Global depression and Argentina’s September 6, 1930 Revolution had a direct and immediate impact on the Arabic-speaking community in the northern province of Tucumán. Economic devastation provoked severe social dislocation and the evaporation of jobs, overwhelming state institutions unable to deal with a surge of unemployed workers. The turmoil caused by economic depression and revolution gave the financially secure and politically minded of the Syro-Lebanese colony in the Tucumán mahjar the opportunity to exercise a broad cultural citizenship heretofore not possible, and which emphasized their place and belonging in local society.

This presentation will examine how the Great Depression created an opportunity for the colony’s elite women to perform charity and create social welfare institutions. Moved by the destitution of unemployed workers roaming the streets of San Miguel, Arabic-speaking women secured a facility, cookware, eating utensils, and foodstuffs to open and operate a public soup kitchen for unemployed men. These activities gave certain women a prominent role in local society and unprecedented influence in crafting social policy, efforts that marked the most successful intervention into local politics by the Syro-Lebanese colony in Tucumán up to that point in time. More importantly, this event demonstrates immigrant women were critical actors at the nexus of political life and public policy.

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