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THE ARMENIAN DIASPORA IN RIO DE JANEIRO: MICRO-HISTORIES OF IDENTITY, MEMORY AND SOLIDARITY DURING THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

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Abstract

This article examines the role of Mihran Latif, an Armenian immigrant and a key figure among the elite of Rio de Janeiro, in supporting survivors of the Armenian Genocide and promoting the Armenian cause in Brazil. Using a micro-historical approach, the study explores Latif's personal trajectory within the broader context of the Armenian diaspora in Rio, a community often overshadowed by the larger Armenian presence in São Paulo. The research draws on primary sources, including immigration dossiers, naturalization records from the Brazilian National Archive's SIAN system, and periodicals. These sources provide insights into the solidarity networks Latif helped establish, illustrating how local elites mobilized resources to support genocide survivors and preserve cultural identity. By focusing on Latif's initiatives and those of other key figures, the article sheds light on the mechanisms of community building, the intersection of citizenship and diasporic identity, and the significance of elite involvement in post-genocide solidarity efforts. This analysis contributes to the historiography of the Armenian diaspora in Brazil, offering a fresh perspective on the role of elites in shaping collective memory and identity. The article challenges the dominant focus on the São Paulo community, emphasizing the importance of individual narratives in understanding the broader dynamics of the diaspora.

Key words: Armenian Genocide, Armenian diaspora, Brazil, Migration Studies, Mihran Latif

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Introduction

“Swept by the storm of fate, the Armenians who arrived in this far corner of the world faced unimaginable difficulties in the early days, primarily due to their unfamiliarity with the language and the harsh climate (the heat).”¹

The Armenian community is believed to have settled in Brazil as early as 1886, with Rio de Janeiro serving as its initial focal point. The first recorded presence of an Armenian in the country dates back to 1879, with the arrival of Dr. Mihran Latif. Latif’s naturalization process reveals his significant contributions to Brazil, including his role as a government engineer from 1880 to 1891 and his recognition by Emperor Dom Pedro II for his work on the D. Pedro II Railroad.² His early involvement with the Brazilian government highlights the Armenian community’s initial integration into Brazilian society, setting the stage for a more extensive presence in the decades that followed.

Migration patterns in Latin America can be understood through both global historical-social contexts and regional specificities. The primary drivers of migration include environmental disasters, political and religious persecution, armed conflicts, and economic opportunities. For the Armenian diaspora, the key catalysts were the Hamidian Massacres (1894–1896) and the Armenian Genocide (1915–1923), which led to forced migrations. These events spurred the displacement of Armenians, many of whom found refuge in Latin American countries, including Brazil, during the early 20th century.

Armenian immigration to Latin America occurred in three distinct waves, each shaped by unique historical and social dynamics. The first wave, known as the pioneering migration, coincided with the Hamidian Massacres and the early years of the Armenian Genocide, spanning the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This phase saw initial Armenian refugees seeking safety in countries like Brazil and Argentina, where immigration policies aimed to meet labor demands.³

The second wave, marked by mass migration, took place during the 1930s and 1940s, following the Treaty of Lausanne. Despite restrictive measures such as Brazil’s *Law of the*

1 Yeznig Vartanian, *A Coletividade Armênia do Brasil: Informações Históricas e Cronológicas: de 1860 ao Fim de 1947* (São Paulo: Labrador, 2020), 75.

2 Arquivo Nacional, *SIAN*, Processo de Naturalização de Mihran Latif, Notação BR RJANRIO A9.0.PNE.9248, Rio de Janeiro Brazil.

3 Silvia Regina Parvechi, *Memória da Diáspora Armênia nos Relatos de seus Descendentes na América do Sul: Cidades São Paulo e Buenos Aires* (Curitiba: Appris Editora, 2021).

Undesirables (Lei dos Indesejáveis, 1907, enforced in 1920) and Argentina's *Residence Law (Ley de Residencia, 1902)*, Armenians continued to migrate, often relying on the Nansen Passport—a League of Nations-issued document for stateless refugees.⁴

The third and final wave, described as late migration, extended into the 1950s, occurring amidst economic and political transitions in Latin America. During this period, immigration policies grew increasingly selective, favoring migrants aligning with nationalist and racialized population projects, exemplified by Brazil's "Two-Thirds Law" of the 1930s.⁵

At that time, the distinction between being a war refugee and an immigrant was not clearly defined. Armenian migrants were often not identified as Armenians but rather as immigrants from Western Europe, frequently mistaken for Syrians and Lebanese who were also arriving in South American cities. These Armenians faced additional challenges in integrating, as this misclassification hindered both statistical data collection and the establishment of Armenian identity in their new contexts.⁶ For this reason, statistical data on the Armenian diaspora in Brazil and South America often vary, making precise figures difficult to determine. Researchers rely on census data collected in destination cities over two decades ago, when Armenians were sometimes recorded under the nationalities they had acquired post-war. This lack of consistency between researchers' classifications and official records further complicates the accuracy of the data.

According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, the estimate number of Armenians in Brazil is 50,000.⁷ However, other sources provide divergent estimates. Grün's research suggests a figure between 20,000 and 25,000 Armenians,⁸ while Bogossian-Porto's study offers an estimate of 40,000.⁹ The Armenian Embassy in Brazil, on the other hand,

4 Nélida Boulgourdjian-Toufeksian, "Del Imperio Otomano a la Argentina. Recepción de los armenios post genocidio. ¿Inmigrantes o refugiados?," *Jornadas de Trabajo Exilios Políticos del Cono Sur en el Siglo XX*, La Plata, 2012.

5 Silvia Regina Parvechi, *Memória da Diáspora Armênia*.

6 Nélida Boulgourdjian-Toufeksian, "Del Imperio Otomano a la Argentina."

7 "Brazil," Ministry of Diaspora of the Republic of Armenia, accessed 06.10.2024, <http://diaspora.gov.am/en/pages/5/brazil#>.

8 Roberto Grün, "Intelectuais na comunidade judaica brasileira," in *Identidades Judaicas no Brasil Contemporâneo*, edited by Bila Sorj (Rio de Janeiro: Centro Edelstein de Pesquisas Sociais, 2008).

9 Pedro Boghossian-Porto, "Construções e Reconstruções da Identidade Armênia no Brasil (R.J. e S.P.)" (Master's thesis, Instituto de Ciências Humanas e Filosofia, Universidade Federal Fluminense, 2011).

reports a figure of 100,000 Armenians and their descendants in the country.¹⁰ This number was also referenced in a resolution passed by the Brazilian Senate in 2015, which recognized the Armenian Genocide and honored its victims.¹¹ To this day, no updated census or statistical survey has been conducted to accurately account for the number of Armenians who arrived in Brazil or for the descendants currently living here.

Studies indicate that most Armenian migrants to South America came from Adana, Aintab (present-day Gaziantep), Marash (present-day Kahramanmarash), and Hadjin.¹² The Armenian community in São Paulo, in particular, was predominantly made up of individuals from Marash.¹³

Despite the challenges they faced, Armenians in Brazil developed robust networks of solidarity, especially through religious, cultural, and philanthropic associations. Apostolic churches and organizations like the Armenian General Benevolence Union (AGBU) played vital roles in preserving cultural identity and facilitating integration of newcomers into Brazilian society.¹⁴ These networks also served as mediator between immigrants and the host society, fostering community cohesion and cultural continuity.

While São Paulo has often been the focal point of studies on the Armenian diaspora in Brazil, the contributions of the Rio de Janeiro's community still offer grounds for research. Building on existing scholarship, this article examines the contributions of Mihran Latif to the Armenian diaspora in Rio de Janeiro, shedding light on his influence and the networks he helped establish. By exploring Latif's trajectory, the article investigates the roles of key individuals in shaping the preservation of Armenian identity and memory in Brazil, focusing on the organizational strategies and actions taken by the community in Rio de Janeiro to support the survivors of the Armenian Genocide. During the early 1900s, Rio de Janeiro played a crucial role

10 "Community Overview," Embassy of Armenia in Brazil, accessed 06.10.2024, <https://brazil.mfa.am/en/community-overview>.

11 Federal Senate of Brazil, "Resolução nº 13, de 2015," accessed 06.10.2024, <https://legis.senado.leg.br/sdleg-getter/documento?dm=1470650&disposition=inline>.

12 Kim Hekimian, "Armenian Immigration to Argentina: 1909-1938," *Armenian Review* 43, no. 1(1990): 85-113.

13 Heitor de Andrade Carvalho Loureiro, "O Comunismo dos Imigrantes Armênios de São Paulo (1935-1969)," (Master's thesis, Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, 2012).

14 Nélide Boulgourdjian-Toufeksian, "Rol de las Redes Asociativas y Vínculos con la 'Madre Patria' en la Conformación y la Permanencia de la Diáspora Armenia en la Argentina," *E.I.A.L.* 24, no. 2 (2013), 7-33; Vartanian, *A Coletividade Armênia do Brasil*.

as the country's political and economic capital, offering a strategic platform for humanitarian and diplomatic efforts.

As ties to the broader Armenian diaspora began to weaken, concerns about the potential loss of cultural identity became more pronounced, particularly as the younger generations became increasingly distanced from their heritage. This fear of erasure, highlighted by Vartanian,¹⁵ drove efforts not only to protect Armenian history but also to ensure that it remained an integral part of the community's identity. Figures like Latif, who provided vital support to incoming Armenians, were motivated not only by humanitarian concerns but also by a shared understanding of the importance of preserving Armenian identity in the face of historical trauma.

In this context, the Armenian Genocide emerged as a central narrative in shaping the collective memory and identity of Armenians in Brazil, serving as the founding myth of the community, as Bogossian-Porto notes.¹⁶ It was through this myth and the collective remembrance of the Genocide that the community in Brazil forged its identity.

This article is grounded in elite theory to analyze the role of influential figures in constructing networks of support for the victims of the Armenian Genocide. Elite theory provides a framework for understanding how individuals in privileged positions utilize economic, social, and cultural capital to mobilize resources and influence collective action.¹⁷ In the case of the Armenian diaspora in Rio de Janeiro, leaders like Mihran Latif acted as crucial mediators, connecting local initiatives to the broader transnational struggle for recognition and support.

To complement this theoretical foundation, the article adopts microhistory as the primary method of analysis.¹⁸ Microhistory, which focuses on specific individuals and events to reveal broader social dynamics, is particularly useful for understanding Latif's trajectory and his networks.¹⁹ This approach allows local actions to be connected to global contexts, offering insights into aspects of the diaspora that could have been overlooked by the historiography.

15 Vartanian, *A Coletividade Armênia do Brasil*.

16 Bogossian-Porto, "Construções e Reconstruções da Identidade."

17 Vilfredo Pareto, *The Mind and Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935); Gaetano Mosca, *The Ruling Class* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1939); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 2018), 287-318.

18 Giovanni Levi, "Sobre a Micro-História," in *A Escrita da História: Novas Perspectivas*, edited by Peter Burke (São Paulo: Editora da UNESP, 1992), 133-134.

19 Carlo Ginzburg, *O Queijo e os Vermes: O Cotidiano e as Ideias de um Moleiro Perseguido pela Inquisição* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2006).

This study draws on primary sources such as immigration dossiers from the Maritime and Border Police of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, naturalization records from the SIAN system of the Brazilian National Archive, and vital records (birth, marriage, and death certificates) available on the Family Search platform. Periodicals like *Correio da Manhã*, *O Paiz* and *Jornal do Comércio* were consulted to explore news related to meetings, appointments, and correspondence between individuals in the Armenian community, available through the open-access Brazilian Digital Newspaper Archive (*Hemeroteca Digital Brasileira*). The study also draws on secondary sources to provide context and support for the primary sources analyzed.

This article seeks to address two central questions: how did the Armenian community organize itself in Rio de Janeiro, and what roles did prominent individuals like Latif play in this process? Latif's story not only exemplifies the agency of Armenian immigrants in navigating their new environments but also underscores the significance of collective solidarity in diasporic identity formation. Through this lens, the article contributes to broader discussions on migration, memory preservation, and the interplay between individual narratives and community dynamics in shaping cultural identities.

Theoretical Concepts

This study employs concepts from diaspora studies, transnationalism, and memory studies to analyze the Armenian diaspora in Brazil. The analysis draws on Khachig Tölölyan's theorization of diasporic communities as "transnations" sustained by networks of elites and institutions. Astrid Erll's concept of *travelling memory* complements this by emphasizing the movement and adaptation of collective memories across sociocultural contexts. Finally, Jelin highlights the role individuals and groups play in transmitting and institutionalizing memory through social and political actions.

Travelling Memory and Agents of memory

Memory serves as a cornerstone for the Armenian diaspora's identity in Brazil. Astrid Erll's concept of "*travelling memory*" is helpful to understand how the collective memory of the Armenian Genocide adapted to Brazil's cultural and political realities, becoming a unifying force for the community. In the absence of extensive written or oral records, this memory is enacted

through community-driven actions, such as establishing cultural and educational institutions and organizing commemorative events.²⁰ Elizabeth Jelin expands on this by emphasizing that memory is a dynamic process shaped by interactions between groups, particularly those who have experienced trauma. She highlights the idea of individuals or groups actively preserving and transmitting collective memories, often advocating for recognition and justice (“agents of memory”).²¹

The application of these ideas is evident in the Armenian diaspora’s leaders, educators, and institutions, who ensure the intergenerational transmission of memory. Drawing on Erll and Jelin, these efforts not only sustain memory but also adapt it to the evolving realities of their host society.

Diaspora and Transnationalism

Khachig Tölölyan argues that being Armenian in the diaspora involves more than mere self-identification; it requires discursive and representational practices.²² Building on this, Vartanian highlights that belonging to the Armenian diaspora demanded active participation, extending beyond the first generation in Brazil.²³ This interplay between identity and participation underscores the dual nature of diasporic experiences, which unfold transnationally—through cross-border networks—and locally, within the national context.

Therefore, following Bauböck and Faist’s argument, this study integrates diaspora and transnationalism to account for the dynamic interplay between identity formation and network mobility.²⁴ While diaspora studies traditionally emphasize collective identity and cultural preservation, transnationalism examines how these same phenomena emerge from cross-border mobility and the creation of networks.²⁵ By adopting both perspectives, this analysis

20 Astrid Erll, “Travelling Memory,” *Parallax* 17, no. 4 (2011): 4–18.

21 Elizabeth Jelin, *Los trabajos de la memoria* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica Argentina, 2022), 71–92.

22 Khachig Tölölyan, “Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 5, no. 1 (1996): 15–16.

23 Vartanian, *A Coletividade Armênia do Brasil*, 55.

24 Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist, *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 5.

25 *Ibid.*, 22.

demonstrates how transnational networks have enabled the Armenian diaspora in Brazil to maintain its collective identity while advancing local and global political agendas. Despite their transnational reach, diasporic actors often define their agendas within national contexts, bridging the local and the global.

The Role of Elites in Diasporic Networks

Elites play a pivotal role in sustaining diasporic networks, as Tölölyan theorizes.²⁶ Their actions encompass cultural preservation, institutional development, and the navigation of complex political and social landscapes, ensuring the resilience and adaptability of the diaspora. These individuals mobilize economic, social, and cultural capital to connect local communities to transnational networks, fostering cohesion and advancing diasporic causes. In Brazil, Mihran Latif linked Armenian communities to global efforts for recognition, while reinforcing cultural identity through the establishment of institutions.²⁷

Armenian Associative Networks in Brazil: Preserving Identity and Political Mobilization

The preservation of the collective identity of the Armenian diaspora is rooted in its churches and partisan associations. According to Loureiro, these institutions are instrumental in articulating and consolidating social networks among community members.²⁸ While the diaspora exhibits diversity in its institutional organization, these networks are often branches of larger associations whose structures vary depending on the regional context.²⁹

In Brazil, the first Armenian organizations were established to support compatriots in need, both in the country and in regions devastated by the genocide, such as Western Armenia and the Middle East. One notable initiative was the creation of the Armenian Red Cross in São Paulo during World War I in 1915. Led by Vahé Boghossian, a native of Kharpert, this institution focused on raising funds for the National Salvation Fund based in Paris, which was headed by

26 Khachig Tölölyan, "Elites and Institutions in the Armenian Transnation," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 9, no. 1 (2000): 109, 114.

27 Ibid., 109.

28 Loureiro, *O Comunismo dos Imigrantes Armênios*.

29 Boulgourdjian-Toufeksian, "Rol de las Redes Asociativas y Vínculos."

Boghos Nubar. Under the stewardship of Vertanés Gebelian, a treasurer originally from Odjakhlu in Deort Yol, the group successfully organized events and collected a total of 10,924.45 French francs.³⁰ These funds were gradually sent to Nubar in Paris, highlighting the transnational ties between Armenians across the globe. This exemplified not only solidarity within the Armenian diaspora in Brazil but also their connection to broader efforts to aid survivors and rebuild the communities impacted by the genocide.³¹

The Armenian Red Cross completed its final recorded activity on 20 March 1917, when it transferred its remaining funds. Following this achievement, its founders began exploring the establishment of a more formal national organization. This effort culminated on 8 November 1917, with the establishment of the Armenian Benevolent Union, led by Elia Naccach, an Armenian originally from Aleppo with origins in Tchemechkadzak. Unlike the Armenian Red Cross, this new organization adopted a more localized approach, aligning with Brazilian laws and operating independently. Between its founding and 1921, it continued to send financial support to Armenians affected by the war, maintaining its focus on humanitarian aid.³²

Charitable organizations tied to the Armenian Apostolic Church began emerging in the Middle East during the late 19th century, establishing a framework that would later influence similar efforts in other parts of the diaspora, including Brazil. This tradition gained momentum with the creation of the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) in Cairo in 1906. In Brazil, an AGBU chapter was eventually founded in São Paulo in 1964. Although established later than in other diaspora communities, the organization quickly consolidated itself, thanks to the economic success of its founding members.³³

Beyond charitable networks, Armenian political parties were instrumental in organizing the diaspora communities. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), known as Dashnaktsutyun, developed several affiliated organizations, including the Armenian Relief Association (HOM) and the Hamazkayin Armenian Cultural Association. These organizations

30 Vartanian, *A Coletividade Armênia do Brasil*, 77.

31 Loureiro, *O Comunismo dos Imigrantes Armênios*, 60; Vartanian, *A Coletividade Armênia do Brasil*, 80-81.

32 Vartanian, *A Coletividade Armênia do Brasil*, 79-81.

33 Ibid.

focused on preserving Armenian culture and reinforcing a shared collective identity in the diaspora.³⁴

In addition to the ARF, other political parties, such as the Social Democrat Hunchakian Party and the Liberal Democratic Ramgavar Party, were active within the Armenian diaspora in Brazil, though their influence was more limited. Despite their smaller reach, these parties played a role in fostering political and cultural discussions within the community. They organized events and initiatives that connected Armenians in Brazil to global efforts advocating for the recognition and reparation of the genocide.

A key feature of these networks was their collaboration with religious institutions, particularly the Armenian Apostolic Church. Functioning as a space for social, cultural, and political activities, the Church played a unifying role within the community. Despite divergences among political parties and other organizations, it remained a symbol of cohesion and a central agent in preserving the sense of belonging and “Armenianness.”³⁵

These associative networks played a dual role in supporting the integration of Armenians into Brazilian society and shaping a collective narrative about the genocide. Grounded in principles of solidarity and justice, this narrative mobilized the diaspora to advocate for recognition of the genocide, both within Brazil and on an international scale. However, official Brazilian narratives, often shaped by diplomatic pragmatism, framed the genocide through a humanitarian lens without fully addressing the political responsibilities of the Ottoman Empire. While civil society and diaspora organizations were vocal in calling for recognition, the Brazilian government maintained a more cautious stance, reflecting its geopolitical interests and diplomatic neutrality at the time.³⁶

As previously noted, Armenians, like other migrants from Asia or Middle East, were not considered “desirable migrants” in the early 20th century. Despite this, the Armenian diaspora in cities like Buenos Aires and São Paulo took root through both formal and informal mutual aid associations. These networks helped Armenians integrate into the labor market, often providing

34 Ibid.

57 Boulgourdjian-Toufeksian, “Rol de las Redes Asociativas y Vínculos,” 17.

36 Loureiro, “Pragmatismo e Humanitarismo,” 203-206.

newcomers with opportunities to work in businesses established by earlier Armenian families, such as haberdasheries and shoe stores, or by offering support to operate within these industries.³⁷

These practices, which were common at the time, were further reinforced by specific economic conditions in each country. In Argentina, a recession led to increased urban unemployment, while in Brazil, restrictive foreign labor policies during the 1930s limited access to other employment opportunities.³⁸ Over time, the perception of the Armenians as “undesirable migrants” shifted. By the late 20th century, Armenian communities in Argentina and Brazil had achieved notable economic integration and growth. In Argentina, Armenians expanded their influence in key industries and gained prominence in the business sector.³⁹ Similarly, the Armenian community in São Paulo experienced significant commercial growth, expanding from 57 stores in 1936 to a broader presence in retail in shopping malls by the 1990s.⁴⁰

The Profile of the Armenian Community in Rio

The Armenian immigrants who arrived in Brazil in the early 20th century primarily settled in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, with a smaller group scattered across other states, such as Minas Gerais, Ceará, and Mato Grosso. Boghossian-Porto points out that the choice of destination significantly influenced the formation of Armenian communities in the country. In São Paulo, Armenians quickly formed cohesive collectivity, while in Rio de Janeiro, integration with other immigrant groups, particularly Arabs, led to a more assimilated coexistence that was less distinct. This contrast is evident in sociocultural practices, as Rio de Janeiro’s Armenians often integrated into institutions founded by other communities, including Lebanese and Syrians, facilitating a smoother but less visibly assimilation.⁴¹

Boghossian-Porto further highlights that the sociability dynamic in Rio de Janeiro also involved a mutual support network, often involving Arab immigrants who assisted in the reception and integration of newcomers. This collaborative process reflected a gradual transition

37 Grün, “Intelectuais na comunidade judaica brasileira,” 117-119.

38 Parvechi, *Memória da Diáspora Armênia*, 68.

39 Hekimian, “Armenian Immigration to Argentina,” 109.

40 Parvechi, *Memória da Diáspora Armênia*, 74.

41 Boghossian-Porto, “Construções e Reconstruções da Identidade Armênia,” 152.

toward assimilation, which hindered the establishment of a firmly consolidated Armenian community, as seen in São Paulo. However, the memory of their Armenian origins remained, albeit somewhat diluted within the broader context of Arab immigration.⁴²

In contrast, the Armenian community in São Paulo quickly established its own institutions, including churches and schools, which helped preserve and reinforce Armenian cultural identity. As Boghossian-Porto notes, this process created strong institutional ties and facilitated the development of international communication networks with other diaspora communities.⁴³

Despite this distinction, the first and second generations of Armenians in Rio de Janeiro present a more nuanced story than the broader narrative often suggests. While the community in Rio may not have developed the same strong institutional structures as in São Paulo, many of the most vocal and influential Armenians during the Armenian Genocide were based in Rio. This is partly due to the city's unique position as Brazil's capital until 1960, where political discourse flourished. At the same time, São Paulo, as an emerging commercial and industrial hub, gradually became the dominant center for Armenian community life, especially after the capital moved to Brasília in 1957.

The establishment of churches and associations in São Paulo was undeniably significant, but it doesn't fully explain the dynamics of Armenian identity and community in Brazil. As Vartanian points out, many Armenian families in both São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro saw their descendants gradually move away from community life, particularly those from influential families.⁴⁴ This trend can be attributed to several factors, such as intermarriage with Brazilians, Italians, and other nationalities, and the lack of a strong community anchor in Rio that would have tied younger generations to their Armenian roots. Furthermore, the decision to remain in São Paulo or move there was also influenced by the city's industrial and commercial significance, as well as the climate, both of which were attractive to newcomers seeking economic opportunities.

In Rio de Janeiro, many Armenians worked in industries such as diamond cutting, tailoring, baking, carpentry, photography, shoemaking and trade. A significant number initially

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Vartanian, *A Coletividade Armênia do Brasil*, 55.

arrived as farmers, aligning with Brazil's migration policies at the time, although few pursued agricultural lives after their arrival. Instead, they transitioned into commerce or industry, establishing themselves in a variety of trades. Armenians who settled in the city came from diverse regions, reflecting the broader geographic distribution of the Armenian diaspora. The Armenians that immigrated to Rio de Janeiro were from cities and villages such as Alexandretta (Iskenderun), Kork Khan, Maadan, Dortyol, Aintab (present-day Gaziantep), Marash (present-day Kahramanmaraş), Urfa, Istanbul, Kesaria (Kayseri), Kessab, Smyrna (İzmir), Kharberd, Fendejak, Akshehir, Knik, Amassia, Yozgat, Erznka, Akkine, Adraca, Kaskina, and Adapazar.⁴⁵

It is important to note that the origins and profiles of the Armenian community in Rio de Janeiro evolved significantly across different migratory waves. While this article focuses on the formation of the initial community in Rio and its efforts during and shortly after the genocide, subsequent waves, particularly between the 1940s and 1960s, brought Armenians from countries such as Egypt, Syria, Cyprus, and Lebanon. These later migrants were often displaced again due to conflicts in those countries, having initially sought refuge there after the genocide. Despite these differences, the Armenian community in Rio de Janeiro reflects a rich and diverse history of resilience and adaptation, which deserves recognition even though it is not the central focus of this study.

The Early Life of Mihran Latif(yan)

As previously mentioned, Dr. Mihran Latif appears to have been the first Armenian to arrive in Brazil. He was born Mihran Latifyan, on May 20, 1856, in Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul). The son of Bedros Latifyan and Izar Kusyikhanlian,⁴⁶ Mihran studied engineering at the University of Ghent in Belgium.⁴⁷ During this time, he met some of the most prominent

45 Arquivo Nacional do Brasil, *Registros de Imigração (Parte 6), 1930–1970*, digitized by FamilySearch International (Salt Lake City, UT, 2011), manuscript, Portuguese, accessed 14.09.2024, <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/2513689?availability=Online>.

46 “Falecimentos,” *Jornal do Comércio (RJ)*, July 25, 1898, reports the passing of Mihran Latif's mother at the age of 70 in Paris, where Latif and his family were staying at the time. A mass was held in her honor at the Armenian chapel in the city, and she was buried at the Père-Lachaise cemetery, https://memoria.bn.gov.br/DocReader/DocReader.aspx?bib=364568_08&pesq=%22Mihran%20Latif%22&pasta=ano%20189&hf=memoria.bn.gov.br&pagfis=29089.

47 Arquivo Nacional, *Fundo: Série Interior – Nacionalidades (IJJ6) (A9)*, Seção/Série: Processos de Naturalização, Notação BR RJANRIO A9.0.PNE.9248. Processo de Naturalização de Mihran Latif, October 11, 1916, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Brazilian architects of the era, including Joaquim Monteiro de Barros, with whom he developed a friendship and later a professional partnership that would yield significant results. As described in a 1943 newspaper article commemorating his life: “Elegant, bohemian, sometimes romantic – interpreting various languid melodies on the piano, and at other times exuberant – displaying our southern gaiety, Quincas [nickname for Joaquim] Monteiro de Barros contrasted with the serious and studious Mihran (...) They never parted again.” After completing his studies, Latif came to Brazil in 1879, introduced by Buarque de Macedo to Emperor Pedro II of Brazil.⁴⁸

Here, Mihran married Emiliana Monteiro de Barros, the sister of Joaquim Monteiro de Barros, shortly after his arrival in Brazil. Together, they had six children: Izar (1887), Emiliana (1889), Alice (1891), Pedro (1893), Julio (1895), and Mihran (1902).⁴⁹ Both Pedro and Mihran followed in their father’s footsteps and became engineers.

Throughout his career, Latif held several prominent engineering positions across Brazil, contributing to significant infrastructure and industrial projects. In southeastern Brazil, he served as chief engineer for the Dom Pedro II Railroad, overseeing its extension from Barbacena to Sabará and contracting the section that connected Sabará to Pirapora (in the state of Minas Gerais). He also played a key role in designing and constructing the challenging Ouro Preto branch line, which served an important mining region.⁵⁰

During Brazil's Republican era, Latif worked on projects in the northeast, including serving as chief engineer for the Central Railroad, which connected Recife (the capital of Pernambuco) to Caruaru, and as an engineer for the Central Railroad of Ceará. In the southeastern state of Espírito Santo, he managed public works projects, including constructing a railway segment crossing the *Serra do Mar* mountain range to link Espírito Santo with Minas Gerais.⁵¹

Beyond his railway contributions, Latif organized and directed several companies. These included the *Ribeirão Preto Power and Light Company* and the *Jahu Power and Light Company*,

48 Roberto Macedo, “Notas Históricas,” *Correio da Manhã (RJ)*, October 26, 1943, https://memoria.bn.gov.br/docreader/DocReader.aspx?bib=089842_05&pagfis=17959.

49 “Eng Mihran Latif Family Tree,” *FamilySearch*, accessed 21.10.2024, <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/person/details/9FST-71H>.

50 Roberto Macedo, “Notas Históricas,” *Correio da Manhã (RJ)*, October 26, 1943, https://memoria.bn.gov.br/docreader/DocReader.aspx?bib=089842_05&pagfis=17959.

51 Ibid.

both in the state of São Paulo, as well as the *Companhia Norte Paulista de Combustíveis*. He also served as a director for the *San Paulo Coffee States Co. Limited* and the *Companhia Estrada de Ferro Minas de São Jerônimo*, and he presided over the Beira-Mar Avenue Construction Company, which was responsible for developing a major coastal avenue in Rio de Janeiro (**Figure 1**).



Figure 1. Marc Ferrez, *Panorama da Enseada de Botafogo, Morro do Pão de Açúcar e Avenida Beira-Mar*, ca. 1906, gelatin silver print, 30 x 40 cm, Coleção Gilberto Ferrez, Instituto Moreira Salles, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, <https://brasilianafotografica.bn.gov.br/brasiliانا/handle/20.500.12156.1/10512>.

In addition to his great achievements, a newspaper article that offers a historical note recalling Mihran Latif's trajectory—who had passed away in 1929—mentions that Latif's uncle had accepted, “to alleviate the suffering of Armenians under Ottoman rule, the position of prime minister under Abdul-Hamid II,” and that his family was part of the Armenian *Amira* elite of Constantinople.⁵² While the title attributed to Artin Dadyan Pasha is historically inaccurate, it is

⁵² Ibid.

possible that Latif was indeed related to him.⁵³ However, this connection remains difficult to verify.⁵⁴

The article also states that Latif returned to Constantinople after his marriage to work on the planning of the Berlin-Baghdad railway and engaged in political activities at the invitation of his uncle. This information is corroborated by another news report published on 1 March 1889, announcing a public auction of all the furniture belonging to Mihran Latif and his family, due to their relocation to Europe.⁵⁵ However, with the onset of the persecutions against Armenians, he decided to return to Brazil.⁵⁶

According to the same report, Mihran was also said to be the nephew of Boghos Nubar, but due to the inability to confirm this claim, Loureiro raises questions about the lack of support for Latif as a representative of Armenian interests in the country during the discussions on the matter.⁵⁷

The fact is that, in Brazil, Latif accumulated many titles beyond that of chief engineer, becoming a banker, businessman, farmer, and coffee trader in the São Paulo region, one of Brazil's most important coffee-producing areas. He managed his company, which later evolved into a family business with the incorporation of his children, called “Empreza Constructora Avenida Beira Mar,” and worked in the coffee sector in São Paulo. Additionally, Latif played a key political role within Brazilian diplomacy, working closely with the country's president at the

53 Hagop Kechichian, “Os Sobreviventes do Genocídio: Imigração e Integração Armênia no Brasil, Um Estudo Introdutório,” (PhD diss., FFLCH/USP, 2000), 313-332.

54 According to a letter preserved in the Latif family archive, written by Mihran Latif's son, Miran Monteiro de Barros Latif, Artin Dadyan Pasha was actually Mihran Latif's great-uncle, who had raised him. The letter, titled *Letters to an Armenian* and addressed to Anastas Mikoyan, provides key insights into Mihran Latif's family history and the erasure of the Armenian identity from his surname. Miran Monteiro recounts: “They removed the suffix from my surname, Latifyan—a suffix that clung too tightly to a past that might disturb everything Uncle Ohannes had dreamed for my father, whom he had raised. This great-uncle, to remain an influential minister, must surely have had to bow his head low when passing through the small gate connecting his house to the Yildiz Palace, suppressing the ‘ian’ in his nephew-son’s name, free of any suspicion [...]”

55 “Bons Móveis,” *Jornal do Comércio (RJ)*, May 1, 1889, https://memoria.bn.gov.br/DocReader/DocReader.aspx?bib=364568_07&pesq=%22Mihran%20Latif%22&pasta=an0%20188&hf=memoria.bn.gov.br&pagfis=22338.

56 “Falleceu hontem, inesperadamente, em sua residência o dr. Mihran Latif,” *Correio da Manhã (RJ)*, May 21, 1929, https://memoria.bn.gov.br/DocReader/DocReader.aspx?bib=089842_03&pagfis=40269.

57 Loureiro, “Pragmatismo e Humanitarismo,” 117.

time, Epitácio Pessoa (president from 1919 to 1922), at the Palácio do Catete, the former presidential palace in Rio de Janeiro.⁵⁸

In addition to his accomplishments, Latif's marriage to Emiliana Monteiro de Barros, the daughter of one of Brazil's most influential families, also played a crucial role in his life in Brazil. The Monteiro de Barros family, descending from a noble lineage in Portugal, arrived in Brazil in the mid-18th century, initially interested in mineral exploration, particularly in Minas Gerais. Their interests later expanded into coffee cultivation in regions such as Minas Gerais and São Paulo. Over time, the family established itself within the imperial court, surviving the end of the colonial period and becoming the "coffee barons." With a strong presence across southeastern Brazil, the Monteiro de Barros family remained at the top of the country's elite, forging important alliances through marriages with other prominent families. This legacy continued when Latif's daughters, Izar and Emiliana, married descendants of Pedro Betim Paes Leme, with whom Latif had collaborated on the Dom Pedro II Railroad. Izar married Luiz Betim Paes Leme,⁵⁹ and Emiliana married André Betim Paes Leme.⁶⁰

The immigration of 108 Armenians to the Canaã Farm in 1926

Despite numerous attempts since 1895, efforts to rescue Armenians during the massacres and genocide with the support of the Brazilian government met with little success.⁶¹ The main problem began in the early 1900s when the Brazilian government was more focused on attracting Italian immigrants to major cities. Fearing a large influx of Chinese and Japanese migrants, it issued a decree that prohibited the entry of Asian ethnic groups, including Armenians. In 1926, after several failed attempts, Mihran Latif, together with his son-in-law, Dr. André Betim Paes

58 Ibid.

59 "Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, Registro Civil, 1804-2013," *FamilySearch*, <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XJ35-BXC>, entry for Luiz Betim Paes Leme and Pedro Betim Paes Leme.

60 "Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, Registro Civil, 1804-2013," *FamilySearch*, <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XJ35-JPD>, entry for André Betim Paes Leme and Pedro Betim Paes Leme.

61 Vartanian, *A Coletividade Armênia do Brasil*, 133.

Leme, and a relative, Hrant Fendekelian, once again acted in an attempt to bring 22 Armenian families to the country, totaling 108 immigrants.⁶²

Since the Brazilian government would only financially support the arrival of laborers for farm work, an agreement was made that these families would work on the Canaã farm, part of the San Paulo Coffee States Co. Limited. At that time, Latif's son-in-law had taken over as the director of the company,⁶³ which managed the farm, located in the municipality of São Simão in the Mogiana region—an important coffee-producing area in the southeastern state of São Paulo. The farm was connected by agricultural rail with a station of the same name. With the help of Hrant Fendekelian and Leon Curiatis, the owner of the shipping company *Transportes Marítimos*, who resided in Thessaloniki, the families were brought to Brazil, although it remained uncertain whether they had any experience in agriculture or farming.⁶⁴

The goal was to have a successful first experience so that other families could follow the same path, helping additional Armenian families seeking refuge in Greece. Since the initial negotiations led by James Procter, a representative sent by the League of Nations to Brazil, for the arrival of Russian and Armenian immigrants were unsuccessful, the Latif family decided to initiate their own mobilization.

As Latif mentions in a letter to the Armenian priest in Brazil, Gabriel Samuelian, attempts were made to bring a larger wave of Armenians to the country, working with the government in both Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. However, the government only agreed to this under the condition that the new immigrants would work in agriculture and not settle in the cities. At the time, his son-in-law, a member of Brazil's Economic Council, had managed to convince the government to authorize the arrival of 10,000 Armenians, with the government covering the costs. This would only happen if the initial success with the 22 families could be achieved first.⁶⁵ However, as reported by Vartinian, after the families arrived in Rio de Janeiro, where they were

62 Ibid.

63 *San Paulo Coffee States Co. Limited*, material on microfiche (1961-1980), ZBW - Leibniz Information Centre for Economics, <https://pm20.zbw.eu/folder/co/071657>.

64 Vartanian, *A Coletividade Armênia do Brasil*, 135.

65 Ibid., 141-142.

supposed to continue their journey to São Paulo, they refused to travel to the farms and fulfill their contract to work on the farms for a period of four years.⁶⁶

After much persuasion from the Armenian community in Rio de Janeiro and the Armenian Catholic priest Hagop Nessimian, these families went to the farm in São Paulo in September. However, it did not take long for them to organize another movement, this time leaving the farm for the city of São Paulo, dissatisfied with the conditions they had found there.⁶⁷ As a result, with the failure of this initiative, the plan for a mass arrival of Armenian immigrants to Brazil with government support was definitively discarded.

To better understand the scale of migration, research was conducted using the Brazilian National Archive's database, focusing on records from the Maritime Police and the Immigration Police. These records provide data on steamship arrivals at the port of Rio de Janeiro, mentioned by Vartinian in his account, during 1926. The research focused on arrivals up to September of that year, when these families were reportedly taken to the farm in São Paulo. Only two ships and their passenger lists stood out in the records, corresponding to significant waves of Armenian migration. These ships departed from Genoa, Italy, as no direct routes to Rio de Janeiro from Greece existed at the time. This match is particularly significant because, during this period, Armenian families likely had to travel to intermediary ports before embarking on voyages to Brazil. Their departure dates closely align with both the families' relocation to the farm and their subsequent return to São Paulo, arriving on September 15.

Based on these passenger lists, **Table 1** was compiled, presenting the relevant data. As some names and surnames were misspelled in the original documents, adjustments were made, which are indicated in parentheses. Other information was corrected using official migration records, marriage, and birth registrations found on the FamilySearch platform for these families after their settlement in Brazil.

Interestingly, it was found that some of these Armenians likely never left Rio de Janeiro, having married shortly after their arrival or started families. Others are recorded as being in São Paulo not long afterward, employed in Armenian-owned shoe factories or industries. Another important point raised by the data is that more than 22 Armenian families did indeed arrive in

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid., 139.

Brazil on these two ships, although the total number of Armenians did not reach 108, as initially suggested.

Name	Last Place of Residence	Destination	Date	Profession	Steamship
Garabed Malakian	Beirut	São Paulo	06/07/1926	Shoemaker	Valdivia
Edouard Tobdjian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	06/07/1926	Shoemaker	Valdivia
Haig Adourian	Beirut	São Paulo	06/07/1926	Shoemaker	Valdivia
Apraham Pochoglomian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	06/07/1926	Shoemaker	Valdivia
Marie Pochoglomian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	06/07/1926		Valdivia
Artin Pochoglomian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	06/07/1926		Valdivia
Hovses Sarkissian	Beirut	São Paulo	06/07/1926	Shoemaker	Valdivia
Sarkis Koumronyan	Beirut	São Paulo	06/07/1926	Shoemaker	Valdivia
Kuleya (Gohar) Koumronyan	Beirut	São Paulo	06/07/1926		Valdivia
Armenak Koumronyan	Beirut	São Paulo	06/07/1926		Valdivia
Marie Koumronyan	Beirut	São Paulo	06/07/1926		Valdivia
Ardache (Artashes) Koumronyan	Beirut	São Paulo	06/07/1926		Valdivia

Chean Koumronyan	Beirut	São Paulo	06/07/1926	Farmer	Valdivia
Yessay (Yeghsay) Kamrousyen	Beirut	São Paulo	06/07/1926	Shoemaker	Valdivia
Sannos (Sanoush) Mouradian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	06/07/1926	Farmer	Valdivia
Terminada (Termine) Mouradian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	06/07/1926		Valdivia
Sarkis Mouradian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	06/07/1926		Valdivia
Cysanna (Shushan) Mouradian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	06/07/1926		Valdivia
Garabed Mouradian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	06/07/1926		Valdivia
Souren Davidian	Beirut	São Paulo	06/07/1926	Shoemaker	Valdivia
Varthes Davidian	Beirut	São Paulo	06/07/1926		Valdivia
Boghos Davidian	Beirut	São Paulo	06/07/1926	Shoemaker	Valdivia
Vergine Davidian	Beirut	São Paulo	06/07/1926		Valdivia
Terfanda Davidian	Beirut	São Paulo	06/07/1926		Valdivia
Ohannes Keldeyan	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	06/07/1926	Shoemaker	Valdivia
Mariam Keldeyan	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	06/07/1926		Valdivia
Menas Keldeyan	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	06/07/1926		Valdivia

Artin Vartanian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	06/07/1926		Valdivia
Garabed Noghochian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	06/07/1926		Valdivia
Louisa Noghochian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	06/07/1926		Valdivia
Antranik Noghochian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	06/07/1926		Valdivia
Le(v)on Mardiros(sian)	Aleppo	São Paulo	06/07/1926	Carpenter	Valdivia
Missak Havhedjian	Beirut	São Paulo	06/07/1926	Farmer	Valdivia
Nevart Havhedjian	Beirut	São Paulo	06/07/1926		Valdivia
Sarkis Havhedjian	Beirut	São Paulo	06/07/1926		Valdivia
Agop Havhedjian	Beirut	São Paulo	06/07/1926		Valdivia
Sosa (Sose) Havhedjian	Beirut	São Paulo	06/07/1926		Valdivia
Tacfor (Takvor) Kuchulian	Damascus	São Paulo	06/07/1926	Shoemaker	Valdivia
Stefan Zeitoun Oglomyan	Beirut	São Paulo	06/07/1926		Valdivia
Garabed Meguerditchian	Beirut	São Paulo	06/07/1926	Shoemaker	Valdivia
Samuel Gendekian	Beirut	São Paulo	06/07/1926	Shoemaker	Valdivia
Hampartsoum Metezersian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	16/08/1926		Plata

Stephan Darakdjian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	16/08/1926		Plata
Ossana Darakdjian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	16/08/1926		Plata
Rastoun Darakdjian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	16/08/1926		Plata
Asniv Darakdjian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	16/08/1926		Plata
Hagop Simonian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	16/08/1926		Plata
Eva Simonian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	16/08/1926		Plata
Le(v)on Simonian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	16/08/1926		Plata
Sarkis Simonian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	16/08/1926		Plata
Le(v)on Kalian	Marash	Rio de Janeiro	16/08/1926		Plata
Avedis Kiskissian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	16/08/1926	Farmer	Plata
Makronki (Makruhy) Kiskissian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	16/08/1926		Plata
Hatoun Kiskissian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	16/08/1926		Plata
Haigaziun Aharonian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	16/08/1926	Shoemaker	Plata
Archagouhi Aharonian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	16/08/1926		Plata
Bedros Aharonian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	16/08/1926		Plata

Hampartsoun Metezersian	Beirut	Rio de Janeiro	16/08/192 6		Plata
Mihran Kirasian	Syria	Rio de Janeiro	26/08/192 6	Farmer	Giulio Cezaré
Issa Oh(a)nian	Syria	Rio de Janeiro	26/08/192 6	Farmer	Princesa Mafalda
Jabra Kartichian	Syria	Rio de Janeiro	26/08/192 6	Farmer	Princesa Mafalda
Mehran Hartalian	Syria	Rio de Janeiro	26/08/192 6	Farmer	Princesa Mafalda
Ternouch Hartalian	Syria	Rio de Janeiro	26/08/192 6		Princesa Mafalda
Mehran Wanassian (Vanassian)	Syria	Rio de Janeiro	26/08/192 6	Farmer	Princesa Mafalda
Eva Wanassian (Vanassian)	Syria	Rio de Janeiro	26/08/192 6		Princesa Mafalda
Mihran Chanakian	Syria	Rio de Janeiro	26/08/192 6	Farmer	Princesa Mafalda
Armenak Orfalian	Syria	Rio de Janeiro	26/08/192 6	Farmer	Princesa Mafalda
Avedis Kurdian	Syria	Rio de Janeiro	26/08/192 6	Farmer	Princesa Mafalda

Table 1. Author's production based on the SIAN – *Sistema de Informações do Arquivo Nacional*, dossiers: BR RJANRIO OL 0 RPV PRJ 21332 D0001DE0001; BR RJANRIO OL 0 RPV PRJ 21312 D0001DE0001; BR RJANRIO OL 0 RPV PRJ 21227 D0001DE0001, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Another event that took place on 24 September 1926 in São Paulo and was reported by the *O Jornal* (RJ) was the lack of shelter for around 200 Armenians who had reportedly arrived in the

city via Santos.⁶⁸ Some figures previously mentioned are featured in the news. What is particularly interesting is that the journalist speaks with a certain Mr. Garabed Korruquian, who claims to have acted as an intermediary in the immigrants' arrival and their settlement in various parts of the country. He also mentions that one of the first waves of immigrants had arrived in Rio de Janeiro ten months earlier and that he was the one who arranged their accommodation at Mihran Latif's property in Rio, where they were working. Other Armenians were sent to the state of Goiás to work with his brother on Elia Naccach's farms. The issue that led to the newspaper article was that the government was doing nothing to support these immigrants, which forced the entire Armenian community to step in and help them establish themselves in the country. According to Korruquian, the immigrants would not work in the farms, as they were skilled in other trades such as carpentry, blacksmithing, tailoring, and shoemaking. Therefore, the Armenian community had put in place an aid that guaranteed them 15 days of accommodation and subsistence until they were able to find employment and new housing.

Although it is unclear whether these events directly relate to the group mentioned by Vartanian, the article reveals the intricate network that was in place at the time to assist new arrivals. It also introduces a previously unmentioned figure, Mr. Garabed Korruquian, who apparently played a crucial role as an intermediary in facilitating the arrival and settlement of Armenian immigrants across the country.

Diplomatic relation and efforts for the Armenian Cause

The unsuccessful attempt to establish the Armenian families on the Canaã farm marked a significant setback for Latif's vision of facilitating large-scale migration, but it was far from the full extent of his contributions to the Armenian cause. Years earlier, Latif had collaborated with Etienne Brasil, another influential figure within Rio de Janeiro's Armenian community, on a series of ambitious diplomatic and advocacy efforts. Together, they urged the Brazilian government to intervene during the atrocities of the Armenian Genocide and pushed for Brazil's recognition of the short-lived Republic of Armenia.

68 "Imigrantes armênios em S. Paulo," *O Jornal (RJ)*, September 26, 1926, https://memoria.bn.gov.br/DocReader/DocReader.aspx?bib=110523_02&pesq=%22colonia%20armenia%22&pasta=ano%20192&hf=memoria.bn.gov.br&pagfis=28576.

For instance, in January 1920, Latif, using his title as President of the Armenian Colony in Brazil, published a telegram in the newspaper *O Jornal*, he addressed to Lloyd George, the then British Prime Minister. In the telegram, Latif declared:

As in other great capitals of the world, here too in Rio, there is a large, hardworking, and united Armenian colony that lives and works alongside us. But the Armenians of Rio do not forget their long-standing dream of reclaiming their national freedom (...). Martyred Armenia, our ally, expects justice from magnanimous England. We request the return of all our territories, devastated and massacred by the Turks for centuries. The proud and hardworking Armenians are ready to pay their share of the Ottoman debt.⁶⁹

Their efforts culminated in the successful recognition of the Armenian Republic,⁷⁰ a milestone for Armenians in the diaspora. Latif's influence and standing led to his appointment as ambassador for the Republic of Armenia in South America, a role he ultimately declined, believing it carried too much responsibility for an undefined term.⁷¹ Instead, Etienne Brasil wanted to take on the position, which eventually due to political problems did not come, to use it as a platform to continue advocating for Armenian interests in the region, including the possibility of a Brazilian mandate in the Armenian territories, as the British and French mandates were being decided.⁷²

Nevertheless, the former Catholic priest, intellectual, and lawyer in Rio de Janeiro, Etienne Brasil became the first diplomatic representative of Armenia in Brazil. Throughout his career, he dedicated himself to promoting Armenian memory and demands, employing diverse

69 "Pela Republica da Armenia," *O Jornal (RJ)*, January 3, 1920, https://memoria.bn.gov.br/DocReader/DocReader.aspx?bib=110523_02&pesq=%22colonia%20armenia%22&pasta=no%20192&hf=memoria.bn.gov.br&pagfis=32, translated by the author.

70 Ibid.; "Um apello da colonia armenia á imprensa brasileira," *Correio da Manhã (RJ)*, January 3, 1920, https://memoria.bn.gov.br/DocReader/DocReader.aspx?bib=089842_03&pesq=%22colonia%20armenia%22&pasta=no%20192&hf=memoria.bn.gov.br&pagfis=36; "Republica Armenia," *O Jornal (RJ)*, February 9, 1920, https://memoria.bn.gov.br/DocReader/DocReader.aspx?bib=110523_02&pesq=%22Etienne%20Brasil%22&pasta=no%20192&hf=memoria.bn.gov.br&pagfis=507; "Edição de hoje, 12 páginas," *O Paiz (RJ)*, November 6, 1920, https://memoria.bn.gov.br/DocReader/DocReader.aspx?bib=178691_05&pesq=%22Etienne%20Brasil%22&pasta=no%20192&hf=memoria.bn.gov.br&pagfis=3749.

71 Vartanian, *A Coletividade Armênia do Brasil*, 97.

72 Loureiro, "Pragmatismo e Humanitarismo," 19.

strategies, including writing articles, delivering lectures, publishing books, and engaging actively with the Brazilian government to secure political recognition and solidarity for Armenia.

According to his naturalization records, Etienne Brasil (an adopted name from Etienne Ignace, though his original name remains unknown) was born on December 25, 1882.⁷³ He arrived in Brazil in 1907 from Paris, initially settling in Bahia to work as a professor at the *Seminário Arquiepiscopal da Bahia*. In 1911, he relocated to Rio de Janeiro, where he lived until his death.

Alongside Mihran Latif, Etienne Brasil became a central figure in fostering diplomatic relations between Brazil and the Republic of Armenia after World War I. A leader of the Armenian cause in Brazil, he relied on his extensive network, including his partnership with Latif.⁷⁴ Latif's social and economic influence played a crucial role in granting Etienne access to Rio's elite circles, opening doors to Brazil's political and diplomatic centers, as well as establishing connections across South America.⁷⁵

Etienne Brasil used this access to amplify Armenian demands, launching an intense propaganda campaign in the Brazilian press to bring the "Armenian Cause" to national attention. With the support of the diaspora elite, he established himself as a mediator for the Armenian diaspora and a staunch advocate for their cause, mobilizing public opinion and gaining visibility for Armenian issues among Brazil's middle and upper classes, particularly through newspapers and magazines.

Another initiative led by Etienne Brasil, as president, alongside Latif and other Armenians from the Rio de Janeiro community, was the creation of the Armenian Center (*Centro Armênio*) around 1916. The goal of this organization was to raise funds and political support to assist Armenians suffering during the genocide.⁷⁶ Similarly to the work done by the *Sociedade Armênia de Beneficência* in São Paulo, the Armenian Center in Rio served as a key support and resistance entity during this period. From this center, they issued reports on the ongoing plight of their

73 Arquivo Nacional, *Fundo: Série Interior – Nacionalidades (IJJ6) (A9), Seção/Série: Processos de Naturalização*, notação BR RJANRIO A9.0.PNE.24391. Processo de Naturalização de Etienne Brasil, May 29, 1936, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

74 Heitor de Andrade Carvalho Loureiro, "Pragmatismo e Humanitarismo," 116.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid., 99-100.

compatriots, raised awareness of the genocide, and organized fundraising efforts to support the victims and facilitate their migration to Brazil.⁷⁷

To advance the Armenian Cause on the international stage, Mihran Latif leveraged his personal connections with prominent Brazilian figures, including Rui Barbosa. A renowned Brazilian lawyer, politician, and writer, Barbosa was a key intellectual force in the country, known as the “Eagle of The Hague” for his eloquent defense of Brazil’s position in II International Conference for Paz, in Hague-Netherlands, in 1907. He was also one of the directors of the Brazilian League for the Allies in 1915 and served as Latif’s personal lawyer.⁷⁸ In 1918, as Barbosa was being considered to lead Brazil’s delegation to the Peace Conference—an appointment he would later decline—Latif wrote him a heartfelt letter pleading for support for the Armenian cause:

At the moment when the Brazilian nation unanimously acclaim Your Excellency as its delegate to the most important gathering of men since humanity has existed, I take the liberty, as a Brazilian citizen of Armenian origin, to present an appeal to Your Excellency, who has always sympathized with the weak and protected the abandoned, on behalf of the most unfortunate, the most miserable, and the most forsaken of oppressed nations. The poor Armenians who escaped the heinous massacres of 1915, which claimed the lives of more than a million innocent souls, continue to face extermination. Hunger is completing the sinister work of the sultan’s soldiers. If the Allies do not act immediately, the peace they will establish will be that of a cemetery for the region once inhabited by this industrious people, victims of their fidelity to the religion of their ancestors.⁷⁹

Latif’s appeal demonstrates not only his profound personal commitment to the cause but also his strategic use of his connections to advocate for international action. By addressing Rui

77 “Os Armenios no Brasil,” *Jornal do Comércio (RJ)*, December 24, 1916, https://memoria.bn.gov.br/DocReader/DocReader.aspx?bib=364568_10&pesq=%22Centro%20Armenio%22&pasta=ano%20191&hf=memoria.bn.gov.br&pagfis=59550; “Anexação da Armenia Menor a’ Syria,” *Correio da Manhã (RJ)*, February 20, 1919, https://memoria.bn.gov.br/DocReader/DocReader.aspx?bib=089842_02&pesq=%22Centro%20Armenio%22&pasta=ano%20191&hf=memoria.bn.gov.br&pagfis=38288.

78 Loureiro, “Pragmatismo e Humanitarismo,” 171.

79 Ibid.

Barbosa, Latif sought to amplify its reach during a critical moment in history, acting as a mediator between the Armenian diaspora and global powers.

As Latif's health declined, his involvement in community efforts diminished, although he remained a significant figure, frequently mentioned in the community's initiatives in Rio.⁸⁰ Despite his reduced activity, Latif's earlier contributions laid the groundwork for future community efforts. Unfortunately, after Mihran Latif's passing in 1929, his sons and daughters did not continue his work with the Armenian community in Brazil.⁸¹

In the aftermath of his pivotal work, new initiatives emerged to address the evolving needs of the Armenian diaspora. In 1945, under the leadership of the *Sociedade Cultural Armênia* [Armenian Cultural Society] and with the support of the Brazilian Red Cross, the *Comitê de Auxílio para os Armênios Vítimas de Guerra* [Aid Committee for Armenian War Victims] was established. This was later formalized as the *Conselho Administrativo dos Armênios do Rio de Janeiro* [Administrative Council of Armenians in Rio de Janeiro]. The Council, composed of prominent community members such as Alexandre Khatchadurian, Boghos Boghossian, Mihran Kelekian, Boghos Nercessian, Hrant Mardirossian, Mikael Kerekdjian and Sarkis Minassian, embodied the ongoing efforts of the Armenian diaspora to foster solidarity, advocate for humanitarian aid, and preserve their collective identity amidst the challenges of post-war displacement.

Among the prominent figures in the Administrative Council of Armenians in Rio de Janeiro, Alexander Baghdassar Khatchadourian stands out for his achievements and remarkable life journey. Born in Ibrahim El Charkié, Egypt, in 1887, Khatchadourian arrived in Brazil on 16 August 1943, bringing with him a wealth of expertise in cotton inspection.⁸² His specialized knowledge, honed during his studies at the Université de Louvain in Belgium in 1910 and further developed in Paris and London, attracted the attention of then-president Getulio Vargas. Prior to his arrival in Brazil, Khatchadourian had collaborated with the Ministry of Agriculture in Chile, where his work in the cotton industry earned him recognition. After settling in Rio de Janeiro, Khatchadourian's expertise became instrumental in securing a special concession from the

80 Ibid., 141.

81 Vartanian, *A Coletividade Armênia do Brasil*, 55, 100.

82 Arquivo Nacional. *SIAN*, Notação BR RJANRIO OL 0 FCN RTE 034802050 D0001DE0001, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Vargas government in 1945 to cultivate cotton in the state of Bahia with the support of foreign capital.⁸³

Another name mentioned is Boghos Nercessian, born in Hayni, in the Dikranagerd region, on 14 April 1907. He was the son of Estepan and Sonig Nercessian and came to Brazil in 1923, adopting the name Paulo Nercessian.⁸⁴ Boghos initially settled in Ceará, working in commerce, before moving to São Paulo in 1933 and later relocating to Rio de Janeiro in 1939 to work in the crystal trade for a relative named Mardiros Atamian, as mentioned by Vartanian. It is also stated that Boghos came to Brazil with the help of a cousin, Donabed Atamian.⁸⁵

However, there appears to be an error in the spelling of their surnames. Cross-referencing records available from the Brazilian National Archive and the FamilySearch platform reveals that Donabed adopted the name of Domingos, while Mardiros took the name José, and both are listed with the surname Adamian, not Atamian.⁸⁶ Mardiros is further identified as a council participant by Vartanian, also originating from Hayni, where he was born on 22 October 1898. He reportedly came to Brazil in 1933, arriving in Fortaleza, Ceará, with the assistance of his brother Ruben.⁸⁷

Additionally, Vartanian indicates that Mardiros married a Brazilian woman in Diamantina, Minas Gerais, in 1922—a detail confirmed in José Adamian’s dossier. By 1926, he began working in the crystal trade, including mining gold in the states of Amazonas, Goiás, and Minas Gerais. Another fact mentioned by Vartanian and corroborated in José Adamian’s dossier is that he served as the mayor of Cristalina, Minas Gerais, between 1931 and 1933.⁸⁸ Later, he moved with his family to Rio de Janeiro, establishing his diamond trading business there, including owning his own mine. This is further supported by documentation of his company, registered on April 17, 1939, at Rua da Alfândega, 124, 1st floor in the city center of Rio de

83 Vartanian, *A Coletividade Armênia do Brasil*, 101.

84 Arquivo Nacional, *Fundo: Série Interior – Nacionalidades (IJJ6) (A9)*, Seção/Série: Processos de Naturalização, Notação BR RJANRIO A9.0.PNE.72024. Processo de Naturalização de Boghos Nercessian, April, 13, 1945, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

85 Vartanian, *A Coletividade Armênia do Brasil*, 103.

86 Arquivo Nacional, *Fundo: Série Interior – Nacionalidades (IJJ6) (A9)*, Seção/Série: Processos de Naturalização, Notação BR RJANRIO A9.0.PNE.122. Processo de Naturalização de Domingos Adamian, April 4, 1931, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Arquivo Nacional, *Fundo: Série Interior – Nacionalidades (IJJ6) (A9)*, Seção/Série: Processos de Naturalização, Notação BR RJANRIO A9.0.PNE.37570. Processo de Naturalização de José Adamian, May 10, 1939, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

87 Vartanian, *A Coletividade Armênia do Brasil*, 101-102.

88 Ibid.

Janeiro—the same year that Boghos Nercessian moved to Rio to work as the general manager at his cousin Mardiros Atamian’s establishment, according to Vartanian.

Given all these facts, it seems evident that despite the spelling or translation errors—either in Vartanian’s book or in official documents—Mardiros Atamian was, in fact, José Adamian, and Donabed Atamian was Domingos Adamian. The only relative mentioned by Vartanian who could not be located in the records was Ruben.

Lastly, another name listed and mentioned by Vartanian as a member of the council, who could also be identified in official Brazilian records, is Hrant Mardirossian. Hrant Mardirossian, who adopted the name Aram Oxene Minas Mardirossian in Brazil, was born on 7 August 1918, in Cairo, Egypt, and arrived from Antwerp, Belgium, in 1939.⁸⁹ The son of Minas Mardirossian and Arennack Stephanian, he specialized in diamond cutting in Belgium, a profession he also pursued in Rio de Janeiro.⁹⁰ Later, he married Lusine Nazarian, an Armenian native of Aintab, in 1941.⁹¹

All in all, the micro-histories of these members of the council in Rio de Janeiro reveal important contributions to the community's development and support. By examining these individuals, a broader understanding of the leadership diversity within the diaspora is gained. Their varied backgrounds, professions, and migration experiences illustrate how different sectors of the community worked together to preserve Armenian identity and foster solidarity. The profiles of figures like Boghos Nercessian, Mardiros Adamian, and Hrant Mardirossian, provide valuable insights into their roles as intermediaries, advocates, and entrepreneurs, as these individuals played an important role in organizing support for their fellow Armenians, helping them settle in Brazil, and ensuring the community’s continued presence and integration. Additionally, their stories connect local experiences in Rio to the broader experience of the survivors of the Armenian Genocide and the complex patterns of migration and displacement that followed. Together, these narratives offer a richer and more nuanced understanding of the

89 Arquivo Nacional. *SIAN*, Notação BR RJANRIO OL 0 FCN RTE 001504067 D0001DE0001, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

90 Yeznig Vartanian, *A Coletividade Armênia do Brasil*, 104.

91 “Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, Registro Civil, 1804-2013,” *FamilySearch* <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QGJ1-DT4T>, entry for Aram Oxene Minas Mardirossian and Lucin Nazarian.

Armenian community in Brazil, highlighting their significant yet often underappreciated contributions to both the diaspora and their new home country.

Epilogue

The micro-histories explored in this study illuminate not only the resilience of individuals within the Armenian community but also the profound ways in which migration theories, particularly those emphasizing networks and elites, manifest in real-world contexts. The Armenian diaspora in Rio de Janeiro, forged amidst the traumas of genocide and displacement, serves as a testament to the critical role of community structures and networks in supporting migrants during periods of acute crisis and resettlement.⁹²

Migration studies emphasize that integration is a collective process,⁹³ as exemplified by the Armenian community's mutual aid. This embrace was not merely symbolic. It involved tangible acts of mutual aid: paying for passage on steamships, offering jobs in stores, industries, and farms, and opening their homes to those in immediate need. These gestures were underpinned by the community's economic stability, which allowed them to act as a lifeline for those fleeing the genocide.⁹⁴

These actions align with the concept of *memory agents*, as members of the diaspora actively preserved and transmitted collective memory through their actions. By fostering networks of support and creating spaces where cultural practices could thrive, these agents ensured that memory was not only preserved but also adapted to the Brazilian context. The commemorative events they organized and the advocacy for genocide recognition served as bridges between past traumas and present identities, solidifying the community's place within broader historical and transnational narratives.

Moreover, the diaspora's efforts extended beyond immediate survival. Through the networks they built, the Armenian community was able to articulate their collective voice, raising awareness about the atrocities of the genocide both within Brazil and internationally. Figures like

92 Boghossian-Porto, "Construções e Reconstruções da Identidade Armênia," 152.

93 Stephen Castles, "*Entendendo a Migração Global: Uma Perspectiva Desde a Transformação Social.*"

94 Vartanian, *A Coletividade Armênia do Brasil*; Loureiro, "O Comunismo dos Imigrantes Armênios."

Mihran Latif and Etienne Brasil exemplified the agency of individuals and groups who operated at multiple levels of power—engaging with Brazilian elites, local political structures, and international organizations to amplify the Armenian Cause during and after the genocide.

In addition, these networks underscore the importance of solidarity. The Armenian diaspora’s ability to maintain mutual aid despite linguistic and cultural barriers reflects the power of shared identity and purpose. For new immigrants who could not speak Portuguese or understand Brazilian societal norms, these community structures provided not only practical assistance but also a sense of belonging and continuity. This resilience is echoed in Erll’s concept of “travelling memory,”⁹⁵ as the shared memory of the genocide was adapted to new sociocultural environments, becoming a unifying force within the diaspora. This study shows how the Armenian diaspora shaped its sociopolitical environment through migration, memory, and elite theories. Furthermore, their advocacy and diplomacy illustrate the broader social and political impact of this community, exemplifying how diasporic networks can operate as agents of resilience and transformation.

Ultimately, this research aims to honor the memory of these individuals and their collective achievements. By bringing these stories to light, we not only preserve their legacies but also deepen our understanding of how the Armenian diaspora has worked—and continues to work—as an agent of social transformation.

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95 Astrid Erll, “Travelling Memory,” *Parallax* 17, no. 4 (2011): 4–18.

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