

BOOK REVIEW ESSAYS

Muslims, Moriscos, and Arabic-Speaking Migrants in the New World

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This essay reviews the following works:

Between the Middle East and the Americas: The Cultural Politics of Diaspora. Edited by Evelyn Alsultany and Ella Shohat. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013. Pp. ix + 334. \$41.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780472069446.

Forbidden Passages: Muslims and Moriscos in Colonial Spanish America. By Karoline P. Cook. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. Pp. 261. \$45.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780812248241.

More Argentine Than You: Arabic-Speaking Immigrants in Argentina. By Steven Hyland Jr. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2017. Pp. ix + 304. \$65.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780826358776.

Islam and the Americas. Edited by Aisha Khan. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015. Pp. vii + 331. \$32.00 paperback. ISBN: 9780813060132.

Crescent over Another Horizon: Islam in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latino USA. Edited by María del Mar Logroño Narbona, Paulo G. Pinto, and John Tofik Karam. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015. Pp. ix + 344. \$60.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781477302293.

The Mexican Mahjar: Transnational Maronites, Jews, and Arabs under the French Mandate. By Camila Pastor. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017. Pp. ix + 352. \$29.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781477314623.

Syrian and Lebanese Patrícios in São Paulo: From the Levant to Brazil. By Oswaldo Truzzi. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018. Pp. ix + 173. \$30.00 paperback. ISBN: 9780252083631.

This essay seeks to illuminate striking elements in Arab and/or Islamic migration and presence across the Americas through the analysis of seven recent books. These works by anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and interdisciplinary scholars in the humanities show an epistemological turn, overcoming a normative, hierarchical, and ahistorical perspective on cultural experiences associated with human mobility. With interdisciplinary analysis, these books point out the roles played by Arabic speakers (Christians, Jews, and Muslims) in diaspora throughout Latin America, emphasizing (1) the production of identities as Syrian/Lebanese, Turkish, Muslim, and Morisco on the continent; (2) the elaboration of new Orientalisms in the region, expanding on the concept coined by Edward Said; (3) the mobility between peripheries of global capitalism; and (4) the intellectual exchanges, cultural production, and construction of statements by those Arabic speakers and their descendants about themselves and about many different forms of otherness.

This “diasporic turn,” in Ella Shohat and Evelyn Alsultany’s happy expression (27), shows the process of breaking with the current historiography, rejecting the “methodological nationalism” (Pastor, 9) that has guided the approaches and documents chosen to explain the assimilation and integration of minorities in

national societies. The authors move away from the concept of *world areas*, which has attributed cultural units to regions around the world other than the West, to be observed, described, and explained by Western researchers. The authors have overcome the static character ascribed to the notion of culture in diaspora through the study of changes in experiences, discourses, and representations produced by the subjects. The historicity of culture and experience thus sets the tone for their analyses. Furthermore, the set of works clarifies distinctions that are easily confused in the popular imagination. First, most of the Arabic speakers who migrated to the region were Christians and Jews, not Muslims. The Muslim or Morisco presence in the Spanish Empire was largely composed of Iberians themselves, and then North and West African subjects. The association between the Arabic language and culture and Islamic religion, therefore, is not linear.

The presence of Arabic-speaking migrants and non-Arabic Muslims in Latin America grew from a set of migratory waves since the early beginning of European settlement in the continent. Between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, under Spanish colonization and Atlantic slavery, Iberian Muslims converted under force to Catholicism (called Moriscos), North Africans (enslaved, free, and freed persons), and enslaved people from West Africa made up the first Islamic groups to participate in the construction of the New World's societies and cultures. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Arabic speakers from the Ottoman Empire, which was undergoing a process of modernization, formed a distinct group of migrants to the Americas, mostly from present-day Lebanon and Syria: these were Maronite and Orthodox Christians associated with transnational trade networks. In the first half of the twentieth century, a third segment was formed by individuals from the same Lebanon and Syria, but in different historical, economic, and political contexts. In Latin America, these groups interacted with local communities, forming complex cultures that are constantly changing and redesigning themselves, fed by contemporary diasporas. They have guided the development of local "Orientalist" perceptions by negotiating identities between different religions, racial characterizations, and social classes.

Faced with the broad thematic, chronological, and geographical diversity addressed by the books under review, this essay is organized into three sections. The first deals with the Morisco presence in the Spanish Empire. It is followed by the analysis of mass migrations from the eastern Mediterranean to Latin America between 1870 and the first half of the twentieth century. Finally, general issues of three edited volumes will be discussed, highlighting the diversity of Muslim experiences in the Americas. Taken together, these works confirm the tendency toward historicization of culture and discourses about being, becoming, recognizing, or denying Muslim, Morisco, and Syrian/Lebanese identities in a part of the world where such belongings are not commonly stated as constitutive of its formation.

Muslims and Moriscos in the Spanish Colonial Empire

Karoline Cook's proposal in analyzing the Morisco presence in the Spanish Empire is groundbreaking. *Forbidden Passages* analyzes Castilian policies concerning Muslims in both Europe and America. Close attention is devoted to the processes by which these Moriscos (and even Muslims from North and West Africa), forbidden to cross the Atlantic to the New World, intruded into Spanish American colonial life as captive, free, or freed men and women. The author is keen to note distinctions within the Spanish Morisco community, their different levels of involvement with Castilian politics and with Iberian Islamic rebellions, and how these particularities influenced the constitution of the Spanish American Morisco community itself. The book's central point, however, concerns the way anxieties were created within the Spanish Empire through the immigration of Moriscos to the Americas and their incorporation into local elites. In light of this, denunciations of religious offenses at the Holy Office to harass political opponents and efforts to construct genealogical narratives claiming Christian ancestry were on the agenda of internal disputes of the Hispanic American elite.

Cook's work dialogues with another field well explored by historiography concerning the persecution of the New Christians (Jews converted to Catholicism) in the Iberian empires. The uses of "Moorish" and "Morisco" categories in colonial daily life are of particular interest to her, and she demonstrates how these terms could be appropriated by individuals or attributed to them in contexts of disputes for power and recognition. On the one hand, access to *encomiendas* or to positions as *familiares* of the Holy Office in a society marked by the *Estatutos de limpieza de sangre* required its plaintiffs to watch over their public image and to disentangle themselves from stigmas of Muslim descent. On the other hand, men who lived as healers could manipulate elements belonging to the Islamic identity, recognized by the Hispanic community as especially possessing magical and healing powers. However, the search for the construction of a Spanish imperial identity based on Catholicism made Islam its antipode, even used to categorize American Indigenous contexts in order to indicate what should be fought and uprooted in the New World.

Cook has done extensive research in Spanish, Peruvian, Mexican, and American archives and libraries. Her analysis underlines sources from Inquisitorial tribunals, in which cases for religious misconduct marked the lives of many Moriscos (or people accused of being Moriscos). Memorials, geographical and historical descriptions, chronicles, dictionaries, and compilations of colonial legislation are other documentary types accessed by the author. Her methodology is characterized by the analysis of documentation concerning Muslims and Moriscos in the colonial Spanish Empire in light of two perspectives. In the first, she structures her arguments within the internal dynamics of administration and control of the Spanish Empire, highlighting elements of the Catholic imperial identity and its impositions on the diversity of existing beliefs. In the second, she examines individuals' personal relationships and previous experiences, performing microhistorical exercises that allow her to relate cases from Mexico or Peru to broader cultural processes located in Spain and the Mediterranean, dealing with Muslim culture at large and political and religious conflicts in Castile.

Forbidden Passages highlights the discursive dimension of Iberian-American social relations. Cook discusses how speeches about Muslims and Moriscos were part of the vocabulary of belonging and exclusion in America (184) and helped to shape a Spanish imperial identity, gradually based on the concept of race. Therefore, and despite its rich documentation and thought-provoking analysis, the book may seem misleading to a reader seeking studies about the Islamic presence in the Americas. Cook focuses on statements about Muslim identity, not on the Muslim experience itself. Regarding the specific Islamic presence and its public expression in America, the book shows little, and it is unclear why Black African Muslims are disregarded in her discussion. Cook points out the role of North African Muslims, and she is aware of the impact of those coming from West Africa in the New World. The presence of Wolof, Mandinka, and Fula Muslims in Havana is well noted (50). Muslims from these ethnic groups were identified by other researchers, such as Sylviane Diouf, Michael Gomez, and John Tofik Karam (in Logroño Narbonna, Pinto, and Karam) and were very well represented in Latin America and the Caribbean for their knowledge of Quran literature, their ability to write in Arabic, and their resistance to slavery.¹

The presence of these African Muslims in the Americas is well documented in Hispanic sources, which indicate the public expression of Islam that they professed and the use of this element in the production of Christian speeches. The canonical process that sought to sanctify the Jesuit priest Pedro Claver, begun in 1657, declares the conversion of a Wolof Muslim to Catholicism in the city of Cartagena de las Indias, immediately after the missionary's death, as a miracle. Such a characterization, by itself, already highlights the difficulty faced by those who tried to convert African Muslims. Moreover, various witnesses in the canonical process have declared the wide presence of Black Muslims in the Spanish Caribbean.² Advancing the study of these Muslims in a more particular way than other researchers have already done may be a promising path to follow, especially now that Cook clarified the central role of discourses about being Muslim in Hispanic America. Even if West African Muslims have disappeared from Cook's approach, their existence has helped to shape the social speech that she studies. The book therefore allows the next researcher to better measure the weight of validation of Islamic identity by any Muslim faith adept in the Spanish American colonial context.

Turkish? Syrians and Lebanese in Latin America

The large Turkish migration waves, nowadays understood as Syrian/Lebanese, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were global phenomena that affected several societies. In Latin America, their legacy is lasting. In Brazilian presidential elections held in 2018, the runner-up was Fernando Haddad, an Orthodox Christian of Lebanese descent who was mayor of São Paulo, the largest Brazilian city. Before him, other members of the Syrian/Lebanese community in Brazil stood out in politics: Michel Temer, who was Dilma Rousseff's vice president and played a central role in her controversial impeachment, and Paulo Maluf, who was federal deputy, governor of São Paulo, and mayor of its capital, among others. In Argentina, Carlos Menem, the son of Syrian Muslim immigrants, held the presidency of the republic from 1989 to

¹ João José Reis, *Rebelião escrava no Brasil: A história do levante dos malês em 1835* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, [1986] 2003, edição revista e ampliada); Sylviane Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, [1998] 2013); Michael A. Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). I recently made a contribution to the theme studying Cartagena de Indias in present-day Colombia: Thiago Henrique Mota, "Religiosidade islâmica e diáspora africana na América: Muçulmanos jalofos em Cartagenas de Índias, século XVII," in *Estudos africanos, diálogos diaspóricos*, ed. Marcelo Pagliosa Carvalho (São Luís: EdUFMA, 2018).

² Thiago Henrique Mota, "Significados da escravidão para africanos muçulmanos: Ideias jurídicas e religiosas islâmicas no Mundo Atlântico (séculos XVI e XVII)," *Anos 90* (Porto Alegre) 26 (2019).

1999 after serving as governor of La Rioja Province. In Ecuador, former presidents Abdalah Bucaram (1996–1997) and Jamil Mahuad (1998–2000) are of Arab descent, as is El Salvador's current president, Nayib Bukele (2019–), of Palestinian origin. In the cultural industry, Mexican actress Salma Hayek and Colombian singer Shakira are of Lebanese ancestry. Notwithstanding the influence of this group, such facts have attracted little attention from researchers. Fortunately, the three books that make up this section differ from the choir.

Analyses by Oswaldo Truzzi, Camila Pastor, and Steven Hyland Jr. highlight the role played by social networks and the transformations of life in Greater Syria (the region encompassing the territories of today's Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and Palestine) between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in motivating migration. These changes were influenced by the *Nahda*, the Arab renaissance that began in Egypt in the nineteenth century and spread throughout the *Mashriq*—the eastern Mediterranean—and by the intense movement of administrative reforms produced by the Ottoman Empire. Due to these reforms, Ottoman provinces gained autonomy and some economic dynamism through the integration of the empire (as a whole) and its parts with Western economies. In this context, the three authors approach the phenomenon of Syrian/Lebanese migration through a global scale and the transformations experienced in the Mashriq.

Truzzi, in *Syrian and Lebanese Patrícios in São Paulo*, identifies family relationships as the main force driving migration, pointing out disputes between families over resources from abroad as the axis of family decision-making about sending children overseas (8). Hyland's *More Argentine Than You* emphasizes the role played by educational reforms and the expansion of Western denominational schools in the Turkish Empire (26). Access to information in these schools and the establishment of social networks through these institutions were decisive in motivating people's movements from Greater Syria to the Americas. The production of positive images of the West in these educational centers would cause a higher incidence of emigration in areas where schools were established. In addition to this attraction, the reason for departure was associated with local conditions, particularly a subsequent wave of economic stagnation and job shortages due to the opening of markets in the region to European products (Hyland, 32; Truzzi, 2–3; Pastor, 26).

More than highlighting these aspects of outward migration, Pastor, in *The Mexican Mahjar*, argues that mobility within the Ottoman Empire was already a reality before migrants traveled abroad (27–29). With the advent of technologies that facilitated long-distance movement, such as steamships, and with access to formal education and information, a middle class formed by peasants who became rich in the silk business went abroad. The return of these first enriched migrants was responsible for high expectations among the new generations, fostering the flow's continuity, followed by traders with international connections that facilitated their insertion into the job market in the destinations where they docked. Thus these three authors consider the context of origin in the construction of their arguments. However, their goals, methodologies adopted, and sources used are distinct.

Syrian and Lebanese Patrícios in São Paulo is the result of a doctoral dissertation defended by Truzzi in April 1993 and first published in Brazil in 1997, with a second edition in 2008. The English translation was published in 2018. The book focuses on the integration of Syrian and Lebanese immigrants into Brazilian society and their social rise to positions ranging from peddlers (a common occupation of this group throughout the Americas) to liberal professionals, doctors, and, finally, politicians. Among its conclusions, the *timing* of arrival of the first immigrants stands out, connected to the opportunities offered by the market. This argument is visible when Truzzi compares Syrian/Lebanese immigration in Brazil and in the United States and also when internal community stratification in Brazil is discussed. Truzzi points out the role that simultaneous and intergenerational social networks play in characterizing the success of certain individuals. Accumulations of social and symbolic capital in the same family and hierarchical social relations depending on the socioeconomic condition of the subjects were determining factors in their trajectories. Such stratifications were based on a symbolic economy founded on values and practices from both the society of origin and that of destination.

An analytical innovation made possible by Truzzi's thesis, especially in the Brazilian academic scenario, was to shift the focus from the presence of immigrants in rural contexts to the urban ground. In this exercise, the sociologist closely follows the research developed by Clark Knowlton in the 1950s, published in Brazil in 1961.³ His sources are newspapers, photographs, official documentation such as the *Boletim do Serviço de Imigração e Colonização*, and textual genres such as memoirs, biographies, and stories produced by Syrian/Lebanese intellectuals about their own community. At times, the adopted methodology proves to be fragile as it relies too much on the endogenous views present in the memoirs, stories, and

³ Clark Knowlton, *Sírios e Libaneses: Mobilidade social e espacial*, trans. Yolanda Leite (São Paulo: Anhambi, 1961).

biographies, sometimes complemented by Arab sayings, treated in an illustrative way. The book points to the impossibility of treating “Syrian-Lebanese” as an undifferentiated block; to the pitfalls of assimilationist analysis, which loses the conflict between local and origin identities; to negotiations in the production of new identities; and to community diversification into social, economic, and cultural subgroups. Although the central arguments remain valid, the book’s general structure must be analyzed in the context of its elaboration in the early 1990s, since the new publication has had few bibliographic updates besides the addition of the last chapter, “Afterword: Sociability and Values of Lebanese Muslim Families in São Paulo.”

More Argentine Than You is Hyland’s award-winning book published in 2017. It deals with the transition of the Arabic-speaking community in Tucumán Province, Argentina, from a foreign group to a well-integrated minority from the late nineteenth century up to 1946. Very well documented, it results from extensive research in archives and libraries in Argentina, France, Lebanon, Syria, and the United States. The work brings broad documentation from civil, commercial, and criminal court proceedings; diplomatic correspondence; annual statistics and censuses; and government publications, literature, and the press. Through these sources, the author seeks to understand the mechanisms involved in adapting, integrating, and developing new social identities in a group of immigrants over successive generations.

Inserting his research object in the context of migrations from Europe and Asia to the Americas, Hyland argues that local and global factors influenced Syrian/Lebanese integration in Tucumán. These include worldwide economic cycles, interpersonal networks related to places of origin and destination, time of arrival in Tucumán, place of birth, religious identity, nationalist ideologies, and political contexts in Argentina and Greater Syria, as well as local economic and social conditions. Through this set of variables, Hyland notes that by the late 1940s, Syrian and Lebanese identities had become variations of Argentine identity. The consulted sources allow him to argue that the integration process occurred through the incorporation of Argentine national symbols associated with respect for the traditions of Greater Syria, as the place of many families’ origin. To the children of immigrants born in northwestern Argentina, Syria and Lebanon were references of origin but not of destination; the nationalist disputes in the Mashriq no longer mattered to them.

The Mexican Mahjar, by Camila Pastor, published in 2017, is an innovative book with creative reading of sources and well-designed chapters. It deals with the period since 1870, mostly from the 1920s to the 1940s, aiming to explain the diasporic waves from the Mount Lebanon region to Mexico. The work’s ethnographic features reach into the twenty-first century, looking into the production and management of memories by migrants and their descendants. Dialoguing with the disciplinary fields of history and anthropology, Pastor distances herself from what she calls methodological nationalism, stating that such a perspective has “focused on migrants’ lives in the context of reception, with little serious attention to their sustained mobility, the history of their place of origin or the ways in which that context continues to inform their trajectories as they dwell in movement” (9). She focuses on Mexican established migrants coming from the former Ottoman Empire and their relationship with France, after the establishment of the French Protectorate (1920) in the Mashriq as a result of World War I. In the 1940s, this relationship extended to the new countries of Lebanon and Syria. The subjects were mostly Arab Maronite Christians and Arab Jews.

This construction of the object of study leads to a conceptual arsenal distinct from the majority of works on human mobility. Its reference is not the people’s assimilation by the states in which they come to live, but their very experience lived in the movement; the production of culture and strategies to fulfill their projects; and the economic, political, and emotional relations lived by them between the occupied places. In this context, the concepts of migrant, Mashriq, *Mahjar*, and *Mahjari* take on new contours: the subjects’ experience and point of view are what matter the most. Thus concepts such as “Middle East” and “Levant” give way to the Mashriq, the Arabic speakers’ understanding about their macro-region of origin in the eastern Mediterranean. The Mahjar is the universal place of the Arab diaspora, a foreign land, not a specific destination (hence the need for its classification as Mexican). Such considerations show that the state and the society in which individuals would build their stories were not defined in advance. Once abroad, there were possibilities to move among different countries before settling in a specific one. Hence, *Mahjari* is applied to those who live abroad, the migrant on the move. It does not mean emigrant/immigrant in the sense of one who leaves/enters a state. It must be noted, however, that the transnational perspective does not underestimate the national state. Pastor points out how the movement between different legal regimes and the living conditions under national laws structured Mahjari experiences but did not determine them.

The investigation comprised research in French, Lebanese, and Mexican public and private archives, interviews, ethnography, and published texts such as national histories, stories of migrant communities, cookbooks, and family memoirs. Thus the anthropologist makes an original analysis of a historical process of global features from local perspectives and unique points of view, flirting with the field of microhistorical

studies, well known to historians. The variety of documents gives her access to a broad analytical spectrum, from French policies on human movement in the French protectorate in Lebanon to family memories and the underground history that persists in cookbooks. The analysis of the latter is particularly interesting when confronted with national narratives or collective memories and stories built by the community to legitimize their present by validating their past in socially accepted terms in the Mahjar symbolic goods market.

Such documentary richness and its careful reading lead to important conclusions about culture transformation and Mahjaris' active agency. The narratives constructed about the Lebanese identity as Phoenician, Phoenicia being the first cradle of Western culture and civilization and, therefore, a common bond between Lebanese and Spanish in Mexico, is a good example of this process. The same claim arises around the Christian religion, in which the Lebanese stands as defenders, which turns them into partners of the Creole elite in their self-appointed task of "civilizing" American Natives (Pastor, 147–152). This finding leads to the realization that the success of the Syrian/Lebanese community in Latin America cannot be dissociated from the context of race relations lived on the continent. As Pastor (147) points out, members of the Lebanese community in Mexico presented themselves as racially superior to the local Indigenous population, seeking a shared identity with the Hispanic-descendant Creole elite.

The racial element is prominent not only in Pastor's analysis. Concerning Brazil, Truzzi argues that "Syrians and Lebanese followed the general tendency of other groups of immigrants, who quickly learned of the undesirability of association with Afro-Brazilians" (44). Hyland, however, does not address the issue. The demotion of this debate is dangerous, since it makes the structural racism in force in Latin America an invisible element, flirting with the liberal thesis of immigrants' individual merit in social ascension as an exclusive result of their work and effort. However, it must be remembered that once freed from racism, which ruled the labor market in the New World after the abolition of slavery, the Arabic-speaking newcomers were able to integrate themselves in societies marked by selective exclusion. Thus to advance the study of migrations in the Americas, it is necessary to recover the concept of race, central in the lived social relations in this part of the globe, from either the domestic or external perspective. It is known that the Brazilian state, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, legislated in favor of European and Asian immigration. Eugenic science drew public policies to whiten the country's population through the 1934 Brazilian Constitutional Charter. In this context, Syrians/Lebanese were incorporated into the white sector of the Latin American population and were not subjected to structural obstacles to their social ascension, despite the xenophobic prejudice expressed in the term *Turk*. The local condition of being white made it possible for them to maintain the established opposition to those already excluded in domestic scenarios: Indigenous and Black peoples.

A point tangential to the three books is the historicity of culture and the realization that an ahistorical ethnic identity referring to a mythical land of origin is an inadequate resource for studying migration. Syrian, Lebanese, and Syrian-Lebanese identities in Latin America result from historical processes of cultural constitution on a transnational scale, since migrant communities in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico changed their self-conception according to the policies produced after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. It was at this time that migrants ceased to be Turks, once they had entered Latin America with Turkish passports, and then became protégés under the French Protectorate (1920) in the Mashriq, and finally turned into subjects of new national states: Lebanon (1943) and Syria (1946). Homeland politics have been reflected in Mahjari communities, which started to claim Syrians, Lebanese, or Syrian-Lebanese epithets and applied them to their institutions abroad (Truzzi, 59; Hyland, 69–70; Pastor, chap. 6).

From a religious viewpoint, the three works share a consensus that most Syrian/Lebanese migrants in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico were Christians (either Maronites, who are Eastern-rite Catholics in communion with the Holy See, or Orthodox) or Jews, to the detriment of Muslims. This indicates elements that supported migration and were reaffirmed by the diasporic communities: Christian denominational schools, trade relations with the West, and the role of religious minorities in the Muslim Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, the production of religious identities did not happen homogeneously. In Argentina, religion was not a central element in articulating identities, and the existence of religious institutions did not prevent members of different traditions from sharing seats in secular organizations and celebrating social events such as weddings and births (Hyland, 2). In Mexico, the Maronite Christian religion was regarded as the main feature of Lebanese identity, opposed to Syrian (geographical and political) and Jewish (religious), and seeking support from both the French protectorate and the local Creole elite (Pastor, 156–157). In Brazil, the strong emphasis on Christianity and openness to Westernization professed by the Syrian-Lebanese sought to separate this part of the community from their Muslim fellows, identified by them with features seen as vulgar (Truzzi, 45). The historicity of culture is striking in the comparison between these studies. They

demonstrate that the preservation of supposedly static original identities is not verified in the empirical analysis, which shows local constructions of Syrian/Lebanese identities and their dilemmas.

Historicity of Culture: Constructions and Meanings of Islam in the Americas

The historicity of culture is central to *Between the Middle East and the Americas: The Cultural Politics of Diaspora*, edited by Evelyn Alsultany and Ella Shohat; *Crescent over Another Horizon: Islam in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latin USA*, edited by María del Mar Logroño Narbona, Paulo G. Pinto, and John Tofik Karam; and *Islam and the Americas*, edited by Aisha Khan. These books question the supposed dichotomies between Islam and an idea of the West, rhetorically constructed in opposition to an idea of the East and Islam. The criticism of Edward Said and Talal Asad has entered deeply into these volumes.⁴ They highlight different discursive perspectives that structure various Orientalisms, advancing Said's proposal and demonstrating how global peripheral contexts, such as Latin America, built and build particular images of how "East" looks. At the same time, they consider Islam as a discursive tradition of historical and relational character, according to Asad. This implies a broadening of the analytical spectrum of Muslim participation in the Americas, in the constitution of its textual universe and in the analysis of how Islam on the American continent is built, signified, publicized, and understood.

In advancing the postcolonial studies agenda, the editors and authors focus their studies on becoming Muslim, rejecting the essentialism embedded in this field of studies. They argue that the concept of *world areas* has delimited geographies as cultural units and clouded the perception of culture's exchange, circulation, and historicity. Seeking to escape from this approach, the methodological procedure adopted in these books can be adequately described by Khan's term, "creative skepticism" (4), meaning to question accepted epistemological criteria and advance over established certainties. Once American connections with the global Muslim community are placed at the center of the discussion, new issues emerge in the public debate. Some of them are (1) the production of new Muslim identities in Latin America and the Caribbean in opposition to either US imperialism or homogenizing Eurocentric and Christian national identities; (2) the circulation of ideas among Muslim intellectuals around the world, highlighting circuits other than the Western Atlantic; and (3) the impact of the concept of race on Islamic identities in the Americas. With contributions that emphasize different ways of being and recognizing Muslims, the book edited by Khan, published in 2015, in particular corroborates the historical perspective and discursiveness proposed by Asad. According to Khan, "Islam is never simply a self-referential history about itself" (20).

Appearing in 2013, Alsultany and Shohat's book aims to favor the study of Muslim immigration in the Americas by enhancing relationships and connections across the continent and elsewhere, with emphasis on cultural practices. As they point out in the introduction, distinctive elements of Islamic and Middle Eastern cultural practices have grown in the United States, particularly in the context of mass culture consumption. The paradox, however, is that such growth takes place in the context of the expansion of Islamophobia in the country. As a result, the book's chapters focus on the production, circulation, and consumption of discourses about the "Middle East." This geographical-cultural concept, as such, is criticized by the volume editors for its inaccuracies and its inherent Eurocentrism as a normative product of European Orientalism to classify the world based on itself. Nevertheless, it is precisely this inaccuracy that justifies the use of the term, which explains the contradictions and ambiguities carried by popular usage. The focus is on the *idea* of Middle East, rather than on a supposed existing-in-itself geographical area essentially determined by cultural area studies.

"From a Latino American subject position, what does an Islamic world, one that is more 'global' than conventionally assumed, look like?" This is the fundamental question posed by Logroño Narbona, Pinto, and Karam (3–4) in presenting *Crescent over Another Horizon*, published in 2015. Seeking to escape the limitations of area studies, the volume's authors are less interested in cultural essentialism or Islamic features in America and more likely to discuss the different Muslim subjects' perspectives and experiences over space and time. In line with Arjun Appadurai, a new geography is sought throughout the volume in which place does not frame who individuals are supposed to be but is the space from which one relates to the world. What is sought is to understand how Muslims shaped, and were shaped by, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Latino United States. Therefore, it is important to understand how Muslim subjects imagined and built the global Muslim community (*umma*) from the Americas. By centering on subjects' experiences, the national space and its limitations become fluid: the field of experience and the production of meanings about *being* Muslim vary over time and across borders in connected places.

⁴ Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (Washington, DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1979).

The topics covered have thematic and analytical affinities, along with the fact that the authors of the books under review circulate among the edited volumes: Pastor and Cook have chapters in Logroño, Narbona, Pinto, and Karam's collection; the latter authors refer to Khan's edited book in their introductory chapter. This observation underlines constitutive elements of the field of study, escaping territorial limitations and emphasizing transnational analysis from various perspectives. In this context, it is worth highlighting the role of cultural production, diffusion, and consumption in the characterization of this "diasporic turn." Important to the works contained in these volumes, such elements have been enhanced by internet and digital social networks, in the construction of (new?) Islamic identities. According to Karim Tartoussieh's chapter, digital space has been used for sociability, virtual learning, and online religious performance, as well as for the production of other forms of Orientalism, such as those associated with the Arab male body in the production and consumption of gay pornography (in Alsultany and Shohat, 228). Jerusa Ali notes that in the face of racism, Brazilian Black people may seek access to religious instruction and sources for Islamic knowledge online rather than going to mosques, especially in the city of São Paulo, to avoid public discrimination (in Khan, 196).

Internet access has enabled the production and maintenance of cross-border Islamic identities exceeding the Arab culture. In this regard, an emblematic case to add to these chapters is that of the Muslim Senegalese presence in South America. As remarked by the Venezuelan anthropologist Fanny Longa Romero, most of the Senegalese Muslims are characterized by the mobility linked to the Mouride Muslim networks. The Mourides are supporters of the Mouridyia brotherhood, a Muslim brotherhood founded in Senegal at the end of the nineteenth century. Longa Romero has shown how these new migrants use technological resources, such as Facebook pages, to structure their networks and maintain unity in the diaspora through access to Mouride Senegalese symbols.⁵ Such elements underline historical identity constructions in Islamic diasporas and contribute to better understanding the act of becoming Muslim in the Americas, emphasizing the plurality of meanings embodied by Islam and its connectedness around the world. This is the rich analysis running throughout these three volumes.

Final Considerations

In 2001, shortly after the 9/11 attacks, Brazilian television started broadcasting the soap opera *O Clone*, which was relayed to several other Latin American countries and the United States. As discussed by Shohat and Alsultany (4), this soap opera shows an aspect of Brazilian Orientalism that, along with the belly dance popularized by the Colombian Shakira in the late 1990s, has contributed to the construction on a continental scale of a discourse about a "Middle East" opposed to the narratives of violence and fear emerging after 9/11. These narratives, in turn, have been built up from earlier academic and political positions forged on Samuel Huntington's thesis about the end of the Cold War and the subsequent "clash of civilizations" that would oppose West and East, another "Orientalist" reading. In the Americas, therefore, the production of discourses about being Muslim or descending from Arabic speakers was guided by the juxtaposition of public, academic, political, and cultural statements and their reworking in daily life.

The set of books analyzed in this essay breaks with linear narratives not only by refusing them but also by allowing the reader to understand them in their historical and cultural contexts. These books demonstrate how peoples of Arabic background, being Muslim, Christian, or Jewish, acted in the constitution of the Americas. It shows how this continent came to be part of the Muslim global community through local production, diffusion, appropriation, and transformation of narratives about Islam. Latin American Muslims have been part of the global Islamic exchange by elaborating images of themselves, their otherness, and the world they see. Latin American, peripheral, exotic, or tropical Orientalisms—as conceptualized by several authors reviewed here—evidence impressions of Islam and Arab worlds (Muslim or not) that make up imaginaries, stereotypes, dislikes, and enchantments. The discourses of and about Arabic speaker migration and Islam, therefore, are constitutive elements of Latin American experiences as a whole, opening up a long-neglected history.

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⁵ Fanny Longa Romero, "O simbolismo de poder de líderes mourides em plataformas virtuais: Enraizamentos históricos, dinâmicas identitárias e rituais multissituados," in *Estudos sobre África Ocidental: Dinâmicas culturais, diálogos atlânticos*, ed. Raissa Brescia dos Reis, Taciana Almeida Garrido de Resende, and Thiago Henrique Mota (Curitiba: Editora Prismas, 2016).

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