

MIDDLE EAST REPORT

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## THE LATIN EAST

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A special collaboration  
between MERIP,  
NACLA, and Jadaliyya.



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**COVER** Protesters against Israeli airstrikes on Gaza in front of the Israeli embassy in Santiago, Chile, 2012. (Jorge Villegas/Xinhua News Agency/eyevine/Redux)

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This double issue of *Middle East Report*, “The Latin East,” is a collaboration with the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA). We publish it in tandem with the current issue of *NACLA Report on the Americas*, which is available for free online at [www.tandfonline.com/toc/rnac20/50/1](http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rnac20/50/1). With the kind permission of Routledge, we reprint in this magazine two essays originally appearing in NACLA’s issue of “The Latin East.”

In January 2009, thousands of protestors packed into crowded streets holding signs in support of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. Since first taking office in 1999, Venezuela’s firebrand president had led an unprecedented political transformation, what has been called the Pink Tide. Following decades of neoliberal rule, one country after another in Latin America elected left-wing governments of various stripes, all linked by a new focus on social spending, wealth redistribution and state power. In the process, Chávez earned the ire of venerable political and economic elites, who derided him as a populist, and the admiration of the popular sectors who came to see in Chávez a champion for the poor and the disenfranchised. On its own, that scene was unsurprising. What makes it noteworthy is that it took place not in Caracas or even elsewhere in the Americas, but half a world away in Ramallah, in the heart of the West Bank.

Approval for Chávez in Ramallah in part reflected the late president’s full throated endorsement of Palestinian statehood. As early as 2006, he expressed his support in fiery speeches denouncing occupation, by hosting delegations of Palestinian activists, students and politicians in Venezuela and through the provision of economic aid to Gaza and the West Bank. He severed diplomatic ties with Israel over what he called its “cruel persecution of the Palestinian people” following a three-week military offensive in Gaza in 2009. By 2012, Venezuela had opened a diplomatic mission in Ramallah.

Chávez’s rhetorical and material solidarity with Palestinians formed part of a much broader, and often fraught, relationship forged between Latin America and the Middle East at a time of deep flux in both regions. As the Pink Tide reached its crest in the mid-2000s, left-wing governments throughout Latin America increasingly made generating a multipolar world to disrupt US hegemony a central part of their agenda. Outreach to the Arab world in particular figured prominently in those efforts. Chávez led the way by hosting the Organization of Oil Producing Countries (OPEC) heads of state in Caracas in 2000 in a bid to file the long-dormant organization’s teeth. He also met with longtime US nemesis Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and later staged massive rallies in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Iran and elsewhere in the region where crowds, showcasing rifts and dissatisfaction with local leaders, proclaimed him “Chávez of Arabia.”

But Chávez was far from alone. Over the years, other Pink Tide countries and leaders in Latin America followed suit, developing economic, political and cultural ties with Arab countries more broadly in a clear bid to flex newfound geopolitical muscle vis-à-vis the United States. In 2005, leaders of Arab and Latin American nations met in Brasilia for a first-of-its-kind gathering, the Summit of South American-Arab Countries (ASPA), which was repeated in 2009 in Doha and in 2012 in Lima. In response to Israeli military operations in Lebanon, Gaza and the West Bank, several Latin American countries besides Venezuela broke diplomatic ties with Israel. Iranian presidents, first Mohammad Khatami and later US antagonist Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, traveled throughout Latin America in unprecedented official state visits. In 2010, Brazil, Turkey and Iran brokered a deal to curb nuclear weapons acquisition. Though US pressure ultimately scuttled that agreement as well



Protesters in Ramallah, with a photo of President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, rally against Israel's military operations in Gaza, 2009.

ISSAM RIMAWI/FLASH 90/REDUX

as other multilateral initiatives by the two regions, the efforts powerfully showcased a new era of autonomous cooperation between Latin America and the Middle East.

Meanwhile, in the Middle East entrenched power regimes teetered against a wave of social and political movements that began at the end of 2010 and were broadly identified as the Arab spring or Arab uprisings. The uprisings had precursors to be sure—the post-war twentieth century Middle East was far from the docile region that is often portrayed in popular discussions or academic analyses. Nevertheless, the uprisings upended a regional equilibrium and revived the role of mass movements. Authoritarian regimes, regional powers and international intervention have managed to shatter the early promise of the uprisings, bringing back a suffocating political climate in places like Egypt and engineering social and humanitarian catastrophes in Yemen, Syria and Libya.

Of course, the fact that many of these teetering regimes were the primary partners in Latin America's outreach efforts exposed uncomfortable realities about the mostly state-to-state rather than people-to-people nature of that relationship. As the Arab uprisings deepened, widened and turned ever more deadly, it increasingly appeared that dissatisfaction with the status quo in the Arab world had been obscured by solidarity that was limited mainly, it now seemed, to shared antagonism against US foreign policy in both regions. The perspectives included in this issue of *Middle East Report* and the companion issue of *NACLA Report on the Americas* allow us to dive deeper into the origins and development of various relationships between the regions and allow for a rethinking of assumptions about what was possible in the past, what is possible now, and what may be possible in the future between Latin America and the Middle East.

Above all, Latin America's striking and strategic outreach to the Middle East during the Pink Tide invites questions—as yet largely unasked, much less answered—about how the role and image of Latin America in the Middle East changed in the process. Moreover, as the Pink Tide recedes, and in the case of Venezuela and Brazil—two major drivers of Latin American outreach to the Middle East—enters deep crisis, and as renewed conflict and authoritarianism grips the Middle East in the wake of the Arab uprisings, the time is ripe to consider the origins, contours and legacies of their relationship.

This special double issue is the result of an unprecedented collaboration between MERIP and the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) that seeks to explore the roots of Latin American outreach to the Middle East and the larger processes, problems and possibilities inherent in ties between the two regions. NACLA and MERIP have much in common. Through our print magazines, we have offered independent reporting and analysis of Latin America and the Middle East over almost half a century. We have brought together prominent and up-and-coming scholars, journalists, artists and activists to cut through the imperial gaze to which both regions have long been subjected by both mainstream media and policy circles in the United States.

Our reporting has consistently interrogated the underlying assumptions and consequences of US actions in both regions and presented deeply informed alternative viewpoints. Our coverage extends far beyond a focus on US endeavors, however. Both NACLA and MERIP provide informed and critical perspectives that crucially emphasize the view from the region. We seek to shed light on underreported crises, long-term challenges and struggles for social change ranging from the politics of garbage collection in Lebanon and Sahrawi activism for self-determination in Algeria and Morocco to contestations over



welfare state politics in Kuwait. In *NACLA*, recent coverage has included the influence of #BlackLivesMatter in Brazil, the deep history of border wall politics between the United States and Mexico and old and new machinations of resurgent right-wing movements across Latin America.

In this collaborative publication of *Middle East Report* and *NACLA Report on the Americas* we have pooled our resources, expertise and experience to explore links both new and longstanding between parts of the world infrequently considered side by side. Our collaboration is organized around three themes: Latin America in the Middle East, comparative regionalism and recent history.

Due to the legacy of successive waves of migration from the Middle East to Latin America in the twentieth century, most accounts of the relationship between the regions have focused on the influence of the Middle East in Latin America. As contributors to the first theme reveal, however, Latin America's influence in the Middle East, direct and indirect, is deep, longstanding and wide ranging, appearing in politics, economics, culture and ideology. Writing in *NACLA*, Fernando Camacho-Padilla draws on his long experience teaching courses on Latin America at Iranian universities to offer a rich account of how elite and popular perceptions of Latin America, going back decades, inform present day views about the region. Houzan Mahmoud and Ismail Hamalaw, Kurdish writers and activists, reveal longstanding fascination with Latin American revolutionary leaders, and especially literature, among Iraqi Kurds in their quest for autonomy and independence from Baghdad. Lena Meari, too, traces widespread and serious study of Latin American revolutionary tracts and *testimonio* literature among Palestinian prisoners during the first intifada against Israel in the 1980s, an influence and readership that continues today among new generations of Palestinian youth. Meanwhile in *Middle East Report*, Iraqi novelist and poet Sinan Antoon explores the haunted memories of Iraqi poet Sargon Boulus and his poetic tributes to the Peruvian poet César Vallejo.

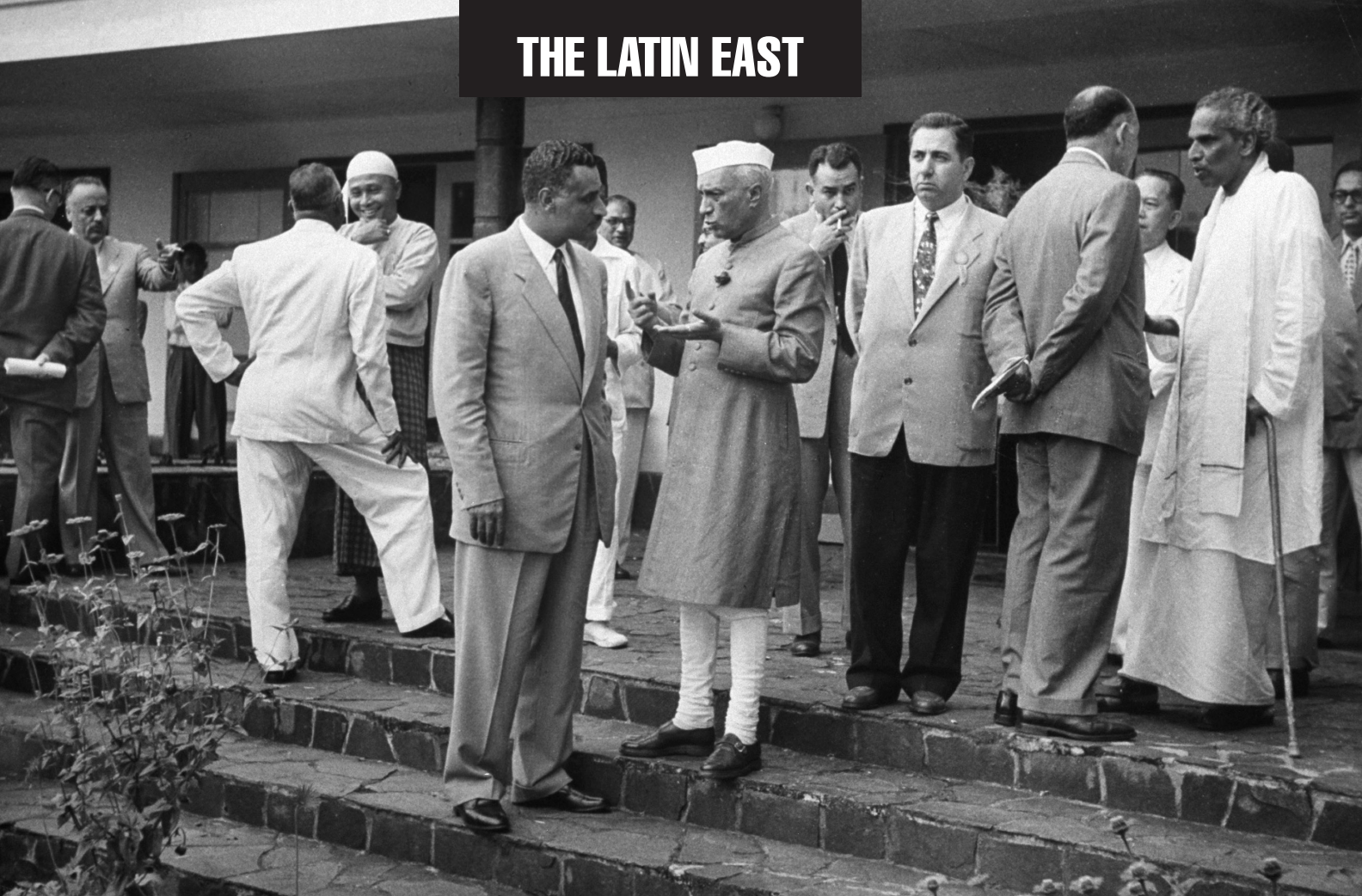
Comparative regionalism is our second organizing theme. It features contributions that focus on how democracy, neoliberalism, post-neoliberal development, political parties and social movements manifest themselves similarly or differently in both regions. In *Middle East Report*, Hiba Bou Akar and Roosbelinda Cardenas describe their experience co-teaching courses that compare ethnographic texts on Latin America and the Middle East and how the specter of violence appears again and again as an analytic yoke tying both regions together, in ways largely detrimental for comparative reflection. Kevan Harris uses the lens of inequality to examine different contours of democratization and forms of integration into the global economy, yet also finds similarities between the regions in the challenges presented by violence, unequal relations with the global North and conglomerate forms of capitalism. While Latin American texts made their way to Israeli prisons during the intifada and after, Sara Awartani traces how Palestinian struggles for national liberation influenced Puerto Rican activists seeking independence from the United States.

Nadim Bawalsa, writing in *NACLA*, digs even further—spatially and historically. Drawing on newspapers published

by Palestinian migrants in early twentieth century Chile, he uncovers a fascinating story of how a community that self-identified in pan-Arab terms came to see itself as explicitly Palestinian, powerfully shaping what is by far the largest and most tightly organized community of Palestinian descendants in the Americas. Omar Tesdell, too, reads deep into the twentieth century to uncover how Mexican and Palestinian agronomists sought to turn dry-farming techniques into a political tool for land tenancy, development and eventually national identity formation, as the Mexican revolution raged and the Ottoman empire collapsed. Mexico also features in Marwan Kraidy's essay, which examines the meanings of modernity in both regions through the lens of two prominent intellectuals who have shaped discourse and policy in the Americas and in Egypt, in particular, with wider impact across the Middle East. Egypt is also a key site of comparison for Paul Amar, whose explosive piece considers how the return of military dictatorship in Egypt in 2014 and the resurgence of right-wing rule via parliamentary coup in Brazil in 2016 are two sides of the same coin of military capitalism with striking, and troubling, parallel trajectories in each region. Finally, Omar Dahi and Alejandro Velasco demonstrate how both regions confront not just a changed global economy, but a global South landscape greatly altered from that of the Third World era, and the possibilities and challenges that have come with the dramatic rise of China as a global industrial power.

Our third thematic area examines recent history. Here, contributors consider social movements, political, economic and cultural exchanges, and transnational solidarity and diaspora politics in light of the Arab spring and winter and against the backdrop of nearly two decades of left-wing governance in Latin America. Writing in *NACLA*, Tariq Dana offers a sweeping appraisal of factionalism in the Palestinian liberation movement. His essay provides a crucial corrective to the kind of surface-level solidarity that has long informed Latin American views not only of Palestine but of political movements in the Middle East more broadly. This kind of solidarity has obscured fraught internal dynamics and their harmful effects in the region. In *Middle East Report*, Cecilia Baeza and Paulo Pinto shed light on the practices, repertoires and forms of mobilization of diaspora populations through an examination of support for Syrian President Bashar al-Asad's regime within the Syrian-Lebanese community in Argentina and Brazil. Paulo Farah examines the potential and challenges of the Summit of South American-Arab Countries (ASPA) and sheds light on the possibilities of state-led South-South solidarity.

Finally, our jointly published issues of *NACLA* and *Middle East Report* are only the first of a two-part collaboration. On April 27 and 28, 2018, contributors to both magazines will assemble in New York City for a major conference, jointly sponsored with Jadaliyya, to present their work and to launch a platform for future projects. Thus we begin a game-changing initiative to kick off both publications' next 50 years of publishing in the same way as we have our first half century: by bringing you cutting edge coverage and analysis of the Middle East, Latin America and the wider world that you will not find anywhere else. ■



**Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt talks with Jawaharlal Nehru of India during the Bandung Conference, 1955.** HOWARD SOCHUREK/THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES

## Latin America-Middle East Ties in the New Global South

**Omar Dahi and Alejandro Velasco**

Over the past several years, posters of a gray Chinese terracotta warrior have caught the eyes of travelers in international airports. Hung on walls alongside moving walkways, the posters advertise the London-based bank HSBC and feature photographs ironically labeled with a sentence starting, “In the future.” The campaign was designed to portray HSBC at the cutting edge of banking and commerce worldwide. In one particular poster everything about the image was similar to the famous terracotta warrior statues except for one detail: instead of boots the warrior wore bright yellow and green

flip-flops. Over the photo was the line, “In the future, South-South trade will be norm not novelty.” Below the photograph, four sentences elaborated on the idea: “Direct trade between fast growing nations is reshaping the world economy. HSBC is one of the leading banks for trade settlement between China and Latin America. There’s a new world emerging. Be part of it.” It may not have been the creators’ intention, but the poster unwittingly captures an increasingly salient feature of South-South relations: In the Chinese-Latin American trade relationship, the photo implies, the Chinese contribute the mighty warrior and the Latin Americans make the flip-flops.

Many of the essays in this historic NACLA-MERIP collaboration examine the evolving nature of Latin

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America-Middle East relations with respect to changing North-South political and economic relations. But what is also noteworthy is the way South-South relations themselves have evolved. In the 1950s, intellectuals from Latin America and the Middle East, including structuralists and *dependentistas* like the Argentine Raul Prebisch and Egyptian Samir Amin, formulated their advocacy for South-South relations as a response to unequal North-South development. They and others challenged mainstream economic theory, which maintained that free trade benefitted both rich and poor countries, demonstrating instead that global exchanges were fundamentally unequal and that free trade works to benefit the industrialized global North to the detriment of the largely agrarian global South. Today, many scholars of both regions are sounding the alarm on South-South relations. As the image of the mighty Chinese warrior suggests, despite the possibilities for an alternative source of finance, trade and technology transfer, the risk of unequal development and de-industrialization between nations of the South looms.

## The Rise and Fall of Third Worldism

Increasing economic ties and industrial development among and within nations of the global South were cornerstones of the Third World movement that was launched at the 1955 Bandung Conference in Indonesia. The conference marked the first time in modern history that representatives from liberated African and Asian nations gathered to deliberate over global affairs and chart a path of collective solidarity. Bandung did not just concern itself with issues within the global South. Their calls for disarmament and peaceful co-existence insisted that the global South had a moral imperative to shape global affairs, particularly to counter what they saw as the nuclear recklessness of the two “Big Powers,” the United States and the Soviet Union.

Two decades later, on May 1, 1974, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 3202 calling for a New International Economic Order (NIEO), an initiative of the G-77, the legendary South voting bloc in the General

**In the future, South-South trade will be norm not novelty.**



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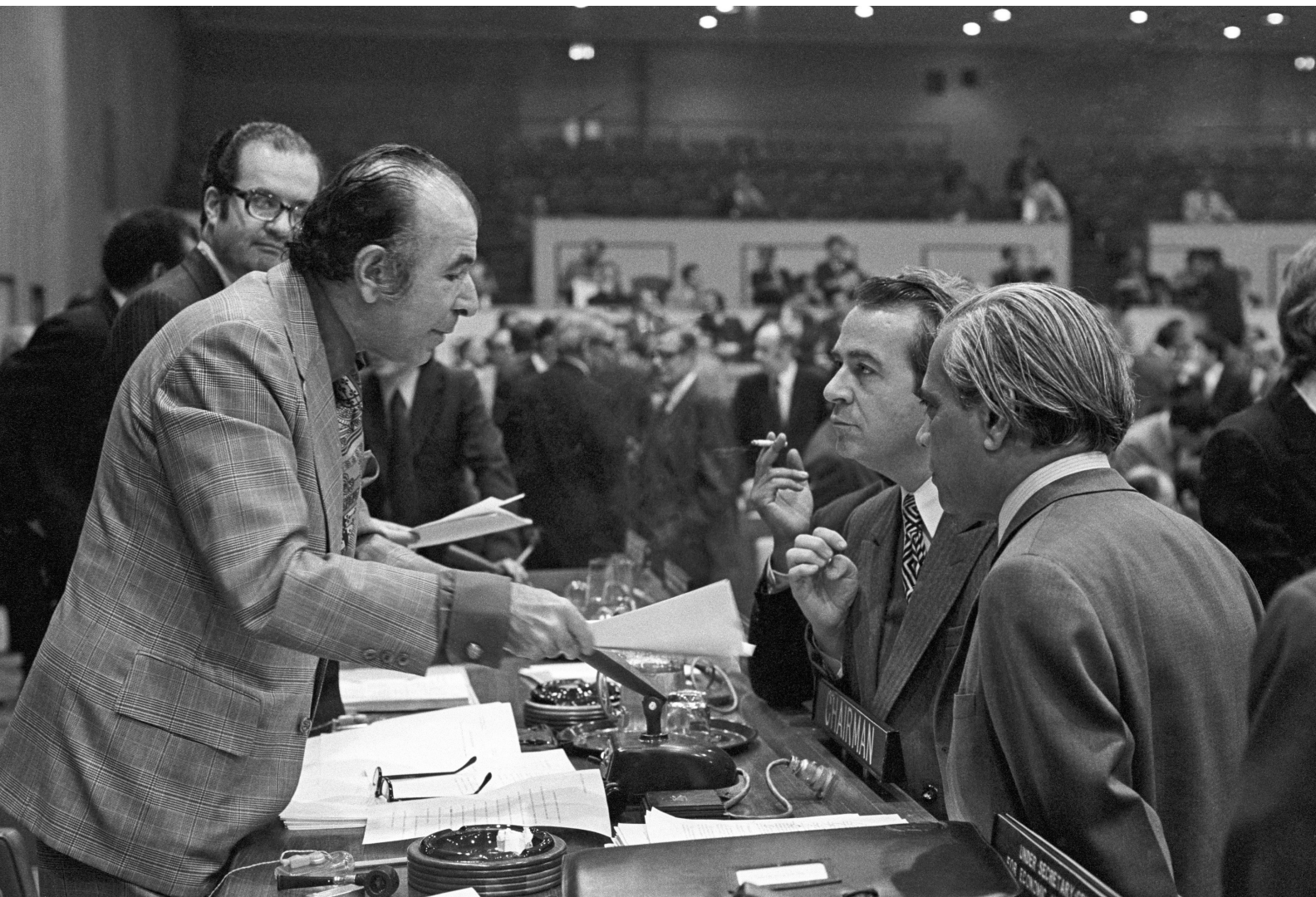
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Assembly. It was the zenith of the Third World movement, offering perhaps the most ambitious call for restructuring the global economy ever adopted by the UN General Assembly. The resolution offered a critique of neo-colonialism, apartheid and domination by the global North, as well as significant demands around industrialization, technology transfer and global finance. The NIEO resolution included a special section advocating a code of conduct for transnational corporations, with the aim of preventing “interference in the internal affairs of the countries where they operate and their collaboration with racist regimes and colonial administrations.” In addition, it also supported the goals of facilitating technology transfer, developing local skills and regulating the repatriation of profits.

In Latin America, the NIEO constituted more than a program of political and economic innovation; more and



On May 1, 1974, at the United Nations, a draft declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order was adopted. Conferring before the meeting are (from left) Fereydoun Hoveyda (Iran), Lazar Mojsov (Yugoslavia) and Samar Sen (India). TEDDY CHEN/UN PHOTO

more, it grew into a matter of life and death. By 1973, only five Western Hemisphere nations had signed on to the Non-Aligned Movement from which the NIEO proposals had emerged. But these nations—Cuba, Chile, Jamaica, Peru and Trinidad and Tobago—had come both to the Non-Aligned Movement and to the NIEO in the midst of socialist transformations at home, from revolutionary change to gradual reform. As such they, as indeed the rest of the region, became the front lines in a misnamed Cold War that saw one country after another in the global South descend into brutal dictatorship or armed conflict. Efforts to promote social and economic rights had been met with intense opposition domestically and by the United States especially, which saw in every effort to advance alternatives to liberal capitalism, however tepid, a communist inroad in need of violent quashing. The bloody, US-sponsored 1973 overthrow of socialist Salvador Allende in Chile, followed by even more brutal covert and overt interventions in the Americas and the Caribbean over the next two decades, aimed above all to

forestall any attempt at economic reform that strayed from the purview of US economic control in the region.

Thus Ernesto “Che” Guevara’s imperative to create “two, three, many Vietnams” was matched in practice by a concerted policy of military, financial, medical and other aid in the 1960s and 1970s from Cuba’s revolutionary government to anti-colonial movements in Africa—from the Congo to Angola to the African National Congress, among others. Guevara aimed to project a vision and a project of South-South unity and cooperation that fused political and economic independence along socialist lines. In turn, Cuba’s global outreach drew from over a century of attempts in Latin America—stretching back to the independence struggles of the early nineteenth century—to generate regional integration independent of an increasingly imperial United States. Most such efforts had failed, from Simón Bolívar’s *Gran Colombia* in 1830 to Guevara’s ill-fated Bolivia expedition in 1967, which aimed to spark continental revolution in South America. Nevertheless, each failure gave rise to new attempts



at integration and South-South cooperation. A sense of urgency was carried over from one generation to the next of Latin Americans long sidelined from projects of social justice, welfare or development. Moreover, as rural sectors flocked to cities throughout the continent, they unleashed an urban explosion that transformed the region and opened new opportunities for reform and revolution.

These changes were not limited to Latin America but included most of the global South in the 1970s, heralding new efforts at South-South cooperation aimed more directly at economic development above and beyond armed revolution. In 1960, a newly liberal democratic Venezuela, while fully aligned with the United States in a Cold War context, sought to leverage its oil wealth more autonomously from the North American and British interests that had dominated the industry since its founding in the 1910s. Instead, it partnered with other nations to form the Organization of Oil Producing Countries (OPEC). Though largely toothless through the 1960s, the 1973 oil embargo revealed the organization to be a global geopolitical player of major weight. The embargo also rained petrodollars onto Venezuela in unprecedented quantities and ushered in a period of dramatic domestic investment, spending and growth in heavy and light industry, infrastructure and technology. The newfound wealth would catapult the country into what its leaders thought was first-world status and allowed it to project itself as a source of leadership and economic aid to other Latin American nations. Indeed, buoyed by the leverage that the 1973 oil shock seemed to offer the global South, the UN's NIEO resolution asserted that "irreversible changes in the relationship of forces in the world necessitate the active, full and equal participation of the developing countries."

Within less than a decade, however, Venezuela and the global South more broadly would learn that these forces were far from irreversible. The NIEO evoked a vicious reaction in both policy and mainstream academic circles in the global North and was considered dead on arrival by US officials. The United States then immediately worked to undermine the power of the G-77, eventually launching the G-7 as a forum to discuss economic policy far away from the obstreperous democracy of the General Assembly. At the same time, a dynamic of revenue windfall coupled with readily available credit generated a paradox of plenty throughout the global South, as political scientist and Latin Americanist Terry Lynn Karl has famously remarked. Debt contracts among oil dependent nations dramatically outpaced current and projected revenues in the middle of an oil boom, leaving them dangerously exposed in times of oil price busts. By 1982, Mexico, awash in both petrodollars and massive loans contracted in the 1970s, defaulted on its debt when oil prices collapsed in 1981. The global crisis that followed effectively put the final nail in the coffin of the Third World movement. It also gave nations of the global North free rein to dismantle Southern industrialization and begin to negotiate the parameters of

what would become the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1986, the exact antithesis of the NIEO.

## Not Your Grandmother's Third Worldism

Yet the death of the Third World movement did not spell the end of South-South economic cooperation. On the contrary, the past 30 years has seen a boon in South-South economic relations that never materialized in the golden years of the Third World era. From the post-World War II decades of the 1950s until the late 1980s, South-South trade represented roughly 5 to 10 percent of all global trade. However, from 1990 to 2000 this number increased from 10 percent to 16 percent. By 2005, it was 20 percent, and by 2013, 31 percent of all global trade was between or among countries of the South. In 1950, exports from the South to the rest of the world accounted for approximately 30 percent of all world trade, and by 2013 that share had risen to 54 percent. Over the same period, the direction of those exports shifted. By 2013, more than 58 percent of all Southern exports were being shipped to other Southern countries. Global South-South financial flows have also risen remarkably. The share of the global South in world foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows, for example, increased from less than 30 percent in 1970 to over 60 percent in 2013. During this period, the South has also become a major investor in other countries, increasing its share in global FDI outflows from one third of one percent in 1970 to just below 40 percent in 2013, and more than 60 percent of these flows went to other Southern countries.<sup>1</sup>

Given that old-school South-South advocacy used to come from radical political economists, these developments are being applauded from surprising corners ranging from the *Wall Street Journal*, which argued that South-South trade can open up a new era of globalization, to the WTO, which in its 2006 flagship report approvingly invoked Prebisch's famous declining terms of trade hypothesis to encourage the rise of South-South trade in industrial products. September 12 every year is now celebrated in the United Nations General Assembly as the Day for South-South Cooperation. The date commemorates the adoption of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action for Promoting and Implementing Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries, in Buenos Aires on September 12, 1978.

Unlike Prebisch and Amin, however, heterodox economists today are no longer uncritically celebrating the recent wave of South-South relations. There are several major differences between today and that earlier era. First, the Third World movement, whether working through the Non-Aligned Movement, the G-77 bloc or the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, was built on a radical critique of the global economy as inherently unequal and exploitative for the global South. The post-1990s wave of South-South relations, however, has taken



Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez calls an end to the OPEC heads of state official photo, 2000, in Caracas, Venezuela.

JUAN CARLOS ULATE/REUTERS

place in an era of neoliberal globalization where many developing countries abandoned their industrial development model (import substitution industrialization) in favor of export-led growth. The Pink Tide of left-wing Latin American governments emerging in the late 1990s spurred the development of South-South initiatives such as ALBA—the Cuban-Venezuelan regional trade agreement—and the Cochabamba Declarations for Latin American Unity that offered critiques of global capitalism. The recent surge in South-South relations is, however, being led by developing countries that have embraced the global economy.

A second major difference between then and now is that a significant push for increasing South-South ties, including South-South trade agreements, emanates from multinational corporations interested in South-South economic liberalization to solidify global commodity supply chains. In a world of decreasing North-North and North-South tariff barriers, South-South tariffs were one of the last remaining obstacles

for universal free trade. Dismantling South-South trade barriers serves both to streamline production processes as well as allow multinational corporations to use certain Southern countries as launching pads to export to their neighbors. This may help explain the surprising embrace of South-South trade by entities such as the WTO, which includes among its main goals lowering trade barriers worldwide.

The third and perhaps most alarming difference is the dramatic level of inequality within the global South, particularly in industrialization and technological development. Most of the rise of South-South trade is captured by a few countries, primarily China and other emerging Asian economies, who account for the lion's share of trade and financial flows. The rest of the global South is lagging further behind. This situation has raised the possibility that economic interactions under the banner of South-South trade can create just as much inequality as traditional North-South trade, particularly when it comes to trade in industrial products.



## Enter the Dragon

The period from the late 1950s to the late 1970s was far from perfect, but overall it saw significant economic growth and rising productivity levels accompanied by a general rise in human development indicators in health and education and decreasing poverty. The aftermath of the debt crisis and the neoliberal wave, however, had a significant impact on both regions.

In Latin America, the poverty rate rose by 8 percent between 1980 and 1990, real wages declined and income inequality sharpened dramatically as governments cut social spending. Colombian economist Jose Antonio Ocampo has argued that the investment rate fell from its peak of 1975–1980 and never recovered, representing a “lost quarter century” or more and not just a “lost decade.” In the Middle East, Egypt, Tunisia, Sudan, Morocco and Jordan all turned to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the 1980s, followed by several other countries in the 1990s. The decline in oil prices in the mid-1980s meant that the usual buffer available to primary and secondary oil economies was absent, and average growth rates for the entire region was near zero. Privatization of state-owned enterprises was a priority during this period to reduce the scope of the “less-efficient” public sector and over 271 state-owned enterprises were privatized across seven countries during this time period.<sup>2</sup>

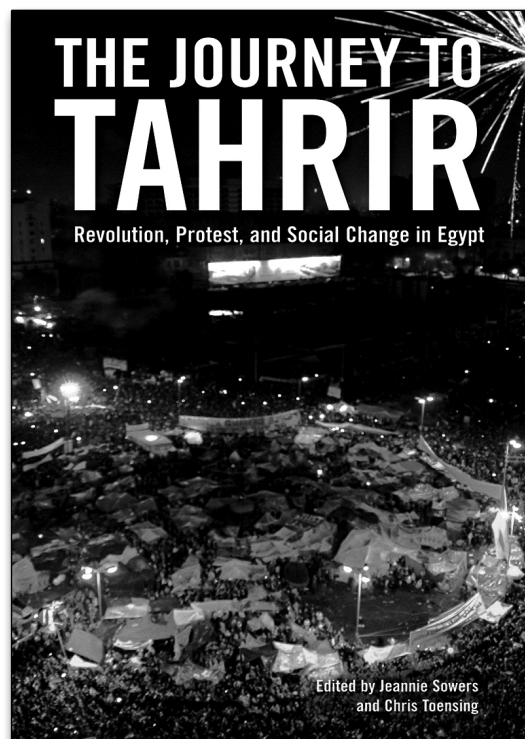
The Middle Eastern countries did not fully dismantle their welfare states nor their large public sectors, and several North African countries increased their manufactures exports after the signing of trade agreements with the European Union. Still, none of the countries became industrial powerhouses and successes were timid. Likewise, the Pink Tide in Latin America saw left-wing governments that came to power in the late 1990s riding a wave of popular mobilization against neoliberalism. Although governments pursued a range of different policies, many expanded social programs and educational opportunities, re-nationalized previously privatized industries and generally attempted to carve out more autonomy from multinational institutions like the IMF. In some cases, like that of Brazil, these efforts resulted in impressive reductions in poverty and inequality. Nevertheless, none of the Latin American countries seriously re-launched industrial policy or were able to expand their manufacturing base.

The global rise in commodity and oil prices in the mid-2000s was therefore a mixed blessing to both regions. It allowed governments to buffer social demands without seriously addressing imbalances in their economic bases. The meteoric rise of China on a global level, particularly after its entry into the WTO in 2001, intensified relations between the rapidly industrializing country and the rest of the global South. The Third World movement was dominated by the likes of Egypt’s Nasser, Yugoslavia’s Tito and India’s Nehru. At the time of Bandung, China was hoping to get a foothold in Afro-Asian affairs to escape its international isolation by

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the United States and the Soviet Union. Its level of industrialization lagged significantly behind others such as Brazil and Argentina. Today, the Chinese economy reigns supreme in the global South and the tables have turned significantly.

Despite the possibilities for alternative sources of finance, trade and technology transfer brought about by China's presence, both regions' trading patterns with China are now highly unequal. For example, in 2012, 74 percent of Argentine and 61 percent of Chilean exports to China were of basic unprocessed products or primary commodities. Together with natural resource intensive manufactures (low technology products mainly developed by processing raw materials), primary goods accounted for 92.6 percent of Argentine and 99.5 percent of Chilean exports to China in 2012. Even in the case of more successful industrializing countries such as Brazil, the future looks grim as 92 percent of Brazilian exports to China were of either primary commodities or natural resource intensive manufactures in 2012. Similarly, over 76 percent of China's imports from the Middle East are in primary products or natural resource intensive manufactures while about 70 percent of its own exports to the region are in relatively sophisticated and high-technology manufactures. China's rise is not only resulting in unequal trade relations between these regions: its entry into the WTO in fact helped to crowd out Latin American and Middle Eastern industrial exports in third regions due to their higher quality or cheaper prices.

## The More Things Change?

Yet, it is difficult to take too seriously the recent warnings by then-US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson about Chinese "imperialism" in Latin America.<sup>3</sup> Not because China's growing influence in the region ought to stand above scrutiny—certainly the relationship raises serious questions about equity, entrenching an economy based on natural resource extraction, financial transparency and more. Rather, Tillerson's warnings ring hollow because they betray just how little has changed in international trade and finance. While South-South relations have certainly evolved from the days of Bandung, the Non-Aligned Movement and the NIEO, what has endured is how US hegemony remains the default setting among academic and popular circles in the global North, while alternative international relations are judged against the loftiest ideals. In the same way that scholars and policy makers in the United States and Europe once denounced the "neutralism" of non-alignment as naïve or sinister, today attempts by the global South to diversify their international relations are treated with suspicion or, increasingly, in the rhetoric of President Donald Trump, as an assault on the United States itself.

In regions long mired in webs of Euro-American influence and power, the arrival of a counterweight at least offers an opportunity to balance different interests against each

other, hopefully, of course, with the kind of caution born of decades of experience navigating and resisting imperial and neo-imperial designs. After all, China did not create the Bretton Woods monetary system, nor has it (as yet) engineered and mandated ruinous structural adjustment policies by controlling financial institutions of its making, as the liberalizing policies of the so-called "Washington Consensus" did through the World Bank and the IMF. Nor has China proven (as yet) interested in overthrowing governments in Latin America at will, as the United States did when it backed the ouster of Honduran President Manuel Zelaya in 2009, or of Paraguayan President Fernando Lugo in 2012 or of Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff in 2016.

Even accusations against China of "irresponsible" lending to countries like Venezuela or complaints that cash support also comes with World Bank-style strings attached have not stood up to careful scrutiny. The Global Development and Environment Institute (GDAE) at Tufts University<sup>4</sup> found that Chinese lending was tied to the purchases of Chinese equipment, rather than conditioned on changes in governmental policy. The charge that China is buying influence through spendthrift cash infusions also does not stand up to close examination. The same study found that Latin American borrowers in fact generally pay a premium above international rates for Chinese loans. Instead, the availability of Chinese funding means that Latin America can "get more financing for infrastructure and industrial projects to enhance long-term development,"<sup>5</sup> that is, for their own priorities rather than those emanating from the West.

To be sure, allegations of corruption and mismanagement of Chinese funds across the hemisphere raise serious questions about transparency and the rule of law. These grave issues, as well as trade and financial imbalances, reveal structural deficits and long-term governance challenges in the regions themselves more than they indicate newfound imperial ambitions. The global South will need to tackle these issues, and do so quickly, if it is to turn incipient efforts at cooperation into lasting changes in global geopolitics. For now, what is clear is that the rise of China along with other large Southern countries, and their active role in the WTO and other global forums disrupting the supremacy of the United States, European Union, Canada and Japan, has created significant possibilities for autonomous human development that did not exist in the 1980s and 1990s. More and more, the future of the global South is in its own hands. ■

## Endnotes

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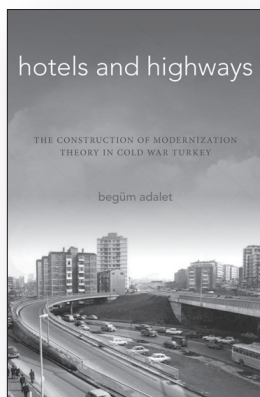
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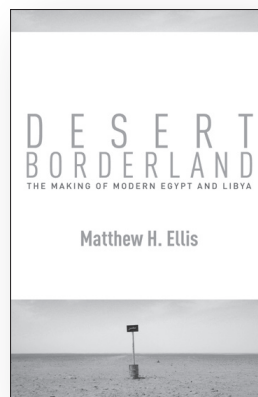


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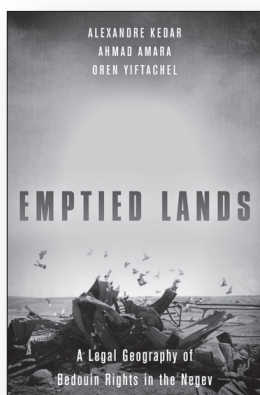
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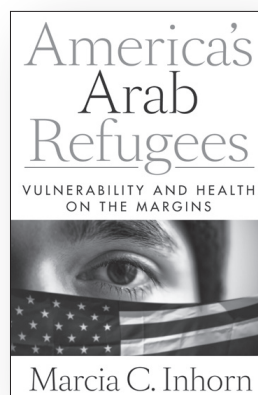
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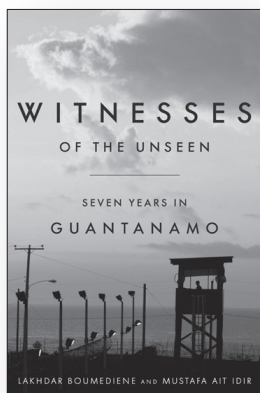
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Lolita Lebrón, after an assault on the US House of Representatives, speaks to reporters at police headquarters in Washington, DC, March 1, 1954. Lebrón said that the shooting was planned to coincide with the opening of the Pan American Conference in Caracas, Venezuela, to dramatize "the problem of colonialism." At right is Puerto Rican nationalist Rafael Cancel Miranda.

BOB SCHUTZ/AP PHOTO

# Puerto Rican Decolonization, Armed Struggle and the Question of Palestine

Sara Awartani

**L**olita Lebrón, 24 years after unfurling the Puerto Rican flag and opening fire in the US House of Representatives in 1954,<sup>1</sup> once again cried out against Puerto Rico's colonial status in 1978. "The liberation movement of the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico," declared Lebrón, "conscious of its historic responsibility to the Fatherland, aspires to, advocates and work through [sic] all means of struggle possible—including armed revolution, if it were necessary to constitute Puerto Rico as a free, sovereign and independent republic in accordance with the Principles of Nationalities."<sup>2</sup>

Although written from her cell at the Alderson federal prison in West Virginia, Lebrón's words did not represent solely a

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private reflection on her involvement in the struggle for Puerto Rican independence. They also formed part of a larger legal defense strategy that sought to bring the case of all Puerto Rican nationalist prisoners before an international, rather than US, court of law. In this 11 page letter, addressed to the jurists of the United Nation's International Court of Justice (ICJ), concerning "the Case of Puerto Rico through the Nationalist Prisoners and its Projection towards the World Forum of the United Nations," Lebrón reiterated her position and the position of her three fellow nationalists as freedom fighters facing unjust and illegal prosecution by the US government.

Their legal efforts sought a tangible outcome: the unconditional release for Lebrón, Rafael Cancel Miranda, Irvin Flores



and Oscar Collazo. The four nationalists were all charged and imprisoned for seditious conspiracy following their attacks in Washington, DC on Blair House in 1950 and in Congress in 1954. But perhaps more importantly, the prisoners and their supporters worked to place the United States on trial for its continued colonial subjugation of Puerto Rico—a direct appeal against the removal of Puerto Rico from the United Nations’ list of non-self-governing territories. Throughout her letter to the ICJ, Lebrón fervently indicted the United States as an imperial power, urging the prisoners and those in solidarity with them to claim the authority—“in the highest sense of justice for nations—to denounce the usurping empire before world and international consciousness.” Indeed, from her perspective, to move their case to an international court of law was merely the next phase in the path toward decolonization. Such an opportunity “would be an important front of struggle to expose publicly and internationally the true situation of Puerto Rico.”<sup>3</sup>

Buried within Lebrón’s impassioned appeals was a pervasive anxiety over what constituted a legitimate anticolonial struggle. “We should show the United Nations that in order to fulfill its responsibilities for peace and harmony, it need not be suggested or even expected that oppressed Peoples make use of violence and bloodshed on a wide-scale basis,” wrote Lebrón. At different moments throughout the letter, Lebrón waived on the necessity of violence. At times she disavowed the need for massive revolt, in other moments, she painstakingly traced the deep history of armed struggle within the Puerto Rican independence movement. “Is this what is being demanded by the UN in order to demonstrate that a people should be free?” she asked rhetorically. But her question warrants further reflection. In a historical moment that conceptualized decolonization as a visible confrontation between colonial authority and anticolonial armed struggle, how could demands for Puerto Rican independence be taken seriously?

Perhaps no other decolonization struggle captivated the attention of the United Nations and broader international community more than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. So much so, in fact, that Lebrón found herself corresponding directly with her attorneys about the question of Palestine. One attorney, J. L. A. Passallacqua, argued in a memorandum to her, “There exists the possibility, in view of the situation of the PLO, of succeeding in having the United Nations accept one of the independence movements of Puerto Rico; however, given the political conditions in Puerto Rico, this is doubtful.”<sup>4</sup> Passallacqua saw the case of the nationalist prisoners as an opportunity to build upon and recreate the diplomatic momentum recently afforded to the Palestinian liberation movement by the United Nations General Assembly. Only four years prior, the General Assembly passed UN Resolution 3236 affirming the Palestinians’ right to self-determination and Resolution 3237 granting the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) observer status. As

diplomatic historian Paul Thomas Chamberlin writes of these victories, “In the eyes of the United Nations, the Palestinians were no longer merely Arab refugees. The Palestinians were a nation.”<sup>5</sup>

Lebrón dubiously responded to Passallacqua’s propositions: “I am not in a position to put forth opinions because I’m unaware of what ‘PLO’ means.” If her initial response appears skeptical and uninformed, Lebrón eventually narrated what were, presumably, Passallacqua’s intended goals. “I wish to say that I believe it would be possible for us to represent ourselves,” asserted Lebrón, “and for us to represent the liberation movement of Puerto Rico, according to its principles.” Thus, the Puerto Rican prisoners and their legal representatives found themselves engaging the question of Palestine as they strategized their own appearances before the international courts. “I do not seek from this legal step any personal rights as an individual, but as a freedom fighter who will defend the liberation of Puerto Rico as the only object before international law,” concluded Lebrón.<sup>6</sup> Whether as a conscious act of solidarity or not, from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, making Puerto Rico an object before international law—that is, making it a legitimate case for decolonization—involved invoking the struggle for Palestinian self-determination.

## The Politics of Puerto Rico’s Status

Demands for Puerto Rican decolonization sought to upend the reputation of the United States as the leader of the so-called “Free World.” Following World War II, the US government worked diligently to position itself as the harbinger of global democracy. Doing so required a refusal to participate in colonialism—at least in theory. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, this imperative drove US policies toward Puerto Rico. Working closely alongside Luis Muñoz Marín, the island’s first elected governor, and the Popular Democratic Party, the US government drafted a new constitution to reform the island’s political status. The result was the formal establishment of the commonwealth as *Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico* (Free Associated State of Puerto Rico) in 1952. This new status decreed Puerto Rico to be self-governing, but allowed the United States to retain ultimate authority over the territory’s affairs. More importantly, this transformation had significant international ramifications. Recast as a “decolonized” nation, the United States successfully petitioned for the formal removal of Puerto Rico from the United Nations’ list of colonized nations the following year.<sup>7</sup>

Despite this nominal success, the question of Puerto Rico’s colonial status continued to haunt the United States. For advocates of Puerto Rican independence, the Free Associated State was nothing more than colonialism by another name. “We cannot take lightly,” implored Lebrón in her letter to the ICJ, “the fact that the United Nations had recognized assimilation within the metropolitan power as a legitimate form of ending a colonial relationship.”<sup>8</sup> Throughout the



**Puerto Rican nationalist Oscar Collazo answers questions at a United Nations news conference sponsored by Cuba on September 11, 1979. Lolita Lebron, who was released after 25 years in US prison, listens. The two vowed to continue the fight for liberation.**

SUZANNE VLAMIS/AP PHOTO

1960s and 1970s, the United Nations' Special Committee on Decolonization repeatedly brought forth measures petitioning for the applicability of General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV) to the case of Puerto Rico. Debates surrounding the resolution—which “solemnly proclaims the need to remedy immediately and unconditionally the colonial situation in all its forms and manifestations”—placed Puerto Rico in conversation with decolonizing movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Leaders of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party and Puerto Rican Independence Party spoke before numerous meetings of the Special Committee. In the process, they mingled with representatives from Cuba, Iraq, Congo, Mali and the Syrian Arab Republic, among others.

In contrast to the intended goals of the United States, other international forums came to locate the question of Puerto Rico's colonial status within broader visions of Third World liberation. In September 1964, the Second Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries held in Cairo, Egypt issued the “Programme for Peace and International Co-Operation.”<sup>9</sup> The declaration strongly rebuked the uneven application of independence to colonized nations by the United Nations, calling for “the unconditional, complete and final abolition of colonialism now.” It also established a sweeping condemnation of all manifestations

of imperialism across the globe, including in both Palestine and Puerto Rico. While the conference endorsed and fully supported the right of Palestinians to self-determination, it also demanded that the Ad Hoc Decolonization Commission of the United Nations reconsider the case of Puerto Rico.

Instead of cementing the United States' international reputation as the leader of global democracy, Puerto Rico's ambiguous commonwealth status fueled common cause around anti-US sentiments. That the United States' Cold War antagonist Cuba spearheaded much of this organizing merely amplified the potency—and threat—of such solidarities. For example, the 1966 Tricontinental Conference of Havana brought together delegates from a variety of nations and liberation movements, including Puerto Rico and Palestine. Seeking increased collaboration between liberation movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America, the conference addressed the quagmire and excesses of US imperialism in the Cold War. This pervasive anti-American sentiment was captured in the report, *A Staff Study*, published by the US government shortly after the conference. The report quotes Cuban President Osvaldo Dorticós:

It is certain, however, that imperialism, especially North American imperialism, which has assumed the sad role of international gendarme, is sharpening violence and is intensifying the taking advantage



of all vile instruments of aggressions against peoples, from bribery and blackmail up to the most barefaced forms of violence and armed intervention. There is no better place than this conference to proclaim without vacillations the right of peoples to oppose imperialist violence with revolutionary violence.<sup>10</sup>

These politics formed the ideological framework for the Organization of Solidarity of the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL), the permanent organization founded at the Tricontinental Conference. They also came to inform the case for Puerto Rican decolonization. Even the Puerto Rican delegate to the conference, Norman Pietri, spoke of Puerto Rico in such terms: “Armed struggle has taken place in Puerto Rico. The struggle for independence has continued in the streets, and is becoming stronger daily.”<sup>11</sup> The attention given to Puerto Rico throughout the conference was so significant that the writers of *A Staff Study* raised urgent alarm at its incorporation into such visions of Third World liberation. From the perspective of the US government, Puerto Rico had become “a target of tricontinental subversion.” As Francisco Ortiz Santini finds in his study of the National Security Council’s declassified Carter administration documents, these concerns informed the president’s decision to free Lebrón and her comrades in order to allow the United States to “save face internationally.”<sup>12</sup>

Following the conference, the question of Puerto Rico’s colonial status became deeply integrated within both the rhetorical and organizational structures of Third World revolutionary internationalism. For example, Puerto Rican activists established a “Free Puerto Rico Embassy” in Havana, Cuba on February 10, 1966. Pledges came from 26 Latin American countries to also establish national solidarity committees in support of Puerto Rican decolonization. At the March 1975 meeting of the Non-Aligned Nations, the Puerto Rican Socialist Party was recognized as representative of the national liberation movement of Puerto Rico. From 1967 onward, OSPAAAL’s multilingual *Tricontinental* magazine—published in English, Spanish, French and Arabic—circulated vividly colored propaganda posters celebrating “World Solidarity with the Struggle of the People of Puerto Rico.”

Indeed, *Tricontinental*, and particularly its attendant posters, played an essential role in building common cause against US imperialism and sustaining transnational solidarities. It was especially productive in engendering Latin American solidarities with Palestine, including between Puerto Rico and Palestine. Annually produced posters celebrating each struggle’s respective day of world solidarity wove together the Puerto Rican and Palestinian decolonization movements. Images include a flame slowly smoldering toward the American flag, its explosion inevitable. An Israeli flag is seen caught amidst a rifle’s crosshairs, already consumed in fire. Fists are defiantly raised above the heads of revolutionaries. These posters rendered the Palestinian struggle effervescently revolutionary. Keffiyehs are draped around children, men and women—all of whom

stand confident against oppression, rifles pointed upward in victory or aimed at the enemy beyond the page. By contrast, Puerto Rico’s revolutionary potential was constrained. Fists raised in power are simultaneously shackled in chains. An eagle relentlessly crushes Puerto Rico in its claws while “E Pluribus Unum”—out of many, one—hangs behind its wings.

These posters spoke of global arrangements of power and dominance, of the possibilities and limitations structuring the promises of national liberation. Thus, as historian Manuel Barcia argues, “The Tricontinental Conference of Havana signified new direction [sic] for the anti-imperialist struggle worldwide.”<sup>13</sup> But it also signified new directions for Puerto Rican decolonization itself—namely by placing it alongside Palestinian liberation as a pivotal *cause célèbre* in the struggle against US imperialism.

## The Fight for Decolonization

Political affiliations, party memberships and cultural formations were the terrain of common cause that the Puerto Rican prisoners, their legal representatives and those in solidarity drew upon as they brought the case for decolonization before the United Nations. The Puerto Rican Solidarity Committee, for example, conceptualized Puerto Rico as the next successful decolonization movement. Its founding document declared, “From the liberated capitals of Cambodia and South Vietnam, to independent Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique, to the worldwide recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organization as the official representation of the Palestinian people, imperialism suffers one setback after another.”<sup>14</sup> Inevitably, it seemed, Puerto Rico would be next.

A pervasive sense that imperialism—and, in particular, US imperialism—was in crisis overwhelmed the 1970s. And that urgency carried forth into the following decade. In the early 1980s, 11 Puerto Ricans were arrested in Chicago on the basis that they were members of the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (FALN, Armed Forces of National Liberation). A clandestine movement committed to the strategy of “armed propaganda” in defense of Puerto Rican independence, the FALN carried out over 100 bombings between 1974 and 1983. Upon their arrest, they swiftly declared themselves prisoners of war and, like Lolita Lebrón and her comrades, rejected the authority of the US judicial system and demanded the right to be tried before an international court.

Their formal petition to the United Nations, submitted May 16, 1980, began: “These 11 captives hereby petition the United Nations to formally recognize their legal status as Prisoners of a Decolonization War and to take all appropriate measures to secure their release from detention and imprisonment in the United States.”<sup>15</sup> Addressed to the UN Secretary General, the UN Human Rights Commission, the Special Committee on Decolonization and the Bureau of Coordination, Conference of Non-Aligned Countries, the petition appealed directly to international law. In doing so, it symbolized another stage in



Tricontinental Conference, Havana, Cuba, 1966.

which the case for Puerto Rican decolonization was understood partly through a conscious effort to invoke the struggle for Palestinian self-determination.

In comparison to the hesitant discussion of Palestine in Lebrón's letter, these prisoners frequently and unabashedly declared solidarity with Palestine. The petition even included in its lengthy appendix a FALN communiqué dated August 3, 1977, which avowed both "Independence of Puerto

Rico Now!" and "Victory to the Palestinian Struggle!" The ferocity of these assertions was due, in part, to the prisoners' unflinching position regarding the necessity and validity of armed struggle. The FALN openly embraced the politics of Third World internationalism, espousing itself as Marxist-Leninist and committed to the incitement of people's war. For prisoner Carmen Valentin, armed struggle represented "the duty as colonized [sic] people to show the world the true facts—that Puerto Rico is still a colony."<sup>16</sup> For these prisoners, armed struggle was an imperative. It was the logical conclusion to the political masquerade of the Free Associated State imposed upon Puerto Rico.

In the parlance of the US government and mainstream media, these actions were the work of a terrorist organization and these Puerto Ricans were terrorists. Such accusations stripped the FALN's actions of their political, revolutionary legitimacy, reducing them to illegal acts. The prisoners responded by declaring themselves "freedom fighters, not terrorists." Along with their legal representatives, they worked to reassert the fundamental role of colonialism in the armed actions, citing legal precedent: "The unconditional support of the United

Nations for the liberation struggles carried on by the peoples of Namibia, Zimbabwe, Palestine, and other newly freed or soon-to-be freed nations of this world, clearly establishes the right to employ all methods and choose all targets which the strategy and conscious of the freedom fighters themselves indicate are correct."<sup>17</sup>

The intensity with which these prisoners declared solidarity with Palestinian liberation capitalized upon an increasing



recognition of Israel as an aggressive imperialist state. Their petition to the United Nations, for instance, documented Haydée Beltrán Torres' experience in the federal jail of Manhattan. Torres, who had been forcibly separated from the rest of the Puerto Rican prisoners and sent to New York City for prosecution on her involvement in the Mobil Oil bombing of August 1977, found herself monitored by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Fervently objecting to such surveillance, the petition claimed that, "unlike any prisoner, she must have all her visits approved by the federal police (FBI), who have refused her all visits, tauntingly telling her she could have a visit from an officer of the Israeli army." Although the petition did not belabor this point any further, it would presumably have raised alarm in its readers, particularly those from the UN Human Rights Commission and the Special Committee on Decolonization.

## Puerto Rico's Anti-Colonial Struggle in the Context of Palestinian Resistance

The continuities in legal strategies adopted for both cases of the Puerto Rican prisoners signified the increasing importance of understanding Puerto Rico within an anticolonial context. At least one lawyer—Michael Deutsch—represented both Lebrón and her comrades and the 11 Puerto Rican prisoners from the early 1980s. From the 1960s through the 1980s, Puerto Rican decolonization was increasingly understood and legitimized as part of a broader struggle against imperialism. But this conceptual framework circulated well beyond the court of law. So much so, in fact, that the case of Puerto Rico eventually appeared in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine's English language publication, the *PFLP Bulletin*.

Published in the journal's February 1980 issue, the editor introduced the article—plainly titled "Puerto Rico"—rather unassumingly. "In recent months much activity has been taking place in Puerto Rico and the US, concerning the release of four Puerto Rican freedom fighters [Lebrón, Collazo, Cancel Miranda, Flores], held in US prisons since the early 50's." Readers quickly learned that the article was authored and submitted by the Liga Socialista Puertorriqueña (LSP). Led by Juan Antonio Corretjer, the LSP staunchly supported a Puerto Rican embrace of revolutionary violence. Consequentially, the article traced the historical legacy of armed struggle and justified its use in the movement for Puerto Rican national liberation. In the process, it denigrated the Puerto Rican Independence Party and Puerto Rican Socialist Party as reformists and, therefore, not truly committed to liberation.

The editorial board found itself issuing an apology four months later. The article's steadfast support for mass agitation and armed actions had sparked controversy within the Puerto Rican independence movement. Disavowing responsibility for the turmoil, the apology encouraged those involved in the

struggle for Puerto Rican independence to submit material for publication. This invitation, however, was mitigated by a stern warning: "In any case, some of the questions dealt with in the article are best resolved among the Puerto Rican left forces and the solidarity organizations supporting them, and not in the pages of our Bulletin."<sup>18</sup>

Within the global struggle against imperialism, Puerto Ricans and their allies contended with the legibility of Palestinian liberation. Both before the international community and within global leftist movements, the question of Palestine was understood as a quintessential coordinate of the struggle against imperialist oppression. The Puerto Rican independence movement sought this same recognition, at times manifesting as a desire to replicate the diplomatic successes of the PLO. In some moments, their embrace of the Palestinian struggle reflected a maneuver through which to legally justify armed struggle, and in others it involved infighting over what exactly constituted the appropriate strategies for liberation. In all these ways, the Puerto Rican independence movement encountered the question of Palestine and, in the process, made sense of its own claims to decolonization. ■

**Author's Note:** I am grateful to Nathan Santoscoy who patiently and generously talked through this article with me and provided a keen editorial eye throughout.

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The favela of Santa Marta on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2012.

WERNER RUDHART/VISUM/REDUX

# Divergent Histories and Converging Inequalities in the Middle East and Latin America

**Kevan Harris**

**T**he field of Middle East studies likes to tell itself that the region is an anomaly within the global South. One peculiarity attributed to the region is a relatively low level of income inequality, purportedly due to a combination of redistributive traditions within Islam, large public sectors and welfare systems, cross-border remittances from Arab labor migration and official aid by oil-rich countries.

Enter economist Thomas Piketty. In September 2017, Piketty and his colleagues released a stunning report on income inequality in the Middle East.<sup>1</sup> By estimating the top incomes of wealthy individuals, which tend not to be captured in household surveys, Piketty's team produced an alarming set of numbers. The region, they argued, is "the most unequal in the world." The report defines the Middle East as a regional

unit of roughly 410 million people, "going from Egypt to Iran, and from Turkey to the Gulf countries," rather than a discrete set of national economies. Within this region-wide unit, the top 10 percent of income earners collect 61 percent of total income.<sup>2</sup> To put that figure in perspective, compare this estimate to similarly sized regions in the global North: the top 10 percent of Western Europe (420 million people) garners 36 percent of income, while the top 10 percent of the United States (320 million) receives 47 percent.

Piketty and his colleagues also compared their inequality estimates for the Middle East to similarly derived figures in Brazil (population 210 million), where the top decile's share of income was estimated at around 55 percent in 2017. In other words, one of the most unequal countries in the world, Brazil, is still a little more equal than the Middle East, when the latter is taken as a single unit.

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Moving higher up the income distribution ladder, the inequality estimates grow even starker. According to Piketty's team, the top 1 percent of income earners in the Middle East collect 27 percent of total income. This concentration at the top surpasses the income shares of the 1 percent in Western Europe (12 percent), the United States (20 percent), South Africa (18 percent), China (14 percent) and India (21 percent). Once again, the main competitor in their report is Brazil, where the top 1 percent of income earners receive 28 percent of the income distribution.

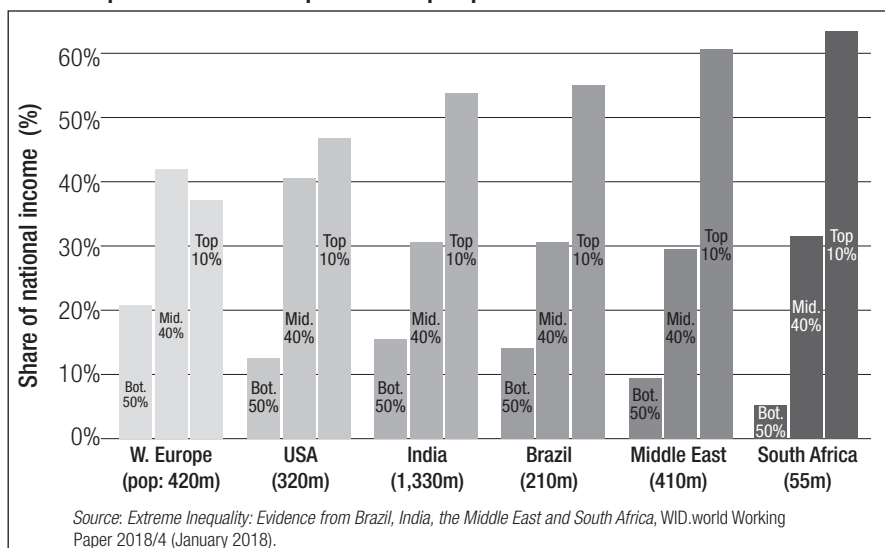
What conclusions can be drawn from Piketty's account of inequality in the Middle East, especially in relation to more thoroughly documented inequalities in Latin America? After all, previous studies note that inequality within any particular country in the Middle East tends to be low in comparison with other parts of the world. Surveys measuring the inequality of household expenditures provided lower estimates in countries such as Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia. In the wake of the 2011 Arab uprisings, World Bank economists claimed that these figures presented an "Arab inequality puzzle," given that perceptions of high inequality expressed by protesters did not seem to match up with the data.<sup>4</sup>

The contradiction between low inequality within particular countries in the Middle East and high inequality across the region as a whole is not really a contradiction, however, once the processes which have produced one or the other over time have been unpacked. A historical comparison between Latin America—albeit a much larger region by population and size with its own internal variations—and the Middle East reveals similarities and differences in regional politics and the generation of inequality. On the surface, both regions appeared to jointly slide from state-led policies of industrialization down into the caprices of market-led policies of neoliberalism. Underneath, however, in the characteristics of industrial projects, the pathways of neoliberalization and the outcomes of social upsurges, there were distinct divergences between Latin America and the Middle East which led, through separate routes, to the high regional inequalities of the present.

## Common Concepts, Divergent Histories

From the 1940s until the 1970s, scholars and activists across Latin America and the Middle East often saw their respective regions as sharing a common fate and facing similar prospects. There is a reason why by the 1970s these intellectuals held a set of concepts in common. They had been talking to each

Bottom 50 percent vs. middle 40 percent vs. top 10 percent income shares across the world.<sup>3</sup>



other for decades within and across the institutions of the international order, many of which contained spaces like the Non-Aligned Movement that were dedicated to an idea of the linked fortunes of the Third World.<sup>5</sup> They argued that the playing field of the world economy was tilted against the formerly colonized world. The global values of the products and resources of these countries, from agricultural commodities to minerals, were declining over time in relation to the industrial goods produced in North America and Europe. Furthermore, the structures of regional economies in Latin America and the Middle East were not traditionally mired in primary commodity production but rather had been forced into that role through interactions with colonial powers. As a result, Latin America and the Middle East were both in a dependent relationship with the First World. This common condition implied a set of common strategies to reverse the process and enable participation in the world economy on a more equal footing.

Strategies to remedy this shared legacy included a government-led push for domestic industrialization, often by expanding infrastructure to link internal markets, protecting export sectors to diversify trade and creating or subsidizing companies to produce manufactured goods at home. Indeed, this was already beginning to happen from the 1920s through the 1930s in countries with manufacturing experience such as Mexico and Brazil. Countries could also coordinate the production and pricing of primary commodities via regional or global cartels so that the terms of trade for resource-dependent states did not continue to decline in volatile fashion. This strategy was not solely limited to the well-known example of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), although no other collective organization had such a lasting impact on commodity prices. Lastly, countries could collectively insist on the sovereign rights of their states to determine internal affairs while at the same time call for a restructuring of

the postwar institutions that set the rules of the international economic order.<sup>6</sup>

So far, so anti-imperialist. By the mid-1970s, the model of state-led development seemed similar in both regions. Each had a strong tradition of leftist oppositional politics. Not coincidentally, partly due to such opposition, both regions had shifted from a cluster of popular-nationalist states toward authoritarian rule by military regimes. Ultimately, however, the different histories of the two regions contributed to a divergence in paths.

Compared to the Middle East, large countries in Latin America historically had lengthy experience with manufacturing and more access to technological inputs from American and European firms. These countries had been independent for over a century, after all, though their elites tended to be linked to conservative, landowning classes. While land redistribution was carried out over the mid-twentieth century in countries such as Mexico, Bolivia, Peru and Chile, counter-reform and lack of support for small-scale production limited its positive impacts on rural inequality.<sup>7</sup>

Many Middle Eastern states, conversely, engaged in extensive programs of land reform soon after independence, with varying levels of success in decreasing poverty and inequality in the countryside. This process broke the hold of landed notables on elite politics in countries such as Egypt, Iran and Syria, but did not result in increased agrarian surpluses, which could be funneled into a growing manufacturing sector (the approach in East Asia during the 1960s and 70s). Nevertheless, as a major component of inequality was driven by differences in rural living standards, land reforms in the Middle East and state investment in the countryside did contribute to a social leveling of sorts, albeit one where rural citizens were now freed to search for higher paying jobs in large cities across the region, including in the city-states and growing urban centers of the Persian Gulf.

The drive to industrialize varied between these regions as well. By 1974, manufacturing made up 31 percent of Brazil's GDP and 23 percent of Mexico's GDP. At the same time, in Egypt—after two decades of economic nationalization and state-protected industry under Nasserism—17 percent of GDP came from manufacturing activities. In Iraq the figure was even lower (10 percent of GDP in 1972, before major oil price hikes).<sup>8</sup> The “oil revolution” from price increases in the 1970s did not spur a great manufacturing push in the Middle East. Instead, it motivated a push for the expansion of financial institutions and urban infrastructure in Persian Gulf countries, which had too many petrodollars to spend, and a military spending spree among larger states.

In sum, after a period of state-led development across both regions with common goals of reversing a historical dependency on primary commodities and fighting to gain access in the world market for their domestic production, a divergence had taken root. Parts of Latin America were impressively specializing in industrial goods that stood a chance of competing in Northern markets, but the inherited inequalities of colonial rule and the lack of land reform meant that stark inequalities

remained in the region, often manifested in the continued exclusion of indigenous or Afro-descendent citizens from populist-era social contracts.<sup>9</sup>

In the Middle East, manufacturing zones remained small and state-protected with limited linkages to Northern markets. Large public sectors, which employed a sizable minority of the population, an expansion of access to primary education and health care and universal subsidies of basic food staples and fuel, however, reduced inequality between households during the postwar decades through the 1970s.

## The Uneven Geography of Neoliberalism

Asserting that the Middle East's main dilemma was neoliberalism *tout court*—that this master process was the cause of the 2011 Arab uprisings, for instance—tells us little about the key dynamics of recent decades. From the 1970s onwards, the Middle East as a region was not subject to external or internal pressures of neoliberalization to the same extent as Latin America. As an umbrella term that has entered the vernacular of everyday politics, the word neoliberalism means many things to many people. At times, the term has too many meanings to function as a standalone concept for capturing social change across the entire global South over the past four decades. Take, for instance, the privatization of public sector companies, often held up as a telltale sign of neoliberal policy during the 1990s. As seen in Table 1, the two regions with the highest absolute levels of privatization during the 1990s were Latin America and post-socialist Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Even taking into account the larger size of the Latin American economies compared to the Middle East, states in the latter region privatized relatively little during the same period. In smaller countries such as Lebanon, Tunisia, Jordan and Morocco, of course, the size of public sectors had been historically more limited. Along with Egypt during the 2000s, these countries did selectively sell off state-owned firms across oil, gas, banking, manufacturing and telecom sectors. Yet, the pace and degree of privatization was not evenly shared across the region.

**Table 1. Proceeds from Privatization in Developing Countries, 1990–1999**

Region	US \$ Billions	% Share of Total
East Asia and the Pacific	44,100	14.0
<b>Latin America</b>	<b>177,839</b>	<b>56.3</b>
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	65,466	20.7
<b>Middle East</b>	<b>8,197</b>	<b>2.6</b>
South Asia	11,854	3.8
Sub-Saharan Africa	8,264	2.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>315,720</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Source: Alberto Chong and Florencio Lopez-de-Silanes, eds, <i>Privatization in Latin America: Myths and Reality</i> (Washington, DC: Inter-American Development Bank, 2005) p. 5.		





The Egyptian Iron and Steel Company in Helwan, near Cairo, 1987.

A. ABBAS/MAGNUM PHOTOS

Several factors help explain why large parts of the Middle East were less subject to the economic dictates of the neoliberal wave of the 1970s to 2000s. After the Sino-United States détente and end of the Vietnam War, the main global theater of military build-up, geopolitical conflict and mass warfare shifted from East Asia to the Middle East. Dating back to the mid-1960s, political elites in the region found that war and war preparation served as useful excuses to fight off technocratic efforts to shrink the state's budget and privatize national "mother" industries (such as banking, oil and gas, mining, petrochemicals and power generation). When state elites did eventually engage in neoliberal adjustments from the 1970s onwards, such as reduction of trade barriers, removal of price controls and allowing for foreign investment, they did so dragging their feet, a half-hearted neoliberalism at best.

Social welfare contracts across the region frayed, and even stagnated in some countries, but they did not precipitously collapse as in Latin America. Austerity protests across several Middle Eastern countries also alarmed autocratic state elites and contributed to their weak embrace of neoliberal policies. Although many Middle Eastern states were not oil producers, the commodity bubbles of the 1970s generated sufficient intra-regional transfers of capital to keep segments of the state-led welfare systems in place. These capital flows, coupled with new sources of external finance for Middle Eastern states, prevented the deep balance-of-payments crises that Latin America experienced in the 1980s and 90s, and allowed for the continued use of the public sector as a provider of employment and status attainment. Jordan's public sector employed more people in

the 2000s than in the 1980s. Egypt's public sector salaries rose, not fell, over the same period.<sup>10</sup> Flows of military and development aid were also significant and buffered political elites in US-friendly states such as Egypt and Jordan.

Neoliberal-sounding intellectuals abound in the Middle East and are well received among the chattering classes of Northern countries. Yet they never held the reins of power for an extended period anywhere except Turkey. There were no crises deep enough to allow the takeover of Arab states and purging of old guards until the 2011 protests. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, it did seem that limited democratization-cum-liberalization might take hold in the Middle East, as was occurring in Latin America. Political councils were established in Jordan and Kuwait and regular elections were held in Iran and Turkey. Moves toward liberalization proved transient, in the Arab cases at least, when neoliberal upstarts were selectively grafted into the state by political veterans, from Egypt to Syria, without radical changes to governance. Crony-style arrangements for regime allies replaced corporatist organizations for labor and professionals. As a result, economic growth across the region during the 2000s benefited the top strata. Nevertheless, compared to the United States' punitive approach to Latin American economies, the special relationship between Washington and the region remained distinctive. In the most blatant example, the United States repeatedly intervened to prop up the Egyptian economy from the 1980s to the present without demanding severe structural adjustments. As Martyn Indyk, the director of Near East and South Asian Affairs on the Clinton administration's National Security Council, recalled, "the Egyptians dictated the pace."<sup>11</sup>

This soft landing into the neoliberal era contrasts with the experience of Latin America from the early 1980s onwards, where public debt crises mounted as a byproduct of rapid increases in US interest rates. The United States sneezed and Latin America caught the plague. A rupture in economic and social policy took place across the region, justified by the technocratic magical realism of the Washington Consensus. The standard package of liberalizing economic reforms attached to loans from Washington-based financial institutions might have been reasonable if selectively applied across a longer time frame. But instead, they were swiftly enforced in concert and held in place even as the reality of collapsing social development indicators in the wake of economic austerity belied the theoretical expectations of rapid adjustment. The industrial policies of the previous decades, which stood a chance—however slim—of facilitating a Latin American equivalent to the East Asian manufacturing boom, were torn up by the region's politicians and rebuked by in-house intellectuals.

The upside of the Latin American debt crises of the 1980s, if any, was the de-legitimization of the region's military dictatorships and their claims to superior authoritarian handling of the economy. Consequently, also unlike the Middle East, most states in Latin America underwent democratization at the same time as neoliberal transformation. The transition to more democratic forms of mass politics widened the civil space for popular mobilization against ensuing economic austerity and the rapid unraveling of social welfare compacts across the region.

## The Political Outcomes of Social Upsurges

The starkness of Latin American inequality was politicized by new social movements from the 1980s to the 2000s, eventually contributing to the Pink Tide of left-leaning governments that appeared across the region. Yet underneath this tide was a notable variation in political outcomes. In countries where conservative-run political party systems (inherited from the pre-neoliberal era) provided room for leftist mobilization, such as in Brazil or Uruguay, the outcome of popular upsurges tended to result in left-wing party success within the recently democratized institutions of the state. Social democratic forces, finally victorious at the polls—such as Brazil's Workers' Party or Uruguay's Broad Front—implemented inequality-reducing packages of social investments while also benefiting from increased prices for commodities in global demand. Where more oligarchic parties backed by military elites dominated the democratic transition and its aftermath, such as in Honduras or Paraguay, even liberal politicians from the business sector or Catholic priests running on populist platforms encountered severe pushback through impeachment or coups. This form of oligarchic restoration arguably presented a model for the counterpunch against social democratic parties over the past several years in Brazil and Argentina.

Lastly, where recurring popular mobilization paralyzed the inherited party systems of the pre-neoliberal era, such

as in Bolivia or Ecuador, social movement-spawned parties outflanked the ruling elites through plebiscitary power. Constitutions were re-written and policies geared towards reductions in poverty and inequality were funded through increased state taxation of domestic resource extraction.<sup>12</sup> Impressive gains in social development notwithstanding, the re-founding of these countries' constitutional orders, often through referenda, could prove as unstable as their Venezuelan cousin has shown in dismal fashion, as old elite coalitions engage in investment strikes and capital flights. In sum, the rising social unrest from neoliberal adjustment interacted with the divergent legacies of Latin American dictatorships to induce different political outcomes.

In the Middle East, inherited political structures also mattered once a tide of popular uprisings swept across the region in 2011. Where leaders had previously entrenched dynastic or hereditary methods of succession, as in Syria, Jordan or the Gulf monarchies, nonviolent protestors found that autocrats and security forces were difficult to wedge apart due to the increased loyalty of the organs of repression to regime coteries. In states with ambiguous succession prospects, as in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen, ruling heads were successfully ousted when nonviolent mobilization pushed their security apparatuses into abeyance. In Libya, however, a leader without institutional succession had enough resources to violently hold off popular rebellion, but foreign intervention cut off Qaddafi's gambit for survival.<sup>13</sup> The counterrevolutions of 2011 and the ensuing collapse of large swaths of the Middle East into civil war, population migration and inter-state rivalries exacerbated the main contributors to region-wide inequality.

In crude terms, the high inequality estimates for the Middle East region as a whole reported by Thomas Piketty and his colleagues stem from two main processes. First, average incomes have been stagnating in larger Middle Eastern countries, given middling growth rates and large population increases. Second, however, and far more significant for Piketty's estimates, is the concentration of income at the top levels of the Persian Gulf states. In Piketty's regional sample, Gulf countries represent only 15 percent of the Middle East's population but receive 47 percent of the total regional income (measured at market rates). Within the Gulf countries themselves, whether in majority-national states like Saudi Arabia or minority-national city-state archipelagos such as the United Arab Emirates, the influx of cyclical migrant labor over the past three decades has brought down the average incomes in each country, but the ratio of income between Gulf nationals and foreign labor has increased over time.

In other words, as Piketty points out, even if within-country inequality had not changed at all over the past three decades in the Middle East, the "evolution of total inequality at the level of the Middle East taken as a whole would have been virtually the same."<sup>14</sup> The inequality dynamics of the Middle East—relatively low inequality inside large states, glaringly high inequality across the region—is largely due to accumulation of



income in the garrison states of the Gulf, with restricted and tiered social contracts benefiting small shares of the population in these territories.

The concentrated accumulation of Gulf incomes is rooted in the rest of the Middle East's sorrowful trajectory. The outcome of four decades of cascading war across the region was to push the political and economic leadership of Middle East and North African states toward the Gulf monarchies. The Gulf model advertises a costless, codified capitalism: social citizenship for elite kinship minorities, imported professional and working classes and territorial security subcontracted to the American superpower. Celebrated by sycophants and chimerically held up as an obverse to Nasserist state-led development of the 1960s, the model is under strain on all three fronts. Young Gulf Arabs are growing tired of being cloistered and pampered without career trajectories, leading the monarchies to pursue a half-hearted policy of "nationalization" of the workforce, with increased costs in tow. The long-term circulation of South Asian and North African labor throughout the Gulf has built up local communities with their own resources of social solidarity. Hidden resistance is still the norm, but the costs of containing labor unrest are growing. The US protection umbrella, as royals now grumble, is looking more like a protection racket. But if the Gulf monarchies had to protect themselves, they would also have to enter into a more ordinary balance of power arrangement in the region where Iran, Turkey and other possible competitors could claim a veto, irrespective of US or Israeli wishes. This quivering in the balance of power has occurred to some extent anyway, signaled by the recent split in the Gulf Cooperation Council over Qatar, making the Gulf model even more precarious. There is no equivalent in Latin America of this form of garrison capitalism.

## Present Convergences

This idiosyncratic historical route to Middle East inequality makes the high inequality levels in Brazil, a democratic country with open internal migration and at peace with its neighbors, perhaps even more alarming. In addition to startling inequality, however, after a half century of divergence, the Middle East and Latin America now have much else in common.

After the recent commodity booms and busts of the 2000s to the present, both regions are chiefly exporters of primary commodities (such as soy, oil, meat or gas) and people (as desperate economic migrants and refugees as well as labor inputs into low-wage goods) rather than high value added goods. The fortunes of both regions rest on the temperature of the world economy. If the US economy tanks, slumping China in turn, then the niche specializations of Latin America and the Middle East will have little use for the world economy.

At the top of both regions, a conglomerate form of capitalism reigns supreme, where large business groups such as Odebrecht (Brazil), Grupo Carso (Mexico), SABIC (Saudi Arabia) and Etisalat (UAE) operate in a grey zone of state-linked contracts, kinship networks of ownership, speculative linkages to global

finance, webs of subsidiaries across numerous industries and powerful influence on regional politics and capital flows.<sup>15</sup>

Lastly, both regions share a common experience in the rupturing of social fabrics through intense violence indiscriminately directed at marginalized or disempowered social groups, abstracted as "crime" in one region and "war" in the other. Upon closer examination, there is less difference between the two than presumed, as both forms of violence operate with the complicity of state institutions and depend on the toil of everyday laborers who cannot acquire their livelihood through other means. Previous exit valves of migration are increasingly closed off in the United States and Europe.

The inclusively authoritarian path of Middle East state-led development arguably contributed most to the reduction of inequality during the postwar era among large states. The programmatic social democratic parties of Latin America girded by popular mobilization, however, proved the main route for inequality reduction at the turn of the twenty-first century. Neither model seems attainable at the regional level today. As a similar fate looms across both regions, however, new opportunities for reimagining the future are also present. After all, the two regions have far more in common today than a century ago. A sense of linked fortunes and shared horizons could provide the stirrings for collective political strategies once again, this time on firmer historical ground. ■

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# South-South Solidarity and the Summit of South American-Arab Countries

**Paulo Daniel Farah**

A sense of deep connection has reverberated between South America and Arab countries since the early waves of Arab migrations to South America in the late nineteenth century. The Arabic language also played an important role in Brazil's history. Most of the Muslim African anti-slavery activists and revolutionaries in nineteenth century Brazil wrote and spoke Arabic, or Portuguese and African languages using Arabic letters. Although there are more than 16 million Arabs and their descendants in Brazil, which constitutes the largest Arab community outside the Middle East, no Brazilian president had ever visited the region until President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in 2003. His was the first official visit of a Brazilian head of state to any Arab country since the emperor Dom Pedro II (1825–1891) visited the region in the nineteenth century.

Historically, relations between Arab states and South America were built primarily on bilateral negotiations and agreements. Since early 2003, however, a new approach has developed that prioritizes an alternative model of international relations through bi-regional cooperation. Following the election of President Lula da Silva in 2003, Brazil launched a series of summits promoting political, economic, technological, cultural and educational cooperation with Arab countries. In 2005, the Summit of South American-Arab Countries (Cúpula América do Sul-Países Árabes, ASPA) was formally established with 12 South American and 22 Arab countries cooperating in the fields of science and technology, the environment, culture and education, economy and social issues.

ASPA is one of the first mechanisms to promote cultural and educational cooperation within a South-South perspective of solidarity. Over the past 15 years, the final declaration of each ASPA Summit of Heads of State and Government, held every three years, has emphasized the importance of translating and publishing books, organizing exhibits, festivals, workshops and cultural and educational exchange programs. While ASPA's initiatives have produced significant results, they are limited by a lack of financing and an emphasis on trade. These limitations illustrate some of the challenges of South-South solidarity and cooperation.

## Cultural Diplomacy and Achievements

In 2005, Brazil hosted the first ASPA summit, which was intended to serve as a platform for the formulation and implementation of a

common agenda between the regions. The response was encouraging: commercial and cultural relations strengthened considerably and Arab countries opened several new embassies and consulates in South America. Brazil opened more than 20 new embassies in the Middle East and Africa. Similar to the South-South vision laid out at the Bandung Conference between Asian and African states in 1955, participants envisioned the summit as a launching pad to coordinate positions as a unified block in order to influence the United Nations, World Trade Organization, World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Some of ASPA's most significant accomplishments have been at the cultural level. At the time it was founded, political leaders in South America understood that cultural diplomacy could produce crucial results in mobilizing domestic, regional and international support for an emerging South-South solidarity. They also realized that cultural initiatives could enhance political and commercial relations and build alternatives to the hegemonic politics of the global North. Ministries of culture as well as civil society-based cultural and research institutions have played a major role in this process.

The establishment of the Library and Centre of South American and Arab Research (BibliASPA), in São Paulo, Brazil, with branches in other cities, has been among ASPA's most impressive cultural and educational accomplishments. This institution promotes critical, cross-regional reflection through the publication of books in Portuguese, Arabic, Spanish, English and French; creating and translating literary and social science works from one region to the other; maintaining a website in five languages; organizing conferences, courses, debates, exhibitions, movie festivals, theater performances and the annual South American Festival of Arab Culture.

Another goal of BibliASPA is to promote the teaching of languages such as Arabic, Portuguese and Spanish. Language instruction supports researchers in the study of non-European sources and promotes non-Eurocentric ways of reading and interpreting. It also helps Arab, African and South American refugees and migrants integrate into the society where they live. Brazil, for instance, receives the most refugees in South America, the majority of whom are Arabs and Africans. At BibliASPA refugees are offered free education. Every month about 1,350 refugees also receive food, transportation, clothing, legal aid, psychological assistance, translation and assistance in finding a job.

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An important achievement of ASPA is the establishment of the research group “Arab, African, Asian, South American and Diasporic Themes, Narratives and Representations,” which aims to promote the reading, analysis and translation of key texts and manuscripts directly from the original language without an intermediate language. Creating proficiency in, and literary appreciation of, regional languages paves the way for a new generation of cultural dialogue within the global South and avoids the stereotypes and ignorance historically generated by relying upon the mediation of a third language, especially considering the possible imperial, geopolitical or cultural biases inherent in these frames of understanding. ASPA has also formalized spaces for networking among artists and academics, beyond the networking of government officials and businessmen. A good example is *Fikr: Journal of Arabic, African and South American Studies*, with an editorial board of professors from 25 countries.

## Challenges and Difficulties

Unfortunately, despite the focus within ASPA on South-South cooperation, a critical problem emerged when some Arab countries called on European and North American expertise to oversee several initiatives, thus undermining the entire idea. A concrete example was the assistance offered by the Qatari government to educational programs in Brazil and Argentina, including support for Arabic language learning. Doha asked North American institutions to supervise the programs although the designated team did not speak Portuguese, Spanish or Arabic and had never been to Brazil and Argentina. Brazilian and Argentinian professors, teachers and students were offended by the way they were treated and were confused by the orders, orientation and promises made by the North American team on behalf of the Qatari government. The North American visitors brought with them stereotypes about favelas, Carnival and beaches. Their South America seemed to be a holiday reward rather than a workplace.

The episode reinforces the idea that the era of “triangulating” South-South relations via the mediation of the United States or Europe should be over. Brazil, for example, has features and histories that allow it to develop a special direct relationship with Arab and Muslim countries. South America should consolidate and expand its privileged relationship with Arab countries through a respectful and non-invasive dialogue, but one that should never concede ground in key areas such as human rights, freedom of expression, social inclusion and the environment.

Further development of BibliASPA and other initiatives have been agreed upon in the summits but have not seen the light of day due to lack of funding and political follow up. The ministers of culture of South American and Arab countries affirmed their support in their Riyadh 2014 summit meeting

and called for an ASPA museum. They also urged BibliASPA to prepare and implement more programs of translation between Arabic, Spanish, Portuguese and English. At the fourth ASPA summit, in Riyadh in November 2015, the heads of state and government commended the progress achieved in the field of cultural cooperation, applauded BibliASPA and urged practical steps forward. But repeated requests for financial support and a fixed budget for culture and education have been ignored.

Difficulties are perhaps understandable. On one side, some Arab countries involved do not fully see the importance of supporting, with practical steps, educational and cultural initiatives related to ASPA—despite public affirmations to do so—and some have instead pursued initiatives with the global North. On the other side, South America has been facing political and economic crises, decreasing support for culture and education, and unfortunately the current governments of countries like Brazil and Argentina do not see social, cultural or educational programs as priorities. The turn to more conservative governments has made cooperating on ASPA style initiatives more difficult. Brazil’s current government, led by Michel Temer, who took office in May 2016, remains deeply unpopular. Today, ASPA’s bi-regional cooperation is threatened by political and economic crises in South America and by upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa.

The ASPA model aims to institutionalize and build upon historic ties to advance common interests. Challenges include the lack of financing for culture, education and research projects (which also enhance political and commercial relations); an excessive dependence on chambers of commerce (which have expertise on its sphere of work, but not on societies, culture and education); difficulties in realizing the importance of the refugee issue; travel barriers and restrictions (Arab and South American citizens carrying ordinary passports still need visas in most cases) and other factors. As the term ASPA (which means quote in Portuguese) itself suggests, member countries should facilitate cooperation and rapprochement through more consultation and inclusion.

For the ASPA process to advance and for cooperation to be not just a momentary and elusive initiative, both regions need to continue building institutional frameworks and organizations, as well as to maintain the original commitment to cultural and educational programs. This commitment includes providing adequate financing, institutional support and the reactivation of dormant initiatives, such as the ASPA-UNESCO contact group that was established to formalize cultural cooperation with the United Nations. The ASPA movement of rediscovery and of cultural valorization can encourage the construction of alternatives enhanced by mutual understanding and critical reflection upon rich histories of linguistic, literary, commercial, social and development partnership and transregional exchange. ■



Demonstrators hold up Syrian national flags as they march towards the US Embassy during a protest against possible US military intervention in the conflict in Syria in Buenos Aires, Argentina. September 10, 2013.

MARCOS BRINDICCI/REUTERS

# The Syrian Uprising and Mobilization of the Syrian Diaspora in South America

Cecília Baeza and Paulo Pinto

**T**he Syrian uprising against President Bashar al-Asad's government that began in 2011, and the armed conflict that followed, has generated a strong reaction among the large populations of Arabic-speaking immigrants and their descendants in both Brazil and Argentina. Institutions and community members mobilized in the past around political issues of the Middle East, such as the Palestinian question, the US-led invasion of Iraq and the Israeli bombing of Lebanon in 2006. The US "War on Terror" provoked collective mobilization among the Muslim communities in the Brazilian and Paraguayan cities of the Triple Border Area, Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este, which were directly

targeted in discourses on terrorism and materially affected by increased surveillance and police control. These earlier mobilizations were often supported by left-wing parties since the causes fit well with those parties' general anti-imperialist discourse. Conversely, on national Argentinian and Brazilian issues there is no unified political stance held by the Arab communities, since their members are distributed across the political spectrum according to their particular interests and ideological leanings.

The reaction to the Syrian conflict differs in terms of the scope of the mobilization and the resulting changes in the internal dynamics of these communities. Most previous political mobilizations were not met with the same enthusiasm or with any form of consensus among the various institutions and groups within the Arab communities in

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either Brazil or Argentina. The Syrian uprising, in contrast, has created or revealed profound divisions that are expressed as shifts in how the community and the identities of its members are imagined and defined. Three elements mark the mobilization around the Syrian conflict in Argentina and Brazil: the engagement of younger individuals, including some who had not participated previously in the collective life of the community; the limited influence of Syrian refugees on the production of discourses about the conflict; and the public dominance of pro-Asad discourses and political actions, fostered by institutions self-defined as Syrian-Lebanese and/or Arab.

In contrast, the Tunisian revolution of 2011 passed almost unnoticed by these communities. The Egyptian revolution of the same year and Muhammad Mursi's election as president of Egypt in 2012 were celebrated only by some Islamic institutions, such as the Muslim Charitable Society (Sociedade Beneficente Muçulmana) in São Paulo and did not provoke any larger political debate among the members of the community. The celebration of Mursi's election had both nationalist and religious undertones since many sheikhs leading mosques in Brazil come from Egypt and Mursi symbolized the victory of an Islamic political project for the country.<sup>1</sup>

Brazil and Argentina host the largest populations of Syrian-Lebanese in Latin America—lower estimates put the total population of Arabic-speaking immigrants and their descendants between 1 and 2 million in each country, with Syrians accounting for one quarter of that number.<sup>2</sup> This Arab presence in South America is the result of several waves of immigration which peaked between 1870 and the 1930s, and has continued, albeit in much reduced numbers, until today. Patterns of immigration and trajectories of incorporation have been similar across the continent, with a significant portion of the immigrants and their descendants progressively joining the middle classes and, for a minority, the upper classes of their host societies. While there is a sense of ethnic solidarity and shared cultural references among immigrants from the Middle East and their descendants, there is no single overarching identity that is accepted by them all. Instead, several ethno-national identities—Syrian, Lebanese, Palestinian, Syrian-Lebanese, Arab—are differently claimed, combined and sometimes rejected in each context. The Syrian-Lebanese identity was adopted in diasporic contexts as a compromise between Pan-Arab, Syrian and Lebanese nationalisms, in particular because some Lebanese rejected the attribution of an Arab identity to Lebanon, claiming instead a Phoenician origin. For the sake of clarity, the networks of institutions and the imagined communities that give a sense of belonging to these various identities will be referred to as the Syrian-Lebanese and/or Arab community.

The success of the pro-Asad mobilization among certain sectors of the Syrian-Lebanese communities in Argentina

and Brazil, as well as the effects that this mobilization has had on the reconfiguration of these communities and their diasporic identities, can be traced through an examination of several factors. The key components shaping the perception of the Syrian conflict in these diasporic communities are the mobilization of an authoritarian political imaginary fostered by some ethnic Syrian-Lebanese and Arab institutions in Brazil and Argentina, as well as the silencing of dissident discourses; sectarian mobilization of religious identities; and the resonance that the ideological arguments used in defense of the Syrian regime have with vernacular expressions of Latin American anti-imperialism and nationalism.

## Mobilizing the Community Through Street and Cyberspace Politics

The largest and most influential Syrian-Lebanese and Arab organizations and leaders in Argentina and Brazil began to take a political position when the peaceful uprising against Asad's government transformed into an armed rebellion. Most notably, they called for supporting the Syrian regime, which they usually qualified as "progressive," "secular" and "the legitimate representative of the Syrian people," as the president of the Federation of Arab American Entities (FEARAB), Eduardo Elias, declared in 2012 during a gathering at the Homs Club in São Paulo. Similarly, a March 2012 demonstration in support of the Syrian government convened at the Obelisk of Buenos Aires with 100 participants, whose chants and slogans praised Bashar al-Asad and the *shabiha* (armed militia groups that support the ruling Ba'ath Party and the Asad family).

Some Syrian-Lebanese and Arab institutions have historical ties with authoritarian nationalist parties from the Middle East, such as the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP, al-Hizb al-Suri al-Qawmi al-'Ijtima'i) and the Ba'ath. The SSNP has the strongest presence in the Syrian-Lebanese communities, with a representation in Argentina and Brazil through the Syrian Cultural Association. The Ba'ath party acquired influence over ethnic and nationalistic organizations through the creation of FEARAB in the 1970s. While the role of the FEARAB and its pro-regime stance in the Syrian conflict has been questioned by some Syrian-Lebanese and Arab institutions in Brazil and Argentina, dissent has been kept out of the public sphere, thus building up an image of what looks like pro-regime consensus.<sup>3</sup>

The largest demonstrations convened by the Syrian-Lebanese and Arab organizations were held in August and September 2013, when the United States threatened to attack Syria after the chemical attack on opposition-controlled areas of Ghouta, on the outskirts of Damascus, on August 21. These parades exceeded the small circle of supporters of the Asad regime in the diaspora. In Buenos Aires, the demonstration included labor unions, left-wing parties, Armenian, Islamic and Arab organizations. In Brazil, a similar



Protesters shout slogans against Syria's President Bashar al-Asad as they wave Syrian opposition flags during a protest marking two years since the start of the uprising, in São Paulo, Brazil. March 15, 2013.

NACHO DOCE/REUTERS

alliance of Syrian-Lebanese institutions and left-wing political organizations staged periodic pro-Asad demonstrations in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Solidarities built through past common political struggles, like the Palestinian cause and the mobilization against the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, were revived. After the 2011 NATO military intervention in Libya, the so-called Arab Spring came to be seen by these activists as a pretense to topple Arab nationalist and pro-Palestinian governments in the region. This anti-imperialist grid of interpretation of the Syrian conflict was also a key element in the mobilization of community members who were born in Brazil and Argentina, for it allowed them to combine their sometimes newly claimed ethnic identity with a political sensibility central to both Brazilian and Argentinian nationalisms.

Strategies to silence dissident discourses were mobilized on both personal and institutional levels. For example, in 2011, during a dinner that gathered representatives of the Argentinian branch of FEARAB and members of the local Syrian-Lebanese community in a restaurant in Rosario, conversation turned sour. When some of those present expressed their outrage at the protests in Syria, a Syrian-Armenian living in Argentina since childhood said, "We may

not agree with the protests, but we also know that life in Syria is not easy. We suffered with dictators here [in Argentina], why should they live with them for eternity?" Someone else immediately replied, "Armenians should be stripped of their Syrian nationality." Another joined in and added, "We saved them from the Turks, and now they show how ungrateful they are. Let them live with the Salafis." The Syrian-Armenian man stopped talking and said nothing more throughout the dinner. Insults and other verbal aggressions, often with sectarian overtones, have spread all over social media. Individuals who disagree with the political position of an online page or a group are immediately excluded as "trolls."

On an institutional level, intimidation and personal threats have been used together with financial pressure, such as in the 2015 Arab Film Festival in São Paulo as the curator explained during an interview. He programed the documentary film *Silvered Water, Syria Self-Portrait*, which some Arab organizations judged as too critical of the Asad regime. Several sponsors, including the Arab-Brazilian Chamber of Commerce, withdrew their support for the festival. These examples show how strategies of silencing helped to create a public image of seemingly unanimous support of the Asad regime among the Syrian-Lebanese communities.



In general, those who dare to voice their opposition to the regime or their support for the opposition are unable to dismantle the public image of support for the regime created by the main Syrian-Lebanese institutions. With the help of some left-wing parties in Brazil and Argentina that express clear support for the opposition or the revolution, some Syrian refugees managed to organize several anti-regime protests in São Paulo. However, their small number and peripheral position in the institutional and social life of the Syrian-Lebanese community in Brazil limited the impact of these initiatives. Therefore, the main narrative publicly displayed by Syrian-Lebanese and Arab institutions is support for the regime.

## The Political Mobilization of Religious Identities

The transnational dimensions of the political mobilization of the Syrian-Lebanese communities in Brazil and Argentina are even more visible in the sectarian frameworks used to engage people in the pro-regime discourse. The mobilization of religious identities is seen in Shi'i, Christian and 'Alawi institutions, where there is a tendency to side with Bashar al-Asad's government, and in Sunni religious institutions, where sympathy toward the opposition is expressed through humanitarian discourses about the refugees or victims of the war, usually those in areas controlled by the opposition. This

institutional reproduction of sectarian understandings of the Syrian conflict, which was regularly reinforced by religious authorities visiting from Syria, has had an effect on the internal dynamics of the Syrian-Lebanese communities.

Nevertheless, religious differences within the Syrian-Lebanese diaspora in Argentina and Brazil, albeit important in various contexts, were never seen as insurmountable divides. Until recently Christians (Maronite, Melchite, Orthodox and Roman Catholic) represented a larger part of the Arabic-speaking immigrants from the Middle East. Muslims (Sunni, 'Alawi, Druze and Shi'a) were a significant minority, amounting to 37 percent of the total in the early decades of immigration in Argentina<sup>4</sup> and between 10 and 15 percent in Brazil.<sup>5</sup> In Argentina, 'Alawi immigrants from Syria represented a significant portion of the Muslim community and became highly organized, while in Brazil they were a very small minority with a feeble institutional life.<sup>6</sup>

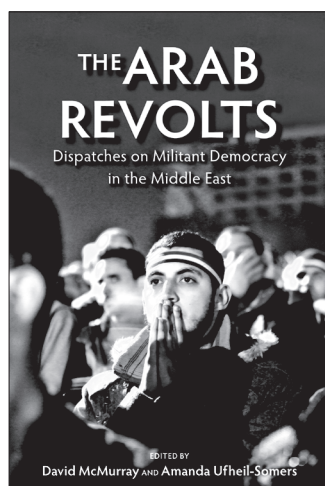
The Syrian civil war stirred tensions between Christians and Sunni Muslims, as well as between Sunnis, Shi'a and 'Alawis in both Brazil and Argentina. The image of Saudi-financed terrorists versus Shi'i resistance against Israel and imperialism circulate among Shi'a and 'Alawis. Also, many Shi'a in Argentina have a millenarian reading of the Syrian conflict, seeing it as a sign of the end of times.<sup>7</sup> Since 2012 both Christian and 'Alawi institutions have promoted events that foster sectarian readings of the conflict. One of these occasions was when Bishop Lucas al-Khoury, an assistant to the patriarch of the Antiochian Orthodox Church in Damascus, gave a lecture in 2014 on the situation in Syria and in the region at the Saint Nicholas Orthodox Church in Rio de Janeiro. The audience consisted of official representatives of Orthodox and 'Alawi institutions, as well as members of both communities. Many people were wrapped in Syrian flags that were distributed by the organizers. The president of the Saint Nicholas Orthodox Society opened the event by downplaying religious and national differences and rhetorically affirming the unity of the diasporic community by saying, "Here is the home of all Arabs; the home of all Brazilians. We are all together here, and there never was any difference between us."

The bishop started his speech by stating that the war was the result of a "conspiracy" against Syria plotted since the creation of the state of Israel and because of the refusal of Bashar al-Asad to "abandon the nationalist project in Syria." Bishop al-Khoury argued that "more than 90 countries have already agreed to divide Syria among them. They started with Iraq, now they want Syria. They say they want reforms, but the greatest reform that benefited the Syrian people was the ascension of Bashar al-Asad to the presidency." He then referred to the Syrian opposition as "criminals" who betrayed the country by inviting "foreign terrorists" to kill the Syrian people.

Then the bishop threw out the religious nationalist slogan coined by Bashar al-Asad in 2005, "God protects you, Syria,"

*Continued on page 59.*

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MARWAN M. KRAIDY

# A Tale of Two Modernities

What two preeminent scholars in Saudi Arabia and Latin America tell us about modernity and cross-cultural connections

In 2017, under the new leadership of the 32-year old Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia announced its plans to build the world's most advanced smart city in the desert with great fanfare. Saudi authorities also bestowed citizenship on a robot—even as Saudi subjects, including religious minorities and women, do not enjoy the basic benefits of actual citizenship. This marked contrast between modernism and modernization is familiar to Saudi Arabia, calling to mind debates from the 1980s, ones that also resonated in Latin America. As Néstor García Canclini eloquently sums, Latin America is often said to have “exuberant modernism with a deficient modernization.” Can an inverse description, of robust economic and technological modernization alongside limited levels of aesthetic and cultural modernism, apply to Saudi Arabia?

To compare Saudi Arabia and Latin America, one could ask specific questions in many areas: to what extent does the Saudi preoccupation with *ikhtilat*, the unsanctioned mixing of males and females who are neither kin nor wed, resonate with the idea of *la malinche*, the iconic female figure who represents the ambivalence and complexity of colonial hybridity in Mexico? How does the associated notion of *mestizaje*, both as official ideology and lived experience in Mexico and much of Latin America, provide a counterpoint to the doctrinal purity and cultural traditionalism prevalent in Saudi Arabia? What can we learn from comparing the Saudi women's novel movement of the 2000s with Mexico's distinctive crime fiction tradition that blossomed in the 1970s? Are there any broad conclusions to be drawn comparing jihadi *anashid* with Mexican *narcos*—both





rogue, criminal subcultures fought by governments that at times collude with them? Both these groups have used digital media to create community and enemies, allowing us to use these “symbolic circuits,” as García Canclini calls them, to “rethink the link between culture and power” and pursue a “search for mediations and diagonal ways for managing conflict,” which “give[s] cultural relations a prominent place in political development?”

For someone grappling with these questions or interested in comparative, South-to-South understandings of modernity, ‘Abdullah Muhammad al-Ghathami’s *hikayat al-hadatha fil mamlaka al-‘arabiyya al-sa’udiyya* (*The Tale of Modernity in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*), and Néstor García Canclini’s *Culturas híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (*Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*) are an irresistible pair. The two books are as different as the view from two peaks overlooking the same valley at different times, from varied angles and under disparate conditions: each covers a territory that to the other would appear mostly familiar but somewhat out of focus. Though both books grapple with the link between culture and politics, al-Ghathami’s is best described as a blend of eyewitness account and political manifesto, while García Canclini’s is an academic monograph.

*Hybrid Cultures* taught me a new language to help decrypt Arab politico-cultural transformations as oblique shifts and fluid rearrangements, rather than binary or complete transitions from “autocracy” to some combination of “democracy” and “capitalism.” It explores the notion of hybridity, the topic of my first book, which

applied theories of cultural mixture developed in Latin America to understand complex cultural identities in the Arab world and elsewhere. *Hybrid Cultures* also taught me a new language, literally: I initially acquired my Spanish by reading and re-reading the original Spanish version and comparing it page-by-page to the English translation.

A few years later, I encountered ‘Abdullah al-Ghathami’s *The Tale of Modernity in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* as I was trying to make sense of controversies triggered by the introduction of reality television programs in the Arab world, particularly Saudi Arabia, the subject of my second book. The Arab reality television wars became public trials of modernity, with clerics, intellectuals, and journalists acting as prosecutors who attacked modernity for promoting “foreign” values such as the intermixing of unmarried men and women, versus defenders of reality television, who argued that social change fostered by reality television is inevitable and even desirable. The results of these contentious claims and stands about reality television were about not merely about what should be accepted from “Western” modernity, but more importantly, also about how to elaborate and articulate a uniquely “Arab” modernity.

But what does it mean to be Arab and modern? Arab intellectual history from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Arab intellectual and cultural Renaissance known as *the Nadha* and onwards can be seen as a series of interventions attempting to answer this question. *The Tale of Modernity in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* is a historical and personal account of how Saudi modernists fought conservatism through poetry, literature, the press, and television from the 1920s to the 1980s. Al-Ghathami’s book differed from

The Sacred Mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia JAZZZI/ FLICKR





Néstor García Canclini  
WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

many others on the topic because it was a manifesto that extracted theoretical value from personal experience, cast against a deep historical backdrop of Saudi intellectual and public life.

The two authors have distinctive styles. With a background in philosophy, García Canclini's work is a blend of cultural sociology and anthropology. Trained as a literary critic, al-Ghathami expands the purview of criticism to media, politics, and culture. García Canclini, for his part, is an Argentinian-born academic who has taught at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana in Mexico City since 1990. There he became known for his anthropologically oriented work on museums and urban culture, epitomized in the publication of his magnum opus, *Hybrid Cultures*, in 1990, and other writings on museums, globalization, citizenship, and the imagination.

'Abdullah Muhammad al-Ghathami received a Ph.D. in literary criticism in the United Kingdom, then taught at Saudi universities all his life, first in the Red Sea city of Jeddah and then at King Saud University in the capital of Riyadh. He is a prolific writer on conservatism, media, and culture in Saudi Arabia, with books on cultural criticism, the human body, and more recently, *al-Faqih al-Fada'y* (*The Satellite Jurisprudent*), and *thaqafat twitter* (*The Culture of Twitter*), a platform where he is very active along with many other Saudi intellectuals. A long-time critical scholar with a post-structuralist sensibility, al-Ghathami is considered a liberal—in the Saudi sense

of the word, which typically means socially liberal, economically neoliberal, and politically acquiescent. But in a highly polemical public lecture in 2010, he lashed out at liberalism as a symptom of Western imperialism. On Twitter, of late, he comes across as a Saudi nationalist, defending his country against rivals like Iran and Turkey.

The two books discussed in this essay also have different scales of circulation: *Hybrid Cultures* has been translated into English and released in two editions by the University of Minnesota Press, becoming a global bestseller in cultural studies. *The Tale of Modernity* has, to my knowledge, not been translated into any language from the Arabic original. García Canclini has become a key figure in global cultural studies, giving distinguished lectures at universities worldwide, and seeing his books *Consumidores y ciudadanos* (*Consumers and Citizens*) and *La globalización imaginada* (*Imagined Globalization*), translated into English. In contrast, al-Ghathami's renown is confined to Arabic-reading circles, an unfortunate situation, as his voice is distinctive and deeply grounded in Saudi thought and life. The two books appeared in countries that could not be more different in the way they define themselves. Saudi Arabia is dominated by a social conservatism influenced by *Wahhabiyya*, a version of Sunni Islam that is culturally conservative, socially puritanical, and politically obedient to the ruler, and sees itself as the cradle of Islam. In contrast, Mexico, despite its own kind of Catholic social conservatism, is an manifestly blended culture. If Saudi Arabia is a country of putative purity, Mexico is a land of ostensible hybridity. It is also worth emphasizing that though al-Ghathami's book focuses exclusively on Saudi Arabia, García Canclini's scope is pan-Latin American. Drastically different political and cultural environments shaped the writing and reception of García Canclini's *Hybrid Cultures*, which appeared in 1990, and al-Ghathami's *The Tale of Modernity*, which came out in 2005.

The answer to the question, "how can you be Arab and modern at the same time," which has preoccupied many an Arab intellectual, often depends on how you define modernity. By the time al-Ghathami published *The Tale of Modernity in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, in 2004, he was a battle-hardened veteran of the Saudi culture wars. His 1985 book, *al-Khat'i'a wal-Takfir* (*Sin and Excommunication*), a biography of the modernist Saudi poet Hamza Shahata, generated an impassioned and public controversy about modernity and Islam in Saudi Arabia. Al-Ghathami faced blistering accusations of apostasy and treason from proponents of what he diagnosed as *al-nasq al-muhafidh* (the conservative mode.)

For al-Ghathami, Saudi modernity evolved in six stages: from the forging of modernity via poetry in the 1920s



to an “explosion of social modernity” in the 1980s via television and the press, and ultimately to dissemination via the Internet in the 1990s. He defines modernity as aware, attentive, or self-reflexive renewal. “This means that modernity is an awareness of history and of the present” and entails that “we do not restrict modernity to one discourse with no others, since all discourses are necessarily exposed to *al-tahdeeth* (modernization, or renewal.) Al-Ghathami writes that “there is no (single) definition of modernity,” but at the same time it is a total “package,” an all-encompassing mental/intellectual state including ideas, lifestyles, and professional norms. Al-Ghathami’s definition of modernity depends on context—“every social or intellectual environment has its specific definition [of modernity]”—even individual: “every modernist has his own specific definition that no one shares with him.”

Since to al-Ghathami, modernity entails an embrace of “the new...the extraneous, contingent, unforeseen,” in deeply conservative Saudi Arabia, it can create a permanent state of cultural schizophrenia. Saudi modernity is thus stuck in a perpetual state of incompleteness. This situation is exacerbated and further complicated by the fact that Saudi modernity is in some ways non-native. Al-Ghathami points to the 1970s oil boom as a major culprit of modernity, leading to a “schizophrenia...when we [Saudis] abandoned manual and technical labor and accomplishment to imported hands, and we became high-minded masters who issue orders.” Al-Ghathami proceeds to say that “this is a mastery of paper and not a mastery of sweat; meaning it is not a mastery over the self and the circumstance, which makes it momentary, formal, illusory.” That is why the oil “boom did not...produce a modernist society, but only a modernity of appearances.”

Al-Ghathami concludes that in Saudi Arabia, the “modernity of means did not become a modernity of mental modes and human conceptions,” leading to “a total schizophrenia between the building of place and the building of human beings, and development became that of space and not that of people, with its human dimension ripped out of it.” He compares the way that Saudis wear traditional robes at home, and Western attire abroad, to “the situation of the ideas we wear. As if we faced a local culture, like our clothes, and a foreign culture, like our travelling clothes.” Modern roads, buildings, and machines, al-Ghathami concludes bluntly, reflect “a modernity of means and a reactionism of minds.”

There are resonant echoes across the valley that separates these two visions of modernity. Like al-Ghathami, García Canclini sees the phenomenon as plural: “There is not only one form of modernity,” he writes in *Hybrid Cultures*, “but rather several unequal and sometimes contradictory ones.”



'Abdullah al-Ghathami  
GLOBAL INFLUENCE

And like his Saudi counterpart, García Canclini sees Latin American modernity as incomplete. *Hybrid Cultures* ends with this definition:

*Modernity is not only a space or a state one enters into or from which one emigrates. It is a condition that involves us, in the cities and in the countryside, in the metropolises and in the underdeveloped countries. With all the contradictions that exist between modernism and modernization—and precisely because of them—it is a situation of unending transit in which the uncertainty of what it means to be modern is never eliminated.*

In this view, modernity is a comprehensive human condition that encompasses economic, political, social, and cultural elements, but some of these elements contradict each other. For example, Mexico has lively and sophisticated traditions in literature, theater, dance, and painting that have spawned distinctive aesthetic sensibilities and cultural dispositions, while it has a regressive political system riddled with clientelism, corruption, and authoritarianism.

In addition, both writers ascribe importance to media. To al-Ghathami, newspapers, television, and now the Internet are crucial catalysts for Saudi modernity because they articulate its fundamental tensions: individual versus social, rural versus urban, male versus female—to the detriment of the conservative mode. For example,



A mural in Cairo, Egypt JORGE LÓPEZ/ FLICKR

these platforms show that individual women, if given a public platform, are capable of producing journalism, fiction, and art that is as creative and valuable as that produced by men.

Al-Ghathami writes that the Saudi culture wars over the desirability of modernity, with its advocacy for individual and women's rights and for liberal social change, grew so fierce in the 1980s that the Ministry of Culture and Information banned the use of the word "modernity" from all national media in 1988. Editors excised the word *hadatha* (modernity) from al-Ghathami's articles and replaced it with *tajdid* (renewal), *tatwir* (development), or *taqaddum* (progress), an exercise that fudges the boundaries of "modernity," "modernization," and "modernism."

Whereas al-Ghathami sees the media as an incubator of national modernity, understood as positive social change, García Canclini emphasizes the role of the media as a catalyst of transnational cultural hybridization, which occurs when the cultural products of one country circulate heavily in another, often through border-crossing media technologies. "The delocalization of symbolic products by electronics and telematics, and the use of satellites and computers in cultural diffusion impede our continuing to

see the confrontations of peripheral countries as frontal combats with geographically defined nations," García Canclini writes.

I continue to find García Canclini's work useful for understanding social and political events in the Arab world in the age of social media, discussed in my most recent book, *The Naked Blogger of Cairo: Creative Insurgency in the Arab World*, an analysis of Arab Spring popular protests in Egypt, Syria, and Tunisia from 2010 to 2012. García Canclini's notions of indirect power struggles and mixed cultural forms help explain how Arab revolutionary graffiti and videos mix old and new, local and foreign: one mural in Cairo, for example, featured the bust of Nefertiti, a queen in ancient Egypt, wearing a modern-day gas mask, suggesting that Egyptian state repression was targeting Egyptian culture and identity.

Al-Ghathami sees the media as a platform enabling the emergence of modern subjectivities, in the way the newspaper column in 1960s Saudi Arabia helped the rise of modern women's authorial voices, and the way that Saudi television in the 1980s enshrined modern notions through conversation and debate. In contrast, García Canclini sees hybrid media forms, like graffiti and comics, which he famously called "*géneros impuros*"



(impure genres) as emblematic of the “*poderes oblicuos*” (oblique powers) of indirect cultural influence that constitute modernity.

García Canclini advances three “hypotheses” that set the groundwork for his definition of modernity. First, he argues that uneasiness about “the meaning and value of modernity” stems not only from differences between nations, ethnic groups, and social classes, but from the ways in which previously distinct social values and cultural traditions become mixed. Second, he advocates an interdisciplinary approach to redefine modernization in Latin America, not as foreign ways of being that replace long-existing traditions, but as attempts to integrate the new and the old in national cultures that recognize influences from multiple historical periods, which he calls “multitemporal heterogeneity.” Third, he claims that such an approach helps researchers understand the intermingling of “liberal institutions and authoritarian habits” and of “social democratic movements with paternalistic regimes.”

Some overlaps notwithstanding, the two authors’ conceptions of modernity diverge. Whereas al-Ghathami sees modernity as a struggle mired in cultural schizophrenia, García Canclini regards it as a multi-faceted process of cultural *reconversión* (*reconversion*), characterized by a mixing of the old with the new rather than the new replacing the old. This is manifest in al-Ghathami’s view of modernity as an open political confrontation between modernists and their conservative foes, while García Canclini sees various kinds of modernity and tradition as sometimes opposing, yet other times reinforcing one another, in cultural struggles that are sometimes latent and at other times manifest. In sum, al-Ghathami sees Saudi modernity as imported wholesale, hence foreign, while García Canclini considers Latin American modernity “not a question of a transplant...but rather of reelaboration eager to contribute to social change.”

The two thinkers operate with disparate notions of history: al-Ghathami seems to work with an undeclared teleological understanding of history, visible in his six stages which end with the diffusion of modernity via digital media and the retreat of tradition to the margins of society. García Canclini subscribes to the *tiempos mixtos* (mixed temporalities) perspective dear to Latin American scholars, where influences from different historical periods coexist in contemporary life. He uses the example of the Plaza de Las Tres Culturas in Tlatelolco, Mexico City, where a pre-Columbian pyramid, a colonial church, and a contemporary building stand next to each other.

A corollary of this is that al-Ghathami seems to assume that Saudi Arabia has one level of socio-economic development shared by most, if not all, Saudis, whereas García Canclini’s transnational sweep enables him to see

“a heterogeneous continent consisting of countries in each of which coexist multiple logics of development.” To al-Ghathami, history moves in a more or less straight line; to García Canclini, different temporalities of history keep cycling, coexisting in the present.

Nonetheless, looking back to the oppositions of modernism and modernization described above, we can now say that the relationship between modernism and modernization is not an antagonism. It is rather an awkward and partial coupling that yields multiple permutations. Scholar Daniel Lerner has made a comparison between “Mecca or mechanization,” when in actuality the two processes are happening in tandem. Saudis today drive to the mosque in air-conditioned SUVs, and tote mobile devices that ring prayer times and point in the direction of Mecca. How can we adapt an approach that encompasses the coexistence of multiple temporalities without simply importing the theory to Saudi culture and politics? We can begin by looking deeper into the comparisons and contrasts between Saudi and Latin American culture.

Ultimately, al-Ghathami and García Canclini agree on a fundamental issue, which is that modernity is a process. Each work provides a unique theoretical and analytical approach to understanding that process. For al-Ghathami, that process is a public ‘battle of modes.’ The elaboration of Saudi modernity is a contentious process that involves societies and cultures broadly, beyond the confines of the halls of academia, literary periodicals, and poetry recitals. Even if, in the Saudi context, “the open struggle centered on modernity as a notion and as an arena of struggle and discussion” has come to an end, “modernity remained, interacting in various ways, and multiplied in various fashions.” To García Canclini, this elaboration is constantly in progress because, as he puts it, modernity is an “unending transit in which the uncertainty of what it means to be modern is never eliminated. To radicalize the project of modernity is to sharpen and renew this uncertainty, to create new possibilities for modernity always to be able to be something different and something more.” Modernity, in other words, is a general predisposal to experiment with the new, to integrate emerging ideas, lifestyles, and products into our lives—in Latin America and the Arab World—without abandoning older ways of thinking, doing, and being. ■

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NADIM BAWALSA

# Palestine West of the Andes

Chile is home to the world's largest Palestinian diaspora community. How did Chile's Arabic newspapers contribute to its formation?

"Pay attention and wake up, Palestinians!" Philip Badran, a journalist of Lebanese descent based in Lima, Peru, wrote these words in an article published on December 26, 1925 in *al-Watan*, an Arabic newspaper based in Santiago, Chile. Badran was referring to new legislation promulgated by British authorities earlier that year—the Palestinian Citizenship Order-in-Council. This new citizenship and nationality law was designed as part of the British Mandate over Palestine, under which British authorities created a nationality law that facilitated the naturalization of Jewish immigrants to Palestine as Palestinians. Through this law, British authorities regularly denied citizenship to non-Jewish applicants. It also meant that Palestinians who were not residing in Palestine at the time could not become legal citizens of Palestine. It thereby disenfranchised at least 10,000 Palestinian migrants, barring them from their rights to Palestinian citizenship and nationality.

How did Chile's Arabic-speaking migrant community in the early twentieth century respond to such developments? Two newspapers in particular, *al-Watan* and *ash-Sharq*, printed in Santiago in the early twentieth century, suggest that Arabic-speaking migrants in Chile actively connected with other Arabic-speaking communities regionally and transnationally to defend the economic wellbeing and social reputation of their *jaaliya* (migrant community) in Chile, and to demand rights for Palestinians—among them the right to Palestinian citizenship and nationality. This activism played a critical role in this community's formation into a diaspora—or, as Rogers Brubaker puts it, the process through which groups of migrants and their descendants come to see and speak about themselves in terms of groups or collectives. When it came to Chile's Palestinian migrants, the struggle to secure a legal means to return to Palestine during the British Mandate

became an important part of their development into a diasporic community.

Historians estimate that by the start of World War I, there were about 10,000 Palestinian migrants worldwide, and by 1936, about 40,000. Most settled in Latin America. In Chile alone, between 1905 and 1914, Palestinian migrants made up 56% of the total number of migrants of Middle Eastern descent, according to research by Nicole Saffie Guevara and Lorenzo Agar Corbinos. Today, Chile is home to the largest number of descendants of Palestinian migrants in the world. Exact figures vary, but approximately 300,000 descendants of Palestinians are scattered throughout the long and narrow country, and many are active in exploring and preserving their Palestinian heritage. For example, several organizations, sports clubs, and community groups in Chile work to promote awareness of issues related to Palestine and Palestinian identity. These include the Club Palestino, an expansive community center that hosts cultural events, lectures, classes, and more, as well as the famous Club Deportivo Palestino, one of Chile's most celebrated soccer teams. The history of the Palestinian diasporic community both as part of a larger collective of Arabic-speaking migrants from Greater Syria—which today comprises Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, and Israel—and as a distinct diaspora sheds light on the processes of diaspora formation for Palestinian migrants in the interwar years. Arabic periodicals from this period offer invaluable insight into these processes.

More than 10 Arabic newspapers circulated in Chile between 1912 and 1930. With the end of World War I in 1918, what Arabic-speaking Middle Eastern residents of Chile knew to be their homelands changed dramatically. The war terminated the centuries-old rule of the Turkish Ottomans over Arab lands, and starting in 1920, ushered in the age of European mandates,





The Club Palestino is one of Chile's most popular soccer teams today. CARLOS YO/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

purportedly established as temporary trusteeships by the newly-created League of Nations to guide former Ottoman subjects toward national self-determination. As laid out in Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, this was based on the assumption among European powers that: "Certain communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognized subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone." Thus, in the Middle East, Britain held mandates over Palestine, Transjordan, and Iraq, while France received mandates over Syria and Lebanon. These mandates remained in place until the 1940s.

Chile's Arabic newspapers responded to the rapidly changing geopolitical terrain of their readers' *watan* (homeland), including through adjusting the identifiers they used to address their readers. That is to say, prior to the European mandates, newspapers generally addressed their readers as Arabs and Syrians, especially when calling for collective action to rectify the pejorative "*turco*" misnomer, a despised slur used against Middle Eastern migrants in Latin America starting in the late nineteenth century. But as the mandate era

progressed and new nationalities emerged throughout Greater Syria in the 1920s and 1930s, Chilean newspapers began differentiating between the Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian experiences under French and British rule. Therefore, when it came to Palestine and its unique experience with British and Zionist forces, the newspapers' coverage of specifically Palestinian experiences reflected and contributed to a growing sense of commonality among Palestinian migrants, who began seeing themselves increasingly as Palestinians and no longer only as Arabs, Syrians, or former Ottomans.

Palestine became a cause for activism for the entire *jaaliya* in the interwar years, and different groups and organizations formed to directly address it. These included *El Club Deportivo Palestino* (The Palestinian Sports Club), *El Club Sirio-Palestino* (The Syrian-Palestinian Club), and *La Sociedad Juventud Palestina* (The Palestinian Youth Society). As Myriam Olguín Tenorio and Patricia Peña González point out, *La Sociedad Juventud Palestina* formed in 1924 with the goal of "the mutual protection of Palestinian residents in the Chilean territory as well as the moral and intellectual advancement of its members." The authors link these objectives to developments in Palestine surrounding Britain's support for Zionist aspirations there, especially following the 1917 Balfour Declaration,

when Britain promised to establish a “national home” for Jews in Palestine.

These groups, among many others, offered a range of opportunities for members of Chile’s Arabic-speaking *jaaliya* to support their compatriots in Palestine regardless of their new legal designations as Syrians, Lebanese, or Palestinians. In this way, the struggle to secure Palestinian migrants’ rights to Palestinian citizenship and nationality following the 1925 Palestinian Citizenship Order-in-Council became a cause for collective action in the Arabic-speaking diaspora.

### The Migrant Community through Newspapers

In 1912, an Arab Orthodox priest, Paul Jury, founded *al-Murchid* (The Guide), Chile’s first Arabic newspaper. Jorge Hirmas, a Palestinian migrant from Bethlehem, funded the newspaper, which, according to Guevara and Corbinos, sought to create an “Arabic publication in the country to advertise the business community and to discuss events and news on the homeland from [the migrants’] perspective.” Several Arabic periodicals ensued: *al-‘Awatif* (Sentiments) and *al-Munir* (The Torch) in 1916, *ash-Shabeebah* (The Youth) in 1918, and *al-Watan* (The Homeland), Chile’s longest-running Arabic newspaper. Founded in 1920 by Issa Khalil Daccarett, a Palestinian migrant, *al-Watan* circulated for nine years, during which time it began printing in Spanish, attracting a larger readership that spanned the continent. *Ash-Sharq* (The East) was founded in 1927. On August 5, 1928, its editors printed: “We saw to naming the newspaper *ash-Sharq* out of respect for and pride in our beloved East: the source of the soul, of poetic, philosophical, and human inspiration, and the place of values and the land of civility.”

In Chile, *al-Watan* and *ash-Sharq* focused on circulating information that strengthened meaningful and durable connections between the homeland, the diaspora, and the local. These three spheres appeared regularly and often sequentially in these periodicals. For example, in many of its issues, *ash-Sharq* had separate sections titled “Homeland News,” “Letters from the Diaspora,” and “Local News.” Each provided readers with regular, relatively comprehensive news, contributing to the creation of interconnected networks of communication between local, regional, and transnational Arabic-speaking *jaaliyaat* (communities). Consequently, these networks strengthened the scattered *jaaliyaat*’s connectedness around shared calls for social and economic success in the diaspora and for preserving connections with the homeland.

Newspapers offered a range of contributors, including newspaper editors and representatives from the

forementioned organizations and committees, the opportunity to address their *jaaliya* openly and forthrightly. These included pleas for change and collective improvement, and even admonishments and instructions on how to behave morally, especially in light of increasingly negative stereotypes that were seen as threatening to the *jaaliya*’s reputation and survival. This was a major concern in the fall of 1927 when the Chilean government implemented restrictions on existing and incoming Arab migrants. On October 18, 1927, *al-Watan* published a plea to the *jaaliya* to warn the community of the “very dangerous” circumstances the immigration restrictions posed:

*The parliament has unanimously decided to kick out the Syrians from Chile, and if it weren’t for the President’s mercy on us, the [decision] would have passed and we would have been done away with...The Parliament has sufficed with a legislation that prohibits the entry of Syrians to this country.*

The author continued with an important point of clarification:

*And by Syrian, I mean of course that the Lebanese is Syrian, and that the Palestinian is Syrian, and that we are all turcos in the eyes of Chilean nationals...The Chilean people have decided to kick us out because of the belief that we are leeches on the body of their nation...We must straighten our ways before they straighten them for us.*

*Al-Watan*’s appeal for action and reform was addressed to the entire Arabic-speaking *jaaliya*. They were all undesirable “*turcos*” in Chile, and the threat of banishment affected them all. The call for reflection and betterment was thus collective.

To be sure, the term “*turco*” was synonymous with fraud, treachery, and deceit, referring to the pervasive stereotypes related to the community’s business dealings as shop owners and peddling merchants. The *jaaliya* was well aware of this. On November 29, 1927, *al-Watan* published an appeal from El Club Sirio-Palestino to all “Arabic Speakers in the Republic of Chile” with instructions on how to achieve a better reputation as merchants in Chile. Addressing the appeal to its “Dearest *muwaatineen*” (compatriots),” the club explained the serious situation they were all confronting:

*The [Chilean] government wants to encourage the immigration of useful elements into the country ... Likewise, it prohibited the entry of harmful elements into its lands. As for us Syrians, Palestinians, and*



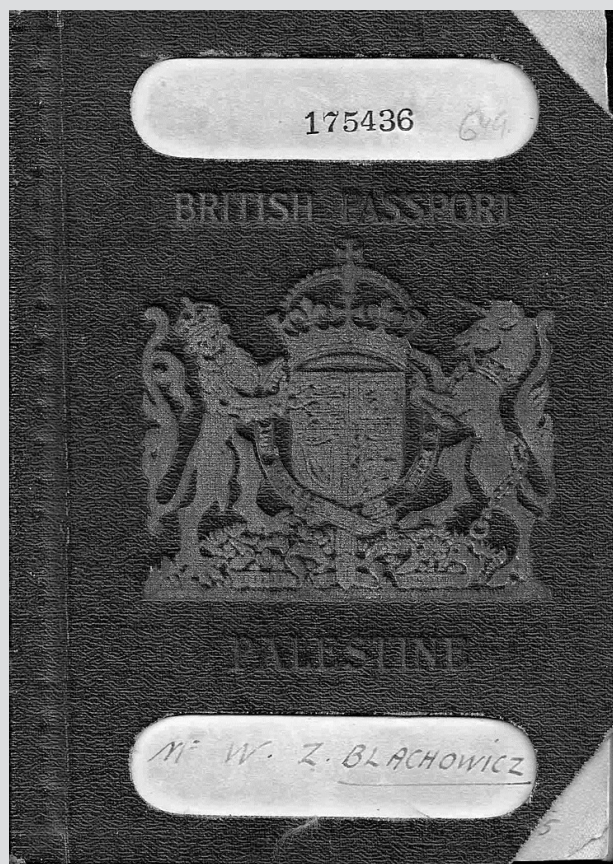
*Lebanese, it is unfortunate that we are of those of little use and desire.*

The Club further explained that it had sent representatives to meet with the head of the consular department, who confirmed that the new law was in effect. The consul, according to *al-Watan*, had evidently explained that the Chilean government “wants immigrants who are useful for the nation...like Saxons [i.e. Germans and English, among others]. As for Asian elements who come to the country to simply sell, the government does not desire them.” Therefore, the club advocated that the *jaaliya* behave more like European migrants and less like Asian ones. As elsewhere in the world, race and class were critical components of assimilation in Chilean society.

El Club Sirio-Palestino instructed its readers to follow a list of 11 “dos and don’ts” to prove themselves as desirable migrants. This included exhortations against fraudulence, arson, tax evasion, and mistreatment of female customers in “*turco*” stores. The club also urged the migrants to “respect the feelings of the people of this country with whom we live by closing our shops on church days and national holidays,” and to keep their stores and clothes clean. Finally, it called on migrants to “care for our moral and social institutes so they can appeal to the foreigners and be a source of admiration.” By 1927, *El Club Sirio-Palestino*, whose mission was the betterment of the *jaaliya*’s local reputation, had come to represent Chile’s Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian communities, and *Al-Watan* was its primary platform.

### Palestinian Citizenship and Nationality

The pages of *al-Watan* and *ash-Sharq* also discussed transnational developments that affected the *jaaliya*. Citizenship and nationality took on special importance following the instatement of the British and French Mandates in the Middle East. Mandate authorities legislated citizenship laws in Lebanon, Syria, Transjordan, Iraq, and Palestine. While local European and Arab officials designed and implemented the Mandates in the first four countries, Britain’s King George V personally handled the issue in Palestine. The 1925 Palestinian Citizenship Order-in-Council was thus designed to be different from its counterparts in the region. While Palestinians’ Syrian and Lebanese neighbors were able to apply for their respective citizenships from French consulates throughout the diaspora, the ordinance determined by King George V ensured that Jews were naturalized above all other applicants as Palestinians, effectively excluding Palestinians living abroad from this very citizenship and nationality. Therefore, by 1925, Chile’s Arabic newspapers had begun discussing



A passport for British Mandate Palestine WIKIPEDIA

the issue of citizenship and nationality in the context of Palestinians alone.

In his December 26, 1925 letter cited above, Philip Badran urged Palestinians to reject being referred to as “Ottomans” by British authorities, since it implied their ineligibility for Palestinian citizenship under the new citizenship ordinance. Specifically, he called on all Palestinians to realize that “the gravest plague and most evil illness threatening the existence and future of the Palestinian migrant is the phrase ‘An Ottoman resident of Palestine,’ which the current [British] Government of Palestine writes in the passports of Palestinians.” The phrase implied that Palestinian migrants were considered former subjects of the Ottoman Empire whose legal status as citizens and nationals would be determined by Turkish, not British, authorities. However, since Britain now had full administrative control over Palestine, Palestinians could not actually secure rights to Turkish or Palestinian nationality through Turkish authorities. There was no recourse for this ambiguous status. Badran expounded: “The Palestinian is therefore deprived of British protection, of his nationalism, and of his nation as well...[Palestinians]



"In Palestine, human rights are violated," reads a Palestinian-Chilean demonstrator's sign in Santiago, Chile. PINTEREST

are forbidden from returning to their birthplaces and to the life of the country of their fathers and grandfathers." Finally, he warned:

*To prevent this danger, every Palestinian migrant must refuse under any circumstance to have that expression placed in his [passport]. Instead, he must insist that he is a Palestinian, son of Palestine, with Palestinian forefathers, and that he is not an Ottoman ... [Palestinians] have the right to return to their nation as nationals and not as foreign Ottomans.*

The debates surrounding citizenship and nationality for Palestinians in the diaspora intensified following a slew of rejections of citizenship applications by Palestinian migrants across the Americas starting in late 1926. In Chile, Arabic newspapers thus addressed Palestinian members of the *jaaliya* more directly. On January 22, 1927, for example, *ash-Sharq* reported that La Sociedad Juventud Palestina held a public hearing and invited "all members of the Palestinian community" in Santiago to discuss the crisis of Palestinian nationality. The purpose of the hearing was to collect "financial and moral support from every national who has enthusiasm and patriotism and who desires that the English government recognizes their Palestinian nationality." The committee accepted donations from Palestinians in "all parts of this Republic." Later that

year on November 19, *al-Watan* published the following call to Palestinian migrants urging them to take action against losing their rights to Palestinian nationality:

*Are you Palestinian? If you are a real Palestinian, concerned for the wellbeing of your nation upon which your dignity rests...then hurry to register for the Committee for the Defense of the Rights of Palestinians which defends your nation and your nationality against the colonizing ghoul.*

Chile's Arabic newspapers thus became vehicles for public awareness and action, and the loss of Palestinian nationality was a serious concern.

Newspapers also printed acerbic articles about Palestinian nationality and citizenship in Spanish. On January 29, 1927, *ash-Sharq* printed an article by a contributor named Salvador Sackel. The article was titled "The Concept of Nationality," and in it, Sackel described his philosophy on nationality and the importance of "the patriotic sentiment." For Sackel, having nationality was congruous with achieving freedom, and "Only a citizen who has duties and civic rights is worthy to be called man! Others are vile slaves!" True rights, he believed, were only achieved with nationality.

In the second article, "The Denial of our Nationality," an unnamed contributor urged the *jaaliya* to action in response to the denial of Palestinian citizenship and nationality to Palestinian migrants:



*The British consulates abroad have received strict instructions from His Majesty's government to not grant visas or passports to any Palestinian citizen who wishes to travel. The alarm caused among the children of Palestine by this arbitrary measure will gradually break out abroad. [The policy] is ... illegal and contrary to every rule of international law.*

The author explained further that, “the vast majority of true Palestinians have informed Mandatory authorities that the Palestine they are attempting to deliver to Jewish hands belongs legitimately, by Law and Justice, to its native sons who have lived there for centuries.” Despite these attempts, the author concluded, British authorities “have resorted to eliminating the Palestinian element, denying them... passports, thus preventing their return to their legitimate homeland, despite their families and relatives, properties and interests.” The contributor ended with a condemnation of British rule: “We are deeply disappointed with the purposes given to forbid our leaving, and with the discovery that the British Government is doing this, [despite] the freedom and emancipation that it promised the people of Palestine.”

While Palestinians struggled with the consequences of the 1925 Palestinian Citizenship Order-in-Council, *ash-Sharq* emboldened its readers in the *jaaliya* to stand together with their Palestinian compatriots and with Palestinians in the *watan* to defend “our nationality.” As Reem Bailony made clear in her discussion of Syrian activism in New York during the 1925 Syrian Revolt, distance from the homeland was not a barrier to transnational solidarity.

### Chile's Palestinian Diaspora Story

Chile's Arabic newspapers generated language geared toward collective improvement and unity, especially in the face of divisions in the homeland. The different spheres of identification—local, national, regional, and transnational—that the newspapers promoted offered Arabic-speaking migrants in Chile an interconnected and transnational public platform from which to discuss and circulate information that was relevant to them, from how to remain politically, socially, and economically connected to their homeland, to the most effective ways of ensuring the survival of the *jaaliya* in their host country. Thus, these newspapers functioned as edifying and instructive platforms for the *jaaliya* of Arabic-speaking migrants seeking to become a patriotic, productive, and welcomed *jaa-liya*, and they tell a great deal about the ways in which these migrants saw themselves within Chilean society, within Latin America more broadly, and in relation to

their homeland. Furthermore, they suggest the type of community these migrants aspired to form while growing into distinct, multinational collectives during the interwar years.

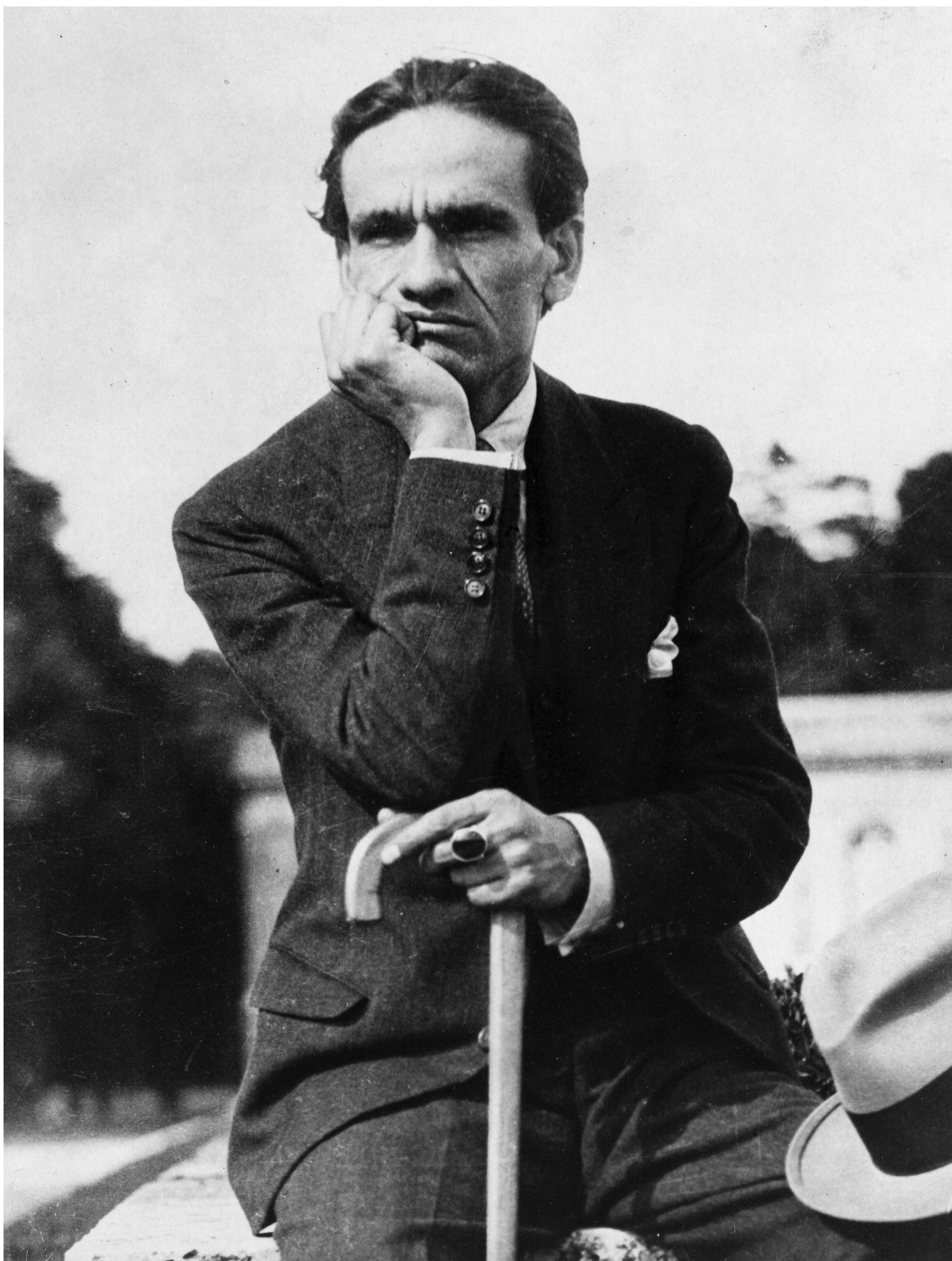
These processes parallel, in significant ways, the historical narrative of this community's formation into a diaspora. When it comes to Chile's Arabic newspaper subscribers in the 1920s, these diasporic connections developed as readers paged through newspapers and read stories of *muwaatineen*—compatriots—in Chile, the Americas, and in the homeland, with whom they felt an affinity. Simultaneously, this community's process of diaspora formation developed as its members paged through newspapers, reading about and reacting to the dramatic changes developing in their homeland following the end of World War I and during the instatement of European mandates.

Nowhere in the region were these developments more dramatic than in interwar Palestine. Chile's Arabic newspaper editors were prolific in expressing concern over the loss of Palestinian citizenship and nationality following the 1925 Palestinian Citizenship Order-in-Council. They urged their readers to action in the form of demanding redress, rights, and citizenship as Palestinians. In this way, the exclusionary measures put in place by British authorities in London and Jerusalem set in motion a transnational campaign to raise awareness among those who identified as Palestinians and their allies about the importance of fighting for citizenship and nationality. In so doing, they contributed to consolidating Palestinian modes of group understanding and connectedness across the world. The emergence of Palestinian modes of national identification in the interwar years was a deeply transnational process.

This community's struggle with the denial of Palestinian citizenship and nationality starting in the 1920s was a formative part of its diasporic story. Indeed, to this day, Chile's Palestinian community, like others in the Palestinian diaspora, remains unified and empowered by an ongoing and shared experience of distance from a homeland that holds symbolic and material significance for the collective community. These transnational connections are worth exploring today. ■

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César Vallejo in Paris, 1929.

FROM GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE (PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN)



# Reading César Vallejo in Arabic

## On Poetic Affinity and Solidarity

Sinan Antoon

### The Poets

The posthumous poetry collection of the Iraqi poet Sargon Boulus (1944–2007), *Azma Ukhra li-Kalb al-Qabila (Another Bone for the Tribe's Dog)*, published in 2008 shortly after his death in Berlin, is populated with ghosts.<sup>1</sup> There are ghosts of anonymous humans who perished in recent wars, but there are also ghosts of dead poets with whom Boulus initiated poetic conversations and shared an affinity. Two of these in particular stand out: the Chinese poet Tu Fu (712–770) and the Peruvian poet César Vallejo (1892–1938).<sup>2</sup> Boulus dedicates one of the poems in this collection to Vallejo (he had already translated six of Vallejo's poems via English into Arabic). Boulus' homage poem reveals those aspects of Vallejo's persona and poetry that made him an appealing interlocutor and poetic ancestor for Boulus.

There are some parallels in the lives of the two poets. Both lived most of their lives in exile and died far away from their homelands. Vallejo left Peru for Paris in 1923 and died there in 1938, six years before Boulus was born in Iraq. Boulus left Iraq early on in 1967 and lived the rest of his life in exile, mostly in San Francisco, and died in Berlin in 2007. Both lived in cosmopolitan cultural centers but remained largely at the margins. Neither poet made peace with his exile and they both maintained a sense of linguistic and cultural dislocation and continued to write in their native language. Their engagement with and attitude toward organized politics, however, was quite different.

Vallejo's politics were outspoken and radical. In the 1920s he embraced communism and visited the USSR three times. He wrote articles and chronicles about his visits expressing his admiration of the Soviet experiment. He joined the Spanish Communist Party in 1931. The Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) had a profound effect on his politics and his late poetry. Like the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, he was a member of the French section of the Committee for the Defense of the Republic and a delegate of the Second International Association of Writers in Defense of Culture, held in Valencia, Spain in the summer of 1937. Two hundred writers from 30 countries assembled in major cities in France and Spain over two weeks to support

the people of Spain against fascism. He went to Spain twice, reported on the war and saw its horrors. His involvement in the Spanish Civil War ended in deep despair with the defeat of the popular revolution at the hands of the communists. The former held the greatest emancipatory potential for Vallejo, who had sympathies for Trotskyism.

Boulus never joined any party or political movement. When he was still a young poet in Iraq, the Iraqi Communist Party enjoyed wide support and popularity. He, however, was disinterested in organized politics. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, when he lived in San Francisco after a brief stay in Beirut, he led a bohemian life and was still enchanted by the individual freedoms America offered him. The first Gulf War and the US bombing of Iraq in 1991 marked the beginning of a bitter disenchantment. "It was a bloodied mirror. America had nothing more to offer, as far as I was concerned," he wrote.<sup>3</sup> Boulus was further alienated and angered by the 2003 US invasion of Iraq and its aftermath. It had a profound influence on his later writing. His late poems reveal a sustained engagement with visceral political themes. The voices and ghosts of the victims of wars and global exploitation intermingle and become more prominent. The subjects of his poems are alienated and exploited humans struggling against the barbarism of history and a global economy of greed. In this, Vallejo and his poetry might have been an inspiration.

### The Poem

#### To César Vallejo

"From in between my own teeth I come out  
smoking,  
shouting, pushing,  
dropping down my trousers."

César Vallejo! I am the one shouting this time.

Allow me to open my mouth and protest  
the blood rising in the thermometer  
pushing mercury's banner backward

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And then windows tremble  
the world's metaphysics are dragged down  
to the bottom of the empty boots of a soldier  
who was killed by his own crooked bayonet

"The Hungry Man's Wheel" is still rolling  
who will stop it?

I read you on the dreariest night  
the family's bandages were undone

I read your restless storms  
where monsters pretend to sleep in crypts  
where the sick man, on the road of sorrows, leans  
on the cane  
of the blind man  
who saw

Vallejo,  
On this evening, alphabets rise and fall  
The building collapses  
The poem extinguishes its stars atop the head  
of the dead man  
crowned with thorns

Something will come to drag our bodies on its  
stone course  
Like a surging river

There is a stone on which the black and white  
poet will sit this Thursday  
And today, I am the one shouting.<sup>4</sup>

The poem is prefaced with three lines excerpted from "The Hungry Man's Wheel," one of the Vallejo poems which Boulus translated into Arabic. The poem begins with Boulus addressing Vallejo directly in the first line: "César Vallejo! I am the one shouting this time." The sentence is repeated again at the very end of the poem: "And today, I am the one shouting." The act of shouting is being repeated here again by another poet in a different era ("this time"/"today").

Has Boulus, too, arrived at the same existential and political coordinates from which Vallejo raised his voice? The next two lines tell the reader more about what sort of shouting and to what end: "Allow me to open my mouth and protest, the blood rising in the thermometer/pushing back mercury's banner." Even without the reader knowing much about Vallejo's politics, the telos of this "shouting" is explicitly defined as "a protest." And this protest is almost natural since it follows as soon as the poetic persona opens his mouth. The poem itself is the extension of the shout. It is spontaneous and urgent and directed against the overwhelming presence of blood (in the thermometer). One is reminded of Neruda's

famous lines from "I'm Explaining a Few Things" which was written during the Spanish Civil War: "Come and see the blood in the streets."

While war (a prominent theme in Boulus' late poetry) is not explicitly mentioned in this poem, a dead soldier does appear in the next section. "The world's metaphysics are dragged down/to the bottom of the empty boots of a soldier/who was killed by his own crooked bayonet." These lines are followed by another direct reference to the title of Vallejo's poem: "'The Hungry Man's Wheel' is still rolling/who will stop it?" Boulus then affirms the act of reading Vallejo. The time of the reading is significant: "I read you on the dreariest nights," and so are its effects: "The family's bandages were undone."

The act of reading is not neutral and not only produces meanings. Its effects are felt on the body itself. It exposes wounds and makes suffering explicit and unmediated. The theme of wounded and damaged bodies continues in the next section: "I read your restless storms... where the sick man, on the road of sorrows, leans on the cane/of the blind man who saw." Then Boulus addresses Vallejo directly again in a section that speaks of endings and death: "alphabets rise and fall/The building collapses/The poem extinguishes its stars atop the head/of the dead man/crowned with thorns." The link between poetry and the body is asserted again. The dead man here appears to be a reference to Vallejo. The following line reads: "something will drag our bodies on its stone course." The "our" here may refer to the two bodies of Vallejo and Boulus, who are now joined in the poem. The last two lines of the poem refer to Vallejo's death and reference one of Vallejo's poems in which he foresaw his own death: "There is a stone on which the black and white poet will sit this Thursday/And today I am the one shouting."

In a poem entitled "Black Stone on a White Stone," Vallejo had written: "I will die in Paris with a rainstorm/on a day I already remember/I will die in Paris—and I don't shy away—/ perhaps on a Thursday, as today is, in autumn." Boulus provides the stone Vallejo was looking for in "The Hungry Man's Wheel": "Won't there be a stone/For me to sit on?" The poem is prefaced with Vallejo's words of protest and shouting and it opens and closes with Boulus affirming that he is the one performing that act now: "César Vallejo! I am the one shouting this time.... And today, I am the one shouting."

This homage poem may be read as a site of solidarity and affinity between the two poets. Within the space of the poem, Boulus converses with Vallejo and claims him as a poetic comrade or ancestor. He appropriates and echoes his protests and inherits and inhabits his subject position.

The Vallejo poems which Boulus translated and to which he refers in the homage poem (primarily "The Hungry Man's Wheel") belong to a group of late poems in which Vallejo's concern transcends class to express solidarity with the species as a whole. This tendency can be found in many of Boulus' late poems. It has been remarked as well that there is a gradual shift in Vallejo's poetry from an earlier concern with writing avant-garde poetry to a pronounced focus on the political, but without falling



into the traps of facile podium poetry. There is a similar shift in Boulus' trajectory early on: he was obsessed with the search for new forms and a radically different poetic language. His first few collections are quite experimental. It is in the 1980s during the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) and the rise of Reaganism that he writes several explicitly political poems (one on El Salvador and the other on an unnamed dictator). The New World Order and permanent US wars against Afghanistan and Iraq compelled Boulus to be more engaged and outspoken. He denounced the silence of American poets vis-à-vis the wars their country was waging and likened them to ostriches.

Another noteworthy development in the late poetry of both Vallejo and Boulus is that the body itself becomes the primary locus of poetic discourse and the site where deprivation, hunger and injustice are manifested. A closer look at Vallejo's "The Hungry Man's Wheel" may illustrate this point.

### The Hungry Man's Wheel

From in between my own teeth I come out  
smoking,  
Calling out, pushing,  
Dropping my trousers...  
My stomach empties, my jejunum empties,  
Poverty pulls me out from the cuff of my shirt.

Won't there be a stone  
For me to sit on? Even  
The stone that trips the woman who gave birth,  
The mother of all things, the cause, the root,  
Won't there even be that for me?  
At least that other one,  
That has passed crouching along my soul!  
At least  
The bad, calcareous one (humble ocean)  
Or the one not even good to be thrown against  
a man,  
Give me that one now for me!

At least the one found crosswise and lonely in  
an insult,  
Give that one now for me!  
At least the one twisted and crowned, over which  
Just once echo the steps of straight consciences,  
Or just the one that, thrown in worthy curve,  
Drops by itself  
In profession of real gut,  
Give me that one now for me!

Won't there even be a piece of bread now, for me?  
Never again shall I be what I will be always,  
But just give me  
A stone on which to sit,  
Please give me

A piece of bread on which to sit,  
Give me,  
In Spanish  
Something, in short, to drink, to eat, to live, to  
lie on,  
And then I'll leave...  
I find a strange shape, my shirt's  
In fitters and filthy  
And I have nothing. This is dreadful.<sup>5</sup>

When Vallejo wrote this poem, he himself was sick and very poor. The "I" in the poem could be read as the poet himself, or the poet inhabiting the persona of the universal hungry man. The hungry man's needs are basic: to drink/eat/live/lie/sit, but he ends up with nothing. Vallejo wrote this poem in the late 1930s. In his homage poem, written more than seven decades later, Boulus tells Vallejo and the readers that, "The Hungry Man's Wheel is still rolling/Who will stop it?"

The violent structures and forces that dispossessed Vallejo's hungry man and reduced him to nothingness are still operative today. Reading Boulus' poetry one senses and learns that the global machine of violence and inequality has only become more complex, brutal and efficient in this new century. Boulus' urgent question is worth repeating and pondering: Who will stop it?

Boulus is the one shouting today instead of Vallejo. He protests the state of the world and the fate of the species. In "Railroad," the despair and the dead-end of colonial modernity is clear.

### Railroad

The shrieking of the wheels on the rail  
the appearance of the next station  
at the bend of the tunnel  
full of wailing  
a few vagabonds on the platform  
gulping alcohol from bottles hidden in paper  
bags

It is the same void rising  
from night's end in any city  
overstuffed with the living and the dead: Paris,  
Berlin, London, New York.

The end of the west. The end of the line. The end  
of the rail.<sup>6</sup> ■

### Endnotes

1 Sargon Boulus, *Azma ukhra li-kalb al-qabila* (Beirut: Dar al-Jamal, 2008).

2 I have written elsewhere about Boulus and Tu Fu. See "Sargon Boulus and Tu Fu's Ghost(s)," *Journal of World Literature*, 2/3 (2017).

3 "An Interview with Sargon Boulus," *Parnassus*, 29/1 (2006).

4 Boulus, pp. 24–26.

5 César Vallejo, *Complete Later Poems 1923–1938*, editor and translator Valentino Gianuzzi and Michael Smith (Exeter: Shearman Books, 2005).

6 Ibid, p. 199.



View of resettlement area for internally displaced people south of Bogotá, Colombia.

JUAN MEJIA

# Writing about Violence

## A Joint Reflection from Latin America and the Middle East

### Hiba Bou Akar and Roosbelinda Cárdenas

**A**lthough we cannot pinpoint the exact origin of the idea to co-teach a comparative course on contemporary politics in the Middle East and Latin America, we remember well what followed from that initial decision in late 2015. First there was the excitement that accompanies an emergent sense of possibility. As we reviewed the literature while designing the course, we found numerous connections and continuities that allowed us to place Latin America and the Middle East in joint focus. But resonance and similarity were not the only promise, so we developed a syllabus that also explored the differences

and disjunctures. We discussed the state's role in gendering, as people in the informal sector stake their claims to livelihoods in Egypt and the Dominican Republic.<sup>1</sup> We thought through the racially-contested geographies that characterize black women's fight against land grabs in Brazil and the negotiations and resistance against the building of the separation wall in Israel and Palestine.<sup>2</sup> We reflected on the oil modernities of Dubai and Venezuela<sup>3</sup> and discussed the aftermaths of the Pink Tide in Latin America and the Arab spring in the Middle East.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, as we pulled out these promising lines of connection we had to confront the realization that many of them were framed in experiences of violence. Suddenly, our syllabus began to read like a list of dystopic nightmares: devastated landscapes,

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persistent forms of gendered subjugation, ever-more exploitative labor regimes, voracious resource extraction and seemingly endless cycles of war. Our initial excitement turned into somber reflection.

With this realization, we entered the classroom with a sense of both anticipation and urgency. The class brought together students from diverse backgrounds and experiences, creating a rare opportunity for them to complement their skills and enter into rich dialogues as we thought through issues across the two regions.<sup>5</sup> The semester-long project assignment we designed produced exciting results as students made unexpected connections. Posters of their final projects

pinned on our class walls displayed the generative potential of thinking comparatively: on political graffiti and street art in Cairo and Bogotá, the state's role in Brazilian favelas and West Bank refugee camps, drug wars in Mexico and Afghanistan, the tactics of Zapatista and Kurdish women's resistance movements and diasporic influences in popular music in both regions, among other projects. In addition, this pedagogical experiment afforded the two of us a unique space where we could have South-South conversations, beyond the Eurocentric gaze, about places we call home.

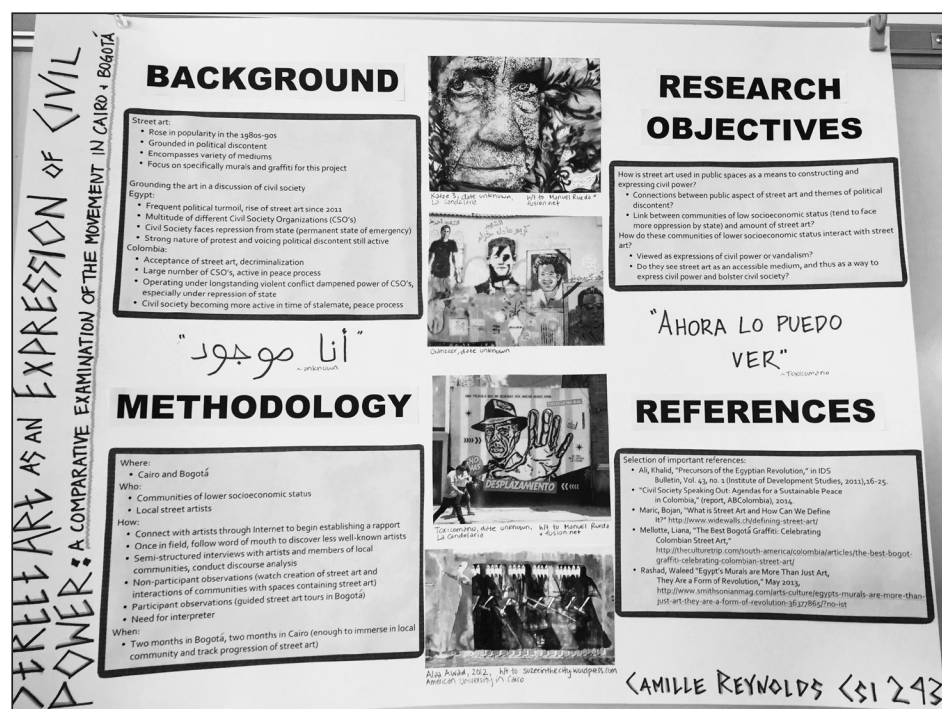
As we eagerly learned from one another, we realized that both of us struggled in writing about violence, and that this difficulty had to do with our respective positions vis-à-vis our work and our relationships to the places and people of which we wrote. So, while the focus on violence initially cast a shadow on our syllabus, in the end it allowed us to engage in a critical self-reflection about our research and writing practices. If violence is pervasive in our field sites and homes, then violence is what we must wrestle with. This is the place from which we write.

Moved by the gravity of the situation in the places we call home, we are animated by the enduring hope that thinking together might yield further insights. This essay reflects on some of the challenges of writing about violence that is intimate. It reflects on the difficulty of interrogating the separation between victims and victimizers, experts and subjects, and times of violence and times of peace. Cárdenas describes her difficulty in writing against victimization. In particular, she discusses the political dangers of trying to focus not only on the loss and suffering of Afro-Colombian internally displaced

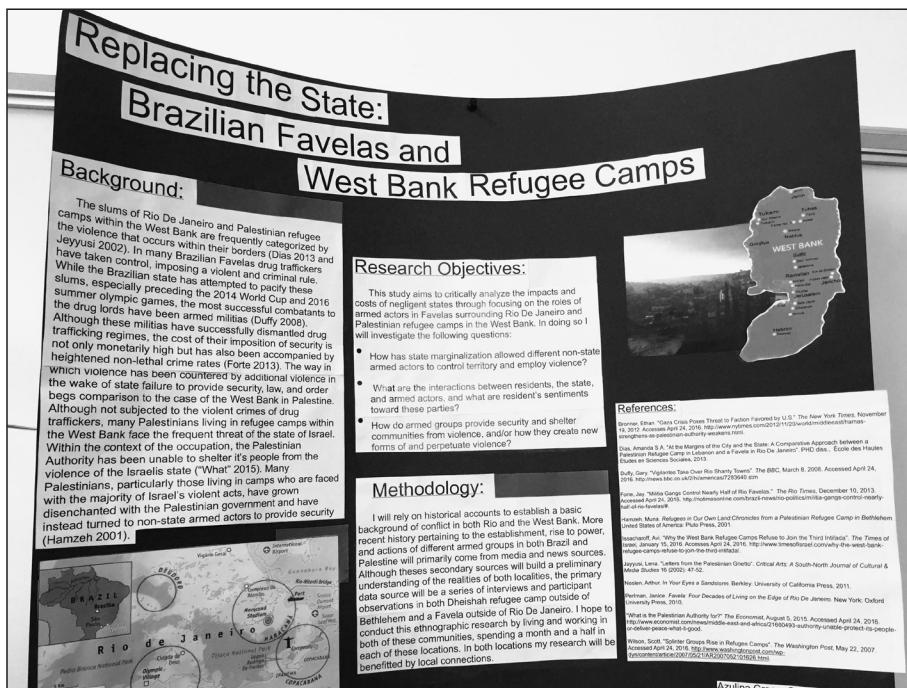
people, but also on the possibilities afforded to some by the very experiences of the war. As a person who lived through the Lebanese civil war, Bou Akar reflects on the agonizing labor of writing about violence that is personal, and the nagging fear that writing about such violence might conjure it yet again. While our respective positions differ, this joint reflection that emerged from our class conversations provided us with the opportunity to arrive at several insights, all of which are founded on a strong claim for the unique value of knowledge produced by those who are living in violence.<sup>6</sup> Together, we insist on the messiness of violence as we wrestle to represent it in its routine, day-to-day forms while bearing witness to both suffering and the loving labor that goes into creating worlds anew from the very debris of those sites of destruction.

## From Latin America: On the Challenges of Writing Against Victimization

Earlier this year I published an article titled, "*Thanks to My Forced Displacement.*"<sup>7</sup> In it I narrate the life stories of several Afro-Colombians living on the outskirts of Bogotá as internally displaced people (IDPs). The stories I wrote about were as distressing as they were complex. They followed circuitous routes from place of origin to place of settlement. The people I wrote about were entangled in all kinds of alliances and affiliations within Colombia's thorny political landscape. The outcomes of their difficult journeys were similarly varied. Some folks returned to their hometowns, some were displaced multiple times, and others settled permanently in Bogotá. Many families lost members through physical separation or



Camille Reynolds' project on street art in Cairo and Bogotá for the class co-taught by Rosbelinda Cardenas and Hiba Bou Akar. ASA WAKABAYASHI NEEDLE



**Azulina Green's project on Brazilian favelas and Palestinian refugee camps for the class co-taught by Roosbelinda Cardenas and Hiba Bou Akar.**

ASA WAKABAYASHI NEEDLE

death, while others grew or were formed while in displacement. Some folks fell through the cracks of the state's humanitarian aid system and lost everything, while others managed to obtain degrees, secure jobs and become visible activists against all odds.

As I worked my way through these stories, I tried to recognize the relentless and multiple forms of violence that my interlocutors' lives were enmeshed in—poverty, racism, crime—and to acknowledge the pain of their encounters with extreme forms of violence such as death threats, forced displacement and disappearances. But time and time again, I found it particularly challenging to tell stories that highlighted joy and agency. I would write a draft where the emphasis seemed almost triumphant and immediately deleted it, worried that I might be accused of underplaying their suffering, or worse yet, misread as celebrating misfortune.

When I received the comments from the article's reviewers, I realized that my fears had been warranted. I was initially struck by the dissonance. Reader One raved, using words such as "elegant," "theoretically risky" and "provocative" and recommended that the piece be published immediately. Reader Two raged, using words such as "astonishment," "uneasiness" and "concern" when responding to my suggestion that IDPs were not only victims of violence. Reader Two suggested major revisions to correct the overall tone of the piece, which in their view gave "no sense of the suffering experienced by the displaced." The problem, in Reader Two's view, was not simply one of interpretation, but a deeply ethical one wherein emphasizing the positive aspects of some of my informants' new lives was tantamount to denying the scale of tragedy that had befallen them and the millions of other victims of Colombia's civil war—the longest-lasting conflict

in the western hemisphere, which spanned more than five decades.

In a sense, the dissonance in the two readers' reactions was in line with my own struggle in writing the article. I recalled revising the draft, first including descriptions of people's victories—small and large—and then deleting them for fear that they may overshadow painful stories of loss. I belabored descriptions of my informants' trajectories, relationships and associations in order to show the complexity of their politics without reducing them to either victims or victimizers. I was particularly called to task in rethinking the article's title. As it stood, Reader Two's concern was that by saying "thanks to" and describing some of the ways in which displacement had opened

up new and interesting life paths for some IDPs, I was suggesting that the war was not so bad after all. Reader Two urged me to reconsider my translation of the phrase "*gracias a mi desplazamiento*," suggesting that it might be indicative of causality—in other words, akin to "due to"—but not suggestive of gratefulness.

As I worked my way through the revisions, I struggled with each choice, taking the critique seriously and at the same time reaffirming my own convictions about the tricky politics of representing violence. In the end, despite our seeming disagreement, Reader Two and I concurred that at stake was not theoretical elegance, but political expediency. In the end, what drove us both was the question of who stands to lose and gain—and what—from our representations of violence. With that clear objective in mind, I went to work on the revisions and here I share the main insights that I gained in the process.

In the current political moment, it is very important to carefully define what is meant by violence. This means challenging dominant definitions, which only recognize violence when it manifests itself in spectacular encounters, rather than in its quotidian and structural forms. These definitions routinely render victims invisible. In the Colombian case, for example, the state-sanctioned definition of violence identifies as victims only those who have experienced loss during the years demarcated by the civil war and by a specific set of victimizers—the army, the guerrillas or other armed groups. As it stands, this definition fails to show how the lives of many are enmeshed with and exacerbated by everyday forms of living in violence. Thus, despite having lived in violence her entire life, the current state-sanctioned definition of violence in Colombia cannot recognize Margarita—a black domestic



worker from the rural Pacific who has always lived in extreme poverty and recently lost a son to street violence in Bogotá—as a victim. This inability to recognize all victims is because our tools to identify and name violence disregard structural forces such as poverty, patriarchy and racism and their deadly intersections with the geographies of war.

My purpose in showing the complex trajectories of people's lives was not to call into question the legitimacy of their status as IDPs or to minimize their suffering. To the contrary, my intention was to crack open the definition itself, to make room for a recognition of the multiple, *longue durée* systems and structures that enact exclusion, enable exploitation and inflict injuries on a daily basis. While I realize that there is a risk of glossing over the particularities of the suffering experienced by victims who have had spectacular encounters with armed actors, I stand by the urgency of expanding the scope of narrow definitions.

The second lesson I have learned is that representations that explore multiple uses of and responses to violence are urgently needed. Meeting this need involves treading the tricky ground of showing more than just victimization. This insight is something that I've gathered not from scholars but from my interlocutors themselves, who routinely emphasize their agency and celebrate their triumphs. Why then is it so difficult to consider the ways in which violence can be generative as well as destructive? Perhaps by doing so, the connections that are engendered and the possibilities that are conjured in the midst of loss could be brought into focus. And this focus could bring the worlds that are disappearing into the limelight while also offering an opportunity to harness the ones that are emerging for future political projects. For example, while it is important to continue to mourn for and denounce the loss of life and land that followed mass displacement in Colombia, is it not just as urgent to show and even celebrate the ways in which IDPs are creating new identities and crafting political projects in their places of arrival?

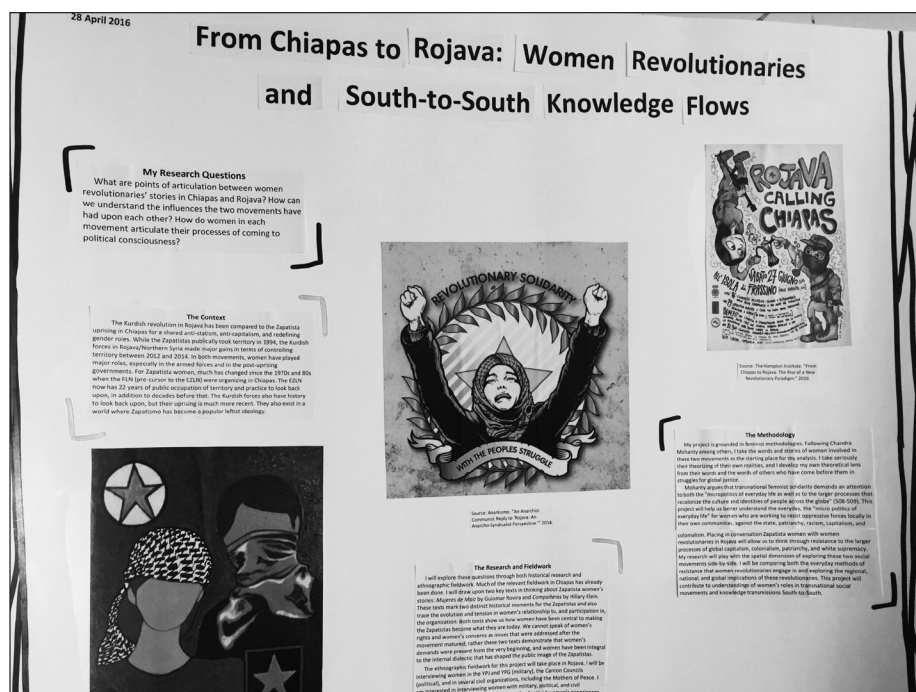
Looking closely and intimately at the lives of people living in seemingly perpetual violence reveals more than destruction and rupture. With this perspective it is possible to see that violence—while traumatic and destructive—can also be transformative and productive. This is, of course, very treacherous ground. I am well aware of the risks of providing fodder for apologists of these multiple forms of violence and want to be vigilant in my duty to continue denouncing the

suffering that they cause. But there are other risks inherent in letting violence-as-destruction exhaust its possible meanings and uses.

Last summer, when I was in Colombia I asked my friend Dora, from whom I borrowed the phrase “thanks to my displacement,” to reconsider her intention. I explained that different translations could be given to the phrase—causality versus gratefulness—and asked her to clarify what she meant, but she was steadfast in her position. Speaking first in the third person, she said: “Yes, we should not thank perpetrators, but we should recognize that if it hadn't been for that war, we wouldn't be here in Bogotá doing things that we never imagined doing, and we would have never discovered our leadership capabilities.” Then she shifted to a more personal register: “Thanks to my displacement, I met new people and learned new things. I didn't know I could sing, I hadn't met black leaders from other regions. I had no idea that I was a leader, but if I hadn't undergone that experience of violence, I wouldn't have taken advantage of my potential.” In the end, I believe that her words reveal that the choice between denouncing violence and celebrating the possibilities that are often unexpectedly created during a moment of rupture is a false one. If the goal is truthfulness and hopefulness in the difficult work of representing violence, then both must be considered.

## From the Middle East: Writing on Violence from Within

For the past ten years I have been ethnographically studying, and writing critically, about the contested geographies of Beirut



Olivia Lawrence-Weilmann's project on women's resistance in Chiapas and Rojava for the class co-taught by Roosbelinda Cardenas and Hiba Bou Akar.

ASA WAKABAYASHI NEEDLE

after the end of the civil war (1975–1990). While Cárdenas discusses the process of writing with nuance to an academic audience about the closures and openings of Colombia's war, here I reflect on the process of thinking and writing about violence in a place I call home. Ultimately, my work aims to expose the forms of violence that people endure in post-conflict geographies where the future is imagined to consist of war more than of peace. Throughout, however, I often found myself asking: what is my purpose and what are the ethics of writing academically about violence that has been so intimate to my life? My writings about war and displacement are personal and political.

Numerous dilemmas arise when thinking and writing about violence. In my experience, writing about violence in a place I call home (itself the landscape of many lost homes) revolves around the pain of excavating a personal history shaped by war, and the fear of reproducing violence through writing about it. My family and I were displaced several times during the Lebanese civil war. We lost many a home, each round of displacement erasing memories of spaces, which were later shelled and burned. One of my childhood homes still stands empty in a ruined building, a witness to a long-lost life and long-lost neighbors. While I write this reflection from New York, the violence of Beirut's post-conflict geographies that continue to shape people's lives in the city remain personal. They affect my family, friends and loved ones who make Beirut home. This process of writing on violence from within, therefore, involves learning how to walk the tightropes that define the contours of my scholarly, political and personal engagements with these sites. These tightropes make writing about violence from within powerfully illuminating because they give nuance to an understanding of conflict. At the same time, it is quite difficult to parse the personal from the political from the scholarly when one's life is intertwined with these geographies.

In my book, *For the War Yet to Come: Planning Beirut's Frontiers*,<sup>8</sup> I include an auto-ethnographic account of my family's life in an apartment building in a southeastern periphery of Beirut. In 2009–2010, I was doing field research on the urbanization of Beirut's southern peripheries. Just a year before, in May 2008, the area (and the rest of Beirut) had witnessed street battles that brought the city to the verge of another civil war. My family's neighborhood was in constant flux as new buildings mushroomed in an unparalleled construction frenzy. With every new development, the meadows that separated our building from the Mediterranean Sea were filled with concrete buildings enclosed in curtain-covered balconies. Meanwhile, a contestation evolved surrounding the building construction taking place next door. One day we woke up to see that the building had been extended vertically beyond the legal height limit. While the neighbors were willing to ignore the additional floors, they were outraged by the developer's plan to build over the neighborhood's public shared amenities, blocking the sidewalk and encroaching on the shared cul-de-sac.

Experiencing the ensuing contestation first-hand prompted me to write about it. The intensity of the conflict made evident the political negotiations around construction in an area that is ruled by a honeycomb of competing factions. These factions were mostly war militias that transformed themselves after the end of the war into religious-political organizations that continue to rule the country. In Lebanon, the enforcement of the building law is uneven, only becoming relevant when illegal construction is contested.<sup>9</sup> Thus, challenging the illegal extensions of the building next door soon became a political process divided along sectarian lines. As parties became involved, the people who resisted the illegal construction—including my family—received threats. Eventually, the illegalities were removed, only because at that moment the political scale tipped in favor of the religious-political organization that supported removing them.

Witnessing the negotiations and threats as they unfolded from my family's living room, I was convinced that an auto-ethnographic account of this contestation could astutely illustrate the capillaries of power that have transformed Beirut's peripheries into frontiers of urban growth and sectarian violence. When I started jotting my account down on paper, however, I became anxious about describing these everyday forms of contestation without giving away details that would compromise the safety of my family in a place where sectarian violence is always anticipated. Making the difficult writing process worse was the worry that writing about this experience might one day cause yet another round of displacement for my family.

This worry is neither unfounded nor unrealistic. In May 2008, my family had to temporarily leave their apartment as battles raged in the streets. My family, like many Lebanese people, are well trained for such situations. They know exactly what to pack: passports, jewelry, religious texts, and important paperwork including title deeds and wills. In fact, many families have these bags packed, ready to leave at any moment. In 2008, they had to pass through militia checkpoints where the warring factions were checking people's IDs—actions reminiscent of the civil war when people were killed at checkpoints based on the religion stated on their IDs. The ghosts of such past experiences cast a large shadow every time violence erupts.

They also cast a shadow every time I wrote about the territorial contestations between the different religious-political organizations unfolding in Beirut's peripheries. Writing about violence and its anticipation involved writing and rewriting, writing and deleting, trying to figure out how to make the violence of urbanization visible, how to articulate people's suffering and dispossession while editing out the stories that could subject them to new rounds of displacement. The struggles surrounding how to write about violence from within without potentially subjecting my interlocutors to future violence consumed me.



Over the years, I came to realize that in the violence I study, there are no winners and losers, and the lines between aggressors and victims are blurry. The tables keep turning: one day an aggressor, another day a victim. As a result, I set out to write simultaneously from the different perspectives involved in the territorial conflict; this is a difficult task when writing about charged topics like land sales to Shi'a in formerly Druze or Christian areas, and in places where animosity along sectarian lines has reached its peak. My aim has not been to pin the violence and its aftermath on any specific actors but instead to examine how all of the actors use the tools of planning, housing and real estate markets to shape Beirut's contested geographies, focusing on how people's everyday lives suffer irrespective of their sectarian or political affiliations.

Another challenge revolves around the possibility that the process of excavating experiences of war reproduces new forms of violence. My interlocutors have recounted to me their experiences with war. Some of them still carry the scars on their amputated and disfigured bodies, others remain haunted by nightmares. Many lost loved ones, their pictures hanging on their living room walls. Others had to live in makeshift shelters for 30 years before they were able to find a permanent home again, while some have never been able to go back to their homes. People described their experiences as vividly as if they had just happened, an intensity that suggested that people, including my family, were reliving the pain of war by narrating it. I often struggled to determine whether this process of narration is cathartic or simply causes new iterations of violence.

This process of producing knowledge on violence from within is also shaped by the challenges of presenting such work in the public sphere, both "at home" and within the larger academic community. In 2010, the first time I presented my work in Beirut, I was overtaken with anxiety about how it was going to be received. There I was standing in front of a packed auditorium to speak about the territorial contestation between the Shi'i Hizballah and the Druze Progressive Socialist Party, a topic that everyone in the room had a strong opinion about. The country was still recovering from the 2008 battles between the two groups. Given my family's origin, I was nervous that someone in the audience would accuse me of being against Hizballah; or that I would be denounced for not being sympathetic enough to the plight of "my own people," a minority religious group. Speaking in a world shaped by dominant narratives of the war on terror, I had similar worries presenting my work in front of a US academic audience where many in the audience know Hizballah by its Western label as a "terrorist organization." However, writing from within Beirut involves discussing Hizballah as just another Lebanese actor representative of a large section of Lebanese citizens. It was quite challenging to undo exotic and reductionist portrayals in order to begin to have a conversation about people making lives in actual places. Evidently, writing about violence from within becomes a project that folds within it local and global anxieties

about places that have been always labeled as "dangerous" but that are—with their histories of violence—a home to many.

## South-South Encounters

As scholars of Latin America and the Middle East with deep personal stakes in the places we write about, our hope is that by looking one another in the eye, we might circumvent the Eurocentric gaze that usually accompanies studies of violence in the global South, and that we can move beyond the exoticization of violence and the reduction of subjects and places to being labeled as "dangerous." In its place, we favor creating spaces to hold South-South exchanges about the mundane aspects of violence and the flourishing lives that people build every day in such places. To that end, this essay inverts the scholarly gaze from the North, by speaking back to it, questioning its assumptions, and illuminating its limits. We did this by making visible the intellectual and emotional labor that it takes to write about violence from within, and to remain truthful to our interlocutors while addressing audiences far removed from those settings.

It is important to reiterate that this South-South intellectual engagement started as a pedagogical exercise. The classroom provided us with an opportunity to carve out a space where our weekly conversations interrogated the knowledge produced about Latin America from the prism of the Middle East and vice-versa. This method proved productive for imagining different futures in a moment where the horizon of progressive politics seems to be foreclosing around the globe. Such pedagogical approaches are central to de-centering hegemonic knowledge production and generating different approaches to understanding the world. Like the rest of the efforts that make up this issue, we strongly believe that these kinds of experiences should be encouraged and become more common, not only for epistemological reasons, but to better respond to the political urgency of our historical moment. ■

## Endnotes

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# Anti-Semitism and Pro-Israel Politics in the Trump Era

## Historical Antecedents and Contexts

Les Field

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's silence following the neo-Nazi, white supremacist march in Charlottesville, Virginia on August 12, 2017 was deafening, and revealing. For three days following the parade of anti-Jewish slogans and swastikas, Netanyahu—often characterized as an outspoken critic of anti-Semitism worldwide—made no comment.<sup>1</sup>

The struggle against anti-Semitism and the effort to safeguard Jewish people around the world have certainly played a key role in the history of the Zionist movement and the establishment of the state of Israel. Yet Netanyahu's politics provide evidence of other priorities. Indeed, Israeli governments over many decades have maintained relationships with states where anti-Semitic policies have prevailed. What accounts for this contradiction between Zionism's self-stated mission to defend world Jewry and the economic, military and political partnerships Israel has pursued with anti-Semitic governments?

The founding of Israel is commonly understood as reaction to, and justified by, hundreds of years of violent and virulent anti-Semitism that victimized the Jewish communities of Europe—where, until World War II, the majority of Jews in the world lived. That history of anti-Semitism culminated in the Holocaust of the mid-twentieth century. The goal of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, unfolding in the early twentieth century and first decisively affirmed by the Balfour Declaration of 1917, was provoked by two important factors: nationalist movements developing among

suppressed populations of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end of the nineteenth century and large scale, systemic, brutally violent and racist campaigns against the Jewish populations of Europe. In the wake of the Holocaust, the Zionist movement gained the support of a much greater number of politically diverse and previously skeptical global Jewry, which deepened the commitment to establishing not just a Jewish homeland but a Jewish state in Palestine. In a surge of unity among many of the world's Jews—that did not override or even always marginalize dissident views—many agreed that a Jewish state would be the one place where Jews could live free of the fear of persecution.

After Israel was established, the Zionist movement encouraged Jewish populations all over the world to identify with Israel. That effort was linked to Jewish religious education, which meant that learning to read Hebrew was not only the means to reading religious texts but was also explicit preparation for a possible emigration to Israel. Zionist organizations also supported movements to protect the rights of Jews in other countries. Before the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1990, that effort was largely directed toward protecting Jews living there and in the Soviet bloc countries. The discrepancy between how much effort was directed toward fighting discrimination and how much went into making it possible for Jews to emigrate to Israel provides another measure of the gap between the interests of Israel and the interests of the Jewish people worldwide.

Recent events reinforce the perception that the Israeli government's interests do not necessarily align with the interests of Jewish communities.

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In Central Europe, the very scene of the Holocaust, Netanyahu made clear just how closely he is willing to work with anti-Semitic governments. In July 2017, he instructed the Israeli Foreign Ministry to retract a statement that had urged Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his ruling right-wing party to end a poster campaign against Jewish-American financier George Soros, a campaign the ministry had feared was stirring up anti-Semitic sentiments.<sup>2</sup> Since Orbán's election, the Hungarian Jewish community has expressed concern about the anti-Semitic content of his party's propaganda. Leaders of the Jewish community (numbering over 100,000, the largest in Eastern Europe) believed the posters and other anti-Semitic messages were creating an increasingly hostile environment for Hungarian Jews. Their concerns were ignored in the wake of alliances the Netanyahu government forged between Israel, the Orbán government and right-wing nationalist regimes in Eastern Europe. In today's Europe, being pro-Israel and anti-Semitic do not necessarily contradict one another, and the Israeli government recognizes the distinction.

Netanyahu's comments in France two years earlier, following the deadly attack on the Paris office of the satirical publication *Charlie Hebdo*, underscore how the prime minister treats anti-Semitism as an opportunity to recruit European Jews to emigrate to Israel. After Islamist attackers killed seventeen people, Netanyahu told French Jews, "To all the Jews of France, all the Jews of Europe, I would like to say that Israel is not just the place in whose direction you pray, the state of Israel is your home."<sup>3</sup>

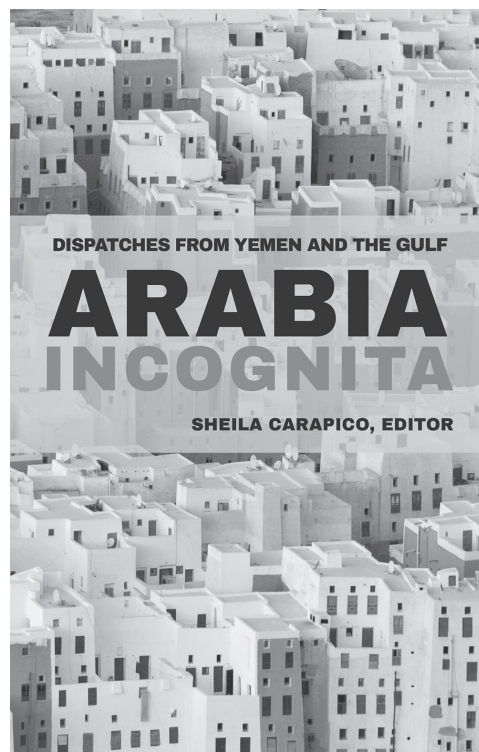
Is the ability of Israel's allies to maintain a separation between domestic anti-Semitism and pro-Israel foreign policies unique to the tenure of Prime Minister Netanyahu? The history of Israeli policy and alliances in Latin America since the 1980s suggests that such distinctions and their consequences have a much deeper history. Israel's relationship with Argentina's military dictatorship (1976–1983) and with the Colombian paramilitaries since the late twentieth century, suggest that Latin America was where these flexible Israeli policies first appeared.

Israel sold sophisticated weapons to the Argentine generals, and indeed was Argentina's firm ally during the Falklands War with Great Britain from April to June of 1982. The weapons included some of the most important elements used in combat: air-to-air and air-to-sea missiles, missile alert radar systems, large fuel tanks for bomber planes, anti-tank mines, large bombs and mortars.<sup>4</sup> But the Argentine military's *Guerra Sucia* (Dirty War) against the left and all perceived domestic enemies disproportionately targeted Argentine Jews. The military was explicitly anti-Semitic in its targeting, and routinely utilized Nazi symbols and images in its own propaganda as well as in its infamous torture chambers. Israel concluded agreements with the generals to send Jewish Argentines to Israel rather than killing them.<sup>5</sup> For Israel, the logic was that, like all

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diasporic Jews, Argentine Jews would be affirmed in their Jewishness only when they immigrated to Israel. Rather than defend the Jews of Argentina because Israel is supposed to be the defender of Jewish people everywhere, Israel was an overt ally of the anti-Semitic regime and considered its characteristically anti-Semitic policies as an opportunity to recruit more people to the Israeli state project.

In the Colombian case, right-wing paramilitaries, which from 1997–2006 were organized into an umbrella organization, the United Self-Defenders of Columbia (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* or AUC), were supplied by and allied with Israeli military contractors and military officials. AUC's co-founder Carlos Castaño received over a year of training in Israel in 1983–84, both in military schools and at Hebrew University. He has proclaimed his admiration for the Jewish people and for Zionism's militant nationalism. In his biography, he detailed how the concept of *autodefensa*, or self-defense, in fact derived from Israeli civilian defense practices and the arming of citizens against their enemy, the Palestinian people, all of whom are considered potential terrorists.<sup>6</sup>

What kind of ally did Israel cultivate through its relationship with the Colombian paramilitaries? According to the Colombian government's own self study, the AUC was responsible for "the bulk" of the human rights atrocities and massacres in the country between 1980 and the present. The United Nations specifies that "80 percent of all killings in Colombia's civil conflict have been committed by paramilitaries, 12 percent by leftist guerrillas, and the remaining 8 percent by government forces."<sup>7</sup> The Colombian government reported that in the year 2000, the paramilitaries and state forces committed approximately 85 percent of political murders. In 2003, the Colombian government estimated that the AUC was responsible for at least 40 percent of the narcotics trafficking in the country, and in 2002 Castaño himself reported that 70 percent of AUC's operating budget was derived from the narcotics trade.<sup>7</sup> AUC's successor paramilitary organizations continue to be well supplied with numerous and highly sophisticated Israeli-made weapons and are consistently advised by former Israeli military officers.<sup>8</sup> The Colombian government has proven to be a reliably strong ally of Israel at the UN and in other international organizations.

Latin America since the 1980s has been a dress rehearsal for Israeli foreign policy that is consistently right-wing in its orientation. Israel's alliance with the right internationally is revealed when Israel does not protect Jews globally, but rather pursues the political, economic and social policies that build the strength of the state of Israel. The two goals have sometimes coincided since Israel's independence in 1948. When they do not—and increasingly they do not—the gap between the struggle against anti-Semitism and the state's self-interest emerges. The Trump administration has ushered in an era in which that gap has become particularly stark.

The anti-Semitic character of the US alt-right, in alliance with fascist, neo-Nazi, white supremacist, neo-Confederate and other far right groups has been well established in 2017, if it was not already quite evident before. President Trump's persistent defense of the ultra-right ideological world, and the anti-Semitism that goes along with it, coexists with his alliance with Las Vegas casino tycoon Sheldon Adelson and his reliance upon his son-in-law Jared Kushner and his family. Only one year into the Trump administration, the combination of anti-Semitism and pro-Zionism that was pioneered by Israeli foreign policy in Latin America in the 1980s, and has been manifesting in Israeli relations with Eastern Europe in the last five years, has become a regular feature of the domestic US political landscape.

Globally resurgent ultra-right politics, which are essentially anti-Semitic in nature, are serving the interests of international alignments of political power on the state level. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is apparently ready to sacrifice the Palestinian national movement to his alliance with the Trump administration and the Netanyahu government. All three of these regimes promote a vision of the future that profoundly constrains the rights of women, minorities and immigrants, enshrines the power of fundamentalist religious conservatism, and promotes technological advances in the national security state. In alliance with other countries blazing the way to twenty-first century forms of corporatist crony capitalism operating under the banner of right-wing nationalism, including Colombia, their influence is making the world an increasingly dangerous place for Jewish minority populations—while Israel's power grows.

Ironically, strident anti-Semitism in the United States and Europe is increasingly cloaked by political and economic alliances with Israel, a seeming paradox the Israeli government under Netanyahu has been all too ready to facilitate. In the Trump era, the Jews of the United States, who have been perhaps the least aware of this paradox, will need to face the consequences in their own country of what has been going on for decades elsewhere in the world. ■

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# ***The Afterlife of al-Andalus: Muslim Iberia in Contemporary Arab and Hispanic Narratives***

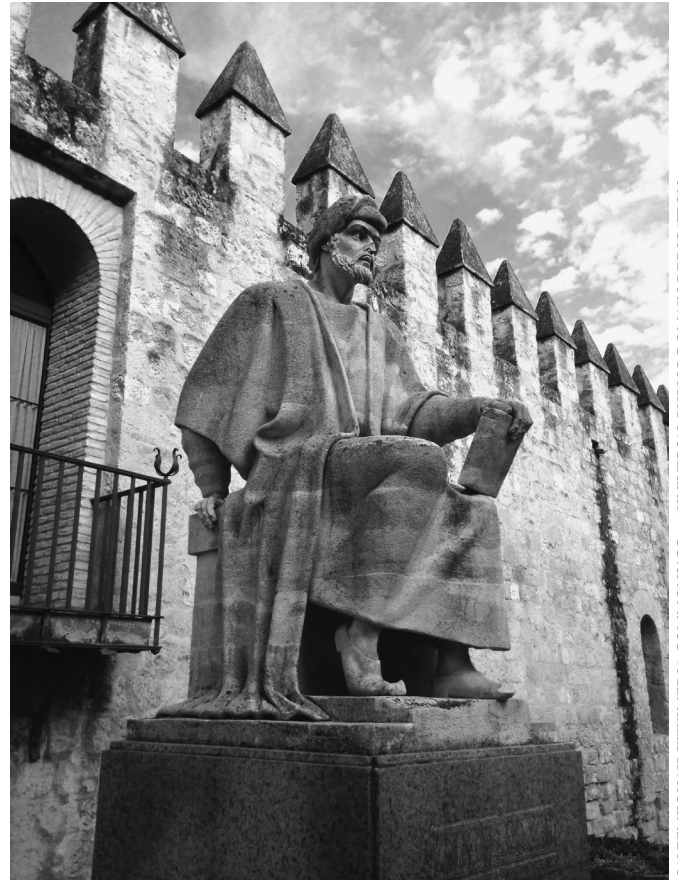
## **A Synopsis**

*The Afterlife of al-Andalus*<sup>1</sup> examines medieval Muslim Iberia, or al-Andalus, in twentieth and twenty-first century narrative, drama, television and film from the Arab world and its diaspora, as well as from Spain and Argentina. My focus in this book is on the role of contemporary representations and invocations of al-Andalus in relation to questions of cultural translation, postcolonial identity construction, empire, migration, gender, sexuality, metafiction and tolerance.

Traditionally the invocation of al-Andalus has been understood as a purely nostalgic gesture, and more recently as a reenactment of medieval conflict. On one hand, this study establishes that al-Andalus is indeed a key element in narratives of identity and that paying attention to the rhetoric and symbolism employed reveals how various types of oppression are reiterated. On the other hand, this inquiry reveals that many writers and filmmakers depart from traditional invocations of al-Andalus and creatively reinterpret the past. These reworkings of iconic figures critique sociopolitical issues—such as lack of freedom of expression, dictatorial rule, gender and sexual oppression, labor migration and economic disparities, restrictive religious and nationalist ideologies, and postcolonial identity politics—to imagine new migrant and gendered identities and different types of cultural integration, and point to the richness of al-Andalus as a story that can be retold. In short, these works reveal and transform concepts of cultural, religious and gender identity that are the foundation of traditional discourses about al-Andalus, and Arab, Maghrebi, Spanish and Argentine identities, as well as East–West relations at large. Al-Andalus is not a fixed history of conquest and re-conquest but a site of creativity, a story that can be re-created to imagine better, more tolerant futures.

One of the bridges between Latin American and Middle East studies included in *The Afterlife of al-Andalus* is that of Arab migration to Latin America. My interest in contemporary versions of al-Andalus grew out of my first book, *Between Argentines and Arabs: Argentine Orientalism, Arab Immigrants, and the Writing of Identity*.<sup>2</sup> In the course of that research I came across a few works by immigrants from the Levant to Argentina (as well as by Euro-Argentines) that represented or alluded to al-Andalus, which inspired me to analyze them within the broader corpus of texts engaging with al-Andalus. Additionally, through Iberian literature, legends and sayings, al-Andalus is part of the cultural heritage of Latin America. In a sense, the Arab world holds up one end of this bridge that traverses

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Statue of Ibn Rushd (Averroes) in Córdoba, Spain.

Spain, and Latin America supports the other end. Another set of links between the Middle East and Latin America that this book addresses, however, is a network of bridges—the slanted bridges of empire—that unite areas of the global South in their shared experience of being conquered by the Spanish empire and, more broadly, by the geopolitical power of the North. *The Afterlife of al-Andalus* attends to continuities in imperial power relations, as well as the interactions between various empires and world systems, and between various colonized communities across the globe and across historical periods.

The Spanish Reconquista (718–1492) resulted in the shrinking of the Muslim empire and the expansion of the Christian Castilian empire, a process that was propelled forward by Christopher Columbus' arrival in the Americas. For these reasons, themes of power, conquest, religious and linguistic difference and loss are an integral part of narratives about al-Andalus. Many of these narratives tell the story of nostalgia for a lost position of power or, on the part of the

Spanish, the loss of a European identity conceived of as pure and authentic—al-Andalus in this case is used to create exclusionary imperial and national identities. Alongside these established narratives, however, there are alternate discourses about the legacy of al-Andalus that rewrite the traditional narratives. In the process, these discourses critique the imperial and gendered dimensions of the al-Andalus story and pursue intercultural translation.

The book focuses on texts that refer to a set of specific cultural icons, the historical and legendary figures that are most prominent and recur most frequently in the corpus of modern creative works on al-Andalus. The first part, “Cultural (Un)translatability and Narratives of Identity in Representations of Ibn Rushd/Averroes,” centers on the medieval Cordoban polymath Ibn Rushd, known in European languages as Averroes, and foregrounds attitudes regarding the potential for cultural translation. Part two, “To and From al-Andalus: Migration and Coloniality,” examines figures who are known for their movement in and out of al-Andalus such as the initial Muslim conqueror Tariq ibn Ziyad, the exiled last Muslim ruler Abu Abd Allah or Boabdil, and modern-day immigrants. This part emphasizes transcoloniality, which is a term I propose that brings to the fore the nature of enduring colonial power relations as temporally layered and having multiple origins and axes. The third part, “Florinda, Wallada, and Scheherazade, or the Women of al-Andalus and the Stories They Tell,” examines representations of the two most famous women of al-Andalus and focuses on women as storytellers and al-Andalus as narrative. Each part consists of two interrelated chapters.

Chapter one, “Borges and His Arab Interlocutors: Orientalism, Translation, and Epistemology,” is a comparative analysis centered on the short story “La busca de Averroes” (“Averroes’s Search,” 1947) by the renowned Argentinian author Jorge Luis Borges. I assert that Borges’ “La busca” demonstrates elements of Orientalism and precludes cross-cultural contact. Furthermore, I explain how the responses of two early twenty-first century short stories, Moroccan Abdelfattah Kilito’s “Du balcon d’Averroès” (“Concerning Averroes’s Balcony”) and Iraqi Jabbar Yassin Hussin’s “Yawm Buenos Aires” (“The Buenos Aires Day”), make Borges’ search more complex and successful. In modern Hispanic and Arab-Maghreb literature, Ibn Rushd functions as an icon of cultural (un)translatability. I argue that what matters most is not determining whether ideas can, in the abstract, be translated but how and why the potential for translation is deemed to be hampered or enabled. What are the assumptions that underpin understandings of what can and cannot be successfully translated into another context? In Borges’ story, underlying concepts of reason and the radical otherness of “the East” are what create a barrier to cross-cultural understanding.

Kilito’s story promotes a de-romanticized openness to cultural contact, in contrast to Borges’ foreclosed cultural

contact. Kilito’s form of cultural connection is aware of postcolonial sociopolitical hierarchies, but avoids anchoring identity in a single language. Kilito’s dream-based story presents the ironies, paradoxes and mediations of language and the multiplicity of interpretations which spring from these hierarchies. Hussin’s story responds to Borges’ ambiguously Orientalist depiction of Ibn Rushd with a fantastic tale in which Ibn Rushd travels through time and space to meet Borges in Buenos Aires. Hussin responds to Borges’ portrayal of Ibn Rushd as a symbol of cultural separation and inability to create meaning with an Ibn Rushd that symbolizes cultural connection and the endless possibilities of signification. The two literary responses to Borges bring up issues of postcolonial identity and assert the possibility of intercultural dialogue through other forms of signification and identity construction.

The second chapter, “Ibn Rushd and Freedom of Expression: The Construction and Fragmentation of Identity Narratives,” examines a more indirect textual dialogue between three works that portray Ibn Rushd: an Egyptian film, a Spanish television screenplay and a Tunisian play. The three works share a concern with constraints on freedom of expression in the face of censorship and the fashioning of narratives of identity and truth. In addition to presenting Ibn Rushd as a champion of rationalism who supports the compatibility of secularism and Islam—that is, as a bridge-building figure to be emulated—the three works reveal the limits of narratives of cultural identity. The challenge, which is played out in these representations of Ibn Rushd, is how to acknowledge mediation by language and cultural positioning without adopting a narrative of antagonism—a belief in an inevitable clash of cultures—and how to build tolerance and equity within mediated, partial knowledge. The existence of this textual dialogue in and of itself supports the possibility of meaningful cultural contact: not a facile, idealized vision of *convivencia* (the idea that Muslims, Christians and Jews coexisted peacefully in medieval Spain) or of Muslim supremacy, but a careful negotiation that considers how knowledge is constructed.

In part two of the book, chapters three and four and a coda delve into the core narratives of identity and truth that are part of the legacy of al-Andalus by examining three historical figures pivotal in the physical movement and power dynamics between Iberia, North Africa and the Americas. This section reveals that Arab and Hispanic cultural production links these figures to various migration flows from the nineteenth through twenty-first centuries. Chapter three, “The Migration of a Hero: The Construction and Deconstruction of Tariq ibn Ziyad,” centers on representations of the military general of Amazigh (also known as Berber) origin who started the Muslim conquest of Iberia. Traditional representations of Tariq from the Middle East and North Africa emphasize his identity as a Muslim and the glory of the Muslim empire. In the process, Tariq’s probable non-Arab identity and the subjugation of the Amazigh peoples are erased. Since the

mid-twentieth century, Tariq has been the topic of several literary works from the Middle East and North Africa region and its diaspora. The analysis of these texts identifies significant temporal and regional differences between romanticizing triumphalist narratives and narratives that demythify Tariq by linking him to other conquests and to contemporary labor migration from the global South into Europe.

While Hispanic cultural production has shown little interest in Tariq, there has been a veritable obsession with Boabdil, the last Muslim ruler of the Emirate of Granada. Chapter four, “Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad XII (Boabdil) and Other Migrants,” examines works ranging from the 1926 novel *Zogoibi* (a nickname for Boabdil, from the Arabic for “unfortunate one”) by Argentine Enrique Larreta, to the 1990 Spanish mini-series *Réquiem por Granada* (*Requiem for Granada*) and popular historical novels produced in Spain since the 1990s. Parallel to the trends found in the works on Tariq, these Boabdil-centered works exhibit a temporal shift from experimentation in the 1970s and 1980s to traditionalism in the 1990s and beyond. The twentieth and twenty-first century Spanish representations of Boabdil mostly take their cue from the Romantic writers and craft the last Moorish king of Granada as a weak, melancholic figure who affirms Spanish power. Similarly, in the Argentine novel *Zogoibi*, the protagonist is identified with Boabdil due to his weakness and tragic end. Throughout the novel, al-Andalus’s encounter between Arabs/Amazighs/Muslims and Iberians/Christians is used as an analogy for the encounters between Argentina’s indigenous, mestizo gaucho, Spanish, European and North American elements. In this way, the novel uses al-Andalus to comment upon the tensions inherent in Argentine nation-building. One of these tensions is the arrival of foreigners understood as a threat to Argentine authenticity.

Arabic speakers from the Levant had been immigrating to Argentina for several decades before the publication of *Zogoibi*. One such immigrant, Ilyas Qunsul, arrived in Argentina a few years after the publication of *Zogoibi* and decades later invoked a similarly tragic Boabdil in his 1980 essay in Arabic, *The Tragedy of Arabic in the American Mahjar* (place of exile or migration). In this essay, Qunsul laments the disappearance of Arabic in Argentina and employs the legend of “the Moor’s last sigh” to urge Arabs in the Arab world to support the Arabic-language *mahjar* press. Like Qunsul’s essay, many of the texts about Boabdil use migration to reveal the falsehoods of triumphalist narratives (whether Christian or Muslim) about Muslim Iberia and to open the way to shared narratives of al-Andalus.

The last section of part two, “Coda: Columbus and Coloniality,” considers another border-crosser who often appears in tandem with Boabdil, who was the catalyst for large-scale European conquests and connects al-Andalus to the Americas: Christopher Columbus. I compare the representations of Columbus in late twentieth and early twenty-first century works from Spain, North Africa and Syria and consider the early twenty-first century phenomenon of US

Hispanic converts to Islam and their invocations of al-Andalus. These discourses emphasize not only the destructiveness and ephemerality of empire and the persistence of the disenfranchisement of immigrants from the global South but also the possibilities for imagining and establishing new realities.

In part three, the final chapters reflect on women as an integral part of the conquest narrative by looking at issues of gender, sexuality and storytelling. Chapter 5, “Florinda and Wallada: Subjugation, Seduction, and Textual Transformation,” considers the two women most frequently associated with al-Andalus. Florinda is the legendary figure whose rape or seduction is said to have led to the Muslim conquest of Iberia, and Wallada is an eleventh century poet who was the daughter of the penultimate Umayyid ruler of Cordoba. Florinda and Wallada are portrayed in a plethora of twentieth and twenty-first century texts from Spain and the Arab world. An analysis of these works show that the representations of Florinda and Wallada, although varied, ultimately result in the silencing of female agency. Nonetheless, I identify two significant exceptions to this in the form of two novels about Wallada, written by a Spaniard and a Syrian, which use the mythology of al-Andalus to reflect on the myth-making process itself and offer alternate narratives about al-Andalus and its women.

Chapter six, “Scheherazade: al-Andalus as Seduction and as Story,” further explores the workings and uses of narrative in texts from Iraq and Egypt that address al-Andalus more broadly. By focusing on the transformative power of storytelling, including storytelling as survival and al-Andalus as a narrative, these texts suggest a Scheherazade figure who recasts conceptions of gender and al-Andalus. In these works women function as storytellers—not just the objects of narrative—and use storytelling to create equity and cultural resilience. The narratives constitute an imaginative departure from both discourses of restorative nostalgia and forced exile and the versions of al-Andalus that replay East–West conquest through romantic and sexual relationships.

Around the globe, concerns about strained interfaith relations have led to efforts to find more successful models, such as those deemed present in medieval Muslim Iberia. The conclusion of *The Afterlife of al-Andalus* considers recent critiques of the concept of tolerance, including how some types of tolerance, characterized by one party offering forbearance to another who is understood to be of lesser standing, are themselves implicated in structures of oppressive power. Yet critics of tolerance also point to how the disruption of competing ideologies, expressed through narrative, often reveals unexpected commonalities. Re-writing the myths surrounding Muslim Iberia activates al-Andalus’s potential for creating a deeper tolerance built upon equity and understanding. ■

## Endnotes

1 Christina Civantos, *The Afterlife of al-Andalus: Muslim Iberia in Contemporary Arab and Hispanic Narratives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017).

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# The Legacy of Faleh Abdul Jabar (1946–2018)

**Renad Mansour**

Iraqi sociologist Faleh Abdul Jabar passed away on February 26, 2018 in Beirut, Lebanon. His last words, on Al-Hurra's "Iraq in a Century" program, emphasized his concern with the prospects of rebuilding the Iraqi state after many years of foreign interference, yet also hinted at an optimism derived from shifting political dynamics and a positive move towards issue-based, rather than sectarian, politics on the Iraqi street.

The news of Faleh's sudden death made its way to the forefront of all major newspapers and broadcasts in Iraq, as well as into major regional and international outlets. In Baghdad, a debate emerged on the nature of his legacy. Many commentators compared him to the renowned Iraqi political sociologist Ali al-Wardi (1913–1995). Most agreed that Faleh was one of the top Iraqi intellects of his time. He leaves behind not just important texts, but also a generation of researchers, activists and politicians who have been inspired by his life and work.

Faleh was born in Baghdad in 1946. He began his university studies in engineering at the University of Baghdad, but dropped out expressing his dissatisfaction with the subject. Instead, he chose to study English literature, based on his love for reading novels. At a young age, Faleh became politically active in Arab nationalist and then leftist movements. He travelled to Lebanon in the 1970s and supported the Palestinian cause. In the early 1980s, he went to the mountains of the Kurdistan region of Iraq and joined the communist partisan fighters there in opposition to Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime. He eventually moved to London in the 1990s, where he switched his focus to academia and began his doctoral studies in sociology at the School of Politics and Sociology, Birkbeck College.

First and foremost, Faleh was a deep thinker. He authored several fundamental texts about Iraq. He is best known for *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq* (2003), where he investigated the history of Iraq's previously understudied Shi'i population and the development of Shi'i political activism. He argued that simplistic

concepts such as "the Shi'a" are not sociologically or politically sufficient, as the group is far from monolithic. Moreover, he described how in Iraq, the guild, clan, city, region and tribe have guided social cohesion just as much as religion or sect. This book was definitive for the academic narrative about Iraq after the 2003 US invasion and demise of the Ba'ath regime, and has been particularly important for the study of sectarianism. Other key contributions to academic literature include his edited volumes such as *Post-Marxism and the Middle East* (1997), *Ayatollahs, Sufis and Ideologues: State, Religion and Social Movements in Iraq* (2002) and *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East* (2002), all published by Saqi Books in London. He was also a valued contributor to this magazine. With his publications, Faleh inspired a generation of scholars who applied the same methodologies of political sociology in different contexts across the region.

One of Faleh's greatest frustrations was the dismal state of the social sciences in Iraq. As one of the founders of the Iraqi Cultural Forum in 1993 in London—which after 2003 moved briefly to Iraq and then Lebanon and was renamed the Iraqi Institute for Strategic Studies—he pursued his vision to improve the capacity for independent political thought inside Iraq. At the height of the civil war in the mid-2000s, he organized seminars and workshops to teach methodologies, theories and the art of critical thinking in his offices in Beirut. Many of his students have gone on to lead research departments and projects across Iraq.

To connect Iraqis with foreign academia, he also directed the Iraqi Institute in an extensive translation campaign to make influential social science texts available in Arabic. Translated works included *Das Kapital* by Karl Marx, *The Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith, *The Federalist Papers*, *Models of Democracy* by David Held, *La Revolution Moderne* by Marcel Gauchet and *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States* by Terry Lynn Karl. Walking through the book markets of Baghdad's famous Mutanabbi Street, one can find many of the institute's translated works, now available

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to the Iraqi reader at a bargain price. These translations allowed Iraqis and Arabic speakers to access and engage with key debates in philosophy and the social sciences.

Faleh was not only an academic, but also a political engineer. Respected by political elites across party lines and frequently asked to provide advice, he often found himself at the center of power. In early 2016, for instance, Faleh began advising popular Iraqi Shi'i cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. In meetings first in Beirut and then in Baghdad, he helped to provide Sadr with a theoretical understanding of the concept of technocracy in order to ensure that Sadr's political movement was compatible with democracy and the political process in Iraq.

Faleh also became one of the key architects of the alliance between the Sadrist and the leftist, secular and civil society groups that make up the protest movement that emerged in 2015 and called for the reform of Iraq's post-2003 political system. The protesters eventually swept through the heavily-guarded Green Zone in April 2016 to demand change in government.

Then, in the lead-up to the 2018 elections, the Sadrists and Iraqi Communist Party decided to run together on a single list—making strange bedfellows of Islamists and secularists. Faleh's final post on Facebook shows that he remained committed to this cause. He continued to defend the necessity of working with a variety of political actors across the board in order to improve the political system in Iraq by combatting corruption and ending the post-2003 ethno-sectarian quota system known as *muhassasa*.

Faleh was an activist. He too picked up the banners and took to the streets. Although many demonstrators, frustrated with the slow nature of change, stopped going to Friday protests, he continued to protest almost every week, whether in Beirut or Baghdad. As a writer, teacher, political engineer and activist, Faleh will be remembered for his drive to support bottom-up change in Iraq. He has equipped the next generation of thinkers and politicians with a vision for moving toward issue-based politics and has helped to create space in state-society relations for both religious and secular citizens to build a civic state—an unusual formula in today's Middle East. ■

*Continued from page 29.*

which was repeated by all in the audience. Bishop al-Khoury continued his speech with gruesome details of the killing of Christians and 'Alawis. The audience reacted by expressing their horror and condemning the fanaticism of the (Sunni) "Islamic terrorists." Transnational connections were evoked in order to bring the horrors of the war close to the diasporic audience, as a man in his twenties exclaimed in a loud voice, "They even killed Brazilians in Homs," referring to the community of Brazilian-born returnees that existed in that city. The bishop ended his lecture saying that God is great and would not allow "criminals" to destroy Syria, and that Bashar al-Asad would be re-elected in the coming elections.

This ethnographic account shows how sectarian discourses, religious identities, transnational diasporic connections and secular versions of Syrian and Pan-Arab nationalism are combined in discursive and performative ways. The result is to symbolically create a universe of good, patriotic Syrians who—both in Syria and in the diaspora—are being victimized by fanatic, criminal and treacherous terrorists acting as agents of conspiracies supposedly plotted and financed by foreign powers.

## Vernacular Latin American Anti-Imperialism and Nationalism

Since its beginnings, the conflict in Syria has been seen by many Argentinean and Brazilian left-wing parties and social

movements as a new and dramatic confrontation between nationalistic and progressive forces and imperial powers, embodied by the United States and Israel. This interpretation is common to most of the anti-imperialist movements.<sup>8</sup> While Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificado (PSTU) in Brazil and Izquierda Socialista in Argentina became fierce critics of the Syrian regime and supported the Syrian revolution,<sup>9</sup> most other left-wing parties remained faithful to this vision. Ideas of national sovereignty and resistance to imperialist intervention also structured official state discourses on Syria. Thus, Brazil's then-President Dilma Rousseff, during a visit to Russia in 2012, condemned any possibility of American or European intervention in the Syrian civil war, and was silent on Russia's active involvement in the conflict.<sup>10</sup>

Conspiracy theories explaining the role of the United States—through its alliance with Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar—circulated widely among diaspora members. For example, the *Diario Sirio-Libanes* (Syrian-Lebanese Journal) published an article titled "ISIS and Iraqi Crisis...Pentagon Strategies to Topple Syria?" on its website on September 3, 2014. Anti-imperialist imaginaries were also mobilized in strategies of silencing dissent. During a meeting at a Syrian-Lebanese institution in São Paulo, a young man of Christian Syrian descent expressed his sympathy with the Syrian opposition, which made another man of Shi'i Lebanese descent react with outrage, saying, "I always thought that you supported the cause!" thus ending the conversation. The "cause" is used as a general political category that can refer, according to the context, to the Palestinian

Akin, Yigit. *When the War Came Home: The Ottomans' Great War and the Devastation of an Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018).

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Hamilton, Omar Robert. *The City Always Wins* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017).

Nassar, Maha. *Brothers Apart: Palestinian Citizens of Israel and the Arab World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017).

Sheehi, Stephen. *The Arab Imago: A Social History of Indigenous Photography 1860-1910* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

Trenin, Dmitri. *What is Russia up to in the Middle East?* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2018).

national struggle, the opposition to Israeli colonialism and military aggressions or anti-imperialist struggle in the Middle East. Similar uses of the "cause" as a moral category, which implicitly classifies those engaged in it as holders of positive moral qualities, is fairly recurrent.

This perception of the Syrian conflict was also a projection into Syrian realities of South America's historical experience with US imperialism. The anti-imperialist framework was a key element in the mobilization of younger members of the generations born in Brazil. Many of them rediscovered their Syrian or Arab identity after becoming interested in the Syrian conflict within the narrative of an anti-imperialist saga. As anti-imperialist discourses were also an element of Brazilian and Argentinian nationalism, this allowed the youth to articulate and affirm both their diasporic and national identities through their engagement in the transnational arenas organized around Syria.

The image of a "consensual" support of Asad's government is constructed through strategies of political mobilization of local identities and diasporic imaginations, fostering transnational partisan and sectarian discourses and silencing dissent. The current political mobilization has two clear, albeit contradictory, effects: it reinforces symbolic, political and personal ties with an imagined homeland identified as Syria, thus strengthening the diasporic character of these communities; and it fosters a Syrian diasporic identity with more precise boundaries. However, it also inscribes sectarian and political tensions in the very Syrian identity that it claims to promote and defend.

The mobilization of the Syrian-Lebanese communities in Argentina and Brazil around the Syrian revolution and civil war shows how local and transnational elements combine to produce diasporic identities and imaginations. While events, images and ideas from the "homeland" can affect the internal dynamics of diasporic communities, they do so only if they can articulate with elements that matter to the local configuration of these communities. That is why pre-2011 efforts by the Syrian government to mobilize the diaspora in South America, which included the creation of the Ministry of the Expatriates in 2002 and Bashar al-Asad's visit to the region in 2010, mostly failed. It presupposed a clear-cut Syrian identity that was not actually present in the Syrian-Lebanese and Arab continuum.

Conversely, the political mobilization of the Syrian-Lebanese communities during the Syrian conflict has succeeded in tapping into the diasporic imaginary that portrays a stable, prosperous and peaceful Syria under the Ba'ath. Similarly, local religious identities have been mobilized into sectarian frameworks through the construction of narratives of collective victimization fostered by both local institutions and transnational agents. Political alterities are then produced from religious differences and coexistence outside an authoritarian framework is deemed impossible. For the younger members of the Syrian-Lebanese communities and those who rediscovered their Syrian and/or Arab identity through the conflict, the anti-imperialist element in the pro-regime discourses

was a central element that allowed them to construct a diasporic identity fully articulated with their Brazilian or Argentinian identities.

The transformation of the internal dynamics of the Syrian-Lebanese communities in Argentina and Brazil through their mobilization around the Syrian conflict illustrates how diasporic communities are defined by their ability to endure through a process of reinvention over generations. This case also shows how diasporas connect diverse and dispersed communities through the mobilization of material or symbolic links to homelands that are invested with moral dimensions. In this sense, diasporas also constitute imagined communities produced through political, symbolic and moral cosmologies that both belong to and transcend the social and territorial contexts in which they actually exist. ■

## Endnotes

1 The data analyzed in this article was collected by the authors during ethnographic fieldwork between 2011 and 2014.

2 The estimates vary wildly according to who makes them and the context in which they are made. See John Tofik Karam, *Another Arabesque: Syrian-Lebanese Ethnicity in Neoliberal Brazil* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007) p. 10-13.

3 Silvia Montenegro, "The Debate Over Syrian Refugees in Argentina: Reverberations of the War in the Syrian-Lebanese Diaspora," in Sofian Merabet, ed. *In and Out of Syria: The Revolution, the War, and the Refugees* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, forthcoming).

4 Gildas Brégaïn, *Syriens et Libanais d'Amérique du Sud (1918-1945)* (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 2008). [French]

5 Clark S. Knowlton, *Sírios e libaneses: mobilidade social e espacial* (São Paulo: Anhambi, 1960). [Portuguese]

6 Silvia Montenegro, "Alawi Muslims in Argentina: Religious and Political Identity in the Diaspora," *Contemporary Islam* (2017).

7 Montenegro, "The Debate Over Syrian Refugees in Argentina."

8 Yassin al-Haj Saleh, "The Syrian Cause and Anti-Imperialism," *Al-Jumhuriya*, February 24, 2017.

9 Montenegro, "The Debate Over Syrian Refugees in Argentina."

10 "Dilma diz que Síria não pode ser transformada em um novo Iraque," BBC News, December 14, 2012. [Portuguese]

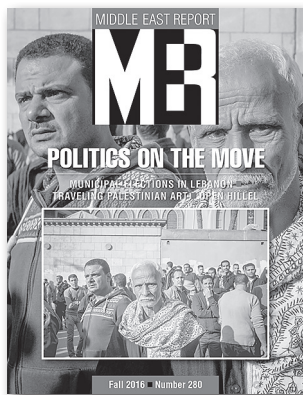


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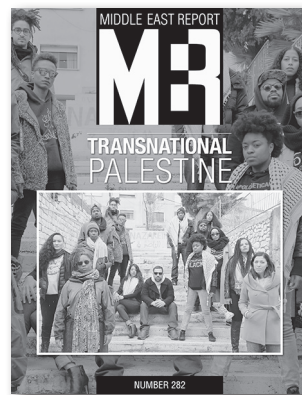
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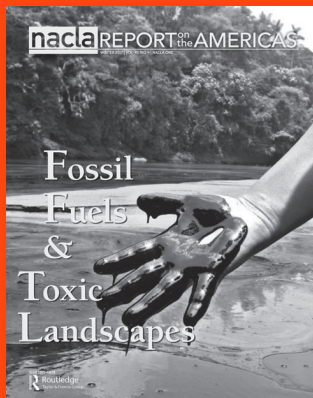
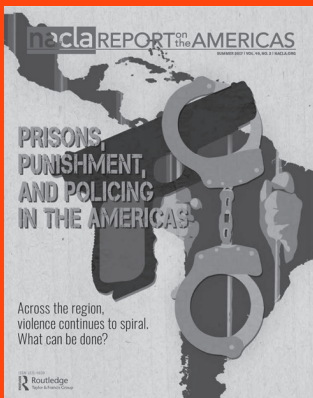
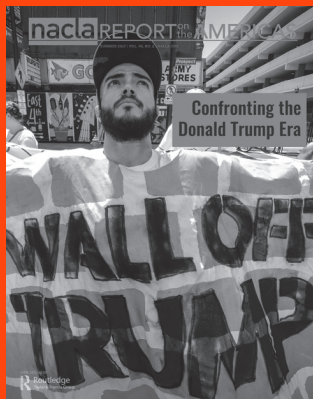
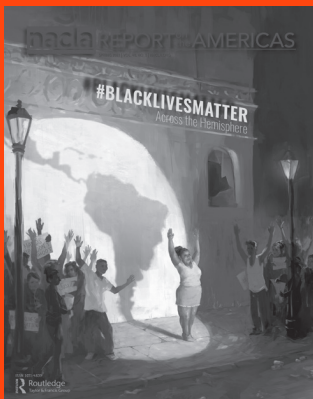
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