

The Lebanese and Their Children Who Are Building Brazil

Contributed by Isaura Daniel
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Businessman Ricardo Sayon runs Ri Happy, one of the most renowned toy store chains in Brazil. Sayon is a grandson of Lebanese. Economist João Sayad was the author of the Cruzado Plan (which changed the Brazilian currency to the Cruzado in 1988 and aimed at balancing the country's economy) and is currently the secretary of Culture in the southeastern Brazilian state of São Paulo. He is also a descendant of Lebanese.

Businessman and politician Guilherme Afif Domingos owns the Indiana insurance company, and is also the secretary of Labor of the state of São Paulo. He, too, is a grandson of Lebanese. Stories like those of Sayon, Sayad and Afif are part of the book "Gente do Líbano que faz no Brasil" (Entrepreneurs from Lebanon Working in Brazil), to be launched today, February 9, by São Paulo-based journalist Carlos Abumrad.

Abumrad was born in the city of Jundiaí, in the interior of the São Paulo state, and is also a member of the Lebanese community in Brazil; he spent three years researching the stories of Lebanese families that became entrepreneurs in Brazil. His work resulted in the book, which includes 40 biographies, photographs and statements.

The research work was done entirely by Abumrad. "Gente do Líbano que Faz no Brasil" is going to be launched by the publishing house Editora CLC, owned by the author himself. Not only does the book provide accounts of the Lebanese businessmen's feats, it also narrates unusual situations in the stories of each family.

One such story is that of how Afif's last name Domingos came about. In the book, Abumrad explains that in the region where Afif's maternal grandparent lived, in the interior of São Paulo, near the southern border of the state of Minas Gerais, there used to be two merchants by the name of Jorge Abdalla.

This caused trouble when it came to receiving merchandise. One of them would receive the orders placed by the other. But then, he would send them to the correct recipient. This went on until, one day, the Jorge Abdalla who was not Afif's grandparent accused the other of keeping some of his merchandise.

The two never reached an understanding again. Afif's grandparent proved his innocence, but decided to change his name. He became Jorge Domingos, since Sunday, in Arabic, is spelled al uáhad, which has a similar sound to Abdalla.

By writing the book, Abumrad hopes to rescue the stories of Lebanese entrepreneurs, so that they do not run the risk of losing themselves by relying on oral tradition alone. According to the author, there were no books focused solely on Lebanese entrepreneurs.

"I decided to show what the Lebanese are doing and what they did," he says. Abumrad is also a history aficionado. So, he engaged in research. This is his first book. But he intends to go further. Now, he wants to write a book on immigrants in the city of Jundiaí, his hometown, to write a second volume about the Lebanese, and another book on Syrian entrepreneurs.

Abumrad's own family has a history of Arab immigration. The father of the journalist, Camilo Feres, who passed away in 1999, came from Lebanon to Brazil at 15 years of age. He worked as a merchant, first in Pirassununga, then in Jundiaí, both in the interior of the state of São Paulo.

He got married in Jundiaí, and then Carlos was born. Abumrad's maternal family is also of Lebanese descent, and it is also a family of merchants. But the author chose to be a journalist, inspired by an uncle, Tobias Muzaiel, who established the Jornal de Jundiaí (JJ) newspaper. Abumrad worked for the newspaper for several years, until he left town in 1975 to work in other newspapers, such as Diário do Grande ABC, O Estado de S. Paulo and Gazeta de Pinheiros.

Abumrad established his first business communication company in 1981 and then, in 2002, he founded a new company, this time to promote cultural activities under the culture incentive laws. It was in this context that the book "Gente do Líbano que faz no Brasil" was developed.

The work was carried out using resources from the publishing company itself. Only the launch event will be sponsored by the Caixa Econômica Federal bank, and will take place at Caixa Cultural, a space belonging to the bank that is dedicated to the culture. The cocktail marking the release of the book will be held later today, at 7 pm.

Service

Gente do Líbano que faz no Brasil

Author: Carlos Abumrad

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Information and purchase:

Email: contato@editoraclc.com.br

Telephone: (+55 11) 3082-7177

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