valdivia. Although Palestinian migrants were not given the same level of support, those unable to reach the United States, or who sought less competition with other Arab merchants in larger Atlantic coast cities in South America, were able to enter Chile, making the arduous journey over the Andes by horse.

The new migrants concentrated in a specific neighborhood in Santiago: Patronato, in the capital's North Mapocho sector, with subsequent generations moving to the more elite neighborhood Las Condes. From 1860 to 1925, some 40,000 Palestinians migrated to Chile. Before 1930, 81 percent of the country's Palestinian population had arrived, at which point Chile began restricting its relatively open-door migration policy (Agar and Saffie 2005).

The first migrants were overwhelmingly single men who worked as ambulatory street vendors, gradually establishing stores and concentrating in the clothing business, including retail, tailoring, and later textile manufacture. Patronato came to be both the commercial and cultural center of Palestinian life, where the community established its first Orthodox Church in 1917. To non-Palestinian Chileans, Patronato came to be a shopping destination for the "four Bs": products that were good, nice, cheap, and abundant ("*Bueno, Bonito, Barato, y aBundante"*), as well as Arabic food, drink, and music (Caro 2010). Migrants founded pan-Arab mutual aid community

organizations starting in 1904 with the Ottoman Benevolence Society, and later the Arab Union Club and Arab Benevolence Union, business organizations (Syrian-Palestinian Commercial Association) and even firefighter squads (The Eduardo Farley Chilean Arab Firefighters in Valparaíso). These coincided with the founding of other Arab descended hometown associations (Sociedad Juventud Homsiense Siria, in 1913, Club Sirio Unido, in 1935, and Círculo Libanés in 1943).

Despite facing often blunt racism and misrepresentations of their faith (the newspaper of record, *El Mercurio*, described Palestinian migrants as "Mohammedans" who "are dirtier than the dogs of Constantinople"), Palestinians' Christian background hastened their early assimilation into broader Chilean society. And though their businesses were dismissed as small and cheap, some merchants took advantage of the ascendant economic nationalist model of Import-Substitution Industrialization in the post-Depression era to avail themselves of close relations with the government. This in turn opened doors to state support, while splitting the community during the subsequent period of intense political polarization.

The business and political history of the Palestinian-owned textile industry, and especially of the Yarur family, detailed in Winn's *Weavers of Revolution* (1986), is illustrative. First generation migrants from Palestine in 1902, the Yarur brothers first opened a retail store, then a textile plant in neighboring Bolivia. Under the industrialization policies of Chile's Alessandri administration, the Yarurs were coaxed into opening a much larger textile plant in Santiago with the patronage of the Chilean government, which included a loan from the state bank and subsidized investments in machinery, eventually employing 3,000 workers. Other Palestinians opened textile plants, and the industry came to be dominated by Palestinian owners like the Hirmas, Kassis, Said, and Sumar families. Eventually, the Yarurs opened their own bank, BCI, to finance their investments. Growing worker radicalism in the 1960s and 1970s led to increasing labor-management conflict and demands for worker ownership. In 1971, following the election of democratic socialist president Salvador Allende, workers took over the Yarur plant and ran it collectively, with other Palestinian-owned factories nationalized by the government in short order. The subsequent military regime of Augusto Pinochet, who overthrew Allende in a 1973 coup, violently suppressed these worker movements and returned the factories to their owners. However, these owners were wiped out in the financial crash brought on by the dictatorship's 1975 economic shock therapy, facilitated, ironically, by a fellow Palestinian Chilean, Pinochet's economic minister, Jorge Cauas Lama. The Yarurs' textile factory failed, however their bank, BCI, remains one of the largest in Chile.

Throughout this tumultuous Cold War period, Palestinian Chileans took up prominent positions on both sides of the political divide. Some were

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unapologetic supporters of the dictatorship; Alberto Kassis founded the Pinochet Foundation. Others held positions in left-leaning administrations, including Rafael "El Turco" Tarud, economic minister under the government of socialist-supported Carlos Ibañez del Campo, and Mahfud Massis, ambassador under the socialist Allende government. Another prominent Allende supporter was movie director Miguel Littin. All three were forced into exile by the military regime.

Palestinian Chileans' political pluralism at the elite level also allowed for a broader base for Palestinian nationalist political activism. By the 1930s, Palestinian Chileans had founded a Spanish language reformist newspaper, *Al Islah*, which reported on news from Palestine and which has a counterpart today in Revista Al-Damir (Alsutany and Shohat 2013). The community raised money for family members of those who had died in the 1936–39 Arab Revolt against the British, and in 1947, lobbied the Chilean government not to support the UN resolution on Partition. In 1963, a commemoration of the Nakba was read in Chile's Congress (Baeza 2014).

Explicitly nationalist institutions emerged in Chile in the 1960s: poet and future ambassador Massis founded FRELIPA (Palestine Liberation Front) in 1964, along with its affiliated newspaper, *Palestina Patria Martir* and radio station Voz de Palestina, which organized support for the Palestinian Liberation Organization. PLO delegates visited Chile in 1966, and later opened a Palestine Information Office in 1978, operating uneasily under the military regime. Intent on renewing nationalist sentiment among the Latin American diaspora through the Sanaud movement, the PLO (and later Palestinian Authority) was sensitive to both the Christian background of Chile's Palestinians and the allergy of business owners to any form of radicalism, sending as their first delegate a Catholic priest from Bethlehem. Pro-Palestinian activism and the BDS movement have been especially pronounced on college campuses, organized by the Chile branch of the General Union of Palestinian Students. Though associated with the left during the Cold War period, it has been increasingly common for politicians across the political spectrum to pay lip service to Palestinian causes. In 2011, right-wing president Sebastián Piñera visited Palestine and declared support for Palestinian statehood. In 2014, left-wing president Michelle Bachelet recalled Chile's ambassador to Israel in protest of Operation Protective Edge in Gaza (Legrand 2014). In Chile's Congress, a Palestinian Chilean Inter-Parliamentarian group today includes members from parties across the political spectrum.

Nationalist sentiment extends beyond electoral politics and into community, religious, and educational organizations. Fundación Palestina Belén 2000 (Palestine Foundation Bethlehem 2000) formed in response to Pope John Paul II's jubilee call that year, with the mission to "form a strong and

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participatory community made up as much of Chileans as of Palestinians and their future State" and to "support actions to achieve peace in Palestine" (Caro 2010).[2] The University of Chile houses a Center for Arab Studies and publishes the *Revista de Estudios Árabes*. The *Juventud Palestina* (Palestinian Youth) organization has chapters is most major cities in Chile, and today includes membership that is not of Palestinian descent. Diaspora feminist organizations have existed since the 1970s, beginning with the Chilean Arab Feminist Association, continuing through the present day with the *Yo Soy Palestino* (I Am Palestinian) movement founded by Leyla el-Massou, Leyla Haibeh, and Nadia Garib (Palma Troncoso 2017).

The most visible symbol of the Palestinian community's social capital is Club Deportivo Palestino, a professional soccer team in Chile founded in 1920 by Palestinian migrants. Though today its players and management are not necessarily of Palestinian ancestry, the team has always been a vehicle for nationalist sentiment, with its colors—black, white, green, and red—an explicit reference to the Palestinian flag. Fans at Palestino games often wear keffiyehs and fly Palestinian flags, and the team's social media broadcast nationalist statements: "For us, free Palestine will always be historical Palestine, nothing less" (BBC 2014). The club faced controversy in 2014 when it unveiled new jerseys in which the number "1" was replaced by an outline of Mandate-era Palestine. Jewish Chilean groups protested the design as implicitly denying the legitimacy of modern-day Israel, and Chile's soccer federation banned the jerseys and imposed a fine. Following the controversy, the number 11 jerseys became bestsellers in Chile. Palestino has won the national championship; its legacy as a highly visible vehicle for Palestinian identity that is no longer exclusively Palestinian in its makeup symbolizes the degree to which Palestinian nationalist sentiment has become mainstream, not just in the diaspora community but within broader Chilean society.

Central America's *Turcos*

The other major destination for Palestinian migrants to Latin America became the Northern Triangle of Central America, principally Honduras and El Salvador, where together the Palestinian-descended population is roughly equal to that in Chile. In comparison to the *chilestinos*, Central America's Palestinians can be characterized by their more uniform conservative political orientation and concentration in business, and less developed nationalist sentiment and institutions.

The late nineteenth-century Ottoman migration waves coincided with a period of openness in Central America, particularly in Honduras with a new permissive immigration law in 1866 and the Liberal Reforms of 1876.

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Although aimed at encouraging migration from Europe, especially France and Germany, and the United States, the reforms established Honduras as a destination for Palestinians slightly before Chile. While European migrants settled in the country's south, Palestinians settled along the country's Atlantic coast, concentrating in the city of San Pedro Sula. In El Salvador, the period of migration was cut short relative to other destination countries, largely ending by 1922 with a reform to that country's immigration law which blocked entry to Chinese and Arabs. Future laws targeted established immigrants, prohibiting the opening of new stores, factories, and farms by any persons of Arab descent. In part due to such official discrimination, and in part the greater concentration of Palestinians in Honduras, many Palestinians migrated from El Salvador to Honduras and established homes and businesses in San Pedro Sula and other towns in the north.

As in Chile, Palestinian business owners got their start in the textile industry. In the 1930s, coinciding with the opening of the Yarur factory, Jacobo Kattan established Central America's first clothing company in Honduras. Central America's business oligarchy, characterized by El Salvador's *las catorce* (the fourteen), concentrated in agricultural export goods, primarily in coffee, agave, bananas and sugar, financed by investments from the United States and United Kingdom. This left a vacuum in the neglected retail, manufacturing, and finance sectors which Palestinians came to fill. Such businesses were family owned and operated and closely linked within the Palestinian communities, with business relationships fortified by intermarriage. By the 1980s, the Honduran government, seeking to further develop the clothing manufacturing sector, established duty-free export zones on the Atlantic coast, where the Palestinian population and businesses concentrate. Palestinian business owners came to dominate the new maquila sector.

Nationalist activity was not always low. Like their Chilean counterparts, Palestinians in Honduras raised funds for those displaced in the 1936 Arab Revolt and successfully lobbied the Honduran government to abstain from the 1947 UN Resolution on Israel. Following the foundation of the State of Israel, however, Palestinian activism in Central America went into steep decline. Palestinian community newspapers disappeared. Efforts by the PLO in the 1960s to revive Palestinian identity met little enthusiasm, though delegates from Honduras visited Chile in 1966 to elect Latin American delegates to the organization's Palestinian National Congress. The PLO found greater support in countries with little to no Palestinian population, notably Cuba and Nicaragua, and opened offices there.

This association of late 1970s Palestinian nationalism with nearby left-wing regimes had a chilling effect on Palestinian activism in Central America, then dominated by right-wing regimes supported by the United States as

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anti-communist bulwarks in the Cold War. Palestinian Central Americans, concentrated in the business sector, feared a communist takeover by rebels inspired by the 1975 Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua. The subsequent Sandinista government maintained close ties with the PLO and included one prominent Sandinista of Palestinian descent, Moises Hassan. A 1982 hostage crisis in which Sandinista-inspired Honduran rebels took 100 hostages in the San Pedro Sula Chamber of Commerce, including several Palestinian business owners, brought to sharp relief these fears.

Palestinian-descended business owners provided strong support to the Honduran government's counterinsurgency program in the 1980s. The business and political career of Miguel Facussé, the wealthiest person in Honduras, illustrates the close ties between the government and Palestinian business community. Having received support from the state National Investment Corporation during Honduras' adoption of Import-Substitution Industrialization policies, Facussé developed businesses in diverse industries including textiles, food products, biofuels, soaps, commercial airplanes, and pharmaceuticals. He later advised president Roberto Suazo Córdova and became a leader of the Association for Progress of Honduras, an organization founded to forge close relations between business owners and military officers. As an owner of the Dinant palm oil company, Facussé is alleged by the U.S. State Department to command an extensive private militia targeting landless peasant activists with violence, and to be involved in cocaine trafficking from his vast landholdings in the Aguán Valley (Wikileaks 2004). Facussé and fellow Palestinian Honduran business owners Camilo Atala, Juan Canahuati, and Fredy Nasser, made up four of the ten principal financiers the 2009 coup against left-wing President Miguel Zelaya, whose reforms of the energy sector diminished the profits of Dinant and other biofuel companies (Salomon 2009, Thale 2017).[3] These business owners have maintained close ties with subsequent post-coup governments.

There have been some notable exceptions to the political one-sidedness of Palestinians in Central America. In neighboring El Salvador, Palestinians played a role on both sides of the 1980–1992 civil war. The guerrilla forces under the umbrella group FMLN were led by Schafik Handal, member of one of that country's most prominent Palestinian families. Handal's roots made him something of a class traitor. The guerrilla movement attracted other Palestinian Salvadorans, including Hato Hasbún, who joined the rebels and later became a politician in the postwar era, rising to education minister under Mauricio Funes, the first democratically elected left-wing president. Héctor Samour, a former vice minister of education, also of Palestinian descent, was a collaborator with Archbishop Oscar Romero, a martyr of the Salvadoran left whose assassination in 1980 formally started the war. In Honduras, the candidate declared to have lost in the disputed 2017 presidential election was

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Salvador Nasralla, a business owner and television personality of Palestinian ancestry, who founded the Anti-Corruption Party, and has been stridently critical of several Honduran government, including those largely supported by the Palestinian Honduran business establishment.

Exceptions aside, El Salvador and Honduras' Palestinian community is more right-leaning than Chile's. This reflects its continued uniform concentration in the business sector. In Chile, Palestinian merchants leveraged their commercial success into educational attainment and careers in law, medicine, media, universities, and politics. In Honduras and El Salvador, where the higher education system is more limited, the preferred career path of Palestinian families has been to maintain the family business, usually passed down from father to son. In all three countries, the threat of expropriation during periods of worker radicalism provoked a right-wing backlash among business owners, Palestinians included. However in Chile, this political and occupational diversification had occurred prior to this period of Cold War upheaval, as well as prior to the inroads of Palestinian nationalist organizations, principally the PLO. Thus by the time of the 1973 coup, there had already been notable Palestinian Chileans associated with the left, and Palestinian nationalism had found purchase among the otherwise conservative business sector. In El Salvador and Honduras, the Cold War turned hot a decade later, in the 1980s, when counterinsurgency efforts received much more sustained support from the United States. Yet by this time, a Palestinian left had not emerged, nor indeed had any Palestinian social sector outside of that of wealthy business owners. Politically, this had a reinforcing effect, with Palestinian identity taking on elite, right-wing, and anti-democratic associations among the broader Honduran public, particularly in the aftermath of the 2009 coup.

The Question of Nationalism

The relative neglect of the Palestinian Latin American community, particularly within the Palestinian diaspora as a whole, is reflective not only to its minority status within the broader Arab Latin American population but also the visibility of the issue which has largely defined Palestinians in the eyes of the world: the national question. Palestinian nationalism is a less salient issue among those of Palestinian descent in Latin America than those in the Middle East, for whom migration was more recent and associated with a shared narrative of forced displacement and dispossession (the *Nakba)*, the desired temporary nature of their settlement (refugee status), and a denied aspiration to come home (right of return). As Baeza 2014 notes, the term "diaspora" is itself fraught with controversy when it comes to Palestine, as it may be understood to suggest a permanent settlement in a new home, which does not

reflect the aspirations of the post-1948 migrants for whom the term "refugee" is more appropriate. Nevertheless, "diaspora" can also have nationalist connotations as well, as exemplified by the nineteenth–twentieth-century Zionist movement, and thus is not fundamentally incompatible with aspirations for an as-yet-unrealized homeland.

Nationalist sentiment can often develop in contest with competing nationalisms. Within the Middle East, there is considerable research on the development of Palestinian nationalism in relation to Zionism, not simply in opposition but also adopting certain aspects of Zionist rhetoric as a strategy of validation: terms such as exodus and diaspora evoking a forced dispersion from a historic homeland, brought on by a catastrophe. Because Palestinian migration occurred prior to 1948, however, under less violent circumstances, the early development of Palestinian nationalism in Latin America was not in response to a new Israeli identity but newly constructed out of an older imperial Ottoman identity, and later in response to a new ethno-nationalist Turkish identity. For both competing identities, the uniqueness of Palestinian identity at the time was seminal, aspirational, and as yet unclear. Palestinian migrants to Latin America accompanied those from what became Syria and Lebanon, and these other Arab migrants shared with Palestinians many customs, traditions, as well as a history of dominance by Turkish Ottomans. They also largely shared a religious identity which set them apart as minorities within the majority Muslim empire. Among early migrants, distinct identities between Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian migrants were more amorphous and less politically relevant than those of post-Nakba refugees. What distinguished Palestinian migrants was the largely shared hometown ties of Bethlehem in particular.

For Arab Christian migrants, including Palestinians, the appeal of nationalism depended in large part to its association with secularism. Prior to the PLO's Latin America outreach, it was Nasser's pan-Arabism which attracted the most support within the Latin American diaspora, which by design deemphasized unique national identities. Later, the PLO was careful to cultivate a Christian-friendly image and underscore its secular ideology. Nevertheless, the global association of Palestinian nationalism in the 1970s with radicalism and terrorism did much to undermine the movement among conservatives and business elites within the Latin American diaspora, a trend that was only counterbalanced in Chile by the development, decades earlier, of social networks outside of the business world and the political right. In the latter twentieth century, the association of Palestinian nationalism first with revolutionary leftist regimes in Cuba and Nicaragua, and, in the twenty-first century, with Hamas and other Islamist organizations, further alienated conservative Latin America's Palestinians who were by then multiple generations removed from their ancestral homeland.

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Yet the decline of Palestinian nationalism in Latin America is neither linear nor inevitable. Nationalist sentiment has risen and fallen in waves, long after the initial period of migration. There have been revivals of nationalist sentiment in the Americas in response to events in Palestine: the 1936 Arab Revolt, the *Nakba*, the 1967 war, the Sabra and Shatila massacre, the Intifadas, and the Gaza wars. External forces, most notably outreach by the PLO in the 1970s, had some measured success, while U.S. influence has had opposite effects, by constraining official expressions of nationalism, particularly in Central America due to its dependence on the United States. This trend has been compounded especially in Central America by the rapid growth of a Christian Zionist evangelical community.

However, comparing diverging nationalist sentiments and activity in Chile, El Salvador, and Honduras—three countries which experienced both significant U.S. intervention and PLO outreach during the Cold War era—suggests that the most notable factor in determining the purchase of nationalism is not foreign but domestic: the relative political and occupational diversity of the Palestinian community. In Chile, we can see the cultivation of a strong Palestinian identity despite generations of successful assimilation, through media, student groups, civic organizations, and sports teams. The emergence of high profile Palestinian figures beyond the business sector, on both the political left and right, has given Palestinian nationalism a bipartisan veneer and disassociated the movement from radicalism. In Central America, where high profile Palestinians are firmly and nearly uniformly entrenched in the business sector and on the political right, and where Palestinian nationalism came to be associated with Marxist threats to business interests, there has been little appetite for the movement. Like in Chile, community associations, Palestinian clubs, and official monuments exist. But expressions of Palestinian identity have been largely depoliticized and limited to a cultural sphere.

The Palestinian Latin American experience illustrates the challenges of building a nationalist movement within a dispersed and diverse diaspora. Notably, it is not impossible. Despite more than a century of removal from the homeland, loss of language, decline of endogenous marriage, and religious minority status in relation to the broader nation, Palestinian nationalism has found purchase among the *chilestinos* and, to a lesser extent, other Palestinian-descended Latin Americans at different moments in history. The Chilean case shows it is possible for national identity to survive and revive through generations of assimilation into the host community, for organized nationalist movements to have an impact on policy and diplomacy and to achieve a degree of mainstream and cross-party support. It is also possible for nationalist movements to become radioactive in the context of contentious and polarized politics, within diaspora communities defined by their political

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and economic insularity, as the Central American cases demonstrate. Social ascension by itself is not determinative. Rather, it is pluralism that allows diasporas to leverage social capital into political capital, to redefine homeland issues as host country issues, to de-radicalize and legitimize national causes. Contrasting with the pitfalls of the Palestinian case, the experience of other nationalist movements—including, in the case of Zionism, oppositional ones—can illustrate the potential successes of this dynamic.

NOTES

1. *Jizya* was a tax levied by the Ottoman Empire on its non-Muslim, principally Christian and Jewish, subjects intended to substitute for both military service, for which non-Muslims were exempt, and the *zakat* which Muslim subjects were obliged to pay. In 1856, after the empire allowed for military service (and conscription) of non-Muslims, the jizya replaced by a new tax, *baddal askari*, with which a non-Muslim subject could pay in lieu of military service.

2. Though the Palestinian population is overwhelmingly Christian, organizations for the Muslim minority of Palestinian and other nationalities include the Muslim Society of Chile, the Islamic Center of Chile, and the As-Salam, Bilal, and Coquimbo mosques. Such organizations have largely avoided politics, owing to Islamophobia in the early 21st Century, and sectarian divides, including accusations of Wahabbi radicalism by the Shia-oriented Center for Islamic Culture against the Sunni Defenders of Islam.

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