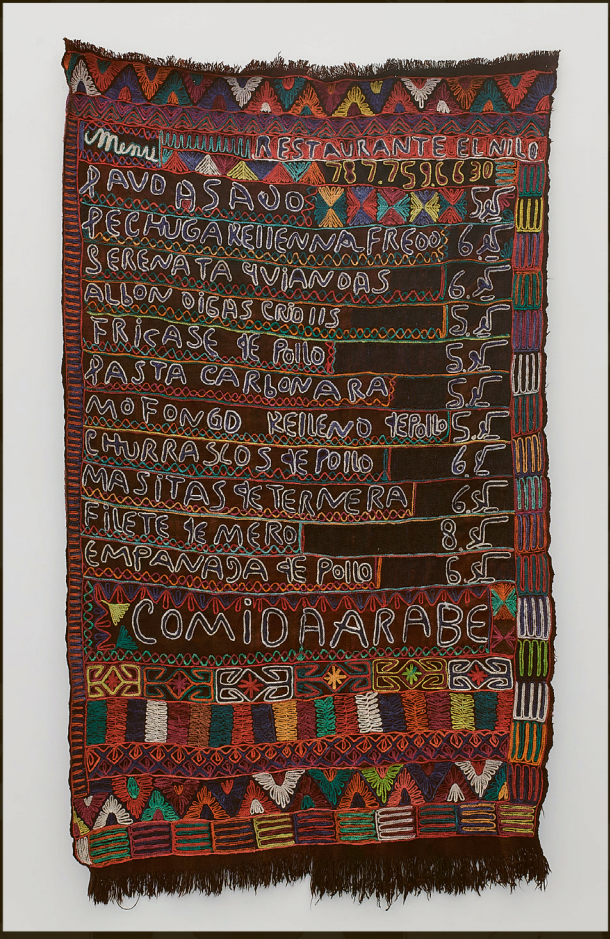
Art and Politics between the Arab World and Latin America



Edited by

LAURE GUIRGUIS AND MARU PABÓN

BRILL

Art and Politics between the Arab World and Latin America

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Neoliberal Brazil (Temple University Press) won awards from the Arab American National Museum and the Brazilian Studies Association and has been translated into both Arabic and Portuguese. With María del Mar Logroño Narbona and Paulo G. Pinto, Karam coedited the volume *Crescent over Another Horizon: Islam in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latino U.S.A.* (University of Texas Press). His most recent book is *Manifold Destiny: Arabs at an American Crossroads of Exceptional Rule* (Vanderbilt University Press). He is currently working on a book project tentatively entitled *Arab Americana in Spanish and Portuguese: An Open Frontier*, which explores audio, print, and visual texts read as *árabe* (Arab) in Spanish and Portuguese which are translated to and from English.

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Tercer Cine: Los documentos de Montreal, 1974 (Rehime-Prometeo, 2014), *Las rupturas del 68 en el cine de América Latina* (Akal, 2016), *Los condenados de la tierra: un film entre Europa y el Tercer Mundo* (Akal, 2022, with Alberto Filippi).

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lished in numerous international academic journals and her notable works include *Herrera, la revolución del orden* (2016), *Combatir con la pluma en la mano. Dos intelectuales en la Guerra del Chaco*: Juan E. O'Leary y Luis Alberto de Herrera (2017, co-author with Liliana Brezzo). Together with Arianda Islas, she has also coordinated the collective publication *Guerras civiles: un enfoque para entender la política en Iberoamérica en el siglo XIX* (2018).

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nuevomundo/85403 and "América como modelo para la actuación de España en el Protectorado en Marruecos. La visión de Rodolfo Gil Benumeya," *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, vol. 6, no 1 (2016). He has also coedited, with Leandro Calle, *Marruecos y América Latina. Viejas y nuevas confluencias* (Santiag de Chile: Centro Mohamed VI para el Diálogo de Civilizaciones, Altazor Ediciones, 2014).

A Note on Transliteration

For transliterations from Arabic, we have followed a simplified version of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*) transliteration rules. However, where Arabic terms and names were transliterated in a specific way by a particular linguistic community, we have not altered the spelling.

Introduction

Laure Guirguis and Maru Pabón

In 1928, Nabih Schamun, José Dial, and Roberto Kouri premiered the film *La Atracción de Oriente* (*The Orient's Attraction*) at the Buenos Aires Grand Splendid Theater and undertook a journey across Argentina to screen their movie—the movie is lost, alas. Born in Lebanon and having migrated to Argentina in the early twentieth century, Schamun, Dial, and Kouri had shot the film in present-day Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey. By displaying their homeland's cultural richness, they intended to challenge the stigma Arabs experienced as *turcos* in their host countries (Balloffet 2020 and, on Kouri's later move to Uruguay, Ehrick 2006). Some forty years later, Argentine filmmaker Jorge Giannoni travelled to Palestine and Lebanon, where he directed and produced a film called *Palestina, otro Vietnam* (*Palestine, Another Vietnam*) (1971), in support of the Palestine Liberation Organization's struggle, considered as part of a global war against imperialism. After this, Giannoni represented Argentina at the Third World Filmmakers Meeting in Algiers (1973), which led to the creation of the Third World Cinema Committee aimed at establishing a tricontinental organization for film distribution (Mestman 2002 and 2015, Hadouchi and Mestman in this volume). Almost ten years ago, the sociologist Anibal Jozami, himself of Lebanese descent, rector emeritus of the Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero (UNTREF, Buenos Aires) and the director of its museums (MUNTREF), founded the art biennial BienalSur, with the Saudi Kingdom participating in the 2023 edition.

These anecdotes bear witness to the rich history of cultural entanglements between the Arab world and Latin America, which span over a hundred years. Still to be written, this history is intertwined with the archives of Arab migration to the Americas, and with the emergence of competing and long-distance nationalist narratives within Arab communities in Latin America. Beyond the lens of diaspora studies, this history is enmeshed in the cultural Cold War and the birth of anti-imperialist and anticolonial struggles, from the advent of the Non-Aligned Movement up to the decline of Third World solidarity networks and the creation of new spaces for South-South connections and political rivalries. This book thus stands at the intersection of the emerging field of studies on Latin American-Middle Eastern relationships, cultural diplomacy, and the politics of art.

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Gathering an international and interdisciplinary team of scholars, this book sets out to write the stories of the many cultural agents who created new bridges between the two regions, and to examine their shifting modes of attachment, belonging, and solidarity. We have organized the chapters in chronological order instead of imposing a thematic grouping. As many themes cut across multiple chapters, we believe that varying sets of connections will light up for each reader. Below, we trace the different courses charted in this project, beginning with the framing concern taken up by all the essays: the politics of art and culture.

New Openings in Arab-Latin American Studies

Since the early 1990s, *mahjar* (diaspora) historians have mapped Arab migrants' circuits and settlements by identifying their assimilation strategies or fears of acculturation in host countries, as well as their evolving modes of politicization (Alfaro-Velcamp 2012, Arsan et al. 2015, Baeza 2014, Balloffet 2020, Funk 2022, Gonzales 1992, Gualtieri 2009, Gutiérrez Rivera 2014, Hyland 2017, Karam 2018, Khater 2001, Klich and Lesser 1998, Klich 1998, Logroño Narbona 2009 and 2013, Logroño Narbona et al. 2015, Pastor 2017, Roberts 2000, Vargas and Suaza 2007). International relations theorists have scrutinized the ties between the two regions in their analyses of Cold War power plays (Karam 2013, Robledo 2018, Sheinin 2012, Velez 2016) and of the recent deepening of cooperation between Latin American and Arab countries, especially the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Lechini and Rabbia 2016, Tawil Kuri 2016). Finally, as well-known Arab writers and literary circles flourished in the Americas from the early twentieth century, world literary studies explored the processes of (dis-)identification and resignification across transcontinental routes (Abdel Nasser 2018 and 2022, Civantos 2006, Fadda-Conrey 2014, Ottmar and Pannewick 2006).

The interdisciplinary and transnational turns in the social sciences and humanities that have taken place since the 1990s have contributed to charting new paths in the study of Middle Eastern-Latin American connected history (Alsultany and Shohat 2013, Balloffet, Padilla and Stites Mor 2019, Karam 2018, Rein, Rinke, and Zysman 2017). The politics of culture thus became a privileged field of enquiry: for instance, a handful of studies have begun to explore Argentina and Chile's cultural diplomacy (Dumont 2018, Vagni 2015), and there are new forms of attention being paid to audiovisual media, considered as sites that make visible the changing figure of the Arab or the Arab Jew in South American cinema and TV series (Aharoni 2017, Al-Attar 2013, Tal 2012 and 2018). In line with the current hypertrophic

attention paid to the Global Sixties and left-wing revolutionary trends—to which we have contributed—a great deal of contemporary scholarship focuses on the cultural Cold War, on Latin American or Arab cultural production committed to transnational solidarity (Bystrom et al. 2021, Djagalov 2020, Hatzky and Stites Mor 2014, Jian et al. 2018, Lee 2010, Mahler 2021, Palieraki 2020 and 2021, Stites Mor 2021 and 2023), and in particular on Third World Cinema (Mestman 2002 and 2015, Shohat 2003).

This collection of essays draws from and broadens these conversations by contrasting the study of cultural diplomacy with that of various artistic networks and individual paths, and by adopting a diachronic perspective that sheds light on the dynamics of rupture and continuity. For we start from the assumption that art and politics do not have an essential nature and that no singular, ahistorical relation between them could therefore be defined (Rancière 2000, Rockhill 2014). As Rockhill would put it, "we always start in the middle, so to speak, in a complex nexus of immanent, historically constituted notions and practices" (Rockhill 2014, 3–4). The authors of this collection therefore locate artworks, art writing, and artists, as well as cultural institutions and political agents, in an intricate cultural history of multi-layered debates and events that have shaped cultural production in and between the Arab world and Latin America since the early twentieth century (Lenssen 2020, Lenssen, Rogers, and Shabout 2018, Maasri 2020, Mikdadi 2008, Mikdadi and Shabout 2009, Shabout 2007, Toukan 2021, Winegar 2006).

In the Arab-Latin American nexus, the history and practices of art have been shaped by, and have shaped, diverse crises of identity—crises at play in the interrelated aporic tensions between colonial modernity and notions of the traditional, nationalism and internationalism, the local and the global, and the homeland and the experience of exile. The aporic tensions between these institutionally constructed notions revolve around the question that lies at the core of the political: the question of community, from (imagined) nations in the making or in search of a definition, both in Latin America and in the Arab world, up to associations or political parties created by Arab migrants in Latin America, and to ephemeral or even alternative forms of being-together, as epitomized in the literary work of Juan José Saer, an Argentine writer from Syrian descent (Guirguis 2024). What kinds of communities have the cultural agents under study mobilized, imagined, or enacted?

The book revolves around three interrelated problematics: art, memory, and in-between communities; cultural practices and the nation; the aesthetics of solidarity and infrastructures of cultural diplomacy during the Cold War.

Shifting Space-Frames and Transcontinental Journeys

The focus on the early and mid-twentieth-century era pulls our attention to the origin region of most Arab migrants to the Americas (today's Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine), to Egypt as a cultural hub during the interwar era due to President Gamal Abdel Nasser's prestige, but also to Algeria and, once again, to Palestine, as emblematic revolutionary nodes and connected revolutionary topoi during the Cold War. On the other side of the Atlantic, our contributions cluster around cultural figures and institutions in several of the countries that received the largest waves of Arab migration: Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico. Castro's Cuba, because of its internationalist commitments and mirroring role as a Third-Worldist leader for national liberation movements in the Arab world, is also a shared space of significance. Noticeably absent, however, are essays that touch on the cultural activities of members of the Arab diaspora in Colombia, Chile, Honduras, El Salvador, or elsewhere in Central America and the Caribbean—omissions we hope the reader will take as invitations to further study. Intellectual commitments often mix uneasily with more worldly concerns like deadlines and limited resources, meaning that comprehensive coverage of all the relevant topics becomes an unfeasible goal. Nevertheless, we have endeavored to bring together interventions that, while grounded in the historical particularities of a certain contact zone, showcase the twentieth century as a period of intense redefinitions and cultural effervescence across the whole of Latin America and the Arab world. The result is a polished image of the twentieth century as a period whose shifting categories of affiliation were tied to events and movements that connected the two regions in ever-deepening ways, and to forms of artful experimentation through which political ideologies, alternative collective identities, and aesthetic movements could be contested or embraced.

The study of the contemporary moment would, of course, open up new paths of investigation, which we hope future researchers will take up. Expanding the scope of observation to the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, which have become central sites of art funding, production, exhibition, and studies in the Arab world, would be an important next step. Many regional institutions are eager to develop a South-South perspective on art history and art practices, and regularly focus their efforts on the Middle Eastern-South American nexus. For instance, in 2013, curator Yuko Hasegawa opened the Sharjah Biennial, *Re:emerge, Towards a New Cultural Cartography*, with a strong commitment to reassessing the Western-centrism of culture and knowledge production, and to rethinking the entangled

histories of the Arab world and Asia through North Africa and Latin America (Sharjah Art Foundation 2013 and 2014). Eight years later, the Sharjah Art Foundation also presented a series of online film screenings entitled *Genealogies in the Middle East and Latin America.* Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia participated in BienalSur 2023, attesting to the kingdom's cultural diplomacy efforts in the framework of the roadmap "Visions 2030" to transform the country (https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/, Freitag 2011, Mirgani 2017). This deepening cultural cooperation is part not only of the overturning of the Arab cultural scene, whose cultural centers have moved from Cairo and Beirut to the Arabian Peninsula, but of the recent strengthening of South-South political and economic ties, as epitomized by the creation, in 2005, of the South American–Arab Countries Summit (ASPA). An expansion of the concerns of this book into the Arabian Peninsula would also allow for a more direct engagement with the histories of militarization in both regions, the connections between which have begun to be studied and thematized by the Puerto Rican-Kuwaiti artist Alia Farid, who has generously allowed us to use one of her artworks as the book's cover image. The piece in question will be discussed at the conclusion of this introduction.

The first waves of scholarship on the history of Arab-Latin American connections mainly focused on Arab communities in South America, with each scholar devoted to the study of one Latin American country. However, this project contends that it is worth re-envisioning Arab migration paths to the Americas as multidirectional: whereas many migrants moved directly to their aimed destination, a town or city where they already had some relatives, many others boarded a ship without having a clear picture of the American continent, a situation sympathetically ironized in Raphäel Confiant's novel *Rue des Syriens* (*Syrian Street*), whose Syrian protagonist arrives in Fort-de-France confused as to why everyone seems to be mispronouncing "Amérique" as "Martinique" (2012). Arab migrants often disembarked in Mexico to tentatively cross the border to the United States, to its East Coast (Regan 2019), and sometimes to its West Coast (Gualtieri 2009). Following the recent literature on the subject, the authors of this book draw attention to the variety of migration and travel paths along transcontinental routes, but also between South American countries, be it to reach their stated destination, to search for other opportunities in neighboring countries, or to flee a war-torn area. For instance, several novels written by Arab-Chileans, in particular Palestinians, abound in narratives of the long trips leading to Chile after crossing Argentina or the Panama Canal and the Andes (El Attar 2017). In her study on the "several different stages of the journey to and within Chile," Heba El Attar also reminds us of Walter Garib's famous novel,

El viajero de la alfombra mágica (*The Magic Carpet Traveler*), tracing the story of the Palestinian family Magdalani. His founder and main character, Aziz, "starts his Latin American journey in Bolivia, where he lives until he has the chance to amass great wealth by collaborating with one of the Bolivian factions involved in the War of the Pacific, at the end of which he must flee with his family to Chile, where he begins once more, building from the ground up until prospering" (El Attar 2017, 598).

As the century progressed, these migratory circumlocutions also interacted with the emergence of new media like the automatic telephone and the radio, which opened up unprecedent channels of communication and creative expression—channels discussed by Diogo Bercito in his chapter on the formation of an Arab listening public in Brazil and the success of Naguib Hankash's music across both sides of the Atlantic. While the establishment of a *mahjar* press and its attendant forms of literary association have been well studied by scholars, and especially by those interested in the US context, we affirm Bercito's call for critical methodologies that can account for the role of non-literary objects in shaping attachments to the homeland as well as new paradigms of the syncretic. John Tofik Karam's chapter on "Arab Brasiliana" explores precisely the craftiness of cultural notables across Brazil and the Arab world at a moment of fervent discursive transformations around notions of the hybrid and "cultural cannibalism" (de Andrade 1928). Moreover, the contributions to this book make clear that the histories of Arab migration to Latin America and the cultural Cold War cannot be separated from one another either at the level of individual trajectories or institutional formations. The figure of the Cuban writer and artist Fayad Jamís, born in Mexico to a Lebanese father and a Mexican mother, is but one example of a cultural agent whose travels and cross-cultural engagements were sparked by the confluence of familial and ideological affiliations, as Pabón recounts in her essay.

Art, Memory, and In-Between Communities

Representations of the past are key in establishing and challenging social orders, as attested to by the design of state policies regarding the curation of, and access to, archives, the writing of history, and the constitution of what counts as patrimony and heritage. Art practices and works of art have thus always been at the heart of states' efforts to shape the representations of the past and to institutionalize expressions and movements considered the most conducive to state objectives. Conversely, artists have at times

elaborated counter-narratives of state or imperial violence and authority. Art practices engaging with the issue of the disappeared are certainly one of the most significant examples of this endeavor in several (post-)dictatorial or post-war countries in the two regions under discussion, and beyond them. Yet, the present volume is concerned with in-between communities and individuals whose paths, agency, and sense of belonging develop in the interplay between the two regions and between varying imperial power relations.

Often mobilized to promote an idealized and at times nostalgic vision of Jews, Christians, and Muslims peacefully coexisting in medieval Spain, Al-Andalus also appears as a recurring symbol in the shaping of Latin American-Arab common past and possible future: "the construction of this discourse of a 'shared identity' and a 'common destiny' has been designed along the twentieth century through the initiative of intellectuals, activists, diplomats, and community leaders from both sides of the Atlantic" (Vagni 2015), from Habib Estefano up to the ASPA and the UNESCO (Vagni 2015, Civantos 2017, Estefanos 1931, Martinez Lillo 2020). A key element in varying imperial and national identitarian narratives, the invocation of 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" (Civantos 2017a). Indeed, the *topos* of Al-Andalus is just one of the many recurring figures prompting us to ask: How have artists and cultural institutions represented shifting modes of belonging, disaffiliation, or solidarity? How have they embraced exclusive definitions of the community or, to the contrary, invented narratives subverting the hegemonic system of dominance often grounded in identity politics and thus, ultimately, in a logic of annihilation of the other?

Vagni's and Jauregui's chapter in this volume sheds light on the Arab community of Córdoba's evolving strategies of commitment to Argentinian history and local political life, as well as to claims of Arabness. Stressing Arab figures' achievements in the host country was a constant struggle during the interwar era, at a time when Arabs had established community associations and even political parties, such as the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) created by Antun Saade (Schumann 2004, Solomon 2022), and developed an array of cultural activities, from the press to the cinema and literature (Akmir 1995, del Amo 2006, el-Attar 2011, Pacheco 2006, Sayda 1956). Beyond the stereotype of the Arab peddler, newspapers published in Arabic and/or Spanish by Arab migrants and their descendants were eager to foreground Arabs' contribution to the development of economic and cultural life, and to the industrialization of their host countries, which was of

special importance in mainly agrarian Argentina. Yet, they also expressed a sense of pride with regard to their region of origin, as did Schamun, Dial, and Kouri, whose journey to premiere their movie, *The Orient's Attraction*, was duly reported on in the newspapers published by Arab migrants, and especially in *El Eco de Oriente* (*The Echo of the Orient*), at the time headed by Najib Baaclini.

Art embodies the infinite shapes of memory and the desire of community, from the monument anchored in strategies of patrimonialization and commemoration (Vagni and Jauregui, in this volume) to the song whose melody and lyrics are transmitted from one generation to another across the ocean (Bercito, in this volume). While many Arab Chileans narrated the journey to Chile, second and third generations of *chilestinos* offer various perspectives on the reverse travel, in their attempts to re-discover Palestine and figure out the multi-layered meanings of this country's present and distant pasts, be it considered as a political cause or as a screen for desires and family scattered memories. Several artists and writers, such as Miguel Littín, Lina Meruane and Claudia Aravena Abughosh, all three Chilean from Palestinian descent, put into play personal and collective remembrances that deconstruct or blur national identities (Littín 2001 and 2005, Meruane 2014).

Cross-regional Cultural Entanglements and the Nation: Between Construction and Contestation

The history of Latin American-Arab world cultural entanglements is a scattered history, one not readily gleamed from the vantage point of any single national archive, and whose cultural forms may or may not have outlived their historical moment. The many languages, archives, and methodologies that appear in this volume are a testament to its richness, as are the diverse entry points of the book's authors into the question of the nation.

In the early twentieth century, as nation-states were taking shape in the Middle East under the tight control of the British and French, Arab migrants in Latin America contended with various modes of Arabism and Ottomanism, including Syrianism and Phoenicianism (Hyland 2011). The newspapers published in Arabic and/or in Spanish during this period attest to Arab migrants' competing political stances on the question of political community (Bruckmayr 2013) and to their involvement in the Arab revival and reform, the *Nahda* (Hamzah 2012, Hanssen and Weiss 2016). Meanwhile, most Latin American countries were struggling to define their national identity and migration politics by giving priority to allegedly modern and progressive ideas

and peoples, hence to populations racialized as white and western Europeans, rather than to natives, black people, and *turcos*. Diplomatic efforts at that time were thus aimed at Europe, and Latin America often found itself torn between influences and at times diverging interests from the United States and Europe (Dumont 2015 and 2018).

Coupled with the social integration of the Arabs—at times an economic success, as Funk rightly highlights in the afterword—and their cultural involvement in Latin America, the decolonization process has significantly enhanced both state-led and individual initiatives fostering cultural and artistic cooperation and influences between the two regions. While the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–1970, r. 1956–1970) drew on the example of Mexican muralism to envision a system of state funding for visual art in Egypt (Nugent, in this volume), Argentinian President Juan Domingo Perón (1895–1974, r. 1946–1955 and 1973–1974) was tirelessly writing letters to Egyptian presidents Muhammad Naguib and then Nasser to express his sympathy toward the Egyptian regime. Bilateral agreements of cultural cooperation were signed between Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, and Latin American countries, and various academic exchanges consequently took shape, as Karam analyzes in his chapter.

Yet, the cross-regional linkage also plays out as a critical and creative milieu: in this volume, Nugent's essay shows how Ewais built on Mexican muralism to reveal the fracture of the Egyptian nation, and to figure the enduring divide between the people and a regime that silenced the people in the name of the people. Other Latin-Arab artists complicated the uncritical identifications with the homeland as a source of pride or even meaning, enabling a dialectic of affiliation and disaffiliation that Silvina Schammah Gesser examines in her chapter on the playwright Ricardo Halac, an Argentine Jew of Syrian descent.

These individual experiments were part of a larger historical dynamic, and all the authors writing on the cultural Cold War had to confront the question of how to reconcile nationalism with internationalism/socialism; at times this question was at the heart of their aesthetic arguments, at others it remained at the margins. The interplay of tensions and convergences between nationalism and internationalism/socialism was indeed not a problem that could be solved. Rather, it constituted an aporia that arose from a particular double bind: from the changing stance of the USSR on this issue in both theory and practice, and from the original sin, so to speak, of post-Second World War internationalism, which ultimately relied on nationalist claims since it took shape in the decolonization process. This aporia structured the debates and the political stances at local, regional, and

international scales in various and complex ways. Casting a critical eye on the long 1960s revolutionary era, the Argentine filmmaker Néstor Suleiman expresses the desire to invent communities beyond ethnic or national identities—a form of "belonging by vocation," as Reali and Manero describe it in this book.

Cultural Diplomacy and the Aesthetics of Solidarity during the Cold War

The Cold War was an era of acronyms, and the chapters in this book devoted to the politics and aesthetics of Third World solidarity are littered with them. The OSPAAAL, UNEAC, FEPACI, and many other consonantal clusters are spelled out and examined by our authors as some of the primary cultural apparatuses sustaining the project of the Third World. In their chapter on links between Arab and Latin American filmmakers, for instance, Hadouchi and Mestman chart how the "New Latin American cinema" came to influence its Arab counterpart via the creation of local film clubs as well as larger, transnational structures like the 1969 Pan-African Cultural Festival in Algiers—highlighting the deep connection between statecraft and cultural diplomacy. This methodological gesture follows an important development in the study of Cold War cultural politics. Over the last decade, many scholars of the cultural Cold War have responded favorably to Vijay Prashad's insistence on not spatializing the Third World (2007), but rather viewing it as a shared ideological project best understood by looking at its constitutive infrastructures. This shift in focus has led to an institutional turn, with researchers across disciplines devoting themselves to tracing the connections between the wide array of organizations, journals, festivals, and conferences that facilitated transitive as well as intransitive encounters between far-flung anticolonial actors (Djagalov 2020, Kalliney 2022, Lee 2010, Mahler 2018, Pabón 2022).

Indeed, beginning with the Bandung Conference of 1955, the 1960s and early 1970s saw the rise of anticolonial movements whose internationalism was constitutive of their nationalism, and vice versa. As noted above, the tensions between these two modes of conceiving of one's political responsibilities found no easy resolution in the form of the postcolonial state and its authoritarian excesses, as the dissolution of the Third World project around the early 1980s evinces (Prashad 2007). Assessments of the real-world effects of Third World solidarity movements and their infrastructures, especially as concerns the Latin American-Arab world nexus, have

emphasized even earlier limitations, such as the minimal impact they had on the lives of ordinary citizens (Morsi 2019). Other analyses of Third World cultural solidarity have taken disillusionment as an aesthetic as well as ideological starting point for projects of literary comparison (Millar 2019). Recognizing the validity of both these perspectives, the chapters in this book concerned with Third-Worldism highlight the ever-transforming significance of identifications and initiatives which, even when they failed to result in hybridized aesthetic currents or organizations that outlived their present moment, continue to shape our understanding of solidarity in the neoliberal era.

The artwork on the cover of our book brings together the history of the Arab diaspora in Latin America with the legacy of the political ties between the two regions. Alia Farid's tapestry, a reproduction of the menu of an Arab restaurant in San Juan, Puerto Rico, forms part of the artist's ongoing project *Elsewhere*, which aims to gather the styles, symbols, and rituals of Arab and South Asian diasporas in Latin America and the Caribbean. Transforming the woven tapestry into an archival form, the project's focus on overlooked migrations intervenes in the writing of history through weaving, literalizing the metaphor of the "social fabric." Working with a team of weavers in Nasiriyya, a city in southern Iraq, Farid's tapestries recover the presence of the Arab and South Asian communities that constitute an integral element of Latin America's distinctive hybridity. The first chapter of this project, from which the menu tapestry is drawn, focuses on the Palestinian diaspora in Puerto Rico, many of whose members are refugees from the *nakba.* Their lives and politics have been shaped by overlapping experiences of colonialism: first in their homeland, then as residents of an American colony.

It is crucial to Farid's process of developing the tapestries that the relationship between reference and output be translational rather than mimetic. Just as Palestinian cultural forms were translated into Puerto Rican ones in the process of migration, so are the resulting objects and institutions translated into a regional idiom of flat weaving and chain stitching. This is a translation *forward*, not a nostalgic return to an origin (Arab content returning to an Arab form). In this first chapter of *Elsewhere*, Farid's tapestries affirm the right of return of all Palestinians. But crucially, they do so from the vantage point of Puerto Rico, meaning in Spanish as well as Arabic. Like many of the artworks discussed in the pages that follow, Farid's piece thus offers us a window into the vernaculars of solidarity—their travels as well as their multi-directional translations.

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CHAPTER 1

"Talk to Me on the Phone Once a Day": Arab Migration to Brazil, Music, and Memory

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Abstract

Taking Nagib Hankach's song "Hakini Al Telephone" ("Talk to Me on the Phone") as a case study, this chapter argues that music was a fundamental aspect of Arab social life in Brazil in the first half of the twentieth century. It also posits that Hankach's music was neither Arab nor Brazilian but rather a digest of both, which helps explain his long-lasting success. I take the idea of "digest" from Oswald de Andrade's seminal art manifesto on "anthropophagy." Finally, this chapter claims that the music that Hankach made in Brazil impacted his homeland in the Levant. This is an intervention in the historiography of Arab migration to Brazil, which to date has privileged the written word to the detriment of sound. There is little material on a figure like Hankach, who played a central role in the diaspora. Born in 1904 in Zahle, in present-day Lebanon, Hankach migrated to Brazil in 1922; he made a career in commerce, but it was his music and jokes that made him famous. Hankach returned to Lebanon around 1955, where he kept writing and singing until he died in 1977. It was Hankach who arranged Khalil Gibran's verses into the song "Aateny El Nay We Ghanny" ("Give Me the Nay and Sing"), which Fairuz famously sang. This chapter draws on written and aural documents that Arab migrants produced in Arabic and Portuguese. It also benefits from oral history interviews, during which interviewees recalled "Hakini Al Telephone" and sang it passionately, reliving years long gone.

Keywords

Brazil – Lebanon – Zahle – Nagib Hankach – popular music – oral history – social memory

Ninety-five-year-old Nádia Sahão still remembers visiting her cousin Salim, who owned one of the few record players in the small town of Ibitinga, in

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the countryside of São Paulo.[1] Sahão's visits happened in the early 1940s when she was in her teens, but this memory persists. So much so that she interrupts our interview to sing one of the songs she would listen to in family gatherings in the Brazilian hinterlands: Nagib Hankach's "Hakini Al Telephone."[2] A month later, Samira Sarquis, ninety-two, recalls the same song during another oral history recording. Sarquis grew up in the larger and more urbanized state capital of São Paulo. Like Sahão, she sings the Arabic lyrics, which she knows by heart after all this time: "Talk to me on the phone once a day, by God, once a day."

The coincidence is both touching and staggering. It has been almost a century since Hankach migrated from Zahle, in present-day Lebanon, to São Paulo and recorded "Hakini Al Telephone." That two elderly women separated by two hundred kilometers from one another have such a strong recollection of the song is evidence of its impact on their generation. This raises questions about the importance of music in producing and maintaining an Arab community in Brazil, one of the countries that received the largest number of Arab migrants at the turn of the nineteenth century to the twentieth—most of which came from what later became the states of Syria and Lebanon.

Taking Hankach's "Hakini Al Telephone" as a case study, this chapter argues that music was a fundamental aspect of Arab social life in Brazil in the first half of the twentieth century. It also contends that Hankach's music was neither Arab nor Brazilian but rather a "digest" of both, which helps explain its long-lasting success. Finally, this chapter shows that the music that Hankach made in Brazil impacted his homeland in the Levant, something which reminds us that Arab migration was never a unidirectional phenomenon but rather involved multiple comings and goings.

My choice to describe Hankach's work as a "digest" of Arab and Brazilian cultures requires some explanation. Many other terms are available to refer to the same phenomenon, among them "hybridization," "fusion,"

1 The author would like to thank the local historian Heloísa Abreu Dib Julien for kindly facilitating access to valuable archives in São Paulo, as well as assisting with contacting members of the community. The author also thanks Prof. Nadim Shehadi for introducing him to Hankach's family in Brazil. Prof. Osama Abi-Mershed and João Gabriel Rabello Sodré offered valuable insights.

2 I transliterated Arabic names according to customary spellings in Brazil. *IJMES* guidelines dictate that the singer's last name should be written 'Hankash.' That is not, though, how local records or the press in Brazil and Lebanon latinized his name. The same applies to song titles.

"borrowing," "translation," and "creolization" (Burke 2009, 34). That said, Hankach's arrival in São Paulo in 1922 coincided with the Semana de Arte Moderna (The Week of Modern Art), the groundbreaking moment when a group of Brazilian artists presented their work and shaped local understandings of modernity. One of those intellectuals, Oswald de Andrade, later defined Brazilian art as "anthropophagy" in the sense that it devoured and digested local and external influences, producing something new. This metaphor is the one that—true to a time and place—best explains what Hankach did with his music in São Paulo.

Below, I draw on oral history interviews and unstructured conversations that I conducted during my fieldwork in Brazil in 2022 and 2023. I also rely on early-twentieth-century books, magazines, and newspapers published in Brazil in Arabic and Portuguese. Moreover, I resort to music recordings of the early twentieth century, most of them in 78 RPM. The goal is not to retrace Hankach's life and work in detail but to reflect on the reasons why people remember him. On a wider scale, this chapter is an intervention in a historiography that has privileged the written word. The seminal works in the field (Knowlton 1960, Truzzi 1997) heavily depend on the few accounts published by migrants in the first half of the twentieth century, chiefly among them Taufik Kurban (1933) and Taufik Duoun (1944). As a result, we know something about the intellectual production of Arab migrants and the history of their ethnic institutions. Other types of sources pertaining to the world of sound, as well as oral histories, have received far less attention, which means that historical accounts still miss textured understandings of Arab migrants' daily, embodied lives.

Anthropologists have been calling for "an aural reflexive turn" which opens possibilities "to think about the enculturated nature of sound" (Samuels et al. 2010, 330). Recently, historians of the Middle East have begun incorporating this approach into their work. In his study of street sounds in modern Egypt, for example, Ziad Fahmy argues that "listening in to the sources brings us closer to the lived contemporaneity of past experience" (Fahmy 2020, 6). Scholars of Arab migration to Brazil, however, are still debating what their subjects wrote and read, sidelining what they said and heard. To date, Arab music has not received the attention it requires. It is time to think about what sounds existed during Arab social gatherings like those in which Hankach performed—a mix of instrumental music, singing, laughter, and applause.

Techniques of oral history like interviews and musical analysis constitute a powerful method for exploring soundscapes. They allow scholars to

unearth social memories and provide a textured understanding of the past. During interviews, Arab migrants and descendants bring up experiences that did not make it to the written archives. When they talk about sounds, they resort to particular discursive practices. Interviewees sing, for example, infusing their words with different emotions and structures. Singing involves switching to Arabic, even if they grew up speaking Portuguese in their households. Talking about sounds, people also convey personal, meaningful messages that otherwise get lost. Among such cases is the touching story that the historian Heloísa Abreu Dib Julien told me about her father, Claudio Zaki Dib, who died in 2022 at age 88. In his last months, this descendant of migrants from Homs, present-day Syria, taught his nurse an old Arabic song that his family had not heard for a long time. Zaki Dib sang passionately: "Talk to me on the phone once a day, by God, once a day."

1.1 Nagib Hankach

Hankach was born in 1904 in the city of Zahle. It was a time and a place of migration. Tens of thousands were leaving the Eastern Mediterranean in the early twentieth century and moving to Brazil, a faraway country that now hosts one of the largest Arab populations outside the Middle East. Zahle was one of their main points of departure. Hankach inhabited a world in which the idea of being Lebanese was more and more tied to the notion of leaving one's land in search of opportunities—in other words, there was a Lebanese "mode of transnational existence" (Hage 2021, 2). Migration affected even those who decided to stay in the homeland, as departures fractured families and the occasional return of wealthy migrants inspired many others to leave.

Hankach's father, Asad Shahin, followed the beaten path and migrated to Brazil in 1910. The stated plan was to return to Zahle bringing back a fortune, something which Asad never did. He settled in Cuiabá, in the western state of Mato Grosso, and like many others dedicated himself to peddling. Hankach joined his father in 1922, motivated by the same ambition.

The words "ambition" and "greed" appear frequently in Hankach's writings. Explaining his decision to migrate, Hankach states that he took the trip "motivated by greed for money," with which he had "a bad relationship" (Sahd 1944, 111). Hankach mentions the episode of his arrival in Santos, the main port on São Paulo's coast, as an example of his arrogance. Hankach writes that he at first rejoiced over the sight of a crowd that he thought was

waiting for him. Later, he realized they were expecting a wealthy Lebanese migrant instead (Hankach n.d., 123–124).[3]

Hankach first settled in Cuiabá. The city, though, was not to his liking, and he moved from there to Goiás and then to São Paulo, which was at that time growing as fast as a mushroom after heavy rain, in Sevcenko's apt metaphor (Sevcenko 1992, 31). São Paulo offered opportunities for ambitious migrants like him. It was there that he stayed for the following three decades, joining a vibrant community of other Arabic-speaking migrants who were opening stores, charities, and newspapers. The same year of his arrival, Hankach helped create the Zahle Club, where Zahlawis like him gathered to play cards, read Arabic periodicals, and recite poetry (Duoun 1944, 288).

In his childhood in Zahle, Hankach had amassed a reputation as a talented impersonator (Safady 1956, 60). His skills in imitating others were a sign of his charisma. One of Hankach's first jobs in São Paulo was selling shirts in Camisaria Colombo, owned by one of his relatives, Aziz Maluf. He excelled in the task. The exception was, perhaps, a particular incident—hilarious as many other episodes of his life—with a Portuguese buyer. Hankach, who barely spoke Portuguese, wanted to say that, if the shirt did not fit him, the man could come back and return it. Instead of saying "devolve" (return it) he said "reforfe." The mistake made it sound like he was referring to a revolver and, therefore, threatening the Portuguese customer. When the confusion was solved, however, the man laughed and became a recurrent client at the shop (Safady 1956, 59).

Although this paper mostly deals with Hankach's music, it would be a misrepresentation of a much more complex character to only treat him as a musician. If one reads the books about Hankach which came out in Lebanon during the 1960s, they all focus on his career as a comedian, not as a singer (Hankach 1962, 1964, n.d.). That is how many people remember him in the homeland and the diaspora. In the introduction of the anthology *Hankash bi-Liratayn* (*Hankach for Two Pounds*), for example, this is how the editor writes about Hankach: "People would laugh at the jokes coming out of Hankach's mouth, or a picture drawn on his expressive face, and they would fall on the ground due to the intensity of their laughter" (Hankach 1962, 6–7). Talking about Hankach during an oral history interview, the Arab descendant Hafez Mograbi, who lives in São Paulo, describes him as

3 Hankach's book *Hankashiyyat Munawwa'a* is undated. It most likely came out after 1961, given the mention of events related to Brazilian politics. More work is necessary to confirm that.

exceptionally "funny" (divertido). Mograbi recalls seeing Hankach perform in the Syrian fraternity Clube Homs and the orphanage Lar Sírio; moreover, he spontaneously mentions "Hakini Al Telephone," like many of the other migrants and descendants I interviewed.

Besides his humor, the editor of the anthology *Hankash bi-Liratayn* praises Hankach's style, arguing that he wrote in "a language stronger than the complicated philosophies or dry theories" (Hankach 1962, 6–7). Hankach benefited from the simplicity of how he talked, sang and wrote. His discursive practices were "simple" in the sense that he often sang in Levantine dialect rather than in a formal register of the language; he also avoided complex grammatical structures or complicated vocabulary, which could alienate his audience. Evidence of Hankach's success in communication is the frequency and level of laughter we hear on the background of many of his recordings. In another anthology, he narrates the day when the editor of a newspaper in Zahle invited him to work with them. Hankach at first refused and said that he struggled with grammar. "Write as you talk and do not be afraid," the editor replied, convincing him (Hankach 1964, 35).

The turning point in Hankach's career as an artist was his 1923 performance in the play *Ibn Hamid*. The task had frightened him. It was only his second time acting, after a short stint in Zahle, and the location was daunting: the Teatro Municipal, São Paulo's most prestigious stage. It was then that the Zahlawi poet Fauzi Maluf gave him words of encouragement (and a shot of cognac). Hankach discovered the thrill of speaking to the public and became a star among the Arabs of São Paulo; so much so that his presence or absence could make or break an event (Safady 1956, 61). His troupe included the actors Adib Saadeh, Jorge Damús, Salim Merhej, Salim Dib, Maria Halabi, Wadih Yunan, and Falalla Sabbag; the musicians were the oud player José Farah, the violinist Bechara Teffaha, and the singer Romeu Féres (Duoun 1944, 262–266).

In the meantime, Hankach kept working in commerce. In 1926, he opened a store in Liberdade Street, downtown São Paulo, which soon went out of business. A few years later, in a more successful venture, the ambitious Hankach opened a tie shop called Fábrica de Gravatas Odeon (Odeon Tie Factory). He owned other shops in the city, often running ads in local Arabic newspapers. One of the last ones was the textile shop Tecelagem Diana, which existed at least until the late 1950s.

The arts, however, were his passion. Hankach not only performed in plays but also sang in Arab social events in São Paulo. Remembering those old days, Hankach writes that he was lucky to count on a generous crowd and that it was his audience who pushed him to record his songs (Sahd

1944, 112). Ambition soon revealed itself again. "I began picturing myself as a colleague of Abdel Wahab and Umm Kulthum," Hankach writes, mentioning two of the most important Arab singers of the twentieth century; "in no time, my name was spinning in many records" (Sahd 1944, 112). As we saw from Sahão's story at the beginning of this chapter, Hankach's name did not spin only in São Paulo's state capital but also in the countryside, which is evidence of a broad appeal.

Hankach faced some resistance in those early days when he decided to explore his musical talents, however. With no formal training, he could not read music sheets, something that led some in the Arab community in Brazil to discredit and mock him (Safady 1956, 76). Nevertheless, Hankach went forward and released his first album in 1927; a year later, the Rádio Educadora Paulista broadcast his work for the first time; the chosen song was "Hakini Al Telephone," a groundbreaking track to which we will return momentarily (Safady 1956, 79).

In many of his recordings, Hankach addresses his lack of musical training. The track "Kossat Sanat 29 Wal Azifin" ("The Story of the Year 1929 and the Musicians"), for example, is a quite telling joke about a day in 1929 when Hankach went to a studio to record an album. The sound engineer asked Hankach what his voice range was, to which he did not know how to answer. The man suggested Hankach was a *tenor ligero*. "Your mother is a *tenor ligero*, your father is a *tenor ligero*," Hankach replied, thinking it was an insult and reacting as such. Afterward, Hankach was so proud of his newfound title that he wrote on his business card "Nagib Hankach: Tenor Ligero." Or at least that is how the joke goes. The idea here, regardless of whether the episode happened or not, is that Hankach was aware of what people said about his musical knowledge. More than that: he found the whole issue comical.

It is unclear why, after so much success in Brazil, Hankach decided to return to Lebanon. Throughout his life in São Paulo, he visited his homeland on several occasions, sometimes for long periods. His grand-nieces Norma and Márcia Abumansur remember him as a person who was always in transit—sometimes in Zahle, other times in São Paulo. Jurj Saydah guessed that Hankach simply missed Lebanon (1964, 553). The nostalgia for the homeland—a feeling expressed by the Arabic word *ghurba*—is ever present in the family lore. They say, for example, that Hankach's sister became ill in Brazil in part because she was far from Lebanon, to which she finally returned to die. Whatever his reason, it seems that Hankach finally settled in Lebanon around 1955. Based in Chtaura, Mount Lebanon, he managed a luxurious hotel, told his jokes on television, met Lebanese divas like Fairuz and

Sabah, and contributed to the local press (Saydah 1964, 553). Hankach kept visiting Brazil, however, even after leaving the country. On one of those many trips, in the early 1960s, he flew to Rio de Janeiro at the bequest of the Baalbek International Festival to prepare the ground for the arrival of a group of Lebanese artists in Latin America (Hankach n.d., 127). Hankach died in 1977. Although his death coincided with the Lebanese civil war (1975–1990), he died of natural causes. His family—both in Brazil and Lebanon—could not recall the specific illness that took him.

1.2 "Hakini Al Telephone"

Even though Safady claims that "Hakini Al Telephone" first came out in 1927 (Safady 1956, 79), the earliest evidence I found dates from 1928. This information, however, requires some clarification due to the nature of the source. Many 78 RPM records from the early twentieth century did not carry any information about their release dates. Historians of music in early-twentieth-century Brazil often need to compare different recordings to arrive at an approximate date, which is what I did here, assisted by the generous disc collector Henrique Tabchoury, who is himself of Arab descent. "Hakini Al Telephone" was numbered 10,255 in Odeon's series. Since we know that disc 10,251 was released on August 10, 1928, Hankach's disc could only date from that same year. This does not mean, however, that there was no earlier version of "Hakini Al Telephone." Hankach released at least three discs with Brasilphone before 1927, with the sponsorship of the Arab-owned store Casa dos Três Irmãos (The House of the Three Brothers) (Tabchoury 2023). One of them may have included the track. It would explain Safady's claim that the song came out in 1927, but there is no further evidence.

That said, the song surely came out in the late 1920s, shortly after Hankach had arrived in Brazil. It may have therefore been his first success. Hankach was certainly not a one-hit wonder, though. The authoritative Instituto Moreira Salles' disc catalog has information about at least nineteen tracks in which Hankach appears as a performer, the earliest of them being "Yabladi Leh Tebkialaya" ("Oh My Country, Why Do You Cry Over It?") (Odeon 10405), from 1929. Drawing on his collection and his knowledge of the sector, Tabchoury believes Hankach may have released around thirty recordings in Brazil. Unfortunately, given the incipient state of the research on Arab music in Brazil, there is almost no information on which artists sang and played on Hankach's earliest tracks, including "Hakini Al

Telephone." Not all of the recordings were songs, moreover. Hankach also told jokes and anecdotes on many of his discs.

Of all the tracks that Hankach recorded in Brazil, "Hakini Al Telephone" caused the longest-lasting impact, judging by how often Arab migrants still remember—and sing—its lyrics. It does not seem like the answer to the song's longevity lies in its verses, however. The song is mostly a passionate appeal for a woman to call a man. It was not that different from other romantic tracks of the time.

Below is a translation of the original Arabic lyrics. Due to poor audio quality, a few sentences remain unclear, which I have placed between brackets. At least one other version came out decades later with slightly different words.[4] Many in Brazil, though, remember the first iteration.

Talk to me on the phone, once a day
By God, once a day
Let me hear your voice every day
Oh, girl, you are my eyes

Tell me what is on your mind
Your fondness burned my heart
I just wanna know what happened
For you to get so angry with me
I would like to see you in a garden [...]
You and I [...] so that we could speak freely

Talk to me on the phone, once a day
By God, once a day
Let me hear your voice every day
Oh, girl, you are my eyes

Out of kindness, you loved me
Without reason, you left me
Your beauty drives me insane
Oh sweet one, oh Zahlawiyya

Because of you, I hate myself
You alone occupy my head

4 The song appears in the disc 'Hankashiyyat Munawwa'a,' released by *Voix de l'Orient* in 1997.

All my money is at your service
Just let me see you, oh Homsiyya

Talk to me on the phone, once a day
By God, once a day
Let me hear your voice every day
Oh, girl, you are my eyes

If the lyrics of "Hakini Al Telephone" are not particularly inspiring, the secret of the song's longevity must be elsewhere. Its success most likely resulted from Hankach's ability to make sense of the Arab community's context in Brazil. In other words, Hankach "digested" Arab and Brazilian cultures, adapting to and successfully communicating with his environment. That is primarily evident in two passages of the song.

First, Hankach mentions a couple of Levantine types. The song talks about a Zahlawiyya (a woman from Zahle) and a Homsiyya (one from Homs). These demonyms would immediately ring bells in downtown São Paulo, where Hankach worked. Zahle and Homs were two of the cities that sent the most migrants to Brazil at the turn of the century. Everyone listening to him knew someone from those places or at least was aware of their sizable presence in the community. Furthermore, it may be the case that Hankach is taking Zahle and Homs as metonyms of the lands of Lebanon and Syria, respectively. The overall sense, among Arabs in Brazil, is that someone from Lebanon tends to be wealthier than someone from Syria. There is no way of knowing what exactly Hankach meant by those two types but he likely had a specific audience in mind when writing "Hakini Al Telephone," that is, the Arab community of Brazil.

Secondly, allusions to the telephone make complete sense given the context. Brazil created its major phone service Companhia Telefônica do Brasil (Brazil's Telephone Company) in 1923, one year after Hankach's arrival. Automatic phone services—which did not need an operator—became available in São Paulo in 1928 (*Folha da Noite* July 13, 1928, 3), right when the song came out. Hankach's audience was aware and excited about the prospect of being able to call someone on the phone, perhaps even daily. Along with the radio, the automatic phone allowed faster and more frequent communication, which in turn contributed to the sense that people shared a specific time and place—one of the central elements of community-making. Hankach's allusion to such a transformative technology could explain its emotional impact.

There is yet a third important element, which is the fact that Hankach sang "Hakini Al Telephone" in the Levantine dialect. Typically, Arab songs

are in local dialects, particularly Egyptian or Levantine. Yet, there is a tradition of Arab music and songs in standard or classical Arabic, especially those songs based on poetry, some of which were also part of Hankach's repertoire. Although many Arab migrants in Brazil were intellectuals, including prominent graduates of the Syrian Protestant College, many were uneducated and could struggle to respond to lyrics in standard Arabic. "Hakini Al Telephone" appealed, in a sense, to Arabs of different backgrounds, fore-fronting their common ethnic origin rather than their class. Arabic dialects, moreover, are localized, in the sense that they appeal to specific communities. Migrants from Syria and Lebanon could more easily connect to Hankach's language than those who had come from Egypt and Iraq. The choice of dialect reflects the prevalence of Levantine migrants in Brazil. It also reinforces their hegemony in the process of constructing an Arab identity that progressively became reduced to "Syrian-Lebanese," which is how the community itself refers to the diaspora nowadays (in Portuguese, "sírio-libanês").

There are, of course, aspects of the success of "Hakini Al Telephone" that go beyond the scope of this chapter, such as the arrangement and even Hankach's sheer luck, which can often determine an artist's career. Nevertheless, for reasons that I will go on to explain, "Hakini Al Telephone" should be considered an Arab-Brazilian song and, as such, it was particularly suited to the cultural world inhabited by Arab migrants in Brazil. This evidences the effectiveness of "digesting" different cultural elements into new forms. We can wonder how successful Hankach would have been if he had sung solely about Levantine cultural realities or, conversely, if he had instead adopted purely Brazilian styles, themes, and vocabularies.

1.3 Arab Music in Brazil

Arabic-speaking people like Hankach started migrating from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Americas in the 1870s. The context of their departure is contextualized elsewhere in this book. This section focuses instead on the role of culture and, more importantly, music in the formation of their communities.

Upon their arrival in Brazil, Arabs mostly settled in the states of São Paulo, Minas Gerais, and Rio de Janeiro, although they spread themselves throughout all other regions as well. In those places, particularly where there were large numbers of them, Arabs established their micro-societies, which earlier scholars described as "enclaves." Such societies were places in

which Arabs were able to circulate and socialize among themselves, say, speaking Arabic and eating Levantine food; they shielded themselves from host societies that were often hostile to their traditions (Fausto 1998, 31). In São Paulo, the best example is the downtown region around 25 de Março Street. The equivalent in Rio de Janeiro is Alfândega Street, also in the historic downtown area.

In these micro-societies, cultural activities played a fundamental role in defining and reinforcing ethnic and national boundaries. That was at a time when these categories were in transformation not only in the diaspora but in the homeland as well. If Arabic-speaking migrants had arrived as "Ottomans" or "Turks," they later became "Arabs," "Syrians," and "Lebanese."

Music was one such cultural practice. Writing about the Arab community in the United States, Anne Katherine Rasmussen argues that their musical activity was "a medium through which ethnic identity, national identity, and community identity [were] constructed and projected" (Rasmussen 1991, 401). In that context, musicians acted "like grandmothers who pass down family recipes and remember holiday practices" as well as "agents of ethnicity [...] responsible for remembering and generating a complex of social traditions, linguistic patterns, and cultural aesthetics" (Rasmussen 1991, 401). The same is true of the Arab community in Brazil, where music events likewise reinforced aspects of "Arabness" and communicated them to the group.

It was not only Arabs who were producing and maintaining ethnic identities through music, it must be said. On a national scale, during the first half of the twentieth century, popular music was a decisive forum for debate over what constituted "Brazilianess" (McCann 2004, 5). These processes, furthermore, were not only happening simultaneously but rather mutually constituted each other, as debates over migration helped define Brazil's national identity, which intellectuals and officials often articulated in contrast to migrant identities (Lesser 1999, 38).

The importance of music to Arab socialization in Brazil is made clear by the frequency with which it comes up during oral history interviews. For example, take the testimony of Sílvia Antibas, 57, who descends from migrants from Marjayun and Antakia. When speaking of her parents' wedding, Antibas mentions the fact that her relatives rented three train wagons to travel from São Paulo to Pederneiras, some 320 km away. During the whole journey, Antibas' uncle Lian played the oud.

Samira Sarquis also mentions music when talking about her family's countryside home, which they called al-Mimas after the region in Homs from which they came. According to Sarquis, whenever the Syrian

community gathered in that family property in Embu, thirty kilometers away from São Paulo, her father's cousins would play music: Mussalam played the oud and William sang. Hankach's work was most certainly part of the repertory, as Sarquis' memory of the track suggests. The whole family sang along during those cheerful retreats from the city, Sarquis says.

Besides those informal settings, music was also present in official gatherings. The Arabic press in Brazil is full of information about musical events. For instance, the August 31, 1933, issue of *Azzikra* (*The Memory*), a newspaper published by the Muslim community, details a party at the prestigious Clube Homs in São Paulo. In between speeches, there were several Arab music performances by local artists like Ilya Najat, Jurj Karkar, and Rafiq Farah. It is clear, from *Azzikra*'s report, that such presentations mattered to Arab migrants in Brazil and their descendants, being a central part of their social lives. The lack of interest of scholars in the following decades, however, made names like Najat, Karkar, and Farah unfamiliar even to active members of the Arab community.

Arab recordings were widely available as well, allowing Arab migrants and their descendants to maintain their cultural and emotional ties to the homeland. A similar scenario existed in the Arab community in the United States, where recordings "helped them construct their new sense of community in terms of who they are and what they would like to be" (Racy 2011, 51). Claiming an Arab identity in Brazil included the gesture of picking up a record, placing the needle on its tracks, and enjoying lyrics in Arabic—like Hankach's telephone song.

Racy suggests that Brazil did not have an Arab record industry comparable to that of the United States (Racy 2011, 51). It seems too early, however, to draw such parallels, particularly given that we do not know how many Arab discs were recorded in Brazil in the first place. Scholars tend to underestimate the role of the Arab diaspora in Brazil in part because of a lack of primary and secondary sources, and also in part due to a predisposition to sideline communities other than those established in the United States. Authors have claimed, for instance, that Arabs in Brazil did not produce impactful or original Arabic literature in comparison with that of those settled in the United States (Ostle 1992, 223), something with which I profoundly disagree, based on the tens of Arabic newspapers, magazines, novels, poetry anthologies, and even plays that I have located and read in the formal and informal archives of the Arab community in Brazil. Brazil had more Arabic periodicals than the United States in the early decades of the twentieth century (Bruckmayr 2014, 247). Even later in the century, there were so many authors writing in Arabic in Brazil that, in 1970, the magazine *al-Marahil*

(*The Stages*) managed to gather almost a hundred poems celebrating the life of Rose Maluf in the anthology *Muqattifat al-Nujum* (*Harvester of Stars*). Rose was the wife of the Arab poet Chafic Maluf, and a celebrity herself.

It is undeniable that Arabs recorded music in Brazil, and that their songs had an important impact on the consolidation of their communities. The challenge, as mentioned above, is that many of the early discs are not dated. Moreover, while Brazilian music scholars have cataloged some of the country's productions in Portuguese, they have sidelined Arabic, a language they rarely speak. Nevertheless, there is evidence of record companies producing Arab records as early as the 1920s. The first one seems to have been Brasilphone, followed by Arte-fone, Columbia, RCA Victor, Odeon, Continental, Star, and Baida do Brasil (Tabchoury, 2023). Baida do Brasil is an interesting case, as its name invoked the famous Lebanese company Baida but was instead owned by a migrant named Constantino F. Baida. A few of Baida do Brasil's records are preserved, for example, in the informal library of the Orthodox Cathedral of São Paulo—including discs like "Wainik Ya Laila" ('Where Are You, Laila?') and "Limin Bitruf Jufunik" ("To Whom Do You Bat Your Eyes?") (P-347-B), all of which were performed by the Conjunto Artístico Libanês ("Lebanese Art Ensemble") under the direction of Antoine Krayde. I suspect that scholars may find many other recordings by digging up the many libraries of Arab ethnic institutions in Brazil. Ideally, this work should go beyond the cities and states of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, which were the most important nodes but not at all the only ones.

Shop owners like Jorge Yazigi and Miguel Nassif Farah also imported Arab records in the early twentieth century. According to Yazigi's account, these two traders together brought 150,000 discs over the course of twenty years (Duoun 1944, 270). Farah put up an advertisement in the April 1933 issue of the magazine *al-Sharq* (*The East*) appealing to the Arab community's nostalgia, something which underscores the connection between consuming music and fostering an ethnic identity abroad. "Do you want to go back to those beautiful mornings you spent in your village?", the Arabic piece asks the reader. Expecting an affirmative answer, it promotes the album "Dawn," by the Lebanese singer Laura Daccache. "Listen and close your eyelids, feeling the morning breeze" (*al-Sharq* April 1933, 66). Casa Farah, in São Paulo, boasted it could ship anywhere in Brazil (Racy 2011, 50). Such pieces of advertisement were recurrent in the local Arabic press.

By the 1950s, Arab migrants in Brazil and their descendants could also listen to their music on the radio. Among their options were the daily shows "Páginas Orientais" ("Oriental Pages") in Rádio Excelsior, "Recordações do Oriente" ("Memories of the Orient") in Rádio Clube de Santo André

and "Voz do Oriente" ("Voice of the Orient") in Rádio América (*al-Burkan* October-November 1956). The Lebanese descendant Fátima Soubhia, who was 52 years old when we met in 2023, says her father used to sit by their radio in São Paulo to listen to such Arabic broadcasts. "I can still hear the anchor's voice if I think about it," Soubhia says. She also recalls how the whole family would often sit around the record player and listen together to the songs of Romeu Féres, who released his work in the 1950s. Among Féres' discs was the pioneering 1956 "Joias Árabes," one of the very first LPs recorded in Brazil in Arabic. Soubhia's mentions of Arab radio shows, recordings, and phone conversations are an important reminder of the role of new technologies in mediating the formation of an Arab-Brazilian community. Those were some of the mediums of the cultural "digestion" this chapter discusses.

1.4 Anthropophagy

This was the world that Hankach inhabited. There was no shortage of Arab music in the public or private spheres, something which makes his accomplishments all the more remarkable. It is Hankach's work—particularly "Hakini Al Telephone"—that migrants and their descendants remember the most when we meet, even though his name rarely features in articles and books.

One explanation for the resilience of Hankach's fame is his ability to "digest" Arab and Brazilian traditions, as already suggested above. This idea appears repeatedly in Antenor Salim Sahd's book *Hankash Adiban wa-Fannanan* (*Hankach, Writer and Artist*) (Sahd 1944).[5] This bilingual volume, published in São Paulo, collects Hankach's writings. In his introduction, Sahd discusses Hankach's "mixing of Arab music and Western music" and heralds a "new era in which Arab music is liberated from all the sterile traditions and their restrictions" (Sahd 1944, viii).[6] Sahd credits Hankach for the renewal of a tradition that until that moment was—in his

5 Sahd was born in Brazil in 1892 to Levantine parents. He learned Arabic and joined the prestigious literary group Liga Andaluza, which was based in São Paulo (Saydah 1964, 548).

6 Sahd's bilingual book has different page numbers for its texts in Arabic and in Portuguese. It is, in effect, two books in one. To avoid confusion, I decided to use Roman numerals to refer to the pages in Arabic. Whenever I refer to the pages in Portuguese, I use Hindu-Arabic numerals.

understanding—destined to fade. In Sahd's analysis, the renovation of Arab music meant mixing Eastern and Western instruments, tonalities, and arrangements, creating what this chapter has described as a "digest" of cultures.

This same notion appears in several of the news articles that Sahd gathered from major Brazilian newspapers, all of which were keenly aware of Hankach's work. Writing in *Estado de São Paulo* (*São Paulo State*) in 1944, João Gennari describes Hankach as "an entrepreneurial young spirit who tasked himself with the sublime artistic task of renovating Arab music" (Sahd 1944, 7). Raul de Polillo writes in *Correio Paulistano* (*Paulistano Post*) that Hankach's work was "Lebanese and strongly occidentalized" (Sahd 1944, 14). Curiously, Polillo praises Hankach's amateurism and suggests that it was precisely his dilettante knowledge that allowed him to revolutionize Arab music (Sahd 1944, 14). In an undated and unsigned piece, yet another author argues that Hankach's music was different than other Arab works—and better for what it is worth—because it was "familiar to us," that is, to Brazilians not of Arab descent (Sahd 1944, 18). There are several similar pieces in Sahd's edited volume. The idea that Hankach revolutionized Arab music by infusing it with Western elements was remarkably recurrent. Here, "anthropophagy" explains his success among Brazilians too.

Since Hankach had no musical training, he sometimes worked with the prestigious and prolific Brazilian arranger Gabriel Migliori. The song "Aateny El Nay" ("Give Me the Nay"), in which they collaborated, is a telling example of Hankach's "digestion" of Western and Eastern components. Racy mentions, in this regard, the track's "use of Western symphonic instruments in addition to an oud adherence to the minor tonality; and the application of harmonic textures, particularly in the instrumental passages" (2011, 50). The song, moreover, took its lyrics from a poem by Khalil Gibran, a Lebanese writer who famously migrated from Bsharri to the United States. The "anthropophagy" went even further, as Hankach based part of his song's melody on the Uruguayan track "La Cumparsita," one of the most played tangos to date (Racy 2011, 50).

Something similar happens in the song "Ya Marhaban Bel Kamar" ("Welcome, Moon"). The track includes a one-minute-long introduction in which Hankach talks about his creative process. Hankach explains that he took the lyrics from the Lebanese poet Said Akl.[7] Moreover, he acknowledges that he

7 Said Akl was well known among Arabs in Brazil; he was translated into Portuguese (Akl 1971).

is not a musician. Hankach compares his work to that of someone who visits a garden of roses and picks up a few flowers, in the sense that he gathers inspiration from many sources and synthesizes them in his music. That is how Hankach explains that his song's introduction is based on the classic Gioachino Rossini's *Barber of Seville*. The first seconds of "Ya Marhaban bel Kamar" are an excerpt from that opera's overture. The mixture of a Lebanese poem with a traditional Italian opera, done by a migrant, is more evidence of Hankach's "digestive" skills.

Hankach's work, therefore, was not defined nor bound by particular national borders. Rather, it transcended them. A further indication of this transnational nature is the fact that the Rahbani brothers later rearranged the song "Aateny El Nay," which is now one of the most recognizable tracks of Lebanon's diva Fairuz. Whenever this song plays it bears witness to how Arab migration did not only affect host countries. Lebanon and Syria were also transformed as a result of the mass movement of people.

Regarding Hankach's work in "digesting" Arab, Brazilian, and other musical elements, it is worthy of note how there is no evidence that his peers thought he was diluting or polluting the traditions they had brought from the homeland. Innovation was in fact celebrated. Rasmussen identifies a similar process, albeit occurring elsewhere, in which Arab music transformed itself in the United States. The role of pioneering musicians was precisely that of defining tradition for the broader community (Rasmussen 1991, 4), something which holds for the Brazilian context.

1.5 Conclusion

Had I limited my research only to written sources, this chapter would not exist. Written words can only go so far in informing historians about the past. It was only when I sat down with Arab migrants and their descendants in Brazil that I comprehended Hankach's impact on that community. His songs—particularly "Hakini Al Telephone"—survived the test of time, reappearing in the homes of people like Nadia Sahão and Samira Sarquis. It gave meaning to Zaki Dib's last months, a powerful testament to its relevance.

This chapter was an attempt to make sense of the affective attachment to a particular artist and song. In the process, it presented three main arguments. The first of them is that music was a fundamental aspect of Arab social life in Brazil during the first half of the twentieth century. We see evidence of this in migrants' stories about their past, which include visits to relatives to listen to Arab records, for example. We also understand music's centrality to Arab social life when we read in local newspapers the

descriptions of their social events, marked by musical performances. The many advertisements of Arab record shops constitute yet another type of evidence. There existed a sizable Arab music industry in Brazil, with several labels releasing discs and advertising them as medicine to migrants' *ghurba*—that is, their feeling of being out of place.

The second argument presented in this chapter was that Hankach's music was a "digest" of both Arab and Brazilian elements. This "anthropophagy" is prominent throughout Hankach's career. One of his songs borrows from a famous Uruguayan tango. Another one draws on an Italian opera. Critics and audiences praised Hankach for renewing an Arab musical tradition they perceived as stagnant. "Digestion" was one of the keys to the endurance of social memories about Hankach.

Finally, this chapter argued that Hankach's work was not confined to the national borders of Brazil. Migration is not a unidirectional event. Arabs circulated throughout different parts of their diaspora in the Americas, crossing national borders. More to the point here, migrants sometimes moved back to the Eastern Mediterranean, which was Hankach's case. Hankach brought with him an experience of "anthropophagic digestion" that remained productive in Lebanon. His song "Aateny El Nay," which the Rahbani brothers later re-arranged and which Fairuz sang, is the most eloquent evidence of this. Every time someone listens to this track—say, in a coffee shop in Mount Lebanon—they are also listening to the echoes of a rich world of migration. Gibran, who wrote the lyrics, migrated from Bsharri to New York. Hankach, who first arranged it, went from Zahle to São Paulo and drew inspiration from a popular Uruguayan tango. When Fairuz sang it in the homeland, "Aateny El Nay" had already traveled throughout the world.

Oral History Interviews

Heloísa Abreu Dib Julien. São Paulo. March 28, 2022.
Hafez Mograbi. São Paulo. August 3, 2022.
Fátima Soubhia. São Paulo. February 13, 2023.
Sílvia Antibas. São Paulo. March 20, 2023.
Nádia Sahão. Londrina. April 20, 2023.
Samira Sarquis. São Paulo. May 4, 2023.
Henrique Tabchoury. Telephone. July 9, 2023.
Norma Abumansur. Video call. July 20, 2023.
Marcia Abumansur. Video call. July 20, 2023.

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CHAPTER 2

The 1910 Centenary Plaque: The Memory and Heritage of Arab Communities in Córdoba, Argentina

Juan José Vagni and Julia Solana Jáuregui

Abstract

In 1910, the Arab community in Córdoba donated a commemorative plaque to the provincial government to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of Argentina's May Revolution. This sculptural piece by the artist of Syrian origin, Jorge Batica, connects the Argentinian Centenary with the history of Arab immigration since the mid-nineteenth century. This art piece also features a wide variety of symbols: the flag and the shields of the Ottoman Empire, the Sultan Mehmed V *tughra*, as well as other inscriptions in the Arabic language. The plaque lay forgotten for many years in the corridors of the former provincial government office, and it was rediscovered during the recent restoration activities in the building. This rediscovery triggered new processes of resignification and the remanufacturing of memory (Nora 1984, 1987, 1992). The plaque embodies the memory of Arab communities in Argentina, from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present. This chapter studies the different processes of resignification that Batica's plaque underwent: from its creation to its recognition as a valuable historical asset in the present. It draws on Batica's own written records and the press archives of the period of the Centenary, as well as on local and national legislation and articles which describe these processes and the specific symbologies of the plaque.

Keywords

Cultural identity – Arab communities – collective memory – historical heritage – Córdoba – Argentina

In 1910, the community of Arab immigrants living in Córdoba donated a commemorative plaque to the provincial government as part of the celebrations of the hundredth anniversary of Argentina's May Revolution. It

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was a sculptural piece by an artist of Syrian origin, Jorge Batica. The plaque shows a series of symbols summarizing historical events such as the country's Centenary and Arab immigration towards the end of the nineteenth century. After it was installed, the plaque lay forgotten for many years in the corridors of the provincial government's old office; during the restoration of the building in 2011, it was rediscovered. The piece of art immediately called the attention of the Arab community and its leaders; it triggered a desire to rebuild their image and history. The plaque was reclaimed as a symbol of identity, receiving the names of "the Great Arab Plaque" and "the Centenary Plaque." It was in this context that political actors at the national and local levels, as well as scholars, Turkish and Arab diplomats, Arab diasporic organizations, and the artist's descendants all interceded to begin the process of patrimonializing the plaque—transforming it into heritage.

During the twentieth and twenty–first centuries, these actors collectively set in motion several actions aimed at redefining the role of the Arab community in Argentina's political and cultural scene. Consequently, in 2021 president Alberto Fernández signed Decree 560, which proclaimed the plaque an asset of national historical interest. Building on Pollak's notion of the "memory frame" (Pollak 2006), we argue that the plaque constitutes a material memory frame for the Arab communities, from the beginning of the twentieth century until today.

By analyzing the events associated with the plaque and by taking into account the different sets of participants and epochal contexts, we aim to decipher the diverse and changing connections among identity, public recognition, memory, culture, and politics involved in the resignification process. We set ourselves the task of finding answers to the following questions: How do the plaque and its resignification offer a novel point of view into the transformation of the Arab communities in Córdoba and Argentina? What are the connections between the different actors' actions and interests for the material and symbolic creation of the plaque? What were the political, cultural, and identity-based dimensions needed to build the memory of Córdoba's Arab community during the different stages of the plaque's resignification process? What collective imaginaries and social representations, in 1910 and the present, catered to the resignification process so as to elevate the plaque's importance in the public agenda? How did the diverse commemorations of the plaque work towards legitimizing a discourse that defined the meaning of Arab identities in local and national public spaces?

To summarize, the aim of this chapter is to analyze the resignification processes that Batica's plaque underwent: from its creation until it was recognized as an asset of national historical interest. The chapter will discuss a local case study drawn from the history of Córdoba, one of the most important cities in Argentina from both a political and economic standpoint. We will focus on the role of the city of Córdoba during the process of constructing collective identity and memory, a process which in turn sheds light on significant bonds of cooperation with Arab actors and groups in Buenos Aires.

Our work has been structured in four stages. We first begin by introducing the historical context of Arab migration to Argentina and particularly to Córdoba. Second, we focus on the creation, placement, and promotion of the Centenary Plaque. Third, and as our main contribution, we study the ever–changing evolution of self-representation, identity, and collective memory surrounding this piece of art in the context of the relevant Arab communities throughout several decades. Finally, we investigate the plaque's involvement in the process of reshaping memory, its resignification, and its subsequent patrimonialization.

This chapter draws its conclusion from the analysis of several archives, such as Batica's own written records and the press articles published during the period of the Centenary. We also address the provincial and national legislations produced during this period, relevant newspaper articles, the symbologies of the plaque itself, and secondary literature about the Arab diaspora in Argentina. In order to closely define the objective and addresses the processes of resignification surrounding the construction of a collective Arab memory around "the Great Arab Plaque," we find it relevant to refer to the already established conversations on identity, memory, and heritage developed by Halbwachs (Halbwachs 1992), Pollak (Pollak 2006), and Nora (Nora 2008). Similarly, the contributions by Hall (Hall 1996) about identity understood as a historical, strategic, and positional construction, allow us to analyze the changing nature of the representations of the Arab diaspora throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in relation to the place historically assigned to them in the construction of the nation.

2.1 Arab Immigration to Córdoba during the Centenary

By the mid-nineteenth century, Argentina's elite class had designed a project of national construction founded on the exporting industry of agro-raw

materials to Europe and the United States. The same elite had also defined a demographic policy, which crystallized in 1853 with the adoption of the National Constitution.[1] The creation of the modern state according to liberal ideas considered European immigration, and especially Anglo-Saxon immigration, as an essential contributing factor to the growth of the country (Veneroni 2004). These dispositions were based both on the need to attract a workforce that could support the nation's economic development, and on the desire of the educated elites to improve the composition and lineage of the population. According to Segato (Segato 2007), myths about the origin of the nation grouped under the trope of the *crisol de razas* (*crucible of races*) postulated that the Argentine population was massively white and culturally European, both considered neutral citizenship patterns. But far from what the elites were expecting, most of the immigrants who arrived during this period came from the south of Europe and different regions of the Near East and Asia; they were soon considered "undesirable" (Tasso 1988).

While Arab immigration to the country was the third largest in terms of numbers (Veneroni 2004), the fiction of a huge presence of *turcos* (Bianchi 2004) settled in the social imaginary. The Arab immigrants were for the most part Maronite, Orthodox, and Catholic; a smaller number of them were Muslim (Jozami 1998). However, the diverse array of Arab identities, based on religion or regional origin, was quickly homogenized under the pejorative denomination of *turco*. This designation hindered the ways in which Arab communities redefined their identities in keeping with the political processes of their areas of origin (Jozami 2004).

The political restrictions on immigration that had been set in place towards the end of World War I intensified after 1930. At the same time, two opposing images consolidates: one of immigrants as a civilizing agent that could correct the country's social ills, and another of immigrants as a corrupting influence on national identity (Veneroni 2004). While the Argentine state and the Ottoman Empire maintained their political relations, which had emerged as the result of a commercial agreement signed in 1872 (Atakam 2012), the ruling classes considered Arab cultural and religious

1 From the beginning to mid nineteenth century, this intellectual movement advocated for the abandonment of monarchic methods inherited from the Spanish crown in favor of a democratic government. Its leaders and ideas were of critical relevance during the period called the National Organization, between 1852 and 1880.

practices "exotic and denigrating," placing the Arab immigrants at the lowest step of the hierarchy of desirable immigrants (Tasso 1988).

The aspiration to build a new model for the nation under the moralizing ideals of the universal citizen (civil, republican, white, and European) became a problem for the incorporation of any other expression of otherness (Segato 2014). Consequently, Arabs assigned to positions of power in the nation were negatively perceived, regardless of their upward mobility in the economic, cultural, and political realms (Pacho 2004, Azize 2004, Akmir 2009).

According to Pachá (2004), immigration to Córdoba began towards the end of the nineteenth century and continued in large numbers until 1914; a second wave of immigration lasted until the end of the 1920s. The Arabs were the third largest migratory group in the province; they settled inland, in southern cities like Río Cuarto and Villa María. To the East, they established themselves in towns like San Francisco and mountain areas like Calamuchita and Punilla. In the capital of the province, the first wave of immigrants of Syrian and Lebanese origin moved to Corrientes Street and the surrounding areas, which later became known as *Barrio Turco* (Flores 1995). Subsequent migratory waves populated other districts like Pueblo Colón, San Vicente, Güemes, and Talleres (Pachá 2004).

The Arab immigrants were mostly businessmen in the food and textile industries (Pachá 2004). According to Flores (1996), eighty percent were street vendors and peddlers; the rest were employees, day laborers, and drivers. The social differences among immigrants were less about their class position and more about their religious and cultural differences, which were in turn rooted in their national origin (Pachá 2004, Montenegro 2009).

Not unlike in the rest of the country, Arab immigrants to Córdoba and its neighboring areas created civil organizations dedicated to social aid, cultural activities, and religious institutions, organizations which provided a valuable support to the structure of the community. The very first civil organization, founded on June 22, 1913, was the Sociedad Siria del Amor Patriótico which in 1920 changed its name to Sociedad Sirio-Libanesa de Socorros Mutuos. Its charitable activities crossed provincial borders (Veneroni and Abu Arab 2004). According to Pachá: "It was built as a mother-entity, without political and religious distinction, serving as an instrument for integration in the new homeland" (Pachá 2004, 385)

By 1910 the province was home to several Christian groups—Melchites, Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox—as well as Jews and Muslims. Christians established their religious centers in 1920, whereas Muslims had created their

institutions earlier, during the first years of the twentieth century.[2] Sephardic Jews founded their first institution, Sociedad Israelita de Beneficencia Sefaradí Chebet Hachim, in 1914.

2.2 The Centenary Plaque: A Piece of Art for the Present and for the Future

This section is dedicated to reconstructing the trajectories of the plaque's creators, followed by a description of the opportunities that the celebrations of the Centenary opened up for the visibility and recognition of the Arab community in local and national public spaces. We will examine the contacts that this community established with the political elite in Córdoba, and their interactions with other immigrant organizations.

The Centenary Plaque is the product of two prominent Arab immigrants: Moisés Azize and Jorge Batica. Azize was born in the city of Hama (in present-day Syria) on January 1, 1892, which at that time was part of the Ottoman Empire. He migrated to Argentina at a very young age, where he became a successful textile businessman. His journey included cities like Santiago del Estero, Santa Fe, Córdoba, and Buenos Aires. Because of his many economic, political, and cultural activities during most of the twentieth century, Azize became one of the most prominent representatives of the Syrian-Lebanese community in Argentina.[3] In a social context highly biased against Arab immigrants, he dedicated himself "to fighting discriminatory attitudes and to elevating the self-esteem of the community" (Jozami 2004, 340). Batica arrived in Argentina in 1909. A renowned sculptor and blacksmith, his artistic skills were already well known in Damascus and among his countrymen in the Southern Cone region. Batica and his family set up a hardware shop in Buenos Aires before permanently moving to Córdoba.

2 In 1905, they created the Nebek Islamic Society, in 1907, the Lebanon and Tripoli Society, and in 1908, the Islamic Arab Society and the Becá Valley Islamic Society. In 1928, they all converged in a new institution called Muslim Arab Social Mutual Charity Society (Jáuregui 2023).

3 His public activities began expanding in the 1920s: he was the founder of the Syrian-Lebanese Bank, the Syrian-Lebanese Board, the Syrian-Lebanese Association, the Syrian-Lebanese Chamber of Commerce, and the Honor and Homeland Club, as well as of newspapers such as *El Diario Sirio-libanés* (*The Syrian-Lebanese Daily*) that is still published nowadays. He also organized charity institutions and led numerous cultural organizations (Klich 1995, Azize 2004, Jozami 2004, Veneroni and Abu Arab 2004).

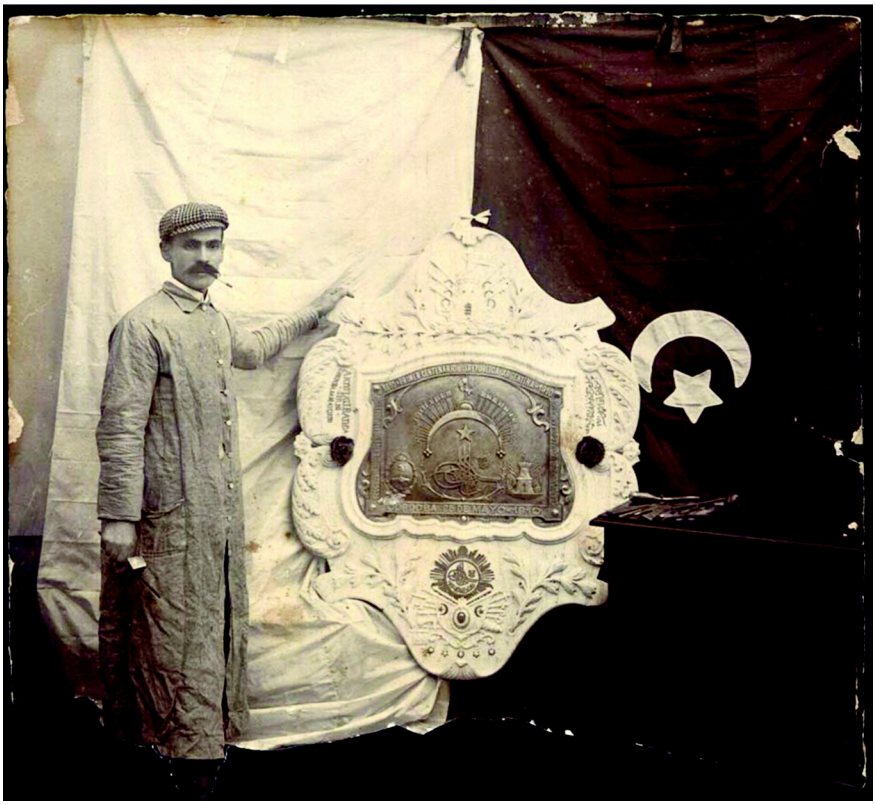


FIGURE 2.1 The artist Jorge Batica posing with his finished work and the Ottoman flag in the background
SOURCE: AZIZE 2020, 2; AND BATICA'S FAMILY ARCHIVE

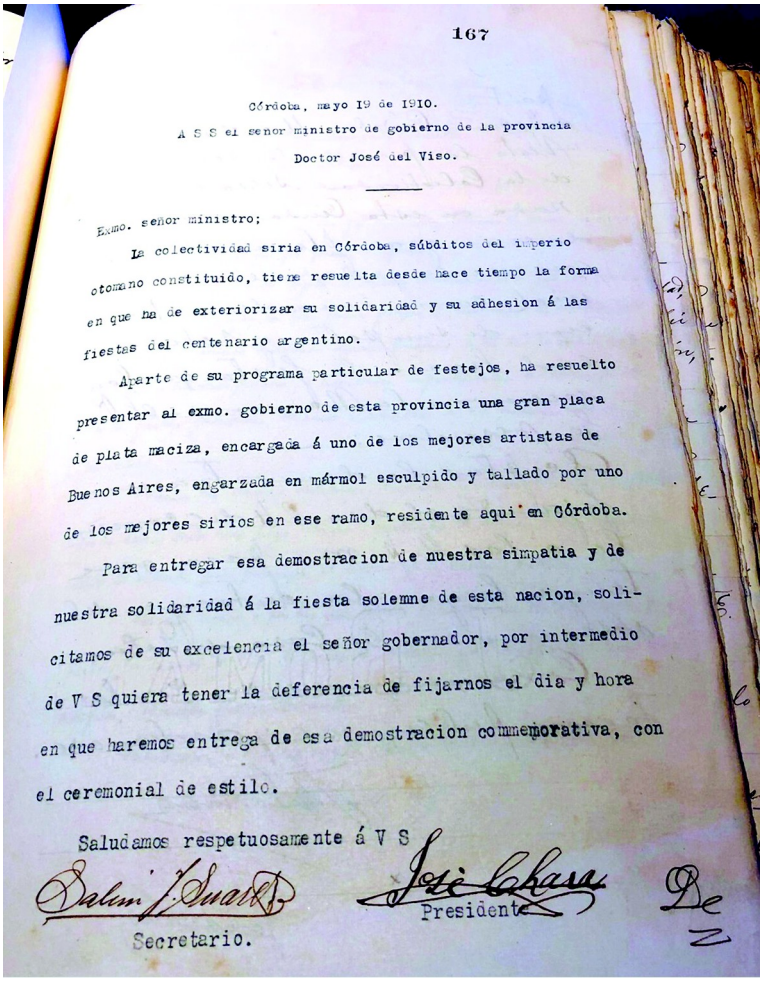
As the year of the Centenary approached, the commemorative celebrations became the focus of public attention, especially in Buenos Aires. It was there that the majority of the official celebrations took place, which were attended by prominent representatives of the global political arena, artists, as well as other people of influence. Meanwhile, in Córdoba, Moisés Azize decided to present a tribute to the Arab community that would live up to the reputation of this important inland city. As Pavoni points out, at that moment in Córdoba "the communities of immigrants were an important part of the public opinion—made evident in civic and press manifestations—and of the political affiliation, both peaceful or insurgent" (Pavoni 2016, 168). In this celebratory mood, the artist Jorge Batica was commissioned to make a sculpture. In his words: "The truth is that I worked tirelessly day and night on such an important celebration to honor my obligation to this generous and hospitable country and to my beloved countrymen. I did nothing more than my duty" (Córdoba, August 19, 1930). The precise moment when the plaque was finished was immortalized

in an iconic photograph where the Ottoman flag can be seen in the background. This photographic item would become, a century later, one of the main visual resources used to remember the artist and his art (Figure 2.1).

Batica's sculptural plaque is part of a series of commemorative monuments commissioned to celebrate the Centenary and gifted by the Arab diaspora in Argentina to different state sectors (Azize 2004, Veneroni 2004). In line with Pollak (2006) and Nora (2008), we believe that the materiality of the plaque not only expresses the phenomenological relation between identity and memory, but also that it contains multiple meanings in just a few signs.

With the financial help of his countrymen, the artist himself provided the materials needed to create the plaque. Batica brought marble, bronze, silver, and even gold from Syria, according to his granddaughter (*Caminos Culturales*, April 5, 2018). Weighing 200 kilograms (440 pounds), the piece sports a central section made of bronze and a marble frame with multiple embeddings. The heart of the plaque showcases the *tughra*, the seal or signature of the Sultan Mehmed V, who had ascended to the Ottoman throne in 1909. To each side stands the coat of arms of Argentina and of the province of Córdoba. The upper side shows the flag of the Ottoman Empire and other banners. The plaque is surrounded by inscriptions: the top reads "1810 –Primer centenario de la República Argentina S– 1910" (1810–The First Centenary of the Argentine Republic–1910") and at the bottom "Córdoba, 25 de mayo 1910" ("Córdoba, 25 May 1910"). To the left, there is the inscription "Recuerdo de la colonia siria de Córdoba" ("A memento from the Syrian community of Córdoba"), with its translation in Arabic on the right side. The marble frame is also impressive with an intricate decoration. The top part is engraved with Córdoba's coat of arms and two laurel branches crossed, symbolizing freedom. Both figures incorporate gold nuggets in the design. At the bottom of the composition again appears the *tughra* surrounded with more ornaments. On both sides we can see the inscription "Artista sirio, Jorge Batica" ("Jorge Batica, a Syrian artist"), combined with acanthus leaves, a traditional motif in classical art and in the Arab-Islamic visual tradition.

The finished artwork was kept by the Società Italiana di Mutuo Soccorso e Istruzione Unione e Fratellanza (Italian Society of Mutual Aid, Education, Union and Brotherhood) until its delivery and public exhibition, according to the correspondence between this organization and the provincial government (Archivo Histórico de la Provincia de Córdoba, Ministerio de Gobierno, 1910, Volume 21, Sheet 178). According to these letters, we understand that the temporary stay of the plaque at the Italian institution evidences the camaraderie felt among the different organizations of immigrants during the celebrations of the Centenary. On May 19, 1910, the Syrian community sent a letter to José del Viso, minister of the provincial



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Córdoba, mayo 19 de 1910.

A S S el señor ministro de gobierno de la provincia

Doctor José del Viso.

Exmo. señor ministro:

La colectividad siria en Córdoba, súbditos del imperio otomano constituido, tiene resuelta desde hace tiempo la forma en que ha de exteriorizar su solidaridad y su adhesion á las fiestas del centenario argentino.

Aparte de su programa particular de festejos, ha resuelto presentar al exmo. gobierno de esta provincia una gran placa de plata maciza, encargada á uno de los mejores artistas de Buenos Aires, engarzada en mármol esculpido y tallado por uno de los mejores sirios en ese ramo, residente aqui en Córdoba.

Para entregar esa demostracion de nuestra simpatia y de nuestra solidaridad á la fiesta solemne de esta nacion, solicitamos de su excelencia el señor gobernador, por intermedio de V S quiera tener la deferencia de fijarnos el dia y hora en que haremos entrega de esa demostracion commemorativa, con el ceremonial de estilo.

Saludamos respetuosamente á V S

Salim J. Suarez
Secretario.

José Chara
Presidente

FIGURE 2.2 Letters sent by the community leaders to the provincial authorities asking for the donation of the Plaque.
SOURCE: HISTORICAL ARCHIVE OF CÓRDOBA PROVINCE, GOVERNMENT MINISTRY, 1910, VOLUME 21, SHEET 167.

government, announcing the decision to "externalize the solidarity and adherence of the community with the ceremony of the Centenary" with the donation of a plaque created by one of the best Syrian artists living in Córdoba (see Figure 2.2, Archivo Histórico de la Provincia de Córdoba, Ministerio de Gobierno, 1910, Volume 21, Sheet 167). In the note, they identify themselves as "the Syrian Community of Córdoba, subjects of the constituted Ottoman Empire." The note is signed by José Chara, the president of the organization, and by the secretary, Salim J. Suárez. A few days later, the provincial executive power resolved to "accept the gift" and fixed its delivery to the Casa de Gobierno (Government House) on May 24 (Archivo

Histórico de la Provincia de Córdoba, Ministerio de Gobierno, 1910, Volume 21, Sheet 167, dorsum).

The celebration of the Centenary received ample coverage by the newspapers *Los Principios* (*The Principles*) and *La Voz del Interior* (*The Voice from the Interior*). On May 24, a group of Syrian immigrants gathered at the headquarters of the Società Italiana di Mutuo Soccorso e Istruzione Unione e Fratellanza. "When the column started moving, waving the Syrian, Italian, and Argentine flags at the front, a great number of people joined, forming a considerable legion" (*Los Principio*s, 25 May 1910, 2).

> At the front there was a luxury carriage carrying the Syrian gift: a marble plaque engraved in an artistic fashion…a big solid silver plaque full of allegories and inscriptions in Spanish and Turkish. In the center, under a series of symbolic flags, were the half-moon and stars, emblem of the far region whose sons were making the gift.[4]

The group then reached the Governor's house, where they were received by the governor Félix Tomás Garzón, the vice-governor Manuel Vidal Peña, ministers, representatives, senators, and other figures of the Autonomist Party, a political party with a conservative inclination. The government minister José del Viso made the commitment to install the plaque in a central location inside the office of the provincial government (Figure 2.3). This building, previously the old Club El Panal, served as a meeting point for the elites in Córdoba, a very exclusive group with the power to pull influential strings at the local and national levels.[5]

The celebrations of the Centenary promoted the involvement of local immigrant communities, and the journey of the plaque through the city's streets to its final installation at the very heart of Córdoba's elite building was one of the most important public exhibitions of the Syrian community. There, two young members of the community, Alfredo Zarauk and Juan Abraham, proclaimed: "We send greetings with open hearts to the generous expansion of this great and elevated nation; and to the warm welcome that this province of legendary traditions and culture has always given us" (*La Voz del Interior,* 25 May 1910, 21). Another important political leader, Felipe

4 *Los Principios*, 25 May 1910, 2.

5 The building had been the residence of Miguel Juárez de Celman, when he was the president of the Republic (1886–1890) and the governor of Córdoba (1880–1883). In 1887, the building hosted the influential El Panal Club founded by his brother Marcos Juárez and from 1909 it was briefly the office of the provincial government (Bischoff 1987, 1993, Waisman, Bustamente and Ceballos 1996).

FIGURE 2.3 Current location of the Plaque, at the *Espacio Cultural Museo de las Mujeres* (Women's Museum Cultural Space).
SOURCE: PICTURE TAKEN BY THE AUTHORS.

Crespo, outlined the economic and social contributions of Arab immigrants despite the dominance of their negative image:

> [The community's] behavior in this province has been a lesson and a trial: the result is demonstrated by the statistics which reflect in numbers and documents the economic significance of the Syrians living here. It is also revealed in the precedent of their peaceful and orderly activities.[6]

Crespo also drew a comparison between the Centenary and the constitutional process developed by the Ottoman Empire since 1908.[7]

6 *La Voz del Interior*, 25 May 1910, 21.

7 In 1908, the Union and Progress Committee (the Young Turks) rebelled against the autocracy of Sultan Abdul Hamid II. After the success of the uprising, the ruler was forced on July 24th to restore the Ottoman Constitution of 1876, which meant restoring the

> Another greater meaning is symbolized in this offering: the national coats of arms linked to the symbols of this big and rich province are declaring loudly the brotherhood between Argentina and the Ottoman Empire, which recently entered its constitutional era.[8]

The conservative leader also compared the alleged national and provincial stability of Argentina under a conservative order with the new airs of modernity that were knocking on the Sublime Porte. Crespo presented this thriving migration as a bridge between both worlds and also mentioned the national coat of arms, a fundamental symbol of the construction of national identity at the time.

The national media reported on this event as well: the newspaper *La Prensa* (*The Press*) highlighted that "This afternoon, the Syrian community gifted the provincial government a silver plaque embedded in marble in a ceremony that marked an expression of the youth to the community" (25 May 1910, 32). The newspaper *La Nación* (*The Nation*) emphasized the effusiveness of the celebration: "The Syrian colony gathered and greeted the May sun, hats in hand" (27 May 1910, 17).

The discourses of the Syrian community, the political leaders, and the local and national press reveal a clear will to offset the narrative which placed the Arabs as economically useless and responsible for the corruption of the nation's heritage. While the community acknowledged the generous principles of the Argentine nation, the political leaders highlighted the economic performance, and the press underlined the immigrants' desire to adhere to the patriotism and to the elements of national identity.

2.3 Arabs in Córdoba: Issues of Memory and Identity Surrounding the Plaque

In this section we will discuss the fluctuations of identity, memory, and the imaginary of the nation surrounding the plaque; from the memorials and homages of the first decades in the context of the institutionalization of the Arab community, to the oblivion and neglect of the plaque towards the end of the twentieth century after the death of its creators and the progressive

Assembly under a multi-party democratic system, calling for elections, and interdenominational equality. This date is known as the Young Turk Revolution. Christians and Muslims celebrated this achievement with great joy in their respective churches and mosques (Der Matossian 2014).

8 *La Voz del Interior*, 25 May 1910, 21.

abandonment of the public building where it was held. Along the same line, examining how the community institutions evolved and were integrated into the public sphere will inform us of the transformations in identitarian definitions.

In the years that followed the celebrations of the Centenary, the Arab community of Córdoba consolidated its social presence by establishing religious and civil institutions. At that time, Azize founded various institutions using the denomination "Syrian-Lebanese," an expression adopted by all the organizations in the country from the 1930s onwards (Jozami 2004). This position was "coherent with his internal policy of unity, regardless of localisms, regionalisms and religions (Christian, Muslim and Jewish)" (Jozami 2004, 340). In 1934, the Sociedad Sirio-Libanesa de Córdoba (Syrian-Lebanese Society of Córdoba) bought a new building to be used as the central office, with the help of members of the community and other organizations such as the Banco Sirio-Libanés del Río de la Plata, which was controlled by Azize, and the Círculo Social Sirio-Libanés. This location also hosted the Club Honor y Patria from 1941 onwards, with the support of the same leader (Veneroni and Abu Arab 2004, 70).

Meanwhile, as previously mentioned, Jorge Batica and his family moved to Córdoba to open a branch of the family company Batica Hermanos. Twenty years after the installation of the plaque, *El Diario Sirio-libanés* (*The Syrian-Lebanese Daily*), headed by Azize, promoted a paid subscription to honor Jorge Batica. Nevertheless, Batica requested that the funds be devoted to the construction of the Syrian-Lebanese Hospital and the Syrian Lebanese Society, both in Córdoba. "As regards the memory of our community, which is considering honoring me, I beg it simply honor me on paper with gratitude and the desire for our community to thrive," wrote Batica to the responsible of the newspaper in a letter (Letter to the Director of *El Diario Sirio-Libanés,* Córdoba, 19 August 1930).

During that period of institutionalization, the Centenary Plaque in Córdoba attested to the presence of Arab immigrants in the public, cultural, political, and economic spheres of the city. During the 1950s, the plaque continued to embody the contribution of Arab heritage to the Argentine nation. For that reason, in 1957 Azize joined different political, economic, religious, and diplomatic authorities to celebrate the inauguration of the Syrian-Lebanese Bank branch in Córdoba.[9]

9 Among the participants there was Nader El Kouzbari, Syrian ambassador, and Nazih Hakim, delegate of the Arab League in Latin America (Azize 2020).

From the second half of the twentieth century onwards, communal life in Córdoba showed a steady tendency towards consolidation. For instance, new social facilities were added, such as the library and the sports club, and cultural activities expanded as well. In 1987, the Syrian-Lebanese Society inaugurated a new building: a modern tower with numerous floors and a curved design evoking the sail of an old boat.[10]

Despite the increasing consolidation of the community, the memory of the plaque followed the fate of its material and ideological creators: Batica died on September 20, 1953, at seventy–eight. According to his granddaughter, his death was received by "the biggest official silence. [He was] perhaps waiting that someday his most beloved creation would become a symbol of union for all the descendants of the Syrian, Lebanese and all the Arab countries, regardless of religion, social status, or race" (*Caminos Culturales*, 5 April 2018, 2). Azize died on November 17, 1973, leaving behind a prolific body of work in multiple fields. At the same time, the memory of the plaque became tied to the ups and downs of the building where it was located. Despite its proximity to the office of the Provincial Legislature, and after the return to democracy in 1983, the old building served different purposes; at times, it was completely abandoned. Multiple projects of recovery and renovation were considered, making it inaccessible to the general public.

Throughout the years the Arab community attempted to build its group identity by organizing festivities and searching for prominent personalities from its history, selecting career paths characterized by upward mobility and political, cultural, economic, and intellectual activity. Currently, in addition to Azize and Batica, the community's role models are Abdón Sahade, Diab Maluf (Pachá 2004), José Guraieb, and the Palestinian professor Juan Yaser, "a promoter of the knowledge of the Arab world in the New World," according to Martínez Lillo (Lillo 2020, 80). Yaser worked tirelessly in the field of literature and as an advocate for the defense of the Arab and Palestine cause (Civantos 2006).[11]

10 The decoration and furnishing of the property incorporated diverse artistic elements that recall not only the Arab-Muslim past but also the legacy of other periods of the ancient history of the Middle East, such as references to Phoenician, Babylonian, and Persian heritage, among others. In 1989, the Cultural Athenaeum was built, which until the present groups the most diverse social, cultural and artistic activities, especially groups of Arab dances, the teaching of the language, among other proposals.

11 Born in 1925 in the surrounding area of Jerusalem, he was exiled and arrived in Argentina in 1952. He was the president of the Arab Entities Federation of the Republic of Argentina (FEARAB) and director of the regional confederation of the organizations

2.4 The Plaque: A Testimony between Revaluation and Resignification

In this section, we will examine the process that allowed the plaque to be understood as a material and artistic resource for the re-elaboration of the memory and the construction of Arab identities. We will also discuss how the initiative and intervention of multiple actors favored the plaque's re-signification in the local and national public agenda. Furthermore, we will address the historical and social conditions that endorsed its revalorization and its consideration as patrimonial heritage. Once again, we contend that the plaque functions as a prism that allows us to observe interconnected and concurrent phenomena: the relationship between the dominant elites and the emergence of identity and heritage as the fabric of a collective construction.

The memory of the Centenary Plaque was recovered amidst the celebrations of Argentina's second centenary, the Bicentennial—a recovery which gave way to wider cultural, social, and political processes. The celebrations became a crossroads where the multiple political levels—provincial, national, and international—converged with the search for the Arab community's identity. The process of recovery and revaluation of this symbol was possible thanks to a conjunction of multiple actors and interests, from academics to politicians, and even members of the community.

At the national level, we must go back to the beginnings of the 1990s, during the presidency of Carlos Saúl Menem, himself of Syrian origin and Muslim parents. During a politically complex decade, the mass media "were using not only the old stereotypes to represent Arabs in Argentina—such as the recurrent image of the desert, the camel, and the odalisques—but also new ones especially linked with different kinds of corruption" (Jozami 2004, 342). In addition, we have to consider the attacks on the Israeli embassy on March 17, 1992, and on the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA) on July 18, 1994, both of them in Buenos Aires. Consequently, according to the same author, "the conversation about roots returned under a new dimension," and Arab communal institutions as well as Muslim religious organizations had to face the (re)construction of new negative imaginaries. The

(FEARAB America). Also, he was a researcher of the UNESCO Project "Contribution of the Arab Culture to the Latin American culture by the Iberian Peninsula." (Agreda Burillo, 2017).

Syrian-Lebanese Society in Córdoba thus published a letter in the newspaper *Clarín*, of national coverage, called "Frente al agravio," on June 26, 1992:

> The tendency to suspect the community as a whole for the isolated actions of individuals is, at the very least, a racist and unforgivable attack. We can attribute virtues and weaknesses to the human being, but we cannot find any justification to point our fingers in such a systematic fashion at the Syrian nation, one of the cradles of universal civilization and culture.[12]

Negative representations of the Arab community increased after the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001.[13] At the same time, the impact of Middle Eastern politics on the region also influenced the formation of certain imaginaries about the local communities. This made evident a constant need to confront anti-Arab prejudices and to increase the visibility of the community in public life. It was in this context that, in 1998, the Comité Interreligioso por la Paz (COMIPAZ) was created. It was proposed by the local leaders of the three Abrahamic religions: the Lebanese imam Munif Hassan El Sukaria, the rabbi Gabriel Frydman, monsignor Roberto Rodríguez of the Catholic Church, and the evangelic pastor Fermín Salcedo. The rediscovery of the Centenary Plaque must be understood in this context, with national and international factors as the site where identity and memory were updated and heritage preserved for the elite members of the Arab community and its political actors in Córdoba. At the local level, 2011 saw the effective recovery of the building where the plaque had been installed. The old building was restored and received the name Espacio Cultural Museo de las Mujeres, an organization dependent of the Agencia Córdoba Cultura. The place returned to its old magnificence, gaining recognition as part of the cultural scene of the city.

The initiative for the resignification of the plaque was promoted by a historian, María Cristina Vera de Flachs, along with community leaders, legislators, and provincial officials—some of them of Arab origin. During 2015,

12 *Clarín*, 26 June 1992.

13 The zone of the Triple Frontier, where the borders of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay converge, is a region that has received an important migratory flow of Arab and Muslim immigrants in the past decades, a phenomenon that has been covered by the mass media and by different North-American sectors in a derogatory manner. After the attacks on the Twin Towers, the region began to be labelled as a refuge for terrorists and a place where terrorists were financed (Akmir 2009, Karam 2011, Montenegro 2010).

the Junta Provincial de Historia (Provincial Board on History) encouraged the revaluation of the plaque as part of a program dedicated to the protection of cultural patrimony in the province. On December 9, 2015, it was (re) inaugurated under the slogan "Placa Histórica Árabe, patrimonio cultural de los cordobeses en el Centenario de la Patria" ("Arab Historical Plaque, cultural heritage of the people of Cordoba in the Centennial of the Homeland"). The media campaign said that "the Provincial Board on History and Córdoba Cultural Agency, both dependent of the provincial government, together with the Syrian-Lebanese community, reinaugurate this plaque which stands as a symbol of the brotherhood of our people." Córdoba's Syrian-Lebanese Society and the honorary consulates of Syria and Lebanon, all of them located in the city of Córdoba, also attended the celebration.

The following year, Carina Villafañe Batica, the artist's granddaughter, asked the technical department of the Comisión Nacional de Monumentos (the National Monuments Commission) for the possibility of declaring the plaque a national asset. She also advocated for the involvement of Arab embassies in this initiative; they sent letters of support for the declaration process (*Caminos Culturales*, April 5, 2018, 2). Furthermore, she highlighted the representational nature of the plaque for Arab diplomatic delegations: "We have to consider that the piece is nothing less of a symbol for the Lebanese and Syrian embassies in the Argentine Republic, as it is also for their communities" (*Caminos Culturales*, April 5, 2018, 2).

A first step was taken on September 26, 2017 when the board of directors of the Córdoba Cultural Agency signed Resolution 321, declaring the so-called "Arab plaque" an object of cultural interest. The declaration stipulated that the plaque was a "unique cultural asset, of enormous historical interest, which recovers the memory of the entire community and the heartfelt homage that the Syrian-Lebanese community paid in the centenary of our nation" (Diputados Argentina 2018, 2–3). That same year, the legislators of Córdoba in the House of Representatives at the National Congress presented a project to declare the plaque an "Asset of Artistic and Historical Interest" under the conditions established by Act 12.665.[14] The initiative was received and discussed in the Committee of Culture, Foreign Affairs and Worship; it was approved unanimously on 6 November of 2017.

14 The Act establishes, in Article 4, that the National Commission of Museums and Historical Monuments and Places has to maintain a public register of the protected assets, establishing a series of classifications among which we can find in ordinal order: 6. National and Historical Interest Asset and 7. National Artistic Interest Asset.

FIGURE 2.4 The Plaque installed in 2019
SOURCE: PHOTOGRAPHY BY THE AUTHORS.

In 2019, the provincial government organized a new act to commemorate the plaque, which was attended by members of the artist's family, political authorities, and community leaders. For the occasion, a marble plaque was placed in the entrance hall, engraved with the inscription "Reconocimiento a la Gran Placa Árabe. Realizada por el escultor sirio Jorge Batica" ("A Recognition of the Great Arab Plaque. Made by the Syrian sculptor Jorge Batica") (Figure 2.4). It also mentions a series of supporters: the Palestinian ambassador Husni Abdel Wahed, the artist's daughter Haydée Batica and her family, the sculptor's descendants (who are part of the Orthodox Church), the priest Elías Battikha and Monsignor Isidore Battikha, representatives of the Syrian-Lebanese Society in Córdoba and of the consulate for the Syrian and Lebanese republics in Córdoba, as well as officials of the government of the province. It should not go unnoticed that this new instance incorporated several actors who had not been previously included: the Palestinian ambassador and the religious representatives.

The most significant step of the plaque's revaluation occurred when it was recognized as a "national historical asset" by the Argentinian president

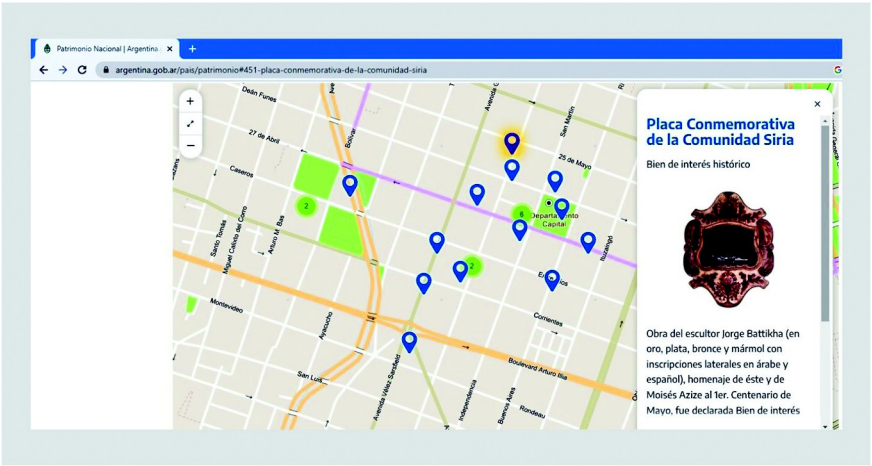

FIGURE 2.5 File of the plaque on the website for the Argentine National Heritage. SOURCE: NATIONAL HERITAGE. SYRIAN COMMUNITY COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUE. AVAILABLE ON: HTTPS://WWW.ARGENTINA.GOB.AR/PAIS/PATRIMONIO#451-PLACA-CONMEMORATIVA-DE-LA-COMUNIDAD-SIRIA

on August 24, 2021 with the signing of Decree 560. This declaration allowed it to be registered, protected, and revalued according to the conditions established by the Act 12.665. The national decree also reconstructs the historical storyline of the plaque and its importance for the Arab community of Córdoba. The plaque was added to the National Heritage website, together with other assets protected by the government of the province, filed under the title of "Placa conmemorativa de la Comunidad Siria" ("Memorial Plaque of the Syrian Community"), which places it under the category of Asset of Historical Interest (Figure 2.5).[15] Once again, the overlapping of denominations and attributions of identity in public documents—Arab, Syrian, and Syrian-Lebanese—illustrate the lack of interest or ignorance about these matters.

As previously mentioned, Carina Batica advocated to preserve the legacy of her grandfather not only within the Arab community, but also in broader diplomatic and political arenas. In this capacity, she visited the embassy of

15 In the National Heritage Archive handled by the Monuments National Committee of Sites and Historical Assets, were found 36 inscriptions of the province of Córdoba, among them historical monuments, tombs, assets of artistic and historical interest. The Arab Plaque, together with the Modern Cinema-Theater, are the only ones in the category "Historical Asset" in this area.

the Turkish Republic (Türkiye) in Buenos Aires on September 17, 2021, where she was received by the ambassador Ş. Vural Altay. The official statement that resulted from her visit highlights that the plaque "was presented to Córdoba's former governor by the Syrian community that emigrated from the Ottoman Empire to Argentina in a gesture of kindness to celebrate the centenary of Argentina's independence, as a symbol of peaceful cohabitation." Furthermore, the statement accentuates that the artwork "shows the bas-relief of the coat of arms and Ottoman Empire *tughra*" (Embassy of the Türkiye Republic in Buenos Aires, September 17, 2021). This interest on the part of the Turkish diplomatic representatives must be understood in the context of a shift in the national imaginary of the Turkish nation since the rise to power of the Justice and Development Party (the AK Party) in 2002, which began a process of revaluating the Ottoman past that contrasted with the way that the Ottoman heritage had been overlooked during the formation of modern-day Turkey under the ideals of Kemalism. The invocation of imperial grandeur, known as neo-Ottomanism, is a component of contemporary Turkish foreign policy that seeks to expand the country's

FIGURE 2.6 The Plaque installed at the Women's Museum Cultural Space on 13 May 2022 commemorating the declaration of the Great Arab Plaque as a National Historical Asset.
SOURCE: PHOTOGRAPHY BY THE AUTHORS.

influence, especially in the former territories of the Sublime Porte. The revalorization of patrimonial sites such as the Arab Plaque is also a dimension of these neo-Ottoman policies (Aykaç 2022, Yavuz 2020).

After the declaration at a national level, on May 31, 2022, the provincial government paid a new official tribute, convened by the Cultural Agency of Córdoba, the Provincial Board on History, and the Historical Archive. The commemorations that followed acted as an instrument for the Arab community to activate the memory of the plaque and to construct a renewed Arab identity, looking to achieve a more substantial visibility in the public sphere and to fight for a place that had been historically assigned in the construction of the nation. At the same time, we infer that for the political leadership, this served as a way to activate an awareness of Córdoba's cultural diversity. Again, the plaque served as a powerful resource. On this occasion, a new plaque was added to the one installed in 2019 in order to

FIGURE 2.7 Banner of the Provincial Board on History promoting the revaluation act on May 2022.
SOURCE: FACEBOOK FANPAGE OF THE PROVINCIAL BOARD ON HISTORY, 30 MAY 2022. AVAILABLE ON: HTTPS://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/PHOTO/?FBID=375510714614260&SET=A.303565421808790&LOCALE=ES_ES

highlight its declaration as a national historical asset (Figure 2.6). This new piece includes a reproduction of the iconic picture of Batica with the finished plaque and the flag of the Ottoman Empire in the background (partially hidden). It also includes the support of the most prominent provincial authorities. In this case, the media campaign followed the same visual guidelines (Figure 2.7).

2.5 Conclusion

The Centenary Plaque in Córdoba is a site that allows us to observe the social processes surrounding the construction of identity, memory, and heritage management in a specific local area, but with a wider impact. It made possible the reconstruction of a network of actors and events that intervened, from the beginning of the twentieth century until today, in the construction of Arab collective memory and the metamorphosis of its meanings.

The Arab community of Córdoba, both in the past and in the present, is not a stranger to the different movements, developments, and emerging social expressions which determine its inclusion and visibility within the public sphere and society at large. A century after its creation, the community leaders started to build close relations with local political actors in order to promote its objectives for an increased recognition. It is thanks to this dynamic that the political elites of the province of both periods, despite the differences in their historical, ideological, and social composition, took advantage of the benefits in terms of influence and support over this group.

In 1910, it was the Syrian colony, as they defined themselves at the time, which, thanks to the donation of the plaque, created a connection of solidarity with the people of Córdoba and with the conservative government that ruled at the time. A hundred years later, during a different stage of the plaque's revaluation and patrimonialization process, different academic representatives, leaders of the Arab community, officials, and legislators at the provincial and national level, and the ambassadors of Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine participated as well. The family of the sculptor, with his wife and daughter, became relevant actors in recovering the memory of the artist and of the masterpiece, leading to the involvement of the Turkish embassy.

During both periods, with some variation, the community's need for increased social legitimacy against old and new prejudices against Arabs reemerged. First as an immigrant group trying to separate itself from the negative social imaginary, and then as descendants showing their desire for

inclusion in the national identity. The strategy that runs throughout these different moments is to reclaim the careers of certain community members who contributed to the political, economic, and cultural spheres, both at the local and national levels.

Since memory and identity are values negotiated among groups and subjects (Halbwachs 1992, Pollak 2006, Hall 1996), the denomination of the plaque over the years and for more than a century also shows the journey of these communities in the definition of their place in the imaginary of the nation, under the influence of internal and external factors. This negotiation has included processes of self-recognition, as well as relations of proximity and distance with the ideology and national references of the homeland. In 1910, still under an emerging constitution of the local institutions, the actors who gifted the plaque to the city of Córdoba identified themselves as Syrian, or as subjects of the Ottoman Empire. They were called *turcos* by the media and the press, a popular denomination. Later, thanks to the leadership of Azize and his organizations, the term Syrian-Lebanese prevailed in order to emphasize unity, regardless of the differences of national, ethical, and religious nature. The Pan-Arab nationalist momentum that permeated cultural institutions from the second half of the twentieth century onwards generalized the definition of "Arabs" over any national category. The numerous ways in which the community identified itself during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are illustrated by the fluctuations in the resignification of the plaque, as observed in the different declarations, legislations, and celebrations associated with it. The sense of belonging to the Arab community was emphasized with the involvement of diplomatic representatives of Syria, Lebanon, and, recently, Palestine. Throughout the process of official revaluation, the connection between the plaque and the Ottoman Empire was in a certain way deferred. However, the Turkish embassy presents a vindicating gesture in line with the recovery of the Ottoman legacy in the contemporary national imaginary of the Turkish nation, which also adds a transnational dimension to the process. Moreover, we emphasize the fundamental role of the provincial and national authorities that intervened for the revaluation process of such an asset. Over the last decades, the treatment of diversities and of the multiple cultural, religious, and ethnical identities in Argentina is considered a topic of increasing relevance in the design of public policies. Issues that were previously considered marginal or secondary nowadays constitute matters of high interest and impact on the public opinion. This disposition moves—and even involves—the different government agencies at every level to protect and highlight the importance of cultural assets and heritage.

All things considered, the plaque is to the Arab community of Córdoba a material form that crystallizes the cultural and social contribution of the

first Arab immigrants to the local society, in contrast with the negative image they had at the beginning of the twentieth century. Even after more than a hundred years, the plaque is imbued with a positive and emotional force supported by feelings of continuity, and works as point of convergence for the group's identity. Also, because it is an object around which communal memories were constructed, its study sheds light on the impact of its multiple meanings through the constant dialogue between the past and the present, and the political concerns which marked every historical period.

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CHAPTER 3

Artful Experiments in Arab Brasiliana, 1948–1964

John Tofik Karam

Abstract

"An Experiment in Democracy" was the subtitle that Thomas Skidmore coined to characterize *Politics in Brazil, 1930–1964*. In this period of nearly three and a half decades, Brazilian authorities were said to have expressed a "willingness to experiment with new political forms in a desperate attempt to discard the old." Following this interpretation, I probe "artful experiments" in the latter part of the timeframe. From 1948 to 1964, cultural and political notables in Brazil and the Arab world shared craftiness and craftsmanship in promoting academic, architectural, cinematic, and poetic exchanges. Brazilian state authorities signed cultural accords with counterparts in Lebanon (1948), Egypt (1951, 1960), and Syria (1960), touching off a series of aesthetic exchanges that attempted to center the margins. This chapter focuses on four of the most prominent artist- and government-led initiatives, based on archival research in Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Relations (Itamaraty), contemporaneous Brazilian, Egyptian, Lebanese, and Syrian press coverage, as well as the personal interviews and writings of the experimenters themselves. Without disavowing professional ties to France or the US, this vanguard turned inside out the trope of "cultural cannibalism" in Brazilian studies, long inspired by Oswald de Andrade (1928). Not only "devouring" Euro-American trends, "Brazilian culture" was crafted to be consumed by a people and part of the globe that many others presume as distant or "new." In selecting Brazilian architecture, cinema, literature, and poetry to connect with Arab publics that had recently gained independence, diplomats and state bureaucrats harnessed art as craft while academics, artists, and authors necessarily became craftier as well. Experimental but hardly accidental, Arab Brasiliana became a crafty and well-crafted enterprise bringing together parts of the world in what seemed to be a new era.

Keywords

Statecraft – cultural accords – cannibalist manifesto – Jamil Almansur Haddad – Helmi Nasr – Oscar Niemeyer – Sérgio Ricardo

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"An Experiment in Democracy" was the subtitle that Thomas Skidmore coined to characterize *Politics in Brazil, 1930–1964*. In this period of nearly three and a half decades, Brazilian authorities were said to have expressed a "willingness to experiment with new political forms in a desperate attempt to discard the old" (1967, 7). Following this influential interpretation made by the preeminent US historian of Brazil, I probe "artful experiments" in the latter part of this timeframe. From 1948 to 1964, cultural and political notables in Brazil and the Arab world shared craftiness and craftsmanship in promoting academic, architectural, cinematic, and poetic exchanges. Indeed, the Brazilian state signed cultural accords with counterparts in Lebanon (1948), Egypt (1951, 1960), and Syria (1960). By way of such agreements, artists, intellectuals, and statesmen initiated, and left unfinished, a journey whereby each other's part of the world took on a novel sense of possibility.

With the Latin suffix "-ana," the title of this chapter, "Arab Brasiliana," refers to a collection of cultural exchanges between Brazil and the Arab world that intermittently appear in Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Relations (also known as Itamaraty), Brazilian and Arab world press coverage, as well as the writings penned by experimenters themselves. In 1954, Itamaraty sent critic and poet Jamil Almansur Haddad from Brazil to Lebanon to lecture on Brazilian Studies, which he also undertook in Egypt and Syria for the next two years. In 1961, Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser sent professor Helmi Nasr from Egypt to Brazil, where he remained at the University of São Paulo for the next half-century. In 1962, the Brazilian ambassador to Lebanon served as the emissary of the Lebanese state's invitation for architect Oscar Niemeyer to design 15 modernist structures for what was later called the Rashid Karame International Exhibition Center in Tripoli. Finally, in 1964–5, Itamaraty recruited filmmaker Sérgio Ricardo (also known as João Lutfi) to represent Brazil in Lebanon's film festival, where he received an invitation from the Syrian state to film what became the now-lost *O Pássaro da Aldeia* (*The Bird from the Village*, 1965). In dislocating, but not disavowing, institutional ties to France or the US, and implicitly rivaling its Afro-Asian counterpart, this Arab Brasiliana collection reveals a deliberate and experimental connection on the world's stage.

These experiments in architecture, cinema, literature, and poetry turn inside out the trope of "cultural cannibalism" in Brazilian studies, long inspired by Oswald de Andrade (1928). Not only "devouring" Euro-American trends, Brazilian culture was crafted to be consumed by a people and part of the globe that others presume as distant or indifferent. The cultural rapprochement between Arab and Brazilian states evoked, but was hardly determined by, diasporic or nationalist politics. Arab, Arab Brazilian, and Brazilian experimenters sometimes referenced Gilberto Freyre (1971, 1977)

and the myth he propagated of little or no racial division in Brazil, allegedly due to Portuguese colonizers whose attraction to darker-skinned peoples was sparked by ostensible Arabic-speaking Muslims in medieval Iberia. But the consumption of Brazilianness in Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as that of Arabness in Brazil, also embodied internationalist aspirations to dislodge imperial legacies—even if they were unable to be fully discarded. In selecting Brazilian architecture, cinema, literature, and poetry to connect with Arab publics that had recently gained independence, diplomats and state bureaucrats harnessed art as craft while academics, artists, and authors necessarily became craftier as well. Experimental but hardly accidental, Arab Brasiliana became a crafty and well-crafted enterprise bringing together parts of the world in what seemed to be a new era.

3.1 Brazilian Studies in Beirut and Beyond

In 1954, Lebanese President Camille Chamoun and his wife visited Brazil. According to Diogo Bercito (2019), this was the first Middle Eastern head of state to visit to South America. The meeting built on the 1948 cultural accord between Brazilian and Lebanese governments to foster links across the "sciences, fine arts, theater, letters, cinematography, photography, radio broadcasting and sports."[1] The welcoming party included Brazil's President Getúlio Vargas and six Brazilian "Congressmen of Lebanese descent," whose presence prompted Chamoun to remark that "I already feel at home" in Brazil.[2] Their joint statements praised the "Lebanese contribution in the material and spiritual development of Brazil" as well as emphasized "shared ideals" in "international legal regulations."[3] As each exuded populist appeal amid short-lived economic prosperity, without overt oppositional coordination intended to offset Euro-American blocs, *Time* nonetheless reported that "everywhere" Chamoun went in Brazil "he plugged Arab-Latin American solidarity in the United Nations."[4]

Shortly after, the newly formed "Cultural Division of Itamaraty" invited Jamil Almansur Haddad to "conduct a course on Brazilian studies in Beirut,"

1 "Acordo Cultural Entre o Governo da República dos Estados Unidos do Brasil e o Governo da República do Líbano," *Diário Oficial*, 28 May 1949.

2 "Brazil: Visitor from Lebanon," *Time*, 24 May 1954.

3 "Declarações conjuntas firmadas pelos presidentes do Líbano e do Brasil," *A Noite*, 11 May 1954, 2.

4 "Brazil: Visitor from Lebanon," *Time*, 24 May 1954.

from November 1954 to December 1955.[5] Itamaraty also dispatched a telegram to Beirut, requesting that the Brazilian embassy "consult" with Lebanese government authorities about "a course on Brazilian studies under the direction of Jamil Almansur Haddad."[6] The course, it was noted, could take place "in some universities in the form of classes or in a series of talks, as preferred by local authorities."[7] The delegation in Beirut wrote back that Lebanon's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hector Klat, himself the former General Consul of Lebanon in São Paulo, "would be very pleased to see the opening of a course in Brazilian studies … under the direction of the poet Jamil Almansur Haddad, his acquaintance."[8] Unlike the self-styled Brazilian cultural diplomacy that sent other professors to lecture abroad, like Sérgio Buarque de Holanda in Rome (Dumont and Fléchet 2014, 203), this initiative looked to a part of the world that had just gained formal political independence from erstwhile colonizers whose cultural influence still loomed large over Brazil itself.

The then forty-year-old Haddad had already gained visibility as a critic, poet, and translator (Haddad 1939, 1945, 1950, 1951). Born in São Paulo to parents from the village of Ibl al-Saqi in Southern Lebanon, Haddad had just married the writer and columnist, Helena Silveira, from a traditional and wealthy family. Hardly accepted by the establishment, Haddad was "a poet of borders," to use the apt characterization of Christina Stephano de Queiroz (2022, 227). High-society cliques, according to Stephano de Queiroz, saw Haddad as *turco*, a category referencing the Ottoman origins of pre-WWI Arabic-speaking migrants but often meant to deride their difference, especially in relation to the reigning Luso-centrism of the time. In fact, Oswald de Andrade himself called Haddad "the only poor 'turco' of São Paulo" (Stephano de Queiroz 2022, 14). In contrast to the nouveau riche status of some Middle Eastern migrants in Brazil, Haddad's middle-class upbringing made him stand out among both old and new "leisure classes" (Veblen

5 Carta do Theodemiro Tostes, chefe da "Divisão Cultural do Itamaraty" para o Ilustríssimo Senhor Doutor Jamil Almansur Haddad, 19 July 1954; "Cadeira de estudos Brasileiros em Beirute," Secretaria de Estado das Relações Exteriores … Para o Senhor Jamil Almansur Haddad, Rua João Moura 362, São Paulo." 10 July 1954.

6 "Cursos de português no Líbano," Secretaria de Estado das Relações Exteriores … Para a Legação em Beirute." 8 May 1954.

7 Ibid.

8 "Curso de Estudos Brasileiros no Líbano," Carta do Alfredo de Pimentel Brandão da Legação em Beirute, 20 May 1954.

1902). Nonetheless, the Clube Atlético Monte Líbano offered a reception in honor of Haddad and Silveira's "trip to the Orient."[9]

In mastering his craft and learning to be crafty, Haddad first faced news that Brazil's foreign ministry would not renew the contracts of university professors sent abroad.[10] Trained as a medical doctor and initially hired by the São Paulo state government, Haddad was already on an official leave without pay from his medical post.[11] Amid funding cuts and freezes, the Brazilian "Embassy of Beirut was authorized" to make "the payment to remunerate Professor Jamil Almansur Haddad...," at least for part of his two-year stay.[12] A year later, the Brazilian embassy in Beirut resent dispatches that Haddad would travel from Beirut to both Cairo and Damascus in order to undertake the "course in Brazilian studies" during the 1955–56 school year, "without cost to the National Treasury."[13] With uncertain and varying state support, Haddad worked beyond his initial contract and post to disseminate "Brazilian Studies" across the Arab world. Art and politics mutually expanded each other's influence.

Haddad lectured about a Brazil that embodied and extended Gilberto Freyre's vision. In *La Revue du Liban* (*The Lebanon Review*), Beirut's high-society, French-language weekly magazine,[14] Haddad was cited as saying that "Brazil is a democracy, not only political, but also racial." In repeating the Freyrian myth of little or no racism in Brazil, Haddad strategically ignored Afro-Brazilians' structural subjugation that had just been well-documented by an UNESCO-sponsored study (Wagley 1952). In addition, Haddad

9 "Sra. Helena Silveira e Sr. Jamil Almansur Haddad," *Correio Paulistano*, 14 November 1954, 6; "Sra. Helena Silveira e Sr. Jamil Almansur Haddad," *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 16 November 1954, 6; "Helena Silveira," *Correio da Manhã*, 27 January 1955, 1–7.

10 "Não serão renovados os contratos dos professores," *A Noite*, 8 January 1955, 2.

11 "Pode ficar, mas sem salário," *Correio Paulistano,* 16 April 1955, 2.

12 "Verba para 'Intercâmbio Cultural' exercício de 1954," 21 July 1955; "Remuneração de Professor Jamil Almansur Haddad," Secretaria de Estado das Relações Exteriores ... Para a Delegacia do Tesouro em Nova York." 7 July 1955; "Remuneração de Professor Jamil Almansur Haddad," Secretaria de Estado das Relações Exteriores ... Da Embaixada em Beirute." 21 July 1955.

13 "Curso de Estudos Brasileiros em Beirute," Da Embaixada em Beirute à Secretaria de Estado das Relações Exteriores, 7 July 1955; "Curso de Estudos Brasileiros. Professor Jamil Almansur Haddad," Da Embaixada em Beirute à Secretaria de Estado das Relações Exteriores, 29 July 1955; "Conferências do Professor Jamil Almansur Haddad," Secretaria de Estado das Relações Exteriores ... Para a Legação em Damasco." 18 August 1955; "Conferências do Professor Jamil Almansur Haddad em Damasco," Secretaria de Estado das Relações Exteriores ... Para a Legação em Damasco." 18 August 1955.

14 "L'Association Libanaise des Amis du Brésil," *La Revue du Liban*, 19 March 1955.

used a Freyrian lens to even idealize the circumstances of the emigrant countrymen of Lebanese audience members. He was cited as stating that Brazil "knew how to welcome with love the emigrants of the Old World who went there to collaborate in the construction of the New World." He concluded that, "the building of the future Brazilian homeland is made of Lebanese stones." Merging a Freyrian Brazil and an emigrant Lebanon, Haddad omitted the prejudices that he himself had experienced. According to Stephano de Queiroz, Haddad's then wife, Helena Silveira, recalled that the writer had been disparaged as a "turquinho" ("little Turk"). However, after his return from Lebanon, Haddad emphasized another element of Freyre's narrative to a Brazilian reporter in São Paulo. Haddad explained that, in Lebanon, "I chose as the general theme of my talks … the Oriental influences in the formation of Brazil," especially "regarding the history of Portuguese and Arab colonization in South America." Haddad evoked ostensibly Arab markers in a Portuguese past to appeal not only to an Arabic-speaking audience whose apparent forebears once governed the Portuguese colonizer that came to rule over Brazil, but also to a present-day Brazilian public that delighted in seeing itself in this Freyrian hall of mirrors.

Of course, Brazil was already very much present in the Arab world, despite Haddad's charge to disseminate information about it. The "opportunity" to "speak Portuguese," Haddad remarked, was "really frequent" in Lebanon.[15] Among the encounters with Lebanese "writers, diplomats, journalists, and local politicians," according to Stephano de Queiroz (Stephano de Queiroz 2022, 130), Haddad and Silveira met Chafic Maluf, the famous poet of "A Liga Andaluza" ("The Andalusian League"), who was visiting from Brazil. These and other Lebanese and Lebanese Brazilians helped to establish the Association des Amis du Brésil (the Association of Friends of Brazil) in Beirut, for the development of "closer ties between Lebanon and Brazil."[16] After President Chamoun's visit to Brazil, the Lebanese ambassador from Brazil, M. Adib Nahas, founded the association that hosted some of Haddad's talks. With greater reservation, Haddad reflected that one could hear "our popular music," specifically "samba," featured by the French-language press in Beirut some years prior.[17] But Haddad regretted that the only

15 Silvio Guimarães, "Arte do Brasil no Líbano e Síria: Entrevista com o poeta Jamil Almansur Haddad," *Para Todos,* 1956, 2a quinzena de agosto, p.1, 6.

16 "L'Association Libanaise des Amis du Brésil," *La Revue du Liban*, 12 March 1955.

17 "D'où vient la samba," *Le Jour*," 21 May 1949, 2.

Brazilian literature he saw in Arabic translation were Jorge Amado's novels, "full of … our geographical nomenclature," which are "unnavigable."

Not only crafty but also a maestro of his craft, Haddad substituted Andrade's cultural cannibalism with what Edward Said would later call critical humanism, "a means of questioning, upsetting, and reformulating so much of what is presented to us as commodified, packaged, uncontroversial, and uncritically codified certainties…" (Said 2004, 28). In 1956, Haddad had returned to São Paulo with "a new book written during his long stay in Lebanon,"[18] which was never released but whose verses about an Arab world were featured in other works (Stephano de Queiroz 2022, 129–30). Though his migrant difference could be a motive for derision, the *Revista da Semana* (*The Magazine of the Week*) identified "the name of Jamil Almansur Haddad" as "a testament of the Arab contribution to the diversification of Brazilian letters."[19] It added that Haddad was "lecturing on literature at Lebanese and Syrian universities where he met professors who studied at the Sorbonne." Legitimized with French credentials, Haddad reflected upon "a trend toward…westernization…in Arab countries…after the struggles that their peoples had to confront…which does not disfigure their social and cultural lifestyles" and leads to "a reconciliation of values and tendencies through human sensibilities…" As suggested by Said's critical humanism, Haddad undertook a literary, poetic experimentation that seemed like a new kind of connection at the world's margins, a connection that meant to accommodate, not efface, the centers.

"Brazilian Studies" in Lebanon, for Haddad, advanced broader struggles to decolonize knowledge. In the art and literature review *Para Todos* (*For Everyone*),[20] Haddad related his "opportunity to administer a course about Brazil, in Beirut," amid a "very intense university mobilization." Haddad listed French, Lebanese, and US universities in Lebanon as well as the "National University in Damascus," which "raises…the problem of culture in so-called semi-colonial or underdeveloped countries." Whereas Damascus sought to develop a "Syrian way of thinking" and displace external influences, Haddad identified Lebanon's academia amid "one or another imperialism" that nonetheless succeeded in establishing a "Lebanese University" which "seeks to give to the student a Lebanese consciousness." Between

18 "Jamil Almansur Haddad," *Correio Paulistano,* 11 January 1956, p. 2.4; "Jantar com Irene e Cesar Giorgi," *Correio Paulistano,* 4 March 1956, 2.

19 "Lira oriental na poesia do Brasil," *Revista da Semana,* 30 June 1956, 44–5a

20 Guimarães, "Arte do Brasil no Líbano e Síria," 1.

statecraft and a well-crafted poetic vocation, Haddad declared that the kind of cultural exchange he initiated, "with some sacrifice," between Brazil and the Arab world, "deserves to be continued."[21]

Jamil Almansur Haddad cultivated a "Brazilian Studies" for consumption in Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt in 1954–56, and he shared critical thoughts about these former Anglo-French colonized publics back in São Paulo. In this experiment, Brazil did not consume European influences but rather exported its literature to a part of the world just liberated from formal European rule. This internationalist venture would find its zenith in the coming years.

3.2 Arabic Instruction in São Paulo and Its Surroundings

In 1960, Juscelino Kubitschek, in Brazil, and Gamal Abdel Nasser of the United Arab Republic (UAR) signed a cultural accord.[22] The UAR had briefly linked Egypt and Syria, and their respective diplomatic corps in Brazil (before Syria seceded in 1961).[23] The head of the UAR delegation in Brazil celebrated the accord to "promote and boost our political independence, wresting it from foreign hands."[24] The accord recycled some of the language used in the 1948 agreement between Brazil and Lebanon as well as the 1951 accord between Brazil and King Farouk's Egypt.[25] Negotiations for the latter took more than a year.[26] With more fanfare, the 1960 accord specified "the establishment of a chair in the Portuguese language and Brazilian literature at UAR universities and a chair in Arabic language and literature at Brazilian universities."[27] In advancing the internationalist direction that Kubitschek had envisioned, Brazil's president-elect Jânio Quadros visited Nasser in

21 Ibid.

22 "Brasil-República Árabe Unida: acôrdo cultural, assinado no Rio de Janeiro, a 17 de maio de 1960" (Rio de Janeiro: Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 1968); "Colaboração amistosa entre o Brasil e RAU para desenvolvimento cultural de seus povos," *Correio Paulistano*, 18 May 1960, 1–5.

23 "Embaixada da República Árabe Unida," *O Estado de São Paulo*, 5 March 1958, 9

24 "RAU: Mensagem de boa vontade aos brasileiros," *Diário de Pernambuco,* 17 May 1960, 1.png

25 "Acordo Cultural Brasil-Egito," *Correio da Manhã*, 11 September 1951, 1; "Acordo Cultural Brasil-Egito," *Diário de Notícias*, 11 September 1951, 1.

26 "Zangou-se o Egito," *A Noite*, 9 October 1950, p.18; "Rompimento Cultural do Egito com o Brasil," *Diário de Notícias*, 10 October 1950, p.1; "O Egito recusa-se a assinar um acordo cultural com o Brasil," *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 10 October 1950.

27 "Colaboração amistosa entre o Brasil e RAU para desenvovlimento cultural de seus povos," *Correio Paulistano*, 18 May 1960, 1–5.

Egypt in 1959, gaining some inspiration to further define what became Brazil's "Independent Foreign Policy" (Vizentini 2004).

Nasser, "in attending to Jânio Quadros," took a direct personal interest in contracting a professor of Arabic letters to be sent to Brazil (Hanania and Lauand 2015, 10). He turned to the recently-established 'Ain Shams University with the Faculty of Al-Alsun that had just hired Helmi Nasr as a professor of French translation. In 1952, a young Nasr had moved to Paris to study at the Sorbonne. After finishing his studies, he returned to teach in Cairo where "there were professors who spoke all languages, but not Portuguese," Nasr recalled. So, the director of the Faculty of Al-Alsun told him: "'You are the one going. You speak French, which is a Latin language like Portuguese, so you will solve the problem.'"[28] One French colleague warned him of snakes in São Paulo, but another reassured him of the city's "modernity."[29] Eleven days later, Professor Nasr found himself in São Paulo where he remained teaching Arabic at the University of São Paulo (USP) over the next half-century. French language and translation studies, no less mastered at the Sorbonne, led to a lifetime in letters between Brazil and the Arab world.

The Arabic-speaking world that Professor Nasr taught about in Brazil helped to craft Nasser's brand of Arab nationalism, the UAR that Nasser's Egypt continued to be officially known by, and ongoing relations with Syria after the dissolution of the political union itself (Cecchini Farias 2020). In 1966, Professor Nasr gave the talk, "UAR, Yesterday and Today," accompanied by two films about Egypt in PUC-São Paulo, where he taught an open course on "Arab Letters and Lebanese Culture," in addition to the open courses he continued teaching at USP.[30] In 1968, the "Egyptian Professor Helmi Nasr" was acknowledged in the ten-year anniversary of the UAR in São Paulo, and the National Day commemorating Egypt's July 1952 revolution.[31] In 1969, Professor Nasr gave a talk on the theme of "Arab Civilization in History," with the presence of the UAR (Egyptian) ambassador, the Syrian Arab Republic's ambassador and general consul as well as diplomats from the League of Arab States.[32]

28 Ibid. "Kassab e Helmi Nasr recebem homenagem," *ANBA*, 27 March 2012, https://anba.com.br/kassab-e-helmi-nasr-recebem-homenagem/. (accessed on 13 May 2023).

29 Ibid.

30 "Curso de Letras Árabes da PUC," *Diário de Notícias*, 16 July 1966, 2–5; "Rush," *Tribuna da Imprensa*, 4 August 1966, 4; "Amanhã, na Faculdade de Filosofia da PUC..." *O Jornal*, 5 August 1966, 5.

31 "RAU e Brasil defendem um intercâmbio maior," *O Jornal*, 23 July 1968, 6.

32 "Semana dá visão sobre a atualidade do mundo árabe," *Diário do Paraná*, 7 October 1969, 7.

Learning to be crafty and on his way to becoming a master craftsman, Professor Nasr in Brazil was under contract with "the Egyptian government" for two years, with his appointment periodically renewed, until reaching the "maximum period allowed by Egyptian law for the time abroad of a university professor" (Hanania and Lauand 2015, 11–2). Professor Nasr informed Dr. Eurípedes Simões de Paula, the director of USP's College of Arts and Sciences (FFCL), who "didn't accept it" and convinced the Egyptian ambassador to allow time for USP to issue a direct contract. Professor Nasr fit into Simões de Paula's vision for a nascent Brazilian university system, contributing to the "History of Civilizations," including "specific areas for the study of language and culture" (Theodoro 2009, 41–3). Indeed, the Arabic studies taught by Professor Nasr spoke to how another civilization had engulfed Brazil's own colonizer, Portugal. One of Simões de Paula's books drew upon Gilberto Freyre's *Casa grande e senzala* (*The Masters and the Slaves*), which, as previously mentioned, affirmed that Arab and Muslim legacies in Iberia shaped how the Portuguese colonized Brazil (de Paula 1946, 7, Freyre 1933, 12–3, 214–6, 223–5). This sort of Brazil diverged from Oswald de Andrade's aphoristic question of "Tupi or not Tupi," which would delimit the study of Brazil to an alleged indigeneity cannibalizing, or not, a seemingly uniform Europe. Instead, the nascent Brazilian university embracing Professor Nasr also pondered the "Oriental influences" that shaped the "Portuguese language" (Nimer, 2000 [1943]). This academic experiment unsettled colonizer/colonized and European/Indigenous binary distinctions in internationalizing curricula by way of the language of an Arabic-speaking polity which governed the Portuguese colonizer that came to rule over an indigenous Brazil.

Based at USP, Professor Nasr helped to broaden the meaning of academic production in Brazil, developing his own Arabic-Portuguese dictionary as well as Arabic lessons for students. Upon departing Cairo in 1961, he asked for Arabic teaching materials from the UAR's Minister of Education, who evidently "did not find it necessary," due to the famed presence of early twentieth-century Arabic literary circles in Brazil. Over the next several decades, Professor Nasr accumulated tens of thousands of translations that ended up in the more than 400-page *Dicionario Árabe-Português* (*Arab-Portuguese Dictionary*), published by the Câmara de Comércio Árabe-Brasileira (CCAB).[33] Over the same expanse of time, Professor Nasr accumulated exercises and techniques in Arabic instruction that CCAB likewise published as *Lições elementares da língua árabe…* (*Elementary Lessons in the*

33 "CCAB vai lançar dicionário árabe-português em maio," *ANBA*, 31 March 2005, https://anba.com.br/ccab-vai-lancar-dicionario-arabe-portugues-em-maio-2/ (accessed on 13 May 2023).

Arabic Language...).[34] He was even said to have translated Gilberto Freyre's *Novo mundo nos trópicos* (*New World in the Tropics*) (Freyre, 1971), which celebrated Portuguese colonialism. Despite this nod to Luso-centrism, Professor Nasr institutionalized Arabic language studies in post-secondary Brazilian education.[35]

Arabic language instruction was just one of many artful experiments being tested out between Brazil and the UAR. In 1960, the UAR's Ministry of Education sponsored nine-month scholarships in Egypt for recent Brazilian university graduates, with the selection process being overseen by Brazil's Capes (Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel) in the Ministry of Education.[36] In 1962, the UAR embassy collaborated with the Museu Nacional de Belas Artes in Rio de Janeiro in an exposition featuring "base-reliefs, drawings and engravings of Nubian monuments."[37] In 1964, the UAR's embassy joined with the Centro Brasileiro de Arqueologia (Brazilian Archeological Center) to put on the "Week of Egypt" that featured "expositions, speeches and films about the legendary land of the Pharoahs," culminating in "a grand Egyptian-themed evening in the ballrooms of the Clube Monte Líbano."[38] In 1965, the UAR embassy in Brazil and Brazil's embassy in Egypt held an exposition of Brazilian artists in Cairo, featuring Carlos Scliar, José Paulo Moreira da Fonseca, Benjamin Silva and Antônio Dias.[39] In 1966, Cairo Radio announced a daily program about Brazil in Portuguese "to collaborate in the strengthening of friendship and mutual understanding between the peoples of the UAR and Brazil."[40] With an internationalist sensibility, Arab Brasiliana took shape as both statecraft and well-crafted art.

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34 "CCAB lança manual de árabe para brasileiros," *ANBA*, 9 July 2008, https://anba.com.br/camara-lanca-manual-de-arabe-para-brasileiros/ (accessed on 13 May 2023).

35 USP's current Program in "Arab Language, Literature, and Culture" is today part of the "Departmento de Letras Orientais." For more information, see: https://letrasorientais.fflch.usp.br/ (accessed on 13 May 2023).

36 "No Serviço de Bolsas de Estudos da CAPES," *Jornal do Commercio*," 16 February 1960.

37 "Preservação dos monumentos da Núbia e planos do Conselho Nacional de Cultura," *Jornal do Commercio*, 24 July 1962, 2–6.

38 "Semana do Egito," *Jornal do Commercio*, 18 July 1964, 1–6.

39 "Brasileiros no Cairo," *Correio da Manhã*, 23 May 1965, p.2,2; "Quatre peintres brésiliens au Caire." *Le Progres Egyptien*, 23 April 1965; "Les créations des artistes du Brésil et de la R.A.U soulignent les affinités des deux peuples." *Le Progrès Égyptien,* 4 May 1965; "Brazilian Artists in Cairo," *Arab Observer*. 3 May 1965.

40 "Rádio de Cairo," *O Estado de São Paulo*, 16 April 1966, 9

Neither an extension of the Sorbonne nor an exotic deviation from modernist plans, the study of Arabic language and literature was developed as an academic program by Professor Helmi Nasr at what became Brazil's premier university. In this internationalist experiment, Brazilian academia did not merely consume trends from Europe but also refitted that part of the world as subject to a polity whose language and culture also shaped the colonizer of Brazil, in an ongoing rapprochement between increasingly connected parts of the world.

3.3 Architectural Modernity from Brasília to Tripoli

In 1962, the Lebanese state asked the embassy of Brazil in Lebanon to extend a formal invitation to Oscar Niemeyer, the then already famous architect of most government buildings in Brazil's planned capital of Brasília, officially inaugurated two years previously by Kubitschek. Niemeyer was asked to design the "International and Permanent Fairgrounds of Lebanon" in Tripoli (Trablus, in Arabic), Lebanon's second largest city.[41] For Adrian Lahoud, the Lebanese state's "selection of a Brazilian architect" spoke to both aspirations and pressures playing out in international and domestic spheres (2013, 815). As "an epistemic model," Niemeyer's modernist architecture in Brasília appealed to Lebanese leaders with competing if parallel aims, despite the inherent contradictions that beset the Brazilian capital itself. Lahoud suggests that the Brazilian modernity associated with Niemeyer made colonial legacies less overt, gestured toward the Non-Aligned Movement, and seemed "compatible with" Lebanon's "post-independence ethos characterized by the National Pact (*al-mithaq al-watani*) of 1943, an unwritten power-sharing agreement formed between Maronite and Sunni leaders."

At the time, the Lebanese government was led by the Maronite Christian President General Fuad Chehab and the Sunni Muslim Prime Minister, Rashid Karame. With a financially vibrant economy due, in part, to petrodollar deposits from the Gulf, the government allocated significant resources to the new fairgrounds. Total budget appraisals varied between $4.3 and $8 million US dollars, based on news reporting in Brazil.[42] Whatever

41 "Pedido a Niemeyer plano para a feira de Tripoli," *A Tribuna*, 23 March 1962, 4; "Niemeyer elaborará os planos da feira de Tripoli (Líbano)," *Correio Paulistano*, 23 March 1962, 2.

42 "Esperam pelo marinheiro Oscar," *Jornal do Brasil*, 11 July 1962, p.8; "Niemeyer," *Última Hora*, 6 September 1962, 1–3.

the gross costs, Chehab and Karame's self-styled government of national unity embraced the Brazilian architect, who allegedly received $30,000, $100,000, or even $250,000 US dollars, according to different reports.[43] Sharing modernist ideals and reformist impulses, President Chehab received Niemeyer a couple days after he arrived in Beirut in July 1962.[44] Shortly afterwards, Prime Minister Rashid Karame hosted Niemeyer, serving a Brazilian coffee in "cups decorated with the architectural symbol (the Façade of the Planalto Palace) and the name of Brasília."[45] After the proposal was completed, Prime Minister Karame awarded Oscar Niemeyer the "officer's insignias" of the "National Order of the Cedar" for "services rendered to Lebanon."[46] Lebanese, and Arab, visions of modernity took shape in Brazilian architectural designs.

Bolívar de Freitas, Brazil's ambassador in Lebanon who sent the telegraphed invitation to Niemeyer on behalf of the Lebanese government, had taken up that role in late 1958 (Niemeyer 1968, 18).[47] Freitas was not a career foreign officer but rather began as a state deputy in Minas Gerais, where Kubitschek had been governor. After Kubitschek ran and won the presidency, his administration appointed Freitas as the Brazilian ambassador to Lebanon. Shortly afterwards, Freitas was praised for his ability to "encourage the investment of Arab dollars in Brazil," which brought the successive administrations of Jânio Quadros and, initially, João Goulart to renew his post in Beirut until 1963.[48] During this time, Freitas served as a central figure in the opening of an entrepot for Brazilian coffee in Beirut's port. Long after his tour ended in Beirut, Freitas called himself a "friend of Lebanon" in the foreword to the book, *Crise no Líbano* (*Crisis in Lebanon*) by the Lebanese president, Camille Chamoun, which Freitas translated from French to Portuguese (1978). After his official visit to Brazil, but before his mandate ended

43 "Agência do Banco do Brasil em Beirute," *Diário da Noite*, 24 September 1962, p.6; "Notas de Arte: Niemeyer," *Correio Paulistano*, 12 September 1962, 3.

44 "Niemeyer," *Última Hora*, 30 July 1962, 6.

45 "Líbano escolhe Niemeyer para feira de Tripoli," *O Jornal,* 11 August 1962, 1–2.

46 "Niemeyer agraciado pelo governo do Líbano," *A Tribuna*, 15 September. 1962, 3

47 "Do Senhor Presidente da República, submetendo à apreciação do Senado a escolha do nome do Senhor Bolivar de Freitas para o cargo de Embaixador Extraordinário e Plenipotenciário do Brasil no Líbano." MSG 133 de 1958. https://www.congressonacional.leg.br/materias/pesquisa/-/materia/104199 (accessed on 13 May 2023).

48 Isaac Akcelrud, "Repercute a vinda de capitais árabes," *Jornal do Commercio*, 6 Novembro 1960, 1; "Pomona Politis: JQ teria manifestado o desjejo de manter o sr. Bolivar de Freitas ... no Líbano," *Diário de Notícias*, 27 December 1960, 3; "Destacados os serviços do entreposto de café mantido pelo Brasil no Líbano," *A Tribuna*, 12 January 1962, 3.

amid institutional crisis, Chamoun's Ministry of Planning had birthed the very idea of an international exhibition fairgrounds.

Stationed for some four years in Lebanon, Freitas made the most of Niemeyer's nearly three-month presence, tapping into return migrants from Brazil. Freitas had inaugurated not only the grounds for the new headquarters of the Embassy of Brazil in Beirut, donated by José Kalil, a return migrant from Brazil, but also a consulate in Tripoli, also headed by another returnee from Brazil, Jean Torbey.[49] After coordinating Niemeyer's aforementioned meetings with the Lebanese president and prime minister, Freitas arranged an interview in Portuguese, which was broadcasted on "The Voice of Lebanon" ("*Sawt Lubnan*," in Arabic), "for Lebanese in Brazil."[50] This diasporic outreach was followed by a general press conference, during which Niemeyer "answered journalists' questions for almost two hours in French, English, Portuguese, and Spanish."[51] Standing at his side was another returnee from Brazil, Amado Chalhoub, who had been recently appointed as the General Director of the Fairgrounds.

Niemeyer worked with Chalhoub and other Lebanese artists and technicians to "revolutionize the concept of the fair," perhaps taking as a point of departure the short-lived expositions in Baghdad and Damascus that brought little development in the previous decade.[52] Prepared and vetted in Lebanon, Niemeyer published the approved plans upon his return to Brazil in the October 1962 edition of *Módulo* (*Module*), the architectural magazine that he founded in Rio de Janeiro. He promised that "the Lebanon International Fair will be the first to be based on a criterion of unity and plastic equilibrium," with "grandeur and simplicity." He planned for the pavilions, theaters, and fairgrounds to be integrated into the everyday life of Tripoli, linking the old city to the port across some seventy hectares. According to Niemeyer's memoirs (1968), after sixty days of sketching and constructing dioramas in Tripoli, he and his team departed for Beirut where they presented their proposal to Lebanon's Heritage Management Council in the

49 "Autoriza o Embaixador do Brasil junto ao Governo da República do Líbano a aceitar a doação das parcelas de terreno que menciona, situadas na cidade de Beirute," Decreto No. 47.164 da Presidência da República, 3 November 1959; "Diplomáticas … Placa de Mármore em Beirute," *Ultima Hora,* 31 July 1961, 6; "Teletipo: A delegação comercial brasileira visitou Tripoli…," *Ultima Hora,* 24 July 1961, 6.

50 "Le Sejour de M. Oscar Niemeyer au Liban," *L'Argus de la presse libanais* (Bureau des documentations libanaises et arabes), July 1962.

51 Ibid.

52 "Niemeyer," *Última Hora,* 6 September 1962, 1–3

Ministry of Public Works, then headed by Pierre Gemayel. Its members approved the proposal.[53] But the construction that began years later never reached completion.

Niemeyer's mastery of his craft was evident in Brazilian media speculation regarding how much he was paid, recalling the architect's alleged view that he had been previously underpaid by "Mr. Juscelino Kubitschek in Brasília."[54] One columnist alleged that Niemeyer entertained a request made by Jordan's King Hussein to build a palace.[55] Niemeyer putatively "asked for half the amount in advance…the King took it as an insult…" But ambassador Bolívar de Freitas was said to have calmed everyone down.[56] In another instance, Niemeyer was supposedly asked for a plan to redesign Beirut's port zone, "that would earn him seventy million cruzeiros." But upon learning of municipal laws that his architectural designs would have to abide by, Niemeyer allegedly retorted: "'Thank you very much, but the Brazilian architect does not subject himself to such municipal posturing.' And he lost seventy million."[57] Niemeyer was also said to have even been invited by a jealous king of Arabia who promised "'whatever price is asked for'" if he would design palaces in Saudi Arabia.[58]

Without confirming or denying such reports, Niemeyer's own proposal for the International Fairgrounds in Tripoli was often cited verbatim by some of the same media, including the *Correio da Manhã, Jornal do Brasil* and *Manchete* (*Morning Mail, Brazilian Newspaper, and Headline*).[59] An unnamed author in the latter reported that Lebanese government approval of Niemeyer's proposal "is a source of pride for all of us." After the 1964 military coup that led to his exile in France, with many projects elsewhere in the world, Brazilian news coverage continued to highlight Niemeyer as a global authority and icon.[60] Whether parodied or praised, Niemeyer's

53 "Niemeyer," *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 5 September 1962, 4;

54 "Niemeyer no Oriente…," *Correio da Manhã*, 25 September 1962, 2.

55 Ibid.

56 "Regressou Niemeyer," *Correio da Manhã*, 4 October 1962, 2.

57 "Niemeyer no Oriente…," *Correio da Manhã*, 25 September 1962, 2.

58 "Agência do Banco do Brasil em Beirute," *Diário da Noite*, 24 September 1962, p.6; "Drops," *Diário de Notícias*, 24 September 1962, 4.

59 "Niemeyer: Feira de Trípoli," *Correio da Manhã*, 14 October 1962, p.12; "A Feira de Trípoli Projetada por Niemeyer," *Manchete*, 26 October 1962, p.95; "Niemeyer no Líbano," *Manchete*, 3 November 1962, 4; "Módulo: Feira de Tripoli," *Jornal do Brasil*, 19 December 1962, 5

60 "Oscar Niemeyer: revolucionário construiu um novo mundo em 90 dias," *Ultima Hora*, 16 October 1964, p.6; "Oscar Niemeyer – 90 Dias em Israel," *Ultima Hora*, 21 October

idiom of Brazilian modernity had drawn the attention of Lebanese artists, intellectuals, and state craftsmen, as architecture became more political and politics became more architectural as well.

Neither an extension of Le Corbusier nor an exotic tryst in modernism, the Brazilian architectural designs for a Lebanese state-sponsored fairground served as an artful experiment in Arab Brasiliana. In this internationalist enterprise, Brazilian modernist architecture did not merely consume trends from Europe but was also the screen upon which Lebanese state authorities projected alliances, anxieties, and aspirations for the future in an ongoing rapprochement between the world's apparent margins.

3.4 Cinema Novo in Beirut and Damascus

In 1964, the newly formed Sector of Cinema in the aforementioned Cultural Division of Itamaraty invited the famous singer, songwriter, and director, Sérgio Ricardo, "to officially represent Brazil in the IV International Festival of Cinema in Lebanon" in October of that year.[61] Already a key figure in cinematic and musical movements, respectively known as Cinema Novo and Bossa Nova, Sérgio Ricardo was the stage name for João Mansur Lutfi, whose artistically-inclined parents were of Syrian origin. His father, Abdalla Lutfi, emigrated from then French-controlled Syria, and his mother, Maria Mansur, was the Brazilian-born daughter of Arabic-speaking emigrants as well. The young João Lutfi remembered playing with his father's oud at home and singing along as the family crooned popular Arab songs.

His film to be exhibited was *Esse Mundo é Meu* (*This World Is Mine*), which opened on April 1, 1964, the day all woke up to Brazil's military coup. Box office sales slumped and criticism was mixed, as one reviewer surmised that the "very timid little film" is "worth it for the exceptional photography, done by the camera-man, Dib, his brother."[62] Regardless, Glauber Rocha called the film "a legitimate filmmaker's passport for the renowned musician who is Sérgio Ricardo…the film demonstrates…that Cinema Novo conquers its position in our cinematographic panorama."[63] Indeed, Sérgio Ricardo exuded credibility. In the previous year, he undertook a cinematic

61 "Filme do Brasil vai ao Líbano," *Jornal do Brasil*, 30 July 1964, 5; "Escolhido o filme para ir ao Líbano," *O Jornal*, 30 July 1964, 1–7.

62 "Preto no Branco: Bilhetinho para o Juiz de Menores," *A Tribuna*, 12 January 1965, 2

63 https://acasadevidro.com/sergio-ricardo/ (accessed on 13 May 2023).

and musical tour in the US that featured his first short film.[64] Itamaraty took advantage of his international stature, arranging for him to travel with his wife Ana Lúcia and co-star Antonio Pitanga to festivals in Beirut, Paris, and elsewhere.[65] As one reviewer misidentified him as being "of Lebanese origin,"[66] the subtle Syrianness of Sérgio Ricardo seemed not to be a main factor in Itamaraty's selection for the festival in Lebanon.

Quite to the contrary, the Syrianness of Sérgio Ricardo was on full display in Lebanon. In the supplemental review published in *al-Nahar* (*The Day*), the Arabic-language daily newspaper of record in Beirut, Sérgio Ricardo was unmasked as the stage name of João Lutfi.[67] His mother and father's ancestral city in Syria was identified as Saidnaya, close to the capital of Damascus. With his film's title directly translated as *al-'Alam Malakyiun*, the review briefly nods to the plot revolving around two men who seek success through their labor but become disillusioned by the meagre salaries they earn. Sérgio Ricardo was praised for directing the film and composing the soundtrack, as well as for his past musical collaboration with Glauber Rocha on *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol*, whose Arabic title derived from the English, *Black God, White Devil*. Based on this and other reactions, the Brazilian press reported that *Esse mundo é meu* was an "official success in the festival of Beirut" as "critics and audiences" praised it.[68] A Brazilian public welcomed the crafting of a Brazil for consumption in the Arab world.

Sérgio Ricardo noted that the Syrian committee at the festival invited him to shoot a "medium-length film in my father's village, Saidnaya" (sic, Sérgio Ricardo 1991, 183). He continued that "the [Syrian] government encouraged cinema in the country and needed foreign professionals to train others." Sérgio Ricardo explained that he went to Lebanon, not to necessarily visit Syria, but rather to accompany the film invited to the festival and for critics to praise the film. Indeed, the Syrian state expressed interest in Brazilian cultural workings. Just a year before, Syria's Ministry of Culture prepared an Arabic translation of Machado de Assis's *Quincas Borba* (1871, 1963).[69] Arab nationalist intellectual, Sami Droubi, translated it

64 "Sérgio Ricardo," *Diário de Notícias*, 11 August 1963, 2.

65 Luiz Alípio de Barros, "Sampaio leva fitas à Europa e à Africa," *Ultima Hora*, 17 September 1964, 8; "Sucesso fora," *Jornal do Brasil*, 24 December 1964, 8.

66 Mendes Viana, "Esse Mundo É Meu," *Diário de Notícias*, 25 July 1964, 2–3.

67 "Min film tawil el-barazil," *an-nahar*, 10 November 1964.

68 "Preto no Branco: Bilhetinho para o Juiz de Menores," *A Tribuna*, 12 January 1965, 2; "Sucesso fora," *Jornal do Brasil*, 24 December 1964, 8.

69 "Machado em tradução árabe," *Jornal do Brasil*, 1 June 1962, B1.

while serving in the Syrian embassy in Rio de Janeiro. Droubi had returned to become Syria's Minister of Education and Culture after the 1963 coup d'état, known as the March 8th Revolution (Moubayed 2005, 408). A decade previously, Brazilian officials and Syrian diplomats inaugurated the Brazil-Syria Cultural Institute, accompanied by calls of the Syrian diplomatic delegation in Brazil for a cultural accord (that culminated in the aforementioned 1960 agreement between Brazil and the UAR, from which Syria had later seceded).[70] In the 1950s and 1960s, amid shifting internal and external alliances, the Syrian Arab state sought, and consumed, Brazilian culture.

Having seized the reins of the state, the newly entitled Syrian bloc invited Sérgio Ricardo to carry out two documentary films, only one of which he accepted to do, given time constraints imposed by prior commitments to attend film festivals elsewhere. In early 1965, Sérgio Ricardo provided updates in a "long letter" from Damascus to the *Diário Carioca* (*The Rio de Janeiro Paper*), a daily newspaper in Rio de Janeiro which supported the administration of João Goulart and expressed critiques of the military coup d'état that soon led to its closure. It noted the importance of the "family ascendance of Sérgio Ricardo" in the official invitation made by the Syrian state.[71] Sérgio Ricardo was praised for having "made the best effort to disseminate, in a virtually new region, the good name of Brazilian culture …" A Brazilian press delighted in witnessing the consumption of Brazilian culture in a "virtually new" part of the world.[72]

Sérgio Ricardo lived in Damascus where "daily I went out in a Volkswagen bus with the film crew; we drove forty kilometers until we found the village where my father was born, nestled in a beautiful mountain of stone houses, many of which my father and his ancestors had been building..." (Sérgio Ricardo 1991, 183). It was this setting that inspired *O Pássaro da Aldeia* (*The Bird from the Village*), which, according to the website that catalogues his career, is a middle-length film set "in the city of Saidnaya, in Syria." [73] It "narrates the story of a woodcutter who feels the need to leave the village where he lives, heading to the big city to obtain better living

70 "Instituto de Cultura Brasil-Síria," *Jornal do Comércio*, 3 September 1953; "Legation de Syrie au Brésil," 11 January 1955.

71 "De Damasco e de Antuérpia," *Diário Carioca*, 9 January 1965, 7a.

72 Another report presumed the film to be a "documentário sobre a imigração síria para o Brasil." See "O cineasta Sérgio Ricardo," *O Jornal*, 13 November 1964, 5.

73 "O Pássaro da Aldeia," *Sérgio Ricardo: Memória Viva*, https://sergioricardo.com/ficha/1950/o-passaro-da-aldeia-1964?busca=S%C3%ADria (accessed on 13 May 2023).

conditions."[74] Transmitting the "yearnings of youth to participate in modernity," the film employed Syrian actors with an aesthetic and plot of Cinema Novo.

In the more than two months he spent in Syria, Sérgio Ricardo crafted his own appearance on radio and television stations. "On the Syrian capital's television," it was said that Sérgio Ricardo "played Brazilian music, mainly numbers from the soundtrack of *Esse Mundo é Meu* ...[and] the themes are already being sung in Syria and Lebanon, enjoying great popularity."[75] The apparent interest in Brazilian music that Sérgio Ricardo sparked, specifically in Syria, did not merely reflect a self-congratulatory Brazilian press. At the time, "television stations across all the major cities of Syria were connected by a micro-wave link and transmission links were set up in most of the Syrian regions" (Dajani 2005, 588). So, Sérgio Ricardo's televised musical performances that promoted the soundtrack for his film were accessible to a larger Syrian public. The television- and youth-centered *Intervalo* (*Interval*) magazine in Rio de Janeiro perhaps exaggerated that Sérgio Ricardo's music was "already one of the three most sold in Syria."[76] The Brazil of the 1960s did not only consume external influences; the country also delighted in seeing Brazilian culture consumed elsewhere in the world.

This excitement over experimentation occurred in what by then had become narrowing domestic scenarios of possibility, whether in Brazil or Syria. The newly installed Syrian government could not reach consensus over Sérgio Ricardo's "proposal of Cinema Novo, of a 'reality cinema'" in Syria" (Hagemeyer and Lopes Saraiva 2019). After shooting the film on the outskirts of Damascus, Sérgio Ricardo had to "...depart for Genoa, where an exhibition of Cinema Novo would occur a few days afterwards...," but his request for a copy of his film was "denied by the Syrian government, with the justification that the exhibition of the film in other countries would be politically counter-productive for Syria" (Sérgio Ricardo 1991, 183).[77] Some years later, the reels drew the attention of Mohammad Shahin, Syrian film director, former director of Syria's Cinema Foundation, and founder of the Damascus Film Festival that featured Arab, Asian, and Latin American

74 Ibid.

75 "Sucesso fora," *Jornal do Brasil*, 24 December 1964, p. 8; Fernando Spencer, "Cinema," *Diário de Pernambuco,* 6 January 1965, 7.

76 "Oito meses de sucesso na Europa e nos Estados Unidos," *Intervalo*, 31 July 1965.

77 "Sérgio Ricardo fala sobre o filme 'O Pássaro da Aldeia," *Sérgio Ricardo: Memória Viva*, https://sergioricardo.com/ficha/1949/sergio-ricardo-fala-sobre-o-filme-o-passaro-da-aldeia?busca=S%C3%ADria (accessed on 13 May 2023).

cinematic productions.[78] The original storyline's rural-to-urban departure, shot by Sérgio Ricardo in a medium-length format, would serve as the first part of a full-length film proposed to culminate in an urban-to-rural return. This idea appears not to have allayed the concerns of the state, as cinematic experimentation took distinct paths in Brazil and Syria.[79]

3.5 Unfinished Ending

Arab Brasiliana is strategy as much as style, within and across genres, inward-and outward-looking. The cultural flows explored here reveal a Brazil not merely digesting technologies and trends from elsewhere, as made famous by Oswald de Andrade's "Manifesto antropófago." Artists, intellectuals, and diplomats also led to the dissemination of Brazilianness beyond the country's actual borders, to be consumed in a part of the world that had just freed itself from the same powers that still exerted global cultural hegemony. In just over a decade and a half, four distinct cultural exchanges between Brazil and the Arab world occurred in a deliberate fashion. The academic, architectural, cinematic, and poetic expressions made up an alternative aesthetic and agenda that appealed to elite and urbane publics in mid-century Beirut, Damascus, and Cairo. Not discussed here, there were concomitant concerted efforts initiated by Brazilian corporate and governmental elites to increase coffee exports, with Beirut as the port of entry for the Arab world market.[80] These Brazilian entanglements are key in the rethinking of the Middle East, not as exceptional but rather as a node in a "global ecumene" (Guyer 2004, 516–17, Hannerz 1996, Shohat 2013). The worlds of possibility that opened between Brazil, Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria remain within view today.

Thomas Skidmore's notion of "an experiment in democracy" characterized not only mid-century Brazil but also its rapprochement toward the Arab world. Set between 1948 and 1964, this chapter drew upon the interpretation of this towering figure of Brazilian studies to propose a complementary concept of artful experimentation. It points to not sui generis

78 "Tajribat al-sinama fi suriya," *Alma'rifah*. Issue 131 (1973), 38.

79 Shahin had experience with adapting banned works. In 1974, Shahin successfully made a banned play into a film. It was *Mughamarat ra's al-mamluk Jabir* (*The Adventures of Mamluk Jabir's Head*) by Saadallah Wannous (Moubayed 2005, 580–1)

80 See: Karam, John Tofik. "Brazilian Coffee in an Arab Mediterranean, 1920s–1940s," Guimarães Rosa Institute, Embassy of Brazil in Beirut, 20 May 2024.

institutions, knowledges, and practices, but rather novel articulations between them, as art became more political and politics became more artistic. In a world where Anglo-French cultural and economic dominance belied the formal political independence achieved by the world's margins, the importance of the skillful possession, if not mastery, of a craft, merged with clever and tasteful ways to achieve multiple ends. The experimentation of artful statecraft necessarily entailed an internationalist flair that inverted the model of cultural cannibalism put forward by Oswald de Andrade and moved beyond the usual metropoles. With particular but not exclusive interest in the Arab world, Brazilian diplomats and bureaucrats joined with artists and intellectuals to exchange architecture, cinema, literature, and poetry. Instead of cannibalizing outside influences, they conducted artful experiments with a part of the world that recently gained political independence, in a shared but still unfinished project to center the margins.

This mid-twentieth century history reveals that the practice of South-South exchange emerged before the nomenclature itself, not quite fitting into the contemporaneous moniker of "tiers monde" (Sauvy 1952). My focus on a sixteen-year period of artful experimentation is just one dimension of a much broader, and still underexplored, understanding of art and politics which re-emphasizes the ideologically and institutionally broader array of possibilities across a Global South. Since before Bandung, there had been horizontal and vertical trajectories in Afro-Asian, or in the case at hand, Arab-Latin American rapprochements. These and other ventures in the Global South have been met with commentaries regarding co-optation or continued resilience today. This chapter offered one way to avoid such a binary, exploring the adroitness, if not mastery, of a craft, and the sly but classy ways to pursue many agendas. As a perspective, and not a place (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2011), this Global South know-how is as useful to autocratic and market forces as it remains for aesthetic and grassroots movements.

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CHAPTER 4

Looking to Mexico: Hamed Ewais, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Egypt's Workers

Gabriella Nugent

Abstract

This chapter examines the work of the Egyptian artist Hamed Ewais (1919–2011), who started to engage with Mexican muralism in the 1950s. His interest in Mexican muralism occurred against a backdrop of shifting geopolitics, when the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser came to power and, in the wake of the Bandung Conference of 1955, when there was increased collaboration between Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

After encountering Mexican muralism at the Venice Biennale in 1952, Ewais started to depict Egypt's working class. Given this subject matter, the artist's body of work is most often discussed in the context of supporting Nasserist ideology. However, the government's official proclamations often intentionally obscured the continuing struggles between the workers and the state. While the government advertised positive images of workers, its concern for national unity and economic development limited their political freedom. I argue that Ewais's adoption of Mexican muralism allowed him to foreground the lived experiences of the country's workers. In doing so, Ewais departs from the previous generation of Egyptian modern artists who, in general, depicted idealized scenes of rural peasant labor. By contrast, I contend that Ewais's paintings demonstrate the exertion of labor on the individual. He details the constraints of the Nasserist state on its workers and a sense of ambiguity towards the fulfilment of the promises associated with the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. This line of inquiry opens up the global dimensions of Mexican muralism, which thus far has been limited to the Americas. I also address Nasser's admiration for the historical precedent of Mexican muralism in which artists supported the ideological work of the state.

Keywords

Hamed Ewais – Gamal Abdel Nasser – David Alfaro Siquerios – Mexican muralism – Egypt – workers – labor

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On September 12, 1956, the Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1974) interviewed Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–1970) in Cairo, Egypt with the aim of expanding Afro-Asian cooperation to include Latin America.[1] Siqueiros was the youngest and most politically radical of "*los tres grandes*" ("the big three"), the name given to himself, Diego Rivera (1886–1957) and José Clemente Orozco (1883–1949). In comparison to Rivera and Orozco, Siqueiros dedicated his career to the promotion of muralism around the world, "writing, lecturing and inserting his vision of mural art, and himself, into the era's artistic and political debates" (Jolly 2012, 75). In this little-known interview, Nasser expresses an admiration for the visual arts of Mexico. He states:

> Indeed, the contemporary Mexican experience in the plastic arts is of the greatest importance for the new Egypt. Lacking a private market, and without the possibility of this market developing rapidly in an appreciable way, the artists of my country will not be able to develop their creative faculty—without the support of the state. The Government, for its part, will need, in its immense transformative social task, the ideological help of the artists, neither more nor less than it will need the help of all citizens in the field of their respective activities… Now, those who appeared first must contribute their knowledge to those who come later. How could Mexican artists, given an experience of almost fifty years, contribute to the emergence of something similar in this land, similar in many ways to theirs?
>
> "Algunas de las opinions expuestas," 1956

Nasser was one of the principal agents of the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, leading a military coup that seized control of the government and ended the monarchy. He assumed executive office in 1954 and was formally elected as president in June 1956. Speaking with Siqueiros, Nasser claims to envision a system of state funding for visual art in Egypt based on the historical precedent of Mexican muralism, where artists after the Mexican Revolution were tasked with transmitting the vision of the state to its people.

The larger aim of Siqueiros's interview with Nasser was to advocate for the people of Latin America. He explains:

1 The interview was covered in the global press. I viewed press clippings about the interview from Egyptian, French, Italian and Mexican newspapers in the Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros in Mexico City, Mexico.

> It is very important that the Egyptian people, who already have the support of the Arab people, the support of the USSR, the revolutionaries and the progressives all over the world, feel the sympathy of the great mass of the people of the world, Latin America; sympathy which, unfortunately, has not yet translated into political facts. We know, in Egypt, that eighty-five percent of Argentines applauded the nationalization of the Suez Canal and that this sympathy is even greater in the countries of Indian blood? We have the same problems, because despite the apparent freedoms of the South American republics, American domination has not for all that disappeared. These republics have twenty-one votes at the UN, more than the united Arab and Soviet voices, and it is paramount to know the public opinion of the people of Latin America.
>
> quoted in Day 1956

Nasser was an Egyptian nationalist determined to make Egypt fully independent of the West. On July 26, 1956, Nasser announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal, which had been controlled by Britain and France. Siqueiros compares this control to the United States' domination of South America. At this moment in time, Latin America had started to look toward Nasser's Egypt and its concomitant program of Nasserism (Vélez 2015). His decision to bring the Suez Canal under state control rekindled nationalism and reignited demands and aspirations for anticolonialism across Latin America (Vélez 2015). In the interview, Siqueiros asks Nasser to "convene a conference similar to Bandung which would include not only Afro-Asian countries, but also the republics of Latin America as well as the three Guyanas, Puerto Rico…?" (quoted in Day 1956). In 1955, the Bandung Conference, the first large-scale meeting between many newly independent Asian and African states, had taken place in Indonesia with the goal of promoting economic and cultural cooperation and opposition to colonialism and neo-colonialism. Latin America stood somewhat apart from the other two continents given that many of its governments during the Cold War were dependent on the United States and opposed to communism (Djagalov 2020). However, as Antoinette Burton notes, Bandung was "not so much a place as it was a geopolitical project," symbolising "the realignment of the postcolonial cold war map" which others wanted to join (Burton 2010, 353).

Against this backdrop of shifting geopolitics, Egyptian artists, including Hamed Ewais (1919–2011), had already started to look towards Mexican

muralism in their work.[2] While many Arab artists had adopted a Western-style art in the nineteenth century onwards, some began to challenge these dominant trends with the emergence of nationalist movements in the 1940s and 1950s, leading them to look elsewhere for inspiration (Naef 2003). From Mexican muralism, Ewais embraced a commitment to a politically themed figurative art and the depiction of Egypt's working class. His body of work is most often discussed in the context of supporting Nasserist ideology (Radwan n.d., Mileeva 2023), but the government's official policy proclamations often intentionally obscured the continuing struggles between the workers and the state.[3] While the government advertised positive images of workers, its concern for national unity and economic development limited their political freedom. In this chapter, I argue that Ewais's adoption of Mexican muralism allowed him to foreground the lived experiences of the country's workers. He departs from the previous generation of Egyptian modern artists who depicted idealized scenes of rural peasant labor. By contrast, I contend that Ewais's paintings demonstrate the exertion of labor on the individual. He details the constraints of the Nasserite state on its workers and a sense of ambiguity towards the fulfilment of the promises associated with the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. This line of inquiry opens up the global dimensions of Mexican muralism, which thus far has often been limited to the Americas.[4] I also address Nasser's eventual fulfilment of state funding for visual arts based on the Mexican precedent through the government program that sponsored artists to depict the construction of Aswan High Dam.

4.1 Muralism beyond Mexico

Born in a small village near Beni Soueif, Hamed Ewais trained as a metalworker before moving to Cairo to study at the School of Fine Arts. He comprised a newly urbanized and educated middle class of young Egyptian men from modest backgrounds that emerged in the 1930s and 1940s (Ryzova 2005). After graduating in 1944, Ewais progressed to further study at the

2 While outside the scope of her study, Radwan (2017) considers the effect of the Bandung Conference on the transnational interstices of artmaking.

3 I have written elsewhere about the divergence between Nasser's public declarations around women and their lived experiences (Nugent 2022).

4 Raffaele Mauriello has published a few articles on Mexican muralism in Iran (Mauriello 2020 and 2025).

Institute of Art Education in Cairo. In 1947, Ewais was one of the founders of the Group of Modern Art, which rejected the dominant movement of Surrealism as promoted by Art and Liberty (Bardaouil 2017). While Art and Liberty members shared communist convictions and believed that Surrealism could be a means to confront the spread of fascism and nationalism (Bardaouil 2017), its visual language was not necessarily accessible to the masses. Other artists, such as Kamel el-Telmissany (1915–1972) and Inji Efflatoun (1924–1989), also turned away from Surrealism for similar reasons at this time. In 1952, Ewais visited the 26th Venice Biennale where he was exposed to the work of the Mexican muralists. That year's Mexican pavilion presented a collection of over one hundred engravings by twenty-five artists, including Orozco, Rivera, and Siqueiros (Nieto Ruiz 2019). The muralists had adopted printmaking as a way for their work to travel and engage an audience beyond Mexico (Indych-López 2009).

Emerging in 1920 at the end of the Mexican Revolution, Mexico's state-sponsored mural project was the brainchild of José Vasconcelos, Minister of Public Education in the newly installed government of President Álvaro Obregon (1880–1928) (Charlot 1963, Gilbert and Buchenau 2013). Between 1921 and 1924, Vasconcelos led a governmental program that brought education to the masses in an effort to unify the country (Secretaría de Educación Pública 1922, Vasconcelos 1923). Bearing in mind Mexico's many different ethnic groups and languages, Vasconcelos turned to instruction through images. He invited artists to create monumental public works depicting the everyday life of the country's people. Reinvigorating the age-old fresco technique and rejecting the elitism of European abstraction, Mexican muralism advocated a politically themed figurative art that depicted the significance of peasants, workers, and people of mixed indigenous-European descent, as well as popular agency, to the operations of the state (Brenner 1929, Rochfort 1993, Coffey 2012, Anreus, Greeley, and Folgarait 2012). Artists from across Mexico joined this cause, but it was Orozco, Rivera, and Siqueiros, or "*los tres grandes*" who were the most visible proponents of Mexican muralism.[5]

During the interwar years, Mexican muralism was an extremely popular modern art movement. Between 1927 and 1940, Orozco, Rivera, and Siqueiros spent extended periods of time in the United States, executing commissions, exhibiting their work, and interacting with local artists (Hurlburt

5 While the term "Mexican muralism" suggests a homogenous movement possessed of "one idea, one aesthetics and one objective," as some contemporary commenters have observed, Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros held radically divergent views of art and politics, and they rarely appeared in public together (Anreus, Greeley and Folgarait 2012).

1989, Haskell 2020). Siqueiros also executed murals in Argentina and Chile during this time. The arrival of the Mexican muralists in the United States coincided with the onset of the Great Depression. American artists at this time were seeking an alternative to the abstraction of European modernism, which seemed too detached for the contemporary moment (Haskell 2020). They accordingly adopted the language and philosophy of Mexican muralism—the medium of muralism itself as well as an accessible figurative art and a commitment to the depiction of workers and popular agency—in order to foreground episodes of social injustice spurred by the collapse of the capitalist system (Haskell 2020).

After the Second World War, the status of Mexican muralism dramatically shifted. By 1947, a Cold War rivalry had developed between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies. In the context of the Cold War, figuration and abstraction became polarized as emblematic of the divide between the communist dictatorship of the Soviet Union and the capitalist democracy of the United States (Prendeville 2000; Denning 2004). In the United States, the figuration of Mexican muralism was vilified due to its association with the Stalinist left, whereas the abstraction of the New York School was celebrated (Krenn 2006, Barnhisel 2015). Not only were Rivera and Siqueiros denied entry into the United States, but their works in the collection of New York's Museum of Modern Art, as well as those by Orozco, were moved from the main galleries to marginal spaces (Anreus 2016). Their mention in literature also became minimal (Anreus 2016).

Nonetheless, the Mexican muralist tradition endured beyond the West after 1945, but its adoption did not necessarily occur on public walls given a lack of patronage and differing political circumstance. Instead, artists aligned themselves with the tradition through a commitment to a politically themed figurative art and the depiction of workers and popular agency in the wake of state building efforts across Africa and Asia. In these later years, Siqueiros and Rivera travelled around the world, including the former's trip to Cairo in September 1956, arguing for a kind of realism that had a social function but did not degenerate into Soviet Socialist Realism. In comparison to the latter's idealism and didacticism, they believed in a visual art that created class consciousness by portraying the everyday lives of ordinary people.

4.2 The Egyptian Revolution and the Workers' Movement

Before Ewais's exposure to Mexican muralism at the 1952 Venice Biennale, the artist had tended to paint city scenes, still lifes, and cubist,

Picasso-inspired portraits. After Venice, however, Ewais adopted certain tenets of Mexican muralism, namely its commitment to a figurative portrayal of workers. Foregrounding the proletariat, or the working masses, as society's revolutionary agent, was central to Siqueiros's artistic project. He declared: "The artist has one possibility: he must make up his mind to serve either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat. I believe that painting and sculpture should serve the proletariat in their revolutionary class struggle" (Siqueiros 1975, 36). In 1953, Ewais executed *After a Working Day* [Figure 4.1], which depicts a group of male workers dressed in blueish grey uniforms and turbans who pass under a brick archway as they leave the factory. There is a photographic sensibility to the painting; the men appear to walk towards the camera and therefore the viewer. In the background are four industrial chimneys that pump smoke into the air. The monumentality of the workers echoes the Mexican muralists' depictions and seemingly emphasizes their significance to the Egyptian state.

As Joel Beinin has argued (Beinin 1989), the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 was indebted to a militant workers' movement that had emerged in the previous decade, creating an atmosphere of social and political upheaval. However, the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC)—the body established to supervise the Republic of Egypt and Anglo-Egyptian Sudan after the Revolution—could not contend with the energy that remained in the movement after the coup, leading them to discourage collective action in an attempt to create economic growth and maintain peace and discipline (Beinin 1989). According to Beinin (Beinin 1989), the RCC rejected the view that there was, or should be, a struggle between classes in Egypt, and it therefore tried to eliminate militant trade union leaders, especially communists, and replace them with elements loyal to the RCC. One extreme example of the RCC's repression of the labor movement was its response to a strike held on 12 August 1952 at the Misr Fine Spinning and Weaving Company in Kafr al-Dawwar (Botman 1988, Beinin 1989). Even though the striking workers had demonstrated in favor of the new regime, the RCC was wary of any disruption to production, so it sent the army to intervene, leading to a violent clash between the soldiers and workers. The RCC arrested two hundred workers, and a brief military tribunal tried and condemned two of them to death.

In the immediate aftermath of the Egyptian Revolution, many people were aware of the schism between the workers and the state. Efflatoun—who like Ewais had started to look toward Mexican muralism and would subsequently meet and befriend Siqueiros on the latter's trip to Cairo in September 1956 (Nugent 2022)—was critical of the government's treatment of workers at Kafr al-Dawwar (Monciaud 2015). Against this backdrop, Ewais's *After a Working Day* rejects the portrayal of workers as

anonymous cogs in the country's drive for economic development; rather, the workers are conveyed in their specificity. He depicts them as individuals, each with their own voice and opinion, challenging the idea of the collective mass suggested through their uniforms. In the painting, the worker on the left-hand side of the group cusps his hands together to light a cigarette. Next to him, a man with a bare head, which differentiates him from the turbans in the group, gazes into the distance while slowly cycling, keeping pace with the group. His brow appears furrowed and his thoughts are elsewhere. Behind these men, two workers engage in a discussion; one appears mid-sentence, grabbing the other by the arm in an attempt to emphasize what is being said. The other worker, who seems slightly older with a grey moustache, leans in to listen, while the men nearby look on to their discussion.

The previous generation of modern Egyptian artists had depicted scenes of work through idealized portrayals of rural peasant labor. The Alexandrian artist Mahmoud Said (1897–1964) painted scenes that distinguished the whiteness of the artist's own upper class from the darker-skinned lower classes of Egypt (Troutt Powell 2021, Seggerman 2019). In *Les Chadoufs* (1934), Said depicts men drawing water from a well in a typical Egyptian landscape. Dressed in pristine white loincloths and turbans, they pull clay pots up from the spring. The triangular stance of the men's legs echoes the pyramids in the background, connecting them to ancient Egypt and naturalizing their labor to the landscape. The painting's expansive viewpoint creates a sense of distance between the viewer and the depicted space. Said does not acknowledge the individual identities of the men, nor of the other figures conveyed in the painting. Next to the men is a *fellaha*, an Egyptian peasant woman wearing a long black cloak and carrying a water jug on top of her head. She is turned with her back to the viewer. Several other *fellahin* can be seen in the middle ground of the painting. Originally a colonial image, the *fellaha* and her water jug was transformed into a symbol of Egyptian identity and nationhood at the turn of the century (Seggerman 2019). By engaging with this image, Said plays with its two-hundred-year genealogy. The status of the image as a trope further obscures any sense of the physical labor performed by the women.

By contrast, Ewais's *After a Working Day* foregrounds the everyday grind of the factory. He shows the workers in a transitional moment as they move between the factory and their lives outside of work, challenging the conflation of their identities with their labor. They are seen from a close distance, which creates a sense of proximity between them and the viewer. At the end of the day, the workers appear coated in the smog of the factory that descends over them. Their every step looks weighted, making them appear fatigued. For example, the figure lighting a cigarette on the left-hand side of

group drags himself forward, slowly lifting one leg after the other. In comparison to the previous generation of modern artists, Ewais's *After a Working Day* demonstrates the exertion of work on the individual, challenging the idea of labor as naturalized to a certain class and perhaps providing the worker with some bargaining power in Nasser's Egypt.

4.3 Constraints and Limitations

In *Reading Worker* (1958) [Figure 4.2], Ewais depicts a worker dressed in a blue boilersuit and cap who sits with one knee bent on some wooden crates. The painting was executed a couple of years after Nasser's assumption of the country's presidency and amidst the government's mobilization of state-led capitalist development and industrialization. In one hand, Ewais's worker grasps a blank white book, seemingly empty of text and images, and, in the other, a transparent glass filled with tea. A spoon for stirring the tea sits on the crate next to him. In the arch behind the worker, there is a factory with the same kind of industrial chimneys seen in *After a Working Day*. Like Ewais's other workers, this man is big-boned, taking up the majority of the canvas. His hands appear strangely large as they hold the book and glass, symbolizing the significance of the worker's labor to the state. However, Ewais substitutes the tools of the trade with objects that signify leisure.

Ewais's *Reading Worker* could be seen as an idealized depiction of Nasserism, whereby an enlightened worker is given a break during the working day. However, there is simultaneously something awry in this painting: the worker is cramped against the crates and the edges of the canvas. These feelings of confinement are amplified by a lack of depth in perspective. In Ewais's earlier painting *After a Working Day*, the group of men is similarly confined by the brick archway and the edges of the canvas. The constraints of the pictorial frame could be viewed as a critique of a Nasserite government that limited the political independence of its workers.[6] Indeed, the government had attempted to co-opt and control all aspects of the labor movement, from the prohibition of strikes to trade unions. In terms of the latter, the RCC refused the formation of a national trade union federation in the autumn of 1952. In 1957, the Nasserite government announced the creation of its own organization, the Egyptian Trade Union Federation, and

6 Nadia Radwan has commented on the "the reduced space of the canvas" in Ewais's work as "a metaphor for the social boundaries of the Egyptian society" (Radwan n.d.).

controlled the appointments to the executive board for several terms of office (Beinin 1989).

Another example of this type of constraint can be found in the worker's blank white book. Following the Egyptian Revolution, Nasser led a campaign of censorship. He maintained extensive oversight of the press from 1953 onwards. In 1956, the Higher Council of Arts, Letters, and Social Sciences was created to bring all literary output under government control. This Egyptian body operated more through patronage of approved authors than outright censorship (Crabbs 1975). The censorship of the press and arts was intended to limit the spread of communism. Nasser led an anti-communist campaign that saw many known and suspected communists arrested and jailed, including Efflatoun. It is perhaps in this context of censorship that we could consider the blank white book.

Ewais's oeuvre oscillates between the limitations of Nasser's government, specifically with regards to workers, and the promise of what it could achieve, fulfilling but also subverting Nasser's vision based on the Mexican model. In 1957, Ewais painted *Nasser and the Nationalization of the Canal* [Figure 4.3], which depicts Nasser at the centre of a diverse crowd. As previously mentioned, Nasser had brought the Suez Canal under state control in 1956, ending its domination by Britain and France. In the upper right-hand corner of the painting, Ewais references this event through the figure of a ship on a body of water, suggesting that it would serve the Egyptian people who look towards Nasser in admiration. However, as Anneka Lenssen observes, the crowd is expectant and not yet exultant (Lenssen 2016). She writes: "Ewais's revolution was almost always an anticipatory rather than a finished one" (Lenssen 2016, 434).

The limits of the state in terms of its fulfilment of revolutionary promises is an experience shared by Egyptian and Mexican people and a theme explored by Siqueiros himself. Dan Tschirgi has drawn a comparison between the Mexican Revolution and the Nasserist experience, claiming that neither altered the overall social, political, and economic marginalization of the country's peasantry (Tschirgi 1999). When Siqueiros visited Cairo in 1956, one Egyptian newspaper published an article on him, reproducing the artist's painting, *Zapata* (1931), which depicts Emiliano Zapata (1879–1919), a leading figure of the Mexican Revolution who advocated the redistribution of land to the peasants and spurred the agrarian movement called Zapatismo (Bartra 1985, Harvey 1998, Padilla 2008).[7] Another Egyptian

7 The title of the newspaper where this article appeared is unknown. The press cutting was found in the Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros in Mexico City, Mexico and marked only as coming from an Egyptian newspaper.

newspaper, *Akhbar al-Yawm* (*News Today*), included an image of Siqueiros's painting *Our Present Image* (1947), which is based on a photograph that the artist had taken of himself, incorporating the camera's foreshortening and acute perspective.[8] In *Our Present Image*, a naked man devoid of distinguishing features extends his hands towards the viewer, but not in a way that suggests an identifiable task. He is neither a peasant nor a laborer. Siqueiros's painting is a representation of Mexico's break with its past, a former identity linked to land and agriculture. One of the goals of the Mexican Revolution had been the redistribution of land, which began under the aegis of President Obregón and reached its apex with President Lázaro Cárdenas (1895–1970) (Hall 1980, Bantjes 1998, Fallaw 2001). However, many of these reforms were reversed after Cárdenas stepped down in 1940, and they were still being neglected at the time of Siqueiros's painting. His *Our Present Image* speaks to the death of the Mexican Revolution's goals.

Two years after *Nasser and the Nationalization of the Canal*, Ewais painted *Peasant Family* (1959) [Figure 4.4], which portrays a mother, father, and son transporting their wares. Here again, the sheer scale of Ewais's figures dominates the canvas. The man walks hunched over, carrying a log of wood on his shoulders and a pickaxe in his hand. His thick calves suggest the strength involved in this daily task, but also the ways in which it weighs on the body. Meanwhile, the woman balances a basket of terracotta pottery on her head with one hand and in the other grasps a ceramic vessel. The combination of the woman and pottery plays with the trope of the *fellaha*, moving away from an idealized image of Egyptian identity and nationhood towards the economic realities of daily life. In the middle of the man and woman, their son, who is dressed in a long white shirt, carries an additional tool on his shoulder. A small dog accompanies the family, walking between their feet. The gleeful expressions of the young boy and dog mark a contrast with the scowls of the man and woman, who appear cast in a blanket of shadow. They offer a further deviation from the eager expressions of the crowd in *Nasser and the Nationalization of the Canal*. The couple appears tired from the drudgery of the same daily work performed over decades, and which will eventually be passed on to their son. He too will grow weary from this work. The lineage depicted by Ewais suggests that, despite Nasser's promises, the hardships of Egypt's working class endured.

8 Siqueiros advocated the adoption of radical technical means, including spray-painting, commercial lacquer and photographic projectors, as necessary for a revolutionary art.

4.4 The Aswan High Dam

Returning to the interview with Siqueiros, Nasser expressed a desire for a system of state funding for visual art in Egypt based on the precedent of Mexican muralism. This vision came to fruition some years later with the construction of the Aswan High Dam between 1960 and 1970. Nasser presented the High Dam as a bold technological initiative designed to deliver Egypt from 'colonial underdevelopment and into industrial modernity' (Reynolds 2012, 181). By damming several years' worth of Nile floodwaters, the hydroelectric project aimed to greatly expand agriculture, ensure the security of water and food supplies, and jumpstart industrialization. During its construction, the Egyptian government provided sponsorships and grants to artists, including Ewais, to visit the High Dam and the Nubian villages that were to be drowned by the flood.

In *At the Aswan Dam* (1965) [Figure 4.5], Ewais depicts three men at work on the construction of transmission towers and power grids above Lake Nasser. The workers are denoted through an "abstract geometry" that echoes their tools and equipment (Lenssen 2016, 434). Two of the men attach and tighten one of the structure's electrical conduits. They crane their necks forward, consumed by the task at hand. In doing so, the men are concealed from the viewer, only identifiable through their brown hardhats, the shape of which echoes the circular screws nearby. In the same vein, their curved arms call to mind the conduit they are in the process of attaching. A third worker, who wears yellow protective goggles, a green mask, and an electric blue hardhat, almost disappears into the structure. He looks up from a triangle of wooden beams below the other two men, overseeing their task. His yellow googles echo the color of the connector nearby, collapsing him too with the structure.

Ewais's conflation of the workers with the tools and equipment surrounding them suggests their complete submission to the state. As previously mentioned, the Nasserite government attempted to encompass and control the country's workers. In *At the Aswan Dam*, the workers are shown only in relation to the jobs performed. They are literally depicted as cogs in the machine. Where Ewais had previously attempted to convey each worker's individuality, *At the Aswan Dam* proposes that Nasser's vision of technological modernity depends on the erasure of the worker's individuality, including their political independence. The individual is further obscured through the multiple perspectives of the painting, from the bird's-eye view that surveys the shoreline to the floating perspective that captures the assembly of the electrical tower. Given the abstract geometry of the workers and the

multiple perspectives portrayed, there is little sense that a viewer could stumble upon the scene depicted. The loss of the painting's immediacy encapsulates the delayed arrival of the Nasserite project.

4.5 Conclusion

Ewais's body of work simultaneously advocates for the country's workers, celebrates Nasserism, and demonstrates the tensions that continued to exist between them and the state after the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. Ewais's *After a Working Day* presents the exertion of work on the individual, challenging idealized depictions of labor and its naturalization to a certain class. In this work and again in *Reading Worker,* Ewais's cramped canvases echo the constraints of the Nasserite government. Other works from the 1950s, such as *Nasser and the Nationalization of the Canal*, express a sense of anticipation for the fulfilment of the government's promises. At the same time, Ewais is not naïve about the lived experiences of the Egyptian people. His *Peasant Family* portrays the continued hardships of Egypt's working class and their cyclical nature within the lineage of a family. Finally, Ewais's *At the Aswan Dam* abandons the individuality of the workers depicted in the artist's other paintings, suggesting that Nasser's vision of technological modernity depends on their complete submission to the state.

It would seem that Ewais continued to believe in the Nasserite project until its very end in 1970 with Nasser's death. In 1967–68, the artist painted *Le Gardien de la vie* (*The Protector of Life*) [Figure 4.6], which expresses both this sense of belief as well as the tensions between the workers and the state. In the painting, Ewais depicts a larger-than-life Nasser-like soldier who looms protectively over a group of Egyptians. Echoing Mexican muralism in its narrative structure, the background tells the story of Nasser's Egypt, from the modernization of the country through industry to the construction of the Aswan High Dam. Just before Ewais executed *Le Gardien de la vie*, Egypt had lost to Israel in the Six-Day War of June 1967. The country was simultaneously struggling with a serious economic crisis that had led to several austerity measures. In the aftermath of the military defeat, Nasser resigned in disgrace only to promptly return to office after Egyptian citizens showed their support with massive street demonstrations. Responding to these events, Ewais's *Le Gardien de la vie* projects an image of strength and protection, as the Nasser-like soldier tenderly shields the Egyptian people going about their daily lives. The group is loosely ordered by age as children, both playing and learning, and the newly in love appear in the foreground.

The middle ground is occupied by parents and a bride and groom, and finally an older generation looks on from the background. Ewais blurs the faces of these figures, rendering them anonymous so that a viewer could imagine themselves occupying the space.

On the right-hand side of *Le Gardien de la vie*, there is a factory from which a group of workers dressed in blue overalls and white shirts emerge, next to the arm of the Nasser-like soldier. The workers are shaped through loose brushstrokes, which give them a ghostly appearance. They occupy a curious position in the painting's composition. The workers are depicted as the right-hand men to Nasser, acknowledging their contribution to the achievements depicted in the background. Indeed, the shaft of the gun held by the soldier echoes the shape of the factory's chimneys, suggesting the source of Nasser's power. However, the workers are simultaneously excluded from the group protected by the soldier. They appear joyless in comparison to this crowd. The dull colors of their uniforms blend in with the soldier's sleeve and the background; they could easily be missed. In this way, *Le Gardien de la vie* simultaneously acknowledges and erases the country's workers, suggesting a sense of ambiguity toward their position within the Nasserist state.

FIGURE 4.1 Hamed Ewais, *After a Working Day*, 1953. Oil on canvas. Collection of Modern Egyptian Art, Cairo.
PHOTO: NADIA RADWAN.

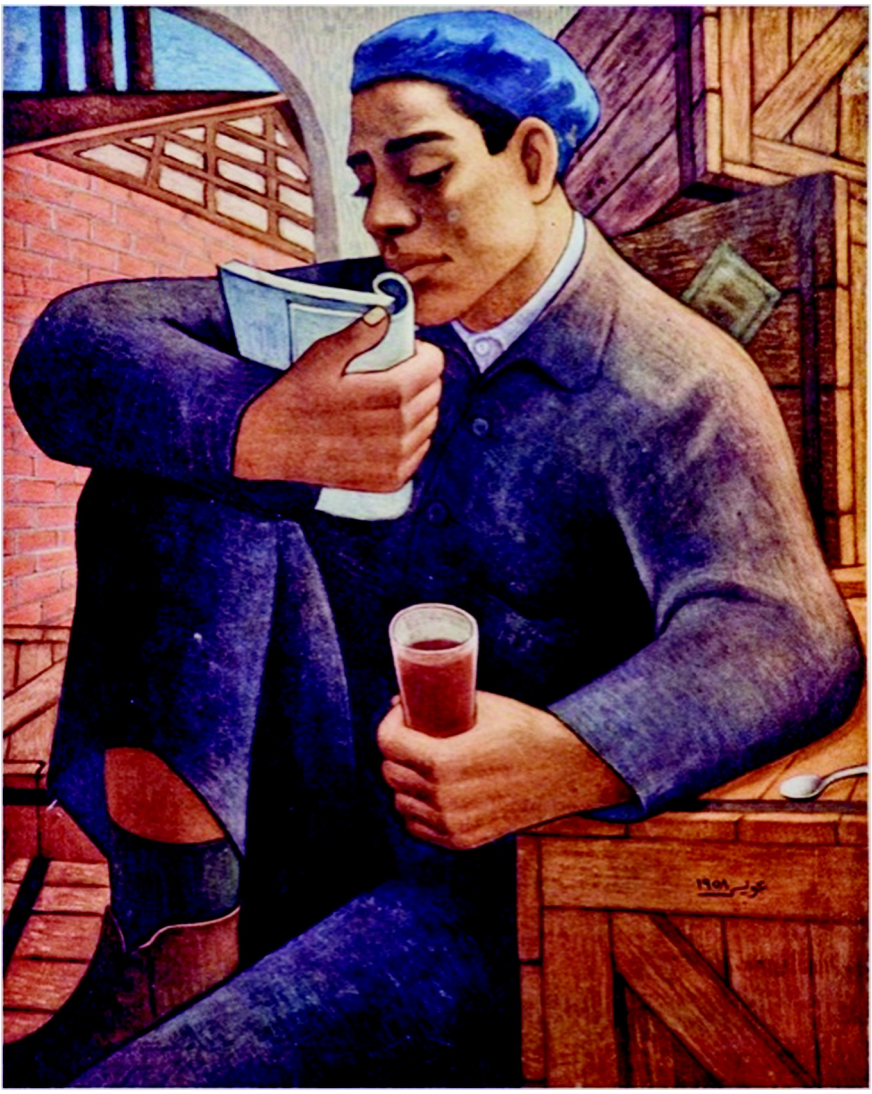

FIGURE 4.2 Hamed Ewais, *Reading Worker*, 1958. Oil on canvas. Private collection.

FIGURE 4.3 Hamed Ewais, *Nasser and the Nationalisation of the Canal*, 1957. Oil on canvas, 113 × 138 cm.
MATHAF: ARAB MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, DOHA.

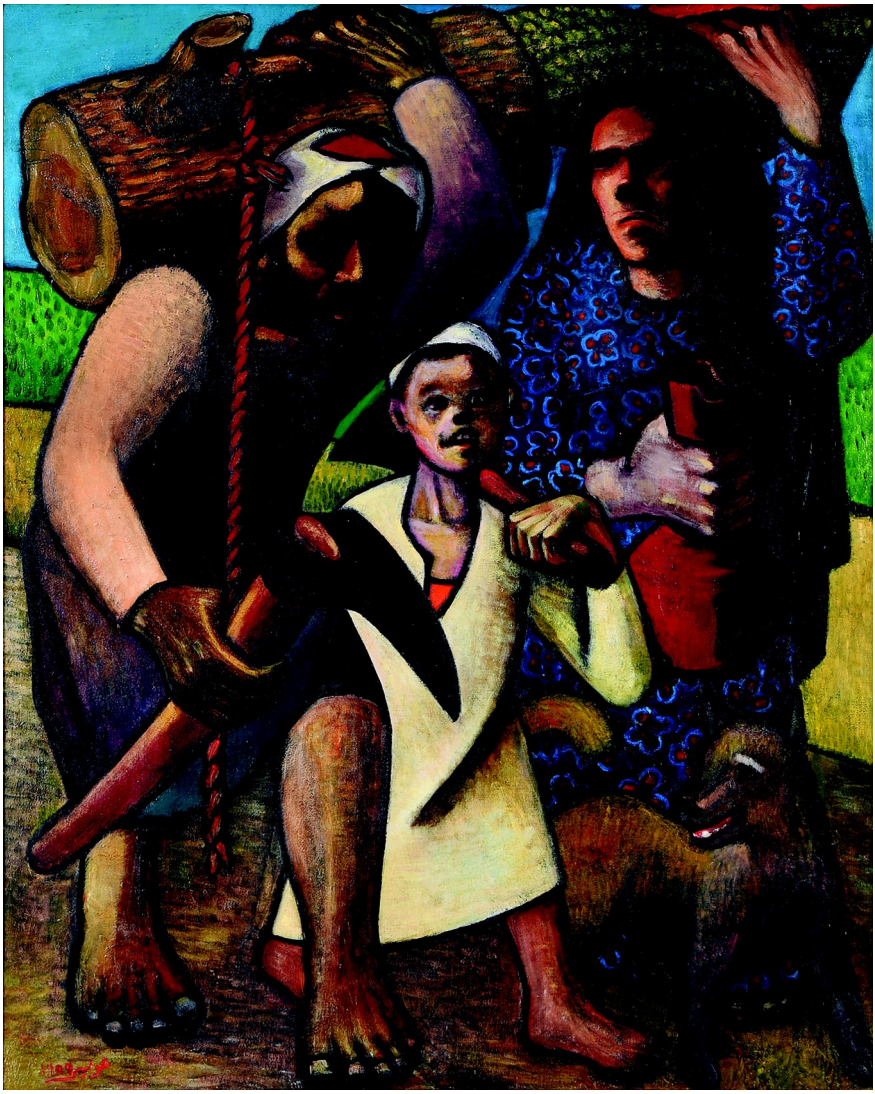

FIGURE 4.4 Hamed Ewais, *Peasant Family*, 1959. Oil on canvas, 121 × 102 cm. MATHAF: ARAB MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, DOHA.

FIGURE 4.5 Hamed Ewais, *At the Aswan Dam*, 1965. Oil on canvas, 99 × 85 cm. STATE MUSEUM OF ORIENTAL ART, MOSCOW.

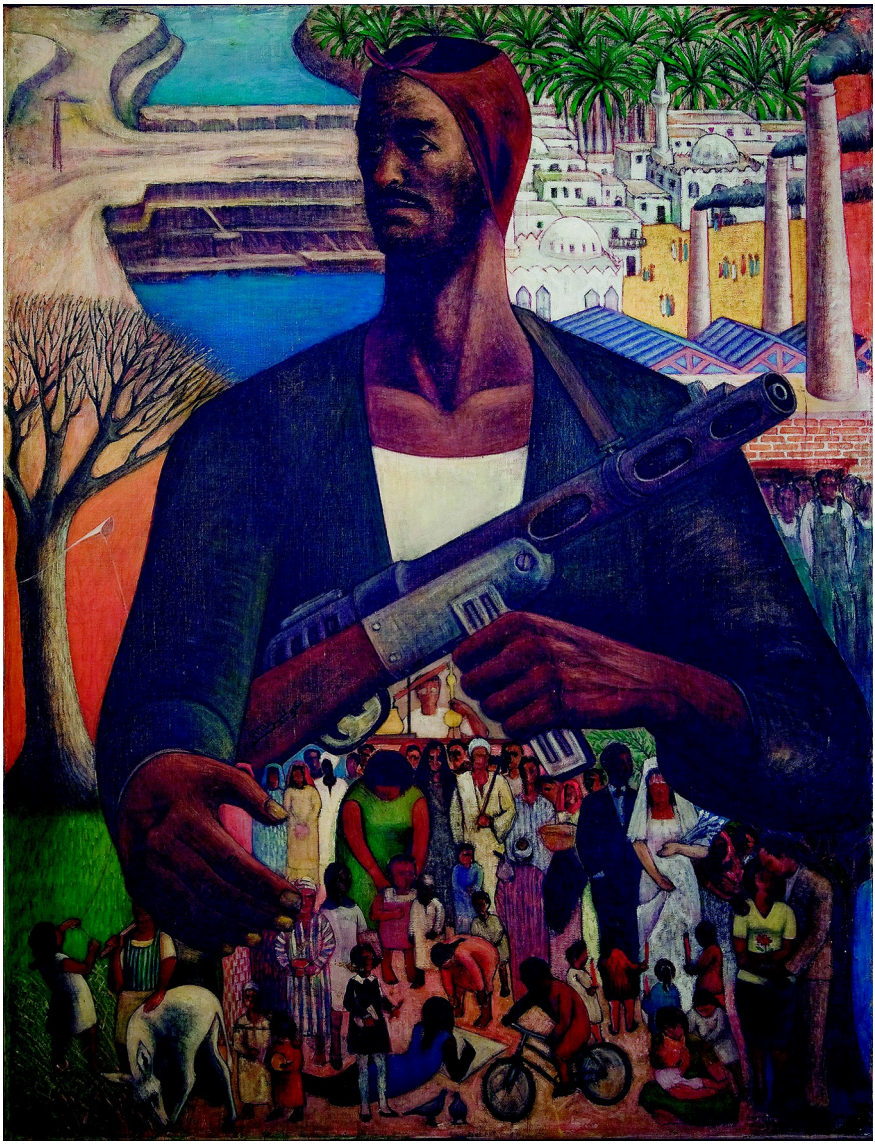

FIGURE 4.6 Hamed Ewais, *Le Gardien de la vie* (*The Protector of Life*), 1967–68. Oil on canvas, 132 × 100 cm.
BARJEEL ART FOUNDATION, SHARJAH.

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CHAPTER 5

Ethnicity, Aesthetics, and Argentine National Identity in Ricardo Halac's Early Plays

Silvina Schammah Gesser

Abstract

The present study focuses on a neglected group within the first and second generations of Argentine Jews of Middle Eastern origins born in the capital of Argentina. It argues that their ethnic identification can be best understood as a personal definition pertaining to the individual rather than as an explicit statement of belonging or affiliation to a specific community that may provide a false sense of cohesiveness and homogeneity. The trajectories of disaffiliated Jews with origins in the Middle East and North Africa, as is the case of Ricardo Halac (born 1935), undoubtedly the most prestigious Sephardic playwright of Argentina, help reveal a highly intriguing, multifaceted, and heterodox portrait of the early generations of migrants from the Middle East and their descendants. By reconstructing the initial stages of his career, and the social and aesthetic context in which his first plays appeared, this chapter discusses how ethnicity and national identity filter through and maintain a dialogue with Halac's plays and writing in the always politically volatile and culturally competitive city of Buenos Aires.

Keywords

Arab minority migration – ethnicity – disaffiliation – national identity – Argentine theater – Arab Jews – Sephardic studies

•••

> I am a Sephardic Jew: When I look for my origins I always go back to Jewish Spain. I have a Moroccan grandfather, a Turkish grandmother and two Syrian grandparents. Halac in Arabic is "*Hjalah*" which means hairdresser, and I feel very attached to all things Arab, but equally so to *cante jondo*, of course, along with *tango*, *mate*, *asado*, *fútbol*, and all my Argentine passions. If there

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> is something that I would have liked to write it's Borges's "Averroës's Search," who recreated the Spanish Arab ambiance, as no one else.[1]
>
> RICARDO HALAC, 1990.

⁂

The trajectories of the third and fourth generations of Argentine Jews of Middle Eastern descent born, in the capital of Argentina, are nowadays receiving increasing scholarly attention (Brauner and Torres 2022; Menashe 2014). Conversely, much less is known about the first and second generations, especially in the crucial decades marked by the interwar years in the "Old Continent," through the birth of the State of Israel in 1948, and up to the rise of the New Left in Central and South America, which had Buenos Aires as one of its epicenters. For almost half a century, circa between the 1920s and 1970s, many among these migrant groups turned from dispersed entrepreneurs (initially peddlers, later small merchants) into successful professionals, artists, intellectuals, writers, political actors, and human rights activists.

The present study focuses on a significant sector within the first and second generations who, for the most part, have remained outside ethnic and religious community networks and boundaries, thus experiencing processes of disaffiliation. The latter can be defined as processes of disengagement from nuclear community institutions, be they the circuits of synagogues, community centers, clubs, schools, and youth movements, as well as forms of distancing from religious observance and rituals. Disaffiliation does not necessarily mean rejecting one's ethnic identity or denying one's religious descent. Instead, I will argue that the ethnic identification of many Argentine Jews with origins in the Middle East can be best understood as a personal definition pertaining to the individual rather than as an explicit statement of belonging or affiliation to a specific community that may provide a false sense of cohesiveness and homogeneity. In this respect, I contend that learning about the trajectories of disaffiliated Jews with origins in the Middle East, as is the case of Ricardo Halac (born 1935), undoubtedly the most prestigious Sephardic playwright of Argentina, helps reveal a highly intriguing, multifaceted, and heterodox portrait of these early generations of migrants and their descendants.

Indeed, Halac's prolific career as a playwright for more than sixty years includes filmmaking, journalism, documentaries, cultural management,

1 Interview with Glickman, 1990.

television series, and teaching.[2] A non-conformist and thought-provoking voice, Halac's portraits of Argentina's sociopolitical transformations have won him a central position not just within the independent theater circuits of Buenos Aires, but as a major referent among Argentine men of letters.[3]

By reconstructing the initial stages of his career, and the socio-political and aesthetic context in which his first plays appeared, the sections that follow weave together oral and written interviews, theatrical pieces and criticism, historical documents, as well as print periodicals. This reconstruction brings to the fore key aesthetic developments and issues of ethnicity and national identity as these filter through and maintain a dialogue with Halac's plays and writing in the always politically volatile and highly competitive cultural environment of the city of Buenos Aires.

Halac's trajectory will be framed, at the same time, within the waves of Arabic-speaking migrants of different faiths who arrived in Argentina in the early decades of the twentieth century (Akmir 2011, Noufouri 2005, Bestene 1988). For the most, these immigrants departed from the Ottoman Empire as the latter faced an enduring crisis in the late nineteenth century, which culminated in its dissolution at the end of World War I.

5.1 Immigration, Arabness, and Argentine Letters

Most of the Arabic-speaking Jews who arrived in Argentina were of Syrian descent, mainly from Damascus and Aleppo. Other Arabic-speaking Jews arrived in lower numbers from Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey, and Morocco. They constituted a minority within two other minorities: the wider Jewish population (Ashkenazi Jews from Central and East Europe) and the Arab Muslims and Christians who began to establish themselves in Argentina in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. If for Christians and Muslims the increasingly xenophobic cultural nationalism initiated in early twentieth-century Buenos Aires easily merged with various forms of anti-Arab sentiment, for Arab Jews, the anti-Arab stereotypes were reinforced by anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic prejudices. Be that as it may, the sharing of Arabic

2 This study is part of a larger work that focuses on the intellectual biography of Ricardo Halac. Many of the biographical details in the article have been taken from the twenty-five videorecorded interviews carried out with Halac and the author between March 2020 and March 2023 in both Buenos Aires and Israel.

3 His numerous distinctions include the *María Guerrero* Award, the *Asociación de Críticos de Teatro* Award, Argentores, which he received in 1975, 1978, 2016 and 2023; the *Konex* Award in 2024, and the *Martín Fierro*, Argentina's top distinction, awarded to him on two occasions, among other important prizes and mentions.

as lingua franca, a similar cultural background, and common interests led Arab immigrants from different religious creeds to foster entrepreneurial and social links (Klich 1995 and 1997).

These ventures succeeded despite the constant presence of external and internal pressures that sought to align these groups along opposing sides of the Arab-Zionist conflict that was *in crescendo,* especially after the establishment of Mandatory Palestine. Nonetheless, the limited attraction that Zionism aroused among Arab Jews in early twentieth-century Buenos Aires, and that was expressed, for the most, in no more than sporadic donations, contributed to the creation of a distance from the complicated situation in the Middle East. This more relaxed ambiance in Argentina also corresponded to the fact that, as opposed to other countries in Central and South America where migrants from Mandatory Palestine constituted the largest Arab group, as was the case of Chile—there were fewer Palestinian immigrants in the country compared to their Syrian-Lebanese counterparts. Such migrant composition, especially in the capital, somehow eased ties among Arabic-speakers of all faiths, at least until the United Nations proclaimed the partition of Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state in November 1947 (Klich 1995 and 1997).

With the passage of time, the hardening of the conflict disfigured and sometimes even erased the initial bonds between the different communities, and references to joint initiatives were silenced by all sides.[4] Nevertheless, the orchestrated amnesia adopted by both sides did not change the fact that very significant and enduring ventures and institutions had been jointly created. In this respect, Ignacio Klich's studies reinforce my understanding that the history of Middle Eastern Jews in Argentina should be discussed within the relevant historiographical and theoretical frameworks pertaining to Arab immigration to the Americas. Only then will it be pertinent to discuss the experience of these immigrants by making recourse to the historiography of Argentine Judaism. The latter, for the most, was originally distorted by an orientalist bias and an Ashkenazi hegemonic imprint that are only now being critically revisited (Schammah Gesser and Brauner 2012, 2017).[5]

4 See *El inmigrante*, the autobiography by Nissim Teubal published in Buenos Aires after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. As Klich rightly points out, the author omitted his family's close relations with Arab-speaking immigrants of all faiths and their participation in joint ventures with a variety of non-Jewish Syrian Lebanese institutions. In turn, those identified with the Arab cause in the Arab-Israeli conflict purged from their writings all reference to Jewish compatriots in their networks of Syrian-Lebanese communities in Argentina (Klich 1995).

5 See Avni 1983 and Feierstein 1993 which present highly stereotyped views of the Sephardic communities.

Beyond the Ashkenazi/Sephardic divide that pertains to the more circumscribed studies of the Latin American Jewry (Bejarano and Aizenberg 2012, Bejarano 2005 and 1986), the presence of "Arabness" in the Argentine literary field raises questions regarding the position of artists, intellectuals, and men of letters of Arab descent—be they Jews, Christians, or Muslims. The topic has been discussed against claims of a unique blend of races and cultures, given the impact of colonialism, *mestizaje,* and hybridity idiosyncratic to Latin America. It is assumed that Latin America countries differ from their European counterparts, which shared a deep orientalist prejudice nurtured by centuries of expansionist and imperialist policies towards the East (Shohat and Alsultany 2013, El-Attar 2006).

Along these lines, recent scholarship has attempted to define who can be considered an Arab writer in Latin American in general, and in Argentina in particular. Christina Civantos (Civantos 2017) argues that writers who have ancestors from the Arabic-speaking world are, in a sense, "Arab writers." The same she says of "Arab literature," in reference to texts produced by Arab immigrants or their descendants that narrate Arab migration to the Americas or portray Arab characters. However, as Civantos herself admits, many texts written by Arab immigrants or their offspring are in Spanish and may have little if any reference to Arab characters. The fact that many Arab immigrants changed their surnames upon arrival while others openly embraced Catholicism do not play in favor of easy classifications. Even those who did maintain their original faith and surnames have not necessarily addressed their backgrounds in their writings. Conversely, many Arab immigrant authors have asserted their origins as immigrants or as members of a minority community, in para-texts, narrative details, subtexts, or prefaces that refer to their places of origin and or descent. Some others have focused on Arab immigrant characters and their idiosyncratic speech registers while writing in standard Argentine Spanish (Civantos 2017). It seems, therefore, that there might be different textual strategies to perform, mask, silence, or erase Arabness. Indeed, Argentine authors of Syrian background as Halac, the consecrated Juan José Saer (1937–2005), and the popular albeit highly polemical Jorge Asis (1946) are three different writers whose texts unleash variegated modes of "coping with 'Arabness'."

Halac's early theater makes no reference to his Arab family background and migration experience, nor does it thematize his Arab identity. Notwithstanding, from an early age, Halac simultaneously defined himself as Jew, as Sephardic, and as a member of an Arabic-speaking immigrant family. Certainly, veiled references to ethnic entrepreneurship in the textile trade, the characteristic niche of the first and second generations among Syrian Jewish

immigrants do appear in early pieces such as *Tentempié II* (1968), and poignant criticism of the lifestyle of the Sephardic elites haunts the protagonists in *Fin de Diciembre* (*End of December*, 1965). However, it is only in later plays that Halac openly addresses ethnic, racial, and religious topics. *Judío o inocente* (*Jew or Innocent,* 1970), a still unpublished piece, unveils the antinomies that have historically been attributed to the Jews as a persecuted minority. *Mil años…un día* (*A Thousand Years…One Day*, 1993) centers on the dramatic events that preceded the eve of the 1492 Expulsion of Sephardic Jews at the court of the Catholic Kings. *La lista* (*The List*, 2016) recreates real events which took place in 1605 colonial Río de la Plata as the Spanish conquerors monitored the whereabouts of Diego Núñez, a *converso* Jew from Sevilla, who happened to be the only doctor in town. The play centers around Núñez's interrogation as the colonial authorities looked for new Christians and Protestants per the Inquisition's demands in Lima, feared as spies in the local struggles to dominate the strategic port of Buenos Aires. In turn, *Marcados, de por vida* (*Doomed for Life,* 2022) takes place in the 1650 Madrid of the Counter-Reformation where the *converso* author Bautista Diamante, doomed to be a second-rate dramatist, sought in vain to achieve the success of his contemporaries, Félix Lope de Vega and Pedro Calderón de la Barca.

In contrast to Halac, whose career has unfolded in Buenos Aires (notwithstanding frequent and even long stays abroad), Juan José Saer, raised in the pastoral landscape of the province of Santa Fe, settled in Paris since 1968 until his premature death in 2005. Saer wrote most of his *oeuvre* in a Francophone environment and created literary characters and narratives through cryptic, elusive, and enigmatic references. Saer's physical absence in Argentina, and his reticence to collaborate with the rules of the literary market, helped shape Saer's reputation as a cult figure among the public—despite the fact that major literary critics as Beatriz Sarlo consecrated Saer as a key literary figure at quite an early stage in his career. Despite the fact that Saer's Arab ancestry was very well known in his native town of Serodino, and that he maintained intimate collaboration with other Arab artists and intellectuals, such as the filmmaker and documentarist Nicolas Sarkis, Saer never emphasized his Syrian origins. On the contrary, he was very cautious about being referred to as *turco,* probably out of fear of being perceived through the lens of a particular conception of Arabness. Perhaps in reaction to this racialized perception, he remained silent in public about his Arab heritage until his last novel, *La grande* (*The Big One*, 2005). Whether Saer was asserting the success of his acculturation process or, at the same time, disentangling himself from imposed ethnic labeling and

essentialization in the Argentine milieux is still a matter of study and debate (Civantos 2019, Maranguello 2019, Peláez 2014).

While different literary critics have addressed the centrality and symbolism of place and space—their loss and redefinition—in Saer's works (Sarlo 2016), Laure Guirguis (Guirguis 2024) reads his *oeuvre* as occupying a position outside the limits of what can be considered the Spanish-language literature of Arab immigrants in Argentina. Even more so, she claims that his texts are never positioned in relation to it, but rather build on a multiplicity of experiences, playing with genres, subgenres, and literary categories. Hence, she proposes the lens of friendship, and the notion of *hospitalité* proposed by Jacques Derrida as more suitable conceptualizations to delve into his life and work. These allow a reading of Saer beyond the limitations of identity-framed communities, be they ethnic, religious, racial, national, linguistic, or other.

As opposed to Halac and Saer, the younger Jorge Asis presents a quite different profile. Asis' public persona, literary output, and his representations of Arab migrants' experience and Arab culture do maintain an explicit dialogue with "Arabness," as well as with Argentine orientalism and *mahjar* writing traditions in the Americas. Through these engagements, he explores tropes of nostalgia, loss, pride, and attachment to the Arab migrants' places of origin (Palmer 2014).

Indeed, Asis' rather histrionic literary trajectory (Amarouch 2001) has indulged in orientalist conceptions (be they in relation to sexuality, gender roles, patriarchy, and the like) that play with the stereotyped *turco* label, frequently flirting with the ethnicity trap of limited conceptions of Arabness (Petit 2022).

I argue that these textual strategies and discursive forms of self-presentation could be better understood when contrasted with the rise of various forms of exclusive cultural nationalism that many conservative sectors mobilized to challenge the liberal state and the alleged excessive cosmopolitanism of early twentieth-century Argentina. How have the different forms of discriminatory cultural nationalism in Argentina conditioned these writers' early socialization? How did these exclusionary forms of cultural nationalism evolve in the 1960s and early 1970s when Halac, Saer, and later Asis came of age?

Historically, it is crucial to remember that an early nativism, mainly expanding in Buenos Aires, viewed the growth of the immigrant population (especially non-European, non-Latin, and non-Catholic) together with the presence of foreign influences (mainly from the United States and Great Britain) as a dangerous threat to the authentic culture and traditions of the young Argentine nation. As a political device at the national level, this

incipient nativism, which merged with the early twentieth-century search for an Argentine identity, served as a tool to nationalize the immigrant masses who were constantly pouring into the port of Buenos Aires.

As a result, conservatives and Catholics typically sponsored a revival of Spanish traditions as a crucial link between the natives' "pure" Argentine speech, their presumed moral character, and their unmediated bond to the nation-state. These *criollista* discourses defended a particular form of Spanish as *the* national language, and promoted rural and/or autochthonous customs as *the* national culture. Such constructions of Argentine identity intended, in turn, to reverse the democratic definitions of the nation that had originally given emphasis, at least in the written constitution of 1853, to a more liberal understanding of citizenship and popular sovereignty (Di Stefano 2020, Delaney 2002).

Hence, this study argues that the textual strategies and discursive forms of self-presentation adopted by authors with origins in the Arab world can be better scrutinized if discussed *vis-à-vis* the unresolved tensions between democratic, liberal, and even secular tendencies on the one hand, and the nativist, authoritarian, and Catholic-oriented forces that refused to accommodate the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural realities upon which the city-port of Buenos Aires was being built. These tensions took a new turn during the *década infame*, circa 1930–1943. The period is known in Argentine historiography for the electoral fraud that perpetuated conservative alliances, its generalized corruption, military *coups d'État*, persecution of political opposition and, last but not least, the rural exodus to Buenos Aires, which produced a new kind of urban poverty soon exacerbated by the effects of the Great Depression.

The antinomies that marked the infamous decade began with the 1930 undemocratic removal of the elected president, Hipólito de Yrigoyen, and it ended with another military coup in 1943. This time, the coup was orchestrated by a new cadre of young officials; among them was Juan Domingo Perón. The young officials' program claimed to transform Argentine politics and society, making possible not just the rise of Perón as its major speaker, but also as its undisputable leader among the working classes and the underprivileged. In less than a decade, Perón's two consecutive administrations (1946–1955) brought about another paradigm in Argentine politics and society whose consequences endure to the present days.[6] Notwithstanding, the crucial Peronist decade, like the populist leadership of Yrigoyen, ended

6 The well-documented studies by L. Zanatta (Zanatta 1996 and 1999) are crucial to understand this period and its antecedents.

abruptly due to military intervention. Perón's forced exile, and the stubborn proscription of Peronism as a mass movement and legitimate political force, conditioned Argentine politics for years to come. Certainly, Peronism and its leader remained a determinant factor when the repercussions of the Cold War, with its filtering of American policies in the Southern Cone, the Cuban Revolution, and the rise of the New Left, reshaped the sociopolitical, cultural, and ideological debates in the Argentina of the 1960s and early 1970s. The increasing tensions that soon fractured and polarized Argentine society reached a point of no return with the establishment of the last military dictatorship on March 24, 1976. Euphemistically referred to as the Process of National Reconstruction, the new regime initiated the darkest period in the country's contemporary history.

The following sections that analyze Halac's early trajectory and *oeuvre* take this historical contextualization of Argentina between the late 1920s and 1970s as their starting point.

5.2 Ricardo Halac: Upbringing, Affiliations, and Socialization in Peronist Argentina

Ricardo Halac was born in Buenos Aires to an immigrant family from Damascus. His father arrived in the capital at the age of fourteen, after his two elder brothers, in 1914. As was customary among Arab migrants, when Halac's father came of age, he returned to Syria to find a bride. The newly married couple settled in the low-middle class neighborhood of Caballito, next to Parque Rivadavia. While his father had rudimentary knowledge of Hebrew and Turkish, Halac's parents maintained the Arabic-Jewish dialect spoken in Syria in their Argentine home, together with French, which they probably learnt at the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* (AIU).[7] Spanish was used to communicate with the surrounding environment, and French, privately tutored to Halac and his brothers, was the language spoken when the parents did not want others to understand what they told their sons. Arabic, in turn, remained the couple's intimate language to love and hate each other.

7 AIU was a Paris-based international Jewish organization founded in 1860 that promoted the ideals of Jewish self-sufficiency through education and professional development. The organization established French-language schools for Jewish children throughout the Medi terranean, Iran, and the former Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

Self-defined as a hard-core *tanguero*, Halac's father (who preferred Agustín Magaldi to his rival and competitor, Carlos Gardel) did not frequent the Jewish community. This deliberate distancing responded to a sense of dissonance, even uneasiness *vis-à-vis* the higher standards of life that well-off families as the Teubals or the Abadis projected on the Sephardic communities. The struggle of Halac's family to get out of the petty bourgeoisie, to no avail, had its counterpart in the very careful handling of money and expenses. Contrary to the Sephardic *nouveaux-riches'* indulgence in conspicuous consumption, the lack of economic success that haunted Halac's father turned into an incentive to provide his sons with a solid education.

From early on, Halac was aware and proud of his Arab and Jewish-Sephardic origins. He was used to the *turco* nickname associated with both. Yet, growing up in Caballito, known for his famous soccer club Ferrocarril Oeste, the well-communicated subway line, and its immigrant population made up of Italians, Spanish, and other nationalities, helped Halac experience a typical *porteño* childhood. His passion for football, movies, and the novelties the city offered left him outside of the Jewish clubs' circuits. The family's consumption of non-kosher food became compatible with their gathering on the major Jewish holidays and their attendance at a small, improvised synagogue. Halac and his brothers celebrated their Bar Mitzvah, but his involvement with Judaism, if one could call it that, came out of his own free will. Such freedom did not exempt him or his brothers from experiencing incidents of antisemitism at school, in the neighborhood, and on the soccer field. In 1947, at the age of twelve, Halac entered the elite public high-school Carlos Pellegrini, which demanded that all students declare their religious creed. Halac, together with all the other Jewish students, were sent to the same evening class—a segregation that was maintained throughout his high-school years—and were forced to take a morals class instead of receiving Catholic instruction as a compulsory subject.[8]

Catholic indoctrination had been incorporated by the *de facto* military government that ruled the country between 1943 and 1946. This requirement had its origins in the 1920s when the Argentine Church, propelled in power by succeeding crises of liberalism and the decline of the capitalist economy during the interwar period, advanced the national essence of Argentina as both Catholic and Hispanic. Father Jules Meinvielle, a major advocate for the confessionalization of the Argentine State, merged Christian sources

8 The inclusion of religious lessons as part of the compulsory curriculum for all pupils, given the "Catholic nature of the Republic" meant a major achievement for the Argentine Church.

and the thought of prominent figures of the modern European right such as Charles Maurras, easing the rise of the fundamentalist Argentine Catholic Action in 1934. The movement's agenda promoted a medieval Christian conception as the basis for establishing a new social order that would replace the corruption, chaos, and demagogy of the Argentine liberal democracy. Their doctrine popularized the anti-national character of the "enemies" of the Church: Jews, Protestants, liberals, Freemasons, and communists.[9]

With the incorporation of these Catholic cadres into the state administration, the military regime established in 1943 brought with it the return of religious education in public schools, a maneuver that further advanced the legitimization that the military forces received from the Church establishment. Their mutual dependency, which functioned as an explicit and convenient alliance, later helped the charismatic colonel Juan Domingo Perón win power in the general elections of February 1946. Perón's arrival at the presidency of the Republic, in free elections, initially guaranteed the continuity of the predominance of the Church and of Catholicism as a central trait to Argentine national identity—at least in official discourse. Indeed, the new regime assigned subsidies to Catholic institutions as an attempt to stress the Christian character of *justicialismo,* the Peronist social doctrine. Meanwhile, the Church made the most of Perón's popularity to habilitate its own status among the popular masses, and maneuver Peronism as an active barrier against foreign ideologies, communism in particular. However, rivalry and mutual suspicion between Peronism and the Church emerged and underwent a major twist with the drafting of a new constitution in 1949. The latter kept the privileged status of Catholicism but broadened the Peronist state's intervention in the Church's traditional fields of activity: charity, welfare, and education. Perón's self-proclamation as the sole interpreter of the social significance of "true Christianity" led to a confrontation that reached a climax with the loss of Catholicism's dominance over other religions.[10]

The leader's intention not to restrict the activities of non-Catholics signaled the beginning of a proactive attitude towards all religions as a new

9 His book *The Jew* (Meinvielle 1936) deemed members of this creed enemies of social order and Christian morality, and agents of secular and materialistic ideologies: liberalism/socialism. Thus, he suggested returning Jews to ghettos, avoiding all contact with them.

10 In a speech in 1948, Perón tried to equate being a good Christian with being a Peronist, while in May 1950 he declared, in a speech before Catholic academics, that a 2,000-year-old doctrine—Christianity—needed to be updated to fit modern life, see Rein 2005.

feature of the Peronist regime. Such strategy made clear that loyalty to Perón and his movement was more important than loyalty to any other institution, including the Argentine Catholic Church. This new definition of Peronism as an amorphous conglomerate that had a place for every decent citizen who supported its project transformed the Catholicism/other religions dichotomy, up to then taken for granted, be it in the classroom or in any other space of socialization within the public space, into a Peronist/anti-Peronist opposition. The replacement of the delicate issue of religious affiliation with that of political loyalty allowed the ever-growing Peronist populism to nurture bonds and promote the social and political integration of groups that had previously remained at the margins of the system. This not only meant members of the working class, but also immigrant groups of different creeds and nations, including Jews. They too could now benefit from the *bonanza* that the Peronist state promised.[11]

In 1952, while Perón was still heading his second administration, Halac entered the State University of Buenos Aires. Following his father's mandate, he "chose" to study economics, an academic specialization cherished by many immigrant families. Like many of his classmates, he got involved in university activities, began to study Marxism, and closely followed political events, mainly the war for the independence of Algeria—on which he wrote a first text against the French repressive tactics. He eagerly attended political demonstrations and events like the closing campaigns of Ricardo Balbin and Arturo Frondizi, the two major leaders of the Radical Civic Union party, who were then presenting themselves as an oppositional alternative to the Peronist leadership. By then, Halac defined himself as anti-Peronist and resented what he saw as the Peronists' violence against any kind of opposition, especially that of the Radical party's supporters. His father, afraid of the surrounding political tensions, kept destroying flyers and political materials that Halac took home. However, in the years to come, Halac experienced a significant transformation whereby the "university activist" became a "theater activist" and creator, vocations he has cherished until now.

11 The Jewish leaders kept relations with the president stressing their traditional loyalty to heads of state and elected bodies of the Argentine Republic and refrained from boycotting the small Jewish section of the Peronist party (the *Organización Israelita Argentina*, known by its acronym OIA). Yet, the latter failed to get support from the Jewish community that remained mistrustful of Perón, fearing signs of extremism, even when other sectors in the community welcomed the economic and professional opportunities available between years 1946–1955. See Rein, 2005.

5.3 Discovering Bertolt Brecht: Halac's Initiation Journey to Berlin and Eastern Europe

Much inspired by the cultural atmosphere of Buenos Aires, Halac had been attending different meetings where it was possible to hear lectures by young luminaries as such Jorge Luis Borges, who then used to give classes and conferences at the renown Argentine Association of English Culture, located in the city center. Likewise, he was deeply attracted by the vanguardism of the city's independent theater. Having opened in the 1930s, by the late 1950s independent playhouses in the capital were still proliferating. Inspired by similar European currents, these theaters offered an alternative repertoire to their professional and commercial counterparts. In fierce opposition to the marketing and commodification of the official programs, or purely entertaining theatrical activity, independent theater actors, directors, and personnel did not charge for their work. Instead, they adopted a work ethic close to the logic of militant activism.[12] Indeed, acting and rehearsals took place after working hours, and the plays chosen went against speculation at the box office. These cultural actors also resented economic success. The austerity of the productions came hand in hand with greater freedom, social commitment, and an avant-garde choice of plays, topics, and *mise-en-scène* —tendencies that were much in tune with what was happening in Europe at the time (Rizetti 2004).

Halac's vocational call occurred while he was attending Pedro Pasquini and Alejandra Boero's premiere of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage* at the Nuevo Teatro, a small company that Boero had recently founded with her husband in the vibrant streets of Corrientes and Pasteur, and which soon became a major reference for the independent theater circuits. With Pasquini's direction, Boero in the leading role, and casting Hector Alterio, later to become an acclaimed Argentine actor, the play left a major impact on Halac. It had no unity of action, time, or space. It made use of the distancing effect that sought to remind the audience of theater's artificiality while posters, songs, and moving bodies on stage stopped the action. These new techniques that cast a spell on Halac were his first contact with Brechtian theater. The postulates of Brecht's epic dramaturgy had been first exposed in Buenos Aires at the *Idisch Folklore Teater*, which premiered in 1949, and some scenes of *Terror and Misery of the Third Reich*, under the title of *The*

12 Many founding members of independent theatres had ties with left-wing political parties. The Juan B. Justo Theater with the Socialist Party; the *Teatro Proletario* with the Communist Party as was also the case of the militant Leónidas Barletta, founder of *Teatro del Pueblo*.

Informer, directed by David Licht, in the Yiddish language. Also in Yiddish, they produced *Mother Courage* in 1953 under the direction of Alberto D'Aversa and with a set design by Saulo Benavente (Ansaldo 2022). The following year, the play was presented in the Nuevo Teatro, now in Spanish.

Halac's interest in Brechtian theater brought him to the Goethe Institute, where he began to study German. He also established contacts with rising figures in the alternative theatrical milieux, mainly with the young playwright and theoretician Osvaldo Dragún, whose early micro-dramas adopted Brecht's epic model while integrating other elements of the European and Argentine theatrical traditions to address the specificities of the *porteño* audiences. Dragún's pioneering activities took place at the Fray Mocho playhouse. The theater had its own headquarters, repertoire, and cast of actors, which made possible the staging of avantgarde productions (Obarrio 1998).

By 1957, one year after Halac had won a Goethe Institute scholarship and had become well-acquainted with the Brechtian followers at home, he sailed to Europe to study theater in Berlin. His father paid for the round trip by ship. Once at the Berliner Ensemble, the German theater company that Bertolt Brecht and his wife, the actress Helene Weigel, had founded in East Berlin in 1949, Halac established close contacts with Brecht's disciples and widow. Brecht's untimely death took place some months prior to his arrival. It was by attending innumerable theater performances, reading essays and plays, and writing systematically that Halac decided to become a professional writer, or, in his own words, "a theater militant." As such, he made a point of visiting as many communist countries as possible to see first-hand not only their theatrical productions, but also the effects of the communist revolutions in Eastern Europe. This was a phenomenon harshly debated in the circles he frequented in Buenos Aires, where very different versions of what the Soviet Union represented rivaled one another.[13] Therefore, besides Austria and France, Halac visited Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, where he attended a communist youth congress in Warsaw. He also stayed in Auschwitz, an experience that left an indelible mark on him. Much to his surprise, a stopover in Munich made him reassess Buenos Aires as a major center of cultural life and theatrical activity.

Notwithstanding his profound admiration of Brecht as a key Marxist thinker, committed activist, and innovative playwright, Halac did not

13 While Osvaldo Dragún, Halac's inspirational figure, was an active member of the Argentine Communist Party, Halac remained a fellow traveler. He later declined affiliation because he opposed what he considered the Communist Parties' rigidness and dogmatism at home and abroad.

become an imitator, much less a blind follower, of the German dramaturge.[14] Determined to destroy the theatrical illusion, Brecht made the most of his theatrical approach when he became the director of the Berliner Ensemble. Its productions broke with the Western notions of a linear story line, suspension of disbelief, and progressive character development. In their place, the Ensemble proposed episodic plot structures with autonomous unities that disregarded links of cause and effect between scenes and cumulative character development. The aim was to enhance estrangement, or "Verfremdung." This distancing or alienation was to allow audiences to see the stage as a stage, and actors as actors. The subversion of the traditional make-believe in the theater produced a detachment that emphasized reason and objectivity rather than emotion, passion, or empathy.[15] Conversely, the German playwright believed that emotional catharsis, produced by empathy, pity, or terror prevented rational thinking on behalf of the spectators.

Paradoxically, Halac's thorough learning of Brecht's notion of epic theater and of the *Verfremdungseffekt* or alienation effect, did not make him embrace Brecht's hatred of the conventions of "Aristotelian" drama that made the audience identify with the hero to the point of self-oblivion. Instead, Halac developed his own dramaturgical approach. In the years to come, his dramaturgy maintained a dialogue with different Argentine traditions such as the *sainete* and the *grotesco criollo,* as much as with the American realism proposed by Arthur Miller and that of Britain represented in the plays of "young angry men" like John Osborne, Arnold Wesker and, above all, Harold Pinter (Halac 2007).

5.4 Ricardo Halac's Reflective Realism: Independent Theater in a New Key?

Halac wrote his first play, *Soledad para Cuatro* (*Solitude for Four*, 1961), during his stay in Europe. On his return to Buenos Aires, the piece was shown

14 Brecht's epic theater envisioned drama as a socio-ideological forum for leftist causes. He embraced Marxism through Karl Korsch, the eminent theoretician who had been a Communist member of the Reichstag for the German Communist Party until 1926.

15 Brecht considered this detachment a crucial move in awakening the spectators' minds. To accomplish that objective, Brecht focused on cruel, harsh, and realistic scenes, with plots that reached no climax or denouement. Rather, they sought to provoke the audience not only to think about the play, but also to confront an ending that required social action: reforming society by challenging those entrenched ideologies that had been naturalized.

at La Mascara, an important independent playhouse. The premiere was met with immediate success.[16] The plot begins with a random encounter between an idle pair of typical young, lower middle class locals who are willing to find an easy prey for a Saturday night outing, and two provincial working-class girls employed at a textile factory. The encounter takes place at a lousy apartment the mother of one of the men rents. The fact that the son has no knowledge of who his father is makes the play reflect not only different social classes and taboos, but also portrays a dysfunctional family, the antithesis of the bourgeoisie ideal of the time. Placed in the solitude of contemporary life, the play is just that: the failed meeting of four people, their confrontations and lack of vitality, modulated by the successive entries of the mother, an actress of soap operas in decline, and her lover. While the son is the object of his mother's noisy complaints, all of the protagonists participate in a sad *melánge* of absurd situations where they turn invert Sartre's existentialist slogan of freedom of choice, extremely in vogue at that moment.

In Halac's play, the protagonists' flawed search for meaning and identity, their solipsism and lack of commitment, present no one-to-one correlation with reality. Rather, Halac creates fiction following the "credibility of common sense" as a mechanism that sets limits to the recreation of the world outside. By presenting a crisis at the beginning, Halac rejects the weaving of intrigue as a writing technique. In turn, the reduction of stage movement, the absence of a closed end, the maintenance of strict causality, and the reliance on a very realistic stage set help create the profiles of Halac's antiheroes, to whom nothing ever happens. That seems to be their real drama. By presenting antiheroes as referential characters, Halac gives his plays a strong sense of reality. In *Solitude for Four*, the protagonists know they are limited and unable to take action. Yet, they constantly ask themselves: "What's wrong with me?" It is by digging into casual, face to face interactions that the author exposes a mediocre ambiance: the fears and censorship that characterized the socio-political climate of the late fifties and early sixties in Argentina, a time when the semi-democratic governments of Arturo Frondizi (1958–1962) and Arturo Illia (1963–1966) reached power, both conditioned by the proscription of the deposed populist leader, Perón, himself still in exile. Thus, Frondizi's term, which was marked by a rampant disbelief in the capacity of the Argentine middle classes to become a progressive ruling class, was followed by that of Illia, another failing administration whose promises to reestablish freedom and socio-economic change ended in disappointment.

16 Reprinted in Halac, *Teatro Completo (1961–2004). Prólogo de Osvaldo Pellettieri*, 50–99.

Halac's second play, *Fin de diciembre* (*The End of December*), centers on a group of friends reaching their thirties. They have spent more than half of their lives together. They all meet at the country house of one of them—some by chance or because they have nothing better to do—to celebrate the New Year. Contrary to everybody's expectations, their getting together gives way to an atmosphere of emptiness and broken dreams, envy, and resentment. Their apparent enthusiasm finally blurs with frustration, fatigue, and alcohol in an endless night. By dawn, the disagreement that overwhelms the group reveals their unbridgeable differences, turning them violent towards one another. Discovering that nothing true unites them but faded memories, they disband in opposite directions.

Halac's third play, *Estela de madrugada* (*Estela at Dawn,* 1965) centers on a female character who lives with her family outside the Capital, behind the General Paz Avenue, which symbolizes the dividing line between the big city of Buenos Aires and one of its unmodish suburbs. Their house is next to an oil factory, where Estela's father, an engineer by training, works as an employee. The oil factory's effluvia permeate their lodging, a telling detail of their somehow fragile socio-economic status and prospects. The action begins with a frustrated family reunion at the father's birthday, an omen for the characters' broken hopes for a take-off that is always postponed, even if their dreams are modest: obtaining a better-paying job, a salary increase, or getting married and reproducing the parental model. Estela, the motor of the plot, is determined to go further. She flees from a fainthearted boyfriend to throw herself into the arms of an eternal student who lives at the expense of his mother. For all its false opportunities, *Estela at Dawn* is the story of individual frustration, of a dream—Estela's—to change her life, to grow and fight off scarcity, narrow-mindedness, and mediocrity. It is, at the same time, a reflection on the dissonances affecting the middle classes, which are trapped in socio-political confusion, as much as a criticism of vulgar ideas of success, of family relationships, of women's place in society, and of the uncertainty of young people who experience a strong sense of marginality because they live "far" from the big city. In other words, the play gives a distressing snapshot against the background of Illia's time in power, which, despite the president's later deposal, had allowed for a limited and deceiving period of aspiration.

Following the staging of these three plays, art critics began to refer to Halac's innovative approach as "reflexive realism," a type of dramaturgy that merges social and aesthetic concerns with a deep understanding of the socio-political conditions in Argentina. Osvaldo Pelletieri (1987) argues that Halac's reflexive realism seeks to produce a strong dramatic effect by

centering on deliberate banalities, which allows the audience to be deceived, while simultaneously unraveling crude encounters and harsh social criticism, which the spectator faces with no euphemisms or alibis. In this respect, Halac takes inspiration from Armando Discépolo, the Argentinian playwright who gave shape to the *grotesco criollo.* In canonical dramatic pieces such as *Stéfano* (1928), *Cremona* (1932), or *Relojero* (1934), Discépolo positions the antihero as the major protagonist. By digging into family conflicts and generational clashes among its members, he offers a merciless analysis of the lack of communication and disintegration of the household. By merging the tragic and the comic with the protagonist's failures, Discépolo's plays dissect the breakdown of the immigrant utopia at the beginning of the twentieth century, a utopia that revealed itself, decades later, as a suffocating experience of anguish, frustration, and misery.[17]

Halac's reflexive realism also drew from the Stanislavski method of stage acting, which was already leading to new forms of expression within local independent theater in Argentina at the time. Prior to the spread of the Stanislavski method, the training of actors was deemed marginal, and performances were based mainly on what actors had seen on stage and learned from their seniors. It was only in the late forties and early fifties that a real interest in this aspect arose, finally becoming a major and explicit concern in the next decade. Fray Mocho, under the leadership of the charismatic actor and director Oscar Ferrigno, who had studied in France with Charles Dullin and Stanislavski himself (Mauro 2016), was one of first institutions to adopt key elements of the Stanislavski method. Its new notions of action, imagination, concentration of attention, muscle relaxation, units and objectives, sense of truth, emotional memory, inner driving force, and internal creativity all revolutionized acting.

Undoubtedly, Stanislavski's holistic view—his focus on the actors' introspection, their own search for identity and scenic truth—gave Halac the necessary tools for engaging in novel forms of stage direction.[18] It is

17 Discépolo's *grotesco criollo* focused on the everyday life of poor immigrants and other outcasts in the city who struggled to make ends meet in an unjust environment that cherished progress and success. While he was later dismissed, many of Halac's generation of dramaturges in the 1960s looked back to Discépolo and the grotesque genre he cultivated to achieve realist introspection that mixed comedy and tragedy. In that respect, Halac's *Estela de madrugada* shares an elective affinity with Discépolo's *Relojero.* See Escalada 2007 and Kippes 2007.

18 In the prologue to *Soledad para cuatro,* Halac describes his new views on acting and the novel ways his actors approached their characters in the play.

important to remember that by then, La Máscara, where *Soledad para cuatro* became a hit, counted with the collaboration of Hedi Crilla. This European training teacher of actors had come to Argentina fleeing Nazism. Crilla's ideas and experiences brought other nuances and different methods of acting to bear on Halac's first play. Enriched by Crilla's input, Halac's employment of Stanislavski's method reappeared in later plays, mainly *Fin de Diciembre*, *Estela de Madrugada*, *Tentempié 1,* and *Tentempié 11*.

As time went by, Halac's reflexive realism gathered adepts among critics and playwrights alike. Together with a new generation of dramaturges such as Oscar Viale, Roberto Cossa, and Eduardo Pavlovsky, to mention but some, Halac became crucial in the renovation of Argentine theater in general, and of independent theater in particular. This renovation crystallized at a moment of civic tensions and protests among the educated elites and leftist intellectuals. The merging of this unrest and impatience with the criticism against the failing administration of Illia eased the return of the military who, in 1966, initiated another exacerbated wave of authoritarianism.

Unsurprisingly, the military rule that lasted from 1966 to 1973 reached novel forms of censorship: the intervention of public radio and television stations, the banning and closing of independent publications, the purge of higher education institutions, the repression of dissident groups, including professors, students, teaching authorities, and intellectuals at all levels, and, finally, the enforcement of strict public morals from above. The cultural impasse and renewed authoritarianism prompted the younger generations, especially at the universities and high schools, to turn to alternative points of reference like the revolutionary ideas and leftist doctrines already in the air after the Cuban revolution of 1959.

Be that as it may, by the late 1960s, the Argentine political map was roughly polarized between those who demanded a social revolution and supported the return of Perón, and those conservative circles who, fearing further destabilization, sided with the Armed Forces' nationalist agenda. The latter promised order from above, ideological closure, legitimacy from the upper echelons of the Catholic Church, and economic development.

Halac, who had previously collaborated with the major newspaper *El Mundo* (*The World*), began working at *La Opinión* (*The Opinion*), a newly born, combative newspaper that first appeared in 1971, directed by the provocative Jacobo Timerman (Varela 2005). *La Opinión* gathered a prestigious staff, and it allowed Halac to rub elbows with figures like Carlos Ulanovsky, Horacio Verbitsky, Tomás Eloy Martínez, and Osvaldo Soriano, all under the leadership of the poet Juan Gelman. It was because of Gelman's request for a cultural supplement that Halac's continued interest in Brecht found a

renewed platform for discussion. As an investigative journalist and cultural critic, he reinitiated a debate that had originated in Europe in the 1930s about the appalling violence and instability that the arts were experiencing in early 1970s Argentina.

In interwar Europe, the shadow of fascism and of its most aggressive variant, German Nazism, had led Marxist circles and critical intellectuals—Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, Ernest Bloch and others—to elaborate on the social function of art in times of severe crisis and political terror. Bertolt Brecht and George Lukács fueled these disputes while agreeing on the political potential of realism as a popular front of antifascist forces (Brecht 1974). Brecht defended a combative realism, that is, an art committed to social change that, detached from passive experiences of reality, assumes a harsh, objective, and concrete portrayal of contemporary life. The use of montage, inner monologue, and techniques of distancing and defamiliarization were to encourage active intervention to change reality. For Brecht, artistic creation was, therefore, a concern about the practical political uses of art: the collective production and reception of theater and cinema being the optimal genres. In turn, Lukács favored the individualized form of expression of the novel and prioritized a theoretical, less "urgent" approach to art (Brecht 1974).

In a major editorial published at *La Opinión* on October 17, 1971, Halac invoked the Brecht-Lukacs debate to inspire a committed art in the Argentine context (1971). The publication date was no minor detail. It commemorated the events taking place in 1945, when an immense workers' demonstration at the Plaza de Mayo demanded the liberation of Perón, who had been jailed on the island of Martín García. The massive rally turned October 17 into the day of Peronism's foundation.

Convinced of the importance of becoming acquainted with Brecht as a major committed intellectual, Halac later authored a twelve-page special edition of *La Opinión* on Brecht's legacy (Halac 1972). The supplement discussed the opinions of several young Argentine directors on the Brechtian method and its application in the local scene; it also offered a detailed interview with Oscar Fessler, who had directed many of Brecht's work.[19]

19 Born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, of Jewish origin, Fessler became a refugee with the rise of Hitler to power. Finally, he settled in Paris, studying with a disciple of Stanislavski. Personally acquainted with Max Reinhardt and Erwin Piscator, he was well-versed on Brecht's work. He arrived in Argentina in 1957, invited by the *Idisher Folks Teater* (IFT), later directing the Santa Fe Provincial Theater School, and the Theater Institute of the University of Buenos Aires.

Finally, it included excerpts from *Turandot*, Brecht's last work.[20] Likewise, the supplement focused on the political Brecht. Halac reproduced passages of Brecht's interrogation at the Anti-American Activities Committee in 1947 and analyzed the moral dilemmas, economic hardships, and bureaucratic travails the German playwright faced on his return from exile to East Germany, then under the omniscient rule of Ernest Ulbricht. This communist politician, who shaped the structure of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), and its development into a socialist state under the surveillance of the Soviet Union, ordered the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961.

Halac's nuanced discussion of Brecht's opinions on East Germany and his conflictive relationship with Ulbricht, bring to fore the dramatic events of June 1953 that led to the first repression of workers, farmers, and students carried out in the GDR with Soviet support.[21] Halac dwells on Brecht's reaction to the incidents and his paradoxical statement contending that "imposed socialism was better than no socialism at all!"[22]

Halac's prominence not just as a sophisticated dramatist but as an opinionated cultural critic at *La Opinión* won him the suspicion of extremist right-wing factions, and especially of the Argentine Anticommunist Alliance known as the *Triple A*, a paramilitary group active during Isabel Perón's administration (1974–1976). Their harassment forced Halac into exile in Mexico; he returned to Argentina one year later. In the years to come and up to 1982, Halac's activities were strongly censored. It was in this atmosphere that Halac wrote a vaudeville titled *El Destete* (*The End of Breastfeeding,* 1976), a breakthrough whose tone differed from that of his other plays. With a teasing title hinting at "the act of weaning a baby from breastfeeding," *El Destete* points at the failure of parenthood and parent-child relations

20 It is a satire on the bad faith of intellectuals in a capitalist society. It belongs to Brecht's cycle, "the misuse of the intellect." It takes the audience to ancient China, where the emperor summons the intellectuals to help him deal with the destabilization of the economy due to an overproduction of cotton. Brecht conceived the play as complementary to his *Galileo Galilei*. Written in 1953–54, it was left unfinished and premiered posthumously in 1969.

21 The *Volksaufstand* or "popular uprising" of June 1953 was directed against the socialist regime. Starting on June 16 at one of the country's largest construction sites in Berlin, it was followed by strikes and demonstrations in the rest of the country. As violence mounted, the state of emergency was declared. The confrontation with the Communist authorities left dozens of dead and more than a hundred injured.

22 Contrary to what many fellow-travelers considered a repressive flaw and fatal mistake perpetrated by the German-Soviet Communist establishment, Brecht surprisingly sided with the Party's repressive rule.

(Pelletieri 1994). The play tells the story of three flawed middle-class families whose parents fail to realize their own ideals and transfer them to their children. The play makes the most out of the genre of the grotesque by playing with exaggeration, sexual taboos, Freudian meanings, and coarse language; terms like "adult children" and "boyish men" imprisoned in castrating families are part of the play's lexicon. *El Destete* expresses the drama of young yet dull characters with no true ideals or vitality, and of an older generation, that of the grown-ups whose youth was populated by commandments they could not keep. Halac's appeal to metaphor and humor, as Luigi Pirandello notes in *L'Umorismo* and his turn to exaggeration and artificiality serve aesthetic as well as ideological purposes. They allow him to portray the feeling of failure of an entire younger generation which had high expectations of Perón's return from exile and his rise to power in 1973. That very same generation witnessed with awe how their expectations degenerated into a civil war culminating in the last and harshest military coup Argentina ever experienced, in 1976.

5.5 Final Observations for a New Beginning?

This study has focused on the trajectory and cultural production of a leading dramatist from the second generation of immigrant Jews from the Middle East who, like Arab immigrants of all creeds, came to the Americas in search of a better future. In retrospective, Halac's disaffiliation from the traditional ethnic and religious community networks of Jewish-Syrian immigrants, his complete immersion in Argentine society and culture in general, and his attempt to assimilate into the urban experience of the city of Buenos Aires, reveal the alternative ways in which ethnic minorities, traditions, and creeds can simultaneously merge with national identity as non-exclusive, compatible filiations. This hybrid form of identity formation refutes the entelechy of essentialist perceptions—be they ethnic, religious, national, cultural, or other. By questioning the existence of clear and single dimensional delimitations between groups, hybridity emphasizes the ambivalence and contradictions inherent to any conceptualization of collective identities.

The volume on contemporary Sephardic identity in the Americas, edited by Margalit Bejerano and Edna Aizenberg (Bejerano and Aizenberg 2012) addressed Sephardic cultural production in Latin America by discussing how the immigrants' original traditions, customs, and autochthonous languages accommodated in the new continent. They incisively asked whether alternative frameworks other than "nostalgia" for the communities of origin

or idyllic constructions of the past could be fruitful for understanding such cultural production. The present study offers a multilayered framework in which Ricardo Halac makes clear his priority: a dialogue with local/national literatures and aesthetic developments in Argentina that brings in a concern with Argentine politics and society, though not necessarily at the expense of his ethnic origins or religious adscription.

Interestingly, in the case of Halac, the attraction to and curiosity about his origins take him symbolically not to Syria and the Middle East, nor to the Sephardic diaspora that settled in the Ottoman Empire, but to medieval Jewish and Moorish Spain—to the 1492 expulsion from Iberia and the fates of the *converso* Jews, whether in the Peninsula or in the Rio de la Plata colonies. Such an interest is more clearly evinced in Halac's Judeo-Hispanic trilogy, *Mil años ...un día*, *La lista* and *Marcados, de por vida* (Schammah Gesser 2022). Even more so, Halac's inquiry into European and Hispanic cultures, languages, and traditions has reinforced his identification with Argentina, the Spanish language in its unique *Rioplatense* variety, and the Latin American experience. This commitment has been successively asserted in the numerous plays he has written throughout his long and productive career.

FIGURE 5.1 Ricardo Halac's maternal grandfather, Mr. Zagha, in his house in Damascus, circa 1930. Ricardo Halac's Personal Archive.

FIGURE 5.2 The Front Page of the Cultural Supplement of La Opinión dedicated to Bertolt Brecht, prepared and written by Ricardo Halac. "El legado de Bertolt Brecht." *Suplemento Cultural de La Opinión*, Diciembre 10: 1–12.

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CHAPTER 6

Towards a Cinema of Liberation: Links between Political Filmmakers from Latin America and the Arab World during the 1960s–1970s

Olivier Hadouchi and Mariano Mestman

Abstract

This chapter examines the networks that took shape between Arab and Latin American political filmmakers who contributed to the Third-Worldist project during the 1960s and 1970s. The notion of Third-Worldist cinema differs from the broader notion of Third World Cinema, since it does not encompass all the films of the countries of the then so-called Third World, but rather their most radical tendencies, which were forged under the guidance of events or manifestos such as the Tricontinental Conference in Havana (1966), the manifesto *Hacia un tercer cine* (*Towards a Third Cinema*) (1969), and the creation of the Pan-African Federation of Filmmakers (1970). In other words, this orientation included the Third World films and filmmakers most closely linked to national liberation projects, social revolution, and cultural decolonization. This chapter investigates a wide range of film magazines and film events (festivals, filmmakers' meetings, conferences, etc.) carried out in the Latin American or Arab countries where Third-Worldist filmmakers and critics forged a dialogue.

Keywords

Third Cinema – anticolonial cinema – political cinema – Arab cinema – Third World solidarity – internationalism

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To the Palestinian and Lebanese people,
who resist in terrible, inhumane conditions

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During the 1960s and 1970s, the political cinema of the so-called Third World gained remarkable international visibility.[1] Filmmakers from newly independent nations and others involved with the struggles for decolonization or national liberation processes embarked on the production of auteur or intervention films. Their Third-Worldist revolutionary orientation makes them stand out within the broader body of cinematographic work produced in Asian, African, or Latin American nations. The revolutions in Cuba (1959) and Algeria (raging on as an extensive and bloody war of independence from 1954 to 1962) were the key events that led to the emergence of this type of committed cinema in several countries. Also of importance was the radicalization prompted by events such as the Tricontinental Conference in Havana (January 1966) and the creation of the OSPAAAL (Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America) and its magazine, *Tricontinental*, which even promoted some films of its own. Moreover, this Third-Worldist orientation was also present among filmmakers working in North America and Europe, and some others from Eastern Europe or the USSR. Many of them accompanied the Third World struggles during that period of the Cold War, often against states and political parties that advocated for "peaceful coexistence." In this context, a series of festivals, meetings, and publications all around the world supported this type of cinema, regardless of the denomination it received in each place: militant, intervention, Third-Worldist, Tricontinental, Third World Cinema, Third Cinema, and so on.[2]

Over that period, political cinema proposals were influenced by the ideas of independence leaders or revolutionaries, and most notably by the texts of Frantz Fanon. Ideas about the development of a "national cinema," "cultural decolonization," or the "decolonization of the screens," recurrent in many declarations and manifestos, allowed for the establishment of bridges across different struggles. These proposals recognized the common persistence of imperialist and neo-colonial influences, which had to be confronted by state cinematographic entities or opposition groups that emerged out of different political realities. In fact, national dynamics recognized important distinctions in each of the regions or subregions of Latin America and the Arab

1 Olivier Hadouchi thanks Heiny Srour for sharing documents with him. Mariano Mestman thanks the funding received for this research from the DEA program of the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme (France).

2 Olivier Hadouchi, "Cinéma dans les luttes de libération. Genèses, initiatives pratiques et inventions formelles autour de la Tricontinentale (1966–1975)" (Ph.D. diss., University of Paris III, 2012).

world (Latin Americanist, Pan-Arabist, and Pan-Africanist) beyond the widespread Third World political orientation.[3]

Hence, the purpose of this article is to explore the relations between the Third World cinema of Latin America and the Arab world, as a contribution—necessarily panoramic and surely incomplete—to the ongoing research on an extensive and complex topic.

6.1 Algeria and Cuba

In the early 1960s, on both the political and cinematographic arenas, Cuba in Latin America and Algeria in the Maghreb (and the Arab world) were the two main references of revolutionary and Third World cinema. The early creation of the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC), directed by Alfredo Guevara, and its *Noticiero* (*Newsreel*) directed by Santiago Álvarez, as well as its educational documentaries, mobile cinema, and remarkable fiction films are well-known objects and events. Also documented is the work accomplished by the *Cuban Cinema* magazine. Similarly, there is a body of critical works about the role of Algerian cinema institutions in the promotion of "national cinema," the *cine-pop,* and the *cine-bus*, as well as about the organizational roles played by figures such as René Vautier, Ahmed Rachedi, and Mohammed Lakhdar-Hamina, the impact of the films on the War of Independence and the Algerian Revolution, and about the central role of the Cinémathèque algérienne. In both cases—as with so many others in the Third World—there was an early awareness about the important role of cinema in liberation struggles. Algerian cinema sought, from its beginning, to challenge colonial propaganda, and to combat the French in the field of representation, opposing the imperial images and visions that were at the heart of French cinema (both civil and military). In fact, the Algerians proposed an offensive, counter-information cinema, which contributed to isolating French politics on an international scale and to creating a movement of solidarity in many countries of the world. Ahmed Bedjaoui (Bedjaoui 2014) has spoken of a war of images and representations between France and Algeria which, in his opinion, began with the

3 In the Arab world, the defeat in the June 1967 War marked a turning point in many ways and, for committed Arab cinema, it was perhaps an analogous event to 1968 for Western cinema, which influenced the radicalization of many filmmakers.

French conquest of the country (with paintings and photos), continuing during the war of independence and lasting until today.

From 1960 onwards, news about Algeria appeared frequently in the Cuban *Noticiero*. Those newsreels bear testimony to the construction of a parallelism between these two revolutions, their peoples and their leaders, as well as to their emancipatory deeds, active solidarity, and certain difficulties (Berthier and Arêas 2022, 263–278). In November 1964, a broad cooperation agreement was reached between filmmakers of the two countries in the context of a Cuban Film Program in Algiers; it was later suspended in the wake of President Ben Bella's fall from power. While Havana's rejection of Boumediene's military coup in 1965 chilled relations for a few years, new exchanges soon followed.

Many of the internationalist events of those years where the Third World had a leading presence also functioned as spaces of exchange between Arab and Latin American filmmakers; this framework of dialogue also involved filmmakers, critics, and intellectuals from other geographies: Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, as well as Europe, North America, or the Socialist bloc. In early 1968, for example, Cuba and Algeria hosted two important meetings. In January, the Cultural Congress of Havana was held in Cuba, which brought together more than six hundred intellectuals from around the world to discuss the problems of the Third World. Although there was low attendance from international filmmakers, the ICAIC played a key role in the congress's organization, and the guidelines proposed for discussion in the Committee on Culture and Media recognized the previous experiences of the cinematographic policies of countries such as Cuba and Algeria. They also encouraged the filming of the guerrilla struggles still active in many countries, the role of cinema in the education of peoples, and the action of cultural vanguards who were involved in organizing film clubs, *cinémathèques*, and so on, in liberated countries.

A few weeks later, in February 1968, the First Congress of the International Association of Documentary Filmmakers (AID) was held in Algeria, bringing together some of the most renowned international documentary filmmakers active at that moment. Even though it was basically a European association, this congress marked a deepening of the association's links with the Third World and its political cinema. In fact, Santiago Álvarez and the Argentine Fernando Birri were incorporated into the AID Council; four "open" places were left, one of them for Algerian cinema and another for Vietnamese cinema. Several Latin American and Algerian films were part of the Congress' parallel exhibitions. Among the topics discussed, the creation of a Third World Film Festival in Algiers was proposed. A few months later,

preparations began for the Pan-African Cultural Festival to be held in July 1969, also in Algiers (Khellas 2014, Hadouchi 2011). It is a well-known event, of wide political and cultural impact, which focused on African culture (from the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa). Although cinema occupied a lower place at the festival in relation to other cultural expressions, and although there was almost no Latin American presence, the Algerian press remarked on the attendance of the Argentine Fernando Solanas, who the previous year had directed the film *La hora de los hornos* (*The Hour of the Furnaces*) with Octavio Getino. Both were finishing the writing of their manifesto *Hacia un tercer cine* during the days of the festival; it would be published later in 1969. Solanas had come to the festival to follow the colloquium on African cinema, and was interviewed by the newspaper *El Moudjahid* about his ongoing projects, in particular the drafting of the manifesto. We can thus begin to understand the impact that this direct contact with the Arab and African world had on the final drafting of the text (Mestman, forthcoming).

However, it was only around 1973 that these relations were more cohesively articulated as a Third World collective project. Before dealing further with this special juncture, it is necessary to remember the role played in all of this by the cinema environments of Western Europe and the Socialist bloc. That is, with the exception of some direct relations existing between nations of the Third World, one cannot make sense of the emergence of Third-Worldist cinema if one ignores the collaboration of other filmmakers, critics, film festivals, publications, film schools, independent producers, and distributors from these other geographies. Dealing with these engagements does not only mean noting the screenings of the "new cinemas," "support," or "solidarity" projects with countries considered "underdeveloped" (such as those of UNESCO), but also examining the filmmakers or institutions that assumed a political commitment to Third World struggles.[4]

4 We cannot expand on this topic here. Among the works on festivals, see: Caroline Moine, *Cinéma et Guerre Froide. Histoire du Festival de films documentaires de Leipzig (1955–1990)* (Paris: Sorbonne, 2014); Elena Razlogova, "Cinema in the Spirit of Bandung: The Afro-Asian Film Festival Circuit, 1957–1964," in *The Cultural Cold War and the Global South. Sites of Contest and Communitas*, ed. Kerry Bystrom, Monica Popescu, and Katherine Zien (New York: Routledge, 2021), 111–129; Masha Salazkina, *World Socialist Cinema. Alliances, Affinities and Solidarities in the Global Cold War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2023). On film schools: Olivier Hadouchi, "Mohammed Lakhdar Hamina and Boubaker Adjali: The Careers of Two Algerian Filmmakers Who Attended FAMU," in *Filmmakers of the World, Unite! Forgotten Internationalism, Czechoslovak Film and the Third World*, ed. Tereza Stejskalová (Prague: Tranzit, 2017); Magda Lipska and Monika Talarcyk, eds., *Hope*

6.2 From Algiers, 1973: The Third World Cinema Committee

In September 1973, during the famous IVth Conference of Heads of State of the Non-Aligned Countries, held in Algiers, screenings of more than twenty films on the Third World were organized, including films from the Arab world (particularly from the Maghreb) as well as from Latin America. Films by the Brazilian Glauber Rocha, the Cuban Manuel Octavio Gómez, the Chilean Patricio Guzmán, and the Argentines Solanas-Getino and Raymundo Gleyzer, among others, were shown as well. These films were part of the cycle *Le cinéma: une arme* (*The Cinema: A Weapon*), precisely the same expression that Gleyzer used a few days later at the Pesaro Film Festival in Italy, where he arrived with other Latin Americans and North Africans traveling from the IVth Conference in Algiers.[5] This slogan—which spoke of the cinema (or the camera) as a tool of agitation and counter-information, and obviously alluded to armed or guerrilla struggle—had been part of the discourse of Third World revolutionary cinema for some years. This or similar expressions appear frequently in the statements and manifestos of filmmakers. It also had an early visual translation in Montevideo in the image created in 1969 for the film club of the weekly *Marcha,* then isotype of the Cinemateca del Tercer Mundo (Lacruz 2021).[6]

In the days of the IVth Algiers Conference, the organization of the Third World Filmmakers meeting, which would be held that December, began to take shape. The meeting was attended by numerous film directors from the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Congo, Mali, Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal) and Latin America (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Cuba, Chile, Colombia, Uruguay), as well as by representatives of an emerging Palestinian cinema. Although this famous encounter has not been studied in depth so far, it is already a recognized milestone. Let us briefly recall, then, that the main topics discussed at the meeting focused on cinema's contribution to the processes of national

Is a Different Color: From the Global South to the Lodz Film School (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

5 The expression was perhaps used not by Gleyzer but by Jorge Giannoni. Sources differ on the matter.

6 This image was re-appropriated by militant film groups in several countries. But there were also other visual "translations." For example, it was used by the Algerian Cinémathèque, and on the logo of the Palestine Film Unit and the Palestinian Cinema Institution, and on the covers of two books by Guy Hennebelle (1975 and 1977). Historian Julianne Burton also used it in 1978, in an essay on the NLAC.

liberation, the "decolonization of Third World screens," the struggle against "cultural alienation," and the problems of production, distribution, and exhibition of films suffered by most of the filmmakers attending in their respective countries. The topics and manifestos of the New Latin American Cinema (NLAC) and Arab political cinema resonate in these debates: the confrontation with the Hollywood film model, the monopolies of Western production and distribution, the search for collaboration in co-production and distribution between Third World countries, the international distribution of their films, the criticism of the "exotic" or "folkloric" gaze of European or North American cinema about the Third World, and the commitments of cinema to the social policies of newly independent countries, as well as to the liberation struggles still underway.

Although there were no filmmakers from Asia present at the meeting, the Third World Cinema Committee eventually included representatives from various regions: Lamine Merbah (Algeria) as president, Santiago Álvarez (Cuba), Jorge Giannoni (Argentina), Ousmane Sembene (Senegal), and Hamid Merei (Syria). In May 1974, Jorge Giannoni, then director of the Cinemateca of the Third World Institute of the University of Buenos Aires, and his partner Susana Sichel, who had actively participated in the organization of the Algiers meeting, organized a second and smaller meeting of the Committee in Buenos Aires.

The joint program for co-productions and film distribution that emerged at these meetings, including the proposal to create a Tricontinental organization for film distribution, was considered sustainable beyond the possible funding of bodies such as the OAU, the Arab League, or UNESCO, because they thought they could obtain the support of countries with effective control over their cinema industries, that is: Algeria, Guinea, Upper Volta, Mali, Uganda, Syria, and Cuba. Hence, as it was expressed at the second meeting of the Committee in Buenos Aires, although Latin America was going through a politically unstable reality, there were also powerful national liberation movements in several countries (accompanied by their militant cinemas), as well as potential spaces in other countries to develop active communication and cinematographic policies with progressive or revolutionary orientations.

In this context, the Third World Cinema Committee exerted influence, even if just for a brief period, over world political cinema. In June 1974, the *Rencontres Internationales pour un Nouveau Cinéma* (*International Meetings for a New Cinema*) was held in Montreal. Precisely because of the influence of the Committee, it was renamed by some critics as the Estates General of Third Cinema. There, filmmakers and critics from the Third World (and

particularly from Latin America and the Maghreb) gathered with numerous film directors, critics, and organizers of alternative production and distribution companies or festivals in North America and Europe. The program included as its main quote an excerpt from the manifesto *Hacia un tercer cine*, and filmmakers and critics from Latin America and the Arab world played a key role in the discussions and proposals. Tahar Cheriaa (from the FEPACI, Fédération Panafricaine des Cinéastes) and Lamine Merbah, together with the host, André Pâquet, led the final plenary, where it was proposed to develop the organization of world political cinema following the example of the configuration of the Third World Cinema Committee, achieved shortly before in Algiers (Mestman 2002 and 2014).

Although in the following years the dialogue achieved by the political cinemas of the Arab world and Latin America would be diluted as a collective project, the agreements reached between the Algiers, Buenos Aires, and Montreal meetings would leave their traces. In fact, a proposal emerged to form a commission of Latin American filmmakers for the creation of a common federation, which proposed to follow the orientation of the Fédération Panafricaine des Cinéastes (FEPACI), created in 1970. The Latin American federation would be created only a few months later, under another name, and would only partially recognize this background. However, its committee would be composed of the same Latin American filmmakers from the previous Third World events. On the other hand, one of the discussions of these events referred to the place of film criticism, and the document that emerged from Montreal called for a "new type of critic," denouncing the "film culturism" (the merely *cinéphile* criticism) and promoting instead a "militant critic" that "defends progressive cinema." Among the undersigned critics were three active champions of the new cinema and Arab political cinema: Férid Boughedir, Tahar Cheriaa, and Guy Hennebelle. The *Rencontre maghrébine des ciné-clubs* (Maghrebi Meeting of Film Clubs, Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia) held in Mohammedia, Morocco, in August 1974, gave birth to the text *Fonction de la critique cinématographique au Maghreb* (*The Role of Cinematographic Criticism in the Maghreb*), which made explicit the interest in an alliance between Maghrebi criticism and Western radical criticism to strengthen a block of Third Cinema, considered in line with the Argentine manifesto (*Afrique-Asie* 67, October 1974; 76).[7] In August 1977, the

7 Following a reflection by Noureddine Saïl, then President of the Federation of Moroccan film clubs, Ahmed Bouanani proposes a link between Mohammedia 1974 and the manifesto of Solanas and Getino in relation to the idea of "emergence" and its passage from

collective of the *CinémArabe* magazine and the European Bureau of the Union of Arab Film Critics held a meeting in Hammamet, Tunisia, under the title *Une critique nouvelle pour un nouveau cinema* (*A New Criticism for a New Cinema*). The magazine published the documents prepared for that meeting, which it considered an extension of the Third Cinema proposal and the resolutions adopted in Montreal 1974 and Stockholm 1976, where it was continued (*CinémArabe* no 7–8, January-April 1978; no 4–5, October-November 1972; 46–47).

6.3 Arab and Third World film Festivals and Magazines, and the Emergence of Palestinian Cinema

Several Arab and Latin American filmmakers and critics who supported the proposals arising from the 1973 Algiers meeting had played an active role in promoting the "new" political cinema of their respective regions in the previous years. Between 1972 and 1973, for example, the emerging Palestinian militant cinema—the Palestine Film Unit's documentaries, for instance (Habashneh 2023)—as well as an *auteur* political cinema that sustained the cause achieved notable visibility at festivals in the Arab world like the International Festival for Young Filmmakers (Damascus, Syria, March-April 1972), the Carthage Film Festival JCC (Carthage, Tunisia, October 1972) and the First Palestine International Festival of Films and Television Programs (Baghdad, Iraq, March 1973), among others. In Carthage, the representatives of Palestinian cinema presented one of their recent manifestos, and several militant films were shown.[8] In the official competition, the first prize (which was shared) went to the Syrian drama *al-Makhdu'un* (*The Dupes*) by Tawfik Saleh, which was also selected by the Arab Critics Union, an association of critics that awarded prizes at the Carthage Festival. An adaptation of Ghassan Kanafani's famous 1963 novel, *Rijal fi al-shams* (*Men in the Sun*), Saleh provides a powerful representation of Palestinian expulsion and the search for freedom. Further, it examines the responsibility that Arab states

"cultural notion" to anti-imperialist "political concept." See Ahmed Bouanani, *La séptima puerta. Una historia del cine en Marruecos desde 1907 hasta 1986* (Pamplona: Punto de vista, 2022), 151.

8 For a survey of Palestinian cinema manifestos and their context of appearance, see Kay Dickinson, ed., *Arab Films and Video Manifestos* (London: Palgrave, 2018), 81–106; Nadia Yaqub, *Palestinian Cinema in the Days of Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018).

bear for Palestinian suffering. Another Syrian film about Palestine, *Far from the Homeland*, by Kais al-Zubaidi, was awarded the *Mention d'Honneur* in a competition limited to Arab cinema held in Damascus, Syria, and featuring a special program on Palestine with a revolutionary and Pan-Arabist orientation.

Palestinian films would go on to be prominently featured in the subsequent festivals in Carthage and in many other Arab and international festivals. The more radical Palestinian film groups also claimed the slogan "cinema as a weapon" and drew from the experiences of Algerian, Cuban, and other combatant groups or individuals such as Hassan Abu Ghanima (Hennebelle and Khayati 1977, 37 and 43). However, up until then the collaborative relationship between Latin American political cinema with the Palestinian cause remained scarce. A notable exception of early collaboration had occurred in 1971, when the Argentines Jorge Giannoni and Jorge Denti, together with the Swiss Manuela Generali and the Italian Beppe Scavuzzo who formed the Cinema del Terzo Mondo collective, filmed the documentary *Palestine, another Vietnam* (Robledo 2018, 73–79), for which they travelled to Beirut and other cities and came into contact with the Palestine Film Unit.[9] When the Cuban Santiago Álvarez saw the film *Zionist Aggression* (1972, a collective work under the direction of Mustapha Abu Ali) in 1973 in Algiers, he "was impressed, urging Palestinians to use it as a model as they developed their film industry." The following year, interviewed during the Leipzig Film Festival, Álvarez apologized because "we (the Cuban filmmakers) have not produced a film about the Palestinian struggle" (Yaqub 2018, 73 and 238).[10]

Beyond the promotion of cinema in favor of the Palestinian struggle, festivals such as the ones in Damascus, Baghdad, and especially Carthage are of interest to us because they were spaces for connecting the different committed cinemas of the Arab world. With its first (and only) meeting, the Damascus Festival sought to promote a "young" Arab cinema perceived as a "replacement cinema," a "different cinema," or "alternative cinema" compared to the cinema of spectacle and international entertainment, as well as to traditional Arab cinema, the main issue discussed at the festival. There was talk of a shared interest in the "low budgets" used by the films of the European *nouvelles vagues,* and especially the French *nouvelle vague*. It was

9 See Khadijeh Habashneh, *Knights of Cinema. The Story of the Palestine Film Unit*, trans. Nadine Fattaleh (London: Palgrave, 2023), 62–65.

10 Mustapha Abu Ali (Mustefa Bouali) represented Palestinian cinema in Algiers 1973.

considered that the same resources and techniques could be used to promote a cinema that thematically reflected the "Arab social and daily reality," and assumed a political commitment to it (*Information News*, April 1972, 7–8). This orientation was driven by the festival's director, Hamid Merei, who would later join the Algiers's Third World Cinema Committee, as we already mentioned. At that time, Merei oversaw the National Film Organization, under the Syrian Ministry of Culture, an institution that developed a program for the importation of films and the development of a national cinema in line with a socialist commitment to its use in the education of the masses (Yaqub 2018, 88–89, Dickinson 2016, 39–40, Shafik 1998, 154–158).

Nevertheless, the Carthage's JCC were, without a doubt, the fundamental actor behind the articulation and visibility of Arab and African cinema in those years. The JCC had emerged in 1966 as a "Mediterranean" film festival with an international competition, but from 1968 onwards it limited its competition to Arab and African films, favoring at the beginning a cultural (rather than aesthetic or formal) and political valuation of the films. Tahar Cheriaa, its founder, was then Head of the Film Section of the Ministry of Culture and would be the Festival's Secretary General until the middle of the next decade. From its inception and at least until 1974, the Carthage Film Festival was connected to the Tunisian Federation of *cine-clubs* (FTCC), which Cheriaa himself presided. Despite its conflicts —internal, with FIAPF, or with those who promoted a more "European" festival associated with tourism—the Carthage Festival became an unavoidable reference for the most committed practitioners of Arab and African cinema (Courriou 2015). Consider that, between the 1968 and 1970 editions, the 1969 Pan-African Cultural Congress of Algiers took place, while the FESPACO (Festival Panafricain de Cinéma et de television de Ouagadougou), with which Carthage would soon collaborate, was emerging in Ouagadougou. In the 1970 edition of the Carthage Festival, FEPACI was born (Diawara 1992) and, during the 1972 edition, the Association of Arab Film Critics was created, an association whose first meeting had been held at the Damascus Festival a few months earlier.

On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, a series of festivals and meetings between filmmakers also witnessed and promoted the future of the NLAC and its progressive radicalization. The best known of these are surely the Festivals and Meetings of Latin American Filmmakers of Viña del Mar (Chile) in 1967 and 1969, the First Meeting of Latin American Documentary Film of Mérida (Venezuela) in 1968, the Festivals of the *Marcha* weekly and the creation of the Cinemateca del Tercer Mundo in Montevideo, Uruguay between 1967 and 1969, and the creation of the Committee of Latin

American Filmmakers in Caracas (Venezuela) in 1974. Many magazines also promoted the NLAC, among them *Hablemos de Cine* (*Let's Talk about Cinema*) (Peru), *Cine al día* (*The Cinema of the Day*) (Venezuela), *Cine y medios* (*Cinema and Media*) (Argentina), *Octubre* (*October*) (Mexico), *Cine del Tercer Mundo* (*Third World Cinema*) (Uruguay), and, especially, *Cine Cubano* (*Cuban Cinema*) (Cuba). Festivals and magazines were thus enhancers of the relations between filmmakers from different Latin American countries who had elaborated, already in Viña del Mar 1967, a kind of common program.

Something similar happened in the Arab world through publications of official institutions, independent magazines, and associations of critics or film clubs. During the period under review, *Information News,* the newsletter of the Inter-Arab Center for Cinema and Television, based in Beirut, played a fundamental role with regards to information diffusion and mutual knowledge. Created in 1964 by the Lebanese government in an orientation similar to that of the UNESCO regional centers, the Inter-Arab Center had emerged as a suggestion of the round tables on "Arab Cinema and Culture" organized by the international organization in Beirut from 1962 onwards (and later taken over by the Center Interarabe). *Information News* ran from August 1965 to January 1974, when Lebanon was already experiencing a period of political instability on the eve of the outbreak of civil war (Hotait Salas 2020, 55–61 and Sadoul 1966, 259–261). Published in Arabic and French (and since 1970 also in English), it was distributed around the world, and disseminated daily or biweekly information on the cinema of each country of the Arab world, as well as instances of cooperation between them. Following this main objective of information exchange, the bulletin promoted the various "national cinemas," which often had a Pan-Arabist orientation. The inclusion criteria were far-reaching, covering all kinds of films (including television) and the various film policies of each country. In addition, from the beginning, *Information News* became involved with films and filmmakers associated with the Third World project and past and present independence struggles, with a special interest in the Palestinian cause.

In the second half of the 1970s, another significant impetus for inter-Arab articulation—although limited in its reach—came from the magazine of the European Bureau of the Union of Arab Cinema Critics, in this case in a more openly militant orientation. The *CinémArabe* magazine, under the initial direction of the Moroccan-Italian Abdou Achouba and the Tunisian Khemais Khayati, was concerned with the existing fragmentation among the critics of the Arab world and their mutual ignorance of one another, as well as with the strong limits to the development of "national cinemas"

imposed by the production and distribution monopolies. However, recognizing and trying to recover the nationalization experiences of the Algerian and Syrian cinemas ("which bore fruit"), or those of the Egyptian cinema ("which failed"), *CinémArabe* set out to link both films and critics with "all the combative and progressive forces of the world" (*CinémArabe*, no 1, 1975),[11] and soon presented itself as a "Tricontinental cinematic action critical magazine" (*CinémArabe*, no. 4–5, October-November 1976). The magazine's editorial statements and notes proposed the defense of a national and popular anti-imperialist cinema, which—like its critics—should position itself in relation to the class struggle and question the limits of auteur cinema, pronouncing itself instead in favor of collective and militant creations in line with the precepts of Third Cinema. In this context, it became actively interested in the Palestinian cause and its cinema and paid special attention to Latin American political cinema. If the *Information News* bulletin only made sporadic and scarce reference to the NLAC, mainly because of its presence in film festivals, *CinémArabe*, on the other hand, denounced the repression of film workers in Latin America under the dictatorships then in power, and dialogued with the filmmakers and films of the new cinema and militant Latin American cinema in their diversity. So did the magazine *Cinéma 3*, founded by the Federation of Moroccan Cineclubs, as we shall see below.

The critics of these and other magazines engaged with Latin American films and their directors both at international festivals and through screenings organized by *cinémathèques*, embassies, film clubs, or other institutions in the Arab world. Along with the prolific activity of the Cinémathèque algérienne, for example, the Carthage Film Festival was also a place of meeting and exchange. Already in its second edition, in October 1968, Paulo Emilio Salles Gomes—founder of the Cinemateca Brazileira and promoter of the "national cinema" and the Brazilian Cinema Novo—joined the jury of the festival and gave a conference.[12] For that edition, the presence of the Argentine *La hora de los hornos*, and the Cuban *Aventuras de Juan Quin*

11 We thank Léa Morin for providing us with a copy of this first issue and for her work in making available film documents from the Arab world and the Third World. See, for example, the CinémArabe digital collection in: https://www.zine-eskola.eus/en/cinemarabe.

12 Tahar Cheriaa had travelled in June 1968 as a UNESCO representative to a meeting of Latin American film and television, organized at the University of São Paulo. Latin American film delegates from Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, Uruguay, Venezuela, Peru and Chile gathered there.

Quin (*The Adventures of Juan Quin Quin*) (1967) by Julio García Espinosa, were announced, although they were not exhibited in the end. In the 1970 edition, the list of participants includes Salles Gomes and the Chilean filmmaker Aldo Francia, then director of the Viña del Mar Festivals, who played a key role in the NLAC. After that edition, several other films from the new cinema and militant cinemas of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, and Mexico arrived in Carthage. Among them, during the Tricontinental Forum's 1978 edition, were *Los hijos de Fierro* (*The Sons of Fierro*) by Solanas (1974–1976), and *¡Fuera de aquí!* (*Get Out of Here!*) by the Bolivian Jorge Sanjinés (1977, filmed in Ecuador).

6.4 Latin American Political Cinema in the Arab World

The reception (and influence) of Arab political cinema in Latin America and, conversely, the impact of Latin American political cinema in the Arab world would require further study. Surely, the best-known cases are those of the Algerian-Italian co-production *La Bataille d'Alger* (*The Battle of Algeria*) (1966), and the Argentine film *La hora de los hornos* (1968), respectively.[13]

In 1979, the Tunisian filmmaker and critic Férid Boughedir wrote about the influence of The Hour of the furnaces and *Hacia un tercer cine*, Solanas and Getino's film and manifesto, had on the Arab (and African) world, providing numerous examples to show how this text had fostered the politicization of several filmmakers.[14] He explained that there had been no direct influence, rather a mediated one, mainly by French criticism and especially by Guy Hennebelle. Moreover, Boughedir said that while direct knowledge of the Argentine film had been limited (because of its limited distribution), the manifesto, on the contrary, had had an "enormous" and "lasting" influence throughout the 1970s on many films and manifestos from the Arab world that were "very close, in their substance, to the conception of Third Cinema."

13 The presence of films on the Algerian Revolution in Latin America could be traced back to before independence itself.

14 This is his response to a survey taken by eleven critics and filmmakers from different countries on the influence of the Argentine film and manifesto ten years after its release. The survey was proposed and published by Guy Hennebelle and his group CinemAction (1979). For an English translation, see Jonathan Buchsbaum and Mariano Mestman, eds., "Documenting the Third Cinema 1968–1979," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 62, no. 1 (2021).

Beyond the emblematic cases of Third Cinema theory and Cuban films, which were surely among the most well-known, other political cinemas were of interest to many critics and committed filmmakers of the Arab world, namely: the Brazilian Cinema Novo, the Bolivian cinema of Jorge Sanjinés and the Ukamau group, and the Chilean cinema of Salvador Allende's time in power (and then that of the denunciation of the September 1973 military coup), among others.

It is also known that, in those years, the French critic Guy Hennebelle published numerous books, articles, and interviews about Arab and Latin American cinemas (he also wrote about films from Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia), and established bridges between these diverse filmic experiences during the 1970s. During the previous decade, Hennebelle had been an "Algerian" critic, and from September 1965 to 1968 he oversaw the weekly film page of the *El Moudjahid* newspaper in Algiers.[15] In that capacity, he wrote about several films and filmmakers of the NLAC and in some cases considered them—in an explicit and almost programmatic way—as examples to follow. In the notes published about the Brazilian Cinema Novo, he used it as a comparative "model" for the development of Algerian cinema. The critic wrote about the impulse that Cinema Novo had given to film culture in Brazil (the work of film clubs and critics) and encouraged the creation of an Algerian federation of film clubs that would contribute to a similar endeavor. Highlighting the achievements of Cinema Novo to impose itself as a "national cinema" the creation of DIFILM (Distribuidora de Filmes Ltda, created in 1965) with its ability to disseminate the films of the movement in cinemas, and the low production costs achieved—Hennebelle wondered why Algerian feature films could not also be made with more accessible budgets. That is, he proposed the experience of Cinema Novo as "a lesson" for Algeria and by extension the Maghreb and the broader Arab world, since it showed that it was possible to make committed films of excellent quality without large budgets or technical resources (*El Moudjahid*, January 20, 1968).[16]

15 In 1968, Hennebelle was displaced and returned to France. In *El Moudjahid*, he wrote under the pseudonym Halim Chergui. See Sébastien Layerle and Martineau-Hennebelle, *Chroniques de la naissance du cinéma algérien. Guy Hennebelle, un critique engagé* (Paris: CinémAction, 2018).

16 Hennebelle shared *El Moudjahid's* film page from July 1967 with the Algerian critic Ahmed Bedjaoui (pseudonym: Réda Koussim). There and in other publications, both addressed the Cuban experience. When Bedjaoui paid homage to "the tenacious work of the ten Algerian cine-buses that toured the Algerian countryside without ceasing,"

When, at the end of the 1960s, a more openly "militant" Latin American cinema burst into Europe, Hennebelle—now in France—criticized the stagnation of the Brazilian Cinema Novo and supported the radicalization expressed by films such as Solanas and Getino's *La hora de los hornos* (1968), Sanjinés's *Yawar Mallku* (1969) and *El coraje del pueblo* (*The Courage of the People*) (1971),[17] and the Chilean cinema of the Popular Unity (1970–1973), among others. More specifically, he was interested in Third Cinema proposed by the Argentines Solanas and Getino, which he read with accuracy and promoted internationally, claiming its translation in the Arab and African world (*AfriqueAsie*, December 24, 1973). This interest led Solanas to write in 1977 the preface for the Spanish and Portuguese versions of Hennebelle's book *Quinze ans du cinéma mondial: 1960–1975* (*Fifteen Years of World Cinema: 1960–1975*), a preface that was reproduced that same year by the *CinémArabe* magazine (*CinémArabe*, Number 6, April 1977).[18]

In this vein, the Lebanese filmmaker and critic Heiny Srour also took as examples to follow Latin American political films and manifestos such as *Hacia un tercer cine* and *Por un cine imperfecto* (*For an Imperfect Cinema*) by the Cuban Julio García Espinosa. In her opinion, they were a source of inspiration for the promotion of a confrontational militant cinema in the Arab world and the Third World—a way to pave the road to a "different" cinema.[19] In her documentary *Sa'at al-tahrir daqat* (*The Hour of Liberation Has Arrived*) (1972), Srour opted for this "different" approach to documentary and supported the anti-imperialist struggle led by a revolutionary movement in Dhofar, in the South of the Sultanate of Oman bordering Yemen. The famous photograph of a young and smiling female fighter helped to popularize this struggle in the spheres of world political cinema because of its extensive dissemination in magazines, bulletins, illustrations, and militant documents. More to the point, Heiny Srour was moved by the way in which the revolutionary movement in Dhofar gave a unique place to women. In more than one essay or interview, the filmmaker discussed

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he compared it with the "eighty" cine-buses present in "the small country…of Cuba." *Information News*, February 15, 1968.

17 On Sanjinés' films, see: *AfricAsia*, November 29, 1971.

18 On Guy Hennebelle's cited readings of the Brazilian Cinema Novo, the NLAC, Third World Cinema, and his bonds with Solanas, see Mariano Mestman, "Guy Hennebelle, Fernando Solanas et le Troisième Cinéma," in *La critique comme un combat. Guy Hennebelle : critique, cinéma, politique*, ed. Sylvain Dreyer and Sébastien Layerle (Théorème, n° 40: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, forthcoming).

19 See her articles in *AfricAsia* (founded in 1969 by the Egyptian journalist Simon Malley), which became *Afrique-Asie* in 1972.

the place of women in the Arab world, and the condition of double "oppression" suffered by them. In an article where she analyzed the political limitations of the representation of women in Palestinian films, for example, she considered the film *Kafr Kassem* (Borhane Alaouié 1975) as a "serious" and "progressive" work, but questioned, among other aspects, its "patriarchal conception of women," which she also observed in other films. She wondered why the director had not managed to show women's leading roles in the struggles, as the Bolivian film *El coraje del pueblo* by Sanjinés had done. Why that difference, she wondered, if "Spanish culture was no less sexist than the Arab culture" (Hennebelle and Khayati 1977, 50). In those same years, the *CinémArabe* magazine devoted several pages to the subject, including a sharp essay by Srour on the hurdles she had to go through as an "underdeveloped feminist" to make political films in the Arab world, and on her position, not only as anti-imperialist but also a "subversive" in relation to the "decolonization of women" (*CinémArabe*, Number 4–5, October-November, 1976, 34–42).[20] Perhaps it is no coincidence that in that same issue, the magazine reproduced a text by Jorge Sanjinés on "bourgeois cinema and popular cinema," part of a larger essay by the Bolivian director.[21]

The NLAC also had an important presence in the four issues of the Moroccan magazine *Cinéma 3*, published in Casablanca during 1970 by Nouredinne Saïl, then president of the Fédération Nationale des Ciné-clubs Marocains (National Federation of Moroccan Film Clubs).[22] Evidently, the very name of the magazine (*Cinéma 3*) alludes to the idea of the Third Cinema. As part of a program to promote Arab and Third World "new cinemas" and "national cinemas," the magazine published extensive dossiers on Cuban and Brazilian cinemas (no. 1, January 1970 and no. 3, September 1970), and often included mentions of the NLAC in its notes on festivals or in interviews with Arab or African filmmakers. Moreover, already in 1970, this magazine spoke of the process of common organization of committed

20 Also issue 10–11 (October-November, 1978) devotes an extensive dossier by Maryse León and Magda Wassef to "the image of women in Arab cinema," with interviews with Srour, Jocelyne Saab and others.

21 An extract from the program of the newly formed "Groupe du Troisième Cinema" in Cairo is also published in this issue of the magazine (*CinémArabe*, no. 4–5, October-November 1976).

22 Ahmed Bouanani considers that *Cinéma 3* was "capable of imposing, in only four issues before disappearing, a platform of combat without ambiguity or complacency." See *La séptima puerta. Una historia del cine en Marruecos desde 1907 hasta 1986* (Pamplona: Punto de vista, 2022), 106.

Latin American filmmakers at their moment of greatest radicalization: the Viña del Mar Festival of 1969. The article on that event, although brief, evidences a knowledge of the process of grouping the NLAC insofar as it includes mentions of the previous Festivals of Viña del Mar (1967) and Mérida (1968). At the end of the article, in a programmatic way, *Cinéma 3* called on "all Third World filmmakers" to maintain a "substantive dialogue" with these festivals. Which is what, in a way, would happen in Algiers in 1973 (no 1, January 1970).

6.5 A "Mirror Effect," a Two-Way Dialogue

In several films celebrating and campaigning for a Tricontinental solidarity, there is often a mirror effect that creates a phenomenon of rapprochement and identification—a common spirit—with struggles being waged thousands of miles away. The memory of Mostefa Lacheraf, an Algerian intellectual who was ambassador to Argentina and then Mexico, points in that direction. He affirms that Latin American audiences identified with the struggle for Algerian independence by attending the screening of films such as Youssef Chahine's *Jamila, al-jaza'iriyya* (*Jamila the Algerian*), 1958, about the well-known Djamila Bouhired case, or *The Battle of Algiers* by Gilo Pontercorvo—films that he himself had seen in successive years in Buenos Aires. Lacheraf reflects on issues of "verisimilitude" and "ironic distance," remembering the reaction of the audience as fervent, passionate and, at the times, skeptical—especially towards certain scenes in *The Battle of Algiers* that seemed exaggerated. Regarding the screening of *Jamila, al-jaza'iriyya*, he states:

> "Chahine's film, which I saw for the first time in a capital of the other hemisphere, Buenos Aires in 1967, was also a sample of the influence of the liberation struggle of the Algerian people throughout the world and the sympathy it aroused in the masses. It was screened under a sensationalist title—*The Country of Fear*—in an auditorium frequented that day by a large number of Latin American workers emigrated from Bolivia, Uruguay, Chile and Paraguay, who applauded as if it were their own cause."
>
> LACHERAF 1980.

These and other films exhibited in theaters, film clubs, *cinémathèques,* or other circuits in Latin America allowed for an approach and identification

with Arab struggles, at least for the most committed audiences. This was also surely the case with the NLAC films shown in the Arab world. At the same time, numerous films directly alluded to similarities and affinities between struggles on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. At the beginning of this work, we mentioned the construction of a revolutionary "parallelism" in the Cuban newsreels about Algeria. In a similar way, the Cuban film *El camino de la mirra y el incienso* (*The Path of Myrrh and Incense*) by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Constante Rapi Diego (1975), for example, opens with a speech by Fidel Castro (in voice-over) where he compares the situation in southern Yemen (divided into two opposing camps during the Cold War) with that of Cuba: "Yemen is a small country with less than two million inhabitants. But it reminds us of our homeland, our revolutionary process. In the face of colonialism, they are just like us, in a heroic and bloody struggle." It was a comparative reflection that sought to reflect these common realities, and the brotherhood of the peoples in their confrontation of the oppression. This "mirror effect" was an emblematic feature of the Tricontinental aesthetic. It is also manifest in the use of the slogan "the cinema (or camera) as a weapon," or in Ernesto Guevara's proclamation: "We must create two, three... many Vietnams."

Finally, the influences, documented in these pages, of the films and manifestos of the Third Argentine Cinema, the Brazilian Cinema Novo, the Cuban and Bolivian cinemas on Arab political cinema, or, conversely, the

FIGURE 6.1 The Argentinian filmmaker Jorge Denti during his trip to Lebanon for the filming of *Palestine, another Vietnam* (1971)

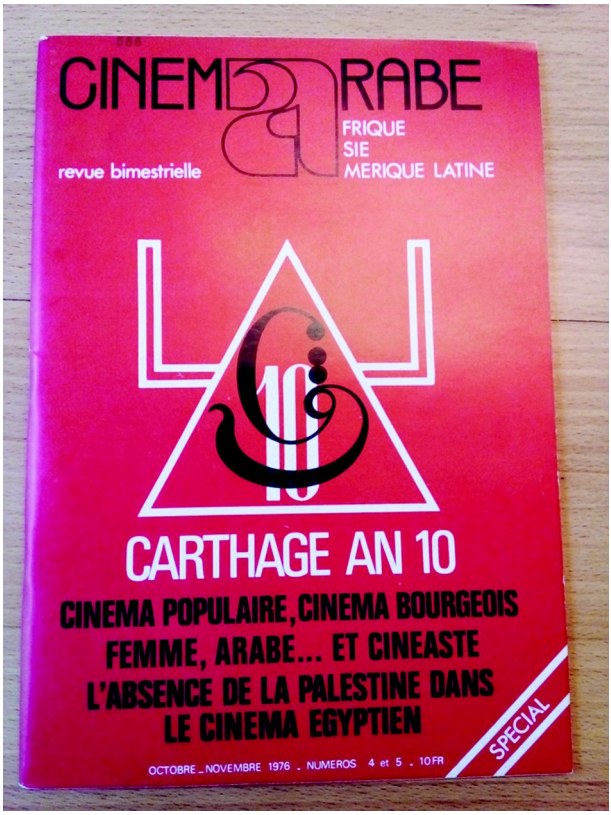

FIGURE 6.2 Revue *CinémArabe*, ns. 4–5, Octobre-Novembre 1976. Courtesy of Jorge Denti. Mariano Mestman Archive.

impact of films such as *The Battle of Algiers,* of organizations such as FEPACI or of meetings such as Third World Filmmakers among the protagonists of the NLAC, all are eloquent examples of a two-way dialogue, bridging peoples and filmmakers in their struggles, which surely included other expressions whose stories are yet to be told. This article would like to invite researchers to travel that path.

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CHAPTER 7

Understanding Third-Worldist Literary Exchange: National Writers' Unions in Cuba and Algeria

Maru Pabón

Abstract

This chapter offers a new account of Third-Worldist cross-cultural engagements and forms of literary exchange by looking at a distinctive channel of contact between Cuba and Algeria from the early 1960s to the mid 1970s: national writers' unions. Drawing on Nan Z. Da's work on "intransitive encounters" (Da 2018), the chapter scrutinizes the bounded but active ties between Cuban and Algerian writers during the height of the Third World project in order to historicize both the structures that made them possible and the ends towards which each other's literary expressions were put. Focusing primarily on the figures of Fayad Jamís and Jean Sénac, the chapter argues that the Cuban and Algerian writers' unions (the UNEAC and UEA) facilitated literary engagements that were rooted in the politicized function of literature. In each other's texts, Algerian and Cuban writers registered less the cultural content of a foreign tradition than the fact of each other's literature as a weapon in the struggle for decolonization. This commonality—a commonality of function—was an essential basis for literary practices of solidarity. As a result, exchanges between Cuban and Algerian writers may not have transcended their occasions in obvious and immediate ways, but they nevertheless shaped the discursive terrain of Third-Worldist internationalism and its attendant literary forms and genres.

Keywords

Third Worldism – national writers' unions – Algerian-Cuban relations – anticolonial poetry – translation

In January 1973, Fayad Jamís (1930–1988)—a Cuban writer, painter, and diplomat of Mexican and Lebanese descent—took a momentous trip to Algeria. Jamís had been invited to exhibit his recent paintings, a series of portraits of Ernesto "Che" Guevara amidst stars and other exuberant motifs,

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at the National Union of Plastic Arts (UNAP) in Algiers.[1] As a founding member of the National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC) and the editor of its magazine, *Unión* (*Union*), Jamís had carved out a space in Cuban cultural production for expressions of solidarity with the Algerian cause at a moment when Cuba was aiming to position itself as a leader of the Third World. Throughout the 1960s, he had translated and published poems by the Francophone anticolonial writers Bachir Hadj Ali (1920–1991) and Jean Sénac (1926–1973), both founding members of the Union of Algerian Writers (UEA). He had also written his own verses in support of Algerian independence while living in Paris.[2] Yet Jamís had never before stepped foot in Algeria, as he avowed in a poetic diary he wrote during his time in the country, titled *Crónica en Argelia* (*Chronicle in Algeria*):

> But for me, then (when the first impressions of
> this country came particularly close to me)
> in the city where I discovered, fascinated, universes
> of art, Algeria was war,
> and, above all, oppression. Inequity, the most brutal
> tortures, and blood were the daily bread,
> and those fragments of reality—which for me were
> just that: barely bubbles—
> arrived to me via newspapers and in the cafés, in
> the Parisian suburbs, and the *metro* (1985, 151)

Written in a characteristically conversational style, Jamís uses the occasion of his visit to Algeria to contemplate the nature and very possibility of solidarity, contrasting the "fragments of reality" that had mediated his sense of kinship with the Algerian cause with the limitations still determining his

1 E.G., "Un peintre cubain à l'UNAP," *Révolution africaine*, February 1973; M. Benbaghdad, "Exposition Fayad Jamis: Une idée d'une étoile," *El Moudjahid culturel*, January 26, 1973. It is important to mention that an overview of the UNAP falls outside the scope of this chapter, as do the activities of the UNEAC which concerned the visual and performing arts. For an overview of the UNAP and the aesthetic debates to which it gave rise, see Nadira Laggoune-Aklouche, "Structures de la réappropriation," *Rue Descartes*, no. 58 (2007): 111–17.

2 Bachir Hadj Ali, "Juramento," trans. Fayad Jamís, *Periódico Hoy*, December 17, 1961; Jean Sénac, "Ciudadanos de belleza," trans. Fayad Jamís, *Unión*, June 1969; Fayad Jamís, "Lamento del joven soldado Jean-Pierre Lepetit en las montañas de Argelia," in *Los puentes: Poesía (1956–57)* (Havana: Ediciones R[evolución], 1962), 125–128. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

attempts to understand what he is witnessing on the ground. Can a poem ever be a meaningful gesture of solidarity? Does experiential knowledge of the other's cultural traditions make a difference? Without resolving these questions, Jamís offers his poem as a tribute to everyone who died fighting for the nation's independence.

Much of the current work on Third-Worldist cultural production seeks to uncover the infrastructures that made possible such powerful if enigmatic feelings of identification and awe. The recent scholarly focus on the Afro-Asian Writers' Association has, in particular, opened up a conversation about the institutions and publications that instantiated what can be variously understood as a "Third World project in literature, a pre-history of postcolonial studies, or a distinct vision for world literature" (Ernst and Djagalov 2022, 700). Other entries into these discussions have contextualized the aesthetico-political debates that drew dividing lines between Cold War literary movements (Kalliney 2022), or problematized the "success" of cultural contact across the Third World by questioning the extent to which ordinary citizens benefited from it or felt its impact (Morsi 2019). Despite this broad attention to the institutionalization of revolutionary culture and the shaping of aesthetic discourses, however, uncritical ideas of what exactly constituted literary exchange within the Third World project tend to dominate conversations about its cultural networks—ideas which remain analytically jammed in a tautology meant to make hidden histories visible: "this exchange is proof of exchange."

This chapter is an attempt to offer a more accurate account of Third-Worldist cross-cultural engagements and forms of literary exchange by looking at a distinctive channel of contact between Cuba and Algeria from the early 60s to the mid 70s: national writers' unions. Drawing on Nan Z. Da's work on "intransitive encounters" (Da 2018), the chapter scrutinizes the bounded but active ties between Cuban and Algerian writers during the height of the Third World project in order to historicize both the structures that made them possible and the ends towards which each other's literary expressions were put. Focusing primarily on the figures of Fayad Jamís and Jean Sénac, I argue that the Cuban and Algerian writers' unions (the UNEAC and UEA) facilitated literary engagements that were rooted in, and contributed to a shared understanding of, the politicized function of literature. In each other's texts, Algerian and Cuban writers registered less the cultural content of a foreign tradition than the fact of each other's literature as a vital weapon in the struggle for decolonization, of each other's literature being comparable and translatable because of their shared political function. This perceived commonality—a commonality of function—was an essential basis for literary

practices of solidarity. As a result, exchanges between Cuban and Algerian writers may not have transcended their occasions in obvious and immediate ways, but they nevertheless shaped the discursive terrain of Third-Worldist internationalism and its attendant literary forms and genres.

Building off a variety of print sources across several national archives, I begin with an analysis of the institutional prehistory of the UNEAC and UEA and important moments in the development of Cuban-Algerian relations, followed by an examination of the unions' charters and the cultural labors of two of the writers who helped bring them into being: Jamís and Sénac. A final turn to the divergent fates of Jamís and Sénac within their respective unions will serve as an opportunity to understand how the era's dominant paradigm of literary exchange was transformed in the twilight of the Third World project.

7.1 The Infrastructures of Third-Worldist Cultural Encounters

Designed as autonomous, state-adjacent spaces, the UNEAC and the UEA were at their inception institutional expressions of a humanist concern with cultural activity as a tool for decolonization and the building of socialism, understood as connected endeavors. Founded only two years apart—the UNEAC in 1961, the UEA in 1963—their autonomous character also meant that they were some of the first institutions to navigate the tensions between the principles of internationalism they upheld and the centralizing drives of their respective nation-states.

The UNEAC and UEA thus differed from their institutional predecessor and template—the Soviet Writers' Union—even as they adapted some of its governing statutes and structures to meet their specific needs. At its foundation in 1932 on the initiative of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Soviet Writers' Union sought to cement party control over the field of literature (Clark 2011). In practice, Thaw-era cultural institutions would come to possess significant degrees of autonomy; this was also true of the increased autonomy of republic and ASSR-level literary bureaucracies vis à vis the main secretariat in Moscow (Kalinovsky 2018). It would take a while, however, for efforts to create a Soviet "literary international" to culminate in the creation of a transnational organization that extended beyond the Soviet republics: the Afro-Asian Writers' Association (AAWA), founded in 1958 (Halim 2012, Djagalov 2020). Launching a literary magazine, *Lotus*, and organizing a series of anticolonial conferences across Asia and Africa in the decade that followed, the AAWA became the central vehicle for Soviet

attempts to exert an influence on ideas about aesthetics, revolutionary subjectivity, and the role of the party across the emergent Third World.

Meanwhile, the emergent Third World was paying increasing attention to two successful revolutions across the Atlantic—Cuba in 1959; Algeria in 1962—whose leaders were articulating visions of socialist culture along Marxist lines that deviated from Soviet dogmas. In the years following the Bandung Conference of 1955, intellectuals across diverse revolutionary contexts had begun to argue that socioeconomic transformation alone would not be enough to abolish the ideological and moral aftereffects of bourgeois society, and so the possibility of other spheres of determination (language, culture, consciousness) had to be allowed (Denning 2004). Central to Third-Worldist currents of Marxist humanism was the understanding of culture as artistic creation: art and literature as forms of social production through which human beings could combat their alienation (Nesbitt 2017). This vision shaped the cultural policies of the Cuban and Algerian revolutionary leaders as they set about positioning their nations as new laboratories of Third-Worldist socialism, and building ties with one another.

In Cuba, just the first two years of Fidel Castro (1926-2016) in government saw the deployment of a mass literacy campaign, the creation of a school for arts instructors, and the founding of the UNEAC, among other cultural institutions. These were efforts to transform the Cuban people into creators that relied on a clear vision of cultural education as a motor of decolonization (Castro 1961, UNEAC 1961). Algeria's Ahmed Ben Bella (1916–2012)—elected prime minister in 1962 and president the year after—began to craft a socioeconomic program around the principles of *autogestion* (self-management), under which a designated set of factories and farms would be socialized, not state-controlled. *Autogestion* soon became a shorthand for the kind of autochthonous socialism Ben Bella aimed to build in Algeria. *Autogestion* was "repeatedly framed as a means of translating revolutionary action into new institutions that would ensure the direct participation of the people." (Crane 2019, 3). On the cultural field, the UEA presented itself as an institution that would "translate, in all their complexity, the features of the life of [the] people" (Sénac 1999, 266), bringing the principles of *autogestion* to bear on the responsibilities of the Algerian writer.

Significantly, the building of cultural infrastructures in both Cuba and Algeria took place at a moment of unprecedented camaraderie between the two nations (Byrnes 2016). When Ben Bella visited Cuba in October of 1962, ruffling American feathers, both he and Castro relied on a language of brotherhood and mutual appreciation to speak about their burgeoning ties. "We consider the victory at Girón a national achievement," Ben Bella stated

in a speech he delivered in Spanish, apologizing for his mistakes but insisting on the importance of addressing the Cuban people in their mother tongue. "You and your companions have the right to feel at home [in Algeria]," he expressed to Castro as a final note.[3]

This is not to underscore the extent to which Castro and Ben Bella both looked to the Soviet Union for economic, technical, and military support as well as guidance about the relationship between culture and politics (Byrnes 2016, Djagalov 2020). But while we cannot separate the national writers' and artists' unions in Cuba and Algeria from the arena of Soviet-Third World cultural engagements, it is important to assert that they represent a distinct conduit of literary exchange between Latin America and the Arab world: one structured around what the historian Jeffrey James Byrnes has called "instant mutual recognition and reciprocal identification, repeated hundreds of times over" (Byrnes 2016, 76). As Byrnes has asserted, even before Algerian independence, the Cuban Revolution had become a unique reference point for the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) "less as a gateway to Latin America than as a conceptual portal through which the Algerians entered their own continent" (Byrnes 2016, 73). For Cuban writers, Algeria and other sites of anticolonial struggle like Vietnam played a similar mirroring role: it was through encounters with foreign anticolonial writers that they became aware of the importance of the Cuban Revolution for the coherence of the imaginary of the Third World. This insight gave Cuban writers new responsibilities, as Jamís asserted in an editorial written right after the 1966 Tricontinental Conference:

> The mere fact of Havana having been chosen as the host of the [Tricontinental] Conference is public acknowledgement of Cuba's significance in the universal fight against imperialism, of its status as example and guide for all the underdeveloped peoples of the world. And the fact that the conference took place in January, the birth month of José Martí, underlines the great foresight of our Apostle, who, since 1891, had warned his contemporaries: 'Peoples who don't know each other should hasten to do so, like those who are planning on fighting together' (1966, 5).

As this reinscription of the Revolution as constitutively internationalist evinces, hastening to "know each other" became tantamount to learning from—and emulating—how the other wielded literature as a weapon.

3 "Abraza la Cuba Socialista a la Argelia Libre," *Periódico Hoy*, October 17, 1962.

7.2 Literary Exchange as Conceptual Portal

But what did it mean in concrete terms for a foreign nation to function as a "conceptual portal" through which a people could better understand themselves? What did it mean, in particular, for the function of literature at a historical moment when it was seen as a weapon for decolonization? The work of the literary scholar Nan Z. Da offers a helpful framework. Writing about the nature and function of literary encounters between American and Chinese writers at the close of the nineteenth century, Da theorizes a form of literary exchange that is self-effacing and "intransitive," meaning that instead of resulting in aesthetic interpollination or detailed knowledge about another literary tradition or culture, it creates new conditions for thinking and political self-articulation (Da 2018).

There is, of course, a large historical breach between the world that Da writes about and the political imperatives towards cross-culturalism that animated the Third World project. But if I turn to Da's work it is because I believe that her insistence on not taking the category of the literary exchange for granted, and her attempts to locate its formal and functional specificities during a particular historical conjuncture, can help us better apprehend what the UNEAC and UEA understood as the parameters of cultural cooperation at a moment when literature was seen as a weapon for decolonization.

Da's insistence on the fact that intransitive literary investments, which she defines as "actions whose 'effects are contained within the agent' and do not pass to other objects or beyond certain limits" (2018, 2), do not represent ethical shortcomings should also remind us that identifying moments of uncritical identification with a foreign cause in Third-Worldist texts is not the end of the story; rather, these moments are the invitation for further inquiry. What do these identifications reveal about the ideological function of literature at this particular moment? What do they tell us about the political ends to which literary exchanges were put?

The vision of solidarity based on the recognition of the political ends of one another's literature is perhaps best elucidated by the Palestinian writer Mahmoud Darwish in his poem *Anashid Kubiyya* (*Cuban Songs*), a narrative-dramatic poem with an epideictic bent written in celebration of the Cuban Revolution:

> I haven't read the literature of the Cuban poets,
> but I have learned so, so many things from Cuba

> because the revolution's words are light read in the languages of all people
> and the revolution's eyes, a sun streaming over all weddings
> and the revolution's chant, a tune familiar to all bells
> and the banner in Cuba, the same rebel raises it in the Aurès (1964, 108)

An admission of ignorance coupled with an immediate assertion of proximity to the Cuban revolution's lessons, and the transparency of the "revolution's words": in this way, Darwish treats the foreign literary object as an opportunity to make thinkable what did not previously seem thinkable in his own context: revolution, unalienation, and the very possibility of weaponizing Palestinian poetry.[4] It is to the Algerian and Cuban forms—both institutional and aesthetic—that mediated the previously implausible relationship of solidarity between the two nations that our attention now turns.

7.3 The UNEAC

The UNEAC was founded at the First National Congress of Writers and Artists, held in late August 1961. Organized by a committee composed of prominent Cuban intellectuals like Nicolás Guillén, Alejo Carpentier, and Roberto Fernández Retamar, in addition to Jamís, the Congress sparked a debate about the creative responsibilities of writers and artists within the Revolution. According to its first statutes, the UNEAC was to be a legally independent organization comprised of a national committee led by a smaller executive (UNEAC 1961, 129). The development of national culture, defined in the Congress's opening manifesto as "a liberating culture, free in itself and therefore capable of serving and stimulating revolutionary progress," was repeatedly invoked as the UNEAC's ultimate goal (UNEAC 1961, 9). Establishing and strengthening cultural relations with "all the countries of the world, and especially those whose socialist experiences can impart valuable lessons" was seen as a crucial step towards achieving it.

At the August gathering, both the Soviet Writers' Union and the inaugural Afro-Asian Writers' Conference in Tashkent (which had taken place in October 1958) were mentioned as analogues for the Cuban congress by delegates

4 Elsewhere, I have written about how Darwish's anticolonial commitments influenced his generic experimentations in the early 60s. See Maru Pabón, "In Search of the 'Voice of the People': Mahmoud Darwish's Third-Worldist Genres," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 25, no. 2–3 (September 2, 2022): 168–86.

of diverse national origins, a testament to how the UNEAC, rather than being treated solely as an apparatus of the burgeoning Cuban state, was incorporated into the imaginary of the Third World at the very moment of its formation. The Japanese delegate, Masa Kitazawa, even took the opportunity to announce a future Afro-Asian Writers' Conference in Cairo, calling for Latin American and Afro-Asian writers to come together in their struggles against imperialism. Nicolás Guillén would, in fact, attend the 1962 conference in Cairo (Guillén 1962, 2).

But it was the Turkish writer Nâzım Hikmet who would most clearly articulate the internationalist promises of the UNEAC's socialist humanist platform. In his message to the congress, Hikmet noted that, for most of its history, the primary influences on Cuban art had been Spain, North America, and Western Europe. With the Revolution, however, Cuba had "opened its windows to winds blowing from Africa, Asia, and above all, the socialist countries." (Hikmet 1961, 17). By "winds," Nâzım meant lessons about the importance of not defining revolutionary culture in a restrictive manner: "There is a national dimension to the creation of truly socialist revolutionary culture," Nâzım cautioned, "but there is also an international dimension. What a socialist artist creates for his people he creates, at the same time, for all peoples." (Hikmet 1961, 17).

The UNEAC would not always heed Hikmet's warning. The case of Heberto Padilla, imprisoned in 1971 after the UNEAC deemed his poetry collection counter-revolutionary, is one of the starkest reminders that the institutionalization of the Revolution had violent repercussions on domestic cultural policy as well as on the foreign perception of the Cuban revolutionary project (Yglesias 1971, Casal 1972, Padilla 1989, Guerra 2012). But we should be careful to recognize the ways in which institutionalization affected organizations unevenly in a matter of years, allowing some cultural organs to experiment with different cultural visions for the nation while others experienced direct state intervention. The magazine *Unión*, which underwent a Third-Worldist turn under Jamís's tenure, attests to a period of regulatory openness that allowed writers to contend with the reception and new responsibilities of the Cuban Revolution abroad through a variety of cross-cultural engagements.

7.4 Fayad Jamís and *Unión*'s Third-Worldist Turn

Created in 1962 as the publishing outlet of the UNEAC, during the first three years of *Unión*'s existence the magazine maintained its focus on Cuban and

Latin American writers, and topics of domestic concern. But the magazine's roster of contributors and topics began to broaden in the lead up to the Tricontinental Conference of 1966, which officially marked the extension of the Afro-Asian movement into the Americas (Young 2005, Mahler 2018). As Par Kumaraswami and Antonio Kapcia have argued, by 1965, the year that Jamís became *Unión*'s editor-in-chief, "no longer did [the external community of the Revolution] refer predominantly to Latin America." (Kumaraswami and Kapcia 2016, 236). It now also entitled the totality of the Third World in addition to the Socialist bloc. The representational responsibilities of *Unión* thus gained a new dimension, with new values attributed to collaborations with anticolonial actors with whom no previous relation had been established.

The forms of collaboration that resulted in translations published in the magazine varied. At times, as was the case with the 1968 issue devoted to Romanian literature, the translations were produced by foreign intellectuals who had been invited to Havana for a period of time.[5] Other times, as with the 1967 issue devoted to Vietnamese literature, the translations were the result of direct collaboration with foreign national writers' unions. And sometimes, as appears to have been the case with Jamís's translation of Sénac's poem *Citoyens de beauté* (*Citizens of Beauty*), in the June 1969 issue of *Unión*, the translation resulted from a personal connection that enabled an institutional one.

Although more research will have to be done to ascertain the details of their first encounter and subsequent association, it seems clear that the relationship between Jamís and Sénac likely stretched back to the mid 50s when they were both living in Paris and frequenting intellectual meetings in the Left Bank.[6] Both writers would return to their countries of birth after their respective revolutions. By 1967, the year that *Citoyens de beauté* was published in the collection that bears its title, Sénac's name began appearing in *Unión* as a forthcoming author; the same year, we have record of a copy of *Citoyens de beauté* dedicated by Sénac to Jamís.[7]

5 "Número especial de *Unión* dedicado a la literatura rumana contemporánea," *Unión*, March 1968, 4.

6 More work will have to be done to conclude how they established contact, but it is known that they both frequent the Café Bonaparte in Saint-Germain des Près during the years 1957–1958.

7 There is an online record of a copy of *Citoyens de beauté* dedicated to Jamís by Sénac that was held and sold by The Time Traveller's Bookshop in Skibbereen, Ireland. I have attempted to track down the copy but have yet to find it.

Already in French, Sénac's poem *Citoyens de beauté* contains and opens up to the history of Cuban-Algerian relations. Written in 1963, the occasion for its composition was nothing less than Guevara's visit to Algeria to celebrate the first anniversary of the country's independence. Sénac's encounter with the Cuban revolutionary prompted a lyrical reflection on the construction of socialism as the creation of a new paradigm of beauty and freedom: a process that draws out the sensual and undifferentiated terrain of connection between the people, the political, and the natural world. In Sénac's poem, the height of aesthetic achievement, the standard against which everything is measured, is the people. At the formal level, the people populate the space of the poem through a series of catalogues of their features and activities written in free verse—catalogues which are also inventories of the new infrastructures through which the people live and labor. The poem's indented lines are reminiscent of Vladimir Mayakovsky's laddered verses, but there is also something of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* in the coupling of anaphoric catalogue with the democratizing gaze of the speaker. As the poetic "I" enumerates all that his eye can see, he holds the emerging nation together. And as with Whitman, the things the speaker sees and itemizes in *Citoyens de beauté* are "things that pretty much anybody might see." (Lerner 2016, 48). The difference is that the commons of Sénac's poem is sustained by the socialist infrastructures of *autogestion*. Indeed, the imbrication of infrastructural form and aesthetic form in the poem is both theme and argument. The poem presents itself as a form of socialist infrastructure constructed, naturalized and inhabited by the people at the same time that the Algerian infrastructures of self-management are aestheticized.

> I love you. You are as strong as a management committee
> As an agricultural cooperative
> As a nationalized brasserie
> As the rose at noon
> As the people's unity
> As a literacy cell (Sénac 1969, 80)

Significantly, the line "you are as strong as a management committee" was directly inspired by a meeting that took place between Sénac and Guevara at a self-managed café in Algiers. At one point during their conversation, Guevara placed his lit cigar on the edge of the bar. The manager was quick to reprimand him. Sénac then pointed out the identity of his companion, to

which the manager responded: "It's precisely because it's him that I'm speaking like this: this bar is for the benefit of the people."[8]

Sénac's "poetics of infrastructure," to borrow Brian Larkin's term (Larkin 2013), are thus revealed to be intrinsically tied to Algeria's image of Cuba as a Third-Worldist leader. Sparked by the confluence of Guevara's presence and the new Algerian infrastructures of self-management, *Citoyens de beauté* reveals the symbolic importance of Cuba for the very coherence of Algeria's project of social transformation. Jamís's translation of the poem in turn reflected the influence and importance of the Cuban Revolution to the Algerian nation back to Cuban readers, offering a window into the reception of the Revolution abroad. Through translation, the poem accomplished the infrastructural role it thematizes even more palpably: it mediated exchange over distance, bringing different readers into an interaction that made their own political subject position legible to themselves.

As for the particularities of the Spanish translation of *Citoyens de beauté*, perhaps the most noteworthy is that it retains the untranslated words from Arabic and Tamazight that appear in the original poem. There is no attempt on Jamís's part to gloss or translate them; with the example of one footnote, terms like *meddah*, *hadaoui* and *bouqala* punctuate the Spanish text, creating a newly multilingual poem wherein points of foreign specificity remain opaque. If the foreign terms do not offer insight into Algerian life, they represent the knowledge that they are sites involved in the struggle for freedom.

There is also a painful irony lurking in the wings of Jamís's translation. By the time that Sénac made his way into the pages of *Unión* in 1969, his vision for an open Algeria was at painful odds with the national reality. Following the 1965 coup against Ben Bella, which brought Houari Boumédiène to power, Sénac became the subject of attacks for his *pied-noir* origins and homosexuality (Sainson 2011, Krienke 2014, 30). Over the course of several years, he was denied Algerian citizenship and pushed away from his various positions within the Algerian cultural infrastructure—the result of a series of controversies that took the UEA as their forum and subject. Understanding these events, and their extensive repercussions across Algerian cultural life, requires that we first examine Sénac's vexed but foundational role in the establishment of the union.

8 Jean Sénac, "La grâce d'un comité," *Jeune Afrique*, no. 291 (1966): 39, quoted in Hamid Nacer-Khodja, *Jean Sénac, critique algérien* (Algiers: El Kalima, 2013), 471.

7.5 The UEA

As was the case in Cuba, the problem of how to define Algerian culture in the early 60s became tantamount to the question of how to decolonize Algerian culture. This was the main prompt for the creation of the UEA in October 1963, a forum that would envision a way forward for Algerian cultural life by way of material proposals and centralized discussions guided, but not directly under the control of, the FLN (Déjeux 1974, Leperlier 2018). The idea for a union had emerged in the midst of a series of debates organized by the newspaper *El Moudjahid* in February of 1963, themselves prompted by the Tripoli Programme of 1962 and its call for the creation of a "national, revolutionary, and scientific culture." (Jabhat al-Tahrir al-Qawmi 1976, 25). In the postcolonial Algerian context, as all contributors to *El Moudjahid* recognized, any attempt to conceive of cultural expressions that exhibited all three characteristics would first have to contend with the problem of language. Namely: what to do with the French language, a colonial imposition? Could it be ideologically redeemed or appropriated by Algerian writers? How to pursue and encourage literary expression in Arabic when the colonial destruction of traditional education systems had created a Francophone elite, and left vast swaths of the population illiterate? (Nacer-Khodja 2013, 458).

Among his peers, Sénac carved a unique path through these thorny questions. As a Francophone *pied-noir* intellectual committed to the Algerian nation, in 1957 he had written a manifesto, *Le soleil sous les armes* (*The Sun Under the Weapons*), that defended the French language as a vehicle for authentic expression, but also referred to it as a transitional language to be employed only while a new Arabophone literary class could be nurtured (1957, 20). Future Algerian literature would inarguably be written in Arabic, he stated, but it was essential to guard against the construction of the Arabic language as an instrument of religiosity. Equally important was to connect the Algerian struggle for freedom to other Third-Worldist endeavors. In a gesture that mirrored Darwish's, during the Algerian war of liberation Sénac had turned to the Cuban Revolution as a source of inspiration. For his 1961 poetry collection, *Matinale de mon peuple* (*Dawn of My People*), he had written a panegyric titled *Pour saluer Cuba* (*To Greet Cuba*):

> The voice
> no longer strips the rose of its petals.
> At arm's length the ocean night revives

the dream of Jose Martí.
Propped up by the Poem—
Science of the People!
It pierces the infant's mouth
like a new tooth.
A tear, a smile,
and the sun above. (1961, 51)

Referencing the spiritual guide of the Cuban Revolution, José Martí, and his famous poem *Cultivo una rosa blanca* (*I Have a White Rose to Tend*), Sénac expresses a humanist vision of poetry engendered by a new "voice," the vivifying voice of the Cuban people, which in turn makes the world flourish. Here poetry is not an isolated creative act—the pure expression of a subjectivity sealed off from the social world—but rather a collective form of knowledge. It is an organic resource at the people's disposal. It is nothing short of a new tooth, the corporeal edifice supporting the expression of a new language. With these priorities and preoccupations in mind, Sénac joined several preparatory meetings in the spring of 1963 alongside writers like Ahmed Taleb, Mouloud Mammeri, and Kateb Yacine—meetings which culminated in an official call for the creation of a writers' union, and the establishment of a planning committee to shepherd it into being (Nacer-Khodja 2013, 462).

Fifty-six Algerian writers, most of them primarily Francophone, joined the UEA at the moment of its creation (Sénac 1999). The inaugural assembly in turn elected an executive board of eight members, with Mammeri as president and Sénac as secretary-general. It has been pointed out that the UEA adapted the statutes of the Moroccan Writers' Union (established in 1958) and the amended statues of the Soviet Writers' Union, ratified in May 1959 (Nacer-Khodja 2013, 467). But it is also important to mention the degree to which the UEA's charter, a weightier because more programmatic document redacted by Sénac, emulated the UNEAC's manifesto. In this document, which marked the official creation of the union on the 28 October, 1963, the executive board of the writers' union tasked members with responsibilities that echoed the UNEAC's prerogatives, and followed the same order on the page.

Both charters begin with a call to recover and develop popular culture and folkloric traditions, and to promote a national culture that is imbued with the revolutionary spirit of the Revolution; both culminate with the importance of increasing cultural relations with other socialist and Third World countries (Sénac 1999, 265–67, UNEAC 196, 10). It is also worth

pointing out, in view of the complications that would ensue, that the UNEAC's manifesto stressed the artist's freedom to choose the form through which he could most efficiently express himself. The UEA's charter echoed the pledge to freedom of expression and added a further specification: to never discriminate against any Algerian citizen because of their origin, language, or religious beliefs (Sénac 1999, 267). Thwarted freedoms in both cases, their appearance in the UNEAC and UEA's charters nevertheless offers a window into how the conditions for thinking about the new political function of literature were conceived in similar terms across barriers of language and culture.

7.6 The For(u)ms of Sénac's Third-Worldism

Sénac's responsibilities as a literary representative of the Algerian nation multiplied with the arrival of the longed-for dawn of independence. Within two years of independence, Sénac had become the adviser to the Minister of Education, joined the cultural commission of the FLN, co-founded the UEA, and created a new radio show for Radio Alger. In all of these roles, he promoted a vision of cultural education rooted in the importance of functional literacy, the recovery of folkloric traditions, and the fight against the discrimination against any Algerian citizen because of their origin, language, or religious beliefs. Sénac was particularly passionate about increasing cultural relations with other socialist and Third World countries. Not only did he oversee the establishment of institutional ties between the UEA and other writers' unions across the Third World, he also sought to integrate Algerian writers into the Afro-Asian literary field, responding favorably to an early proposal by the Pakistani writer Faiz Ahmad Faiz to found a transnational literary journal through the Soviet Writers' Union (Ernst and Djagalov 2023, 705).

Despite Sénac's hopes for the transnational reach of the UEA, however, many of the union's initiatives failed to get off the ground. Unlike the UNEAC, which quickly grew to be a powerful apparatus that presided over the Cuban literary field, the UEA struggled from the very beginning to found a magazine, or even hold a national congress, problems resulting from strained cooperation among both Francophone and Arabophone writers, budgetary issues, and a lack of institutional support (Déjeux 1974, 2, Nacer-Khodja 2013, 474). In the absence of a publication of their own, for several years Sénac worked towards fulfilling the union's goals through other platforms. He organized numerous conferences and lectures at the union's

headquarters, always working against what he saw as the arbitrary division between Algerian writers on the basis of their literary language (Nacer-Khodja 2013, 471).

One particular venture brought him newly close to the world of revolutionary Cuban letters. In March 1964, Sénac joined Mourad Bourboune and Malek Haddad, two other members of the UEA's executive bureau, on the editorial board of a new publication titled *Novembre* (*November*), created by the FLN's cultural commission; Bourboune had been named president of the commission a year prior (Séférian 1980, 137). It is not inaccurate to suggest that Sénac and his peers believed that *Novembre* could serve as the informal publishing arm of the UEA while the union was able to put together its own publication. The first issue, launched in April 1964, bore the clear imprint of the UEA's principles: internationalist sympathies, an interest in folkloric traditions, and the assertion of clear link between the building of socialism and cultural creation. Among contributions by Sénac, the artist Baya, and Assia Djebar, the issue also included the full charter of the UEA, and a poem by the Cuban writer Nivaria Tejera titled, in French, *La parole de Fidel* (*Fidel's Word*), the sole translation published in the issue.

Tejera's appearance in the pages of *Novembre* is noteworthy for several reasons. On the level of biography, it is worth mentioning that Tejera was, at the time, Jamís's spouse. Though she would break ties with Cuba (and Jamís) and migrate to France the year after her poem appeared in *Novembre*, during the early 60s Tejera and Jamís were two of the most visible representatives of revolutionary Cuban poetry abroad, especially in the Arab world.[9] Her presence among the inaugural roster of contributors to *Novembre* is an added testament to the couple's internationalist labors within the structures of the UNEAC. In turn, the poem's formal and tropological features evince the evolving nature of the poetics of immediacy and translatability that sustained literary exchanges between Cuban and Algerian writers.

La parole de Fidel is a patriotic eulogy, earnest in tone and direct in its stylistic simplicity. The object of praise is none other than the Cuban revolutionary leader, whose "word" is being exalted because it gathers and reflects—without any friction—the voice of the Cuban people:

9 In September 1961, for instance, the Lebanese communist magazine *al-Tariq* had published a short anthology of translated Cuban verse which included a poem by Jamís and a preface by Tejera.

The word
that Fidel grants us
We know it already...
It's the word that he learned from you, from me
Fidel learns from the people
He doesn't know anything that the people don't know
He discovers
What the people have always possessed...
Its men
Its mountains
Space
To sow and grow
And each man
His arms
Love and the force of love
for life (1964, 77)

Like Sénac's *Citoyens de beauté*, Tejera's poem turns to the form of the catalogue to amass the sources of the Cuban people's beauty and freedom, whose singularity of achievement is expressed through a metonymic relationship between the voice of people and the "word" of the leader which secularizes an overtly Judeo-Christian paradigm. The poem derives its own quality of immediacy from the triangulation of "the voice" as the basis of unalienation: from "the people" to Fidel to the poet, there is no mediation, only pure transparency. And so, from the original to the French translation in *Novembre* there is also only transparency, an illusion that draws its strength as much from the translation's historical occasion—the established kinship between Castro and Ben Bella, the efforts of the UNEAC—as from the formal and generic mechanisms of the poem, which position it as a conduit of the political force of the people's voice. Inasmuch as this fiction of immediacy was operative across the emergent Algerian literary field, we can see how it was strengthened by the model of revolutionary Cuban literature.

By the time that *Novembre* published its second issue in August 1964, Sénac's name had disappeared from the masthead (Séférian 1980, 137). Interpersonal and professional quarrels had begun to assail him, many of them stemming from his peers' growing discomfort with his *pied-noir* origins, political viewpoints, and poetic style—discomforts which coincided with the FLN's erosion of the vision of cultural openness Sénac so passionately championed. The fledgling UEA was particularly rocked by a series of crises following Boumédiène's coup against Ben Bella in June 1965, starting with

the arrest and torture of Sénac's friend and colleague Bachir Hadj Ali for founding an oppositional organization. Although Sénac had attempted to organize the members of the UEA to formally register their disagreement with Hadj Ali's arrest with the highest offices of the new government, no collective action was taken (Sénac 1999, 268). Sénac resigned from the union's bureau in November 1965 in frustration (Nacer-Khodja 2013, 472).

His full departure from the UEA came in 1967 after an unexpected betrayal from one of his closest collaborators, Kateb Yacine, who wrote several defamatory articles in the Algerian press about Sénac's poetry and his work within the UEA. In a perplexing jab that seemed to take issue as much with Sénac's sexuality as with his poetics, Kateb scoffed precisely at the line in *Citoyens de beauté* inspired by Sénac's meeting with Guevara, writing: "Anyone can write 'you are as beautiful as a management committee' and be anointed secretary-general of a puppet organization looking for dinars and academic laurels."[10]

Sénac did not take Kateb's attacks sitting down, but nor did he hide the pain he felt about the UEA's inability to grow into a productive organization—an oft repeated criticism. He penned a vicious letter of his own in *Révolution Africaine* defending his extensive labors on behalf of a new generation of Algerian writers, and calling for all of his critics to assume their responsibilities now that he was leaving the union. In an inspired gesture, Sénac signed off with a vindication of his infamous line in the name of freedom of expression: "Because we will need, won't we, if these people want to live, that their management committees be beautiful? And that their poets, if they wish to sing to them, are able to do so without being dragged through the mud for challenging aesthetic conformism" (Sénac 1967, 27).

7.7 Conclusion

Sénac would continue to sing to many beautiful subjects and infrastructures, both near and far, for the remainder of his tragically short life. Once he stepped away from the UEA, he devoted himself to the radio show he returned to directing for Radio Alger in 1967, *Poésie sur tous les fronts* (*Poetry on All Fronts*), an internationalist platform that he used to share the work of committed writers like Mahmoud Darwish, Roberto Fernández

10 Kateb Yacine, *Jeune Afrique*, no. 324 (March 26, 1967), quoted in Hamid Nacer-Khodja, *Jean Sénac, critique algérien* (Algiers: El Kalima, 2013), 471.

Retamar, René Depestre, Mario de Andrade, and Amiri Baraka, among many others, to the Algerian public (Krienke 2014, 63). His own verse turned more radical in both form and subject matter, drawing inspiration from sources as diverse as the Black Arts Movement and the erotic premodern Arabic poetry of Abu Nuwas. In a 1972 poem titled *Ode à l'Amérique africaine* (*Ode to Afro-America*), for instance, which bears the clear influence of the Beat poets he so admired, Sénac reworked the catalogue as a space to draw out the connectedness of all struggles against oppression, lending an incantatory and irreverent power to his international roster of adopted comrades:

> Thank you, comrades!
> Free Man smokes. And Hô and Mao and Che and Palestine
> and Crazy Horse
> and November and May, self-management's
> zodiac and $E = mc^2$ the
> generosity of Einstein and Char and Fanon
> and Artaud and
> Angela, holding on to the Minotaur's thread
> and Genet on all the breasts and hairy chests of
> all freedoms
> and Ginsberg and Voznesensky and Ted Joans and Retamar and
> Guillen and Hikmet and Patrick Mac'Avoy and Sonia Sanchez
> and Depestre and Blas de Otero and Darwish and Khaïr-Eddine
> and Adonis and Cernuda and Whitman and (2019, 694)

If Sénac could claim belonging to anywhere without being ostracized, it was to the "fraternal horizon" of the Third World—and he did, with great pride, until his assassination in 1973 under circumstances that remain mysterious to this day.

What, then, to make of Jamís's *Crónica en Argelia*, written in 1973: the year of Sénac's death? Moving from meditations on the effects of colonialism on culture to almost ethnographic observations of events like Eid al-Adha and more quotidian scenes of Algerian life, Jamís seems to be straining to learn something about Algeria and its traditions that could strengthen his identification to the place and its people, something beyond the "fragments of reality" that had anchored "his old sympathy for the Algerian cause." With frankness, he discloses his ambivalence about a poem he had written years before as a gesture of solidarity:

> And now, in the middle of Algiers, holding that text
> in my hands, I think once more
> that a poem is *almost* useless: I couldn't even use it
> to shake hands with an Algerian comrade. (1985, 152)

Testimonial writing, a form of politically charged narrative of witnessing in which the writer swapped the hat of representative for that of researcher, investigator, reader or listener, boomed in popularity among Latin American writers in the 70s. Facilitated by the widespread availability of the portable tape recorder, *testimonio* "opened the way to registering orality beyond the controlling mechanisms of the literary as well as to upsetting the idea of authorship." (Franco 2002, 211). This is not, of course, exactly what is happening in Jamís's *Crónica en Argelia*; there is no voice but that of the first-person speaker, although sometimes sonic snippets of the social world are brought into the text. But the poem shares with later texts of *testimonio* a deep reckoning with the representational possibilities of poetic language and its ability to act materially in the world. To go back to the questions with which I introduced *Crónica en Argelia*: if a poem cannot replace a handshake, what can it do? What use for poetry does Jamís's "*almost* useless" contain? In an elegiac turn, the last stanza of the poem offers a potential answer:

> Under these stars, thick and opaque at this moment, watching us
> in the cold of night, I write you these words.
> Here I pay tribute to your massacred children, to the workers
> who perished in clandestine struggles, in the all-out war,
> to all those who, in one way or another, were marked by
> the colonial night, to your heroes, dead or living, white
> city of Algiers. (1985, 159)

Crónica en Argelia was written in January 1973, almost exactly eight months before Sénac's death. Whether or not they saw each other during Jamís's time in the country is a story lost to history, or to some mysterious, dusty folder in an archive. But through the poem's final testimonial gesture, Jamís does come close to Sénac—even if not close enough to shake his hand. Jamís may not have realized it, but Sénac was one of the comrades he was mourning.

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CHAPTER 8

The Postcolonial Question in Documentary Movies on the Arab World in Argentina: Néstor Suleiman's Critical Insights

Edgardo Manero and María Laura Reali

Abstract

In the second half of the twentieth century, Peronist militants started paying close attention to the Arab world. Framed by nationalism in various ways, their approaches were part of a political agenda revolving around anti-imperialism, national liberation, and revolution. The links between Latin America and the Arab world were not only translated into the circulation of representations and practices, but they also involved militant networks. In Argentina, the journey of those militants coupled with the haphazardness of politics nurtured a documentary practice based on real-life stories and testimonies. The cleavages between nation and imperialism, and the homeland and the colony, constitute a leading theme throughout these documentaries. The films put into play a conceptual elaboration and a political praxis revolving around the people and liberation, a topic which lies at the core of Suleiman's rethinking of decolonization. Drawing on this filmography, and especially on recent works by the Argentine documentary filmmaker Néstor Suleiman, this chapter questions both the nature of South-South revolutionary circulations and the evolving conceptualization of the relationships between the center and periphery from the point of view of colonial studies. Approaches in postcolonial studies have frequently led to an exaltation of so-called minorities. They denounced the oppression in which the minorities' subalternity placed them and identified certain forms of alterity which sometimes carry a different political content than what has traditionally characterized the experience of Peronism. We consider this tension through categories historically constitutive of the colonial question, such as: the alienation of the colonized, the redemptive character of violence, the perspective of the revolution that creates a new man, and the associated category of the Third World.

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Keywords

Peronism – Arab world – political documentary – decolonization – south-south revolutionary circulations – nationalisms

The documentary films that Néstor Suleiman, an Argentine militant with Peronist affiliations, made about the Arab world serve as a valuable starting point for critically reflecting on the tensions between the postcolonial question, the nation, and nationalism. Emerging at a juncture in the early twenty-first century marked by the proliferation of studies about the "metropolis-colony" relationship, Suleiman's work preserves the imprints of the political cycle initiated in the 1960s in Latin America, and particularly in Argentina. In regards to the ways that particular struggles for national liberation are represented, his work can be seen as a departure from the paradigm of so-called "postcolonial studies."

By examining the political trajectory of national liberation movements in the Arab world, Suleiman's work invokes issues common to peripheral societies. However, his perspective on South-South relations is not necessarily shaped by the fashionable effects associated with the overuse of the concept of the "Global South," a concept whose polysemic nature has contributed to its increasing ambiguity, as evidenced by its appropriation by international organizations, think tanks, and Western NGOs (Pagel et al. 2014, Badie 2018). In contrast to the original political uses of the term, championed by state actors associated with projects of decolonization, as well by revisionists of the international status quo and critics of bipolarity, the term "Global South" is now mobilized by actors seeking to explain contemporary geopolitics through appeals to the primacy of the economic and its social effects. Thus, beyond interpretations seeking to politically oppose the "Global South" to the West, the term is conditioned by ideas about globalization as both a process and an ideology, and by interpretations of subaltern demands seen through the lens of cultural studies paradigms.

In Argentina, within a political agenda characterized by ideas about anti-imperialism, national liberation, and revolution, representations of the Arab world occupied a particularly significant place in the political projects of Peronism(s)[1] until the 1990s—even though, in practice, this identification

1 The plural helps to avoid any definition that limits or circumscribes the concept to a single specific form or that definitively establishes, in a dehistoricized way, the particularities of a vast and heterogeneous space where divergent political representations competed—

resulted in a South-South relationship that was more proclaimed than concretized (Manero 2014). However, cinematic production was one of the few spaces where this collaboration was sustained. The imaginary of the Arab world within Peronism(s) also resulted in the circulation of certain images and practices at both the level of ideas and existing networks of militants. In many different ways, this perspective was structured by ideas about nationalism.

Starting in the late 1950s, Arab nationalisms gradually assumed a significant role in the identity construction of different Peronist militant groups. After the foundational period characterized by the parallelism between Gamal Abdel Nasser and Juan D. Perón, which forever influenced perceptions on the topic, the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) inspired the Peronist resistance during the clandestine years following the *coup d'état* that ousted Perón from power in 1955. In the 1970s, armed political organizations aligned themselves with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), establishing ties of mutual solidarity. Following the return of democracy in 1983, relations with Muammar Gaddafi's Libya were part of the identity quest of a significant portion of Peronism(s) as they aimed to avoid a social democratic fate. In the early 1990s, the war in Iraq momentarily revitalized the relationship with the Arab world for those Peronist sectors resistant to the changes implemented during the presidency of Carlos Saúl Menem (1989–1999), which was guided by the declaration of the "end of ideologies."

After the end of the decolonization process and national liberation struggles in Latin America, the premises of neoliberalism articulated in the Menemist experience and the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism

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and still compete. The polyclassist movement founded by Juan D. Perón is a political identity typical of "the age of extremes." Conceived in the era of fascism, it developed in the context of the rivalry between two forms of political, social, and economic organization, attempting to transcend this dichotomy. While not a product of the bipolar order, it is shaped by the Cold War. The advent of liberalism in the 1990s produced identity recompositions that have little to do with the heterogeneity of the movement. Until Carlos Saúl Menem's rise to power in 1989, the multitude of organizations that claimed to be Peronist converged in spaces that had elementary similarities in political representations—nationalism, the figure of Perón, the appeal to the homeland as the ultimate legitimization, the identification of Peronist tradition with anti-imperialist struggles and social justice—and pronounced differences in meaning. If Peronism presented a multiplicity of forms, it tended to coincide with the three historical banners—independence, political sovereignty, and social justice. This is perhaps its only "ideological" definition, a central element for understanding the autopoiesis that seems to characterize it: that property of reproducing itself and maintaining its structure despite changes in its components.

established a limit to such identifications. Projects guided by defensive modernizing nationalisms, for which social justice was inseparable from the self-determination of peoples, were situated in a heroic/epic time and were perceived from then on as anachronistic. By the end of that decade, advocacy for the Arab cause, reduced to the Palestinian issue, was limited to political groups like the Resistance Front or Quebracho, which claimed to be the heirs of revolutionary Peronism (Ferrás and Manero 2023).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century a new political cycle marked by the resurgence of the national question emerged—a cycle characterized by the rise of "contestatory" neo-populisms in Latin America (Manero 2010). This is the context that gives meaning to the work of Néstor Suleiman (Rosario 1950), which consists of political documentaries centered on South-South circulations. His personal journey is the product of these circulations; he played the roles of actor, witness, and correspondent throughout his cultural production. As a secondary education teacher and a columnist in various media outlets, Suleiman has dedicated himself to disseminating and promoting the cause of Arab nationalisms and their identification with Peronism.[2]

Starting in the 1970s, Suleiman acted as a political-cultural mediator, contributing through his activism to the circulation of ideas and political practices between the Arab world and Latin America. In November and December of 1975, he travelled to Syria and Lebanon and established contact with organizations in the Middle East, primarily George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP, an offspring of the Arab Nationalist Movement), the Fatah headed by Yasser Arafat, and the Arab Liberation Front backed by the Iraqi Baath party.[3] These interactions were the result of invitations extended by Palestinian organizations and the governments of Iraq and Libya. Subsequently, Suleiman participated in various events in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Algeria, Jordan, Morocco, Western Sahara, Mauritania, and Libya. In 1983, he was invited by the government of the

2 His publications include *La cuestión Eritrea* (1977), *La educación en Irak* (1990), *Cánticos y relatos mesopotámicos* (2002), *Saddam Hussein revolución y resistencia en Irak* (2006) and *Panarabismo e identidades religiosas y étnicas. Movimientos Nacionales de Liberación* (2019) edited, among others, by the League of Arab States, the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo or the Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina (CTA), a major labor union federation. He made the documentaries *Diáspora en el Sahara* (2018) and *Muñiz el argentino en la revolución argelina* (2021). In the latter, he illustrates the early links between Peronism and the FLN.

3 On these movements, see Guirguis 2020.

Popular and Socialist Jamahiriya of Libya to present at the International Symposium on the Green Book.[4] Between 1998 and 2000, he took part in the annual Babylon festivals in Iraq, events focusing on folklore, archaeology, and literature. Since 2014, he has cooperated annually in the Sahrawi refugee camps in the far south of the Algerian Sahara Desert.

The need to define a position for Peronism on the international stage vis-à-vis the Arab issue and its relationship to the Islamic community in Argentina can be understood as part of an obsession that has marked the entirety of Suleiman's life as a militant.[5] Suleiman was first arrested in 1976 during the civil-military dictatorship in Argentina for his political activism, and again in 1977. In 1978, he travelled to Brazil, where he collaborated with the Embassy of the Republic of Iraq and with associations of Palestinian residents in Rio de Janeiro. In 1988, he founded the Argentinian-Iraqi Cultural Center in Rosario and, a year later, the School of Secondary Education for Adults *Republic of Iraq*, under the Ministry of Education of the province of Santa Fe. In 2012, he was the secretary general of the Federación de Entidades Americano Árabes (FEARAB) of Buenos Aires.[6] His work has been presented in numerous group exhibitions, among them the University of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, José C. Paz University, the National University of Rosario, and the National University of Villa María. In 2018, the Rosario City Council and the Chamber of Deputies of the province of Santa Fe declared the film *Diáspora en el Sahara* (*Diaspora in the Sahara*) of educational and cultural interest in Argentina. This film participated in the 2019 edition of the *FiSahara* festival, organized by different Sahrawi and Spanish film institutions in Auserd, a refugee camp in the Sahara Desert (Algeria), where it was awarded the prize for best documentary in the category of Sahrawi-themed films. Two years later Suleiman produced the documentary *Muñiz el argentino en la revolución argelina* (*Muñiz the Argentine in the*

4 A three-volume work written by Muammar Khadafi in which he expounds his political doctrine.

5 In an interview conducted on April 10, 2021, by Edgardo Manero and Graciela Ferrás, Suleiman recounts that he first became politically active in the late 1960s in the high school student center and continued later in the Peronist youth movement. One of his ambitions was to link his interest in the Arab issue, particularly the Palestinian question, with his activism in Peronism.

6 He also served as an advisor to the Ministry of Education (1984) and provincial legislators (1985–2006), coordinator of the Justicialist Senators Bloc, Rosario delegation (2006–2016), and representative of the Justicialist Party Rosario in the Interparty International Relations Committee (2018–2021).

Algerian Revolution). Both films delve into different historical periods of anticolonial struggle connected by the national question.

8.1 Diaspora in the Sahara

The documentary *Diáspora en el Sahara* aims to reveal a reality that no longer seems distant to the Western world, filtered through a Latin American perspective, and set against the backdrop of the unfinished peace process in the Maghrebi region. More specifically, it seeks to shed light on the situation of a people engaged in a struggle for emancipation. The film was made during various visits to refugee camps in the far south of the Algerian Sahara Desert; it was filmed in camps and areas considered liberated, constituting the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). The film showcases a population that appears to have been left to its own fate, highlighting the UN's failure to fulfill the decolonization process. It seeks to spark interest in a situation forgotten in the agendas of various international forums on human rights, generating reflection on the consequences of the Sahrawi struggle while briefly reconstructing the various stages of the process initiated after the departure of the Spanish colonizers.

The central argument of this film is the struggle for the national sovereignty of the Sahrawi Arab people. Within this framework, the documentary focuses on the displacement suffered by the Sahrawi population, which was temporarily settled in camps in Tindouf, the hardships caused by their forced dispersion in Mauritania, and the suffering of the captive communities in the territories occupied by Morocco. Behind the audio-visual narratives lies a militant commitment. For Suleiman, the Moroccan neo-colonial apparatus encounters a solid and indivisible barrier in the unified conception and resistant action of the Sahrawi Arab people. From his perspective, revealing the sentiments of the populations and their yearnings for liberation involves linking popular sovereignty with national sovereignty. The film denounces the consequences of Spanish colonialism and France's complicity in the usurpation policies carried out by the Moroccan monarchy, demonstrating the violation of international laws. Through comparison, Suleiman revisits a recurring concern in his work: the Palestinian question.

Furthermore, the film contributes to generating an agenda of lasting and stable future relations among peoples who share the same liberatory goals and have experienced similar developmental problems. In order to fully understand the principles guiding the filmmaker's production, it is therefore necessary to consider this specific film as part of Suleiman's broader project

to integrate the sociohistorical processes of Latin America with those of the Arab world, shedding light on a common interest in building societies characterized by justice and solidarity. The SADR thus represents for Suleiman a bridge that connects the Latin American region with the space stretching from the Maghreb to the Arabian Gulf. Language constitutes an indispensable element in the relationships between these regions. Indeed, the Spanish language plays a decisive role in the case of the Sahrawi Arabs, being the second most widely spoken language: a remnant of the colonial framework designed in Madrid.

The author constructs his proposal primarily through the testimonials of political actors as part of an exercise where immersion—or the desire for immersion—in the social environment is accompanied by sustained attention to autochthonous imaginaries, individuals, and group dynamics, but without losing sight of international power relations. The film represents the cinematic undertaking of a dedicated activist who believes that the existence of common problems fosters an interest in scenarios that may appear exotic at first, but ultimately do not appear to be unfamiliar.

Furthermore, Suleiman's work remains rooted in a political sociology that adheres to the "70s canon," in the sense attributed to this term in Argentina. This is evinced by the film's discourse, which relies on the political language of the Cold War, employing categories such as "national liberation," "revolution," and "colonialism." However, Suleiman goes beyond merely visualizing pre-established ideological "truths" and instead suggests a willingness to think with and for the involved populations.

8.2 Muñiz, an Argentine in the Algerian Revolution

The documentary *Muñiz, el argentino en la revolución argelina* tells the story of a left-wing trade unionist and Peronist sympathizer from Argentina who travelled to Algeria to support the FLN. The central issue explored in the film is the process of establishing solidarity through the unique political dynamics of nationalism and anti-imperialism within the context of the Cold War. The documentary openly presents itself as a tribute to the "independence epic" by revisiting the war for national liberation, a theme that had monopolized Algerian-related cinema. One of its iconic films, especially for Peronist militants in the 1970s and 1980s, is still Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (1966).

During the Algerian patriotic resistance, the people engaged in the struggle for national liberation received support from numerous activists

worldwide. Roberto Muñiz, known as *Mahmud* to Algerians, was a true internationalist who joined the independence movement in the bloodiest years of the resistance against French colonialism.[7] His commitment was not an isolated case, since in that same period other Peronist militants of the national and popular camp began to join different insurrectionary and independence movements, both in Latin America and other regions. Muñiz's first contact with the Algerian FLN took place in Buenos Aires, where he met with delegates sent to the city. At the age of thirty-seven, he travelled to North Africa to join the Algerian pro-independence organization, enlisting in the struggle against the occupying forces. In 1959, he went to work as a toolmaker at a clandestine arms factory that the FLN had set up in Morocco. Muñiz worked in the camouflaged arms production plant for the revolution until 1962, the year of independence. He then decided to take up residence in the country with his partner Alfonsa. Throughout the documentary, Muñiz asserts the legitimacy of his solidarity with the Algerian struggle; the slogan that mobilized him is that "people have the right to live independently."

So far, this is the summary of a documentary in which the contemporary sequences—the result of audio-visual interviews conducted by Suleiman with Muñiz in his home in Algiers over one week, totaling 20 hours—are contrasted with the abundant film material produced during the period covered by the film. The use of archival materials posed particular challenges for the filmmaker; it led him to make certain decisions that have opened up important questions for the current researchers interested in the conditions of production of his work. Which images from the past should be employed to narrate the history of these revolutionary movements? How does one portray the history of secretive acts committed by clandestine individuals through a filmography generated in a situation of conflict, and which mainly consist of images from the French perspective gathered for propaganda purposes? Suleiman's interest in recovering these visual testimonies in the Muñiz documentary seems to lie not so much in what these materials *show* but in what they omit or conceal. Paradoxically, their function in the film resides in their ability to generate, in the viewer's imagination, the opposite result of the originally intended one; that is, the images highlight the action of French troops through a new conflicting

7 Coming from a family of small farmers, Roberto became involved in social justice activities at a very young age. During the first Peronist government, he worked as a labor delegate in the metallurgical union. Following the civic-military coup against the democratic government in 1955, he was persecuted due to his union-related activities.

perspective that implicitly invokes, through the narrator's voice, the violence and the repressive acts concealed behind what is visible. The archival film footage thus contradicts the narrator's discourse, subverting its initial intention to construct a narrative favorable to the French side. However, it should be noted that most of the Algerian images of conflict used in the documentary are anonymous, undated, and generally sourced from already edited films. Due to this lack of context, their comprehensibility is limited, yet they are emotionally effective. The same is the case for other visual fragments taken from archives and interspersed throughout the documentary so as to draw a parallel between the Argentinian chapters of Muñiz's journey. It is worth noting, however, that in this latter case, the images are mobilized to illustrate Muñiz's story, acquiring the status of evidence (Lanza 2010).[8]

Suleiman's film is not an isolated example in a country where the documentaries related to Argentina's political past, especially individual or collective paths of political militancy, proliferate. According to Pablo Hernán Lanza (2016), the way these journeys have been represented aligns with the discourses on memory articulated during that same period. Starting with foundational films such as *Montoneros, una historia* (*Montoneros, a History*) (Di Tella 1994) and *Cazadores de utopías* (*Utopia Hunters*) (Blaustein 1995) and continuing with the more recent productions of the second decade of the twenty-first century, this era was characterized by a shift away from the innocent figure of the victim in favor of new forms of attention to the struggle of the political militant, among other aspects (Verzero 2008, Aprea 2007, Aguilar 2007). Through techniques that combine the significant presence of testimonies and interviews with the use of archival footage and fictional scenes, generational and individual stories of heroic figures were constructed—stories to which a collective dimension was frequently attributed (Lanza 2016, 2015). Suleiman takes up this logic to a certain extent through

8 Regarding this point, see Pablo H. Lanza: "Usos del archivo en el cine documental latinoamericano contemporáneo: los documentos sobrevivientes" [The uses of archives in contemporary Latin American documentary cinema: surviving documents]. The author reflects on the issue of "objectivity" and the status of the film document as "evidence", stating that "The main use of archives in Latin American documentaries continues to be for illustration purposes...Archive footage, mainly used as supplementary shots to illustrate, alternates with interviews with witnesses or is subordinated to the discourses delivered by the narrator, who, precisely because of their epistemic authority over the images, has been dubbed the 'voice of God'" (Lanza 2010, 3). Lanza also refers to the difficulties posed by the use of these corpora, pointing out that "probably (almost) no Latin American country, except for Mexico, has a tradition of audiovisual heritage preservation; therefore, archives largely do not exist or are extremely precarious" (Lanza 2010, 2).

Muñiz's journey but places it within the framework of a transnational connected history, moving beyond the confines of the nation-state.

Simultaneously, Muñiz as a political actor, and the perspective projected onto him by Suleiman in his documentary, embody a tradition of patriotism deeply rooted in Latin America: belonging by vocation. Within this tradition, inclusion in the "we" has distinctive features that do not depend on national origin but rather on the political stance adopted by each individual. If this stance aligns with and supports the proposed societal project, it enables the individual to become part of the "we." Beyond any essentialist view of the nation, the legal concept of nationality is relativized in the face of the desire to belong to or share the values of the community in question. Inclusion in the collective identity is not constrained by specific historical and geographical borders but rather shaped by ideological affiliations. This conception of belonging, both a product and a producer of a "universal" patriotism, originates from the modern idea that the nation and homeland result from *demos* rather than *ethnos*. Inherited from the French Revolution of 1789 and affirmed during the 1871 Commune, which granted citizenship to the "good" and labelled the "bad" citizens as foreigners, this conception of belonging by vocation emerged early in Latin America (Wihtol de Wenden 1995, 52). It accompanied the continental dimension of the independence processes, a tradition in which patriotism was not defined by nationality or birthplace within a territory. Commitment to the revolutionary project conferred citizenship on foreigners and cast those who did not share it into the realm of otherness. Rooted in revolutionary messianism, the continental perspective of the Latin American revolution is integral to Ernesto Guevara's ideology.

8.3 From Local to International

In Argentina, the second decade of the twenty-first century witnessed an abundant production of documentaries related to the Arab world, giving rise to a highly diverse body of work: *Beirut, Buenos Aires* (2011, directed by Hernán Belón); *Habi, la extranjera* (*Habi, the Stranger*) (2013, written and directed by María Florencia Alvarez); *Palestina, imágenes robadas* (*Palestine, Stolen Images*) (2017, written and directed by Rodrigo Vazquez); *¡Yallah, Yallah!* (2018, documentary filmed in Palestine and directed by Fernando Romanazzo and Cristian Pirovano; *La pequeña Siria* (*Little Syria*) (TN production, Mario Markic); *13,000 Kilometers from Syria* (2021, directed by Fernando Lojo); *El extranjero* (*The Stranger*) (2022, directed by Alonso

Gastiaburo and Ana Taleb); *Bajar, subir, bajar* (*Going Down, Going Up, Going Down*) (2023, autobiographical documentary film directed by Elad Abraham).

In a global context characterized by the predominance of social documentaries and life-story narratives, these productions evoke diverse issues. For instance, they delve into the life of the Muslim community in a town in the province of Buenos Aires (*La pequeña Siria*), the daily lives of individuals connected to the soccer world and how they are affected by the Israeli occupation (*¡Yallah, Yallah!*), or the story of Kurdish mothers searching for their disappeared children (*Pañuelos para la historia*) (*Handkerchiefs for History*), a work directed by Nicolás Valentini, featuring Nora Cortiñas (a member of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo).

Contemporary to this production, Suleiman's work follows a different logic, reintroducing patterns of thought and reproducing political representations generated in the second half of the twentieth century. As already noted, in the case of *Muñiz, el argentino en la revolución argelina*, the assimilation of Peronism(s) to different variants of Arab nationalism results from the existence of presumed common denominators between nationalist political projects constructed on the will to reclaim national and popular sovereignty. It serves as a concrete example of a political commitment oriented toward breaking dependency through a Third-Worldist cinema that could be interpreted as late for not conforming to contemporary hegemonic norms. Such proposals, rare in recent production, are nevertheless part of a robust Latin American tradition that began to take root in the 1960s, reaching its peak in the 1970s.

Argentine filmmakers played an active role in this process. The trajectories of actors and the vicissitudes of politics encouraged and fueled a cinematic production largely constructed from testimonies and life stories. Influenced by the nation/imperialism and homeland/colony divides, the making of films and documentaries involved conceptual elaborations and political engagements where the notions of "the people" and "liberation" structured the understanding of decolonization.

A new Argentine cinema (political, militant, committed, revolutionary) emerged with the short film *Tire Dié* (1960) by Fernando Birri and the Documentary School of Santa Fe. Together with Gerardo Vallejo, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, directors of the 1968 *La hora de los hornos* (*The Hour of the Furnaces*) created the Cine Liberación group, which organized extensive clandestine screenings in various cities. In the following years, Cine Liberación became more and more integrated into the Peronist Movement, with other filmmakers linked to a greater or lesser degree to that

nucleus (such as the group Realizadores de Mayo, with Enrique and Nemesio Juárez and Pablo Szir). Around 1973–1974, Cine Liberación became an important point of reference, definitively aligning itself with Peronism. With the entry of Getino into the Ente de Calificación Cinematográfica (Cinematographic Qualification Board) for a brief period of time, the group also aligned itself with state institutions.

The blending of documentary with fiction gives the filmography of this group a unique character. A notable example is the film *Operación massacre* (*Operation Massacre*), directed by Jorge Cedrón, based on Rodolfo Walsh's book, and starring Julio Troxler, a survivor of the 1956 José León Suárez shootings. In 1973, Raymundo Gleyzer, Alvaro Melián and Nerio Barberis founded the group Cine de la Base, widening the movement. This founding nucleus was aligned with the Marxist left of the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (Revolutionary Workers' Party) without definitively breaking ties with Peronism, as illustrated by scenes in *Los traidores* (*The Traitors*) (1973), directed by Gleyzer. Concerning the Arab world, in 1971, as a member of the Colectivo de Cine del Tercer Mundo, Jorge Denti co-produced the documentary *Palestina, otro Vietnam* (*Palestine, Another Vietnam*) with Jorge Giannoni, who became the director of the Cinemateca del Tercer Mundo (Third World Cinematheque) at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) in 1974. Significant political films about Argentine history were made during the same period, films such as *Juan Manuel de Rosas* (directed by M. Antin, 1972), *Quebracho* (directed by Ricardo Wullicher, 1974), *La Patagonia rebelde* (*Patagonia the Rebel*) (directed by Héctor Olivera, 1974), and *Yo maté a Facundo* (*I Killed Facundo*) (directed by Hugo del Carril, 1975).

This form of political cinema provided a new impetus to anticolonial thought, conceiving of dependence not only in economic and political terms but also in cultural ones. Emphasizing the need to dismantle the ideological devices inherited from colonization, it anticipated the epistemological critique of colonial discourse that was later established with the work of Edward W. Said, the cornerstone of postcolonial studies (Said 1980, 2000). Culture was seen as central to knowledge production, and to the possibility of subverting the representation of the "us" and the "other." Consequently, cinema came to occupy a central place in strategies of cultural decolonization. The topics explored revolved around the issue of cultural domination, as articulated by the Peronist intellectual Arturo Jauretche as akin to pedagogical colonization.

To establish South-South dialogues as a political opposition to a North constituted by the two hegemonic political-economic systems, a broad coalition centered around Peronism sought to address dependency from

a national historical and geographical perspective. This movement highlighted the political and cultural realities experienced by peripheral societies, promoting a mode of decolonization that broke with Eurocentric traditions and ultimately advocated for a balance between cultural universalism and relativism. In Argentina, the so-called "Cátedras nacionales," a series of seminars held by Peronist professors between 1968 and 1972 at the UBA and the Manuel Ugarte Third World Institute are good examples.[9] For this milieu, the Third World maintained the characteristics associated with the Third Estate—ignored, exploited, and despised—and political revolution was understood as the will to "become something," akin to the concept coined by Alfred Sauvy in his seminal article "Trois mondes, une planète" ("Three Worlds, One Planet") (*L'Observateur* 1952). However, it combined these elements with a constitutive postulate of Peronist ideology—the Third Position—which implied equidistance from hegemonic powers.

The cinematic political project that was crystallizing in Argentina toward the late 1960s expressed the main outlines of this proclaimed "Third World" cinema in Latin American, Asian, or African texts and manifestos. The creation of a Committee of Third World Cinema, aiming to unite filmmakers from the three continents, led to the organization of two successive meetings in Algiers (December 1973) and Buenos Aires (May 1974), which gave rise to this organizational body and established its objectives (Mestman 2007, Hadouchi and Mestman in this volume).

Suleiman's imagery is guided by the primary axes of the Algiers and Buenos Aires meetings, by the processes of decolonization in each region and their recovery of national heritage. The author champions cinematic Third Worldism, assuming an aesthetic identity shaped by a political perspective that is not only national but nationalist—a central element in his conception of national liberation and cultural decolonization processes. Within this framework, cinema becomes a form of opposition that transcends a cinematic model like the one established in Hollywood but also maintains a distance from other hegemonic centers.

In his films, Suleiman has continued reproducing the logic of the New Latin American Cinema movement, addressing themes such as the use of

9 This short-lived institution, comprised of former faculty members of national academic departments, had as its primary objective to create cooperative ties and promote the circulation of ideas and members of Third World national liberation movements. Its activities not only reflect the advocacy of a cultural nationalism but also the influence of the Arab world's imagery in shaping the identity of Peronism in the 1970s.

cinema as a tool for knowledge and decolonization, the transformation of the spectator into a political actor, solidarity with anti-imperialist struggles, denunciation of oppression, and support for revolutionary causes. South-South cooperation motivates and mobilizes the rapprochement between peripheral countries. Production took on a primarily political-ideological character, with little room for formal or aesthetic concerns. This does not imply, of course, that these concerns were absent. His current work still aligns with the guiding principles that shaped Third World cinema: the abandonment of cinematic conceptions from central countries, the search for forms based on the authenticity and reality of Third World media, the promotion of co-productions among countries in this space, and the vindication of the state's role in film production, distribution, and marketing.

Suleiman's documentaries also fit into a regional history for which Frantz Fanon provided the tools to interpret racial issues from an anticolonial perspective linked to state nationalism. Suleiman's work reminds us that documentary cinema offers its own way of reflecting on social issues. It participates in the construction of meaning and understanding of the past, and intervenes in the representation of social processes. It is a means of transmission that testifies to the permeability of science and art with politics, with the merit of being able to reach a wide audience and stimulate reflection on underexplored topics. His work is part of the artisanal, peripheral films that circulate in international documentary festivals. However, his presence in the Argentine and Arab scenes raises questions about a relevant contemporary issue: postcolonial approaches that have been significantly influenced by cultural studies.

Suleiman's work appears as a marginal and potentially discordant product from the perspective of cultural studies. On the one hand, it emerges in a context where the influence of the Arab world's imagery on the social, cultural, and political identifications of Peronist militancy is practically non-existent compared to previous eras. On the other hand, the construction of Peronist political identity through the evocation of a heroic time not only struggles to find its place in a context marked by globalization as a process and ideology, but also contrasts with certain tenets of postcolonialism in the West. As cultural and postcolonial studies gained prominence, they have often led to an exaltation of so-called minorities.[10] These studies

10 Emerging in the United States, these studies have reworked knowledge produced in other societies. Thus, the foundations of postcolonialism can be found in the works of Albert Memmi *Portrait du Colonisé précédé de Portrait du Colonisateur* (1957) and

denounce the oppression suffered by subaltern groups and identify forms of alterity that sometimes carry a different, and occasionally conflicting, political content than anticolonial experiences like Peronism. However, attention to contemporary Argentine documentary production reveals that the incompatibility between two approaches is not as stark as it would first appear.

Indeed, the concern with revisiting the figure of the revolutionary militant during the Cold War period coincided with the diversification of the form and content of the political documentary, which gained an interest in issues like the demands of minorities, the protection of the environment, and the fight against social exclusion. It was in this context that Fernando Solanas, a reference and paradigm of Third World cinema in the 1970s, employed a national-popular tone to express the social and ecological consequences of the dominant economic model in Argentina through a series of documentaries.[11]

More broadly, the audio-visual field began to incorporate different perspectives linked to human rights and dealing with issues of gender and ethnicity. Documentaries denouncing the plight of minorities gained ground starting in the early twenty-first century, marking an important shift. Struggles for gay rights, for example, could intersect with other activist dimensions, as seen in the film *Putos peronistas, cumbia del sentimiento* (*Damned Peronists*, *The Cumbia of Feeling*) (Rodolfo Cesatti 2011). These new approaches clearly break with the practices and perceptions of political opposition groups and guerrilla movements in the decades before the civic-military dictatorship of 1976, as evidenced by the rejection of the Peronist youth groups of the creation of the Frente de Liberación Homosexual (Homosexual Liberation Front) in 1971 (Lanza 2019, 184).

From this latter perspective, Suleiman's analysis of social tensions can be seen to emphasize class issues and asymmetries among nations, without focusing on ethnic, sexual, or religious identities. Focused on the geopolitical context, his approach to colonialism and its representations largely adheres to the binary schemes that oppose the colonizer with the colonized, the center with the periphery, and the North with the South. Indeed, his work is

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Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952) and *Les Damnés de la Terre* (1961), produced in the context of decolonization.

11 *Memoria del saqueo* (2003), *La dignidad de los nadies* (2005), *Argentina latente*, *La próxima estación* (2008), *Tierra sublevada: Oro impuro* (2009), *Tierra sublevada: Oro negro* (2010), *La guerra del fracking* (2013), *Viaje a los Pueblos Fumigados* (2018).

best understood in relation to the predominant analytical model in postcolonial criticism until the late twentieth century. The rejection of colonialism bears the imprint of an era characterized by identities defined by class and nation. Perhaps unintentionally, his perspective aligns with Marxist theorists who argue that culturalist postcolonial theories tend to ignore the political and socioeconomic context, favoring cultural and identity concerns. The importance given in this discourse to national issues and anti-imperialism centered on the concept of the Third World is far from the new imageries about anticolonialism, guided by racial discrimination, ethnic identities, multiculturalism, exile, cultural alienation, *mestizaje*, and criticism of the nation-state. Thus, the reflection on resistance to nation-states developed by much of postcolonialism remains at odds with the statism that fostered anticolonialism since the end of World War II.[12]

However, Suleiman's approach also distances itself from orthodox Marxist positions. Unlike leftist perspectives that traditionally sought to construct a Third Worldism driven less by geopolitical determinations than by a belief in a set of ideas linked to international solidarity (Mahler 2018), his viewpoint remains loyal to the realism inherent in the Peronist tradition, which is structured around power relationships. The centrality of power recognized early on by Peronism and its theorists allowed the recognition of the intersections between different forms of domination and their articulation with political and social movements. Thus, the axiological inversion produced by this movement through the use of the phrase "cabecita negra," a term used derogatorily in Argentina to refer to a segment of the population subject to phenotypical, social, and territorial discrimination, made evident the always-existing intersection of various forms of domination, an aspect that later came to occupy a central place in decolonial studies. Thus, from another perspective, since the late twentieth century, these studies have developed critical tools like intersectionality, aiming at shedding light on the interconnection of oppression faced by subaltern groups related to issues of gender, class, ethnicity, or "race.[13]

That said, without subscribing to the paradigm of postcolonial studies as it evolved from the works of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Suleiman's interpretation of these issues is not frozen in time. Rather, his view is permeated by issues that emerged after the end of

12 The book *Un Nosotrxs sin Estado* by Yasnaya Elena Aguilar Gil (2019) is a good example.

13 An example of this articulation: Hernández Castillo (2012).

the Cold War, creating a tension in his work. While he celebrates the heterogeneity of the Arab world, composed of "cultural minorities" with differences in terms of ethnicity, religion, and language, he continues to defend the role of the nation and the state as a unified, rational actor and the main protagonist of international relations in a context where this view of the state is questioned. Moreover, Suleiman reintroduces the relationship between internationalism and nationalism through his work, highlighting its universalist dimension—a dimension underestimated by postcolonial studies but clearly articulated by Juan José Hernández Arregui, an important Peronist intellectual (Arregui 187, 330): "A nationalism that dwells in the masses of a concrete homeland but is also international, as the liberation of colonial peoples will tend to occur on a global scale and successively. Just as the oppression of the great imperialist metropolises of this century is global."[14]

Early on, Perón considered Latin American integration and progress toward continentalism as a necessary step toward universalism. Rooted in the logic of global conflict, he contended, social and political struggles have a dimension that transcends the nation-state. In the "imperialist" era, the manifestation of a new regime of historicity can only be universal. Like Ernesto "Che" Guevara, the universalist and humanist character of Perón's values and objectives had a concrete anchor: the Patria Grande (Greater Homeland). In this perspective, the "national" claim is intimately linked to the region.

Thus, imbued with a teleological view of history and a "revolutionary messianism," Peronism promotes a representation of emancipatory struggle founded on political action as both global in its significance and localized in its expression. While this view was more evident in the 1960s and 1970s, this logic, driven to its extreme by Jacobin sectors, was already present in the early days of Peronism. Without necessarily evoking the coordination of anti-imperialist revolutionary struggle, each conflict can thus serve as a reference, and every liberation of a people constitutes a stimulus. The national revolution transcends arbitrary borders, presenting itself as a revolutionary political unity of all dependent peoples. The main political references of this view were primarily Third-Worldist, expressing a distrust of social democracy and pro-Soviet communism.

14 For the purposes of this chapter, the quoted text was translated from Spanish to English by the author.

Suleiman's work helps us understand how the Arab world was approached by individual and collective actors associated with the Peronist universe. It highlights aspects related to the construction of symbolic and material connections between political actors operating in different peripheral spaces through the dissemination of anti-imperialist and nationalist ideas, both during the Cold War and in the global disorder. Despite programmatic differences, individuals involved in projects influenced to varying degrees by the radicalism of Arab nationalist projects found in it a vital political and intellectual trajectory, and an object of reflection vis-à-vis the construction of political alternatives.

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Filmography

Diaspora in the Sahara

Shot in 2017, in the Sahrawi refugee camps in the Algerian Sahara Desert (Tindouf), the areas controlled by the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in Western Sahara and in Spain.

Release date: 21 April 2018.

Sponsored by the National Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Arts (INCAA-Argentina).
Sponsored by the governments of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic.
Production: INCAA and Néstor Antonio Suleiman

Muñiz the Argentine in the Algerian Revolution

Shot in 2019 in Algiers
Release date: 22 October 2021
Sponsored by the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and the Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina Autónoma (CTA Autónoma)
Production: Néstor Antonio Suleiman

Refugees

Shot in Syrian and Iraqi refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon in 2019, and in Sahrawi camps in southern Algeria (Sahara Desert) in 2022.
To be released in October 2024
Production: Néstor Antonio Suleiman.

AFTERWORD

Toward a Cultural Political Economy of Arab-Latin American Relations

Kevin Funk

As an assigned text in my newly created "Global Latin America" course, I recently had the opportunity to re-read the historian Peter Winn's classic *Weavers of Revolution: The Yarur Workers and Chile's Road to Socialism*, which narrates and analyzes the role of everyday workers in mobilizing for the occupation, expropriation, and democratization of an emblematic, Palestinian-owned textile factory in Salvador Allende's Chile. In the very first chapter—evocatively entitled "Palestinians in the Promised Land"—Winn (1986, 13) observes that the Yarur cotton mill, which opened in 1937, was the first such "modern" installation in the country. Its Bethlehem-born founder, the industrialist Juan Yarur, had been enticed through various subsidies by the conservative but reform-minded Arturo Alessandri administration to migrate (again) "from the barren highlands of Bolivia," where he and his younger brother had settled two decades prior, "to the fertile valleys of Chile" (13).

Such was the success of his economic endeavors that the phrase "tan rico como Yarur" ("as rich as Yarur") entered the Chilean lexicon (Winn 1986, 4). In turn, by 1970—the year of Allende's election—the Yarurs and two other Palestinian families from greater Bethlehem controlled, rather remarkably, approximately 80 percent of the Chilean cotton textile industry (29). The existence of this ethnic niche economy would also find expression in the cultural sphere. The hit television show *Los 80* (*The 80s*), which aired on *Canal 13* from 2008 to 2014, famously brought—essentially for the first time—the realities of state repression and economic precarity during the second decade of the Pinochet regime to mainstream Chilean audiences. Though it is only a minor (and generally overlooked) detail within a series about human rights and collective memory, there is also some significance to the fact that the kindly owner of the clothing shop that employed one of the protagonists bears the recognizably Arab name Farid. Of further note is that he displays a small Palestinian flag within his store.

Notably, Asian immigrants have established an increasing foothold during the past few decades in Chile's garment industry—coinciding, also, with the

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ascent of many Arab Chileans from small-scale entrepreneurs into the country's business and professional class. This change is visible in the Chilean capital Santiago's traditional Arab enclave of Patronato, immediately to the northeast of downtown, which is still a hub for the local textile trade and features a blend of Middle Eastern and Asian storefronts, restaurants, and markets. That this remains a space (and the textile sector an industry) associated with immigrant "Others" was brought to the fore during an initial visit in the mid-2000s, when I saw that several small clothing shops featured front-door stickers that asserted that *their* products were "hechos con manos chilenas" (made with Chilean hands).

The focus of Winn's history "from below" is the Chilean labor movement, the budding class consciousness of its younger protagonists, and the emergence of a radical, grassroots political project that would push Allende's government—and the associated framework of a "*vía chilena al socialismo*" (Chilean path to socialism)—to recognize their (soon-to-be-crushed) vision of bottom-up, worker-led self-management and economic democracy. Yet, though Winn does not pursue this point, the struggle over the paternalistically administered Yarur industrial complex was not only a political-economic one, which it undoubtedly primarily was. It also played out vis-à-vis and was inflected by particular cultural understandings, often of an Orientalist character, of the Palestinian and Arab "Other" (Camayd-Freixas 2013, see also Hassan 2024).

Tantalizing if under-explored manifestations of such intercultural dynamics, which are ripe for further analysis, include: a worker's boast that, due to Allende's pro-labor orientation, they no longer had to fear that "the Turk"[1]

1 Use of the term *turco* throughout both Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking Latin America to refer to Arab immigrants and their descendants has long been and remains widespread. In its more neutral sense, the application of this label to non-Turkish peoples derives from the arrival of many of their ancestors with passports issued by the crumbling Ottoman Empire. See, for example, the renowned Brazilian novelist Jorge Amado's 1994 [2008] novel, *A Descoberta da América pelos Turcos* (*The Discovery of America by the Turks*), which "narrates the romantic and economic exploits of two Arab immigrants upon their arrival in Brazil at the beginning of the twentieth century" (Funk 2022, 86–87). Indeed, Amado, who is not known to be of Arab descent—though there is speculation to the contrary, or that his family has Sephardic roots (Fonseca da Silva 2020)—regularly deployed Arab/*turco* characters in his works, and in ways that both drew from established stereotypes but also evoked a "positive" sense of "valorization" (Hassan 2012, 399–400).

Yet perhaps more commonly, use of the *turco* cultural marker in the region is intended to suggest a negative set of ascribed traits, namely "shrewdness, thriftiness, and a pathological propensity for commerce," along with an "imagined stinginess and overdeveloped

(referring to Amador Yarur, one of Juan's sons) would be able to "fire us just like that" for their agitation (Winn 1986, 103); another's reference to the Yarur family as "Turkish thieves" (174); and the commonly-held notion within the factory that the Yarurs maintained a "harem" of female workers (171). Artistic production is also implicated—notably, a reprinted "worker cartoon" that proclaims the successful *liberación* (liberation) of the factory features a forlorn Amador with a seemingly ethnically caricatured nose peering despondently from outside the complex's walls (201) [Figure 1].

Both Allende's Popular Unity government and left-wing media tapped into and helped to generate "popular resentment of the *turco* millionaires," with the latter "caricaturiz[ing] the Yarurs as Oriental potentates forcing Chilean workers to do their bidding, running their factory like the feudal domain of an Arab sheik, complete with harems of women workers" (Winn 1986, 152). For their part, many members of Chile's traditional, insular, and majority white-European business class were resentful of the Yarurs and their "meteoric rise" and "unwanted intrusion into the upper reaches of Chilean society," which fed into the Allende government's belief that targeting the property of these "Palestinians in the promised land" would likely provoke a less ferocious elite backlash than would otherwise be expected (152). There was, then, a degree of cross-class overlap in Chile regarding the construction of Palestinians and Palestinian Chileans as racialized "Others."

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sense of business acumen" (Funk 2022, 90). In turn, the implication is that Arab Latin Americans—and especially those involved in business, a field in which they maintain a strong presence—are insufficiently socially integrated or committed to the national projects of their Latin American home societies. Hence the stinging assessment offered by the seminal Brazilian cultural theorist Darcy Ribeiro (2000, 317-318) in the landmark text *The Brazilian People* regarding the country's large and influential Arab-descendant population:

"The Arabs have been the most successful immigrants, quickly becoming integrated into Brazilian life and attaining positions in the government. [...] They are blind to the fact that their success can be explained to a large degree by the casual attitude they have in addressing and working with the local society: armed with prejudices and incapable of any solidarity, detached from any loyalty and family or social obligations. All of this allows them to concentrate their entire effort on getting rich."

Such class-based imaginaries have long conditioned regional understandings of Arab immigrants and their descendants. As part of a broader Latin American Orientalism, these coexist alongside particular stereotypes associated with Islam (Karam 2020), as well as the below-cited caricatured "otherworldly aspirations and inspirations" that local elites, per Ramos-Zayas (2020, 112), have often ascribed to Arab-descendant populations. This broader and longstanding process of "Othering" has led to the assessment that *turcophobia* has deep roots in the region (Rebolledo Hernández 1994).

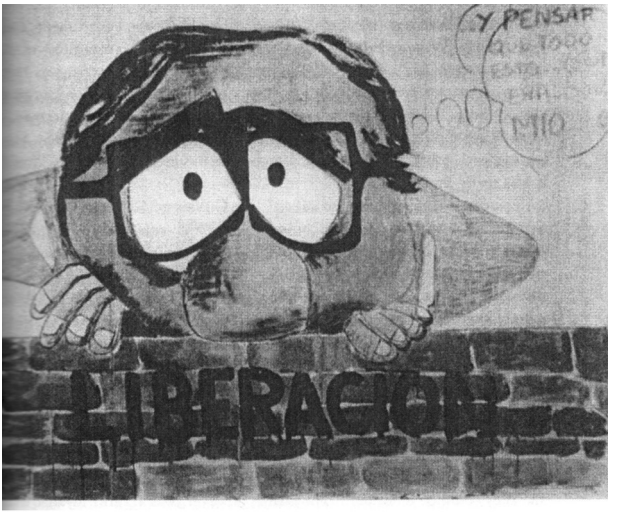

FIGURE 1 "Worker cartoon". This copyrighted image appears in: Winn, Peter. 1986. *Weavers of Revolution: The Yarur Workers and Chile's Road to Socialism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 201.
REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION OF THE LICENSOR THROUGH PLSCLEAR.

More recently, in her comparative "South-South" ethnography *Parenting Empires: Class, Whiteness, and the Moral Economy of Privilege in Latin America*, the anthropologist Ana Ramos-Zayas (2020, 214) interrogates how the parenting strategies pursued by "progressive," cosmopolitan elites in upper-class urban enclaves in Rio de Janeiro and San Juan provide moral justifications for racialized inequalities and the maintenance of "white supremacy" in these respective societies. In the Brazilian case, Lebanese-Syrian ancestry was regularly claimed, invoked, and "highlighted" by her elite interlocutors (177, 180). In her analysis, this served not only to demonstrate feelings of individual and community pride in their traditions and (especially economic) "contributions to Brazil" (180–181). These "migration sagas" also—perhaps to an even greater extent than similar narratives emanating from elites of various European backgrounds—buttressed the notion that upper-class, Middle Eastern-descendant Brazilians comprised a "model ethnic group" who accordingly were deserving of their privileges within the country's highly stratified and racialized socioeconomic hierarchy (159, 177). Unsurprisingly, such discursive strategies are entirely unavailable to the victims of settler colonialism in Rio, namely Afro-descendant and Indigenous populations (Funk 2024a).

Speaking to their overrepresentation in elite sectors, a recent survey indicates, for example, that nearly half of Arab-descendant Brazilians belong to the country's highest-income groups and, accordingly, that "Arabs are doing much better than the average of the Brazilian population" (Sousa 2020). In turn, significantly less scholarly attention has been paid to the class diversity that exists within these communities, or to the question of how "less advantaged Arab–Latin Americans relate to their wealthier [counterparts], as well as to the broader social orders of which they are a part" (Funk 2024b, 513).

Whatever their class origins, there is also significant political diversity among Arab-descendant Latin Americans. In the Brazilian case, recent prominent figures include: the right-wing Michel Temer, of Lebanese descent, who served as president from 2016-2019; former São Paulo mayor, 2018 presidential candidate, and, as of mid-2024, finance minister Fernando Haddad, of both Syrian and Lebanese descent, who belongs to the centrist wing of the left-leaning *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers' Party); and Guilherme Boulos, of Lebanese descent, who belongs to the left-wing *Partido Socialismo e Liberdade* (Socialism and Liberty Party) and as of mid-2024 is a federal deputy and candidate for mayor of São Paulo with a national political profile. Returning to Chile, the Palestinian-descendant and Communist Party member Daniel Jadue has served as mayor of the central Santiago commune of Recoleta (which includes the aforementioned Patronato) since 2012. During the 2021 presidential election cycle, he finished second in primary voting (to Gabriel Boric, who subsequently triumphed in the general election) for the left-wing *Apruebo Dignidad* (Approve Dignity) coalition.

In the cultural sphere, of particular importance is Miguel Littín, a Chilean director and novelist of Palestinian and Greek ancestry "whose daring secret return to Chile from exile in 1984 to capture the brutal reality of life under the Pinochet regime was immortalized in the late Gabriel García Márquez's (1986) *La aventura de Miguel Littín clandestino en Chile* (*Clandestine in Chile: The Adventures of Miguel Littín*)" (Funk 2022, 86).

Socioeconomic and political diversity aside, and though they are still the subject of ethnic "Othering" in certain contexts (Karam 2007, Karam 2020), Ramos-Zayas firmly situates Arab Brazilian elites as participants in, and beneficiaries of, white-dominated social structures, at least within the relatively culturally open elite milieu of Ipanema that is the focus of her Brazilian case study.

As is the case with Winn, the Arab-Latin American angle is not Ramos-Zayas' area of focus, and she does not dwell on the cultural situatedness of

Rio's Arab-descendant elites. However, like *Weavers of Revolution*, her text offers hints of cultural entanglements between the regions.

In a section entitled "Latin American Orientalism," she traces how many of these same Brazilian and Puerto Rican elites draw from Middle Eastern and Asian texts, spiritual practices, philosophies, and in some cases travel experiences to cultivate their own "interiority currency" as part of a broader "self-help culture" that revolved around moral development, as opposed to the celebration of material gain (Ramos-Zayas 2020, 107–112). One of the aims and results, per her analysis, was to demonstrate their superiority vis-à-vis less privileged compatriots (and also, at times, in relation to more materially focused elites and members of the business class). As she puts it regarding the former, this Latin American Orientalism served as "a way of seeking otherworldly aspirations and inspirations that were more cosmopolitan and marked white elites as complex and 'deep,' as opposed to the 'simple' and stereotypically predictable darker lower classes" (112). In these narratives, the Arab world and its "Eastern" neighbors, so geographically distant from the streets of Rio de Janeiro and San Juan, were prized by many (progressive) elites in caricatured ways as timeless sources of metaphysical wisdom concerning self-improvement.

The above readings of these two temporally separated and seemingly disparate texts, neither of which foregrounds its contributions to our understandings of Arab-Latin American dynamics and relations, bring to the fore complementary narratives. Just as Winn reveals the Yarur family and fellow travelers—as immigrants from afar who were pursuing a "(Latin) American dream"—to be not only economic, but also cultural agents, Ramos-Zayas shows how her progressive, cosmopolitan elite interlocutors in Rio's Ipanema and San Juan's El Condado construct and draw from cultural narratives—including those related to the Arab world, Middle East, and broader "Orient"—in service of particular moralistic self-fashioning projects that ultimately justify racialized class privilege in deeply inegalitarian Latin American societies.

In line with the framework of cultural political economy, these books highlight the ways in which local understandings of race, class, and national belonging have been formed vis-à-vis culturally inflected narratives and imaginaries about, as well as representations of, the Arab world and particularly situated Arab migrants (and their descendants). In this way, they provide a bridge to the present volume's insightful contributions, some of which I explore below, to our understandings of the cultural and artistic linkages between the regions. In turn, I also, in this afterword, situate this text vis-à-vis broader bodies of English-, Spanish-, and Portuguese-language

literatures on Arab-Latin American relations, and make the case for analyzing these interregional linkages from precisely such a "cultural political economy" perspective.

Art, Culture, and Political Economy

As this book helpfully demonstrates, there is a long history of cultural engagements between the regions, with diverse actors—mostly Arab (but also non-Arab) writers, artists, musicians, diplomats, migrants, community organizations, everyday citizens, and others—serving as "cultural agents" who are actively constructing various kinds of cross-regional axes of exchange (Guirguis and Pabón, introduction). The contributors take seriously the challenge of exploring new empirical contexts, with the chapters analyzing an intriguing range of cultural artifacts, products, and imaginaries, many of which are in and of themselves quite small, idiosyncratic, and largely unknown, but are nevertheless revealed to highlight varied and important aspects of the interregional relationship.

Such phenomena include a long-overlooked but symbolically rich plaque, replete with Ottoman imagery, which was donated to the Córdoba government by the local Arab community in 1910 to commemorate the centennial of Argentina's 1810 May Revolution (Vagni and Jauregui, chapter 2), and Cold War-era relations through cultural diplomacy (Karam, chapter 3), film (Hadouchi and Mestman, chapter 6, Manero and Reali, chapter 8), and literature (Pabón, chapter 7).

Through these multi-sited empirical analyses, numerous broader themes emerge. I briefly explore a few of them here, along with the overall situatedness and contributions of this volume, before turning to avenues for future research.

First, this text reveals the mutual co-constitution of these two disparate regions, as well as what I have referred to elsewhere as "the need to understand Latin America as *global* Latin America—including vis-à-vis a similarly 'global Middle East'" (Funk 2024b, 504).[2] That is, rather than conceptualize the Arab-Latin American relationship solely in terms of one-way flows—for example, of immigrants from the former region arriving to the latter, and the corresponding consequences for Latin American societies in terms

2 These terms "global Latin America" and "global Middle East" are used, respectively, in Gutmann and Lesser (2016) and Balloffet (2020).

of racial identities and racial formation—what emerges here is a much more complicated story in which the influences are multidirectional and reciprocal.

The Arab world and Middle East are thus shown to be important components of Latin America's racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious syncretism and hybridity, traits that are often associated with the latter region's "kaleidoscopic" essence (Schelling 2000). Drawn from the Brazilian modernist Oswald de Andrade's well-known theorization of Brazilian culture as "anthropophagy," in that "it devoured and digested local and external influences, producing something new" (Bercito, chapter 1), the notion of a Latin American "cultural cannibalism" indeed emerges repeatedly in the text (in addition to the above-cited chapters, see also: Guirguis and Pabón, introduction). But as John Tofik Karam (chapter 3) notes, this is not merely a story of Latin America's "devouring" of "Euro-American" trends; rather, Latin American cultural forms, whether read as autochthonous or hybrid, have also been "consumed by a people and part of the globe"—the Arab world —"that many others presume as distant or indifferent."

It is in this vein that Gabriella Nugent (chapter 4) highlights the arrival in Egypt of Mexican muralism via the works of local artist Hamed Ewais, for whom this tradition served as inspiration to shift the locus of artistic production from "idealized scenes of rural peasant labor" to portrayals of the country's working class. Diogo Bercito (chapter 1) makes a related point regarding the creation of a distinctly Arab-Brazilian song, observing how the music of Nagib Hankach, who spent decades living in Brazil before returning to his native Lebanon, represented an amalgamation of—and resonated in—both countries.

Further research is needed concerning such back-and-forth dynamics, with the obvious caveat that carrying out sophisticated work of this kind requires a repertoire of linguistic skills and cross-regional background knowledge that would be difficult to obtain through typical graduate programs (Bercito 2019).

Second, this volume speaks to the complexities underlying scholarly understandings of South-South relations and their normative implications. On the one hand, many of the Arab-Latin American entanglements under examination here occurred within the context of Cold War-era Third World solidarity efforts that aimed to inaugurate—politically and economically, but also culturally—a more just, egalitarian, and democratic postcolonial, anti-imperialist order. Yet, though somewhat beyond the scope of this text, one also observes shared histories of interregional arms shipments and militarization (Guirguis and Pabón, introduction), the mutual buttressing of

authoritarian regimes, and, certainly in the present, the predominance of capitalist exchange, with the Gulf countries in particular consuming large amounts of South American agricultural products. This, in turn, reinforces the latter's longstanding dependence on commodity exports, thus significantly contributing to environmental degradation in the Amazon and other sensitive areas, and filling the coffers of big agribusiness (which, in Brazil's case, plays an outsized role in promoting Indigenous dispossession and a right-wing, anti-egalitarian agenda) (Funk 2024c). Another noteworthy recent commercial trend involves the state-backed Saudi Pro League deploying its vast resources to sign large numbers of international footballers from Brazil, Argentina, and beyond.

That much of Latin America's contemporary interest in the Arab world revolves around the wealthy economies of the Arabian Peninsula, as opposed to the Levant to which most Arab-descendant Latin Americans trace their heritage and which traditionally has served as a locus for building interregional solidarity, thus highlights the limits of the South-South framing for understanding contemporary Arab-Latin American dynamics (Funk 2015).

To be sure, such solidarity-based framings still percolate, perhaps especially in artistic production. See, for example, the famed Chilean musician Ana Tijoux's 2014 landmark anti-imperialist anthem, *Somos Sur* (*We Are South*), performed in collaboration with the British-Palestinian rapper Shadia Mansour, who has been referred to as "the first lady of Arabic hip hop." With references to Palestinian freedom, ending U.S. intervention, and the joining of hands of all those who have been "silenced," "subjugated," and made "invisible," it evokes a Global South identity based on shared resistance to domination and a collective struggle for liberation.

However, most of what is being cultivated through contemporary Arab-Latin American linkages is far from analogous to earlier Third-Worldist projects such as the previously imagined New International Economic Order (Prashad 2014, see also Ferabolli 2021). Rather, if the present period involves the birth of a new "South-South" economic geography in which, as the leading Brazilian diplomat Celso Amorim noted in the early 2000s, "to get from Brazil to Cairo, you won't need to pass through Washington and Paris" (quoted in Karam 2007, 174), then at least in economic terms it is one defined by a distinctly neoliberal, elite-driven slant (Funk 2024c). As Karam (chapter 3) thoughtfully observes, "many agendas" exist under the South-South label, and—in the spirit of normative complexity—the kind of "Global South 'know-how'" that he analyzes is found to be "as useful to autocratic and market forces as it remains for aesthetic and grassroots

movements." It is also the case that more egalitarian South-South "partnerships" have been "more proclaimed than concretized" (Manero and Reali, chapter 8). A question we are thus left with is to what extent does the observed "discursive terrain of Third-Worldist internationalism and its attendant literary forms and genres" remain salient in the present (Pabón, chapter 7)—and how, in turn, have such cultural entanglements been reshaped in our neoliberal age?

Lastly, as is the case with the above-analyzed texts by Winn and Ramos-Zayas, the present volume evokes the need to grapple with the multifaceted intersections between the political, economic, and cultural spheres.

As I observed in a recent assessment of (increasing) contemporary knowledge production focusing on "Latin American-Middle Eastern exchange,"

> Scholarly works produced before and during the early 2000s "boom" in Latin American– Middle Eastern ties focused primarily on two sets of issues: first, political and economic relations, especially growing commercial links and Latin America's long-standing interest in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and second, the experiences of Arab immigrants who began to settle in the region in large numbers in the early 1900s, as well as how Latin America has been shaped by (and responded to) their arrival and presence, particularly in cultural terms.
>
> FUNK 2024b, 505

Reflecting disciplinary boundaries, the former topics have primarily been written about by political scientists (and, secondarily, economists), while works in the latter areas have mostly been produced by historians, anthropologists, and specialists in comparative literature and cultural studies.[3] Less common have been efforts to consider these distinct facets of the interregional relationship simultaneously, and from a transdisciplinary perspective.[4] The present volume, with its simultaneous focus on the realms of art and politics, represents precisely an effort to link ostensibly distinct spheres within Arab-Latin American relations that have generally been contemplated separately.

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3 For a recent and comprehensive overview of existing literature on Arab-Latin American entanglements, see the introduction of this volume, Balloffet, Padilla and Stites Mor 2019, and the second chapter of Funk (2022).

4 A notable exception is Karam's 2007 landmark text, *Another Arabesque: Syrian-Lebanese Ethnicity in Neoliberal Brazil*, which highlights the role of Arab-descendant Brazilians as protagonists behind then-booming interregional relations while also analyzing shifts in the cultural imaginaries associated with and identities of these same figures.

Elsewhere, I have also argued for the need to interrogate in a more holistic way the "political economy" of Arab-Latin American relations (Funk 2013), particularly from oft-marginalized critical perspectives, Marxist and otherwise (Sclofsky and Funk 2018, Funk and Sclofsky 2021). This would entail, for example, situating our understanding of Latin American state postures toward the Arab world vis-à-vis domestic class forces and their ability to shape foreign-policy agendas (Funk 2016).

Art and Politics between the Arab World and Latin America in the Twentieth Century continues in this vein by further pushing us to consider the cultural and artistic logics that have also underlaid and/or motivated the interregional relationship. What emerges through this volume is thus the too-easily-overlooked reality, at least in my home discipline of International Relations, that "culture matters." More profoundly, this text reveals, through a series of granular, empirically rich case studies of diverse forms of artistic production, the mutual imbrication between the political and cultural dimensions of Arab-Latin American relations. Hints also emerge along the way of how such political-artistic intersections inflect, but are also inflected by, economic logics, both capitalist and otherwise.

Future Directions

It has long been recognized, at least implicitly, that economic orders are also cultural systems, or at least can shape (if not be shaped by) the cultural sphere. Of particular importance here is Karl Polanyi's (2001) *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. In this classic account of the rise of liberalism, and its twentieth-century descent into fascism, Polanyi interrogates how the emergence of a "liberal creed"—and the accompanying faith in the notion of a "self-regulating market"—provoked the corrosion of traditional culturally embedded economies. In the place of the longstanding norms of reciprocity and redistribution, an increasingly culturally disembedded logic of asocial and uninhibited profit-maximization came to predominate. Demonstrating the links between the economic and cultural spheres, this "market economy" would also become a "market society" in which social relations were conditioned, for the first time in human history, by an individualistic drive for wealth and accumulation. Notably, what he describes as the resulting annihilation of existing cultural-economic orders produced highly diverse forms of backlash, including liberal or social-democratic legislative efforts to regulate capitalism, movements for socialism or communism, and, where reform proved impossible, the emergence of fascism itself.

If Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* elucidated the cultural logics of liberalism and its precursors, it has only been in recent years that a fuller appreciation of the ways in which the economic and cultural spheres are mutually co-constituted has come to the fore. In other words, what has become apparent through the novel framework of "cultural political economy" goes beyond the notion that there are cultural dimensions of economic phenomena (Best and Paterson 2010, Sum and Jessop 2013, see also Funk 2018). Further, what key works in this area from the past two decades have revealed is the need "to move beyond the traditional dualism that has separated the study of political economy from culture," as these domains are inextricably linked (Funk 2022, 16). Undergirding this shift has been a concomitant "interpretivist turn" that has created additional space in political science and related disciplines for research that foregrounds the analysis of meaning-making practices (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2015, see also Funk 2019).

Though situated at the nexus between *art and politics*, the present volume also hints at several ways in which economic dynamics inflect these domains, thus evoking a broader *cultural political economy* of Arab-Latin American relations. For example, Silvina Schammah Gesser (chapter 5) reveals how the celebrated Sephardic Argentine playwright Ricardo Halac included, in different works, oblique references to the aforementioned textile sector as an ethnic niche for Arab immigrants and their descendants, as well as "poignant criticism" of the country's Sephardic elite. Similarly, the aforementioned singer-entrepreneur Hankach was revealed to pursue his "passion" in the arts alongside a series of commercial activities, including ownership of tie and textile shops (Bercito, chapter 1). Evoking the significant community-building and educational role played by Brazil's organized Arab-descendant business elite, Karam (chapter 3), for his part, notes that it was the São Paulo-based *Câmara de Comércio Árabe-Brasileira* (Arab Brazilian Chamber of Commerce) that was responsible for the publication of an Arabic-Portuguese dictionary and Portuguese-language Arabic textbook. In this way, though trade is its stated remit, the Chamber—which, as of 2024, has operated for over 70 years—is also an agent of interregional cultural exchange.

That is to say, the cultural politics that are so usefully highlighted in this insightful, path-breaking volume are revealed by its contributors to unfold in myriad ways, including vis-à-vis economic dynamics related to class and (racialized) inequality, the formation of ethnic niche sectors, and the operations of business associations. Returning to Winn, it is notable in these regards that descendants of Juan Yarur currently run one of Chile's largest banks, the *Banco de Crédito e Inversiones*, which he helped to found in 1937.

Invoking the family trade and the aforementioned linkages between the cultural and economic spheres, another of his heirs inaugurated, in 2007, the *Museo de la Moda* in the former family mansion in the upscale eastern Santiago municipality of Vitacura. This fashion museum features "one of the world's largest collections of 1980s garments, accessories, and design objects," as indicated in the description of a forthcoming volume by its founder, and Juan's grandson, Jorge Yarur Bascuñán (Yarur Bascuñán 2025). Its grounds feature a statue of a sharply dressed Juan Yarur, in suit and tie. Such intersections between cultural phenomena and political economy bear further analysis, as do the oft-overlooked ways in which Arab schools, clubs, and social institutions in Latin America—as well as those associated with other typically middle-upper class "immigrant" communities—function as spaces for (elite) socialization, class reproduction (Ramos-Zayas 2020, Karam 2007), and the perpetuation of the myth of "racial democracy" (Karam, chapter 3).

In the context of the Israel-Gaza war and its reverberations in Latin America (Schwabe 2023), the recent dramatic expansion in Latin American-Middle Eastern trade to fill the voids left by the economic disruptions occasioned by the Russian invasion and occupation of Ukraine (Funk 2024c), the rising prominence of "South-South" discourses and linkages, and increasingly abundant cultural (and scholarly) production focusing on Latin American-Middle Eastern themes (Manero and Reali, chapter 8), such interregional cultural, political, and economic entanglements are becoming all the more salient. So is the need to critically analyze them, as well as the often-hierarchical and Orientalist-inflected milieu in which they unfold.

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This volume, the first of its kind, gathers interventions that showcase the twentieth century as a period of intense redefinitions and cultural effervescence across the whole of Latin America and the Arab world. It writes the history of the many cultural agents who have created bridges between the two regions.

This book is a superb contribution to the expanding cross-regional field of Middle Eastern / Latin American studies. The individual essays and the collective project as a whole illuminate intricate transnational connections afforded by the indispensable reframing of what is by now a newly constituted scholarly field-formation.
– **Ella Habiba Shohat**, Author of *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices*.

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