

**SAMIRA ADEL OSMAN, *Imigração árabe no Brasil: Histórias de vida de libaneses muçulmanos e cristãos* [Arab Immigration in Brazil: Life Stories of Lebanese Muslims and Christians] (São Paulo: Xamã Editora Ltda., 2011). Pp. 215. ISBN 9788575871041.**

REVIEWED BY HASAN SHAHID, Graduate, Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; email: [hshahid@gmail.com](mailto:hshahid@gmail.com)



*Imigração árabe no Brasil: Histórias de vida de libaneses muçulmanos e cristãos* by Samira Adel Osman, professor of history at the Federal University of São Paulo and researcher at the Center for Studies in Oral History at the University of São Paulo, examines the lives of Lebanese immigrants and their descendants in Brazil. Focusing on migrants who arrived between the 1940s and the 1950s and the second generation, this study tells the stories of Muslims and Christians originating from villages in rural Lebanon. Rather than relying on written documents to construct her arguments, Osman employs oral history, stating that, “O relato pessoal [. . .] [pode] elucidar questões que o documento escrito não tem dado conta de responder no que se refere à experiência do processo migratório.” [“The personal account [. . .] can clarify issues that the written document cannot when responding to what is referred as the migration process.”] Consequently, the book – available only in Portuguese – allows the reader to lucidly imagine the day-to-day lives of ordinary people in this ethnic community.

The study contains three chapters with distinct themes. In the first chapter, Osman develops her thesis and discusses her methodology and the criteria used in selecting interviewees. The second chapter, which forms the bulk of *Imigração árabe no Brasil*, contains narrations given by the immigrants and their descendants, uninterrupted by commentary or analysis. The last chapter discusses overarching themes present in the personal accounts told in the second chapter, including family, migration, assimilation, gender roles, religion, and work.

Keenly aware of the religious diversity present among Lebanese in Brazil, Osman analyzes the experiences of both Muslims and Christians. By doing so, she primarily seeks to determine how their religious backgrounds influence adaptation to Brazilian society. She finds that while immigrants from both religious groups originated from small agricultural communities in Lebanon and engage in similar types of economic activities, Christians, particularly those in the second generation, tend to adapt more easily to Brazilian culture than Muslims due to the dominance of Christianity in Brazil. However, her stories imply that immigrants from both religious groups have largely similar migration experiences by virtue of sharing the same language, having roots in distant villages, and demonstrating similar kinship patterns.

Motivated by the lack of scholarly research devoted to Arab immigration to Brazil, Osman collected personal accounts from seventeen people of Lebanese descent whose families have lived in the country for at least two generations. All narrators are based in São Paulo, where the largest number of Arabic-speaking people have historically settled. The stories told by the first generation largely concern their lives in their homeland, rationale for emigration, and adjustment to their new environments. Contrastingly, the second generation shares stories that largely pertain to their relationships with their families and experiences growing up as children of Arab immigrants. Because nearly everyone interviewed within each religious group is related to one another, the reader learns about the varying experiences within the same families as they continue to live in Brazil over the course of several decades.

Through vividly recounted narrations, Osman's scholarship provides a window into the lives of Lebanese immigrant family life. In these the author exposes much about the processes of migration and assimilation experienced by immigrants and their children, such as the lack of economic opportunity in Lebanon that drove large numbers of peasants to seek their fortunes abroad and the familial pressures felt by those in the second generation to marry co-ethnics and maintain their ancestral culture. A particularly important contribution of this work is that it gives much space to the voices of women. While participation was typically restricted to the domestic sphere, women often played critical economic roles by providing strategic business advice to their husbands, operating family stores, and peddling, the main occupation held at some point by all first-generation men interviewed by Osman and by countless others of Arab heritage in Brazil since the late nineteenth century.

Osman has written a valuable resource for scholars studying Arab migration to Brazil during the twentieth century, as the book captures the experiences of both first- and second-generation Brazilians of Lebanese descent and preserves their history. Her use of personal accounts as a primary source for her research allows the reader to take an intimate look into a community founded mainly by semiliterate immigrants who may have otherwise not left extensive written documents. While their stories are anecdotal, they have much to tell about these particular generations by touching upon issues relevant to other Arab immigrants and their descendants. *Imigração árabe no Brasil* significantly complements the expanding bibliography on the Middle Eastern presence in South America.