SOUFFLES
ISSUE 6

FALL 2026

OTHER-THINKING, OTHER-SOUTHS:

Latin America and the Maghreb



Cuba Si
1961, Farid Belkahia

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Hisham Aidi and Randa Jebrouni, "Introduction: Other-Thinking, Other-Souths: Latin America and the Maghreb" 1

2. Nizar Messari and Silvia Ferabolli, "Coloniality and Decoloniality in the Maghreb and in Latin America: Crossed Perspectives" 8

3. John Karam, "Grounds of a Global South: Coffee, Brazil, and the Maghreb, 1860s–1960s" 25

4. Yaelle Azagury, "A Moroccan Filmmaker in Venezuela: A Century of Margot Benasseraf" 52

5. Amine Bit, "Abdelkébir Khatibi in Caracas" 64

6. Phoebe Carter, "Ambivalent Brotherhood: An Ottoman Arab Imam's Travels among the Muslims of Brazil" 77

7. Gana Ndiaye, "São Paulo is the New Fez: The Formation of a Senegalese Tijani Community in Brazil" 94

8. Youssef Boucetta, "Marruecos en Coquimbo: Notes on the Mohammed VI Center for the Dialogue of Civilizations" 109

9. Brahim Harchaoui, "Abd al-Krim al-Khattabi's 'Message to the Peoples of Latin America'" 121

10. Yassine Akouh, "Abdelkrim al-Khattabi, the Rif War and Latin America" 143

11. Zeyad El Nabolsy and Migdalia Arcila-Valenzuela, "From Oriental Despotism to Anti-Imperialist Vanguard: The Image of North Africa and the Middle East in Latin American Political Thought" 163

12. Beatriz García Fuentes and Shadi Rohana, "What We Are: Poems from the Arabic-Triqui Collective Translation Workshop, Oaxaca" 178

13. Biel Delgado Trabal, "Decolonizing Solidarity: Puerto Rico and Palestine from the Bay Area to North Africa" 185

14. Cynthia Gonzalez, "Muslimness and Indigeneity in Mexico City" 211

15. Julieta Chinchilla, "Non-Aligned Women: The Exchanges between the Federation of Cuban Women and the National Union of Algerian Women (1962–1978)" 228

TRADUCCIONES

16. Eman Morsi, "Cuba en Árabe y los Límites de la Solidaridad del Tercer Mundo" 242

17. Shadi Rohana, "América Latina en la revista palestina Al-Karmel" 282

EDITORIAL

18. Mhammed Benaboud, "Teaching Al-Andalus in Peru" 300

"Other-Thinking, Other-Souths: Latin America and the Maghreb"

Introduction

Hisham Aidi and Randa Jebrouni

On December 12–13, 2025, the Asociación de Amistad Marroquí Iberoamericana, led by its president, Randa Jebrouni, a research professor in the Department of Hispanic Studies at Abdelmalek Essaâdi University in Tetouan, and Hisham Aidi, editor of *Souffles* magazine, convened a conference in Tangier entitled "Latin American Studies in the Maghreb." Scholars from Morocco, the Americas, and beyond gathered for four panels devoted to travel writing and displacement, migrating texts, transatlantic feminist discourse, and the politics of decolonization and the Global South. The conference concluded with a conversation with the writer Mohammed Serifi about his prison memoir, *El Cielo Cuadrado*. This issue of *Souffles* brings together essays emerging from that conference, tracing cultural, political, and economic exchanges between North Africa and Latin America whose histories are older—and more deeply intertwined—than the historiographies of either region have generally acknowledged.

The timing is deliberate. Sixty years ago, in January 1966, the Tricontinental Conference convened in Havana, bringing together delegates from Africa, Asia, and Latin America in what its organizers hoped would become the founding moment of a unified Tricontinental movement of the formerly colonized world. Souffles emerged the following year as one of the most distinct literary and political manifestations of the Tricontinental project. It published translations of Latin American writers through its partnership with Havana's Casa de las Américas, debated the relevance of Latin American revolutionary thought for North Africa, and gave expression to what the Moroccan sociologist Abdelkébir Khatibi called decolonial "other-thinking."

To publish this issue on the anniversary of the Havana gathering is therefore not simply to ask what remains of the Tricontinental tradition. It is also to look further back, tracing relations between Latin America and North Africa to an era well before the 1966 conference. The essays gathered here reveal connections that took shape through anti-colonial struggles, migration, trade, intellectual exchange, trade, religious networks, diplomacy, and translation. We have organized the contributions from the Tangier conference into five thematic clusters.

I. The Rif and the Americas

Three essays revisit the figure whose presence looms over this shared history: Abdelkrim al-Khattabi, the Riffian leader whose defeat of Spanish forces at Anoual in 1921 reverberated far beyond North Africa. Yassin Akouh's essay reconstructs Abdelkrim's campaign of public diplomacy—his letters, interviews, and appeals to the League of Nations—as an early critique of the colonial international order. His interventions found attentive readers among intellectuals and journalists in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Peru. Brahim Harchaoui's pieces narrows the focus to a single document: Abdelkrim's December 1924 letter addressed to the peoples of Latin America and written to commemorate the centenary of the Battle of Ayacucho in Peru, that ended Spanish rule in most of mainland South America. Harchaoui reads the letter as an act of genealogical construction, reaching back through Simón Bolívar and Antonio José de Sucre to forge a common anti-colonial internationalism linking the Rif, the Arab world, and Latin America. He also reminds us that Moroccan–Latin American diplomatic contact predates the twentieth century, going back to Sultan Moulay Abderrahmane's recognition of Gran Colombia in 1827.

Zeyad El Nabolsy and Migdalia Arcila-Valenzuela's "From Oriental Despotism to Anti-Imperialist Vanguard" traces the place of North Africa and the Middle East in Latin American political thought, from Bolívar's use of the language of "Oriental despotism" in his critique of Spanish rule to the subsequent reimagining of the Maghreb and Mashreq as sites of anti-imperialist vanguard politics. Taken together, these essays reveal a relationship that moved in both directions: Latin American revolutionaries drew upon the political vocabulary and example of the Rif, even as Riffian leaders actively cultivated Latin American solidarity as a political strategy.

A fourth essay examines this history through a more explicitly theoretical lens. In their contribution, Silvia Ferabolli and Nizar Messari adopt a dialogic approach. Ferabolli, writing from Brazil, examines Maghrebi thought through Abdelkebir Khatibi, while Messari, writing from Morocco, approaches Latin America through the work of Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui and Lélia Gonzalez. Their exchange points toward something *Souffles* has long aimed for: a mode of comparison that illuminates difference rather than dissolving it into an undifferentiated "Global South."

A fifth essay returns to Khatibi himself and to his encounter with Latin America in Caracas, Venezuela. Amine Bit traces how Khatibi's training as a sociologist—at the Sorbonne under Albert Memmi, and later as director of Morocco's Institute of Sociology until its closure by the state in 1970—shaped his subsequent engagement with Latin American thought. In 1973, Khatibi attended an international sociology conference in Caracas as its sole African participant. Bit reads this encounter as reinforcing Khatibi's critique of the limits of Western functionalism and as contributing directly to his formulation of "double critique": the imperative to interrogate both the intellectual legacy of the West and the traditionalism of the Arab-Islamic world. For Khatibi, Bit argues, the relationship between the Maghreb and Latin America was never one of contradiction but of translation.

II. Journals, Organizations, and the Limits of Solidarity

Three essays turn from historical genealogy to the concrete institutions and practices through which Tricontinental solidarity was produced—and to the limits that shaped it. Eman Morsi's "Cuba en árabe y los límites de la solidaridad del Tercer Mundo," appearing here in *Souffles*'s own translation, argues that despite deep diplomatic and military ties between revolutionary Cuba and the Arab world, sustained cultural exchange remained limited. Linguistic barriers and state-mediated festivals left Cuban literature largely inaccessible to Arab readers, while Cuba survived in Arabic primarily in the figure of Che Guevara, who, especially after 1967, was referenced to condemn the corruption of Arab leaders rather than to evoke the realities of the Cuban revolution. Morsi highlights another significant connection: Guevara's guerrilla strategy itself drew upon Abdelkrim al-Khattabi's campaign in the Rif, returning us back to this issue's opening theme.

Shadi Rohana's "América Latina en la revista palestina Al-Karmel" recovers a less familiar instance of successful cultural exchange. His essay examines Mahmoud Darwish's Beirut-based journal and, in particular, its landmark 1982 dossier, which published interviews with Gabriel García Márquez and Julio Cortázar alongside translations of Mexican and Paraguayan writing. Through these interventions, *Al-Karmel*'s editors treated Latin America not simply as a political ally, but as offering a conception of literature that could be aesthetically ambitious and politically engaged. Julieta Chinchilla's essay turns from journals to organizations, tracing the transnational exchanges between Cuba's Federación de Mujeres Cubanas and Algeria's Unión Nacional de Mujeres Argelinas from 1962 to 1978. Through these exchanges, the two federations developed a distinctly Third World feminist politics—anti-imperialist and anti-racist, and organized around the figure of the "madre-guerrillera"—that consciously distinguished itself from both Western feminism and Soviet women's organizations. Together, these essays suggest that Third World solidarity was most effective not where it was proclaimed in the abstract, but where translators, editors, and organizers undertook the patient work of creating material and institutional connections.

III. Coffee, Empire, and Devotional Networks

Three essays uncover networks of material and devotional connection that emerged well before the Global South appeared as a political ideal. John Karam's "Grounds of a Global South: Coffee, Brazil, and the Maghreb, 1860s–1960s" follows Brazilian coffee as it moved through Algiers, Casablanca, Rabat, Tangier, and Tunis, traded largely through British and French intermediaries even as Moroccan Jewish return migrants and Brazilian diplomats established more direct ties. Karam traces these connections from an 1861 exchange of horses and cannon between Dom Pedro II and a Moroccan prince, through orientalist debates in Rio de Janeiro's parliament, to a 1969 cup of Brazilian coffee served to King Hassan II in Casablanca. The movement of coffee provides a material infrastructure for solidarities that a later, more romanticized Third World project would claim to invent.

Yaëlle Azagury's essay turns from trade to cinema, tracing the Moroccan Jewish migration to Venezuela sometimes known as "hacer la América." She follows this history through Fortunato Benacerraf, who left Tetouan for Venezuela's Caribbean coast around 1900, and his daughter, filmmaker Margot Benacerraf (1926–2024).

Despite the international acclaim for her landmark films *Reverón* (1953) and *Araya* (1959), Azagury explores Benacerraf's relative invisibility in the Latin American cultural canon, linking it to both gender and class, as well as the unresolved complexities of her Sephardi diasporic identity. Drawing partly on her own family's migration from Tangier to Caracas, Azagury approaches Benacerraf's story as both scholar and inheritor.

Phoebe Carter's essay follows a parallel (devotional) route across the Atlantic. In 1865, a hurricane diverted an Ottoman naval vessel to Rio de Janeiro, where its imam, ᶜAbd al-Raḥmán al-Baghdādī, encountered a community of enslaved and free (Malê) Muslims of West African descent who had been forced underground following the violent suppression of Bahia's 1835 uprising. Al-Baghdadi spent three years teaching Arabic literacy and Islamic practice among Brazil's Muslim communities before returning to Istanbul and composing a travelogue that Carter reads as early evidence, for Ottoman and Arab readers, that the *umma* extended into the New World. Yet the text, she argues, represents neither straightforward solidarity nor simple bigotry. Instead, it embodies what she calls an "ambivalent brotherhood:" a fraternity grounded in shared faith but complicated by al-Baghdadi's anxieties about the Malê community's Blackness and imperfect Arabic. Gana Ndiaye's piece "São Paulo is the New Fez: The Formation of a Senegalese Tijani Community in Brazil" extends this devotional history into the present. Ndiaye traces the Tijaniyya Sufi order, historically anchored in Fez, as it has taken root among African migrant communities in São Paulo, creating an unexpected living counterpart to the Moroccan city on the other side of the Atlantic. Together, these essays remind us that the relationships later articulated through Tricontinental politics were carried not only in manifestos and political congresses, but also in cargo holds, marketplaces, mosques, and synagogues.

IV. Diplomacy and Cultural Memory

Another dimension of this issue is more personal and archival, recovering histories preserved largely through family memory and institutional memory. Veteran Moroccan historian Mhammad Benaboud's "Taking Al-Andalus to Peru" recounts a lecture tour to the Catholic University and the University of Lima, where Al-Andalus became, not simply a nostalgic cultural evocation, but a shared heritage through which new connections with Peruvian audiences could be imagined. Youssef Boucetta's family memoir of the Mohammed VI Center for the Dialogue of Civilizations in Coquimbo,

Chile, offers a more intimate account of Moroccan–Latin American exchange. As the son of Abdelhadi Boucetta, Morocco's former ambassador to Chile, he recalls watching an exact replica of Marrakech's Koutoubia rise over a Chilean port city following a casual 2002 conversation between his father and the mayor of Coquimbo. The story captures the unpredictable ways in which diplomatic encounters can become lasting monuments to cultural memory.

V. Diaspora and Indigeneity

The final cluster turns to the contemporary and the lived, asking what Tricontinental solidarity might mean today and where it takes shape beyond the institutions that once defined it. Biel Delgado-Trabal's "Decolonizing Solidarity: Puerto Rico and Palestine from the Bay Area to North Africa" examines the uneven work of coalition-building among Latinx and Arab/Maghrebi communities in Northern California. He argues that a decolonial solidarity worthy of the name must reckon honestly with the class and racial positions occupied by its own "cultural workers." Cynthia Hernández González's study of Muslim converts in Mexico City examines how a small community interprets its experiences of racism and mestizaje through contemporary Muslim anarcho-leftist thought.

Beatriz García Fuentes and Shadi Rohana document a remarkable experiment in translation: a collective workshop held in Oaxaca in May 2025, in which members of the Triqui Collective and graduate students of Arabic translated a poem by the Palestinian poet Ibrahim Nasrallah into Triqui, an Indigenous language of Oaxaca, and a Triqui poem by Marcos Sandoval into Arabic, with Spanish serving as a bridge language between two peoples who have each experienced, in different ways, the violence of dispossession. If the Tricontinental Conference imagined solidarity primarily through relationships among states and liberation movements, these essays locate its contemporary possibilities elsewhere: in cultural centers, migrant communities, intellectual networks, and the patient, word-by-word work of translation.

Next Steps

Souffles was never a journal of the Maghreb alone. From its earliest issues, it understood North African letters as inseparable from a broader anti-colonial and Tricontinental conversation. Sixty years later, the essays gathered here do not so much revive that conversation as demonstrate that it never fully ended. It migrated into new

institutions, disciplines, communities, and languages, while returning repeatedly to the same foundational intuition: that the struggles and intellectual traditions of the Maghreb and Latin America illuminate one another and, in important ways, depend upon one another. In December of this year, *Souffles* will publish a companion issue bringing together essays in Spanish, contributed largely by literary critics, and extending this dialogue into the language in which so much of this intellectual and cultural exchange has historically unfolded.

We are grateful to the Asociación de Amistad Marroquí Iberoamericana, to our Hispanist colleagues at Abdelmalek Essaâdi University, and to *Souffles* for convening the Tangier conference from which this issue grew. We are equally grateful to the contributors whose work, in its many forms and registers, has helped us return once more to one of *Souffles*'s oldest questions: What becomes possible when thinking the Maghreb and Latin America together?

The Editors
Souffles

Coloniality and Decoloniality in the Maghreb and in Latin America: Crossed Perspectives[1]

Silvia Ferabolli and Nizar Messari

Introduction

Decolonial thought has become one of the most vibrant fronts in contemporary critical debates within the social sciences and humanities. By questioning the alleged universality of Western knowledge, authors such as Aníbal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, Arturo Escobar, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, and Lélia Gonzalez re-center historically subalternized epistemologies that assert themselves both as forms of resistance and as horizons of liberation. Emerging from Latin American experience, this theoretical tradition rejects that there has been a break between the colonial and the post-colonial moments, and advance instead the notion of coloniality: the enduring logic that outlived formal colonialism and continued to shape the modern world through three intertwined dimensions—hierarchies of power, hierarchies of knowledge, and the denial of being, that is, the systematic dehumanization of colonized subjects. In the Arab and Maghrebi worlds, thinkers such as Edward Said, Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, Frantz Fanon[2], Fatema Mernissi, and Sophie Bessis have reinterpreted these enduring structures in light of their own trajectories, opening pathways for rethinking identity, knowledge, and political practice in contexts marked both by European colonial legacies and by internal struggles over cultural hegemony.

Despite their geographical distance and a history of limited intellectual and political exchange, Latin America and the Maghreb provide fertile ground for critical comparison. Their trajectories, while heterogeneous, converge in the experience of colonial domination

[1] This research was partially supported by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), Brazil.

[2] Frantz Fanon is referred to here as Algerian because, although born in Martinique, he consciously embraced Algeria’s anti-colonial struggle as his own. He joined the FLN, served in its provisional government, repeatedly wrote of “we Algerians,” and was ultimately buried in Algerian soil. His Algerian identity was therefore a matter of political choice and commitment rather than birth.

and in the persistence of coloniality as a structuring force of social practices and regimes of knowledge. Against this backdrop, this article explores possible dialogues between Latin American and Maghrebi strands of decolonial thought, identifying both convergences and divergences. The exercise does not seek to dissolve historical and cultural differences, but rather to demonstrate how different local responses can collectively enrich the global repertoire of decoloniality. By situating Latin America and the Maghreb in a comparative perspective, we aim to contribute to the re-imagination of knowledge production in the Global South. The goal is not to construct an artificial symmetry, but to highlight shared challenges and differentiated strategies, showing how dialogue between these regions expands the horizons of decolonial critique. In this sense, recent African critiques of Latin American decoloniality (see, for instance, Pillay 2021) further complicate these dialogues, reminding us that decolonial trajectories are deeply situated and cannot be universalized. Our analysis is organized around two axes: indigeneity, conceived both as a legitimate locus of epistemic enunciation and as a terrain of political resistance, though persistently subjected to silencing; and religion, examined as a paradoxical arena where dynamics of domination and possibilities of emancipation intersect.

Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations

While our readings draw upon a broad constellation of scholars from Latin America and the Maghreb, the conversations we privilege in this article are those with Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, Lélia Gonzalez, and Abdelkébir Khatibi. Our approach is deliberately structured around crossed perspectives: one of us, a Latin American scholar, engages Maghrebi thought through Khatibi, while the other, a Maghrebi scholar, approaches Latin America through Rivera Cusicanqui and Gonzalez. It is worth noting that our choice of Khatibi is not only theoretical, but also reflects the structural asymmetries of knowledge production in the Global South. Access to Maghrebi thought beyond Arabic remains unevenly distributed across academic geographies, and authors whose work might offer distinct significant engagements with coloniality—such as Mohammed Abed al-Jabri— are harder to access for Latin American scholars due to the linguistic barrier, since their intellectual production in Arabic has seldom been translated to Latin American languages[3]. As the Latin American co-author of this article is unable to read Arabic with the depth this undertaking requires, Silvia

[3] It is worth noting here that when books by Mohammed Abed al-Jabri were translated to Portuguese, the translation was not directly from Arabic, but from French. In other words, the Brazilian reader of al-Jabri could only read him through a French gaze.

Ferabolli’s engagement with the Maghreb—like her own writing—necessarily unfolds through colonial languages: French and Portuguese. She encounters the Maghreb through the language of its colonizer, just as she speaks and writes through the language of her own colonizer. This painful condition reveals how coloniality continues to structure academic circulation, determining who can read whom, and under what terms. Khatibi’s work, articulated in French and through post-structuralist registers, becomes readable across these fractured academic geographies, enabling a transversal dialogue with Latin American critical traditions—while simultaneously exposing the epistemic losses that such mediation entails. This predicament resonates directly with Rivera Cusicanqui’s critique of the coloniality of knowledge. Rivera Cusicanqui joins several Decolonial Latin American scholars in arguing that colonialism not only dominated territories but also imposed regimes of knowledge that relegated indigenous cosmologies and orally transmitted knowledge to the status of “folklore” or “superstition.” But she differs from other fellow Decolonial scholars as she anchors her reflection in local thinking and solidly links it with praxis. According to her, Mignolo and others use community based ideas and local concepts, oversimplify them, not to say, sterilize them, to then present them to their Western colleagues. But as they do so, all they achieve is to advance their own careers by pretending to be original and locally anchored thinkers, instead of advancing the agenda and the cause of the population they say they represent. As opposed to that, Rivera Cusicanqui argues that those populations do not need to be given a voice, since they have it and can speak for themselves (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2021, 109). Instead, what they need is to be listened to and taken seriously, which is seldom the case. She operates the latter praxis as she sees what she calls an internal colonialism, a concept initially articulated by Pablo González Casanova,[4] which ultimately refers to the ways in which national elites reproduce colonial hierarchies—through the concentration of land ownership, the monopolization of political power, and the imposition of cultural assimilation—thereby consigning indigenous peoples and peasants to enduring conditions of exclusion and structural dependency. This form of domination also silences the voices of dissent of indigenous and black populations by adhering to and defending the legitimacy—if not the supposed superiority—of the European narrative of universalism and absolute scientific truths. Internal colonialism, far from being merely a political or economic

[4] Pablo González Casanova was a Mexican scholar and thinker from UNAM, the National University of Mexico, who argued that independence did not necessarily lead to independence, as internal elites continued the exploitation of their economies for their own advantage. Rivera Cusicanqui gave the concept a more sophisticated meaning as she used it to refer to spheres beyond the economy.

arrangement, is also an insidious colonialism of the mind, insofar as it legitimates colonial thinking by giving it a local iteration and presenting it as a local voice.

With this concept of internal colonialism, it becomes possible to understand why Latin American states—whether in Argentina and Chile, in the Southern Cone where the indigenous population is relatively small; in Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador, in the Andean region where indigenous presence is significant; or in Brazil, where official statistics indicate that the majority of the population is black and brown—have nonetheless identified themselves as Western, claiming that lineage not only in terms of language and lifestyle but also in ontological and philosophical terms. This has resulted in the marginalization and sidelining of large parts of the population, both black and indigenous, along with their modes of thinking and knowledge production.

Another activist scholar who has emphasized the other unheard voice in Latin America was Lélia Gonzalez. This Brazilian thinker uses the concept of amefricanidade/amefricanity to argue that far from carrying an exclusive European heritage, Brazil and Latin America have also significantly been shaped by African and indigenous identities and cultures. Gonzalez, who is known for her black activism, argued insistently that Brazilian history has mistakenly been presented as a white European descendent history. According to her, the contribution of afro-descendants not only to Brazilian culture but also to the country’s struggle for independence is undeniable, though consistently marginalized, silenced or undermined in the national official and intellectual narratives. Those contributions and their concomitant silencing continued in independent Brazil, notably with the attempts to encourage European immigration in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, that effort not only continued but intensified, in particular under the military regime that lasted from 1964 to 1985 (Gonzalez, 2022, 17). Consequently, and in order to reflect those distinct lineages and their contributions to the subcontinent’s history, identity and culture, Gonzalez proceeded with the renaming of the territory known as Latin America as “Ladin Amefrica” (Rios and Lima, 2020).

Back to Rivera Cusicanqui, her other valuable contribution to the argument we make here is her use of the concept *senti-pensar* (“feel-thinking”), which was first used by the Colombian thinker Orlando Fals Borda. With sentipensar, Rivera Cusicanqui defends forms of knowledge rooted in collective praxis, refusing to separate reason from emotion or thought from body (Scauso, 2021, 173). By affirming this inseparability, she challenges the Cartesian and colonial hierarchies that have historically devalued indigenous ways of knowing, and in doing so, repositions indigeneity not as an object of study described by others, but as a

legitimate locus of epistemic enunciation, capable of producing its own theories and interpretations of the world. This local, grassroot, praxis-oriented, way of thinking, does not seek to trace some middle ground between a West that is all about rationality and a rest that is all about feeling and emotion. Instead, it rejects such dichotomies and empowers local views and ways of thinking in order to confront challenges and deal with a unique and universal narrative. This is exactly what she does with her concept of ch’ixi, a local indigenous, Aymara way of social reproduction that sees that things can at the same time be and not be, which she sees as different from hybridity (da Silva, 2024, 8). With ch’ixi, Rivera Cusicanqui wants to simultaneously overcome and nurture the contradictions instead of avoiding them through hybridity or métissage, which she considers to be a continuous reproduction of a European understanding of synthesis and homogenization as the ultimate resolution of difference.

Among the several concepts articulated by Rivera Cusicanqui in her reading of Latin American decolonial thought, this article foregrounds five—namely, the necessary return to local, community-based knowledge; the centrality of praxis; the overcoming of internal colonialism through the valorization of indigenous and black contributions; the refusal to separate thinking from feeling, expressed in the notion of *sentipensar*; and, as a consequence, the articulation of a third way, which is embodied for her by ch’ixi, that is not a synthesis but an overcoming of contradictions. These concepts will then be placed in dialogue with four central ideas in Khatibi’s thought: *double critique*, *pensée-autre*, *métissage* and the vision of a *Magreb pluriel*. Indeed, in the Maghreb, Abdelkébir Khatibi advanced a critique analogous to that of Cusicanqui, yet distinct in its strategy, developed across both theoretical and autobiographical registers. In *Maghreb pluriel* (1983), he formulates the concept of double critique, a simultaneous refusal of Eurocentric universalism—which elevates its own experience as the measure of humanity—and Arab-Islamic homogenization, which erases internal plurality in the name of essentialism. Against both, Khatibi defends the plurality of inheritances as constitutive of Maghrebi identity, insisting that no single tradition—Arab, Islamic, Amazigh, or French—can exhaust the region’s meaning. From this tension emerges his idea of pensée-autre (other thought): a way of thinking that inhabits the entre-deux (in-between), refusing closure and cultivating métissage as a horizon of thought. His vision of a Maghreb pluriel foregrounds the interplay of multiple legacies where difference is sustained rather than assimilated. If *Maghreb pluriel* (1983) articulates these ideas in theoretical terms, *La Mémoire tatouée* (1971) explores them autobiographically, tracing how they are inscribed on the body. Here, Islam appears not only as a language of belonging and resistance against

colonial intrusion, but also as a disciplinary structure that regulates gender relations, sexuality, and social hierarchies, particularly through patriarchal authority. Religion, memory, and language thus function both as resources of emancipation and as instruments of regulation. By linking the personal to the political, Khatibi demonstrates that the struggle over Maghrebi identity cannot be reduced to an external confrontation with Europe, but must also reckon with the internal inscriptions of power within local traditions.

If Rivera Cusicanqui breaks with the Cartesian dichotomy that separates thought and body and rejects hybridity and métissage, Khatibi, by contrast, disrupts linear notions of identity, showing instead how subjectivity in the Maghreb is always fractured, layered, and open-ended. Unlike Rivera Cusicanqui, he cultivates métissage as the affirmation of the plurality of Arab, Amazigh, and European colonial inheritances that constitute the aesthetic, political, and epistemic conditions of Maghrebi identity. This divergence, however, is less a fundamental opposition than a difference in strategy: while Rivera Cusicanqui dismisses hybridity as a reproduction of colonial logics, Khatibi reworks métissage through his double critique, transforming it into a tool for unsettling both Arab thought in its limitations and Western thought in its hegemonic claims. In these terms, pensée-autre emerges as a possible way of engaging aspects of local heritage and placing them in relation with generative elements of Western thought—as in the dialogue between Islamic art and Western aesthetics. By contrast, Rivera Cusicanqui does not engage in a critique of local thinking but rather embodies it. In other words, each is deeply embedded in their own environment and engages it in order to confront its particular challenges. Taken together, their perspectives form the theoretical foundation of this article, guiding our reading of indigeneity and religion not merely as cultural dimensions, but as political and epistemic battlegrounds traversed by coloniality.

Axis 1 – Indigeneity

Building on these formulations, the analysis of indigeneity reveals processes of silencing and insurgent epistemic practices. In Latin America, the materialization of internal colonialism was the marginalization of the indigenous population from national narratives, public spaces, and structures of political power. As for indigenous resistance, it took several forms, all of which rescued local ways of thinking, of acting, of producing knowledge and of transmitting it. In Ecuador, for instance, Manuela Picq (2013) discusses how Kichwa women challenged state sovereignty–a state that has been instrumentalized by local leaders as the embodiment of a European heritage—through taking the Ecuadoran state to international

justice and defending their agency and the legitimacy of their voices through international courts. In order to face a double marginalization–internal colonialism both as indigenous people and as women– Kichwa women had to affirm their agency through international courts, emphasizing thus their distinctiveness as indigenous people in the country. Bolivia provides an additional, although distinct, Latin American example. In Bolivia, which indigenous population varies between 43% and 62.2%, depending on the estimates, until the revolution of 1953, the indigenous population was not allowed to be in the main squares of Bolivian cities. Along the same lines, that country had been exclusively ruled by white, European descendent, presidents since its independence in 1825 until 2006, when Evo Morales was the first indigenous president elected. A turning point that allowed this development to take place was the 1990 March for Territory and Dignity, which, in line with Rivera Cusicanqui’s argument and in parallel to it, underlined the existence of an indigenous question in the country and fostered an awareness of the structural discrepancies that had led to the marginalization of the indigenous population in Bolivia (Gumucio, 1996). In other words, Rivera Cusicanqui’s insistence on rescuing the distinctiveness of the indigenous people in Bolivia was echoed by activists who marched and brought the indigenous question into the public sphere. Despite this, it was only after the election of Morales that those disparities began to be addressed, culminating in the refoundation of the state as a Plurinational one in the 2009 constitution (Nilsson, 2013). Those developments in Bolivia — the election of Evo Morales, the new constitution– would not have been possible without the rescue of the legitimacy of the contribution of the indigenous thinking to which Rivera Cusicanqui’s concept of ch’ixi and her defense of the indigenous distinct way of producing knowledge solidly contributed. In Brazil, indigenous mobilizations have gathered annually at the Acampamento Terra Livre (Free Land Camp) in Brasília since 2004 and have articulated demands ranging from the demarcation of ancestral territories and environmental protection to the consolidation of political rights and recognition of the country’s ethnic plurality. These encounters brought together hundreds of indigenous peoples from diverse regions of Brazil and exemplify the political articulation of an epistemology that rejects assimilation and asserts diversity as a foundation of democracy[5] . In this sense, the total marginalization and silencing of the indigenous population in different Latin American settings and societies necessitated a long struggle that brought together social resistance and academic activism in order to open spaces for the distinct voice of the indigenous population in the subcontinent.

[5] https://apiboficial.org/atl2022/

In the Maghreb, the Amazigh issue has also been present in the political agenda, though in historically distinct ways from Latin America. Whereas in Latin America indigeneity is largely articulated vis-à-vis European settler colonialism, Amazigh mobilizations unfold in relation to Arabized postcolonial states. In Morocco, for instance, from the 1980s onward, Amazigh mobilizations coalesced into a sustained movement that directly contested Arabization and demanded recognition of Tamazight, the valorization of Amazigh culture, and the protection of indigenous knowledge, thus underscoring how indigeneity in North Africa is relational and historically contingent. Arab presence in the Maghreb predates European colonialism by more than thirteen centuries, emerging through long processes of Arabization and Islamization beginning in the seventh century. Arabs, therefore, cannot be read simply as external settlers: their belonging is the outcome of a historical process of indigenization. “Indigenous” here signals layered histories of inhabitation shaped by shifting configurations of power, rather than an original or fixed essence.

Earlier, the post-independence Moroccan state dismissed Amazigh claims as colonial legacies of “divide-and-rule,” invoking the Arab–Berber distinction institutionalized under French rule only to deny its legitimacy and to subsume Amazigh difference within an Arab-Islamic narrative of unity (Wyrtzen, 2011). It was not until the political opening of the 1980s that Amazigh associations and intellectual networks carved out space for activism, publishing newsletters and local periodicals and staging cultural events; over the following decades, this grew into a wider ecosystem that included journals such as *Asinag*, as well as major festivals like *Timitar* in Agadir and the *Festival de la Culture Amazighe in Fez*, thereby asserting Amazigh collective identity as a political and cultural force. While for decades after independence, the monarchy alternated repression and co-optation, the creation of the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture (IRCAM) in 2001 and the 2011 constitutional reform, which made Tamazight an official language, marked symbolic breakthroughs—though implementation has remained limited. When approached through Khatibi’s double critique, these mobilizations illustrate the dual labor of challenging colonial legacies while also contesting post-independence narratives of unity. On one front, Amazigh intellectuals and associations challenged the Eurocentric categories that had long reduced their language and culture to folklore or colonial anthropology. They did so by codifying Tamazight in written form and mobilizing it in literature and scholarship, contesting its confinement under French rule to colonial taxonomies. On another, they resisted the postcolonial state’s reliance on an Arab-Islamic discourse of cultural essence that sought to erase plural identities in the name of

national unity. By reclaiming Tamazight as both a linguistic practice and a political horizon, Amazigh activism enacted what Khatibi called a pensée-autre: a refusal of fixed identities and a commitment to plurality and métissage. In praxis, this meant reworking elements of local traditions through their encounter with Western categories, neither rejecting the former nor imitating the latter, but enacting the kind of double critique and *pensée-autre* that Khatibi envisioned. Rather than demanding assimilation into a homogenizing project, these movements affirmed a Maghreb “pluriel”, where Arab, Amazigh, and Islamic legacies meet without collapsing into a single essence, while the French legacy enduring as the indelible scar of colonial memory.

In Algeria, parallel dynamics unfolded. The 2001 ‘Black Spring’ protests in Kabylie were sparked by the killing of Massinissa Guermah, an 18-year-old high school student from the region, by a member of the Algerian National Gendarmerie. His death ignited mass mobilizations that addressed the long-standing political and cultural marginalization of Kabyle communities. The protests gave rise to the Arouch Movement, which became the main vehicle for institutionalizing Amazigh demands, pressing for democratization, regional autonomy, and recognition of Tamazight (McDougall, 2017). The state combined repression —the clashes resulted in over 120 deaths and thousands of injuries—with incremental concessions, granting Tamazight “national language” status in 2002 and elevating it to “official language” in 2016. These reforms reconfigured national identity but, as scholars note, implementation has lagged behind symbolic recognition, reflecting the limits of accommodation within an authoritarian political system (IWGIA 2025). To read the Algerian ‘Black Spring’ in light of Khatibi’s thought, one must be aware that French colonial rule institutionalized what came to be known as the “Kabyle myth”: the idea that Kabyles were “almost ‘European’ in their nature” and therefore less “Arab” than the rest of the Algerian population, a racialized distinction deployed as a classic strategy of divide-and-rule (see Silverstein 1996; 2004). Against this legacy, the 2001 Arouch Movement did not embrace Kabyle exceptionalism but instead demanded recognition of Tamazight and democratic rights within Algerian citizenship. In this sense, their mobilization unsettled both the colonial categories that had essentialized Kabyle difference and the postcolonial state’s homogenizing Arab-Islamic narrative—an embodiment of the dynamics of double critique. By articulating claims for democratization and regional autonomy alongside the recognition of Tamazight, Kabyle activists enacted a form of pensée-autre—a thought that resists closure and insists on plurality. Their mobilization not only contested state repression but also gestured toward a Maghreb “pluriel”, where diverse identities could coexist without being subordinated to

authoritarian definitions of unity. In this sense, the “Black Spring” challenged not only specific policies but the very grammar of Algerian nationalism, exposing its exclusionary foundations and reasserting the possibility of a Maghreb of multiple inheritances. Yet this episode was not an isolated eruption: it was part of a longer trajectory of marginalization and resistance in Kabylia, marked most starkly by the “Black Decade” of the 1990s, when successive massacres of Kabyle people—carried out by both the regime and Islamist groups, though more intensely by the latter—sought to silence their voices. The Black Spring thus needs to be understood less as an exception than as a continuation of that violent history, and as another moment in the enduring struggle of Kabyle communities against erasure and repression.

Axis 2 – Religion

If indigeneity reveals parallels of exclusion and resistance, religion demonstrates the dual role of tradition as both an instrument of domination and a potential vehicle for emancipation. In Latin America, religion was also the space to question European universalism: Christianity—historically mobilized to legitimize colonization, slavery, and patriarchy—was reconfigured by certain theologians into a discourse of liberation and popular organization under the rubric of Liberation Theology. In Brazil, beginning in the 1960s, Liberation Theology re-appropriated Christianity in the name of the poor and marginalized (Carvalhaes and Py, 2017). By interpreting the Gospel through the lens of the concrete oppression experienced by rural and urban communities, thinkers such as Gustavo Gutiérrez and Leonardo Boff transformed religion into an instrument of resistance against authoritarian regimes as well as structural and economic inequalities (Camilo, 2011). In El Salvador, the work of figures such as Archbishop Óscar Romero, who was assassinated in 1980, and of grassroot ecclesial communities, illustrated how Liberation Theology became a political practice of resistance against military repression and the violence of Central American dictatorships. With this, religion ceased to be an instrument of oppression, a tool for conservative thinking and status quo, as it became a tool for emancipation. How did that happen, i.e., how did religion become a tool for change? And what did that mean concretely?

To answer these questions, it is important to note the parallel context of the Catholic Church and of Latin America. The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) introduced significant changes aimed at modernizing the Church and bringing it closer to the people. In Latin America, these reforms coincided with the rise of military dictatorships, which, by and large, were supported by the Church hierarchy. Against this backdrop, a sector of the Latin

American Church developed Liberation Theology, which, as mentioned above, was a movement that aligned itself with the poor and dispossessed in opposition to capitalist exploitation and authoritarian rule (Löwy, 2000). This stance generated a paradoxical dynamic: the more these religious leaders stood with popular sectors against injustice, the more they provoked the ire of military regimes, whose repression in turn deepened the leaders’ bonds with the very communities they sought to defend. It was hence in that context that Liberation Theology transformed part of the religious leadership into a tool for change instead of status quo. Another key element that explains that evolution was positionality: those theologians contested the pretendedly universal and conservative meaning that the religious text was having and proposed against it an alternative reading, a locally embedded one. With that, if religion could be considered by some as a discourse and a force for status quo, other possible and legitimate readings considered it a force of change, a force for the oppressed to struggle for change. A final element that explains that evolution was the embeddedness of those theologians in their communities. Indeed, it is that proximity of the leaders with their people and the compatibility of their views that gave force and legitimacy to Liberation Theology.

The consequence of that is that Christianity could have multiple readings, and that the Western and European interpretations not only were not universal, but were only one specific interpretation among many possible others. In sum, in Latin America, with religion as with indigeneity, there is a strong claim for a local interpretation, a local reading of texts and concepts, based on local communities and their challenges within their contexts. In this sense, there is a clear intent not only to distinguish the region from Europe, its universalism and its identity, but also to confront the internal colonizer in it and liberate the region from it.

In the Maghreb, Islam is the common identifier of the population of the region. Both Amazigh and Arabs claim their attachment to their religion, and although some Amazigh do see Islam as the religion of the invader and call for the right to practice other religions, or even, to be atheists, they represent a very small minority. In Morocco, for instance, the 1930 Dahir Berbère sought to separate Arabs and “Berbers” by placing Imazighen under customary rather than Islamic law. Intended to fragment anti-colonial resistance, it instead provoked broad opposition: Arab and Amazigh elites, religious leaders, and nationalists mobilized Islam as a shared framework of resistance (Wyrtzen 2015). The controversy fostered a nationalist discourse that made Islam the ultimate marker of Moroccan unity, eclipsing linguistic and ethnic diversity. While remembered as a failed colonial measure, its long-term legacy was to elevate Islam as a unifying signifier while legitimizing Arab-Islamic hegemony

and marginalizing Amazigh recognition. Within Khatibi’s conceptual framework, the Berber Dahir illustrates the duality of religion as a marker of national identity—at once a force of anti-colonial solidarity and a vehicle of exclusion. In *La Mémoire tatouée* (1971), Khatibi reflects on the intimate ways Islam was inscribed in everyday life in Morocco, not only as a spiritual horizon but also as a disciplinary structure regulating gender relations, sexuality, and social hierarchies. This patriarchal dimension, often overlooked in nationalist accounts, reveals how the mobilization of Islam against colonial rule was double-edged: it offered a language of emancipation while it also naturalized forms of domination within society. Seen through the lens of double critique, the rejection of the Dahir exposed colonial manipulation but also reinforced a homogenizing Arab-Islamic narrative of cultural essence that constrained plural identities. Khatibi’s autobiographical meditation makes visible this tension: religion as memory and belonging, yet also as inscription on the body—of women, of minorities, of those who bore the marks of otherness. In this sense, the legacy of the Dahir was not only political but also epistemic and corporeal, demonstrating how state-sponsored nationalist Islam—mobilized as a discourse of Arab-Islamic unity—resisted colonial fragmentation while simultaneously reinforcing patriarchal hierarchies in postcolonial Morocco. Although Amazigh communities were themselves Muslim, their cultural and religious practices often reflected more heterodox and less rigidly patriarchal interpretations —such as women’s active role in oral poetry and local rituals—which were delegitimized by the state’s promotion of a rigid orthodoxy anchored in male authority.

Echoing this pattern, in Algeria the National Liberation Front (FLN) drew on Islamic symbols as part of a nationalist language of sovereignty during the independence war (1954–1962). In the post-independence period, however, that idiom became one of the legitimating grounds for the consolidation of conservative gender hierarchies—as codified in the 1984 Family Code (see Charrad 2001; 2012)—while Amazigh language and culture were simultaneously marginalized under an Arab-Islamic nationalist narrative. This ambivalence—Islam first mobilized by the FLN as a unifying idiom of anti-colonial liberation, and later weaponized in the violent confrontation between the Algerian state and Islamist movements claiming to embody the nation’s ‘true’ essence—became brutally evident in the 1990s after the army cancelled the December 1991 elections, in which the Islamic Salvation Front had won the first round and was poised for overall victory. According to Martinez (2000), the ensuing ‘Black Decade’ exposed the paradox with tragic clarity: armed groups such as the Armed Islamic Group and the Islamic Salvation Army targeted state officials, media professionals, and foreign residents, while security forces and militias responded with

widespread repression. Within this generalized violence, Amazigh communities—particularly in Kabylia—were also singled out, their cultural practices and heterodox religious expressions denounced as threats to Islamist orthodoxy (Silverstein, 2004; McDougall 2017). In Algeria, at that particular political juncture, intellectuals, artists, and ordinary civilians became emblematic victims of a trajectory in which Islam, once invoked as a language of liberation, was turned into an instrument of coercion. These dynamics highlight the profoundly ambivalent role of religion in Maghrebi politics: at once a shared idiom of anti-colonial struggle and a contested field where recognition, repression, and resistance are continually renegotiated.

Placed side by side, these cases highlight the paradoxical duel between liberation and oppression: religion both legitimizes and contests political orders. It can function as an instrument of coloniality, yet also as a motor of decolonial resistance.

Conclusion

This article has shown how thinkers in Latin America and the Maghreb have generated different intellectual and political responses to deal with similar exclusions and comparable marginalizations produced by coloniality. Rivera Cusicanqui’s insistence on praxis, sentipensar, and ch’ixi, and Gonzalez’s notion of amefricanidade, reconfigure the Latin American landscape by reclaiming indigenous and Afro-descendant contributions as constitutive of collective identity. Khatibi’s double critique, pensée-autre, and vision of a Maghreb pluriel articulate a parallel intervention: one that resists both Eurocentric universalism and Arab-Islamic homogenization by affirming plurality and métissage as the conditions of Maghrebi subjectivity. These scholars go back to their communities and environments (Rivera Cusicanqui through her activism in the Katarista movement advocating Aymara rights, Gonzalez through her activism in the Brazilian Black movement, and Khatibi through his academic work at Mohammed V University and his involvement in communist and student activism) to look for ways to resist and to deal with their predicaments. And although they do not necessarily offer similar paths for dealing with those challenges, they share similar objectives of resistance and emancipation. While in Latin America, and for Rivera Cusicanqui in particular, decolonization has meant rejecting western universalism and its ways of knowing, in the Maghreb, and for Khatibi particularly, it has entailed neither imitating the West, nor rejecting it outright, since métissage can bring an answer to the challenges faced by Maghrebi societies. In both regions, hence, the double critique reflects the double struggle that is necessary, against the West, but also against the internal

colonization. And the only answer that exists is going back to resistance, praxis and grassroots. Taken together, these dialogues underscore that decoloniality must be thought of as a constellation of situated practices that confront coloniality in its multiple power-knowledge-being articulations and contradictions. Comparative engagement between Latin America and the Maghreb thus expands the horizons of critical thought, revealing how different genealogies of struggle illuminate one another.

As scholars of International Relations, we also feel compelled to offer a final reflection on the nexus between the struggle for the emancipation of politically marginalized minorities subjected to internal subalternization and the broader struggle against the perpetuation of imperial structures of power at the international level. For us, it is not only the Maghreb that can be imagined as pluriel – Latin America and what is conventionally referred to as the Arab world can also be understood in plural terms. The very concepts of the Arab world (of which the Maghreb is a part) and Latin America (where a substantial proportion of the population – numbering in the hundreds of millions – is not Indigenous, Black, or mixed-race, but rather descended from Arab and European immigrants, especially in the Southern Cone and parts of Brazil) should not be reduced to racial, ethnic, or religious identity frameworks posited as inherently oppressive and exclusionary. Such reductions– whether of Arabness or of Latin Americanness–ultimately serve the interests of those who benefit from fragmented regions. This is an urgent question with which decolonial praxis must contend. In fact, these reductions have historically disempowered both the Arab world and Latin America, undermining them epistemically and politically while eroding their collective capacity to act in global politics. Initiatives such as U.S. and Israeli projects for a “New Middle East,” European endeavors like the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, or hemispheric schemes such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas are but a few examples of external attempts to fill the void left by the regions’ inability to act collectively. Emancipation, therefore, requires not only resisting global and local hegemonies but also reclaiming a collective identity as a possible horizon of solidarity and historical agency. Otherwise, indigenous peoples once again risk being trapped in a false choice: either subjugation to external colonial powers or accommodation within hegemonic nationalist regimes.

Indeed, any meaningful collective agency in Latin America or the Maghreb can only emerge through the recognition and incorporation of the mosaic of actors that constitute both spaces. Endeavors such as the one we propose—to read decolonial struggles in comparative perspective, across regions so geographically distant and shaped by such distinct forms of colonization—can nurture the necessary transversal conversations as an ongoing practice of

mutual recognition, one that affirms difference as a condition of solidarity and reimagines the Global South as a plural site of epistemic production and political possibility.

Silvia Ferabolli is affiliated with the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. Nizar Messari is affiliated with Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco.

This research was partially supported by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), Brazil.

Bibliography:

Camilo, Rodrigo A. L. 2011. “A Teologia da Libertação no Brasil: Das Formulações Iniciais de sua Doutrina aos Novos Desafios da Atualidade.” https://files.cercomp.ufg.br/weby/up/253/o/Rodrigo_Augusto_Leao_Camilo.pdf.

Carvalhaes, Cláudio, and Fábio Py. 2017. “Teologia da Libertação: História, Temas e Nomes.” *CrossCurrents* 67 (1).

Charrad, Mounira M. 2001. *States and Women’s Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

———. 2012. “Family Law Reforms in the Arab World: Tunisia and Morocco.” Report prepared for the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Division for Social Policy and Development, Expert Group Meeting: *Good Practices in Family Policy Making: Family Policy Development, Monitoring and Implementation: Lessons Learnt*, New York, 15–17 May.

Da Silva, Giovani José. 2024. “‘Dar voz’ ou ‘dar ouvidos’ aos subalternizados? O ‘Sul global’ em perspectiva na obra de Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui.” *Tempo e Argumento* 16 (43).

El Shakry, Hoda. 2022. “The Ontology of Becoming.” *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*. Published online May 25. https://doi.org/10.1017/pli.2022.xxx.

Gonzalez, Lélia, and Carlos Hasenbalg. 2022. *Lugar do Negro*. 3rd ed. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar.

Gumucio, Mariano Baptista. 1996. *Breve Historia Contemporánea de Bolivia*. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA). 2025. “The Indigenous World 2025: Algeria.” April 25. https://iwgia.org/en/algeria/5617-iw-2025-algeria.html.

Khatibi, Abdelkébir. 1971. *La Mémoire tatouée*. Paris: Éditions Denoël.

———. 1983. *Maghreb pluriel*. Paris: Éditions Denoël.

Löwy, Michael. 2000. *A guerra dos deuses: religião e política na América Latina*. Petrópolis: Vozes.

Lyamlahy, Khalid. 2019. “The Professional Stranger: On Abdelkebir Khatibi’s ‘Plural Maghreb.’” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, December 3. https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-professional-stranger-on-abdelkebir-khatibis-plural-maghreb/.

Martinez, Luis. 2000. *The Algerian Civil War, 1990–1998*. New York: Columbia University Press.

McDougall, James. 2017. *A History of Algeria*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nilsson, Martin. 2013. “Bolivia under the Left-Wing Presidency of Evo Morales – Indigenous People and the End of Postcolonialism?” *International Studies – Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural Journal* 15 (1).

Picq, Manuela L. 2013. “Indigenous Worlding – Kichwa Women Pluralizing Sovereignty.” In *Claiming the International*. London: Routledge.

Pillay, Suren. 2021. “The Problem of Colonialism: Assimilation, Difference, and Decolonial Theory in Africa.” *Critical Times* 4 (3).

Rice, Alison. 2010. “Translating Plurality: Abdelkébir Khatibi and Postcolonial Writing in French from the Maghreb.” *Comparative Literature Studies* 47 (4): 455–484.

Rios, Flavia, and Márcia Lima, eds. 2020. *Lélia Gonzalez: Por um feminismo afro-latino-americano – ensaios, intervenções e diálogos*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar.

Rivera Cusicanqui, Silvia. 2012. “Ch’ixinakax utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization.” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111 (1): 95–109. https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-1472612.

———.. 2021. *Ch’ixinakax utxiwa: uma reflexão sobre práticas e discursos descolonizadores*. São Paulo: n-1 Edições.

Scauso, Marcos S. 2021. *Intersectional Decoloniality: Reimagining International Relations and the Problem of Difference*. London: Routledge.

Silverstein, Paul. 1996. “Berbers in France and Algeria: Realizing Myth.” *Middle East Report* 200 (Fall): 11–17.

———. 2004. *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Wyrtzen, Jonathan. 2011. “Colonial State-Building and the Negotiation of Arab and Berber Identity in Protectorate Morocco.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43 (2): 227–249. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743811000043.

———. 2015. *Making Morocco: Colonial Intervention and the Politics of Identity*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Grounds of a Global South: Coffee, Brazil, and the Maghreb, 1860s - 1960s

John Tofik Karam
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, USA

This paper asks how coffee waxed and waned as the material grounds between Brazil and the Maghreb, namely Morocco and to a lesser extent Algeria and Tunisia, from the 1860s to the 1960s. Coffee stimulated possibilities between global peripheries and stirred up risks of replicating asymmetries with the metropoles. Nearly a century before the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung and the idea of a "tiers monde" (Third World),[1] now called the Global South, Brazilian coffee was variably savored, sold, and spoken about in Arabic and French across Algiers, Casablanca, Rabat, Tangier, Tunis, and elsewhere. Whether promoted as "al-bun al-brazili" or "café du Brésil," Brazilian coffee in the Maghreb preceded and played off of, but was precluded by, what became an Afro-Asian-led Third World. During the mid-twentieth century, decolonizing African and Asian states increased coffee exports that came to undercut Brazil's global dominance. Accordingly, this paper materializes a Global South before it became an ideal and idealizes coffee as an unresolved source of power between what Hisham Aidi calls the "connected histories" between the world's margins.[2]

Drawing upon new materialism and transimperial history, my first aim is to outline a "common geostory" where coffee has the "capacity to establish more or less numerous relationships … especially reciprocal ones," as conceptualized by Bruno Latour.[3] Coffee acted upon, and was acted upon by British, French, Luso-Brazilian, Moroccan, Ottoman, and Spanish imperial crowns and subjects. Overwhelmingly produced in Brazil, consumed and traded by Euro-America, as well as initially rapt and resold across the Maghreb (as well as the Mashriq and Misr), coffee beans "make imperial history visible in ways that … transnational history has not," to paraphrase Kristin Hoganson and Jay Sexton.[4] In the nineteenth century, Brazilian coffee planters and government authorities saw their country as the world's largest coffee-producer

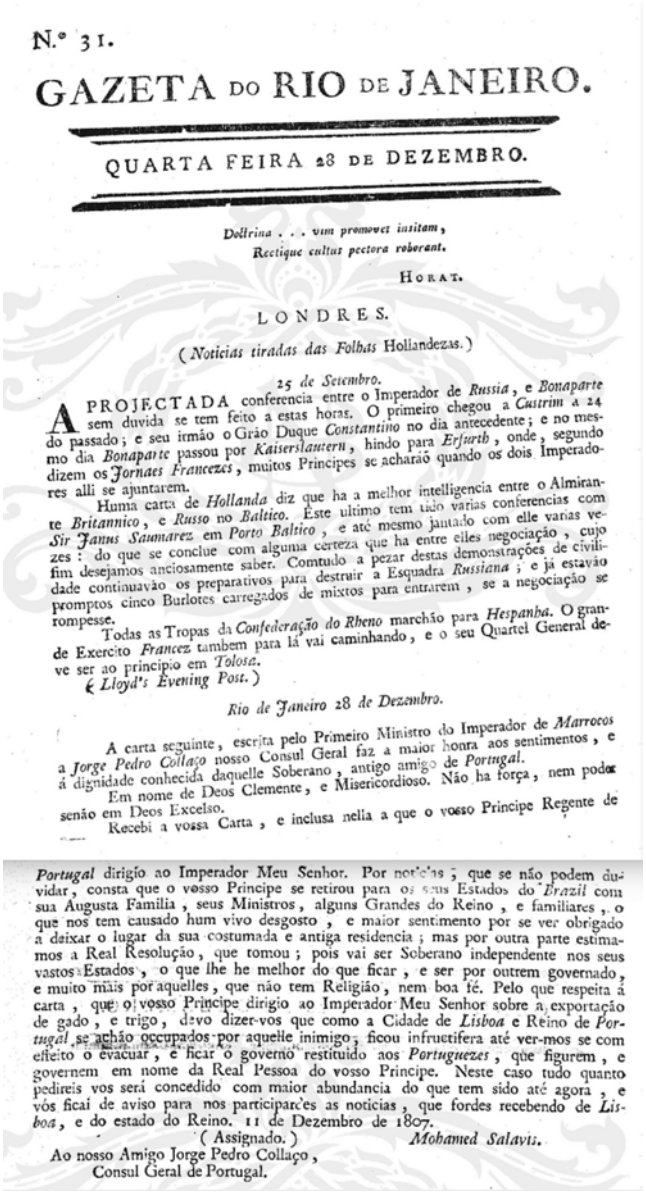
while the Maghreb came to be debated as one of coffee's abiding consumer markets. From the 1860s to the 1960s, coffee connected a Lusocentric Brazil to the Maghreb through and not in spite of British, French, Moroccan, Ottoman, Spanish, and other imperial orders.

This paper's second aim is to bridge heretofore separate bodies of literature regarding coffee and the Global South. On a south-north vector, scholars of coffee rightly examine production in the tropics, namely Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and focus on consumption in mostly temperate zones such as Europe and North America.[5] Meanwhile, scholars of the Global South attend to shared struggles for decolonization, epitomized by the aforementioned 1955 Bandung conference that led to the 1961 inaugural summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).[6] My paper puts coffee at the center of this Third World. Though connecting Brazil to the Maghreb since the nineteenth century, coffee beans were exported in greater amounts by African and Asian powers that came to lead the Third World in the mid-twentieth century. At the same time, Brazilian beans in Morocco mattered less amid more competitive African- and Asian-produced coffee imports. Without the historic grounds that had given rise to them, Brazilian-Maghrebi connections attenuated amid a still unfinished project of a "Third World."[7]

Transimperial Fields, 1860s - 1890s

In 1861, Dom Pedro II, the Brazilian emperor, wrote to Mawlāy Abbas, prince and "brother of Mohammed IV," the Sultan of Morocco.[8] Dom Pedro expressed gratitude to Mawlāy Abbas for rescuing the survivors of a Brazilian navy frigate that had sank near Tangier. The Moroccan prince responded by taking note of the Brazilian lives spared as well as thanking the Brazilian emperor for the gift of a cannon. In return, the "emperor of Morocco" sent "six magnificent horses" to Dom Pedro.[9] This exchange brought about Brazil's formal diplomatic representation in Morocco, headed by José Daniel Collaço, whose family led Portugal's delegation in Tangier for the prior two generations.[10] Indeed, in 1807, his grandfather, Jorge Pedro Collaço, had been the Consul-General of Portugal in Morocco when the Portuguese royal court requested and received a loan of 100,000 piasters from Morocco's Sultan Suleiman, aiding the Portuguese escape from the French invasion, fleeing on British ships to Rio de Janeiro.[11] The elder Collaço received a letter from the "Prime Minister of the Emperor of Morocco," Mohamed Salavis, who applauded the move to safeguard what he called an "independent and sovereign"

Portuguese crown (Figure 1).[12] At the margins of Anglo-French rivalries, Dom Pedro and Mawlāy Abbas renewed nineteenth century Luso-Brazilian and Moroccan connections.



N.° 31.

GAZETA DO RIO DE JANEIRO.

QUARTA FEIRA 28 DE DEZEMBRO.

Doctrina . . . vim promovet insitam,
Rectique cultus pectora roborant.
HORAT.

LONDRES.

(*Noticias tiradas das Folhas* Hollandezas.)

25 de Setembro.

A PROJECTADA conferencia entre o Imperador de *Russia*, e *Bonaparte* sem duvida se tem feito a estas horas. O primeiro chegou a *Castrim* a 24 do passado; e seu irmão o Grão Duque *Constantino* no dia antecedente; e no mesmo dia *Bonaparte* passou por *Kaiserslautern*, hindo para *Erfurth*, onde, segundo dizem os *Jornaes Francezes*, muitos Principes se acharáõ quando os dois Imperadores alli se ajuntarem.

Huma carta de *Hollanda* diz que ha a melhor intelligencia entre o Almirante *Britannico*, e *Russo* no *Baltico*. Este ultimo tem tido varias conferencias com *Sir Jamus Saumarez* em *Porto Baltico*, e até mesmo jantado com elle varias vezes: do que se conclue com alguma certeza que ha entre elles negociação, cujo fim desejamos anciosamente saber. Comtudo a pezar destas demonstrações de civilidade continuavão os preparativos para destruir a Esquadra *Russiana*; e já estavão promptos cinco Burlotes carregados de mixtos para entrarem, se a negociação se rompesse.

Todas as Tropas da *Confederação do Rheno* marchão para *Hespanha*. O grande Exercito *Francez* tambem para lá vai caminhando, e o seu Quartel General deve ser ao principio em *Tolosa*.

(*Lloyd's Evening Post.*)

Rio de Janeiro 28 de Dezembro.

A carta seguinte, escrita pelo Primeiro Ministro do Imperador de *Marrocos* a *Jorge Pedro Collaço* nosso Consul Geral faz a maior honra aos sentimentos, e á dignidade conhecida daquelle Soberano, antigo amigo de *Portugal*.

Em nome de Deos Clemente, e Misericordioso. Não ha força, nem poder senão em Deos Excelso.

Recebi a vossa Carta, e inclusa nella a que o vosso Principe Regente de *Portugal* dirigio ao Imperador Meu Senhor. Por noticias, que se não podem duvidar, consta que o vosso Principe se retirou para os seus Estados do *Brazil* com sua Augusta Familia, seus Ministros, alguns Grandes do Reino, e familiares, o que nos tem causado hum vivo desgosto, e maior sentimento por se ver obrigado a deixar o lugar da sua costumada e antiga residencia; mas por outra parte estimamos a Real Resolução, que tomou; pois vai ser Soberano independente nos seus vastos Estados, o que lhe he melhor do que ficar, e ser por outrem governado, e muito mais por aquelles, que não tem Religião, nem boa fé. Pelo que respeita á carta, que o vosso Principe dirigio ao Imperador Meu Senhor sobre a exportação de gado, e trigo, devo dizer-vos que como a Cidade de *Lisboa* e Reino de *Portugal* se achão occupados por aquelle inimigo, ficou infructifera até ver-mos se com effeito o evacuar, e ficar o governo restituido aos *Portuguezes*, que figurem, e governem em nome da Real Pessoa do vosso Principe. Neste caso tudo quanto pedireis vos será concedido com maior abundancia do que tem sido até agora, e vós ficai de aviso para nos participardes as noticias, que fordes recebendo de *Lisboa*, e do estado do Reino. 11 de Dezembro de 1807.

(Assignado.) *Mohamed Salavis.*

Ao nosso Amigo Jorge Pedro Collaço,
Consul Geral de Portugal.

Figure 1

At the time, Brazil was gaining global prominence for coffee production while the Maghreb was becoming variably associated with coffee consumption. Since 1800, coffee plant branches appeared on the Brazilian royal coat of arms and imperial flags. From 1850 to 1900, Brazilian coffee exports grew six-fold, representing between half and three-quarters of the entire world's supply.[13] Meanwhile, the "café maure" (Moorish coffeehouse) became a staple in the Anglo-French and Luso-Hispanic orientalist repertoire. Ruy da Camara, mentioned it in *Viagens*

em Marrocos (Travels in Morocco) printed in Portugal's Porto in 1879, and read in Brazil's Recife, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo.[14] Camara related that, in Morocco, "There are many cafés with low benches, covered with mats and cushions," frequented by "low and middle-class folk."[15] He added, "The Moors boil the coffee with water and do not strain it, so that half the cup is filled with grounds. It is almost always very strong." Though green tea was dominant on Morocco's Atlantic coast and most of the interior, coffee was becoming more common in the northeast, "along the corridor from Tlemcen and Oujda to Taza," brought in from Algeria.[16] Though green tea reflected British power, coffee suggested Ottoman influence in Morocco too.

Nonetheless, "the infrastructure" of the nineteenth century global coffee economy lay in the hands of "French, English, and American companies," as studied by Steven Topik.[17] In the second half of the century, Brazilian coffee from Rio de Janeiro appeared in Algiers, Tunis, and the "northern coast of Africa," traded by French firms.[18] A French bulletin in Algiers noted that "Algeria buys about 10 millions worth of coffee from Brazil," but "buys it elsewhere, from the warehouses of France, which has bilateral relations with Brazil."[19] In France, "Brazilian coffee" was said to constitute the bulk of consumption and even came to be "sold under the names of Reunion, Martinique, Zanzibar, etc."[20] In Morocco, specifically, Belgium's Legation and General Consulate noted that coffee was sold by England and France.[21] Mid-nineteenth-century salesmen from the US in Brazil likewise emphasized that British imports of coffee" were not for "home consumption" but rather for "re-exportation."[22] In London, the US consul-general repeated that "Brazilian coffee exports" were "made through Great Britain."[23] Though Morocco's *makhzan* began denominating "Jewish merchants" as "the *tujjar al-sultan*, in an attempt to "challenge the power of European merchants operating in Gibraltar, Tangier, and Mogador,"[24] coffee from Brazil and elsewhere passed through Euro-American intermediaries during the nineteenth century.

Nonetheless, some small-scale efforts to directly commercialize Brazilian coffee in Morocco were led by return migrants from Brazil, overwhelmingly Moroccan Jews. Through the Alliance Israélite Universelle that established its first school in Tetuan in 1862, among other factors, Moroccan Jews migrated to Brazil and elsewhere, sometimes returning to the Maghreb with citizenship papers issued by the states where they had sojourned.[25] The *makhzan* generally understood return-migrant requests for consular protections from Brazil and other imperial powers as attempts to skirt local authorities and orders. Nonetheless, amid greater numbers of

Moroccan Jewish return migrants, Brazil's imperial government supported the aforementioned Collaço and expanded diplomatic staff across the Maghreb. One such Brazilian commercial attaché in Morocco, Octavio Fialho, noted that "…the main trade of the Brazilian colony in Morocco is coffee…"[26] As a brief example, Jacob Muniz, returned to Morocco to "introduce Brazilian products such as coffee…"[27] Migrant-led coffee promotion even drew the attention of Brazilian navy admiral, José Carlos de Carvalho. In Brazil, he wrote, "Turkish or Moroccan immigrants... acquired the habit of drinking coffee and they take some coffee with them when they also return to their home country, and what is even more remarkable... they now make small shipments of coffee directly from Rio and Santos to the small ports of their respective countries.."[28] In the late nineteenth century, coffee and migration stimulated connections between the world's margins.

Some Brazilian elites attempted to directly export coffee to the Maghreb around the time of the Spanish American War of 1898, which they saw as potentially opening the Spanish imperial market once dominated by beans grown on the island of Puerto Rico that the US seized. A couple years previously, Adonyram Maurity de Calimerio departed Rio de Janeiro for Tangier, with "his main mission" to "introduce to the Empire of Morocco, coffee and other agricultural products from Brazil."[29] Eventually named as Brazilian Consul in Tangier,[30] Maurity de Calimerio requested a Brazilian export tax exemption for five-thousand sacks of coffee, weighing sixty kilograms each, "dispatched from the port of Santos to Gibraltar, Spain, Morocco and Algeria."[31] His request was initially denied, "for violating… free trade…"[32] He repealed the decision, requesting reimbursement for taxes paid in exporting ten-thousand sacks of coffee, "sold in Spain, Gibraltar, Morocco, and Algeria."[33] In support of his request, a parliamentarian from São Paulo, José Luis de Almeida Nogueira, proposed a motion to reimburse Maurity de Calimerio, who sought to introduce "the commercial brand – coffee of São Paulo or Campinas" that would "open new markets" for Brazil in Spain and Morocco. In Brazil's parliament, Almeida Nogueira reasoned that the beleaguered Spanish empire would likely revoke the "prohibitively" high tariffs on coffee imports that once protected Puerto Rican colonial production, potentially facilitating the entry of Brazilian beans into Iberian and North African markets.[34]

Whether in opposition or support, the Brazilian parliamentary debate regarding direct coffee exports to Morocco evoked Anglo-French orientalism. In opposition to the tax exemption,

one parliamentarian rhetorically asked if the "semi-barbaric people, such as those of Morocco" are the sort of public to savor "our coffee" from Brazil, doubting that "a nation like Morocco" would be "a desirable market for our products…"[35] Almeida Nogueira responded that "It is not about promoting coffee consumption, because in Morocco people drink a lot of coffee, but rather to introduce Brazilian coffee, which is little known."[36] Hardly viewing Moroccan counterparts as allies or partners, Almeida Nogueira continued, "Arabs and Moors drink a lot of coffee, they even eat it. They appreciate it so much that they even ingest it in its solid form."[37] These Eurocentric representations of Arabs, Moors, and Moroccans were evoked at a time when coffee producers in Brazil variably attempted to associate Brazilian-grown beans with civilization and modernity, and diminish their actual origins in slavery and monarchy, respectively abolished in 1888 and 1889.[38] It is not clear whether Maurity de Calimerio was successful, but the Anglo-Íbero-French orientalist impulses continued. The political cartoon, "Preciosidades Marroquinas" (Moroccan Treasures), in the satirical magazine, *João Minhoca*, lampooned Maurity de Calimerio, identified as the Brazilian Consul in Tangier, when he briefly returned to Rio de Janeiro, caricatured as showering the then Brazilian president, Campos Salles, and his Minister of Foreign Relations, with "luxurious and valuable gifts" from the so-called "Orient."[39]

Coffee beans traversed imperial fields informed by British, French, Moroccan, Ottoman, Portuguese, and Spanish powers. In particular, Brazilian-grown coffee was being consumed not only in Iberia but also across North Africa. Between the 1860s and the 1890s, coffee and coffeehouses had become drinking habits and spaces in not only the Ottoman provinces of what today are Algeria and Tunis, but also increasingly in the Kingdom of Morocco. Not sent directly from Brazil, coffee beans were being acquired by European commercial intermediaries, who re-presented and re-sold them in the Maghreb and elsewhere. Meanwhile, Moroccan migrants as well as Eurocentric visions of coffee-drinking Arabs and Moors reached Brazil. Brazilian elites were less aware of the Moroccan Jews in their midst than the European literature they read about the so-called Orient. But since coffee beans made up more than half of Brazil's export earnings, and an ever more valuable import in the Maghreb, coffee producers and coffee consumers would re-evaluate the European intermediaries profiting off them.

Al-bun al-brazili / Café du Brésil in a French-Hispano Maghreb, 1900s - 1930s

"Consular reports," reported the São Paulo state government in the first decade of the twentieth century, "show….large tendencies toward greater coffee imports in Morocco."[40] The US Department of Agriculture likewise reported that coffee "imports into Morocco have more than doubled" between 1900 and 1910, mostly originating in Brazil and sold by Euro-American firms.[41] By the 1920s, a French agricultural bulletin declared "the conquest of Algeria and Morocco by Brazilian coffee is ... an indisputable fact," as Brazilian beans made up at least three-quarters of the region's coffee imports.[42] Nonetheless, the French agronomist and veterinarian, Maurice Piettre, critiqued that "the entire coffee trade from Brazil is in the hands of a few large American and German firms, which handle these matters as bankers…"[43] He regretted that the few French firms that gained a foothold during WWI had lost market share to German counterparts "due to lack of financial agreement from our main importers from Le Havre, Bordeaux and Marseille…" Between 1920 and 1923, Piettre was a professor at what become the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, befriending Miguel Calmon who was Brazil's liberal-minded Minister of Agriculture.[44] Sharing his Brazilian colleague's concern that excessive production may undercut long-term competitiveness, Piettre denounced the abusive commissions charged in such arrangements, "in particular on exports of Brazilian coffee to Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria."[45] Before decolonization began in earnest, the coffee produced in Brazil and consumed in the Maghreb invited critiques of a Euro-American-centered global economy.

With significant growth in the worldwide consumption of coffee in the first decades of the twentieth century, the São Paulo state government, and the Brazilian federal government, planned global campaigns to market coffee as Brazilian. Generally, coffee beans had been classified in a grading system based on color, quality, and size, and once exported from Brazil, labeled as "Rio" or "Santos," based on the port where they were shipped from. In the late 1920s and 1930s, the Brazilian government awarded France's "Havas" advertising and news agency the contract to publicize coffee as Brazilian in not only France but also Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia.[46] In France, in 1930, a Havas ad declared that the "delicious Café du Brésil" will ensure "bright days that give the joy of living" as well as "adorable frolics full of charm and the unexpected, from which there will be no fatigue," thanks to "this incomparable entertainer, this powerful stimulant of physical and intellectual activity" (Figure 2).[47] The text was accompanied by an image of a couple taking coffee at a table next to a golf course. In an art deco style, the

urbane gentleman seemed to stir his cup while the elegant woman with a hat and scarf looked in the same direction. Distancing coffee from its origins in enslaved labor and monarchical governance, this advertisement associated the bean with civilization, modernity, and above all, Brazil.



Figure 2

In 1928, the campaign featured Brazilian coffee in the French-language Moroccan newsweekly, *La Terre Marocaine*, an agriculture-focused supplement of *La Vie Marocain Illustrée*.[48] Brazil was portrayed as the pinnacle of coffee production. Numerically, Brazil was said to produce 72 percent of the coffee consumed globally, with the state of São Paulo alone producing 50 percent of worldwide consumption. This meant that "15 million sacks of coffee weighing 60 kilograms were annually taken from Brazilian soil." It was stated that Brazil offered

the coffee plant the kind of "soil and climate condition that suit it exactly," evoking the image of lands occupied by coffee plants "as far as the eye can see," in perfect alignment with "vigorous branches and blue-green foliage." The piece mixed orientalist paintings and photographs of coffee-drinking, from Jean-Léon Gérôme's "Café maison, Le Caire," to an image of a "Moorish coffeehouse in Rabat, where you can drink excellent Brazilian coffee" (Figure 3). *La Terre Marocaine* praised Brazil as possessing the ideal natural environment for the coffee plant, as well as forging the logistical and technological infrastructure to export coffee. "Morocco deserves to … increase its economic links with South America…" it concluded, "One need not be a prophet to say that one of these first connections will be through coffee."



Figure 3

A year later, "a grand party" at the café that the French architect Maurice Tranchant de Lunel designed at the Kasbah of the Oudayas in Rabat "inaugurated the consumption of Brazilian coffee with the assistance of European and national personalities" (Figure 4).[49] The photograph's byline read that "A brilliant indigenous festival preceded the inauguration" of "these famous Cafés du Brésil."[50] Brazilian coffee likewise supplied a so-called Café Maure in

Alger (Figure 5). According to Brazilian news coverage, actual coffeeshops called "Cafés do Brésil," were also being opened in Alger, Casablanca, and Rabat.[51] The *Correio Paulistano* noted that "the coffeehouses are installed in European and Moorish styles, depending on the location."[52] Whether adopting a more rustically Arab and Moorish design, or a more sleek European vibe, Brazilian coffee promotion in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia did lean into Arabic and Islamic markings, releasing a calendar to be used to advertise local businesses, such as the "Café Maure de Si Mohamed M'Sbai" that promoted "qahwat al-brazil" in Casablanca (Figure 6).[53]



UNE GRANDE FÊTE AUX OUDAIAS (Rabat). - Dans le cadre merveilleux de la vieille Casbah, les " Cafés du Brésil " ont donné une série de fêtes indigènes qui ont connu le plus brillant succès.
Voici une vue de la scène de verdure. Tout au long de ces fêtes ont eu lieu de grandes dégustations, très appréciées, de ces fameux Cafés du Brésil

Figure 4

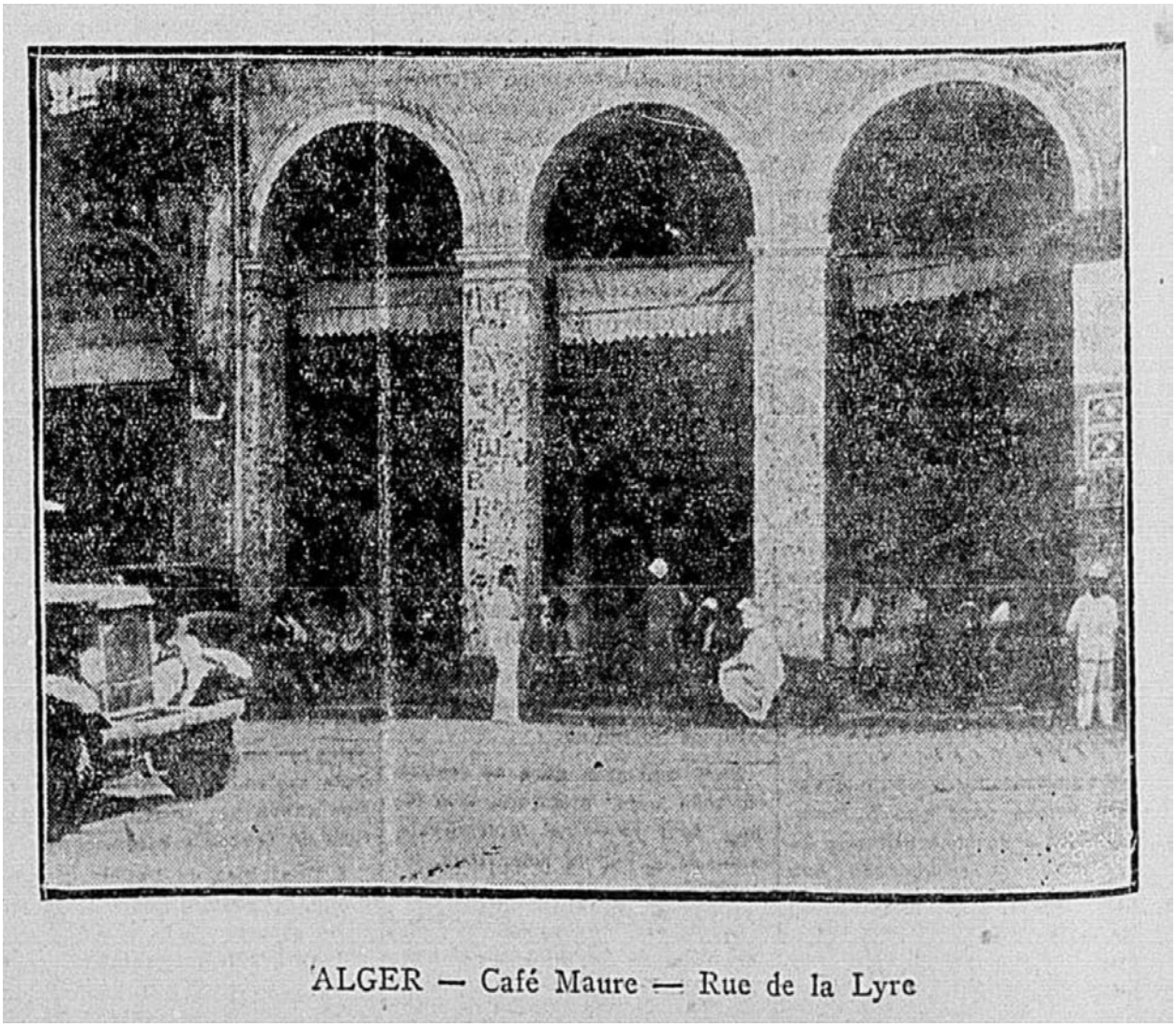
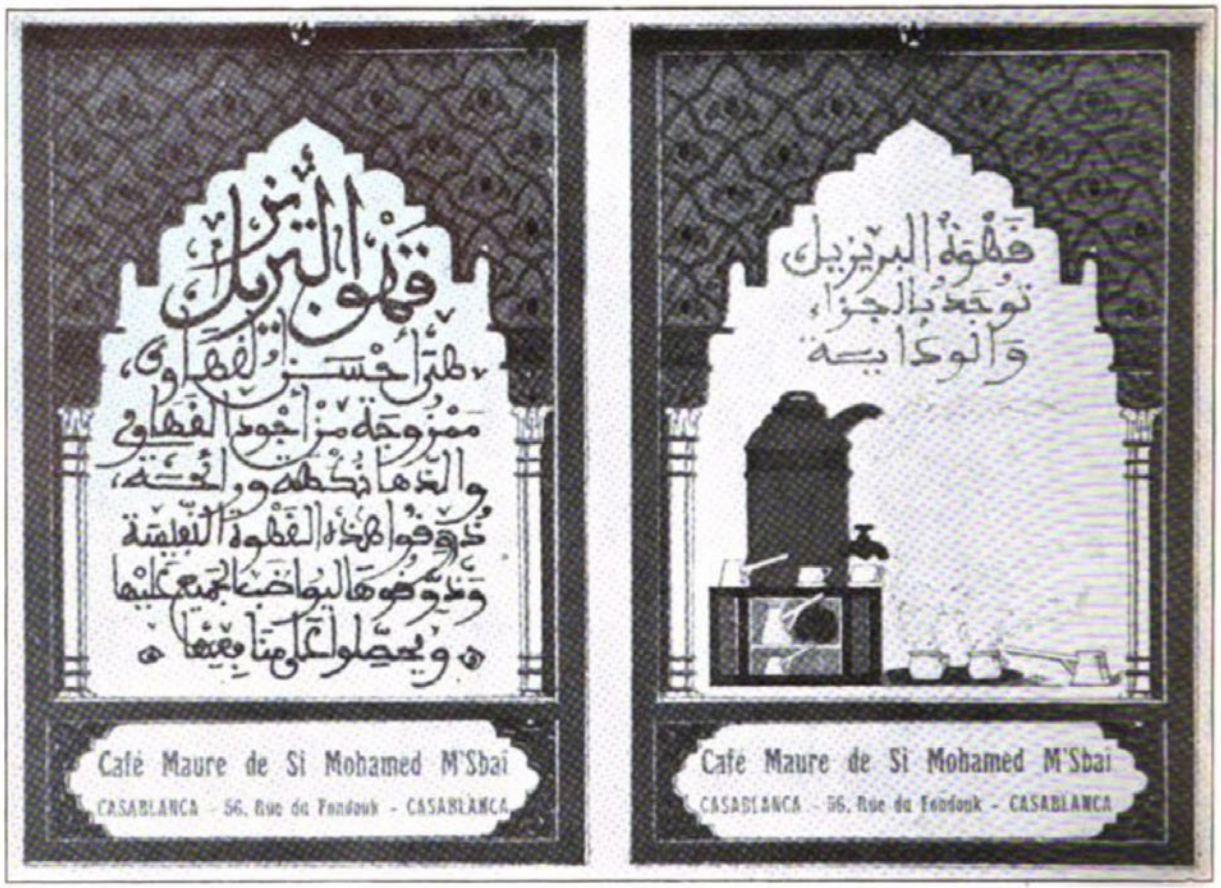


Figure 5



FOUR COLOR ARABIC CALENDAR USED IN BRAZIL'S COFFEE PROPAGANDA IN MOROCCO

Figure 6

Who was connecting Brazilian beans to Maghrebi coffee drinkers and coffeeshop owners? Moroccan return-migrants from Brazil or elsewhere, mentioned earlier, did not explicitly appear in Brazilian coffee promotion, though they still held some diplomatic posts. In 1929, Haim Samuel Bendelac had been named "Honorary Consul" of Brazil in Tangier.[54] Bendelac was a Moroccan Jew, born in Tetuan in 1890.[55] According to his daughter, Bendelac had migrated to Venezuela and "returned home with a little bundle of gold coins."[56] His appointment may have been due to the provenance of his spouse, Celia, who was born in Borba, near Manaus, part of the large Moroccan Jewish community in the Amazon.[57] In 1931, whether to assist with return-migrants, or coffee promotion, the Brazilian state appointed another honorary consul in Casablanca, Antonio Porciuncula. A year before, Porciuncula set up a coffee roastery in the same city, and after a few years following his consular appointment, *Le Petit Marocain* referred to him as the "director of the large coffee firm, 'Champion.'"[58] In 1935, he

and a partner, José Salomao Marques (sic), founded the limited liability company, "Les Cafés du Brésil," appropriating the promotional campaign's language.[59] Son of a Moroccan Jewish migrant couple, Salomao Marques was born in Rio de Janeiro, in 1899, and could have been a gatekeeper.[60]

Whatever was the case, in 1936, Porciuncula provided a photographic and textual update about the "advertising for Brazilian coffee, made in Morocco, by the firm, 'Les Cafés du Brésil.'"[61] He explained that the firm carried out publicity campaigns in "open-air markets," including Bou-Znika in Rabat and Medina in Casablanca.[62] Porciuncula explained that his firm set up demonstrations of how to prepare Brazilian coffee as well as handed out free 125 gram packages of Brazilian coffee. In Casablanca and Rabat, large signs in Arabic and French announced "Coffee of Brazil, renowned as the best throughout the world. For advertising purposes, free distribution today" (Figure 7). Indigenous Arabs and Bedouins appeared in photographs that accompanied the report published in Brazil (Figure 8), but nothing was said of how they actually reacted to the coffee or the marketing ploy.



Figure 7



Figure 8

In the same year, another French-language newspaper in Morocco, *La petit marocain*, covered Porciuncula's efforts to promote Brazilian coffee. It began that "the natives of Tunisia and Algeria have been drinking and loving coffee for many years, (but) their Moroccan brothers are a little less used to it." With an editorial line that generally defended France's imperial interests across North Africa and beyond, *La petit marocain* continued that "in order to make them (the natives) appreciate this invigorating, stimulating drink … we have been seeing in the surrounding souks, free distributions of roasted coffee to village inhabitants." *La petit marocain* concluded that "this is how we were able to observe in Médiouna, Bou-Znika, Ber-Rechid, the pleasure with which these distributions of coffee packets were received, made by the Brazilian consul, whose efforts tend to amplify the trade between Morocco and his country." French colonial settlers seemed to welcome Brazilian coffee in Morocco.

Indeed, Brazilian coffee in the Maghreb sought to appeal to Arab and Berber publics without undermining French or Spanish colonial orders. Whether referred to as "al-bun al-brazili (the Brazilian [coffee] bean, in Arabic), or as "Café du Brésil," (Coffee from Brazil, in French), Brazilian export promotion in the Maghreb offered a taste of a wider world that the future struggle for decolonization inspired, entangled with and not as an alternative to northern or western metropoles. Neither replicating the existing asymmetries nor offering decolonial options, Brazilian coffee exports significantly increased to the Maghreb between 1930 and 1939 (Figure

9). According to Brazil's national coffee bureau, the number of 60 kilogram sacks of beans sent to French Morocco quadrupled from under 9,000 to 36,000 within the decade.[63] Sales to Tunisia doubled from 15,000 to over 30,000 sacks. Algeria remained relatively stable at above 200,000. At this time, Affonso de E. Tauny wrote that "Marrocos e Tunisia," in a period of about 15 years, "increased their purchases of Brazilian coffee."[64] Would this developmentalist or economic interface preclude or precipitate greater political rapprochement?

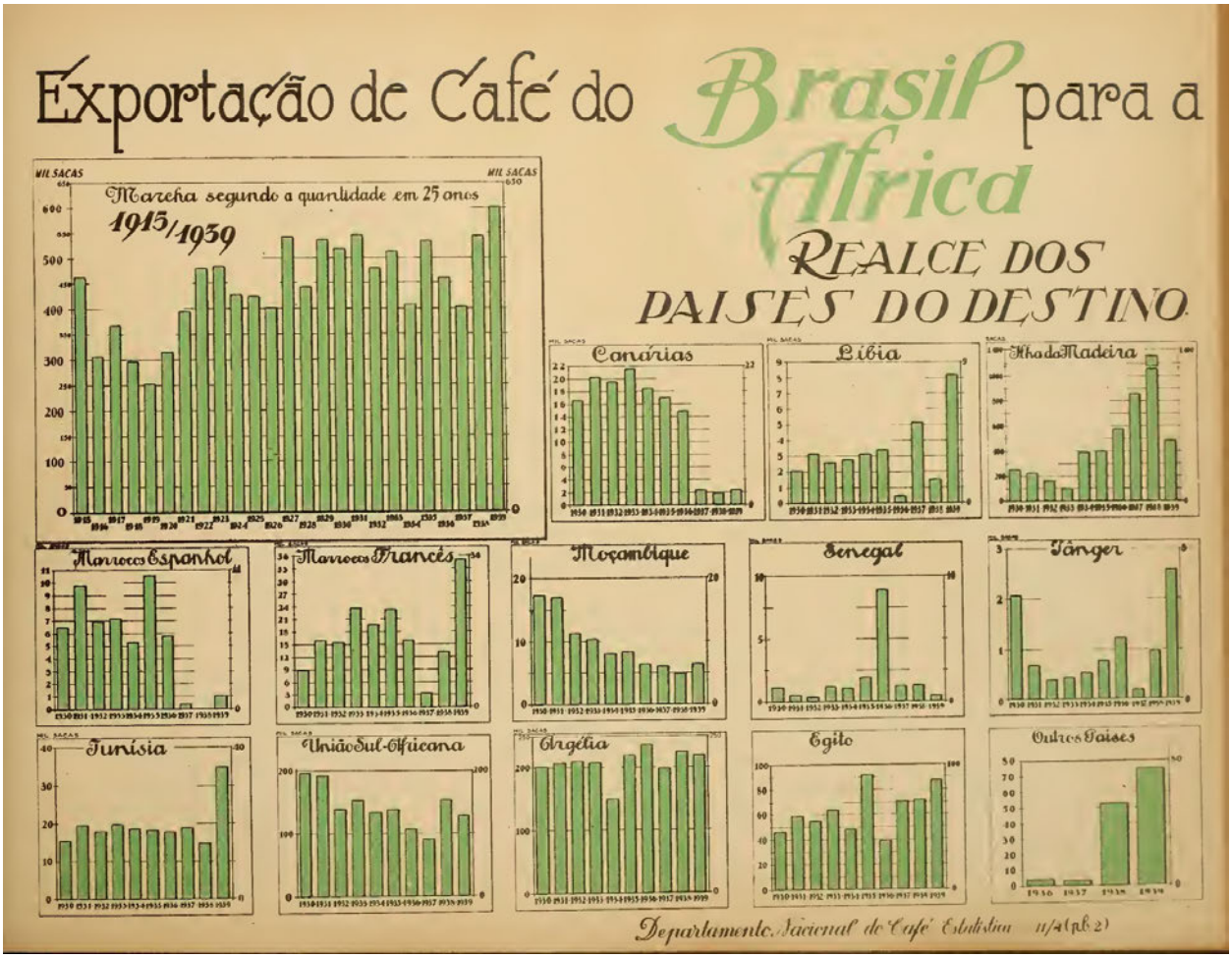


Figure 9

Third World Tastes and Tensions, 1940s - 1960s

"Les Cafés du Brésil" in Morocco continued after the São Paulo state government's contract with Havas ended. In 1945 and 1946, a textual announcement appeared in *Le Petit Marocain*: "The world-renowned Cafés du Brésil guarantee you, as always, perfect roasting, with warehouses in the main cities of Morocco."[65] In 1949, "Les Cafés du Brésil" adopted a new

logo (Figure 10). Under the block letters of the brand name was a two-dimensional side portrait of a horse's head and mane with a decorated harness and blinkers that featured the pentagram from Morocco's national flag, framed by an Andalusian-type of horseshoe arch. Though probably not meant to evoke the memory of the equestrian gift that Morocco's emperor made to his Brazilian counterpart some nine decades previously, "Les Cafés du Brésil" began to advertise Brazilian coffee mindful of a more independent Morocco. Below this design was written "Les Anciens E[TS] Porciuncula," with the firm's address in Casablanca. Indeed, the aforementioned Antonio Porciuncula continued commercializing Brazilian coffee in a Morocco at the twilight of French and Spanish rule. In 1949 and 1950, his ads declared, "Coffee is free, but you are also free to buy good coffee. Demand our brand."[66]



Figure 10

Though coffee could appeal to progressive sensibilities, Brazil's foreign ministry proceeded with greater caution in the Maghreb. In the early 1940s, it divested the title of "Honorary Consul" from both Antonio Porciuncula in Casablanca and Haim Samuel Bendelac in

Tangier, part of a broader institutional move to appoint career foreign service officers to such posts, and avoid past perceptions that honorary designations could be used to skirt local authorities.[67] Subsequently, career Brazilian foreign service officers were assigned to "Spanish Morocco" and "French Morocco."[68] At the time, Moroccan national aspirants vied with French and Spanish overseers over the International Zone of Tangier, the port city managed by European powers, the Sultan of Morocco, and after WWII, the US.[69] In Brazil, the conservative *Correio da Manhã* supported the status quo, declaring "…Brazil's interests in French Morocco still depend on the Consulate in Marseille, while Brazilian interests in Spanish Morocco depend on Madrid…[70] Similarly, in 1952, a Brazilian reporter for Francophone newspapers specified that "Brazil is also interested in the fate of Tangier… because nowadays the ships from Loide (sic) stop there and unload coffee …"[71] Besides, he added, the career "consul of Brazil in Tangier is part of the legislative commission of the city." Brazilian coffee, and other goods, still needed the infrastructure that had been set up by British, French, Spanish, and US powers.

In the 1950s, sugar and not coffee became the single largest Brazilian import into Morocco, as Brazilian-grown arabica beans in Morocco faced stiffer competition from the robusta variety, grown in and shipped from Belgian-, French-, and Portuguese-colonized parts of Africa (as well as British-, Dutch- and French-colonized parts of Asia). Despite the relatively lower amount of Brazilian beans, total coffee imports into French Morocco became "larger than tea."[72] Likewise in Tangier, "robusta coffee, particularly from Côte d'Ivoire (including the Kouilou variety) … were supplemented by robusta coffee from the Belgian Congo and, more recently, small quantities from Angola."[73] A contemporaneous Luso-African colonial report noted that "the exportation" of robusta beans "de Angola" reached "1.5 million sacks in 1956," which put colonized Angola in fourth place "among the world's top exporters, after Brazil, Colombia, and French West Africa."[74] African (and Asian) colonial producers of "coffea robusta" disrupted "the virtual monopoly that Brazil" maintained since the previous century, as Steven Topik argued.[75] Having been overwhelmingly produced by the world's peripheries for mostly the centers, coffee also became a contested source of power between the globalizing margins.

Connections between these margins became more direct and frequent too. In April 1955, the Brazilian president, Café Filho, made a stopover in Morocco.[76] *O Estado de S. Paulo* and Britain's Foreign Office mentioned the visit in passing, overshadowed by what was the official

destination, Portugal.[77] In Lisbon, Café Filho declared, "we stand by the Portuguese in any part of the world," renewing the Luso-centrism of Brazilian foreign policy.[78] Nonetheless, Brazil's *Diário Oficial* reported that Café Filho received "military honors" in Casablanca made up of "a battalion of Morocco's Army and Navy" with "troops lined up in his honor."[79] The welcoming party included French Resident-General Lacoste, a representative of Mohamed Ben Arafa (who the French put in the place of Sultan Mohammed V), Casablanca's military commander, "Pachá Anm Ben Korchi" (sic, Ahmed Ben Korchi), and others. That night, a banquet was held for the Brazilian president at the Hotel El Mansour. The next day, Café Filho "visited Rabat where he again received tributes from the local government and people."

The Brazilian president's visit to Morocco positioned him within a colonial status quo, but was it ambiguous enough to appeal to national struggles as well? His visit coincided with the "Afro-Asian Conference" in the Indonesian city of Bandung which established the "Third World" as a global force.[80] Despite his longer stay in Portugal, Café Filho's administration had dispatched an "unofficial diplomatic observer" to the Bandung meeting between twenty-nine Arab, Asian, and African representatives who condemned "colonialism in all of its manifestations," including the exile of Morocco's Sultan Mohammed V.[81] For the unofficial observer, "Brazil had the possibility of becoming one of the great world powers if it could relate well with the new countries of Asia and Africa."[82] But Brazil remained as an observer and not signatory of Bandung's ten-point declaration that called for noninterference in Afro-Asia, precisely at the moment when robusta beans were increasingly exported from African and Asian producers that jeopardized the historic dominance of Brazil in the global coffee market.

The provenance of coffee beans did not appear to matter much in the mid-twentieth-century Maghrebi café culture that expanded amid colonial and national politics, especially after Sultan Mohammed V returned from exile in November 1955, paving the way for independence less than a year later. During French rule, European-style cafés proliferated, including the "Café de France" in Casablanca, the "Gran Café de Paris" in Tangier, "Les Négociants" in Marrakech, and Café Balima, part of the hotel in Rabat, where Che Guevara once "had a cup of coffee" as he puffed on his "Havana cigar."[83] With Ottoman origins, as noted earlier, "qahwi," or what Said Graiouid called "traditional cafés," had been part of Maghrebi souks and medinas. In the 1940s and early 1950s, Graiouid pointed out that qahwi were "frequently used by nationalist leadership to transmit information to local residents."[84]

Coffee was served in an independent Morocco's own rapprochement toward Brazil. In 1960, Morocco's Minister of Justice, Abdel Khalek Torres, led a diplomatic mission "to almost all of the countries of Latin America."[85] Some eight years previously, Allal al-Fassi had led a similar mission.[86] Though outwardly meant to "strengthen the bonds of friendship," Torres sought "to obtain the support of Brazil" and other Latin American states in the United Nations (UN) in order to collectively counter French "neocolonialism" in North Africa.[87] Born in Tetouan under Spanish rule, Torres was characterized as a "scion of noble Andalusi lineage" (Figure 11).[88] Over coffee with a reputable writer in Rio de Janeiro, Torres remarked that direct relations between Brazil and Morocco would be soon "re-established," because "Morocco had already maintained such relations … with Brazilians before the time of foreign domination…," referencing Morocco's recognition of Luso-Brazilian independence.[89]



Figure 11

The common grounds between Brazil and the Maghreb blended, and further attenuated, in the "Non-Aligned Movement."[90] In 1961, India's Nehru, Ghana's Nkrumah, Egypt's Abdel

Nasser, Indonesia's Sukarno, and Yugoslavia's Tito convened the states that attended Bandung, among others, to institutionalize non-alignment. Jânio Quadros, Brazil's president at the time, sent official observers, not delegates, to NAM's preparatory meeting in Cairo and the inaugural summit in Belgrade.[91] Brazil called itself a founding observer state while Morocco became a founding member state. In the same year, the famous *cronista*, Rubem Braga, became Brazil's ambassador to Morocco (Figure 12). Not a career diplomat, Braga implied a shared anti-colonial sentiment in one of his short stories.[92] Writing about a soccer match between Uruguay's Peñarol and France's Reims in Casablanca, Braga identified with Arab crowds, not French fans making colonialist jeers. Held back from confronting a Frenchman who kept taunting a Chilean friend, Braga wrote that the latter declared, "because of this stupidity the French had been thrown out of Morocco, Indochina, as they will now have to leave Algeria …"[93]



Figure 12

Notwithstanding a shared anti-colonial sensibility, Brazil-Morocco relations remained uneven economically. With the intention of reducing Morocco's trade deficit with Brazil, former minister and sugar importer, Abdelouahab Laraki, led an official government mission in 1968.[94] Welcomed by the Brazilian foreign minister and his general-secretary for Africa and the Middle East, Laraki pointed out that Brazil exported to Morocco several fold of what it imported.[95] Laraki's mission met with Brazil's Ministry of Industry and Commerce, the Commercial

Association of Rio de Janeiro, the Institute of Sugar and Alcohol (IAA), and the Brazilian Institute of Coffee (IBC).[96] Though Laraki proposed the "possibility of installing an instant coffee plant in Tangier," Morocco attracted greater interest as the "the world's leading exporter of phosphates," with an estimated sixty percent of the "world's reserves."[97] As coffee lost its top position in Brazil's export earnings, the grounds of the Global South would continue to shift.

Just a year after the Moroccan mission departed Brazil, in 1969, the Brazilian ambassador in Rabat served "a cup of coffee à brasileira" to "King Hassan II."[98] The setting was a trade fair in Casablanca's Grand Palais. As part of the "general program aimed at promoting the prestige of Brazilian coffee abroad," Brazil's foreign ministry had a stand that prepared actual Brazilian coffee. With more than five thousand "cafezinhos" (small coffees) served in a single day, the stand "also received a visit from almost all of the Moroccan ministers and ambassadors present."[99]

Coffee, though, never reclaimed its status in Brazil's export portfolio. But as can be gleaned in this example, the increased affect and energy it stimulated may, in part, account for the "joi de vivre" that Brazil stirred across and beyond the Maghreb. From the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, much of the coffee savored and traded in the Arab world came from Brazil. Indeed, as early as 1841, the French consul in what he called "le Liban" noted that "the coffee we drink in Beirut is from Brazil …"[100] For the next century, coffee from Brazil grounded a connection to the Maghreb too.

Though eclipsed by a more progressive project between the world's margins, coffee beans from Brazil in the Maghreb ground this nearly forgotten history of a Global South. From the imperial 1860s to the Third World 1960s, Brazilian coffee in Algiers, Casablanca, Rabat, Tangier, and Tunis reveals the materiality of a Global South before it became an ideal, and reconsiders coffee as an unresolved source of power between the world's margins. The 1960s were not simply the start of new global connections, but also the culmination of century-long imperial logics and legacies across Brazil and Morocco.

Endnotes

[1] Alfred Sauvy, “Trois mondes, une planète,” *L'Observateur*, 14 August 1952, p 118.
[2] Hisham Aidi, “‘Let Us be Moors:’ Islam, Race, and ‘Connected Histories’,” in *Black Routes to Islam* , Hisham Aidi and Manning Marable, eds. (New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 121-140.
[3] Bruno Latour, “Agency at the time of the Anthropocene,” *New Literary History*, 45 (2014), p. 1-18.
[4] Kristin Hoganson and Jay Sexton, *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).
[5] William Gervase Clarence-Smith and Steven Topik, eds. *The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia, and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Mark Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds The History of Coffee and How It Transformed Our World* (New York: Basic Books, 2010); Robert Thurston, Jonathan Morris, Shawn Steiman, eds, *Coffee: The Comprehensive Guide to the Bean, the Beverage and the Industry* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013); Catherine M. Tucker, *Coffee Culture Local Experiences, Global Connections*, 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge, 2017).
[6] Jürgen Dinkel, *The Non-Aligned Movement: Genesis, Organization and Politics* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); Christopher Lee, *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Athens, OH: Center for International Studies, Ohio University Press, 2010); Jamie Mackie, *Bandung 1955: Non-Alignment and Afro-Asian Solidarity* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2005); Peter Willetts, *The Non-Aligned Movement: The Origins of a Third World Alliance* (New York: Frances Printer Ltd and Nichols Publishing Co, 1978).
[7] Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2007); Vijay Prashad, *The Poorer Nations: A Possible History of the Global South* (New York: Verso Books, 2012).
[8] Mohammed Larbi Messari, “al-Barazil wa al-Maghreb,” In *Encyclopédie du Maroc / Ma’lamat al-Maghrib*, compiled by the Association des auteurs marocains pour la publication, Vol. 4 Salé: Imprimerie de Salé, 1989-2012.
[9] “Lê-se na *Politica Liberal*,” *Correio da Tarde*, 25 November 1861, p. 3.
[10] Innocencio Francisco da Silva, *Diccionario Bibliographico Portuguez*, Tomo XII (Lisboa, Imprensa Nacional, 1884) p. 293-5; *Relatório da Repartição dos Negócios Estrangeiros* (Rio de Janeiro: Typographia Universal de Laemmert, 1862), p. 39; *Almanak Administrativo, Mercantil e Industrial da Corte e Provincia do Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Eduardo e Henrique Laemmert, 1865), p. 164. For news coverage, see; *Jornal do Commercio*, 20 January 1861, p. 1; *Diario de Pernambuco*, 18 January 1861, p. 1; *Diario do Rio de Janeiro*, 25 January 1861, p. 2. For a diplomatic view, see: José Humberto de Brito Cruz, “As relações entre o Brasil e o Marrocos: Passado e Futuro,” in *As relações entre o Marrocos e o Brasil*, edited by Fatiha Benlabbah and Mohamed Saadan (Brasília: FUNAG, 2018).
[11] Excerpt from Antonio Jorge Afonso, “Portugal e o Maghreb nos finais do antigo regime,” In *Encyclopédie du Maroc / Ma’lamat al-Maghrib*, compiled by the Association des auteurs marocains pour la publication, Vol. 24 Salé: Imprimerie de Salé, 2008, p. 261.
[12] *A Gazeta do Rio de Janeiro*, 28 December 1807, p. 1; “O imperador de Marrocos applaudio a transferencia da côrte portugeza para o Brasil” (sic), *Historia da trasladação da corte portugeza para o Brasil em 1807-1808*, compiled by Alexandre José de Mello Moraes, Rio de Janeiro: Dupont, 1872, p. 381.
[13] Rafael de Bivar Marquese, Coffee and the Formation of Modern Brazil, 1860–1914,” Oxford Research Encyclopedia, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.013.818; Steven Topik, “The World Coffee Market in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” Working Papers of the Global Economic History Network, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2004.
[14] Camara, Ruy da. *Viagens em Marrocos, com ilustrações*, por M. Macedo, C. Alberto e Pastor (Porto: E Cardron, 1879). For ads and reviews in Brazil, see: “Livros Novos,” *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 6 July 1879, p. 2; “Livros que acabam de chegar á Libraria Popular,” *Correio Paulistano*, 17 September 1879, p. 4; “Novidades,” *Diario de Pernambuco*, 21 July 1881, p. 7; “Novidades,” *Diario de Pernambuco*, 22 July 1881, p. 7; “Novidades,” *Diario de Pernambuco*, 27 July 1881, p. 7; “Livros Baratíssimos,” *Jornal do Commercio*, 17 November 1882, p. 4; “Livros Baratíssimos,” *Gazeta de Noticias*, 4 April 1883, p. 4; “Livros Baratíssimos,” *Gazeta de Noticias*, 7 May 1883, p. 3.
[15] Camara, *Viagens*, p. 207.
[16] Graham H. Cornwell, “Sweetening the Pot: A History of Tea and Sugar in Morocco, 1850-1960.” Georgetown University. Department of History. 2018, p. 21, 68.

[17] Steven Topik, *The Political Economy of the Brazilian State, 1889-1930* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), p. 13.
[18] Centro da Lavoura e Commercio of Rio de Janeiro, *The Empire of Brazil at the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition of New Orleans* (New York: E.P Coby and Co., 1885), p. 9; Royaume de Belgique, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Catalogue des collections*, Bruxelles: P. Weissenbruch, 1893. p. 317.
[19] "L'Algérie, contrée de Production Autruchière," *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie d'Alger*, 1898.
[20] Centro da Lavoura, *The Empire of Brazil*, p. 40.
[21] Royaume de Belgique, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Catalogue des collections*, Bruxelles: P. Weissenbruch, 1893. p. 317.
[22] Daniel Parish Kidder and James Cooley Fletcher, *Brazil and the Brazilians: Portrayed in Historical and Descriptive Sketches* (Philadelphia: Childs & Peterson, 1857), p. 618.
[23] E.A. Merritt, "The World's Coffee," in Department of State, *Reports from the Consuls of the United States on the Commerce, Manufactures, Etc., of Their Consular Districts* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), p. 125.
[24] Michael M. Laskier, *The* Alliance Israélite Universelle *and the Jewish Communities of Morocco, 1862-1962* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), p. 39.
[25] Idem.
[26] "Publica uma carta do sr. Octavio Fialho," *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 15 September 1907, p. 2.
[27] Lucas de Mattos Moura Fernandes, "Navigating Citizenship: Consular Practices and the Brazilian Jewish Community in Nineteenth-Century Morocco," in *Jewish Experiences Across the Americas: Local Histories through Global Lenses.* Edited by Katalin Franciska Rac and Lenny A. Ureña Valerio (Gainesville: University of Gainesville Press, 2022).
[28] José Carlos de Carvalho, "A Propaganda para Augmento de Consumo," in *O Café* (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1900), p. 18-19.
[29] "Parte hoje...," *Jornal do Commercio*, 27 August 1896, p.2; "Partiu ontem," *Commercio de São Paulo*, 28 August 1896, p. 1.
[30] "Corpo Diplomático e Consular Brazileiro: Residente nos diferentes Estados estrangeiros," *Almanak Laemmert*, (Rio de Janeiro: Companhia Typographica do Brazil, 1901) p. 251.
[31] Camara dos Deputados do Estado de S. Paulo, *Annaes da Sessão Ordinaria de 1897* (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1898), p. 45.
[32] Idem.
[33] "Para serem collocadas onde convier," *Correio Paulistano*, 5 September 1899, p.1.
[34] "Congresso Legislativo – Camara dos Deputados – Reunião em 14 de setembro," *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 15 September 1899, p.1-2.
[35] Idem.
[36] Idem.
[37] Idem.
[38] "Os cafés do Clube da Lavoura," *A Provincia de São Paulo*, 8 November 1878, p. 1.
[39] Juliana Ricarte Ferraro, "*João Minóca*: O periódico humorístico e ilustrado de Belmiro de Almeida," *Cadernos AEL*, 9:16/17 (2002), p.207-208.
[40] "O consumo do café no mundo," *Boletim de Agricultura*, 11:9, 1910, p. 876-880.
[41] Harry Graham, *Coffee: Production, Trade, and Consumption by Countries* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1912), p. 104.
[42] "La consummation du café en Algérie et au Maroc," *Bulletin Agricole de l'Algérie-Tunisie-Maroc*, 85: 12 (1929), p. 234-5
[43] M. Maurice Piettre, *Production Industrielle du Café* (Paris: Libraire E. Le François, 1925), p. 136.
[44] Paul Forgeot, "Maurice Piettre (1879-1954), *Bulletin of the Académie Vétérinaire de France*, Vol. 27 (1954), pp. 51-52; Mircea Buescu, "Miguel Calmon e a valorização do café," *Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro*, 327: Abril/Junho (1980), p. 235-238.
[45] Piettre, *Production,* p. 136.
[46] "Contratos de Propaganda," *Correio da Manhã*, 18 July 1928, p. 14; "The Propaganda for Brazil Coffee," *Tea and Coffee Journal*, 57:1 (1929) p. 439.
[47] The original reads: "Lumineuses journées qui donnent la joie de vivre !… Adorables ébats pleins de charme et d'imprévu, dont il ne subsistera nulle fatigue grâce au délicieux Café du Brésil, cet animateur incomparable, ce stimulant puissant d'activité physique et intellectuelle.
[48] "Le café, merveilleux breuvage," *La Terre Marocaine*, 49 ber 1928, p. 362-366.

[49] “Une grande fête aux oudaias (Rabat),” *La Terre Marocaine*, 1 September 1929, p. 849; Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 131.
[50] Idem.
[51] “Café brasileiro em Marrocos,” *Diário Carioca*, 28 October 1928, p. 2.
[52] “Marrocos: Inaugurando o consumo de café do Brasil,” *Correio Paulistano*, 28 October 1928, p. 7.
[53] “The Propaganda for Brazil Coffee,” *Tea and Coffee Journal*, 57:1 (1929) p. 439.
[54] “Decretos Assignados pelo Presidente da República,” *O Estado de S. Paulo,* 10 July 1929, p. 6.
[55] José Maria Abecassis, *Genealogia hebraica; Beniso-Fresco* (J.M Abecassis, 1990) p. 83
[56] Aviad Moreno, *Entwined Homelands, Empowered Diasporas: Hispanic Moroccan Jews and Their Globalizing Community* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2024).
[57] Abecassis, *Genealogia hebraica,* p. 83.
[58] “Aux arrives,” *Le Petit Marocain*, 13 June 1934, p. 2
[59] “Annonces Légales,” *La Petit Marocain*, 2 March 1935, p. 10
[60] Egon e Frieda Wolff, *Judeus nos primórdios do Brasil República* (São Paulo: Biblioteca Israelita H.N Bialik, 1981), p. 352.
[61] *Relatório apresentado ao Dr. Getúlio Vargas ... pelo Dr. Mario de Pimentel Brandão*. Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1939, p. 58).
[62] “Propaganda de café em Marrocos,” *Revista do Instituto de Café do Estado de S. Paulo*, 11:115 (1936) p. 1452-3.
[63] *Pequeno Atlas Estatistico do Café* (Rio de Janeiro: Departamento Nacional do Café, 1941).
[64] Affonso de E. Taunay, *Historia do Café no Brasil (1927-1937)*, Volume 13 (Rio de Janeiro: Departamento Nacional do Café, 1942) p. 90.
[65] “Les Cafés du Brésil,” *Le Petit Marocain*, 28 December 1945, p. 2; “Les Cafés du Brésil,” *Le Petit Marocain*, 4 January 1946, p. 2; “Les Cafés du Brésil,” *Le Petit Marocain*, 18 January 1946, p. 2.
[66] “Les Cafés du Brésil,” *Le Petit Marocain*, 31 August 1949, p.2; “Les Cafés du Brésil,” *Le Petit Marocain*, 21 January 1950, p.2.
[67] “Atos do Presidente da República: Na pasta do Exterior,” *Diário de Noticias*, 22 November 1941, p. 4; “Na pasta das Relações Exteriores,” *Correio da Manhã*, 4 March 1943, p.1.
[68] “Novos consulados brasileiros,” *Diário de Natal*, 18 September 1952, p. 1.
[69] David Stenner, *Globalizing Morocco: Transnational Activism and the Postcolonial State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019).
[70] “Tânger,” *Correio da Manhã,* 30 August 1949, p. 1.
[71] Louis Wiznitzer, “A Cidade International de Tanger,” *A Noite*, 4 July 1952, p. 3.
[72] William Harrison Ukers, “Coffee in North Africa,” *Coffee Facts: Elementary Facts about the Product and a Statistical Presentation of Its Production and Consumption* (New York: Tea and Coffee Trade Journal, 1951), p. 74-76.
[73] René Coste, *Les caféiers et les cafés dans le monde* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve & Larose, 1961) p. 683.
[74] “Exportação de Angola na campanha 1955/56 e no ano de 1956,” *Revista do café português*, p. 67
[75] “O mercado africano,” *Jornal do Commercio*, 23 January 1960, p. 1; Steven Topik, “Historicizing Commodity Chains: Five Hundred Years of the Global Coffee Commodity Chain,” *Frontiers of Commodity Chain Research*, edited by Jennifer Bair (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009) p. 57.
[76] “Visita em Portugal e Marrocos,” Coleção João Café Filho, Museu da República (IBRAM). Arquivo Histórico e Institucional. April 1955.
[77] “O presidente do Brasil chega hoje á capital portuguesa,” *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 22 April 1955, p. 1; British Foreign Office, “Further Correspondence Respecting Algeria, Morocco (French and Spanish Zones), Tangier (International Zone), and Tunisia,” Part 4, January to December 1955, p. 43-4, 51.
[78] Adolpho Justo Bezerra de Menezes, *O Brasil e o mundo ásio-africano* (Brasília: FUNAG 2012 [1956]).
[79] “Homenagem ao Presidente Café Filho em Casablanca,” *Diário Oficial*, 22 April 1955, p.7579.
[80] Mackie, *Bandung 1955*; Lee, *Making a World*.
[81] Jerry Dávila, *Hotel Trópico: Brazil and the Challenge of African Decolonization* (Durham: Duke University Press) p.142-3
[82] Jerry Dávila, “Entre dois mundos: Gilberto Freyre, a ONU e o apartheid sul-africano,” *História Social*, 19: 135–47.

[83] Abdelkrim Raddadi, *Les Cafés au Maroc: Wandering around Cafes of Morocco* (Rabat: Marsam, 2023), pp. 105, 162, 166, 186.
[84] Said Graiouid, "A Place on the Terrace: Café Culture and the Public Sphere in Morocco," *The Journal of North African Studies*, 12:4, 2007, 531–550.
[85] "Missão de ministro marroquino na América Latina," *A Tribuna*, 11 November 1960, p. 3; "Marroquinos em Cuba dizem que França quer continuar exploração da Mauritânea," *Diário do Paraná*, 17 November 1960, p. 6.
[86] "Marrocos quer ser livre," *Ultima Hora*, 26 September 1952, p.9; Stenner, *Globalizing Morocco*. p. 139-140
[87] "Marrocos Acusa França de Neocolonialismo," *Ultima Hora*, 20 December 1960, p. 11.
[88] Sasha Pack, *The Deepest Border: The Strait of Gibraltar and the Making of the Modern Hispano-African Borderland* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019).
[89] Maurício Caminha de Lacerda, "Relações com o Marrocos em 1961: Tôrres dá xeque-mate em política," *Correio da Manhã*, 21 December 1960 p. 2.
[90] Willetts, *The Non-Aligned Movement.*
[91] "Relatório do ministro João Augusto de Araújo Castro, observador do Brasil à Reunião Preliminar da Conferência de Chefes de Estado e Governo de Países Não-Alinhados, Cairo 5 a 13 junho de 1961," In *Documentos da Política Externa Independente*. Edited by Alvaro da Costa Franco (Brasília: Fundação Alexandre de Gusmão, 2007) 94-115.
[92] Rubem Braga, in *A Traição das Elegantes: Crônicas* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Sabiá, 1967).
[93] Rubem Braga, "Domingo: Futebol em Casablanca," in *A Traição das Elegantes: Crônicas* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Sabiá, 1967), p. 147-151.
[94] "Missão de Marrocos chega ao Rio querendo aumentar interâmbio com o Brasil," *Jornal do Brasil*, 12 September 1968, p. 17.
[95] "Marroquinos vêm ampliar intercâmbio," *O Jornal*, 12 September 1968, p. 6; "Maghalhães recebe missão marroquina no Itamarati," *Jornal do Commercio*, 13 September 1968, p. 5.
[96] "Marrocos quer comércio," *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 3 September 1968, p. 7.
[97] Instituto Brasileiro do Café, *Boletim do Departamento Econômico*, 20 September 1968, p. 52; "Missão marroquina veio vender cimento," *Jornal do Commercio*, 12 September 1968, p. 7.
[98] "Rei Hassan toma café brasileiro," *Jornal do Brasil*, 30 April 1969, p. 19.
[99] Idem; "IBC obteve êxito com seu 'stand' em Casablanca," *O Jornal*, 23 May 1969, p. 7.
[100] Henri Guys, *Beyout et le Liban: Relation d'un séjour de plusieurs années* (Paris: Imprimerie de W. Remquet et Cie, 1850), p. 19.

A Moroccan Filmmaker in Venezuela: A Century of Margot Benasseraf[1]

Yaëlle Azagury
Independent Scholar, USA

Since S. D. Goitein’s seminal work on *A Mediterranean Society,* Maghrebi Jews from the medieval period onward have been closely associated with highly integrated trade networks across the Mediterranean basin. More recently, scholarship has focused on the emigration of Maghrebi Jews to Israel in the wake of the state’s creation. In recent years, however, research has broadened its scope to consider these communities’ connections to another space—the transatlantic world—ties that long remained beyond sustained scholarly attention. Particular emphasis has been placed on the Hispanophone Jewish populations of northern Morocco and their links with Latin America. The remarkable and still little-known trajectory of the Venezuelan film director Margot Benacerraf (1926–2024), a major figure in Latin American cinema, offers a compelling case study of Moroccan Jewish migration to South America and of the complex mechanisms that shaped it. Hers is a story that still awaits full recognition.

Margot Benacerraf’s life and trajectory merit attention not only for what they reveal about the structures and patterns of Moroccan Jewish emigration to South America, but also for her paradoxical invisibility within the Latin American cultural canon and the aura of mystery that continues to surround her. The daughter of affluent Sephardi immigrants from Tetouan who arrived in Venezuela in the early twentieth century, she moved freely within avant-garde and international bohemian circles, befriending such luminaries as Luis Buñuel, Gabriel Garcia Marques, and Pablo Picasso, among others.

She directed two highly idiosyncratic documentary films: *Reverón* (1953), a twenty-three-minute feature explores the Venezuela painter Armando Reverón, whose works are now

[1] My thanks to Fortunato Benacerraf, Carolina Benacerraf, Samuel Cohen, and Lily Cohen whom I interviewed for this article.

held in major museums worldwide. Her second film, *Araya* (1959), a ninety-minute scripted documentary, chronicles twenty-four hours in the lives of salt gatherers and fishermen on Venezuela's Araya peninsula. Both films received widespread critical acclaim and are regarded as landmark works of Latin American cinema. *Araya,* a film of mesmerizing cinematographic beauty, shared the International Critics award at Cannes in 1959 with *Hiroshima, mon amour,* Alain Resnais's benchmark film of French Nouvelle Vague cinema.

Yet despite the international accolades garnered for her work, Benacerraf has remained critically neglected. One probable explanation for that neglect lies in the problematic reception of *Araya,* whose "anomalous inclusion-exclusion status—its inclusion in a transnational canon, and its persistent exclusion from national and continental film histories" has complicated its legacy.[2] My purpose is likewise to explore Benacerraf's position as the daughter of Sephardi immigrants —at once an insider and an outsider within Venezuela's culture.

In this essay, I reexamine Margot Benacerraf's life, work, and legacy within the broader framework of Moroccan Jewish emigration. I also approach this story from a personal vantage point: although my immediate family did not emigrate, much of my extended family—aunts, uncles, and cousins-- left Tangier for Caracas in the 1950s and 1960s, establishing themselves in the wholesale trade of hardware, small electrical goods, and beauty supplies. Each summer, I traveled with my mother to Caracas, moving between family gatherings and what felt like an anthropological immersion into a Moroccan Jewish community whose members felt at once close and uncannily foreign. Lastly, I will also speculate on the reasons of Benacerraf's marginalization. Following film scholar Julianne Burton-Carvajal, I argue that gender and class privilege played significant roles, but so too the complexities of Benacerraf's diasporic identity.

The name Benacerraf derives from the Arabic "ben" (son) and "serraf", or money changer. According to the philologist Abraham Laredo, the family name appears in its Spanish form (Cambiador) in fifteenth-century Castille. To escape persecution during the Spanish Inquisition, the Benacerrafs left Spain for Tetouan, where a large community of Jewish exiles sought refuge, keeping their Spanish language alive and maintaining their customs.

Margot's father Fortunato was born in Tetouan around 1885 into a family of nine children. By the late nineteenth century, Morocco was beset by an economic crisis and severe external debt, prompting many impoverished Jewish families to send their young men to Latin

[2] Julianne Burton-Carvajal, *Araya across Time and Space*, in *Visible Nations*, *Latin America Cinema and Video*, Chon Noriega ed. University of Minnesota Press: 2000, 51-85.

America. "Hacer la América", as the pursuit of fortune in the New World was known, was not new. Jewish emigration to South America had begun in the early nineteenth-century when Moroccan Jews traveled to Brazil and Ecuador to work as river peddlers on the Amazon. Fortunato likely embarked for Venezuela shortly after his bar-mitzvah, at the age when young men traditionally undertook transatlantic voyages. He arrived in Carúpano, on Venezuela's Caribbean coast, where one of his uncles had invited him to join him, in 1900. Known for its rum, Carúpano was also highly prized for its cocoa and coffee and offered promising commercial prospects. Trading in these commodities proved auspicious for the young Benacerraf and his brother Moisses.

Fortunato's trajectory, however, was marked by both success and considerable challenges. A bon vivant who fell in love with Carúpano's beaches and lush scenery—he was even rumored to have founded its famed carnival-, he also felt the emotional strain that came with exile. Suffering from depression, his brother Moisses who was his business partner, returned to sea to visit his family, and disappeared, probably by suicide. In 1918, grieving yet ambitious, Fortunato moved to Caracas to join *Hermanos Benacerraf*, his brothers' import business in textiles from France and England. This move coincided with a period of authoritarian rule under Juan Vicente Gómez (1908-1935), who exercised control over local *caudillos*. It also concurred with the emergence of a nascent prosperity in Venezuela, fueled by the discovery of oil. Within this shifting economic landscape, the Benacerraf business flourished. In 1923, ready to marry, Fortunato returned to Tetouan in search of a suitable wife, as was the custom among his peers. He wed Sete Coriat, the beautiful young daughter of a patrician Jewish family whose father was the city's Spanish consul. The couple settled in Caracas, where their three children, Moisses, Margot, and Henrique, were born.

Born in 1926, Margot Benacerraf's life spans nearly the entire twentieth century, mirroring Venezuela's turbulent political transformations. Just as Margot lived through alternating cycles of democracy and dictatorship, punctuated by dramatic *coup d'états*—she also played a formative role in shaping Venezuela's cinematic culture. As a film director in the fifties in a country where film culture was virtually nonexistent, she pioneered Latin American cinema. Her work would later inspire major figures of Brazil's socially conscious Cinema Novo, including Glauber Rocha and Nelson Pereira dos Santos. In the 1960s, as director of the governmental National Institute of Venezuelan Culture and Fine Arts (INCIBA), a de facto

Ministry of Culture, Margot Benacerraf further played a formative role in shaping her country’s cultural policy.

Growing up in Caracas in a large Spanish colonial house she named “La Casa de los Tres Patios”, Margot belonged to a close-knit Sephardi clan. The Benacerrafs were industrious, intellectually accomplished, and highly adaptable. Among her cousins was Baruj Benacerraf (1920-2011), who would be awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1980, and his brother Paul (1930-2025), later dean of the Philosophy Department at Princeton University. Yet unlike her parents who showed little interest in intellectual or artistic pursuits, Margot developed an early passion for art and literature.

Her Venezuelan identity was deeply felt. In 1944, while still in high school at the Liceo Andrés Bello in Caracas, she won an essay contest on the topic of Latin American unity, centered on the the Pan-American ideal of the *Libertador,* the title referring to Simon Bolivar. Bolivar was the Venezuelan military and political leader who helped liberate much of South America from Spanish rule. Much later, while working at UNESCO in Mexico, she would remark that it was there she realized how profoundly Latin American she felt.

At the same time, this strong identification coexisted with a degree of distance from the social expectations of her milieu. Caracas in the 1930s and 1940s, enriched by a booming oil economy, offered considerable pleasures to a rising merchant bourgeoisie. Alegria Bendelac, a contemporary of Margot, whose family also emigrated from Tetouan, describes in her memoir *Mosaïques* her family’s daily lives in the milieu of Caracas’ affluent merchants: their comfortable homes on a single floor with patios in full bloom, the well-oiled interactions with peers from the same ethnic origin and social class, a lifestyle enlivened by a busy social calendar, and a large retinue of drivers, cooks, housemaids, chambermaids and nannies attending to their every need. In this upwardly mobile milieu, Margot’s father Fortunato was well integrated into both the business world and traditional Venezuelan society, the only Jew admitted to the exclusive Venezuelan country clubs. Yet Margot showed little interest in this lifestyle, nor in the prospects of a conventional marriage with a man from her community. Hoping to secure a favorable match for their daughter, Margot’s parents took her back to Tetouan in 1947, following the same course Fortunato had once taken. But instead of searching for a husband (she would never marry), she went about town taking photographs (she got into some trouble for that). “Women of my generation”, Margot noted in an interview, “finished sixth grade and then

married. Getting a high school degree was hardly the norm, and to seek a university diploma was simply unthinkable."[3] Her trajectory thus marked an early form of social and gender transgression.

During her university studies in literature and philosophy at the Central University of Venezuela, she forged strong ties with Spanish *Republicanos* in exile—intellectuals and workers displaced by Franco's victory, with connections to socialism, communism, and anarchism. Many had found new homes in Mexico City, Buenos Aires, and Caracas, profoundly shaping the cultural lives of these cities. Intellectuals from the left such as José Bergamín, Juan David Garcia Bacca, Eugenio Imaz contributed to a vibrant intellectual climate in Caracas, deeply influencing Margot's worldview. They assumed endowed chairs at the School of Philosophy and Letters, which had been founded not long before by the Venezuelan writer Mariano Picón Salas (1901-1965). A close ally of social democrat and future president Rómulo Betancourt (1959-1964), Picón Salas was himself a renowned Venezuelan historian, journalist, and literary critic, with whom Margot would develop an enduring friendship. Although never formally aligned with a party, Benacerraf developed a consistently left-leaning political sensibility shaped by progressive postwar movements emphasizing human dignity. Like Picón Salas, she advocated for culture and education as foremost agents of social change. In a telling anecdote, when Benacerraf joined Raul Leóni's democratic government in 1964 to lead the country's cultural policy, she personally undertook an expedition to Venezuela's most remote areas south of the Orinoco River on *a bongo* (a dugout canoe) carrying a projector, sound system, films, and slide shows. Beyond its cultural objective, the mission also served a civic purpose, encompassing efforts to educate the local populations in sanitation and disease prevention. A strong proponent of civilian and democratic governance, Margot believed in a social democracy and opposed authoritarianism and military intervention in politics. She would later be deeply antagonistic to Hugo Chávez (1999-2002 and 2002-2013) and to *chavismo*, whose authoritarian streak she detested.

Her subsequent training in New York and Paris further consolidated this orientation while also redirecting it toward film. In New York, she studied drama at the New School, where several refugees from the Hollywood McCarthy purges taught evening classes. Dalton Trumbo,

[3] *An Interview with Margot Benacerraf: Reverón, Araya, and the Institutionalization of Cinema in Venezuela*, Benacerraf, Schwartzman, Calderón, and Burton-Carvajal, in *Journal of Film and Video*, Fall 1992 and Winter 1993, Vol. 44, no ¾, 51-75.

the famed screenwriter, was one of them. Benacerraf's own teacher and mentor was Erwin Piscator, a German émigré who had escaped Nazism in 1933. It is under the influence of Piscator that Margot came to see film as a medium capable of articulating a social and philosophical vision.

Visiting relatives in Paris in the summer of 1949, she decided to apply to the prestigious Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques (IDHEC) and was one of the few applicants accepted that year, and one of only three women. Immersed in the French capital's foremost intellectual trends of the post-war years, she led the stimulating life of a Left Bank intellectual, debating social equity, anti-colonial struggle, secularism, and the furthering of democracy. She would split her time between Paris and Caracas until 1965, maintaining her commitment to both France and Venezuela.

So why France?

Her attachment to France reflected a broader pattern among Moroccan Jews educated through the Alliance Israelite Universelle, whose schools fostered deep cultural affinities with France. The AIU was a Paris-based Jewish organization whose chief purpose was to come to the rescue of Maghrebi and Middle Eastern Jewry deemed to have fallen behind socially, intellectually, and culturally in their Muslim settings. It owed as much to the Enlightenment ideals of the Jewish Haskalah as it did to French colonialism and was responsible for educating scores of Jewish youths in a network of schools which extended from Morocco to Iran. The first one was founded in Tetouan in 1862. Exposed to the lure of French culture at the turn of the twentieth century, several of Margot's relatives married French women. Their families were from Tetouan but had emigrated at the end of the nineteenth century to nearby Oran, Algeria, by then a French colony. France, as well as Spain, whose influence in the North of Morocco also expanded with the Hispano-Moroccan war (1860-1862) vied for influence in the hearts and minds of the Jews from Northern Morocco. Both cultures shaped their multi-faceted, diasporic personality, even after emigration. Margot explained this conundrum in the following way: "Spain gave me the keys to feel. France gave me the keys to live. Spain is passion, emotion. France is clarity and order."[4]

[4] *Sal de ayer*: *memorias de Margot Benacerraf*, Diego Gil Arroyo, Caracas: Planeta Venezolana, 2019, 48 (my translation).

As for Morocco, it occupied a quiet yet unmistakable place in her heart—less spoken of, perhaps, but deeply felt. Margot would return to Morocco to visit her father’s grave—a practice Moroccan Jews call “zorear”, a hybrid word with an Arabic root (“zor” means to visit), and a Spanish suffix (The custom of “zorear” is still widely popular among Moroccan Jews in the diaspora, who regularly return to Morocco to pay their respects to their deceased relatives). In Tangier where her father was laid to rest, Margot befriended Rachel Muyal, the Jewish director of the famed Librairie des Colonnes and a key figure in the city’s intellectual life. For Margot, Morocco was the wellspring of familial ties and inherited traditions, of flavors and rituals gathered around the table, of melodies and prayers at synagogue shaped in the Tetouani rite. In essence, it formed the bedrock of a Sephardi identity, rooted deeply and carried across the generations.

Throughout her life, however, Margot Benacerraf remained a tireless advocate of Venezuelan culture, despite the obstacles she encountered. Her career was a combination of chance, vision, and remarkable daring. While still a student at the IDHEC, she returned to Venezuela in 1951 and embarked on her first cinematographic project, a film about the painter Armando Reverón. Reverón was an eccentric, marginal artist prone to schizophrenic crises, who lived in the seaside resort of Macuto, about three hours by car from Caracas. Known then as *El Loco de Macuto* (The Madman from Macuto), he did not enjoy the fame he has today, but early on Margot was fascinated by him. Moving to Macuto where he lived with his companion Juanita, to film him on a two-person crew was an audacious venture for a woman, even more so for one from Margot’s social class. “For being Sephardi transplanted to a very provincial society” she dismissed her parents, who opposed the project, as “doubly close-minded”. Neither gender boundaries nor social propriety constrained the strong-willed Benacerraf.

Reverón (1952) is not a conventional documentary, but a carefully orchestrated film with every detail prepared in advance as though it were fiction: sound was mixed and incorporated afterwards, and the sequences were filmed to match the cycles of light in a 24-hour time span. Benacerraf would accommodate spontaneous occurrences only if fitting within her narrative line -- she regarded film as a medium for developing an essay around a central idea. The result is a highly coherent elucidation of the artist’s pictorial development and of his evolution as a painter. It is also a disturbing exploration of the connections between creativity and madness. *Reverón* won first prize at the First International Festival of Art films in Caracas in 1952 and was featured

to great acclaim at the Berlin Film Festival in 1953. In a characteristic episode of misogyny in the male-dominated culture of the time, the festival organizer mistakenly summoned “Herr” Benacerraf to the podium.

Her second film, *Araya*, completed in 1959, also constitutes a tribute to Venezuela; yet unlike Reverón, it shifts the focus from culture to landscape, and from individual subjectivity to collective labor. The project originated in Benacerraf’s initial idea to film three short works on everyday life in Venezuela—a triptych structured around the mountains, the plains, and the seacoast. While she quickly identified settings for the first two, she sought to avoid the clichés associated with Caribbean coastal imagery. The discovery of a photographic spread on the salt pyramids of the remote Araya peninsula proved auspicious. Struck by the unfamiliar beauty of a place that seemed to exist outside conventional representations, she abandoned the triptych in order to devote herself entirely to *Araya*. With its gigantic castle dating from the 1500s when the Spaniards first arrived there, Araya has a rich history as a major salt-mining site during the Spanish and Dutch colonial era, when salt was a common currency, more prized than gold (the word “salary” comes from salt). Benacerraf was drawn not only to the stark deserts of Araya regularly punctuated by their ascending salt peaks, but also to the demure dignity of its inhabitants. The routines of these salt-miners and fishermen remained unchanged for centuries. From the outset, she conceived of the site—“so terrible yet so authentic”—as a metaphor for Latin America itself.

If *Araya* appears at first glance as an ethnographic document, it is in fact structured as an essay-film organized around a central question: how would mechanization and modernization transform communities whose practices had remained largely unchanged for centuries? At the same time, the film anticipates a broader historical rupture. As Benacerraf was filming, Venezuela stood on the threshold of a profound economic transformation: the rise of oil as “black gold,” destined to supplant salt as the organizing resource of the national economy. In this sense, *Araya* does not merely document a vanishing world; it registers, with striking prescience, the transition toward the petrostate that would define Venezuela from the 1960s onward. The country would henceforth become known as “Venezuela Saudita,” a pun on Saudi Arabia, one of the largest producers of oil in the world.

But unlike *Reverón* which is an unsettling piece of artwork, Araya has a hypnotic sway achieved through its formal strategies. Filming the rhythmic repetition of the subsistence rituals

by the peninsula's inhabitants, Benacerraf conceived of her style as "poetic realism". Shot in black and white and deliberately stripped of sociological specificity, the film privileges archetypal structures of human labor over the contingencies of historical context. It thus functions as a "self-consciously poetical social document",[5] a hybrid form that oscillates between ethnography and abstraction. Benacerraf herself resisted overt symbolism—she famously criticized Bergman for his excess—preferring instead to rely on the intrinsic expressive power of images. Focusing on three families, the Salazars, the Ortizes, and the Peredas, Benacerraf followed their work routines in a 24-hour cycle. Their stories are carefully fictionalized to serve the quasi-biblical mode of the film. The inhabitants of Araya are rendered through a visual language that borders on the elemental, their bodies marked "by salt and sun', their gazes "dry and shiny like salt". In this austere environment, the four classical elements -- salt, water, air, and fire are active forces shaping human existence. Chronicling their daily struggles, Benacerraf admires the workers of Araya, even loves them, for "these people turn the very elements that made their existence so difficult into the very means of their existence".[6] Yet, through the narration, she also emphasizes the deep relationship between the extraction of salt and capitalism. The film constructs a world in which labor appears as both timeless and precarious.

It is precisely here that *Araya* departs from the dominant cinematic paradigms of its time. While Italian neorealism from the late forties and early fifties sought to capture the immediacy of social reality, Benacerraf's approach abstracts and stylizes it, producing a form that is at once more distanced and more universalizing. Her "fictionalized documentary" does not simply record reality. Rather, it reconfigures it into a cinematic meditation on time, labor, and survival. If there is a politics to *Araya*, it resides not in explicit ideological statements but in this very tension between documentation and poetic construction.

This tension, however, helps explain the film's fraught reception in Venezuela. While international critics, particularly in Europe, celebrated *Araya* as an "authentic" expression of national cinema, in Venezuela, *Araya* occupied an ambiguous cultural position, which mitigated Benacerraf's standing as a foundational figure of Latin American Cinema. A number of factors are involved. When the film was first shown in Venezuela in 1977, some critics formed within a

[5] The phrase is by Julianne Burton-Carvajal, *Araya across Time and Space*, in *Visible Nations, Latin America Cinema and Video*, Chon Noriega ed. University of Minnesota Press: 2000, 51-81.

[6] *An interview with Margot Benacerraf: Reverón, Araya, and the Institutionalization of Cinema in Venezuela*, ibid.

Marxist, anti-imperialist framework challenged *Araya*'s status as a genuinely Venezuelan and Latin American work, viewing its aesthetic distance as a form of ideological detachment. Admittedly, *Araya* had a complex post-production history. Due to the inadequate methods used by Venezuelan labs at the time, the film's footage had to be sent to Paris. In addition, the voice-over had to be in French for Cannes. Finally, further delays were occasioned by political instability in Venezuela as the dictator Perez Jiménez was about to be overthrown at the time of editing. Finally, when the film came out in Europe, Spanish and Latin American buyers, deeming *Araya* too 'intellectual" for the Venezuelan public, were conspicuously absent. Eighteen years passed before *Araya* would be screened in Venezuela. Ironically, the film gained legendary status.

The abnormal inclusion-exclusion status of the film is complicated by Benacerraf's gender and social class. The challenges Benacerraf encountered in the Venezuela of the 1950s as a woman in a film industry still struggling to gain a foothold are difficult to imagine today, yet I hope to have conveyed some of them. As for social class, the Benacerraf's became wealthy bankers, the co-owners of Banco Union, which grew as the largest bank in Venezuela until it was sold in 1998. It partly accounts for why certain commentors regarded *Araya* as ideologically conservative (in 1977 for example, the Venezuelan critic Alfredo Roffé deemed it "practically the filmic manifesto of the defenders of the status quo").

Lastly and perhaps more difficult to pin down, Benacerraf's diasporic identity constituted another factor at play. "I spent the greater part of my life going to-and-fro", she confided to Gil Arroyo in a book interview.[7] She was a cosmopolitan figure who belonged to a cohort of Sephardi immigrants, particularly Moroccan, partaking in multiple cultures. Moving effortlessly between Caracas, Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Madrid, Paris, Tetouan, Tangier, and New York, she did not fit neatly into nationalist narratives. Thus, for a Marxist and anti-imperialist tradition attentive to an emerging national genealogy free of foreign dependency, Benacerraf occupied an ambiguous position: not entirely Venezuelan or perhaps not Venezuelan enough.

After *Araya*, Benacerraf ceased making film, likely due to lack of institutional support and of private investment for auteur or documentary film. Instead, she turned to cultural institution-building. In 1964, she responded to the call of her close friends Mariano Picón Salas

[7] "Buena parte de mi vida ha sido así de andar de aqui para allá." In *Sal de Ayer*, Diego Gil Arroyo, Planeta Venezolana: 2019, 53.

and Miguel Otero Silva. Otero Silva (1908-1985) was a prominent politician from the left, former member of the Communist party of Venezuela, and journalist who founded the newspaper *El Nacional*. Both he and Picón Salas were part of the new democratic consolidation under President Raúl Leoni (1964-1969). At their request, Margot left Paris to lead the newly founded INCIBA (National Institute of Culture and Fine Arts), launching important initiatives such as the Amazonas Federal Pilot Plan. Populated with isolated communities with no awareness of their Venezuelan identity, the part of the country south of the Orinoco River had been culturally neglected. The Amazonas Pilot Plan was in effect "a civic mission, a work of cultural promotion, and a means of advancing national unification."[8]

Other later projects Benacerraf undertook were her key advocacies for film culture. It included the founding of a National Cinematheque (1966). Modeled after the legendary Cinemathèque in Paris, the Cinemateca Margot Benacerraf bolstered cine-club culture with an emphasis on Latin American films.

A wonderfully strange episode captures Benacerraf's deep enmeshment in Latin America's cultural and intellectual fabric, as well as her proximity to what would come to be known as "magical realism." After *Araya*, she collaborated with her friend Gabriel García Márquez on a script for the film *Eréndira*, which preceded his 1972 novella *The Incredible and Sad tale of Innocent Eréndira and her Heartless Grandmother*. Although the collaboration ultimately failed (the film was directed by Ruy Guerra), a striking scene witnessed by Benacerraf during the filming of *Araya* found its way into the script. One day, President Perez Jiménez arrived unannounced to Araya on his yacht, accompanied by a lavish retinue that included his concubines. In a gesture at once theatrical and surreal, he proceeded to stage a collective Roman Catholic wedding for the couples in his entourage and even asked Margot to film it (she regretfully declined as she was afraid to run out of film stock). The episode seems almost too implausible to be true—yet it was precisely this convergence of the real and the extraordinary that defined the imaginative terrain Benacerraf shared with García Márquez.

[8] *An interview with Margot Benacerraf: Reverón, Araya, and the Institutionalization of Cinema in Venezuela*, ibid.

Recent scholarship has illuminated how Maghrebi Jews of Northern Morocco at the turn of the 20th century articulated a richly layered, multifaceted, and multidimensional model of identity.[9] Furthermore, these studies have also shown how the migration of these populations resulted in complex global networks, in uninterrupted dialogue with their homeland.[10] Fortunato Benacerraf's life –culminating in his burial in Morocco after decades in Venezuela—embodies this circular trajectory. Margot inherited and transformed that layered identity. Drawing upon Spanish and French cultural affinities instilled in her from childhood, she fashioned a complex and capacious selfhood. This inheritance enabled her to move fluidly across cultural worlds, shaping her into a singularly original—if at times misunderstood--national figure in Venezuela.

Select Bibliography:

Alegria Bendelac, *Mosaïques: une enfance juive à Tanger (1930-1945)*, Wallada: 1992.

Julianne Burton-Carvajal:

-*An Interview with Margot Benacerraf: Reverón, Araya, and the Institutionalization of Cinema in Venezuela*, Benacerraf, Schwartzman, Calderón, and Burton-Carvajal ed., Journal of Film and Video, Fall 1992 and Winter 1993, Vol. 44, no ¾, pp.51-75.

-*Araya across Time and Space*, in *Visible Nations, Latin America Cinema and Video*, Chon Noriega ed. University of Minnesota Press: 2000.

Diego Gil Arroyo: Sal de ayer: *memorias de Margot Benacerraf*, Caracas: Planeta Venezolana, 2019.

S.D. Goitein: *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Commnunities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967-1993.

Aviad Moreno, *Entwined homelands, Empowered diasporas, Hispanic Moroccan Jews and their Globalizing Community*, Indiana university Press: 2024.

Susan Gilson Miller, *Moise Nahon and the Invention of the Modern Maghrebi Jew*, in *French Mediterraneans*, Patricia Lorcin and Todd Shepard ed., University of Nebraska Press: 2016.

[9] See Susan Gilson Miller, *Moise Nahon and the Invention of the Modern Maghrebi Jew*, in *French Mediterraneans*, Patricia Lorcin and Todd Shepard ed., University of Nebraska Press: 2016.

[10] See Aviad Moreno, *Entwined Homelands*, *Empowered Diasporas*, *Hispanic Moroccan Jews and their Globalizing Community*, Indiana University Press: 2024

Abdelkébir Khatibi in Caracas

Amine M. Bit
Yale University, USA

Introduction

“I write to you from afar, in a kind of parabolic displacement of continents—as a maritime breath which transcends my nationality.”

—Abdelkébir Khatibi, A Letter Without a Recipient[1]

In January of this year, as I was in the midst of writing this essay, American Special Forces took part in an astounding operation that resulted in the deposition of now former president of Venezuela Nicolas Maduro. Charged with “narcoterrorism”—a bewildering portmanteau of two terms which belong to the lexicon of pseudoscholarship—Maduro and his wife have now resided in the Metropolitan Detention Center in New York for the past 3 months, awaiting a trial which will undoubtedly be a parody of the delivery of justice. While the United States itself has a long history of military intervention in Latin America, the indictment and kidnapping of a sovereign head-of-state is historically unprecedented and represents a sharp inflection point in the accelerating collapse of the neoliberal world order in which the illusion of diplomacy has been shattered by the harshness of material reality: that disagreements between nation-states are not adjudicated through shared interest, reciprocity, and collaboration but by who has the bigger army. Today, with the United States’ War on Iran concluding its second month with no clear end in sight, it has become all the more apparent that war itself has left the realm of political theatre and entered the domain of fiat, in which justification, whether by way of a *mission civilisatrice* or its more recent historical transformations of “The War on Terror” or “spreading democracy,” have become irrelevant in comparison to the ability to simply wage it. In

[1] I’d like to express my thanks to Heide Castañeda, who assisted with the translation of this letter from the Spanish.

that manner, it is now more than ever that it is incumbent upon us as humanists, artists, and historical scientists to mobilize the energy of the South to conceptualize new horizons of struggle against state powers that seek to homogenize, elaborate, dominate, and humiliate as opposed to heterogenize, fragment, and incomplete.

In 1970, the Institute of Sociology was shut down by the Moroccan state as a part of a broader crackdown on intellectual life in the country. At the time, the head of the Institute was Moroccan sociologist, literary critic, novelist, and poet Abdelkébir Khatibi. Born in El Jadida in 1938, Khatibi completed his undergraduate studies in Morocco before leaving the country to complete his doctoral studies in sociology at the Sorbonne under Albert Memmi. He completed his studies in 1965 before returning to Morocco and serving as the director of the Institute of Sociology from 1966 until its closure, after which we see a marked change in the works present in his *oeuvre*. After the institute was shut down, Khatibi continued to publish works on sociology. He, for example (and perhaps not coincidentally), published *Pouvoir et administration: études sur les élites maghrébines* [Power and Administration: Studies on the Maghrebi Elite] in 1970, and *Études sociologiques sur le Maroc* [Sociological Studies Regarding Morocco] in 1971. However, he also began to publish works of fiction, autobiography, as well as political essays, such as *Vomito Blanco*, and *On Precolonial Hierarchy* (1970), a comparative study of Marxist and Khaldunian sociology. We see, during this period, the beginnings of the thinking that would lay the groundwork for some of Khatibi’s most celebrated works of literary criticism, as well as most provocative scholarly contributions in the field of post/decolonial theory. This is partially due to, I think, the fact that during this watershed moment of Khatibi’s life, in order to write these works, he was forced to look elsewhere. Given the repressive nature of the Moroccan state during the time in which Khatibi was producing these works, all of the aforementioned books were published in France with a number of different publishers, whether with magazines or publishing houses. Beyond the practical concern of finding a home for his work, this period, I think, was also a time where looking elsewhere was not simply a logistical concern but a *directional* one—a time where he was searching for another way of thinking and being that would escape both the intellectual legacy of the West and Arab-Islamic traditionalism that characterized much of Maghrebi academia.

In this essay, I should like to argue that Khatibi found this other thought not in the Arab World, or Europe, but in Latin America, and that he conceptualized the relationship between

Latin America and the Maghreb as a matter not of contradiction but of *translation*. While some work has appeared in the past ten years in the anglosphere on Khatibi’s description of the relationship between Spain and Morocco as a “traumatic chiasmus”[2], as well as the need to think with and through that trauma, little to no work has been done on how Khatibi understands Latin America’s connection to the Maghreb. A thorough, exhaustive investigation of Khatibi’s reading of Latin American literature and thought is beyond the scope of this essay, but I would like to, by way of an inquiry into his lesser-read works, position him not as a powerhouse of postcolonial criticism but in fact on the contrary. To not center his work but to think beyond language of elaboration and centrality and disregard notions of self-sufficiency in favor of a way of reading Khatibi’s work that places him on the *margin* of a plurality of intellectual, literary, and disciplinary traditions. I will, likewise, ground this essay’s argument first in a discussion of the theoretical framework underlying Khatibi’s conceptualization of the relationship between Latin America and the Maghreb, as well as the Maghrebi rediscovery of Arab Spain through Latin America. Then, I will move to develop this framing through an exploration of a few incredibly rich notes on Khatibi’s part with regards to the ways in which the Maghreb can benefit from dialogue with other Southern scholars in other parts of the Tricontinent, arguing that Khatibi’s concept of double critique (the call to critique both the West’s intellectual legacy and Arab-Islamic traditionalism) was influenced by a visit to Caracas in the late 1970s. Lastly, I will conclude with a turn to a letter Khatibi wrote in honor of Venezuelan sociologist Jeannette Abouhamad (the only work of his to appear exclusively in Spanish), as well as with a call on us Maghrebis to think of this constant translation between Latin America and the Maghreb not as a moment of loss or lack but rather, as a life-affirming *horizon for thought*.

“A Traumatic Chiasmus:” The Rediscovery of Arab Spain through Latin America

“A specter haunts the Conquistadors…of the Moor and of his brother in destiny: the African.

-–Bouazza Benachir, *The Tango of the Globalizers of a Desert*

In May of 1984, Khatibi attended a conference in Ronda, Spain, where he gave a lecture entitled “Beyond Trauma: Morocco/Spain (In Search of Lost Paradise).”[3] The conference, which was attended by the likes of Adonis, Juan Goytisolo, Abdelwahhab Meddeb, and other select

[2] Lyamlahy, *Nostalgic Rebels*, 13.
[3] Khatibi, *Beyond Trauma*, 291.

Spanish and Arab writers who sought to “ask the questions that they feel must be addressed before Arab and Spanish intercultural debates can be renewed.”[4] Khatibi, just as the title of his lecture suggests, seeks to understand how Moroccans and Spaniards can think of the relationship between their two countries beyond the trauma of the Reconquista which produces “two ruptures: that of the Arab defeat and of Catholic Spain with its historical and cultural continuity.”[5]

In his recent study of nostalgia in the work of Moroccan writers Abdellatif Laâbi, Abdelkébir Khatibi, and Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, Khalid Lyamlahy, assistant professor of French and Francophone studies at the University of Chicago, argues in *Nostalgic Rebels* that Khatibi’s advocacy for an overcoming of trauma, resentment, and denial on both sides of the Spanish-Moroccan chiasmus culminated in a call for a “transnational and intercultural mode of writing through and beyond nostalgia [par la nostalgie et au-delà].”[6] While some scholars have been rightfully critical of the convenient invocation of Andalusian *convivencia*, such as in the case of the fascist Franco government, which used the memory of Al-Andalus to justify colonial projects,[7][8] Khatibi here, instead, seeks to draw from the Nietzschean philosophical grounding of his decolonial project to imagine, through and beyond nostalgia, a world in which Maghrebi thinking about Al-Andalus is not resentful or compensatory—to imagine a mode of writing that says *Yes* to both the historical reality of the Arab defeat and Catholic Spain. In that manner, Khatibi criticizes the of thinking of Al-Andalus exclusively as a lost paradise insofar as “for Arabs and for the Spanish, what constitutes the power of the unforgotten is not exactly the remembrance of a loss…But rather it’s the unthought-of traces of trauma that unceasingly return, even today.”[9] We should take note of Khatibi’s diction here, it is not *exactly* the remembrance of a loss. That is not to say that the end of Al-Andalus did not constitute a loss, but rather that it is just *a* loss in a literary tradition, where nostalgia, “mourning over the ruins”(*wuquf ‘ala al-atlal*),[10] and taking pleasure in reconstituting paradise has been a part of its memories for centuries. The issue, then, is not the existence of these songs, but instead the necessity of writing *other* songs. Simultaneously, this call to write other songs about the traumatic chiasmus of

[4] Ibid, 291.
[5] Ibid, 294.
[6] Lyamlahy, *Nostalgic Rebels*, 13.
[7] Creswell, *Reimaging Al-Andalus*, 4-5.
[8] Aidi, *The Interference of Al-Andalus*, 71-74.
[9] Khatibi, *Beyond Trauma*, 292.
[10] Miller, *The Emergence of Arabic Poetry*, 17-46.

Morocco and Spain is complicated by the fact that “we return to a different Spain, which has been globalized for centuries, and whose destiny requires us to think about a parallel afterlife beyond ruins.”[11] Likewise, Khatibi moves to argue that this Spain, one that exists beyond trauma, “also goes by the name of Latin America,”[12] befitting of the scope necessitated by the fact that Spain has become for us an aesthetic experience as opposed to a historical one. And, I should like to add an aesthetic experience that for Arabic literature in the late 20th-century, hasn’t returned *“through Spain*—or hardly at all—but through Latin America.”[13] Khatibi himself cites the example of Borges, who reintroduced the story of Al-Andalus into world literature through his writing of *A Universal History of Infamy*, which led Khatibi to write his play *The Veiled Prophet*.

Latin America, then, for Khatibi is not just an abstract aesthetic connection within a traumatic rupture but a tangible site of South-South contact between Latin American and Maghrebi literature (as well as Arabic literature more broadly) that is at work even in his own *oeuvre*. As for other examples, he even cites Lezama Lima as having been an inspiration for his interest in mythological depth, and the fact that the first part of *Amour bilingue* ends with a song by Juan Carlos Núñez printed entirely in Spanish.[14] On the other hand, I would be remiss to not mention that Khatibi’s literary project, as I have yet to explicate this throughline in my reasoning up to this point, is simultaneously a poetic project (in the sense that many of its questions belong not to the realm of philosophy but of *poiesis*) as well as a *political* one—one which is strongly influenced by both Nietzsche’s pluralistic moral philosophy as well as Fanonian Decolonial Humanism.[15] His invocations of *ressentiment*, denial, and thinking through and beyond trauma are a part of, a point that in his lecture is not explicated but at once present, his work on the self-overcoming that is the perennial project of the postcolonial subject across the world.[16]

On Latin American Influence on Khatibi’s Decoloniality

[11] Ibid, 293.
[12] Ibid, 293.
[13] Ibid, 297.
[14] Ibid, 298.
[15] Gourgouris, *Nothing Sacred*, 13-33.
[16] While ostensibly a contradiction, insofar as Khatibi’s proclaimed purpose of rereading Nietzsche in a decolonial register in *Pensée-autre* is a part of his critique of Fanon, I would disagree by saying that Khatibi and Fanon’s decolonial projects have much in common as they both ultimately seek to overcome the settler-native distinction entirely. Alas, this is far beyond the scope of this essay.

During the “Years of Lead,” a period of intense political repression, especially of intellectuals, in Morocco that roughly aligned with the reign of King Hassan II, multiple journals appeared hoping to address the concerns of Moroccans. Some, like *Souffles*, began with a focus on Arts and Culture before delving into discussions of Moroccan political economy, leading to the magazine being shut down in the early 1970s. In addition to *Souffles*, however, another publication emerged named *Lamalif*, which ran between 1966 and 1988 and became the longest running francophone journal in the country. Like *Souffles*, Khatibi would contribute to *Lamalif* multiple times, and the interviews and pieces that he contributed are our best insight into how he conceptualized Morocco’s relationship with Latin America, as well as how that thinking appeared in his decolonial project.

Over a decade before the conference in Ronda, in 1973, Khatibi sat down with Zakya Daoud to discuss his experience attending an international sociology conference in Caracas, Venezuela. He was the only African sociologist present at the conference, and returned from the conference “with profound insights about sociology and also about the problems of the Third World and South America.”[17] Admittedly, much of the content of his criticism in *We Must Attempt a Lasting Double Critique*, is essentially what would later become the content of *Plural Maghreb*, his *magnum opus*, such as retreating from metaphysics in Maghrebi thought, the necessity of a double critique of both the West’s intellectual legacy and our own Arab-Islamic tradition, and the decolonization of sociology. However, a rhetorical throughline is how the intellectual liberation struggles of these two peoples, Moroccan and Venezuelan, are inextricably tied. The conference was about Southern sociology very broadly, but was also very political. In terms of his own understanding of the discipline, Khatibi’s attendance confirmed what he terms “the failure of functionalism in understanding the countries of the third world.”[18] That is to say, the same methods produced by Western sociology are inadequate to the extent that they do not deal directly enough with the circumstances of oppressed societies. To solidify this example, Khatibi brings up an example of a Moroccan sociologist using a concept from Khaldunian sociology, *assabiya*, which relies on a cyclical, non-dialectal conception of history, in the context of a society that has a different conception of history, such as in the case of a society that wants to be dialectical, but isn’t yet. A critical disciplinary problem in the course of the decolonization of sociology, Marxist sociologists in the Maghreb sought for years to reconcile Khaldunian

[17] Khatibi, *We Must Attempt a Lasting Double Critique*, 267.
[18] Ibid, 271.

rationality with Marxist dialectics. The subject of an essay which would later be published in *Maghreb pluriel*, many had sought to either constitute Ibn Khaldun as an early progenitor of Marxist sociology (by positioning him as an early theorist of the labor-theory of value) or by placing him in an entirely distinct school of sociological thought, this interview with Daoud serves as a foreshadowing of a radical insight on Khatibi's part: that many southern sociologists understood the differences between these two traditions of critique as a matter of contradiction instead of *translation*, leading either to proposed genealogies that amounted to anachronism or willful applications of decontextualized concepts that amounted to epistemological violence. This intellectual challenge, what Khatibi has in other places called "projective behaviors[comportements projectives]" amongst Moroccan scholars, is a fundamental problem not just in sociology as a discipline, but in post/decolonial thought more broadly. Instead, he calls for Moroccan intellectuals to analyze other societies "where they are"[la ou il-est].[19]

This leads Khatibi to discuss the differences between the challenges faced by sociologists in Latin America vs. the Maghreb. Namely, that sociology was much more well-established in Latin America, whereas sociology in the Maghreb was still very much dependent on French academia. Or, that, for example, in Latin America, there are sociologists who are politicians, or even sociologists who engage in guerilla warfare and use their knowledge within the context of armed struggle, albeit he notes that that is an extreme case. Nevertheless, regardless of context, Khatibi maintains a throughline throughout the course of the essay—the necessity to transform the immense potential of the Tricontinent into a double critique of both the West's intellectual legacy as well as the precolonial hierarchies of one's own society. A part of the attempt of a lasting double critique, however, for Khatibi, is rejecting elaborative tendencies and theological thinking in all traditions, what Khatibi calls in this interview with Daoud the "breaking with the metaphysical circle."[20] And a part of breaking this metaphysical circle, I think, is recognizing that Khatibi's thinking about Latin America and the Maghreb should not be thought of as a matter of contradiction but rather of *translation*. Three-years prior to the publication of the interview with Daoud, Khatibi published the first part of what would later become his famed essay "Double Critique" as published in *Plural Maghreb* in 1983. This essay, called *On precolonial hierarchy*,[21] is immensely illuminating when put into conversation with *We Must*

[19] Khatibi, *Entre les lignes,* 1:54-7:28.
[20] Khatibi, *We Must Attempt a Lasting Double Critique*, 267.
[21] Khatibi, *Plural Maghreb.*

Attempt A Lasting Double Critique in the sense that it serves as a kind of theoretical staging-ground for many of the insights and comments that Khatibi makes during his conversation with Daoud. Four years after *On Precolonial Hierarchy*, as well as one year after *We Must Attempt a Lasting Double Critique*, Khatibi published the second part of his essay entitled *Decolonization of Sociology* which also echoes many of the same insights garnered from Khatibi’s visit to Caracas.

The *Bibliographie de l’oeuvre de Abdelkébir Khatibi*, compiled by colleague of Khatibi Said Nejjar, is one of the most comprehensive bibliographies of not just works by, as well as about, Khatibi up to the year 2001, encapsulating almost the entirety of his published work.[22] The reference is organized by genre, beginning with his works of literature and essays, before then moving on to discuss his collaborative works, articles, and finally, university dissertations and articles that include his work. The bibliography also includes an entire portion dedicated to his works translated into, or appearing exclusively in, Arabic (although he never wrote in Arabic), speaking to how important it was for Khatibi that his ideas were to change the intellectual currents of the Arab world. One notes, as they make their way through the bibliography, that all of Khatibi’s thinking about Latin America, as well as Arab Spain, seems to take place after 1973—after his visit to Caracas. Additionally, four years after his visit to Ronda, Khatibi published *Andalucias*,[23] a project that included an introduction by Juan Goytisolo (a close friend of Khatibi), texts by Khatibi, as well as screen prints by renowned Hispanic and Arab artists such E. Arroyo, F. Belkahia, Mohammed Chebaa, L.R. Gordillo, and Mohammed Kacimi. The texts were also presented in three languages (Arabic, Spanish, and French), and the screen prints produced by these artists were displayed, alongside the texts, at the Marsam Gallery in Rabat in 1988, and later at the University of Seville in 1992.

Considering Khatibi’s thinking about Latin America making way for the rediscovery of Arab Spain was profound enough to merit the writing of a project of this magnitude, I cannot help but suspect that the theoretical jump made between the two chapters of *Double Critique, On Precolonial Hierarchy* (1970) and *Decolonization of Sociology* (1974), was made possible by Khatibi’s visit to Caracas in 1973. Additionally, it is of note that *We Must Attempt a Lasting Double Critique* is, within Khatibi’s *oeuvre*, one of the first calls to his concept of a double critique in a non-Maghrebi decolonial context. The influence of this concept in Khatibi’s

[22] Khatibi passed away in 2009 in Rabat.
[23] Nejjar, *Bibliographie*, 19.

thinking is immense, and, I think, colors the rest of the development of his postcolonial criticism that characterized much of his late work. Seven years after the publication of *Double Critique*, in 1981, Khatibi would publish *Other Thought*, the fullest expression of his concept of double critique not just as a constant practice, but as the beginning of the *chance* of thought—a mode of thinking that exists outside of the political discourses of its time. The essay, a striking work of prose poetry that is required reading for anyone hoping to understand Khatibi’s thinking, notes that a necessary future step in the process of intellectual decolonization is to find “something else”—an “other thought” which exists on a margin on alert, outside of the intellectual legacy of the West or the, at times, elaborative tendencies of our Arab-Islamic tradition. I don’t think it brash to say, then, that the other thought—the insurgent force which animated the production of this essay—was not to be found in the Arab world, or Europe, or even Africa, but Latin America.

“The Living Poem of Caracas:” Latin America and the Maghreb as a Horizon for Thought

“I would also like to celebrate this light that, in the heart of the night, continues to illuminate the living poem of Caracas.”
—Abdelkébir Khatibi, *A Letter Without a Recipient*

When Venezuelan sociologist Jeannette Abouhamad died in 1984, a group of scholars joined together to assemble a collection of essays honoring her life, work, and legacy. The work, entitled “The Human Sciences: International Homage to Jeannette Abouhamad [*Las Ciencias de lo humano: homenaje internacional a Jeannette Abouhamad*],” was published in Caracas, six years later. The collection includes contributions from a number of Latin American authors, like Rafel Caldera and Teolínda Bolivar. Incidentally, the piece includes a contribution from Khatibi that is both, perhaps literally (in the sense that it is not an academic work) and metaphorically out of place. The piece that Khatibi contributed, “A Letter without a Recipient” [*Carta sin Destinario*], which was written in May 1984,[24] a few weeks before his visit to Spain, is a broad reflection that encompasses the beauty of Caracas (what he calls a “living poem”), the specific meaning of *vacilar* in Venezuelan Spanish, the sensory and inspirational qualities inspired within him by the word *Maracaibo* (which he says opens within him “an unknown world that is present

[24] Abouhamad, *Las Ciencas de lo humano*, 43.

in some part of my emblematic imaginary”), and bittersweet reminiscences with regards to his friendship with Abouhamad, amongst other notes.

A Letter without a Recipient is unique within Khatibi’s *oeuvre* for several reasons. Firstly, according to Nejjar,[25] it never appeared in the original French, making it the only one of Khatibi’s works to appear solely in Spanish. Secondly, it is the only work in which Khatibi writes at length about his travels to Latin America, and is likewise rich with metaphor, symbolism, and eloquent poetic language that makes immediately apparent the profound impact that this experience, as well as friendship with Abouhamad, had on his work. As for their friendship, admittedly, we know very little. We do know that, for example, they were both doctoral students at the Sorbonne’s sociology department around the same time, albeit their overlap was only about two years (Khatibi defended in 1965, and Abouhamad in 1969).[26] We also know that, despite being at a French university, both decided to write about their countries of origin. Khatibi’s doctoral dissertation was about the Maghrebi novel, which he did under Albert Memmi, while Abouhamad’s was entitled “The Men of Venezuela: Their Dreams, Their Needs.”[27] Finally, while per Lamalif, we know for a fact that Khatibi visited Venezuela at least once, we also know that Abouhamad ended up serving as President of the International Sociological Association the year right before her death. Whether her tenure ultimately led to an invitation to Khatibi to attend, however, is unclear.

Towards the end of *A Letter*, Khatibi admits “I haven't mentioned Jeannette Abouhamad's sociological work. No doubt others have taken upon themselves this useful and necessary task.”[28] What makes this admission so fascinating is that, well, all of whom have read Khatibi as well as Abouhamad’s work know that he almost certainly contributed an academic piece about her scholarship. Psychoanalysis, for example, figured prominently both in Khatibi’s *oeuvre* (especially around the time that he wrote this piece) and Abouhamad’s, and both were interested in the legacy of colonialism, amongst other shared interests. Yet, I think, as I hope I have demonstrated in this essay, that it would also be wrong to say that he *never* wrote about her work. Khatibi’s friendship with Abouhamad, as well as how deeply he cherished it, is manifest in

[25] Nejjar, *Bibliographie*, 32.
[26] Les Études philosophiques, *SOUTENANCES DE THÈSES*, 283.
[27] Abouhamad, *Los Hombres de Venezuela.*
[28] Abouhamad, *Las Ciencas de lo humano*, 47.

all the ways he has written about Latin America, in the shared struggle of all peoples from oppressed countries, and finally, even in the way he thinks about the Maghreb.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have argued that Khatibi’s engagement with Latin American thought over the course of a decade, as well as how he understood the relationship between Latin America and the Maghreb, was primarily dictated by two distinct intellectual axes. Firstly, that Khatibi’s understanding of Latin America’s connection to the Maghreb was inextricably tied to the “traumatic chiasmus” caused by the fall of Arab Spain and the Reconquista, arguing that in modern Arabic literature, the rediscovery of Arab Spain did not take place through Morocco or even Spain, but Latin America, solidifying this connection with an example from his own creative work. Secondly, Khatibi’s understanding of the connection between Latin America was also necessarily a connection founded on solidarity–on the fact that both the countries of Latin America and Africa, as well as the Tricontinent more broadly, were engaged in a shared struggle to decolonize themselves. This lens, I argue, is exemplified by the influence that discussions on the decolonization of sociology had on the development of the second part of Khatibi’s renowned essay *Double Critique*, later going on to be one of the crowning achievements of his legacy within post/decolonial theory more broadly. Finally, I concluded with a brief meditation on Khatibi’s friendship with Jeanette Abouhamad, a Venezuelan sociologist whose memory he speaks of with immense warmth that points to, while admittedly a speculation, the idea that these insights about the relationship between Khatibi and Latin America did not exist in a vacuum, but were rather a part of a decades long friendship between two scholars who were dedicated to not the just the practice of *thinking* about their homelands, but *changing* them. While this piece exists as merely an inquiry into the ways in which Khatibi’s intellectual trajectory grew with and through his engagement with Latin American thought (perhaps, one could even say, that Latin America was for him a *horizon for thought*) , in terms of future study, a comparative study of Abouhamad and Khatibi’s work could certainly be of interest to students not just of postcolonial theory, but also psychoanalysis and sociology. Additionally, a more comprehensive intellectual genealogy of how Khatibi’s thinking about Latin America developed through his relationships with Abouhamad and Goytisolo is also long overdue.

Bibliography:

Abouhamad, Jeannette, Briceño-León, Roberto, Erika Wagner, and Teolinda Bolívar. 1989. *Las Ciencias De Lo Humano : Homenaje Internacional a Jeannette Abouhamad*. Caracas, Venezuela : Asociación Venezolana de Sociología : Fundación Jeannette Abouhamad : Fundación Fondo Editorial Acta Científica Venezolana.

Abouhamad, Jeannette. 1980. Los Hombres de Venezuela : Sus Necesidades, Sus Aspiraciones. 2a ed. Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, Facultad de Ciencias Económicas y Sociales, División de Publicaciones.

Aidi, Hishaam D.. “The interference of al-andalus : Spain, islam, and the west.” Social Text 24 (2006): 67-88.

Borges, Jorge Luis. *Collected Fictions.* Translated by Andrew Hurley, Penguin Books, 1999

Creswell, Robyn. “Reimagining Al-Andalus: Robyn Creswell.” The New York Review of Books, February 1, 2024. https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2024/02/22/reimagining-al-andalus-on-earth-or-in-poems-calderwood/.

Daoud, Zakya, and Matthew Reeck. “Abdelkébir Khatibi: We Must Attempt a Lasting Double Critique.” In *Lamalif: A Critical Anthology of Societal Debates in Morocco during the “Years of Lead" (1966–1988): Volume 1*, edited by Brahim El Guabli and Ali Alalou, DGO-Digital original., 267–74. Liverpool University Press, 2022. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv32nxxb6.46.

Gourgouris, Stathis. Nothing Sacred. Columbia University Press, 2024. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/gour21514.

Khatibi, Abdelkébir. “Émission ‘Entre les lignes.’” Animée par Adil Hajji sur 2M Maroc, June 7, 2010.

Khatibi, Abdelkébir, and Matthew Reeck. “Beyond Trauma: Morocco/Spain (In Search of Lost Paradise).” *Lamalif: A Critical Anthology of Societal Debates in Morocco during the “Years of Lead" (1966–1988): Volume 1*, edited by Brahim El Guabli and Ali Alalou, DGO-Digital original, Liverpool University Press, 2022, pp. 291–98. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv32nxxb6.49. Accessed 24 Oct. 2025.

LYAMLAHY, KHALID. Nostalgic Rebels: Politics, Aesthetics, and Selfhood in Postcolonial Morocco. Liverpool University Press, 2025. https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.21275906.

Miller, Nathaniel (2024). The Emergence of Arabic Poetry: From Regional Identities to Islamic Canonization. University of Pennsylvania Press. ISBN 978-1-5128-2531-2.

Nejjar, Saïd. 2001. *Bibliographie de l’œuvre de Abdelkébir Khatibi*. Rabat : Université Mohammed V: Souissi, Institut universitaire de la recherche scientifique.

“SOUTENANCES DE THÈSES.” Les Études Philosophiques, no. 2 (1969): 283–87. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20845571.

Talbayev, Edwige Tamalet, '*Andalusia as Trauma: The Legacies of Convivencia*', The Transcontinental Maghreb: Francophone Literature across the Mediterranean (New York, NY, 2017; online edn, Fordham Scholarship Online, 18 Jan. 2018), https://doi.org/10.5422/fordham/9780823275151.003.0003, accessed 27 Nov. 2025.

Ambivalent Brotherhood: An Ottoman Arab Imam’s Travels among the Muslims of Brazil

Phoebe Carter
Kenyon College, USA

In 1865 (1282h.), an Ottoman Navy ship called *al-Burṣa* set sail from Istanbul, en route to Basra. To reach their destination, the Ottoman crew planned to circumnavigate the horn of Africa (since the Suez Canal would not be inaugurated for another four years). However, as the ship reached the Southern Atlantic, it encountered a series of hurricanes that blew it westward until it finally found safe harbor in Rio de Janeiro, capital of the Empire of Brazil. Upon the Ottomans’ arrival in the Brazilian port, curious onlookers flocked to the ship to marvel at these unexpected guests.

Among the Ottoman crew was a man named ʿAbd al-Raḥmán al-Baghdādī, who served as the expedition’s imam. As he descended from the ship in his scholarly turban and robes, a Black man among the crowd of onlookers approached him. Much to al-Baghdadi’s surprise, the man greeted him in Arabic with an *al-salāmu ʿalaykum*, the typical greeting used among fellow Muslims. Al-Baghdadi, however, ignored the greeting. Surely, he thought, this Black man in European garb had learned the phrase in order to mock him. After all, this was the New World, which his geography books told him was inhabited by European-descended Christians and Indigenous tribes, but certainly no Muslims. It wasn’t until later that day, when he rose to perform the afternoon prayer and the man came to pray alongside him, that al-Baghdadi realized his error: the man was a Muslim, one of thousands in Brazil among the large West African community who were forcibly brought to the Americas in the transatlantic slave trade.

There are at least two reasons why this is a striking encounter. From al-Baghdadi’s point of view, finding a practicing Muslim in the Americas speaking Arabic was a complete surprise. But it is striking as well for reasons unique to the history of Brazil. The man who greeted al-

Baghdadi in Arabic belonged to the community of West African Muslims known in Brazil as the Malê. Whether enslaved or free, the Malê were forced to hide their Muslim faith in Brazil to avoid persecution from the Catholic imperial authorities. Decades earlier, enslaved and free Black Muslims had led a series of revolts against the racist order of the Brazilian Empire. The largest and most violently suppressed revolt took place in the northern state of Bahia in 1835. Since then, simply being publicly perceived as a Muslim was enough to get someone beaten, imprisoned, or even killed.[1] We can thus infer that the Black Brazilian man who greeted al-Baghdadi in Arabic did so under threat of violent punishment, since the phrase would have identified him as a Muslim.

Persecuted and largely disconnected from Muslim networks beyond Brazil, the Malê were overjoyed by the arrival of a Muslim scholar from Islamic lands. At the request of the Malê, al-Baghdadi stayed in Brazil for three years, traveling between different Muslim communities in Rio de Janeiro, Pernambuco, and Bahia. During his time there, he covertly provided religious education in the pillars of Islam, Qur’anic recitation, and Arabic literacy. After three years traveling and teaching throughout Brazil, al-Baghdadi returned to Istanbul, with the financial assistance of Bahia’s Muslim community. Before departing, he promised the Muslims that he would return with official Ottoman support. Upon his return to Istanbul in 1869, he penned an account in Arabic about his Brazilian sojourn, which he called *Musaliyyat al-gharīb bi kul amr ‘ajīb*, or, “The Delight of the Foreigner in All Matters of Wonder.”

Written in the style of a classical Arabic *riḥla,* or travelogue, al-Baghdadi’s account was soon translated into Turkish and circulated widely to Ottoman readers. In recent years, this *riḥla* has seen renewed interest, and has appeared in several languages in the past couple of decades. A trilingual edition in Arabic, Portuguese, and Spanish was published in 2007 as the inaugural publication of the Biblioteca e Centro de Pesquisa América do Sul-Páises Árabes (the South America-Arab Countries Library and Research Center), BibliASPA for short. And a quadrilingual edition in Arabic, Turkish, Portuguese, and Spanish was published in 2017 by the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs. These contemporary editions, with multiple translations bound together in a single volume, suggest a project of transregional collaboration between the

[1] ‘Abd al-Raḥmán al-Baghdadi and Paulo Daniel Farah. *Musalliyat al-gharīb fī kul amr ‘ajib / Deleite do estrangeiro em tudo o que é espantoso e maravilhoso: Estudo de um relato de viagem bagdali.* Algiers: al-Maktabah al-Waṭanīyah al-Jazā’irīyah; Rio de Janeiro: Ministério da Cultura, Fundação; Caracas: Instituto Autónomo, Biblioteca Nacional y de Servicios de Bibliotecas, 2007. 142.

Middle East and Latin America and, specifically, the bond of a Latin American Muslim diaspora with Muslim communities in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Indeed, through these editions, al-Baghdadi has been revived as a symbol of what we might call South-South solidarity, hailed for connecting an isolated Muslim community with the umma, or global community of Muslims.[2] Other scholars, by contrast, are less sanguine about what al-Baghdadi represents, characterizing his work as the ramblings of a bigoted Arabocentric Muslim traveler.[3] I argue, however, that both of these assessments are too quick to suppress one side or the other of al-Baghdadi’s contradictory relation to the Malê. They gloss over either al-Baghdadi’s advocacy on behalf of the Muslims of Brazil, or the undercurrent of anxiety over their black African origins and non-native Arabic speech. Rather than defining al-Baghdadi’s travelogue as an unequivocal emblem either of solidarity or bigotry, I read it as an articulation of an “ambivalent brotherhood:” on the one hand, al-Baghdadi expresses a sense of fraternity with the Malê as brothers of a shared faith; on the other hand, he casts them as his racial and linguistic others.

Ambivalent brotherhood

The dynamic of ambivalent brotherhood emerges in the initial encounter between al-Baghdadi and the Malê man who greets him, with which this essay opens. The Malê man extends a greeting in Arabic, al-Baghdadi’s native language and the sacred language of Islam. Yet, although al-Baghdadi understands the words, he views this Arabic phrase as out of place in the Black Brazilian man’s mouth. Only when they wash and pray in unison does al-Baghdadi come to understand, through this shared practice, that they are fellow Muslims. Once he realizes this, he is eager to help them, acquiring permission from the ship’s commander to stay behind in

[2] In addition to the multilingual translations and their editorial framing, see Hisham Aidi, *Rebel Music*, Pantheon Books, 2014, 25-29. See also Ali Kulez, “An Early Encounter in the Global South: ’Abd al-Rahman al-Baghdadi’s Journey to the Brazilian Empire,” *Luso-Brazilian Review* 58, no. 2 (2021): 196–220, which critically evaluates BibliASPA’s presentation of al-Baghdadi’s travelogue as an emblem of early collaboration in the Global South.

[3] See, for example, John Tofik Karam, “African Rebellion and Refuge on the Edge of Empire” in *Crescent Over Another Horizon : Islam in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latino USA,* eds. Maria del Mar Logroño Narbona, Paulo G. Pinto, and John Tofik Karam: 57. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015; and Ayodeji Ogunnaike, “Bilad Al-Brazil: The Importance of West African Scholars in Brazilian Islamic Education and Practice in Historic and Contemporary Perspective,” *Religions* 12, no. 2 (February 2021): 131.

Brazil in order to teach this isolated Muslim diaspora. Nonetheless, even after he begins to see them as brothers of a shared faith, he continues to inscribe their difference along vernacular lines. In other words, their lack of a common mother tongue comes to represent, for al-Baghdadi, their ultimate difference. Throughout his narrative, he treats Arabic as misused and misplaced among the African-descended Muslims of Brazil.

The transatlantic encounter between al-Baghdadi and the Malê is informed by a universalizing ideal, in which all Muslims belong to a single community, regardless of their birthplace, genealogy, or mother tongue; yet their relation as fellow Muslims is also inflected by an asymmetry between the imam, an Arabophone religious scholar who was born and raised in Damascus and employed by the Ottoman Navy in Istanbul; and the non-Arabic-speaking Malê, who live as a persecuted racial and religious minority in a Catholic empire. Given this, there are at least three salient lenses through which the relation between al-Baghdadi and the Malê can be understood: first, in terms of a translingual encounter, in which they share Arabic as their scriptural language of worship, but not as their vernacular (or spoken) language of communication; second, as a transimperial encounter between minoritized Ottoman and Brazilian subjects (many of whom were born in the Sultanate of Sokoto in West Africa); and third, in terms of classical Islamic law, as a center-periphery encounter between an imam from the heart of *Dar al-Islam*, or Islamic lands, and Muslim diasporic subjects, who reside in non-Islamic lands, *Dar al-Ḥarb*, where they cannot freely practice their faith.[4]

For the purposes of this essay, I will focus primarily on the first dynamic—their ambivalent brotherhood as understood through language—though the transimperial context and center-peripheral relation figure into the issue of language as well. Their ambivalent brotherhood is exemplified through dynamics of language portrayed in the travelogue, in which Arabic functions as a medium of cohesion between al-Baghdadi and the Malê, while also becoming a site of friction onto which al-Baghdadi projects the Malê’s otherness. The dual function of Arabic in this transimperial encounter reveals cultural dynamics that exceed the binary constructions—East/West, domination/resistance, solidarity/antagonism—that often structure postcolonial analyses.

[4] For a related interpretation of al-Baghdadi’s travelogue, see Diogo Bercito, “Teaching Islam to African Muslims in Brazil,” *International Journal of Latin American Religions*, 2023, which argues that the manuscript reflects 19th-century Ottoman imperial policies and practices of “correction of belief” (*tashīh-i i ‘tikād*, in Ottoman Turkish) of Muslims within and beyond Ottoman realms.

Arabic as a medium of cohesion and site of friction

As the language of Islamic scripture and worship, Arabic became a cohesive medium, a discursive glue for al-Baghdadi and the Malê, despite their lack of a common vernacular or an alternative common tongue. In one of the more striking scenes of his travelogue, Al-Baghdadi’s *riḥla* registers the role of Arabic as a cohesive force shared by the imam and his fellow Muslims in Brazil. He describes how, after several months in Brazil, he attended the Good Friday mass along with several other Muslims:

> I went with a group of Muslims, all of us dressed in European dress. We entered the church and saw the emperor and the patriarch standing at the right side of the idol decorated with silver and gold. They worshipped the idol by kneeling before it, raising their hands in supplication. They adored the statue. When I saw them doing this I got goosebumps and whispered to my companions, “Say: God is unique,” and so forth, in their hearts, over and over.[5]

> وذهب مع جملة من المسلمين كل منا عليه لباس الإفرنج فدخلنا الى الكنيسة فرأينا الامبراطور والبترك وقوفا
> على يمين ذلك الصنم الذي هو بالفضة والذهب معمل ثم أشاروا له بالسجود على ركبهم باركين رافعين أيديهم
> كالمسجيرين واظهروا هيئة العبودية لتلك الصورة الرسمية فلما راى هذا الداعى فعالهم اقشعر مني الجسد وقلت لرفقائى قولوا قل هو الله احد الخ وذلك سرا مرة بمرة

The verse he instructs them to recite is from a chapter of the Qur’an, *sūrat al-ikhlāṣ*, which declares: “God is unique, supreme, neither begetting nor begotten, and without peer.” This chapter, which expresses God’s unity and singularity, articulates one of the fundamental differences between Islam and Christianity. Recited in a church on the mass commemorating the crucifixion, their collective prayer stands as a pointed yet quiet rebellion against the dominant religion. The scene provides a rich illustration of what it meant to practice Islam in nineteenth century Brazil: forced to dissimulate, they dressed as Christians and participated in the public rituals of Catholicism. However, they maintained the tenets of their own faith, reinforced by a

[5] Al-Baghdadi, 154. Translations are adapted from Yacine Daddi Addoun’s unpublished English translation, which he generously shared with me.

community of Muslims around them. In the church, Al-Baghdadi stands shoulder to shoulder with the Malê, enduring homesickness and possible persecution in order to remain with them. In their whispered rebellion, Arabic as their shared language of worship becomes a cohesive, sacred, and subversive medium.

Another chapter of the *riḥla*, however, reveals how Arabic also becomes a site of friction onto which al-Baghdadi projects the Malê’s difference. Throughout his travelogue, al-Baghdadi critiques the Muslims’ accented Arabic, deprecating them as non-native speakers, and rebukes their use of Arabic for talismans in ways that complicate Arabic’s role as a medium of solidarity between the Arab traveler and his non-Arab others. In other words, the very thing that unites them becomes a source of friction.

In a chapter about their Qur’anic knowledge, Al-Baghdadi writes with dismay about their accented speech in Arabic. Having grown accustomed to producing Portuguese sounds, their tongues are “heavy” (*thaqīl*), and they struggle to produce several of the Arabic letters. However, it is not only the Malê’s weak memorization and poor pronunciation that perturbs the imam. Despite the community’s minimal literacy, he writes that “they make a show of valuing the Eternal Speech, putting it in boxes for blessings (*baraka*) rather than for learning (*taʿlīm*).”[6] (يتغالون بأثمان الكلام القديم يضعوه في الصناديق بركةً ولا للتعليم)

It is a somewhat opaque statement upon first reading. His reference to “Eternal Speech” (*al-kalām al-qaḍīm*) refers, presumably, to the Qur’an, understood as the eternal and infallible word of God. In al-Baghdadi’s eyes, they misuse the Qur’an by placing it in “boxes for baraka instead of for learning.” Al-Baghdadi says no more on the matter, and does not clarify what these boxes are. He may be describing storage boxes, where the Malê conceal their Arabic texts from the prying eyes of suspicious authorities. However, given that he says they place them in boxes for baraka, he is likely referring to a talisman of sorts, in which the sacred script is placed in a small box or amulet in order to provide protection to its wearer.

Such protective talismans were commonly used by the Malê in Brazil, a practice they shared with the West African communities they were born into, as well as Muslims throughout the world.[7] Despite the importance of protective talismans among the Malê and many other Muslim communities worldwide, al-Baghdadi sees the Malê as having misconstrued the value of

[6] Al-Baghdadi, 131.

[7] Kane, 92.

the Qur’an. As al-Baghdadi sees it, the Malê make a show of valuing it by treating it as a commodity to be bought and sold at high prices and enclosed in amulets. In this regard, al-Baghdadi’s reference to eternal *speech* seems pointed: in his view, they have taken language that is meant to be communicative and stripped it of its discursive value. With limited Arabic literacy, he implies, they cannot learn from its message. Instead, they have turned it into a material object of symbolic, and possibly even magical power.

Al-Baghdadi sees their talismanic uses or, in his eyes, their misuses of Qur’anic texts as a result of their isolation in Brazil and their alienation from Islam. For the Malê, however, these practices are not a matter of ignorance, nor the result of their alienation from Islamic realms. Rather, they are practices shared by millions of Muslims in West Africa and throughout the world, practices which they had kept alive and adapted to their new environment.[8] What this line ends up illustrating, then, is a rift over divergent understandings of what constitutes proper treatment of Islamic scripture. The language of the Qur’an, while a shared language that unites Muslims across vernacular difference, thus also becomes a source of friction in al-Baghdadi’s travelogue, and a site onto which he projects the Malê’s difference.

As al-Baghdadi’s criticism of the amulets illustrates, al-Baghdadi equates the Malê’s disconnection from Arabic with their divergence from Islam. Throughout the text, al-Baghdadi criticizes what he sees as aberrant religious practices and tries to discourage them, usually to little effect. He writes,

> They are totally occupied with geomancy and natural magic. They know some Syriac words and tongue clacking. Each leader uses them to attract members to his group. […] I swear these are sciences without benefit. I told them this several times and showed them that it is illicit to deal with these lies. […] They showed their obedience, but I suspect that it was just to please me.[9]

لهم التفات تام لفني علم الرمل والسيميا ويحفظون بعض كلمات سريانية وشقشقات لسانية وكل رئيس بها جذب قلوب عشيرته ... ولعمري انها علوم ليس لها نفع أصلا وكم اخبرتهم بذلك وعرفتهم حرمة تعاطي الاوافك وبالغت في النهي عن ذلك فاظهروا تركها والظاهر لاجل ارضائي فقط وغير ممكن ازالت هذا النمط

[8] Ogunnaike.

[9] Al-Baghdadi, 139.

From this line, we can imagine a polite, hospitable community who want to make their eccentric guest feel welcomed and respected, but who by no means follow all of his dicta. Rather, al-Baghdadi’s pupils select what they want to learn – in particular, how to pray properly and recite the Qur’an – while holding fast to the aspects of their own tradition that are meaningful to them, regardless of al-Baghdadi’s opinions.

Yet, his reference to their “Syriac words and tongue clacking” is telling. His reference to “Syriac words” probably refers, in reality, to Wolof, Hausa, or one of the other languages spoken by the Malê. Just as many languages have their go-to foreign language to denote incomprehensible speech (as the saying in English goes, “it’s all Greek to me”), Al-Baghdadi’s reference for incomprehensibility is Syriac, a minority language spoken in Syria and Iraq and the liturgical language of Syriac Christianity. He thus equates the Malê, in his assessment of their divergent practices, with a religious other. By equating the Malê’s vernacular languages with natural magic and geomancy, both of which al-Baghdadi considers incompatible with his own understanding of Islam, he casts the Malê’s vernacular languages as being outside of Islamic orthodoxy. It is once again along a linguistic faultline that al-Baghdadi inscribes the Malê’s difference.

Diasporic Muslims and Strategic Ambivalence: Reading al-Baghdadi in the *riḥla* tradition

Al-Baghdadi’s account of his years in Brazil is written in the tradition of the Arabic *riḥla* —a word meaning both “travel” and “travelogue” closely associated with the Islamic notion of *al-riḥla fi ṭalab al-ʿilm* (travel in search of knowledge). The Arabic tradition of *riḥla* was conceived as a devotional act (as al-Baghdadi puts it, he set off on his journey to “observe and contemplate the world in order to strengthen my certainty, through observation, in the greatness of the All Powerful”). However, the genre also came to be associated with the strange and the wonderous—*al-gharāʾib* and *al-ʿajāʾib*—which the traveling writer would record for the amazement of his readers back home.

In is travelogue’s title, *Musalliyat al-gharīb bi kul amr ʿajīb,* al-Baghdadi explicitly inserts himself within the Arabic literary tradition of *riḥla* (the terms *gharīb* and *ʿajīb* in his title being the singular forms of *gharāʾib* and *ʿajāʾib*). By titling his work as he did, al-Baghdadi evokes the genre’s key terms, as well as one of its most famous practitioners, Ibn Battuta, the

14th-century traveler who recounted his travels through Asia and Africa in a book called *Tuḥfat an-Nuzzār fi Gharāʾib al-Amsār wa ʿAjāʾib al-Asfār (*A Gift to Those Who Contemplate the Wonders *[gharā'ib]* of Cities and the Marvels *[al-ʿajā'ib]* of Traveling). Ibn Battuta's account includes such marvels as giants, giant snakes, and a giant footprint made by Adam, the first man to walk the earth. The established generic expectations that al-Baghdadi inherited were that a *riḥla* would include descriptions of people, places, and customs utterly strange and surprising to the traveler's audience back home. To write a credible *riḥla,* we might conclude, one had to include incredible things. This understanding of the genre may explain al-Baghdadi's inclusion of some of the more fanciful details, including a description of Indigenous Brazilians' huge feet: when it rained, he writes, they would stand on their heads and use their wide feet as umbrellas (a trope he most likely borrowed from European literature, since similar claims appear in various French and Latin natural histories, including Pliney the Elder's.)[10]

However, al-Baghdadi also distances himself from generic expectations by reversing the typical relation between the traveler and the strange and wondrous things. Whereas in Ibn Battuta's formulation, the writer is the familiar observer who records the strange and wondrous people, places, and things he encounters, in al-Baghdadi's title, *he* is the stranger: in the initial phrase, *Musalliyat al-gharīb, "gharīb"* refers not to the wonders observed, but to the stranger observing the world's wonders. He thus plays with the terms of Ibn Battuta's travelogue in order to highlight his own sense of alienation, even within the unexpected fraternity he found among the Malê.

Part of al-Baghdadi's alienation, it seems, stems not simply from his displacement from his homeland and compatriots. More acutely, he expresses his discomfort with the unfamiliar—and in his mind, aberrant—iteration of his own faith that he finds in Brazil. Throughout the text, al-Baghdadi is ambivalent as to whether the Malê are true Muslims at all. He refers to them throughout the text as *muslimūn,* yet he also tells his commander that "from the beginning of Islam until today, no Muslims have entered these lands. We are the first to arrive and it is our duty to reform this group (*ṭā'ifa*)."[11] He thus implies that "this group" is not, somehow, properly

[10] Paulo Farah notes this in his Portuguese translation of the *rihla* (Al-Baghdadi, 167n19).

[11] من صدر الإسلام الى هذه الأيام ما صادف دخول المسلمين الى هذه البلاد ... ونحن اول من دخل وعلينا في اصلاح هذه الطائفة المعول. 127.

Muslim. Further, his designation of the Malê as a *ṭā’ifa*, a word often used to describe a confessional sect, implies their distinction from a unified global community of Muslims.

There are various ways to interpret the source of this ambivalence: as a tension between divergent forms of religious interpretation and practice; as the result of racial prejudice; or as a perception of the Malê’s peripheral location vis-à-vis Islamic realms. (Al-Baghdadi himself attributes the Malê’s “unorthodox” practices to their diasporic condition in a Catholic Empire). Without dismissing these dynamics, I would like to suggest that al-Baghdadi’s ambivalence is, at least in part, strategic, and can be read within the aims of his *riḥla.* A recent article by Ali Kulez speculates about al-Baghdadi’s authorial motivations, suggesting that al-Baghdadi sought to exonerate himself from charges of treason for deserting his post with the Ottoman Navy in order to stay in Brazil.[12] While Kulez makes a convincing case for how this concern plays into the travelogue’s dynamics, I contend that the text is not entirely self-serving. Rather, the travelogue serves to support his petition for Ottoman sponsorship of his ongoing involvement with the Malê. After all, his travelogue records his promise to the Bahia Muslim community that he will return to them once he has secured aid from his sultan.

If al-Baghdadi did in fact petition the Ottoman government for sponsorship of his mission in Brazil, it appears he was unsuccessful. Besides his travelogue, few traces of the imam remain. However, a passing mention of one “Abdurrahmân Efendi” appears in an article about Syrian emigration to America in a 1907 issue of *Revue du monde musulman*, which reports that the imam returned to Constantinople to petition, without success, the Ottoman government to extend aid to the Muslims of South America. Shortly thereafter, the article reports, he returned on his own to Brazil, where he died, “without having had the satisfaction of being able to spread religious instruction there.”[13] The suggestion that al-Baghdadi did in fact return to Brazil deserves further research. However, though the historical evidence is sparse, the travelogue itself suggests its own potential for instrumentalization in garnering official Ottoman support for the Muslims of Brazil.

[12] The ship’s engineer, Muhendis Faik, levels this charge against al-Baghdadi (Kulez, 204).

[13] [Djinguiz, Mohammed:] “La Question syrienne.” In: *Revue du Monde Musulman*. 2. 1907, 524. The article is anonymous, but Rosemarie Quiring-Zoche identifies its author based on a later article in *RMM* signed by Djinguiz, in which he refers to the article in question as his own (Quiring-Zoche “Bei den Male,” 238 n186).

If we understand al-Baghdadi’s promise to the Malê to be sincere, the text itself seems written to function as a key piece of his petition. Al-Baghdadi makes his case, however, not in the form of a prescriptive political or religious treatise expressly directed at the Sublime Porte. Rather, he employs the descriptive mode of the *riḥla.* Though not an expressly argumentative genre, *riḥla* narratives are often concerned with the question of what it means to be a Muslim and to practice Islam. As Paulo Farah puts it, the genre constitutes a tradition of texts that “reflect the contours – complex, permeable, and in constant movement – of belonging and community within and beyond Dar al-Islam.”[14] *Riḥla* as a genre thus engages with debates between orthodoxy and innovation, and the boundaries of inclusion within a global Muslim community. Presented in a descriptive rather than prescriptive mode, the *riḥla* allowed al-Baghdadi a subtle form of argumentative power to petition for Ottoman aid of the Malê—an argument he was in no position to make, given his own precarity following his abandonment of his post as the Ottoman Navy’s official imam in order to stay with the Malê in Brazil.

Rather than staging his arguments as his own opinions directed towards Ottoman authorities, he uses his narrative to place key debates in the mouths of various interlocutors he met in his travels. Most significant, perhaps, is an early exchange he had with the Muslims who request that he stay and teach them. Along with their request, he reports that the men anticipated his objection by saying,

> If you tell us to emigrate to Islamic lands to learn to pray and fast, we will reply that we are bound within certain conditions. If one of us migrates, he must leave all his worldly possessions to the state, and they will give him nothing in return.[15]

> وان قلتم لنا هاجروا الى بلاد الإسلام وتعلموا الصلاة والصيام نقول ان علينا من الشروط من كل امر منوط ان من هاجر منا بنفسه يخرج من حطام الدنيا وما خوله لنفسه ويتركه للدولة خالصا ولا يكون في إعطائه حائصا

While in his account, it is the Malê who anticipate al-Baghdadi’s reply, his inclusion of it early in the text anticipates his readers’ response. The travelogue seems to insist that it is his and his compatriots’ duty to extend support across the Atlantic, rather than placing the onus on the Muslims to migrate from Dar al-Ḥarb (non-Islamic lands) to Dar al-Islam. Many religious

[14] *O deleite*, 55.

[15] Al-Baghdadi, 128.

scholars agreed that it was obligatory for Muslims under non-Muslim rule to migrate to Islamic lands, at least under certain conditions.[16] Given this, the text could be understood not only as a bid for Ottoman aid, but as a defense of the Malê remaining in the Catholic empire of Brazil. Al-Baghdadi is thus attuned to the Malê's diasporic condition—distanced from, yet still connected to not only their ancestral homeland but Dar al-Islam: a "homeland" tied not to a specific territory of origin, but understood as any space in which one can freely practice one's faith in the presence of coreligionists.[17]

Yet, while his travelogue defends the Malê's right to remain in their diasporic home, he also emphasizes the alienation inherent in the diasporic condition, and the challenges of practicing one's faith in an inhospitable environment. Describing the condition of Islam in Brazil, al-Baghdadi writes, "Given what I saw of […] the alienation/strangeness *(ghurba*) of this religion, I was pulled into a crisis of destiny and fate."[18] The word *ghurba*, which shares a root with *gharīb* (strange, or a stranger), expresses the condition of a foreigner, and the state of being distant from one's homeland. Al-Baghdadi uses the word *ghurba* here to describe not only the far-flung location of the Malê, but the condition of Islam itself in Brazil. His use of *ghurba* here denotes not only this Muslim community's physical displacement from Dar al-Islam, but his perception of their alienation from Islamic practices, or perhaps even the morphing of Islam in Brazil such that the religion itself has become strange. The simultaneous naming of the Malê as Muslims and registering the "strangeness of [their] religion" enacts the ambivalent movement of al-Baghdadi's text, at once incorporating the Malê into and excluding them from his own definition of the umma.

[16] See, for example, the 16th century scholar Ibn al-Fāsī, who states that emigration from Dar al-Ḥarb to Dar al-Islam is "obligatory and will remain so until the Day of Judgment" (121); and Dan Fodio's *On the Obligation to Emigrate* (late 18th century), in which he declares, "It is undisputed that the status of the land is that of its ruler—if the ruler be a Muslim, the land is a land of Islam and if he be an unbeliever, the land is a land of unbelief, from which flight is obligatory" [quoted in Ousmane Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu*, Harvard UP (2016), 109]). Other scholarly opinions are more lenient, arguing that it is only necessary to emigrate in cases where the practice of Islam is not possible, and exemptions are made for physical or financial hardship.

[17] Al-Baghdadi himself evinces such an orientation toward "homeland" when he writes of his increasing pull to leave Brazil. Rather than expressing a longing for a specific place or people he left behind, he writes, "I missed hearing the call for the prayers and the sight of mosques" and so after several sleepless nights, decides to "travel towards Islamic lands" (*qāsidan al-bilād al-islāmiyya*).

[18] Al-Baghdadi, 169.

This ambivalent movement of inclusion and exclusion has been read by other scholars as evidence of al-Baghdadi’s racially inflected views of the West African Muslim diaspora. Without discounting the way that al-Baghdadi’s perceptions were shaped by biases against black Africans that circulated in his Ottoman milieu, we might also read such statements as a strategic portrayal aimed at his intended readers in the Ottoman court to justify the need for their support. Through a strategically ambivalent portrayal of the Malê, his account seeks a fine balance between casting the Malê as a pious, devout community deserving of Ottoman support, while also emphasizing their ignorance, thus justifying the need for the imam’s ongoing intervention. Granted, the fact that he saw the need for this ongoing intervention at all can be seen as a racially inflected “civilizing mission.”[19] Yet to reduce al-Baghdadi’s role in Brazil entirely to that would dismiss the agency of those within the Malê community who sought greater access to religious education and transregional ties to Muslim networks through this itinerant imam.

Tropes of egalitarianism and difference

Al-Baghdadi bookends his travelogue with an expression of unity in diversity, nested within poems extolling the virtues of the Ottoman Sultan Abdulaziz—another feature typical of the *riḥla* genre. In his opening and closing praise poems, he hails the Sultan’s empire as a locus of conviviality between *al-ʻarab* and *al-ʻajam*, or Arabs and non-Arabs. Historically, these dialectic terms often connoted Arab superiority over their non-Arab counterparts. Here, however, al-Baghdadi employs them in the tradition of an Islamic universalism that recognizes parity between Arabs and their “Others” or, more broadly, parity across racial or ethnic difference. This Islamic ideal of community across difference was articulated in the Prophet Muhammad’s Farewell Sermon, in which he said: “Every Muslim is the brother of another Muslim [. . .]. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab (nor a non-Arab any superiority over an Arab), except in piety and devotion” (ليس لعربي فضل على عَجمي إلا بالتقوى).[20]

The term ʿ*ajami*, which I have glossed here as “non-Arab,” has been used by Arabs since pre-Islamic times to refer to non-Arabic-speaking foreigners, often pejoratively. It derives from the word ʿ*ujma*, meaning “confused and incomprehensible speech.” Parallel to the Greek word

[19] Bercito, “Teaching Islam to African Muslims in Brazil.” *IJRL,* 2023.

[20] Translation adapted from S.F.H. Faizi, *Sermons of the Prophet.* See Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism,* for more on exegetical traditions of the Prophet’s last sermon.

barbaros (whence the term "barbarian") *ʿajami* denotes a slippage from linguistic difference to civilizational inferiority. However, since the advent of Islam, *ʿajami* has also been used to refer to ethnically non-Arab communities of believers, as it is used in the Prophet's Farewell Sermon. Given this, the Arabic term *ʿajami* "speak[s] to the historical tension between religious belonging and vernacular difference in a pan-Islamic, Arabic (or arabophone) context," as Annette Damayanti Lienau writes.[21]

The *ʿarab/ʿajam* dialectic provides a key to understanding al-Baghdadi's position vis-à-vis both the Ottoman Sultan, to whom the travelogue is addressed, and the Malê, who comprise the travelogue's central subjects. They illuminate, on the one hand, al-Baghdadi's subordinate position in Istanbul as a supplicant to an ethnically non-Arab (Turkic-Circassian) ruler; and, on the other, his ambivalent solidarity with the non-Arab Malê community in both religious and linguistic terms. In al-Baghdadi's Ottoman context, he belonged, as an Arab Ottoman subject, to an ethnolinguistic group that occupied a subordinate position relative to the ruling Turkic elite. In the ethnically stratified Ottoman Empire, then, to evoke hadith traditions of egalitarianism between *al-ʿarab* and *al-ʿajam* was to seek to raise the Arab author's position to be on equal footing with his non-Arab (*ʿajam*) superiors. It is from this position of subordination that al-Baghdadi presents himself as a supplicant for interethnic parity from his Ottoman superiors, evoking "an imagined diverse and inclusive Ottoman state."[22]

While, on the one hand, *ʿajam* can refer to the Empire's Turkic elite, the designation can also encompass the non-Arabophone West African Malê.[23] If we read al-Baghdadi's travelogue as a document intended to garner Ottoman support for the Malê, his employment of the *ʿarab/ʿajam* trope in his opening and closing panagyrics can thus be read as a bid to incorporate

[21] Annette Damayanti Lienau. "Reframing Vernacular Culture on Arabic Fault Lines: Bamba, Senghor, and Sembene's Translingual Legacies in French West Africa." *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 130, no. 2 (March 2015), 426.

[22] Mustafa Minawi, *Losing Istanbul: Arab-Ottoman Imperialists and the End of Empire*. Redwood City, Stanford University Press, 2022, 2.

[23] In addition to parity between *ʿarab* and *ʿajam*, variations on hadith tradition extend the message of the Prophet's Farewell Sermon to explicitly challenge colorism and racism. Many contemporary English translations of the sermon, for example, gloss the line above as "an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black nor a black has any superiority over a white," rendering the message as one explicitly about racial equality. This translation is found on various mosque/Islamic center websites. For example: https://icliny.org/last-sermon/.

the Malê into a multilingual and multiethnic Ottoman-centric Muslim community. Yet, while al-Baghdadi advocates on behalf of the Malê as fellow Muslims, he casts them as unruly subjects whose racial difference and non-native Arabic speech justify a perceived need for religious reform.

Reading al-Baghdadi’s encounter with the Malê through an *ʿarab/ʿajam* dialectic illuminates the contradictory dynamic of identification and difference at play in the travelogue. When Western hegemony is taken as the only axis of power or lens of analysis, as is often the case in postcolonial studies, it is easy to place al-Baghdadi as fellow victims of and rebels against a hegemonic white, Christian West. However, as Lienau argues, the *ʿarab/ʿajam* dialectic offers a corrective to the typical postcolonial studies lens. It provides “an alternative to the often binary (colonial/postcolonial) constructions used in nationally isolated studies, to reveal a cultural dynamic not fully explained by a single imperial or colonial legacy.”[24] It allows for a consideration not only of colonial dynamics, but also of how vernacular communities developed “within and against other lineages, including, in Africa, Arabic as a scriptural, religious medium.”[25] The *ʿarab/ʿajam* framework can be productively extended to encounters like al-Baghdadi’s with the Malê that take place within a Euro-American imperial context, but are structured by other imperial, linguistic, ethnic, and religious dynamics, complexes and legacies that fall outside of that primary context. The term *ʿajami* speaks to al-Baghdadi’s treatment of the Malê as linguistic and racial others. Yet, crucially, it also implies the proximity of a shared faith: an *ʿajami* identity arising not only from non-Arabness, but precisely out of intimate contact with and appropriation of the Arabic language as a sacred medium. (Indeed, “ajami” has come to refer to the many languages which, through contact with Islam, adopted the Arabic script, including Spanish [*aljamiado*], Persian, Yoruba, several Slavic languages, Malay, Swahili, Hebrew, Wolof, and Turkish.)

In al-Baghdadi’s travelogue, the *ʿarab/ʿajam* dialectic appears as a trope of interethnic parity through its depiction of Islam as a unifying force, and its depiction of Arabic as a principle medium of faith shared by Arabs and non-Arabs alike. Yet, alongside this universalizing impulse, the text also constantly reinscribes difference along an *ʿarab/ʿajam* fault line. It insists

[24] Lienau, Reframing Vernacular Culture,” 420. See also Lienau’s *Sacred Language, Vernacular Difference: Global Arabic and Counter-Imperial Literatures*, Princeton University Press, 2023.

[25] Ibid.

on the accented ʿ*ajami* otherness of the Malê through descriptions of their unwieldy and improper treatment of Arabic, their "Syriac words and tongue clacking," and by casting their spiritual practices as incomprehensible, *gharīb,* and beyond the bounds of Islam. While this ambivalence may be, in part, strategic, serving to justify the need for further Ottoman support of an isolated Muslim community, it also belies an authorial anxiety between identification and difference, between a horizontal brotherhood and a hierarchical, imperialistic bid for control over a "barbarous" other. This, in short, is the dynamic I have termed "ambivalent brotherhood."

The Afterlife of al-Baghdadi's *riḥla*

While Al-Baghdadi's mission to gain Ottoman sponsorship for the Malê was ultimately unsuccessful, his travelogue shifted Ottoman perceptions about the "New World." Like his precursors Ibn Battuta, Ibn Fadlan, and other earlier practitioners of the *riḥla* tradition, al-Baghdadi's travels contributed to new understandings of his own community's conceptions of "the extension and nature of the umma."[26] Some four decades earlier, the Egyptian intellectual Rifāʿa al-Tahtāwi's Parisian travelogue described the Americas as *bilād al-kufār*, a land of unbelievers, writing that "most of America is Christian, except for the nomads, among whom there are still idolators. Islam does not exist there."[27] Al-Baghdadi's travelogue became the first evidence for Ottomans and Arabs that the Muslim umma extended to the New World.

Al-Baghdadi's travelogue grabbed the public imagination, and reshaped Ottoman understandings of the contours of the umma, extending it into Brazil. Al-Baghdadi's travels had almost immediate impact on the Ottoman geography curriculum, with Ahmad Midhat's 1871 geography textbook including mention of the existence of Muslims in Brazil.[28] While al-Baghdadi was unsuccessful in gaining direct sponsorship for his educational mission, the Ottoman government went on to establish two consuls in Brazil in the following decades. While the more direct reason for this burgeoning diplomatic presence was the growing Ottoman

[26] Paulo Daniel Farah. *Deleite do estrangeiro em tudo o que é espantoso e maravilhoso: Estudo de um relato de viagem bagdali.* Rio de Janerio: BibliASPA, 2007.

[27] Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi. *An Imam in Paris,* translated by Daniel L. Newman. Saqi Books, 2011. 122.

[28] Rosemarie Quiring-Zoche. "Bei Den Malé In Brasilien: Das Reisebuch des 'Abdarraḥmān al-Bagdādī." *Die Welt des Islams* 40, no. 2 (2000): 197.

migrant community in Brazil in the final decades of the 19th century, the consuls also took an interest in the African Muslim community and counted them in their census.[29]

Within two decades of al-Baghdadi’s return to Istanbul, two Turkish translations were published. The first appeared almost immediately after the Arabic manuscript was completed, in 1871.[30] The second appeared in 1889 in Bahçesaray, Crimea, in a newspaper edited by Ismail Gasprinski, called *Tercüman* [Translator].[31] That an account of Afro-Brazilian Muslims was read, in translation, by Muslims in Crimea speaks to the role of Arabic as a medium of intra-Muslim connection across vast distances—a hinge articulating between two diasporic Muslim communities without a common vernacular. Al-Baghdadi’s *riḥla*, in both its content and its circulation, reveals Arabic as a global language that functions simultaneously as a force of cohesion and a fault line.

[29] Mohammed Djinguiz, “L’Islam dans l-Amerique Centrale et dans l-Amerique du Sud.” *Revue du monde musulman*, vol. 6 no. 10, 1908. 314-318.

[30] Quiring-Zoche, 197. The translator was Mehmed Sherif Effendi.

[31] Monique Sochaczewski. *Do Rio de Janeiro a Istambul: contrastes e conexões entre o Brasil e o Império Otomano (1850-1919)*. Coleção Relações internacionais. Brasília: Fundação Alexander de Gusmão, 2017.

São Paulo is the New Fez: The Formation of a Senegalese Tijani Community in Brazil

Gana Ndiaye
Yale University, USA

Transatlantic Resonances of European Border Externalization

Since the creation of the Schengen Area in 1995, European countries have invested significant resources in policing their borders and curbing immigration from Africa and, more recently, Asia. This has led to the development of various border management instruments and the signing of several cooperation agreements with non-member states of the European Union (EU). The most significant of those instruments was the establishment of the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex) in October 2004 (FRONTEX, n.d.). The agency was replaced in September 2016 by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, also called Frontex. Individual European countries also invested in preventing undocumented immigrants from reaching their borders. For instance, when a shipwreck on the island of Lampedusa killed over 100 migrants, Italy launched Operation *Mare Nostrum* (the ancient Roman name for the Mediterranean) in October 2013, a search and rescue operation that assisted over 100,000 migrants. However, the cost (9 million euros a month) and criticism from other European countries such as the UK, which argued that rescue operations created “an unintended ‘pull factor’ for migrants,” led Italy to abandon the sea rescue mission (Davies and Neslen 2014). Instead, the EU invested in Operation Triton, which focused on border surveillance, thereby leaving much of the burden of sea rescue to NGOs or “sub-contracted” to non-European countries.

Europe increasingly relies on third countries to act as its border enforcers. The main instrument that makes this possible is the European Union Emergency Trust Fund (EUTF for Africa), implemented in three regions (North Africa, the Sahel and Lake Chad, and the Horn of Africa), with programs in 26 countries to address “The root causes of instability, forced displacement and irregular migration” (EUTF 2025). For example, EUTF data shows that the European Union spent €234 million between 2015 and 2021 to support Morocco on migration (Ibid). Projects funded through the scheme aim to strengthen border management and support voluntary returns, among other goals. In Senegal, EU efforts to limit migration have focused on supporting local agriculture and small businesses, facilitating the economic reintegration of return migrants, and preventing migrant boats from departing. The EUTF spent €164 million on these efforts between 2015 and 2023, according to an EU-funded Altai Consulting report (Altai Consulting 2024). In November 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Spain’s Foreign Minister had traveled to Dakar to discuss sending Spanish forces to help reduce the surge of West African migrants to its territories, especially the Canary Islands (Reuters 2020). What happens to prospective migrants who are deterred by, or are unable to reach Europe because of, EU border-surveillance policies? What are the impacts of EU externalization in Africa and beyond?

Several scholars have examined Europe’s border externalization and emphasized its devastating consequences. Some highlight the coloniality of EU states’ reliance on third countries to serve as “border guards” and of the EU border regime as a whole (Danewid 2021; Hahonou and Olsen 2021), as well as the complicity of humanitarian organizations helping sustain it (Hagan 2024). Other scholars have even problematized the idea of a European border externalization, warning against assuming a unified strategy. Gazzotti et al. (2023) note, for instance, that while most EU member countries may agree on the need to keep “unwanted migrants” away, Northern European countries have often shown little interest in investing in border management (Gazzotti et al. 2023, 71). This lack of solidarity even among EU members has only put more migrants' lives at risk as European nations and third countries engage in what Freier, Micinski, and Tsourapas describe as refugee commodification, i.e., “the transformation of forcibly displaced populations (and their hosting) into commodities subject to negotiation and trade in the marketplace” (2021, 2). In addition to the humanitarian crisis European border externalization has created in North Africa and across the Sahel, the presence of Black migrants

has spurred debates about anti-black racism in the region. These discussions emphasize the legacies of slavery in Muslim societies and European colonialism (Arrouche 2026; El Hamel 2012), the region’s avoidance of race (El Hamel 2002; Gross-Wyrtzen 2023), and whether analyses of race and racism in North Africa import U.S. American categories (Aidi 2025). European border externalization also has transatlantic repercussions.

The concept of resonance is useful for examining the effects of European immigration policies in Latin America, particularly in Brazil. In her study of Japanese *chindon-ya*, ethnomusicologist Marié Abe defines resonance as the “historical, affective, acoustic, and political effects of a particular sound” (Abe 2018, 4). Within this framework, one can examine the resonances of European border policies to assess their affective and political effects across the Atlantic. Just as European colonial expansion helped shape the modern world, contemporary EU migration management is reshaping immigrant communities in Brazil and across Latin America. This article demonstrates how Frontex has transformed traditional Sufi networks between Morocco and Senegal, as prospective migrants to Europe increasingly redirect their aspirations toward Brazil.



Image 1: West African Tijanis at the 3rd edition of the Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani Sherif Day in São Paulo, Brazil, on March 15, 2019. Photo courtesy of the author.

Drawing on more than a decade of ethnographic engagement with Senegalese immigrants in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, I trace the formation of the Senegalese Tijani community in

Brazil. Rather than focusing on the humanitarian challenges that emerged when undocumented West African immigrants began traveling to Brazil after 2010, I examine how followers of the Tijaniyya Sufi order established new forms of religious and social life in their host country. In particular, I show how Tijani commemorations and ritual activities generated new forms of religious encounter and intra-Muslim engagement while also bringing the history of Islam into Brazil's public sphere, particularly among Afro-Brazilians and in broader discussions of the nation's history. Chief among these are the Mawlid (a holiday in observance of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad in some Muslim communities) and the annual Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani Sherif Day, a commemoration unique to Senegalese Tijanis in the diaspora that celebrates the teachings of Abū al-ʿAbbās Ahmad ibn Muḥammad al-Tijānī, commonly known as Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani (1737-1815), founder of the Tijaniyya Sufi order (Wright 2005). Senegalese Tijani religious life in Brazil also illustrates evolving relationships between Sufi leaders and their disciples.

The Making of an African Tijani Community in Brazil

The Tijaniyya is the largest Sufi order in Senegal, with about 50% of Senegalese Muslims being Tijani. The order is organized around multiple autonomous branches, each with its own specific historical and geographical trajectory. The Tall family carries on the legacy of the 19th-century scholar and resistance fighter El Hadji Umar Tall (1797–1864), maintaining strong spiritual and political influence, especially since its establishment in Dakar, which Seydou Nourou Tall (1862–1980) consolidated. The Sy family of Tivaouane, founded by El Hadji Malick Sy (1855–1922), is the largest branch in the country by membership and brings together millions of followers each year for the Mawlid. Internationally, the Niasse family of Kaolack, established in Medina Baye by El Hadji Abdoulaye Niasse (1844–1922) and his son Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse (1900–1975), exerts a global influence throughout West Africa and the U.S. Other centers distinguished themselves through their quest for autonomy. This is the case of the Seck family of Thiénaba (near Dakar), founded in 1882 by Amari Ndack Seck (1830–1899), and the family of Médina Gounass, established in Upper Casamance, Southern Senegal, by Thierno Mamadou Seydou Ba (1898–1980) and famous for its large annual Daaka gathering (Glovsky

2021). Most families of Tijani brotherhoods justify their legitimacy by tracing their spiritual, if not biological, lineage to Fez, Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani, and his descendants.

All roads lead to Rome. For Senegalese Tijani migrants, all roads pass through Morocco, as their past and present migration patterns show. Abdoulaye Kane writes that, in the 1990s, Tijani leaders of the Medina Gounass branch built structures to sustain religious identity in the diaspora and connections between Senegalese migrants. These ties are maintained through transnational religious circuits linking Medina Gounass in Southern Senegal, Mantes-la-Jolie in France, and Fez, Morocco, the latter serving as the key spiritual hub (Kane 2026). Pulaar-speaking religious leaders, notably Thierno Mansour Baro, established annual group pilgrimages (ziyāras) to the mausoleum of Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani in Fez to seek spiritual blessings (baraka) and divine intervention for the challenges migrants face in France, including legal uncertainties and social integration. These journeys fostered strong emotional and communal bonds and reinforced Tijani group identity in Europe (Kane 2026, 18). Migrants who took part in these pilgrimages would bring relatives presents not only from Europe but also from Fez, a sacred city many followers dream of visiting. Over time, these circuits have enabled the Senegalese Tijaniyya diaspora to preserve their religious identity, adapt to new environments, and create a sense of belonging that transcends national borders. The connection to Fez thus sustains both spiritual and economic ties that anchor the Tijani community across Senegal, Morocco, and France (Ibid., 9).

However, restrictive migration policies in Europe have made it almost impossible for most young Tijanis to emulate their counterparts in Mantes-la-Jolie. These policies have forced many West African migrants to seek alternatives to Europe. One such new destination for Senegalese youth is Brazil. Brazil’s economic boom during President Lula's first two terms (2003–2010) and its subsequent hosting of the 2013 FIFA Confederations Cup, the 2014 FIFA World Cup, and the 2016 Olympic Games, attracted many Senegalese migrant workers (Heil 2017). These mega-events and the rise of the Brazilian agroindustry created job opportunities that drew workers from across Latin America and Muslim migrants worldwide. Many migrants would first travel to Ecuador, where they did not need an entry visa. From Ecuador, they were then channeled to Brazil. Until 2016, this was the primary route for undocumented Senegalese in Brazil (Record TV 2014). The numerically largest group would fly to Ecuador and then travel to

Brazil, the Amazon rainforest. This was possible because Ecuador maintained an open-border policy. However, Brazil's diplomatic pressures led Ecuador to require visas for Senegalese travelers in November of 2016 (República del Ecuador 2015). Data from various Brazilian state agencies indicate that the number of Senegalese in the country jumped from less than 500 in 2003 to over 8,486 in 2018 (CONARE 2016; OBMigra 2019). Through ethnographic engagements with Senegalese migrant organizations across Brazil, I estimated the number of Senegalese migrants to be around 13,000 by January 2019. Among these newcomers are many Tijanis who work as street vendors in major cities such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, or in halal meat factories in Rio Grande do Sul and other parts of Southern Brazil, where they join Bangladeshi Muslim migrants and other Senegalese Sufis (Bressan 2018).

The ritual activities of Tijani disciples, namely the *waẓīfa*, in Brazil raise important questions about the history of Islam and Brazil and the legacies of enslaved Africans in the nation. The most well-attended waẓīfa among Tijanis in Brazil occurs during a weekly congregational meeting on Fridays called *Haḍratu al-jumʿa*. This waẓīfa begins shortly after the third prayer of the day, *Aṣr*. A waẓīfa follows a precise sequence of sacred invocations. It begins with the full form of *Istighfar* (A*staghfirullāh al-ʻAẓīm alladhī lā ilāha illā huwa al-Ḥayy al-Qayyūm, wa atūbu ilayhi*), a formula for asking for forgiveness recited 30 times. Then, Tijani congregants chant the famous *Ṣalāt al-Fātiḥi* (the Prayer of the Opener) in unison. They repeat the chant 50 times to a choral melody unique to Senegal’s cultural and spiritual heritage. The liturgy continues with the proclamation of divine oneness through the *tahlil* (*La ilaha illallah*), chanted 100 times, before culminating with the *Jawharat al-Kamal* (The Pearl of Perfection), recited 12 times. This final invocation holds special solemnity in Senegal, as tradition teaches that the spirits of the Prophet Muhammad and Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani, who composed the verses in praise of the Prophet, physically attend the prayer circle beginning with its seventh repetition. Depending on the Tijani branch, optional Sufi poems enrich the ritual's main structure, often before the official start or immediately after the final invocations. Disciples affiliated with El Hadji Malick Sy’s school in Tivaouane regularly sing excerpts from his own liturgical poems, such as the *Jazuru al-Qulūb* (The Weaning of the Hearts), a poem about Sufi ethics and purification of hearts. Among the Niass branch in Kaolack and Medina Baye, the followers favor the mystical poems of Shaykh Ibrahima Niass, drawn largely from his *Diwan*, a

text dedicated to love and praise of the Prophet. In the everyday practice of the Tijaniyya in Brazil, these differences, which can take the form of competition and claims of spiritual superiority of one branch over others in the homeland (Diouf 2019; ACREDAC 2019), are seldom perceptible. This harmony among diasporan Tijani disciples is most visible during frequent visits by Tijani leaders to their disciples in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, home to the country's largest Senegalese communities (Image 2).

São Paulo is the New Fez

Rather than replacing Fez, São Paulo functions as a diasporic sacred hub. Like Fez for earlier generations of Senegalese Tijani migrants, São Paulo offers a site where disciples encounter religious authorities, access baraka through personal contact with spiritual descendants of Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani, renew social ties, and cultivate a shared Tijani identity. Sacred centers are therefore not fixed geographically but can be reproduced through mobility, ritual practice, and transnational religious networks. In this sense, São Paulo has become a new node within the global Tijani landscape. Immigration status and physical distance (due to cost) mean that Tijani communities in Brazil cannot travel to Fez as their counterparts in Mantes-la-Jolie do. Young Tijani migrants who have settled in Brazil have found spiritual centers in São Paulo, where they celebrate the Mawlid and meet fellow disciples from other cities across Brazil. These transformations have been supported by regular visits from Senegalese Tijani leaders who travel to Brazil to lead rituals and pray for disciples facing uncertainty because of their undocumented status. When Brazil issued a decree (Portaria Nº10, 12-5-2019) for mass regularization specifically targeting Senegalese migrants in 2019 (Brazil 2019), many in the Tijani community and other Senegalese Sufi groups saw this as the outcome of the Shaykh’s prayers.

Shaykh Abib Sy, grandson of the founder of the Tivaouane branch of the Tijaniyya, El Hadji Malick Sy, has been the community's most influential leader in Brazil. He travels to Brazil annually to preside over the official ceremony of Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani Sherif Day, which the community started in 2017. The 2019 edition of Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani Sherif Day offers a clear example of the transnational and multicultural encounters among Muslim migrants in São Paulo. Tijani migrants travel from across the world to Brazil for the event. This includes nationals of Ghana and Nigeria, where the Niass branch spread through the work of Senegalese

scholar Shaykh Ibrahim Niass. While Senegalese migrants in Europe organized pilgrimages to Morocco, Shaykh Abib Sy’s visit introduced a new Fez, where Tijani migrants gather to attend his lecture and seek the baraka associated with the order's founder.

El Hadj Ousseynou Niasse, the grandson of Shaykh Ibrahim Niass, is another important religious figure and a regular visitor to Tijanis in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. That same week, Shaykh Ousseynou Niasse gave the Friday prayer sermon and led prayer at the Bilal Al Habashi mosque in Anhangabaú Park, downtown São Paulo, on November 8, 2019. Named after the Prophet's most famous Black companion, the Bilal mosque is led by a Ghanaian scholar who trained in Saudi Arabia before moving to Brazil. Its proximity to Brás and other downtown shopping centers, where many African immigrants work, makes the mosque a hub for African immigrants, who often make up the majority of congregants. After leading the prayer in São Paulo, El Hadj Ousseynou traveled to Rio de Janeiro, where he led multiple waẓīfa sessions and several private lectures. Image 2 shows Tijani disciples at a November 9, 2019 waẓīfa session he led at Espaço Savano, a shopping center a Tijani businesswoman founded in the neighborhood of Flamengo before the COVID-19 pandemic led to its closure in 2021. Like Shaykh Abib Sy, El Hadj Ousseynou Niasse's visit brought all Tijani disciples together.



Image 2: Tijani disciples meet for a waẓīfa session during Serigne Ousseynou Niasse's visit on November 9, 2019. Photo courtesy of the author.

Present at the waẓīfa led by the Niasse branch of the Tijaniyya were followers of the Sy branch. Looking at the congregants' clothing, one can notice a disciple wearing a T-shirt that signals his attendance at the “3rd edition of Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani Sherif Day, held on March 24, 2019, in São Paulo, and presided over by Serigne Abib Sy.” The T-shirt also spells out the motto of the religious organization, or dahira, to which the disciple belongs. The motto, in Wolof and written in non-standard (French-based spelling), reads:

Sunu diiné [our religion]
Sunu tarixa [our Sufi brotherhood]
Sunu metié [our job]
Sunu dahira [our religious association]
Sunu Tivaouane [the holy city of Tivaouane, the capital of the Sy branch of the Tijaniyya]

This visual note illustrates the central role of religious organizations in the lives of Senegalese Sufi migrants. The dahira serves not only as a sacred space where migrants build solidarity that enables economic success, but also as a daily reminder to cultivate ethical lives, focus on work, and pursue religious knowledge and spiritual development at the personal and community levels.

The Mawlid celebration is the most significant event in the Tijani ritual calendar. It commemorates the Prophet's birthday on the 12th of *Rabīʿ al-Awwal*, the third month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Among the Sy branch, the Mawlid celebration begins with the “burd” during the first ten consecutive nights of the month. This is a deeply spiritual and communal period during which Tijanis recite and analyze one chapter each night of the famous *Qasîdat al-Burda* (Poem of the Mantle), an ode to the Prophet written in the 13th century by the Egyptian Sufi poet Al-Busiri. Each night, masters lead chants, invocations, and exegesis sessions in which they impart moral lessons inspired by the Prophet's life. Following this period, disciples celebrate Mawlid, also known in Senegal as Gamou, on the 12th night of Rabīʿ al-Awwal. The Mawlid celebration, especially the burd by Senegalese Tijanis in Brazil, is highly symbolic because of Islam's history in the country.

Enslaved Africans formed Brazil's first Muslim communities. These communities comprised individuals from various ethnic groups, such as the Hausas, Mandinkas, and Yorubas, who were often caught up in Fulani Jihād (Barcia 2013). Lovejoy’s analysis of shipping records indicates Central Sudan as a major origin of Muslims in Brazil (Lovejoy 1994), even though other scholars list the Yorubas as the major ethnic group of enslaved Africans in 19th-century Brazil (Akande 2016). These Muslims were involved in several uprisings in Brazil. The most significant of those uprisings took place in 1835 and is commonly known as the Malê slave revolt of 1835, the subject of the pioneering work of João José Reis (João José Reis 1993). Amulets made with Islamic numerology and magical squares, manuscripts containing Quranic verses, and other documents in African languages written in the Arabic script called Ajami all form a tapestry of sources attesting to the kinds of knowledge that circulated among enslaved Africans in Brazil and the intellectual traditions to which they might be traced back (Reichert 1970). Nikolay Dobronravin’s work on surviving manuscripts produced by enslaved and freed Black Muslims in 19th-century Brazil challenges the notion that their writings were limited to talismans, or "mandingas." His analysis of the documents that survived the 1835 Malê Revolt reveals a high degree of religious and literary erudition linked to West African and Maghrebi intellectual traditions. One such prayer document, which contained a discovered verse from *Qaṣīdat al-Burda*, was likely written by a Bahian enslaved person named Domingos, of “Haussa ethnicity” (Dobronravin 2016, 194).

In chanting the *Burda* during Mawlid celebrations in Brazil, Senegalese Tijani migrants are bringing back to the country a tradition that enslaved Africans may have established. Tijani migrants' religious life contributes to growing interest in Islam among Afro-descendants and to renewed engagement with the religious legacy of the Malês. While there is yet no historical evidence to affirm that the Malês belonged to a specific Sufi order, public expressions of religiosity by Tijanis and other African migrants in Brazil help bring Islam into the Brazilian public sphere.

Conclusion: The Future of the Tijani Community in Brazil

The impacts of Frontex policies resonate far beyond Europe and North and Sub-Saharan Africa. Since 2010, Brazil has received a significant number of African immigrants who have

attempted to migrate to Europe. This interplay underscores not only the interconnectedness of migration patterns but also the urgent need for a compassionate, human-centered approach to migration that addresses the root causes of displacement. Tijani Sufis in Europe made pilgrimages to Fez to visit the tomb of Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani, the order's founder. High travel costs between Latin America and other parts of Africa, along with legal status, have made the trip almost impossible for many in Brazil. West African Tijani Sufis, most of whom were former prospective migrants to Europe, have found new homes in Brazil, where disciples imagine new sacred hubs in which co-disciples cultivate solidarity, reinforce group identity, and sustain transnational religious networks. São Paulo is an important site of such new sacred hubs where Sufi leaders from Senegal travel frequently to meet disciples.

The reverberations of European border policies have led to a diversification in the makeup of Muslim Brazil as Tijanis and West African Muslims move to the country. In Brazil, these newcomers join established Muslim communities from Lusophone African countries and the Middle East. Encounters among these diverse Muslim communities are largely marked by solidarity and intercultural exchange. However, frictions due to doctrinal differences do emerge, as in all parts of the Muslim world. The main source of public commentary regarding the Tijanis is the Mawlid, which Salafis see as a *bidʿa*, sinful innovation.

On November 15, 2019, I attended Friday prayer at Masjid El Nur in Tijuca, Rio de Janeiro. That day, the Imam, a Mozambican who received his Islamic education in Saudi Arabia, centered his sermon on the Mawlid. He delivered a long exposé on why Islam became “complete” before the passing of the Prophet and why Mawlid celebrations are bidʿa, quoting ḥadīth 3017 of Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, among other sources. He concluded that the Mawlid was “a hypocritical show of love, similar to Dia dos Namorados [Valentine's Day in Brazil on June 12], when people offer chocolate to their partners.” Emphasizing the expression of love for the Prophet, he added, “What about the rest of the year?” Having spent the night prior at the Mawlid celebration with many of the Tijanis I saw at the mosque, I asked Ousmane, a Senegalese Sufi, what he thought about the sermon; he replied: “The Mawlid has been the subject of the last three ḫuṭab [Sing: ḫuṭba, sermon]. He is entitled to his opinion.” Shortly afterward, I learned that the Senegalese community began gathering at the Murid community's house in Niteroi for Jummah

and Eid prayers. As the Senegalese Tijanis continue to grow, building a mosque appears to be the next milestone in the Senegalese Sufi migrants' space-making in Southeast Brazil.

Acknowledgment

This research for this article was supported by a 2019 International Dissertation Research Fellowship (IDRF) from the Social Science Research Council, with funds provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Bibliography:

Abe, Marié. 2018. *Resonances of Chindon-Ya: Sounding Space and Sociality in Contemporary Japan*. Wesleyan University Press.

ACREDAC. 2019. “De la réécriture de l’Histoire Générale du Sénégal à une polémique généralisée.” *Afrique Confidentielle*, September 23. https://afriqueconfidentielle.com/fr/societe/de-la-reecriture-de-lhistoire-generale-du-senegal-a-une-polemique-generalisee/.

Aidi, Hisham. 2025. “Exporting Race: Norms, Categories & ‘The All-American Skin Game.’” *Daedalus* 154 (2): 204–28. https://doi.org/10.1162/daed_a_02148.

Akande, Habeeb. 2016. *Illuminating the Blackness: Blacks and African Muslims in Brazil*. Rabaah Publishers.

Altai Consulting. 2024. *EUTF Monitoring and Learning System SLC: 2023 REPORT*. Paris, France. https://trust-fund-for-africa.europa.eu/document/download/2af65771-cde2-45c0-aced-52f99611847b_en?filename=2023%20Annual%20Monitoring%20Report%20for%20the%20Sahel%20and%20Lake%20Chad%20Region.pdf.

Barcia, Manuel. 2013. “‘An Islamic Atlantic Revolution:’ Dan Fodio’s Jihād and Slave Rebellion in Bahia and Cuba, 1804-1844.” *Journal of African Diaspora Archaeology and Heritage* 2 (1): 6–17. https://doi.org/10.1179/2161944113Z.0000000002.

Brasil, Ministério da Justiça e Segurança Pública. 2019. “Portaria Interministerial nº 10, de 5 de dezembro de 2019.” *Diário Oficial da União* 236 (1): 103.

Bressan, Laís Meneguello. 2018. “Sacred Commodity, Profane Labour: Reflections on the Supply Chain of Migrant Workers to the Brazilian Halal Meat Industry.” *OP 089. Global Agrifood System, Emerging Configurations in Food Production and Consumption* (Florianópolis, SC), July 16. http://www.inscricoes.iuaes2018.org/trabalho/view?ID_TRABALHO=595.

CONARE, Comitê Nacional para os Refugiados. 2016. *Sistema de Refúgio Brasileiro: Desafios e Perspectivas*. Ministério da Justiça.

Danewid, Ida. 2021. “‘These Walls Must Fall’: The Black Mediterranean and the Politics of Abolition.” In *The Black Mediterranean: Bodies, Borders and Citizenship*, edited by Gabriele Proglio, Camilla Hawthorne, Ida Danewid, et al. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51391-7_8.

Davies, Lizzy, and Arthur Neslen. 2014. “Italy: End of Ongoing Sea Rescue Mission ‘Puts Thousands at Risk.’” World News. *The Guardian*, October 31. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/31/italy-sea-mission-thousands-risk.

Diouf, Mouhamed (Senego.com - Actualité au Sénégal). 2019. “Histoire générale du Sénégal : Iba Der Thiam met fin à la polémique.” September 10. https://senego.com/histoire-generale-du-senegal-iba-der-thiam-met-fin-a-la-polemique_973622.html.

Dobronravin, Nikolay. 2016. “Não só mandingas: Qaṣīdat al-Burda, poesia ascética (zuhdiyyāt) e as Maqāmāt de al-Ḥarīrī nos escritos dos negros muçulmanos no Brasil oitocentista.” *Afro-Ásia*, no. 53: 185–226.

EUTF. 2025. “Library - Emergency Trust Fund for Africa - European Union.” November 21. https://trust-fund-for-africa.europa.eu/index_en.

FRONTEX. n.d. “Tasks & Mission.” Accessed September 3, 2026. https://www.frontex.europa.eu/about-frontex/who-we-are/tasks-mission/.

Gazzotti, Lorena, Mercedes G. Jiménez Álvarez, and Keina Espiñeira. 2023. “A ‘European’ Externalisation Strategy? A Transnational Perspective on Aid, Border Regimes, and the EU Trust Fund for Africa in Morocco.” In *Migration Control Logics and Strategies in Europe: A North-South Comparison*, edited by Claudia Finotelli and Irene Ponzo. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-26002-5_4.

Glovsky, David Newman. 2021. “Medina Gounass: Constructing Extra-National Space in a West African Borderland.” *African Studies Review* 64 (3): 569–94. https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2020.130.

Hagan, Ampson. 2024. “A Humanitarian and Imperial Return: New Themes of Return in the Repatriation of African Migrants from Niger.” *Transforming Anthropology* 32 (2): 97–108. https://doi.org/10.1086/731814.

Hahonou, Eric Komlavi, and Gorm Rye Olsen. 2021. “Niger – Europe’s Border Guard? Limits to the Externalization of the European Union’s Migration Policy.” *Journal of European Integration* 43 (7): 875–89. https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2020.1853717.

Heil, Tilmann. 2017. “‘Perder, só Perder’: Vendedores Senegaleses durante os Jogos Olímpicos no Rio de Janeiro.” In *A imigração senegalesa no Brasil e na Argentina*, edited by João Carlos Tedesco and Giselle Kleidermacher. EST Edições. https://lirias.kuleuven.be/retrieve/462477.

Kane, Abdoulaye. 2026. “Circuits and Movement in Religious Transnationalism: A Tijani Community between Mbour (Senegal), Fez (Morocco) and Mantes-la-Jolie (France).” *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines* 60 (1): 175–94. https://doi.org/10.1080/00083968.2025.2611750.

Lovejoy, Paul E. 1994. “Background to Rebellion: The Origins of Muslim Slaves in Bahia.” *Slavery & Abolition* 15 (2): 151–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/01440399408575130.

OBMigra, Observatório das Migrações Internacionais. 2019. “Refúgio em Números.” Ministério da Justiça e Segurança Pública. https://www.gov.br/mj/pt-br/assuntos/seus-direitos/refugio/refugio-em-numeros-e-publicacoes/capa.

Record TV. 2014. *Conheça histórias de haitianos e senegaleses que chegam ao Brasil pela floresta*. Fala Brasil. Rio de Janeiro. http://recordtv.r7.com/fala-brasil/videos/conheca-historias-de-haitianos-e-senegaleses-que-chegam-ao-brasil-pela-floresta-06102018.

República del Ecuador. 2015. *Ciudadanos de 11 países requieren visa para ingresar a Ecuador*. In *Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Movilidad Humana*. https://www.ministeriointerior.gob.ec/ciudadanos-de-11-paises-requieren-de-visa-para-ingresar-a-ecuador/.

Reuters. 2020. “Spain to Send More Police to Senegal to Curb Illegal Migration, Says Foreign Minister.” World. November 22. https://www.reuters.com/world/spain-send-more-police-senegal-curb-illegal-migration-says-foreign-minister-2020-11-22/.

Wright, Zachary V. 2005. *On The Path of The Prophet: Shaykh Ahmad Tijani and the Tariqa Muhammadiyya*. Fayda Books, LLC.

Marruecos en Coquimbo: Notes on the Mohammed VI Center for the Dialogue of Civilizations

Youssef Boucetta
Northwestern University, USA

I.

In December 2004, Mohammed VI visited Santiago de Chile. I remember this as an episode of my early childhood, as my parents bore the responsibility of receiving him while liaising with local authorities. At the time, the continent’s governance had shifted from its markedly neoliberal orientation in the 80s to what media commentators were calling a ‘pink tide’ of democratic leadership. In this political climate, a few short years after 9/11 had severely impacted media representations of Muslims worldwide, Mohammed VI had embarked on a Latin American tour, meeting several heads of state across the continent, and stopping by Chile where my father was his Ambassador. Also stopping in Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Peru, and the Dominican Republic, it was Mohammed VI’s first and only official visit to Latin America to date.

The visit to Chile stood out from the rest of the King’s 2004 Latin American tour. Besides signing more traditional cooperation accords at the Palace of La Moneda in Santiago, he was slated to preside over the signing of agreements related to the construction of the Mohammed VI Center for the Dialogue of Civilizations in Coquimbo, also known as the Mezquita de Coquimbo, or the Mosque of Coquimbo for its architecture. The center is an exact replica of the Koutoubia of Marrakech in the port-city of Coquimbo a few hundred miles north of Santiago. Though the center looms large, towering over the surrounding pastel hued houses of the Cerro dominante, one of the most elevated areas of the town, not much is known about the center’s origins, the vision behind it, and the actors who brought it to life. The only Moroccan

cultural center on the continent, its construction was not a carefully planned strategic initiative, but rather originated in a casual conversation in Coquimbo in 2002.

Given that little to no historical record exists of its origins in the context of Moroccan-Latin American cultural and political histories, I have taken up the task of illuminating part of the center’s story, specifically that which belongs to my father, Abdelhadi Boucetta, Ambassador to Chile from 2002 to 2008, who, in concert with the Mayor of Coquimbo at the time, Pedro Velásquez, initiated this project and accompanied it to completion. This piece therefore roughly outlines some key moments that contributed to the construction of the Mohammed VI Center for the Dialogue of Civilizations in Coquimbo, Chile.

As any narrative reconstructed from memory, it is incomplete and confined to the perspective of its source. More than an exhaustive history, it may be better understood as a situated recollection among many. One that may one day contribute to historiographically rigorous research on the cultural and diplomatic ties between Chile and Morocco.

II.

Coquimbo is roughly a five hour drive north of Santiago. For the most part, it occupies a small and hilly peninsula that extends out of the interminable verticality of the Chilean coast. From a bird's eye view on the urbanized side of Coquimbo’s peninsula, developed from the copper and mineral mines that brought industry to the region in the 19th century, one’s gaze might alight upon the dense concentration of yellow and red metal corrugated roofing panels. On the eastern side of the peninsula, the rugged terrains filled with rocky crags and outcrops remain untouched by developments, instead ornamented with desert shrubs and scenic overlooks. Standing atop a hill in the middle of the peninsula, the most notorious feature of Coquimbo’s urban and cultural landscape, is the massive 83-meter-tall concrete Christian cross: the Cruz del Tercer Milenio.

Built between 1999 to 2000, this cross resounds with the memory of Pope John Paul II visit to Coquimbo in 1987, an event that Coquimbo’s majority Christian residents proudly celebrate to this day. Like the country it belongs to, Coquimbo has for long been a bastion of Christian liberalism. It was this political-religious faction that led the restoration of democracy after the twenty-year dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet.

Around the early post-dictatorship days, came of age the most notorious Mayor in Coquimbo’s history, a man by the name of Pedro Velásquez, who describes himself as a pure product of the transitional Christian liberal political culture in Chile. Velásquez was elected Mayor of Coquimbo in 1992 marking the beginning of a twenty-year tenure as the mayor, during which he consolidated tremendous influence in the region and became a player in Chilean regional politics. Among the culminating moments of his tenure, which was thoroughly characterized by the ambition of bringing new shine and recognition to the city, was the prestige project of the Cruz del Tercer Milenio, which would become, after its completion, the largest Christian cross in Latin America, and third largest Christian cross in the world.

Velásquez relates that after traveling to China, and witnessing the Oriental Pearl of Shanghai–perhaps the most recognizable building in the city’s skyline–he was inspired to build a similar symbol for Coquimbo, something equally grandiose that would make the city stand out. Velasquez wanted to bring iconicity to Coquimbo, and he figured that a cross—a symbol behind which all the manifold Christian denominations could unite—was the perfect justification to reproduce such monumentality for his city. The cross was completed on the great jubilee of the year 2000, fulfilling the mayor’s every wish of making Coquimbo far more recognizable than it had ever been—in Chile, and abroad.

III.

In December 2002, under the mild austral summer of central Chile, Abdelhadi Boucetta first visited Coquimbo as part of the courtesy visits he led across different regions and municipalities in the country. As diplomatic manners have it, acquainting oneself with communities across the host country through these visits is a way of forming alliances, envisioning strategic regional partnerships, and bringing awareness of the country one represents. He met with Pedro Velásquez, who quickly took him on a tour of the Cruz del Tercer Milenio.

Velásquez had visited Morocco a few years earlier, and was impressed by the architecture of Moroccan mosques—particularly the minarets, which he understood as a symbol of the unity of God, and of the bond between sky and earth. It might be that the monumentality of the Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca had made an impression on him. While talking with Boucetta, in front of the cross in his native city, Velásquez imagined the possibility of building a symbol of Islam

right beside the cross. On that concrete esplanade flashed before him the ambition to make Coquimbo a center for religious convergence. He imagined one symbol for each religion, as a way of investing Coquimbo’s urban architecture and social fabric with mutuality and harmony.

Abdelhadi Boucetta was immediately captivated by this casual proposal. They continued to discuss it at dinner that night. For Boucetta, who had just been named Morocco’s Ambassador to Chile, this project aligned with Mohammed VI’s vision of restoring Abrahamic siblinghood. This project could also be an opportunity to conduct religious diplomacy, furthering links of cooperation not only alongside economic partnerships, or geostrategic communities of interest, but leveraging the narrative potential of religious symbolism. Velásquez’s ambitions for Coquimbo seamlessly conjoined with one of the principal sources of political legitimation of the Moroccan Monarchy as religious authority.

More than any pre-planned project for a Cultural Center in Latin America by the Moroccan government, what was at the root of the Coquimbo Mosque, was Mayor Velásquez’s ambition to bring shine to his city, and his determination in seeking those he could partner with to bring this vision to life.

IV.

Back in Santiago, and occupied by the daily affairs of the embassy, Abdelhadi Boucetta left the project on the backburner. By that point, it had been casually mentioned in conversation, and though compelling, it seemed more like a distant possibility than something concretely implementable.

A few weeks after their initial meeting, he got a call from Pedro Velásquez who, after conferring with the city council, stated that the municipality of Coquimbo would be willing to grant a portion of land, hoping that the Moroccan state could contribute to funding the project. Abdelhadi Boucetta, sharing in the mayor’s excitement, responded that the immediate next step would be to put together a detailed proposal outlining the specifications of the offer. Boucetta couldn’t promise anything to Velásquez, but he was similarly excited by the prospect of the project.

In the next few weeks, a conversation began between the Moroccan Ambassador in Santiago and the Mayor of Coquimbo. Velásquez quickly got to work in architecting a dossier that included financial projections, cadastral titles for the land grant, land use plans, electrical

and water circuit access, and guarantees from the municipality. In those early days of austral fall in 2003, the focus was on enriching the dossier with as much detail as possible to draw a credible picture of the project’s feasibility. Ultimately, the dossier grew to be around sixty pages, and was appended with a personalized letter from Abdelhadi Boucetta, which detailed the mosque’s potential contributions to the religious leadership of the King on a global level. Indeed, the project was aligned with Morocco’s ambition of positioning itself as a face of Muslim global religious leadership and governance, as well as a key security actor in the fight against terrorism. Crucially, at the time, Islam was confronted with great difficulties internally and externally: the rise of radical Islamisms announced itself across the SWANA region, while mediatic perceptions in the West were quick to overemphasize the supposed violence of the religion after 9/11 and in the midst of a wave of terrorist attacks in the early 2000s. The Casablanca Attacks happened that same year in 2003, Madrid in 2004, and the rise of radical jihadism was taken up by western media and political discourse as a new threat haunting the West.

V.

After July 30th 2003, the Throne Day celebration, our whole family returned to Morocco. We undertook our yearly *ziyaras* and visits to relatives. My father was taking meetings, and reuniting with friends across the country. It was within this itinerary of re-encounters, that he planned a meeting with Ahmed Taoufiq, who had by that point recently been designated Minister of Islamic Affairs and Endowments (Ministère de Habous et des Affaires Islamiques.) Armed with a sixty page dossier that detailed the Coquimbo municipality’s commitment to granting land and resources for the building of a mosque that would stand in fraternity with the Cruz del Tercer Milenio, Abdelhadi Boucetta introduced the idea directly to Ahmed Taoufiq who was immediately charmed by the project but was equally careful in noting he couldn’t take a decision by himself. It had to be brought up higher. Taoufiq asked Boucetta to leave the proposal with him, and stated that at the first opportunity he got, he would present the idea to the King.

It was a mere few weeks after our return to the Chilean winter at the end of that Moroccan summer that Boucetta received a call from Ahmed Taoufiq. Filled with excitement, Taoufiq related that the king was very pleased with the proposal, giving instructions to move forward with the project and follow the dossier together with the Ambassador. Taoufiq told Boucetta that the necessary resources would be allocated for the purposes of starting the work,

and that an architect would be appointed to the project shortly. Ahmed Taoufiq was instrumental in bringing the project up and justifying its alignment with Moroccan cultural and strategic goals.

Shortly after official authorization was given at the end of the summer of 2004, Faissal Cherradi, an official of the Ministry of Culture, then delegate for architectural heritage inspection to the region of Marrakech was appointed as the lead architect. He decided on the Koutoubia Mosque as the model to follow.

Cherradi traveled to Chile, where he began his assessments of the site. He visited the Cerro Dominante with local contractors after the Municipality officially bought the land. At the behest of Velásquez, Chilean workers immediately laid the first foundations to prepare the imminent arrival of Moroccan artisans who would perform above-ground work. The first wave of Moroccan artisans and heritage experts, managed by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and the Ministry of Culture, were charged with coordinating the placement of electrical and water infrastructure—alongside Chilean contractors—and with designating the proper orientation of the prayer rooms towards the Kaâba, amidst other technicalities. As Cherradi was actively developing plans and timelines, to Velásquez's delight, the project was officially marching towards its concretization.

On December 2nd 2004 came the famous visit of Mohammed the VI to Chile. King Mohammed VI stayed in Chile for two days and three nights. Accompanied by Mohamed Benaissa, the Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs, Salaheddine Mezouar, the Minister of Commerce and Industry, Ambassador Abdelhadi Boucetta, and other advisors and officials, he visited Ricardo Lagos at the Presidential Palace of La Moneda in the morning. At night, an official banquet was held at La Moneda, attended by the entire Moroccan delegation, the Chilean government, and the diplomatic corps accredited in Chile.

On the second day, at the Hyatt Hotel, the King turned his eye to maquettes of the Coquimbo project for the first time, accompanied by Ambassador Boucetta, Mayor Velásquez, and officials from both Ministries of Foreign Affairs. It was Boucetta and Velásquez that signed the agreements on the construction of the Mohammed VI Center for the Dialogue of Civilizations while the King presided over the ceremony. Construction work accelerated exponentially after the King left Chile. Abdelhadi Boucetta would go to Coquimbo nearly weekly to sign checks, pay construction workers, and mediate between the diligently working Moroccan and Chilean teams. The architect Faissal Cherradi would come every few months to

Chile for two weeks to oversee the progress. Full teams of Moroccan artisans came successively–plaster workers, woodworkers, and a crew of fountain artisans among other specialists that were tasked with ensuring the architectural authenticity of the building.

VI.

While the financial and technical aspects of the project were mostly secured by the time the King left Chile, another more subtly challenging battle was waged throughout. As Boucetta related, the hardest part of this process was convincing the local inhabitants of Coquimbo—as well as the general public in Chile—of the rationale and worth subtending the project, which was accelerating precisely at the same time as the stranglehold of the post 9/11 discourse gripped the world. Islamophobia ran rampant, and Chile was no exception.

Groups of neighbors of the Cerro Dominante were obdurate in their resistance to the project, many of them gripped by Islamophobic fantasies on who and what this building would attract. Swift in his response, Boucetta held a conference for the neighbors, some of whom asked questions as specific as whether there would be a muezzin intoning the call for prayer five times a day. Beyond the neighborhood, Boucetta held another conference for the notable elite of Coquimbo that included business owners, councilors, and port managers. Here, he articulated the stakes and chances involved in the cultural work that the mosque would make possible. The goal wasn’t for the center to become primarily a site of worship more than it was for it to become a symbol of intercultural dialogue that would be open to all, regardless of religious affiliation, race, and gender. Even if muslim prayers would be available at the site, the center would be managed by cultural workers closer to the research arts than to religious leadership.

Some evangelical Christian groups at the local and national level also rose to question the project. Bad faith critics suspected that the project was animated by an underlying proselytizing intention, as if its model of faith would impinge upon the Christian one, the nature of this criticism raising distant echoes of religious bellicosity. Though far from the Iberian peninsula, the memory of Al-Andalus resonated in this moment of cultural tension, as an inescapable ghost of Christian *hispanismo*. To counter this, Boucetta leveraged his relationship with the Apostolic Nuncio Aldo Cavalli, an influential figure in the diplomatic corps and in the Chilean clerical sphere. Cavalli wrote to the Vatican so as to inform ecclesiastical leadership of the true nature of the project, and prevent any further conflict.

As it were, the cultural work of this mosque began before its construction had even been completed. In merely facing the resistance and sensitivities around the project, a counter-narrative of Islam was already being promoted against the dominant media discourse of the time. It wasn’t only Islam that needed to be explained, but also Morocco and its political system. Of all the points raised, what was hardest to communicate at the time was the role of King Mohammed VI as commander of the believers (Amir al Mu’minin).

This campaign of communication is especially significant in the genealogy of the mosque as the official name and purpose of the building emerged in its wake. During the official visit of the King, it was Mohamed Benaissa, who, in conversation with Boucetta, decided to secularize the nomenclature of the site from “mosque” to “cultural center,” making a diplomatic gesture that would further center the objectives of dialogue promotion, cultural education, and religious tolerance around which the building was erected. These conversations eventually gave rise to the official name, “Centro Mohammed VI para el Diálogo de Civilizaciones” or “Centro Cultural Mohammed VI” for short. From this shift, one can better envision the forces at play which led to downplaying the religiosity of Pedro Velásquez’ initial vision towards something more palatable to Christian democratic political culture, particularly during an era of ambient Islamophobic sentiment. Benaissa and Boucetta had been particularly aware of the evangelical weight of the church in Latin America and of its political influence on this land.

Anecdotally, John Paul II, who had visited Coquimbo twenty years earlier and paved the way for the construction of the cross, died on one of Boucetta’s visits to the construction site. In the mournful air of that day of April 2005, Coquimbo’s Christian population fondly remembered how it had once been chosen for and graced by the pope’s presence. Nearly twenty years later, a mosque would now amplify the range of its religious resonance across cultural borders, thus bringing further notoriety to Coquimbo.

VII.

For Pedro Velásquez, who insisted on the possibility of a mosque in Coquimbo, the political winds began to turn before the project was led to its completion. When Mohammed VI visited Chile, Velásquez was at the height of his popularity, having been reelected in October 2004 as one of the most popular mayors of any Chilean municipality. He is included in the picture below signing the accords related to the construction of the center, opposite Abdelhadi

Boucetta in the presence of Mohammed VI. According to Eleazar Garviso Gálvez, a journalist who wrote a biography on Velásquez, the controversial Mayor was instrumental in the transformation of Coquimbo, notably with the cross and the mosque, but also through his commitment to the working class. He created programs to send youth from impoverished neighborhoods of Coquimbo to universities across the region and the country, revalorized the touristic potential of Coquimbo’s historic English neighborhood, and created an extensive network of social housing programs. Through his links with the Church, entertaining relationships with cardinals, he had hoped to have John Paul II inaugurate the Cross of the Third Millenium. He met Gorbachev, Kirchner, Arafat, Mohammed VI and other leaders. And, according to his biographer, he secretly imagined the possibility of reaching the presidency.

At the same time, as Velásquez rose, his biographer notes that he was being used by the political establishment of the Christian Democratic Party of Chile for the votes he could rally in the region. That establishment never let him penetrate the circle of influence within the party that would allow him to achieve national influence. In 2006, he was indicted for tax fraud and conflict of interest by the court of the neighboring city of La Serena for an affair related to shady land purchases which were used for social housing, though supposedly were bought for much more than they were really worth. And though he was foreclosed from serving as Mayor of Coquimbo ever again, this indictment never impacted his popularity among his constituency. In fact, he was elected Deputy for his district in 2010 for a mandate of four years and again in 2018.

VIII.

On an afternoon of austral fall in March 2007 the Mohamed VI Center for the Dialogue of Civilizations was inaugurated in Coquimbo in the presence of a Moroccan delegation that included Ahmed Taoufiq, Mohamed Achaari, Minister of Culture, as well as most of the Moroccan Embassy staff (coincidentally, Mohamed Benaissa happened to be on an official visit to Chile at the same time as the center was inaugurated, but was not able to attend the ceremony.)

Unfortunately for Pedro Velásquez, the judicial events which led to his indictment unraveled approximately a year before construction work on the Coquimbo Mohamed VI Cultural Center ended, meaning he could not be present for the inauguration of his brainchild. Instead, his successor, Oscar Pereira would officiate the opening ceremony of the cultural center.

Pedro Velásquez died of cardiac arrest in 2023. Many remember him as the greatest mayor Coquimbo ever saw, who fused his outsize personal ambition with an ambition for the city itself.

IX.

Since its inauguration, the Center has published research, held conferences, and sponsored many events. Recently, the Chilean writer Sergio Macías Brevis put together a compendium of Chilean literature on Morocco, the first effort of its kind, and published it with the imprint based in the Mohammed VI Cultural Center. Many of the texts in the anthology consist of travel literature, such as Elsie Wood’s poems from the 1980s narrating scenes in Tangier and Rabat. Some writers, including Macías Brevis himself, have been exiled to Europe and, benefitting from the geographical proximity to North Africa, have included Morocco in their narratives. Most texts have to do with Chile’s *hispanismo* as bearing the cultural memory of the North African Muslim presence in Iberia. Traces of Al-Andalus feature prominently as in Gabriela Mistral’s poem “Recuerdo del Árabe Español”. It is worth it to note that there are few Moroccans in Chile, and certainly not a full-fledged community as there may be in other Latin American countries. But this distance is beginning to shrink, partly because of the work of the Center.

Lately, in the Cerro Navia municipality of Santiago, a library named after the feminist Moroccan writer Fatima Mernissi opened in 2021. In Oujda’s Mohamed I University, a chair named after Gabriela Mistral was created in 2024.

In the years since its construction, the center has thus become a portal for Morocco in Chile, and more amply for Arabo-Islamic culture in Latin America, bridging the cultural with the political and the diplomatic and continuing to deepen the ties between Morocco and the Ibero-American world.



An image of the Mohammed VI Center for the Dialogue of Civilizations (available at https://delfaroalpuerto.cl/2021/09/19/centro-mohammed-vi/)



Photo taken by the official photographer of La Moneda presidential palace. On the left, former Chilean president Ricardo Lagos, and on the right King Mohamed VI. In the background, Abdelhadi Boucetta, and on the right, Mohamed Benaissa.



Photo taken by the official photographer of La Moneda presidential palace. On the left, former Chilean president Ricardo Lagos, and on the right King Mohamed VI. In the background, Abdelhadi Boucetta, and on the right, Mohamed Benaissa.

Abd al-Krim al-Khattabi's “Message to the Peoples of Latin America”

Brahim Harchaoui
Ghent University, Belgium

Introduction

This article analyzes a letter dated December 1924 by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Krim al-Khattabi (henceforth al-Khattabi) to the peoples of Latin America as a political document situated within the broader history of transnational anti-colonialism during the interwar period. It focuses on one of the clearest expressions of al-Khattabi's internationalist vision: his correspondence addressed to these very peoples on the occasion of the centenary of the Battle of Ayacucho. Fought on 9 December 1824 in Peru under the command of Antonio José de Sucre, the Battle of Ayacucho constituted the decisive military encounter that sealed the defeat of Spanish royalist forces in South America and effectively ended Spanish imperial rule over most of the continent. It represented the culmination of the long Spanish American wars of independence, a struggle that had earlier been led by figures such as José de San Martín.

To understand the importance of al-Khattabi's letter, it is necessary to examine why the Rif War held such significance for Latin American anti-imperialists. As Thomas K. Lindner argues in *A City Against Empire: Transnational Anti-Imperialism in Mexico City 1920–30*, the Rif War (1921–1926) held a distinctive place in the political solidarity and comparative reflections of Latin American anti-imperialists for several interrelated reasons. Unlike other colonial struggles of the period, the Riffian resistance confronted Spain—the very European power that had once ruled nearly all of Latin America. This dynamic prompted anti-imperialist intellectuals and activists across the region to reassess Spain's lingering symbolic and political legacy in the post-colonial Americas during the 1920s. Furthermore, al-Khattabi emerged as a transnational icon of anti-imperialist defiance, standing alongside contemporaries such as Nicaragua's Augusto Sandino. Finally, the Rif War ignited debates among Latin American anti-imperialists concerning race and the political role of Indigenous peoples in liberation movements. Alongside the Chinese civil war, the Rif conflict became a key reference point for the emergence of tricontinental solidarity—linking struggles across

Africa, Asia, and the Americas—within Latin American political discourse.[1] Building on Lindner's framework, this article contends that al-Khattabi's 1924 letter can fruitfully be read as a deliberate intervention into this emerging anti-colonial solidarity—one that strategically invoked the centenary of Ayacucho to forge a shared anti-colonial genealogy between Morocco, the Arab world, and Latin America.

The article proceeds in three parts. First, it examines the historical background and intellectual networks that connected the Rif struggle to Latin American political and Arab diasporic milieus during the 1920s. Second, it offers a close reading of al-Khattabi's letter, focusing on its political vocabulary and historical references. Third, it traces the reception and reinterpretation of al-Khattabi in Latin American intellectual and political circles from the interwar period to contemporary writings, demonstrating the enduring presence of the Rif experience within Global South liberation references.

The Path to the Invitation of al-Khattabi to the Centenary of Ayacucho

The anti-colonial struggle led by al-Khattabi in the Moroccan Rif during the 1920s occupies a particular significance in the history of resistance to empire. More than a localized uprising against Spanish colonial rule, the Rif War (1921–1926) emerged as one of the most consequential anti-imperialist movements of the interwar period. The Riffian victory at the Battle of Annual in 1921 destabilized prevailing assumptions about European military supremacy and reconfigured the symbolic geography of anti-imperial struggle.[2] In a short time, al-Khattabi transcended his status as a regional military commander and came to be perceived internationally as a revolutionary figure articulating a political language of anti-colonial sovereignty, self-determination, and transnational solidarity.

Yet the affinities between the Rif struggle and Latin America were not forged exclusively in the 1920s; they drew on a deeper history of diplomatic contacts dating back to the early nineteenth century. The Battle of Ayacucho (1824) provides a useful chronological reference point for early Moroccan–Latin American diplomatic contacts in the post-independence era following Gran Colombia’s establishment in 1819.

[1] Lindner, T. K. (2023). *A city against empire: Transnational anti-imperialism in Mexico City, 1920–1930*. Liverpool University Press.

[2] According to C. R. Pennell, the Battle of Annual (1921) constituted the worst defeat suffered by a European colonial army in Africa in the twentieth century. *See C. R. Pennell*, Morocco: From Empire to Independence *(Oxford: Oneworld, 2003)*.

Morocco was the first Arab, African, and Muslim country to recognize the independence of Gran Colombia.[3] On June 6, 1827, the Colombian vessel *Pichincha* anchored in Tangier carrying Simón Bolívar's plenipotentiary, John Maitland, who requested that Colombian warships and citizens be granted access to Moroccan ports. Sultan Moulay Abderrahmane accepted, provoking Spanish diplomatic irritation. For many scholars, the opening of the Brazilian consulate in Tangier in 1861 constituted the third major diplomatic rapprochement between Morocco and Latin America, following these early contacts with Gran Colombia and an alleged Haitian mission of 1825.[4] As Moroccan historian Abdelhak Hiri notes, the early diplomatic contacts between Morocco and Latin America may be regarded as one of the earliest manifestations of South–South cooperation, illustrating how transatlantic political solidarity between Latin America and North Africa predated twentieth-century anti-colonial movements.[5]

This transatlantic orientation of the Moroccan state was not limited to Latin America. Morocco had also been the first country to recognize the independence of the United States of America, signing a treaty of friendship with the new republic in 1786. Nevertheless, the focus here remains on Latin American connections, which followed a distinct trajectory. Notably, al-Khattabi had already signaled his diplomatic strategy in 1924, before addressing the peoples of Latin America. In a short letter to the American people, he saluted them and declared that the Riffians were struggling for their liberty and were inspired by the high principles of the United States. This appeal to North America, together with his subsequent correspondence with Latin America, reveals a deliberate strategy of engaging multiple American audiences—North and South—as part of his broader effort to internationalize the Rif cause.

Given this historical context, the invitation extended to al-Khattabi by the Latin American Union to participate in the Ayacucho centenary represented an advanced stage of Moroccan–Latin American political ties. The "Latin American Union" refers to the *Unión Latinoamericana*, which emerged from the intellectual and political milieu formed around José Ingenieros' anti-imperialist journal *Renovación* (1923–1930). Its editorial board included Ingenieros and Aníbal Ponce, and it helped consolidate a network of writers, jurists, and

[3] Moroccan diplomatic representatives have claimed that Morocco was the first Arab, African, and Muslim country to recognize the independence of Gran Colombia. This position was reiterated by Ambassador Dr. Brahim Houssein Moussa in his address to the Latin American Parliament (Moussa, n.d.).
[4] Abdelhak Hiri, “Un diálogo cultural transatlántico: América Latina y Marruecos,” *Contextualizaciones Latinoamericanas* 2, no. 31 (2024): 119–133, https://doi.org/10.32870/cl.v2i31.8069.
[5] Hiri, A. (2026, January 2). *De Tánger a los Andes: el papel de Marruecos en el apoyo a los movimientos de independencia en América Latina durante el siglo XIX*. *Atalayar*. https://www.atalayar.com/

political activists. This network eventually created the Unión Latinoamericana in 1925, an organization dedicated to anti-imperialist struggle and transcontinental solidarity.[6] The invitation itself went beyond a ceremonial gesture, reflecting a growing recognition of the Rif resistance as part of a wider anti-imperialist constellation. Al-Khattabi was honored by the invitation but ultimately could not attend. His response—published in December 1924 in *Renovación*[7]—must nevertheless be understood as a political and intellectual intervention rather than a mere diplomatic message. In this letter, he situates the Rif struggle within a shared genealogy of anti-colonial revolutions linking North Africa, the Arab world, and Latin America, constructing a symbolic continuity between nineteenth-century Latin American independence movements and contemporary anti-colonial resistance in the Maghreb.

The dissemination of the Rif cause across Latin America was also mediated through diasporic political and intellectual networks. The Sudanese activist and journalist Ahmad Hassan Mattar played a central role. He worked to publicize the Rif struggle in Latin America, establishing a support committee and building networks with Arab migrant communities. His trajectory began with anti-colonial movements in the Arab Mashreq and anti-British activism in Egypt. He later traveled to Europe, then to Tangier to meet al-Khattabi, remaining there for several months as a self-described "envoy." He then traveled to Brazil, Argentina, and Chile, expanding his networks among Arab diasporic communities. However, it remains unclear how directly Mattar was involved in the publication and circulation of al-Khattabi's December 1924 letter in Latin America. While his broader activism undoubtedly contributed to the diffusion of the Rif cause, the precise extent of his role in disseminating this specific correspondence is not fully documented. Al-Khattabi later acknowledged Mattar's efforts in a formal letter of thanks (1949), preserved in Mattar's autobiography *Sinbad of the Sudan*, though this recognition refers to Mattar's general support for the Rif struggle rather than any direct involvement with the Ayacucho centenary correspondence.[8]

Alongside Mattar's individual trajectory, institutional initiatives emerged across Latin America. The Pan-Islamism Association of Buenos Aires, founded in 1922 by Saifuddin Rahhal, later became the Islamic Center of the Argentine Republic. In early 1924, its leaders addressed a letter to King Alfonso XIII of Spain proposing an international peace conference

[6] Monneveux, P. (2022). Les revues politico-culturelles argentines de la première moitié du xxe siècle. *La Revue des revues*, 68, 58–77. https://doi.org/10.3917/rdr.068.0058

[7] Al-Khattabi, Abd el-Krim. (1924, December). *Mensaje de Abd-El-Krim a los pueblos de la América Latina en el centenario de Ayacucho*. *Renovación: Boletín mensual de ideas, libros y revistas de la América Latina* (Ed. G. S. Moreau).

[8] Mattar, A. H. (1968). *Sindbad of the Sudan* (122 pp.). Khartoum: Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

to resolve the Arab question in North Africa, defending the right of Arab peoples to "defend their independence and aspire to a free life like the other nations of Europe."[9] This activism was paralleled by cultural expressions of support. In 1924, the Lebanese-Brazilian poet Elias Farhat established a "Committee for the Liberation of the Arabs" in Brazil.[10] He composed a poetic tribute to al-Khattabi following the Battle of Annual:

"Your qualities, O 'Abd al-Karim—indeed they are
The qualities of a resolute, clear-minded hero.
You have quenched the anguish of the East, O best of its sons,
And revived the dead hopes and aspirations."

The letter was returned to Farhat and remained in his possession for more than three decades before he personally delivered it to al-Khattabi in Cairo, where al-Khattabi had settled in the Egyptian capital in 1947.

Al-Khattabi's Letter to the Peoples of Latin America: A Content Reading

Within these historical and contextual circumstances that preceded the letter's December 1924 publication, the analysis now turns to the text of al-Khattabi's letter to the peoples of Latin America. The letter is presented below in italics in three parts, each followed by a short analysis.

My dear brothers,
In response to the kind appeal of the “Grupo renovación” in Buenos Aires, I turn—with my heart overflowing with joy—to all the peoples of Latin America on this glorious day on which they celebrate the military action that granted them independence and freed them from the yoke of foreign domination. There is no right more sacred, more sublime, or more inviolable than the right of every people to govern itself and to choose for itself the form of government that best corresponds to its nature and aspirations. The celebrations organized to commemorate the centenary of the Battle of Ayacucho find their echo in the hearts of all

[9] Vagni, J. J. (2021). El colonialismo español en Marruecos y las migraciones árabes y sefardíes en el Cono Sur: primeros contactos a principios del siglo XX [The Spanish colonialism in Morocco and Arab and Sephardic migrations in the Southern Cone: first contacts at the beginning of the 20th century]. *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos*. https://doi.org/10.4000/nuevomundo.85403

[10] Al-Bakhlaqi, M. (2005). *Mafkharat al-Rif: al-mujahid al-Maghribi Muhammad Abd al-Krim al-Khattabi* [مفخرة الريف: المجاهد المغربي محمد عبد الكريم الخطابي]. Tangier, Morocco: Author.

peoples struggling for their freedom, and I share your sentiments at this moment, with legitimate enthusiasm, as the provisional leader of the Republic of the Rif.

This opening cannot be read as a mere protocolary or ceremonial formulation, but rather as a structuring element of al-Khattabi's political discourse. The address "My dear brothers" functions not as a marker of cultural or religious proximity but as a political signifier that presupposes a shared historical condition shaped by colonial domination and resistance. It thus establishes a relational vocabulary grounded in political fraternity, replacing diplomatic formalism with a broader transnational framework of anti-colonial solidarity.

Similarly, the reference to "all the peoples of Latin America," rather than to individual states, reflects a mode of political address that departs from interstate categorization and instead privileges collective historical experience. This discursive choice constructs Latin America as a politically and culturally unified field, allowing al-Khattabi to situate the Rif question within a wider geography of anti-imperial resistance. In doing so, diplomatic language based on state-to-state relations is displaced in favor of a logic that transcends the state—a solidarity grounded in comparable colonial histories and shared trajectories of emancipation.

The heroic people of Morocco are fighting at this very moment for the same ideals defended by Miranda, Moreno, Bolívar, and San Martín. I have always loved and admired the heroes of your nation, and even today we continue to feel admiration for the daring and courageous exploits of Maceo and Martí. We possess, in terms of race, culture, and religion, qualities that prevent us from accepting the domination of any European power whatsoever. And just as you did, a century ago, in your struggle for independence, we today offer the sacrifice of our lives and our property on the altar of national freedom.

Europe, corrupted by the world war, unleashed by the imperialism inherent in its capitalist regime, has already lost the right to impose its thinking and its will on the peoples who, on another continent, wish to inaugurate new cultures based on ideals of human peace and social justice. We, the peoples of the Arab origin, seek to repel the yoke of England, France, Italy, and Spain. Our brothers in Egypt have struck the first blow, and I hope the world will witness the second blow that will be dealt here in Morocco; then will come the hour of Algeria, Tunisia, and Tripoli, whose peoples are also preparing for the moments of great national self-sacrifice.

“Our cause, as yours once was, is a just cause. We are not driven by hatred toward Spain, which was in the past our homeland and the cradle of our ancestors. Every educated Spaniard knows that, during the golden age of the arts in Spain, the Arabs constituted the majority. At the decisive moment when the religious war drove us away from the peninsula—adorned by our arts and enriched by our activity—a dark hour struck, leading to this decline that cast this beloved heritage into a state of irreparable deterioration, which still envelops it to this day.

The pathological nationalism of the military and Catholic classes in Spain dragged the Spanish people into a reckless and disastrous war, turning Morocco into a graveyard for its sons and into a bottomless pit for its military budgets. Even now, poor young Spaniards are here, exposed to death, just as they were sent a hundred years ago to meet their fate in the valleys of the Andes, and thirty years ago in the jungles of Cuba.”

Such massacres disgust us! Let us ask Spain to abandon these adventures that bring nothing but pure loss; and to leave Morocco as it left ‘your Americas,’ so that we may begin to carry out the project of peace, work, and renaissance, which will enable us to build nations no less dignified than those which you have built.

I address you as brothers, because the Spanish blood that runs in your veins is for the most part Arab blood, as is the case with all Spaniards in the south of the peninsula, those who set out from Palos, from Seville, and from Cádiz, to sow in your Americas the Arab love that was reborn in the gauchos and the llaneros, even if it is covered by the marks of another religion.”

Al-Khattabi opens this passage by placing the Rif struggle within a broader anti-colonial tradition. He invokes Latin American figures such as Miranda, Moreno, Bolívar, San Martín, Maceo, and José Martí. These are not mere historical references. They are figures who fought against Spanish rule and sought political unity through regional integration. By naming them, al-Khattabi claims a shared horizon of resistance. He does not construct a systematic theory of global anti-colonialism. Instead, he uses these familiar names to assert that the Rif struggle is legitimate, recognizable, and morally equivalent to the Latin American wars of independence.

A key dimension of the passage is its articulation of political emancipation through sacrifice. The reference to the offering of "lives and property on the altar of national freedom" reflects a recurrent revolutionary idiom in early twentieth-century anti-colonial discourse. In

this framing, liberation is not only a political demand but also an existential commitment grounded in collective endurance, loss, and self-offering.

Within this broader transcontinental context, Latin American expressions of solidarity with Morocco appear as an early, relatively isolated but conceptually significant antecedent. José Martí's essay "Los moros en España" (1893), published in *Patria*, expresses sympathy for resistance in the Rif region against Spanish expansion.[11] He frames it as a legitimate struggle for land, dignity, and survival. His phrase "Let us be Moors" demonstrates that Morocco had already entered Latin American anti-imperial imaginaries decades earlier, serving as a symbolic reference point for anti-colonial resistance.

Returning to al-Khattabi's own language in the letter, from the perspective of political vocabulary, his reference to "los pueblos de tronco árabe" ("peoples of Arab origin/stock") belongs to the semantic field of early twentieth-century nationalist discourse. The term "tronco" evokes lineage and shared descent, a common idiom for articulating collective identity in this period. Al-Khattabi's later association with initiatives such as the Committee for the Liberation of the Arab Maghreb, as well as his support of Arab unity, including Syrian-Egyptian unity in 1958, reflects a consistent unionist Arab political identity rather than a shift in ideology.[12] This stance is already evident in the letter itself, where he writes: "Our brothers in Egypt have struck the first blow, and I hope the world will witness the second blow that will be dealt here in Morocco; then will come the hour of Algeria, Tunisia, and Tripoli, whose peoples are also preparing for the moments of great national self-sacrifice." Yet he was not a classical pan-Arab leader in the mold of the Ba'athists or Nasserists. His position is better understood alongside his Algerian contemporaries such as Ibn Badis and al-Ibrahimi, who articulated a unionist Arab political identity through anti-colonial struggle and cultural belonging, not through a fixed doctrinal system.

A central feature of the passage is its historical parallelism between Moroccan resistance and Latin American anti-colonial struggle. When al-Khattabi states, "Our cause, as yours once was, is a just cause," he aligns the Rif War with Latin America's wars of independence against Spain. The Rif War is thus presented not as an isolated revolt, but as part of a broader pattern of resistance to Spanish imperialism.

Another important dimension is al-Khattabi's invocation of al-Andalus as a symbolic site of Arab–Iberian interconnection. His reference to the Arab presence in the "golden age of

[11] Martí, José. (1893, October 31). *Los moros en España*. In *Patria*. Retrieved from https://www.josemarti.cu/publicacion/los-moros-en-espana/

[12] Mubārak, Z. (2003). *Muḥammad al-Khāmis wa-Ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Khaṭṭābī wa-Ishkālīyat al-Istiqlāl*. Fédiberant Publications.

the arts in Spain" is not primarily a demographic claim. It functions instead as a counter-narrative that challenges rigid colonial distinctions between Europe and North Africa. In this sense, al-Andalus operates as a symbolic link, situating the colonial present of that period within longer Mediterranean histories of exchange, rupture, and entanglement.

To clarify the Arab identity dimension in al-Khattabi's conception of al-Andalus, reference may be made to contemporaneous intellectual figures such as the Spanish Arabist Rodolfo Gil Benumeya and the Lebanese intellectual Habib Estéfano. This reference is not evidence of direct intellectual influence or transmission. Rather, it serves as a heuristic device that helps situate al-Khattabi's discourse within broader early twentieth-century configurations of transcontinental identity construction linking the Arab world, southern Europe, and Latin America.

Habib Estéfano was part of Arab intellectual and diasporic networks in Latin America that sought to preserve Arab cultural identity among migrant communities. His significance lies not in systematic theory but in his contribution to a transcontinental idiom of Arab cultural continuity in diaspora – a context worth considering alongside al-Khattabi's own transnational discourse. Rodolfo Gil Benumeya offers a more explicitly articulated framework for understanding interconnections across three spheres: the European (particularly Spanish), the Arab Eastern, and the Hispano-American worlds.[13] In his interwar writings, these spheres are connected through a long historical arc that includes al-Andalus, Spanish imperial expansion, and migration to the Americas.[14] Within this framework, al-Andalus functions not merely as a historical episode but as a symbolic point of contact through which boundaries between Europe and the Arab world become porous and mutually constitutive. Read in this light, al-Khattabi's invocation of al-Andalus can be understood as not a nostalgic gesture, but as a strategic deployment of shared history to challenge colonial hierarchies.

From a broader interpretive perspective, later mediated representations of al-Khattabi further contribute to his transatlantic construction as an anti-colonial figure. An article in the Argentine magazine Revista Vea y Lea (February 1963), published shortly after his death, attributes to him a pronounced familiarity with Argentine history. In this account, he explicitly compares himself to General Martín Miguel de Güemes.[15] He is also described as drawing parallels between the Riffian resistance and the gaucho forces of the Argentine War

[13] Gil Benumeya, R. (1948, September–December). *Hispanidad y Arabidad*. *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, (5–6), 103–108.

[14] Juan José Vagni, “Les relations Sud-Sud : culture et diplomatie. Discours, identité et relations interrégionales : la ‘construction culturelle’ du rapprochement entre le monde arabe et l’Amérique latine,” *Cahiers des Amériques latines*, no. 80 (2015).

[15] Jassen, R. (1963, 28 February). *El último gran jefe de caballería*. *La Gran Revista de América: Vea y Lea*.

of Independence. While these claims are mediated through journalistic reconstruction and must be treated cautiously, they are analytically significant. They contribute to the posthumous construction of al-Khattabi as a figure legible within Latin American revolutionary history.

This mediated construction of al-Khattabi differs from his own correspondence: the Vea y Lea article lacks the idiom of kinship that he himself articulates. When he writes, "I address you as brothers, because the Spanish blood that runs in your veins is for the most part Arab blood," he invokes "shared blood" as an idiom of kinship. This is a stronger articulation of brotherhood than his first use of "my dear brothers" in the opening of the letter. In contemporary Latin American political rhetoric, Hugo Chávez has at times mobilized similar idioms of affective proximity to the Arab world, including claims of Arab blood. In a interview with Syrian state television, Chávez stated that he felt he had Arab blood in his veins, using this claimed connection to articulate solidarity with Arab causes.[16] Rather than indicating continuity with al-Khattabi's thought, this parallel points to a structural repetition: the use of perceived kinship and historical entanglement as means to forge political solidarity within anti-imperial projects separated by time, place, and ideology. What remains significant is that al-Khattabi's letter already deployed this rhetorical structure decades earlier, making it available for reactivation in later anti-imperial contexts.

The prayers that rise to God for your well-being and happiness, from all the sons of the Republic of the Rif. At the same time, I ask you to urge your gods and saints to hasten the day of our independence ever closer, just as your own day has already arrived.

The glorious memory of Ayacucho is a source of inspiration for all oppressed peoples. It is a lesson we carry in our hearts, and if attaining freedom were to cost us thousands upon thousands of lives, we would never say that the number was too great. We shall fight without ceasing until we complete our mission: the liberation of all Arab peoples on the shores of the Mediterranean and in West Asia. A free Morocco and a free Egypt will be the two pillars upon which the renaissance of a nation will be built—a nation that has honored three of humanity’s great civilizations.

My dear brothers, I ask you to give sympathetic attention to this message which the people of Morocco send you through my voice, with their hot blood burning in their hearts. It is not necessary for me to tell you that, in appealing to your sympathy, we are not asking you

[16] Al-Ikhbariya Al-Suriyya. (n.d.). *Hugo Chávez: أشعر أن في عروقي دم عربي*/[Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGKvRQoxSoA

to take a position against Spain, with whom you have reconciled since it agreed to recognize your sacred right to independence. And we too, after the day of our Ayacucho—which God and our courage will soon enable us to reach—will see our right to independence finally recognized by Spain, and then we shall once again become friends, she and we, like an old and beloved sister.

We regret that our state of war and our lack of recognition by the imperialist states of Europe have prevented us from sending a special embassy to the celebrations of the glorious Ayacucho. But rest assured that we will not wait for the next centenary to establish firm relations with your peoples, founded on love and fraternity rather than on the conventional hypocrisy of the present diplomacy of capitalist imperialism.

My dear brothers, thus speaks to you the Moroccan people, from the battlefields that the enemy abandons day by day, associating themselves with the centenary of Ayacucho through your friend.

Signed,
Abd el-Krim al-Khattabi
Provisional President of the Republic of the Rif

The third and last part of al-Khattabi's letter brings together affective language, diplomatic positioning, and collective self-representation. The opening invocation of prayers establishes a reciprocal spiritual register between the Moroccan side and Latin American audiences. This exchange of supplication functions as symbolic mutual recognition, operating outside doctrinal boundaries and emphasizing ethical rather than theological connection. The emotional register of the passage reinforces this relational dimension. References to collective intensity, such as the expression of "hot blood," construct a sense of immediacy and shared presence between speaker and addressee. These formulations do not introduce new ideological content, but rather reinforce the embodied dimension of political discourse.

The conclusion also introduces a clear diplomatic temporal structure in relation to Spain. While maintaining the legitimacy of resistance, al-Khattabi opens a future horizon in which reconciliation becomes possible after recognition of independence. This produces a distinction between colonial conflict as a present condition and post-conflict normalization as a conditional future stage.

Within the same closing movement, Arab unionist liberation is reactivated. Al-Khattabi declares: "We shall fight without ceasing until we complete our mission: the

liberation of all Arab peoples on the shores of the Mediterranean and in West Asia." As shown in the middle section, where this unionist Arab identity was linked to his later positions, this recurrence reinforces rather than expands his argument. The reappearance of Arab unity reaffirms its position as a central horizon of meaning in al-Khattabi's political vision.

Al-Khattabi reveals a precise strategic awareness. He represents the Rif Republic—the resisting state that confronted France and Spain—and frames his national liberation project in opposition to any contemporary separatist movement. His words and actions, he affirms, represent the Moroccan people as a whole. The signature—"Provisional President of the Republic of the Rif"—is the final performative act. It transforms the letter from a plea into a statement of sovereign equality.

The Resonance of al-Khattabi's Letter and the Reception of His Legacy in Latin America

Having analyzed the letter itself, this section now turns to three dimensions of al-Khattabi's legacy in Latin America: first, articles written in the aftermath of his letter and the Rif War; second, his military influence on revolutionary movements in the region; and third, an overview of contemporary Latin American texts engaging with his figure.

In a response by the Argentinian anti-imperialist intellectual José Ingenieros, published in *Renovación* (January 1925), al-Khattabi's letter reads within a Latin American anti-imperialist framework.[17] Ingenieros highlights the Moroccan leader's military successes against Spanish forces and interprets them as confirmation of a broader anti-colonial struggle, comparable to the Latin American wars of independence, particularly the Battle of Ayacucho. He also criticizes Spanish colonial rhetoric, especially the use of "patriotism" by General Primo de Rivera, which he sees as a reversal of its true meaning, framing Spanish rule as occupation. Ingenieros places al-Khattabi within the tradition of Latin American independence leaders such as Bolívar, San Martín, Sucre, O'Higgins, and Artigas, situating the Rif struggle within a shared anti-colonial pattern.

In an article published in *Variedades* (Lima, 1 August 1925), the Peruvian Marxist thinker José Carlos Mariátegui framed al-Khattabi's struggle as part of a broader global confrontation between imperialism and insurgent peoples.[18] He noted that both reactionaries

[17] Cisneros, R. H. [pseud. of José Ingenieros]. (1925, January). El mensaje de Abd-El-Krim. *Boletín mensual de ideas, libros y revistas de la América Latina*, edited by G. S. Moreau.

[18] Mariátegui, J. C. (1925). *El imperialismo y Marruecos*. Variedades, 1 August 1925. Retrieved from Marxists Internet Archive: https://www.marxists.org/espanol/mariateg/oc/figuras_y_aspectos_de_la_vida_i/paginas/el

like Raymond Poincaré, who claimed "Western civilization feels threatened by Abd-el-Krim," and democrats like Paul Painlevé, who argued France had a "civilizing mission" in Morocco, arrived at the same conclusion: France had the right to intervene. By naming both a right-wing nationalist and a left-wing republican, Mariátegui demonstrated that imperialism united the French political class across ideological divides. Like Ingenieros, Mariátegui placed al-Khattabi within the tradition of Latin American independence leaders by stating that the new generation of Spanish-speaking Latin America greeted al-Khattabi's struggle as a repetition of the enterprise of San Martín and Bolívar. In his concluding lines, Mariátegui wrote that al-Khattabi represented "la causa humana" — the human cause itself.

He interpreted the Rif uprising as part of a broader "resurrection of the Eastern peoples," a reawakening that undermined Western hegemony. France, which had initially viewed al-Khattabi as merely a problem for Spain, began to see him as an adversary of the capitalist West. For Mariátegui, this confirmed that the Rif War exposed a systemic crisis rather than a purely colonial dispute. At the same time, he criticized the different strategies of imperial expansion. The United Kingdom and France, he noted, acted more pragmatically, tolerating local institutions as long as economic exploitation remained secure. Mariátegui suggested that Spain's inquisitorial colonial instinct, unlike the flexible pragmatism of other European powers, played a role in provoking the Riffian insurrection.

In a similar vein, the Peruvian anti-imperialist politician and writer Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, in the mid-1920s — in the context of the Rif War (1921–1926) — adopted a markedly radical position. In September 1925, he wrote the article "El asesinato de un pueblo" ("The Murder of a People"), which was later included in his 1927 work *Por la emancipación de América Latina*.[19] In this text, he sharply condemned Spanish military actions in North Africa and argued that the silence of Spanish intellectuals regarding the crimes committed in Morocco deprived them of any moral legitimacy.

He interpreted the involvement of foreign — including American — actors in the Moroccan conflict as a form of practical training in colonial domination and the systematic destruction of Indigenous populations in peripheral and mountainous regions. Like the previous writers discussed in this section, he placed al-Khattabi alongside the great liberators of Latin America. In his article he asked: "The greatness of Bolívar, of Hidalgo, of San Martín, the greatness of our founding fathers — can it be denied to Abd-el-Krim, champion of

%20imperialismo%20y%20marruecos.htm

[19] *Haya de la Torre, V. R. (1927).* Por la emancipación de América Latina: Artículos, mensajes, discursos. *Buenos Aires, Argentina: M. Gleizer (Editorial Triunvirato)*

his people?" For Haya, Morocco was not a distant conflict but a mirror of Latin America's own past and a warning of its possible future.

Peruvian intellectuals such as Mariátegui and Haya de la Torre, alongside the Argentine José Ingenieros, played an important role in reinterpreting the Rif War within a Latin American anti-imperialist framework. Yet it was Mexico City that emerged as the true revolutionary beacon of tricontinental solidarity during the interwar period. According to Lindner, the Comintern actively cultivated this transcontinental consciousness through organizations such as the Anti-Imperialist League of the Americas (LADLA) and its magazine *El Libertador*, which openly connected Latin American anti-imperialism with anticolonial struggles in Africa and Asia, including al-Khattabi's liberation movement in Morocco. The Anti-Imperialist League of the Americas (LADLA) came into existence in January 1925 in Mexico City. It emerged from a partnership between the Mexican Communist Party (PCM) and the Workers Party (WP)—the name under which the Communist Party of America operated legally between 1921 and 1929. Yet beyond these Comintern-backed efforts, Mexican political circles generated their own distinct responses to the Rif War.

In May 1925, the magazine *La Antorcha*, published in Mexico City under the direction of José Vasconcelos[20], portrayed Abd el-Krim al-Khattabi not merely as a local resistance leader but as a central figure in a broader global struggle against imperial domination.[21] Emphasizing his tenacity and undeniable talent, Vasconcelos' magazine noted that after years of determined warfare in the Rif mountains, he had succeeded not only in reclaiming vast territories in northern Morocco but also in introducing a new spirit of disciplined organization into the anti-colonial struggle—one that echoed the modernizing and national reorganization undertaken by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in post-Ottoman Turkey.

Crucially, Vasconcelos' magazine framed al-Khattabi's struggle as part of a wider project of Arab emancipation. What had initially emerged as a resistance movement against Spanish colonialism evolved into a broader confrontation with French imperial power,

[20] José Vasconcelos (1882–1959) was a Mexican philosopher, writer, politician, and public intellectual known for his influential contributions to debates on education, Latin American identity, and cultural philosophy. He is best known for his essay *La raza cósmica* (1925), in which he developed the idea that Latin America would give rise to a “fifth race,” understood as a cultural and biological synthesis of all peoples. Vasconcelos also played a prominent political and institutional role as Mexico’s Minister of Education, during which he implemented major educational reforms, expanded public education, and promoted large-scale literacy campaigns in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution, viewing education as a central instrument for national and cultural transformation.

[21] Vasconcelos, J. (1925, June 29). *Un aplauso a Abd el-Krim*. *Repertorio Americano: Semanario de cultura hispánica*. (Originally published in *La Antorcha*).

thereby extending its scope beyond the Rif into a more expansive vision of liberation for Arab peoples. In this sense, al-Khattabi was presented not only as a Moroccan leader but as the embodiment of an anti-imperial awakening. Addressing a Latin American readership, the magazine warned: "Republican America would betray its very reason of existence, if it were to hypocritically turn a blind eye towards the fight that the admirable Riffians maintain against the decadent imperialisms of the Mediterranean, unfortunately represented by Latin people."

If Vasconcelos warned against turning a blind eye, Rafael Carrillo—Secretary-General of the Mexican Communist Party—showed that Latin Americans were not just looking away: they were being recruited to fight for Spain.[22] Carrillo wrote about the recruitment practices of the Spanish Foreign Legion in Latin America. According to him, Spanish consuls succeeded in recruiting thousands of young men by "stirring romantic enthusiasm among the youth of America," indoctrinating them with the idea that they were fighting for "civilization," for the "freedom and honor of the white race," and other imperialist fictions, while in reality they were participating in a war of domination and plunder that not only endangered them but also rendered them complicit in the reproduction of European control over Africa.

This dynamic was not limited to ideological influence but also took on a concrete socioeconomic dimension. High-ranking Spanish-Cuban officers, born in Cuba or formed during the Hispano-Cuban War, held key command positions in the Spanish military campaigns in Morocco. Alongside them, a significant number of low-ranking Latin American mercenaries joined the ranks of the Legion, likely driven by poverty and precarious living conditions. The scale of this recruitment from Latin America was notable. In September 1921, shortly after the "Disaster of Annual," 287 men departed from Buenos Aires as volunteers for the Spanish Legion in Morocco.[23] Soon thereafter, 731 mercenaries left Havana for Morocco, the majority of whom were Cubans.[24]

[22] Lindner, T. K. (2021). Tricontinentalism before the Cold War? Mexico City's anti-imperialist internationalism. *Esboços: histórias em contextos globais*, *28*(48), 327–345. https://doi.org/10.5007/2175-7976.2021.e78153

[23] This phenomenon of Latin Americans fighting on behalf of Spain was not, however, the only form of direct involvement. A small number of Latin Americans attempted to join the other side. According to archival records, two Bolivians sought to contact al-Khattabi with the intention of joining his forces in their fight against Spain and France.

[24] *Fleischmann, S. (2020)*. Cuba – España – Marruecos – Cuba: transferencias de conocimientos e imaginarios entre los escenarios de guerr(ill)as (anti)imperialistas: la trayectoria de Alberto Bayo Giroud. *In* América Latina – África del Norte – España: lazos culturales, intelectuales y literarios del colonialismo español al antiimperialismo *(pp. 61–87). Iberoamericana/Vervuert, Madrid/Frankfurt am Main. https://doi.org/10.57727/160*

Among the most illustrative examples of this broader recruitment pattern are the Yaqui fighters of Sonora, whose trajectory makes visible the lived realities behind these trans-imperial mobilizations. In the aftermath of the Yaqui Wars, the Mexican state had consolidated control over Sonora but remained fearful of further rebellion. Simultaneously, Spain, reeling from the disastrous Battle of Annual (July 1921), found itself desperately in need of elite fighters. Approximately 500 Yaqui men were recruited from camps in Sonora; they sailed from Veracruz to Cádiz and were incorporated into the 16th Company of the Spanish Foreign Legion. Deployed to Spanish Morocco, these Yaqui fighters—seasoned by decades of guerrilla warfare in the deserts and mountains of northern Mexico—were sent to fight Moroccan guerrillas in the Rif using the very mountain tactics they had honed against Mexican government forces.[25] This tragic circuit of imperial recruitment reveals how European powers exploited the precarious conditions produced by one colonial theater to sustain domination in another, transforming Latin America from a site of anti-colonial solidarity into a reservoir of mercenary manpower.

While colonial warfare relied on the circulation of soldiers across imperial spaces, anti-colonial struggle generated its own forms of circulation, through which military knowledge and figures such as Al-Khattabi were taken up and reinterpreted in Latin American revolutionary movements. In this context, Al-Khattabi's impact on Latin American military tactic is perhaps best illustrated by his influence on Augusto César Sandino, the Nicaraguan anti-imperialist leader who fought against U.S. occupation and was described by contemporaries as belonging to "the school of Abd-el-Krim." In a 1930 article published in *The Sunday Star* (Washington), Rafael de Nogales Méndez—Venezuelan soldier, adventurer, and writer who met Sandino and later wrote about his anti-imperialist struggle in Nicaragua—described Sandino as a tactician "after the school of Abd-el-Krim of Morocco fame."[26] In this formulation, al-Khattabi functions as an interpretive benchmark through which Sandino's strategy is assessed, while also illustrating the role of Latin American observers in producing comparative readings of anti-colonial warfare.

The timing and nature of this influence, however, require further scrutiny. As Mevliyar Er argues in her research article "Abd-el-Krim al-Khattabi: The Unknown Mentor of Che Guevara," Sandino's revolt started as soon as the Rif War ended in 1927. Sandino did not

[25] Burleson, V. G. (2026, January 24). *Yaqui warriors in Morocco – soldiers (1921–1926)* [Blog post]. Tribal Youth Initiative. https://www.tbyi.gov/post/yaqui-warriors-in-morocco-soldiers-1921-1926 This source is a government blog; the information is presented as a summary of historical events.
[26] Rafael de Nogales. (1930, 14 september). *More light on the "bad man" Sandino and how he fights*. *The Sunday Times* (Washington, D.C.).

immediately adopt the guerrilla tactics that the Rifis had mastered; he turned to them only after his initial conventional attacks proved unsuccessful.[27] This gradual adoption suggests that the transmission of Khattabist military knowledge was neither automatic nor immediate. A more direct channel for this transmission appears to be Antonio Dahud (also known as Antonio Talhami), a Colombian-born fighter of Palestinian origin who joined Sandino's forces in Nicaragua while still young. His revolutionary trajectory suggests a deeper, more sustained engagement with al-Khattabi's legacy. After Sandino's death, Dahud traveled to the Arab East, where he participated in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. During this period, he met all-Khattabi—then in exile following the collapse of the Rif Republic. Contrary to suggestions that this encounter remains unconfirmed, the contact between the two men is documented.[28] While al-Khattabi followed the fighting from behind the scenes, Dahud joined him in leading Arab volunteers in the struggle. This documented encounter represents a direct, embodied transmission of the Khattabist experience from the Rif to the Palestinian struggle, and potentially beyond.

Dahud would later resurface in the Americas, where he became acquainted with Fidel Castro. He joined the *Granma* expedition and fought in the Cuban Revolution. Through this winding revolutionary itinerary—from Sandino's Nicaragua to a documented encounter with al-Khattabi, and from there to Castro's Cuba—Dahud may have served as a living conduit through which the tactical and strategic lessons of the Rif War were transmitted to the Cuban Revolution. Rather than al-Khattabi's influence flowing through printed texts or mediated discourse alone, Dahud's peripatetic career suggests a more direct, embodied form of transmission: a guerrilla who fought with Sandino, probably learned from al-Khattabi, and through him reached the next generation of Latin American revolutionaries. Further research is now needed to determine what exactly was transmitted. What specific tactics, organizational principles, or strategic lessons did Dahud possibly carry from al-Khattabi to Castro's fighters? Archival research into Dahud's writings, personal documents, or testimonies from revolutionaries who knew him could help answer these questions.

In this sense, the circulation of al-Khattabi's legacy did not end with the revolutionary networks of the early twentieth century but continued to resonate within later Latin American intellectual and journalistic production. Beyond the immediate military and colonial dynamics of the Rif War, al- Khattabi has increasingly been reinterpreted in the region as a key

[27] Mevliyar Er, "Abd-el-Krim al-Khattabi: The Unknown Mentor of Che Guevara," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 29, no. 1 (2017): 137–159, https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2014.997355. The article was published online in 2015, but the official journal issue is 2017.

[28] Antonio Dahud, *Hoy Palestina… ¿y mañana?* (México, D.F.: Editorial Indoamericana, 1954).

reference for anti-colonial struggle and guerrilla warfare. In the 21st century, his figure continues to circulate within Latin American publications as a symbolic and analytical point of reference for broader reflections on revolutionary history and South–South intellectual exchanges.

In this regard, the 2020 Mexican publication *De Abd-el-Krim a Fidel Castro* by Fredo Aras de la Canal examines perceived continuities between the Rif War and the Cuban revolutionary movement, with particular attention to the transmission of guerrilla practices and anti-colonial military experience.[29] As Aras de la Canal writes, the reference to Abd-el-Krim in his book is justified because he was fought against in Morocco by Alberto Bayo, the republican soldier who trained the Cuban revolutionaries who, under the command of Fidel Castro, started the revolution – as Bayo recounted in his work *Mi aporte to the Cuban Revolution*. Alberto Bayo thus represents an influential framework on the Cuban Revolution through his direct transmission of Rif War experiences – a point confirmed by multiple sources, among them the previously cited article by Mevliyar Er. Similarly, the Paraguayan journalist and member of the Academy of History and Military Geography of Paraguay, Luis Agüero Wagner, in his article "Maestro marroquí para la guerra de guerrillas," confirms al-Khattabi's influence on the Cuban Revolution once again, explicitly through the figure of Alberto Bayo.[30]

The article by Argentine journalist Leandro Albani, *“Cuando la figura de Abd-el-Krim sobrevoló América Latina”* (2024), shows how the figure of Abd-el-Krim and his letter to the peoples of Latin America represented a symbolic bridge between the anti-colonial struggle in North Africa and the independence movements in Latin America.[31] In doing so, Albani mainly discusses selected fragments of Abd-el-Krim (El-Khattabi)’s letter to the American and Latin American peoples, presenting its content in an accessible way for a broad audience. On a more scholarly level**,** the Argentine historian Martín Bergel has extensively examined the transcontinental circulation of anti-colonial ideas, particularly in his work *De los "Viajes" de Sarmiento a la recepción 'prototercermundista' de la Guerra del Rif: tres momentos en las conexiones culturales entre América Latina y el Norte de África*. In this study, he identifies three key phases in the historical connections between Latin America and North Africa: the representations produced by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento during his nineteenth-century

[29] Arias de la Canal, F. (2020). *De Abd-El-Krim a Fidel Castro*. Frente de Afirmación Hispanista, A.C. (71 pp.).
[30] Agüero Wagner, L. (2017, June 7). *Maestro marroquí para la guerra de guerrillas*. *Diario Siglo XXI*. https://www.diariosigloxxi.com/texto-diario/mostrar/750026/maestro-marroqui-guerra-guerrillas
[31] Leandro Albani. (2024, 14 april). *Cuando la figura de Abd-el-Krim sobrevoló América Latina*. El Salto Diario. https://www.elsaltodiario.com/historia/cuando-figura-abd-krim-sobrevolo-america-latina

travels in Algeria; the intensified circulation of information on North Africa following the late nineteenth-century communications revolution and its reinterpretation within Latin American media; and the emergence, after the First World War, of intellectual and political affinities between Latin American actors and anti-colonial movements such as that led by al-Khattabi.[32]

Taken together, these processes situate the Rif War within a broader genealogy of transregional exchanges that contributed to the development of a Latin American "tricontinental" sensibility within the framework of the Third World. This line of inquiry has been further enriched by the work of the Mexican historian Yolotl de María Valadez Betancourt, whose master's research at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, completed in September 2025, constitutes an early systematic study of the reception of al-Khattabi in Latin America.[33] Her work focuses on the ways in which news of the Rif War was received, interpreted, and rearticulated within Latin American intellectual, political, and journalistic spaces.

Within this evolving field of Latin American reception and reinterpretation of al-Khattabi's North African anti-colonial experiment, the ways in which his political experience and message have been received and reinterpreted acquire particular significance. His address to the peoples of Latin America has, throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, come to be understood as a key articulation of an evolving sense of solidarity. In this perspective, his letter can be read not merely as a historical document, but as a recurring political reference that has framed and sustained visions of anti-colonial cooperation between Arab and Latin American societies. Its continued reinterpretation may contribute to broadening the horizons of emancipatory thought within the Global South, giving this convergence a lasting theoretical and political dimension that extends well beyond its original historical moment.

[32] Martín Bergel. (2020). *De los “Viajes” de Sarmiento a la recepción “prototercermundista” de la Guerra del Rif: tres momentos en las conexiones culturales entre América Latina y el Norte de África*. In *América Latina – África del Norte – España: lazos culturales, intelectuales y literarios del colonialismo español al antiimperialismo* (pp. 121–138). Iberoamericana/Vervuert.

[33] Valadez Betancourt, Y. de M. (2025). *La recepción de Abd el-Krim en América Latina* [Master's thesis, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México].

Bibliography:

Agüero Wagner, L. (2017, June 7). Maestro marroquí para la guerra de guerrillas. *Diario Siglo XXI*. https://www.diariosigloxxi.com/texto-diario/mostrar/750026/maestro-marroqui-guerra-guerrillas

Al-Bakhlaqi, M. (2005). *Mafkharat al-Rif: al-mujahid al-Maghribi Muhammad Abd al-Krim al-Khattabi* [مفخرة الريف: المجاهد المغربي محمد عبد الكريم الخطابي]. Author.

Albani, L. (2024, April 14). Cuando la figura de Abd-el-Krim sobrevoló América Latina. *El Salto Diario*. https://www.elsaltodiario.com/historia/cuando-figura-abd-krim-sobrevolo-america-latina

Al-Ikhbariya Al-Suriyya. (n.d.). *Hugo Chávez: أشعر أن في عروقي دم عربي*[Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGKvRQoxSoA

Al-Khattabi, A. e.-K. (1924, December). Mensaje de Abd-El-Krim a los pueblos de la América Latina en el centenario de Ayacucho. *Renovación: Boletín mensual de ideas, libros y revistas de la América Latina*.

Arias de la Canal, F. (2020). *De Abd-El-Krim a Fidel Castro*. Frente de Afirmación Hispanista, A.C.

Bergel, M. (2020). De los “Viajes” de Sarmiento a la recepción “prototercermundista” de la Guerra del Rif: tres momentos en las conexiones culturales entre América Latina y el Norte de África. In *América Latina – África del Norte – España: lazos culturales, intelectuales y literarios del colonialismo español al antiimperialismo* (pp. 121–138). Iberoamericana/Vervuert.

Burleson, V. G. (2026, January 24). Yaqui warriors in Morocco – soldiers (1921–1926) [Blog post]. *Tribal Youth Initiative*. https://www.tbyi.gov/post/yaqui-warriors-in-morocco-soldiers-1921-1926

Cisneros, R. H. [pseud. of José Ingenieros]. (1925, January). El mensaje de Abd-El-Krim. *Boletín mensual de ideas, libros y revistas de la América Latina*.

Dahud, A. (1954). *Hoy Palestina... ¿y mañana?* Editorial Indoamericana.

Er, M. (2017). Abd-el-Krim al-Khattabi: The unknown mentor of Che Guevara. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *29*(1), 137–159. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2014.997355

Fleischmann, S. (2020). Cuba – España – Marruecos – Cuba: transferencias de conocimientos e imaginarios entre los escenarios de guerr(ill)as (anti)imperialistas: la trayectoria de Alberto Bayo Giroud. In *América Latina – África del Norte – España: lazos culturales, intelectuales y literarios del colonialismo español al antiimperialismo* (pp. 61–87). Iberoamericana/Vervuert. https://doi.org/10.57727/160

Gil Benumeya, R. (1948, September–December). Hispanidad y Arabidad. *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, (5–6), 103–108.

Haya de la Torre, V. R. (1927). *Por la emancipación de América Latina: Artículos, mensajes, discursos*. M. Gleizer (Editorial Triunvirato).

Hiri, A. (2024). Un diálogo cultural transatlántico: América Latina y Marruecos. *Contextualizaciones Latinoamericanas*, *2*(31), 119–133. https://doi.org/10.32870/cl.v2i31.8069

Hiri, A. (2026, January 2). De Tánger a los Andes: el papel de Marruecos en el apoyo a los movimientos de independencia en América Latina durante el siglo XIX. *Atalayar*. https://www.atalayar.com/

Jassen, R. (1963, February 28). El último gran jefe de caballería. *La Gran Revista de América: Vea y Lea*.

Lindner, T. K. (2021). Tricontinentalism before the Cold War? Mexico City's anti-imperialist internationalism. *Esboços: histórias em contextos globais*, *28*(48), 327–345. https://doi.org/10.5007/2175-7976.2021.e78153

Lindner, T. K. (2023). *A city against empire: Transnational anti-imperialism in Mexico City, 1920–1930*. Liverpool University Press.

Mariátegui, J. C. (1925, August 1). El imperialismo y Marruecos. *Variedades*. https://www.marxists.org/espanol/mariateg/oc/figuras_y_aspectos_de_la_vida_i/paginas/el%20imperialismo%20y%20marruecos.htm

Martí, J. (1893, October 31). Los moros en España. *Patria*. https://www.josemarti.cu/publicacion/los-moros-en-espana/

Mattar, A. H. (1968). *Sindbad of the Sudan*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Monneveux, P. (2022). Les revues politico-culturelles argentines de la première moitié du xxe siècle. *La Revue des revues*, *68*, 58–77. https://doi.org/10.3917/rdr.068.0058

Moussa, B. H. (n.d.). *Discurso del Embajador Extraordinario y Plenipotenciario del Reino de Marruecos ante el Parlamento Latinoamericano* [Speech]. Parlamento Latinoamericano.

Mubārak, Z. (2003). *Muḥammad al-Khāmis wa-Ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Khaṭṭābī wa-Ishkālīyat al-Istiqlāl*. Fédiberant Publications.

Nogales, R. de. (1930, September 14). More light on the "bad man" Sandino and how he fights. *The Sunday Times* (Washington, D.C.).

Pennell, C. R. (2003). *Morocco: From empire to independence*. Oneworld.

Valadez Betancourt, Y. de M. (2025). *La recepción de Abd el-Krim en América Latina* [Master's thesis, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México].

Vagni, J. J. (2015). Les relations Sud-Sud: culture et diplomatie. Discours, identité et relations interrégionales: la “construction culturelle” du rapprochement entre le monde arabe et l’Amérique latine. *Cahiers des Amériques latines*, (80).

Vagni, J. J. (2021). El colonialismo español en Marruecos y las migraciones árabes y sefardíes en el Cono Sur: primeros contactos a principios del siglo XX [The Spanish colonialism in Morocco and Arab and Sephardic migrations in the Southern Cone: first contacts at the beginning of the 20th century]. *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos*. https://doi.org/10.4000/nuevomundo.85403

Vasconcelos, J. (1925). *La raza cósmica*.

Vasconcelos, J. (1925, June 29). Un aplauso a Abd el-Krim. *Repertorio Americano: Semanario de cultura hispánica*.

Abdelkrim al-Khattabi, the Rif War and Latin America

Yassin Akouh
Independent journalist and researcher, Belgium

Between 1921 and 1926, the Rif War turned northern Morocco into one of the major anti-colonial battlegrounds of the interwar period. Initially fought against Spanish colonial expansion, the conflict escalated after 1925 when France intervened alongside Spain. The war ended in 1926 following large-scale Franco-Spanish military cooperation and the systematic use of chemical weapons against the Riffian population.[1] More than a regional colonial conflict, however, the Rif War became an international event that attracted the attention of journalists, intellectuals, diplomats, anti-colonial activists, and political observers across Europe, the Islamic world, Asia, Africa, and the Americas.

This international visibility was closely tied to the political strategy of the Riffian leader Mohammed ben Abdelkrim al-Khattabi (1882–1963), better known as Abdelkrim. Although primarily remembered as a military commander, Abdelkrim also recognized the importance of diplomacy, international communication, and public opinion in the struggle against colonial rule. In his view, anti-colonial resistance had to be fought not only on the battlefield, but also in the spheres of international law, political legitimacy, and moral authority. Through letters to foreign governments, interviews with journalists, diplomatic initiatives, and appeals to organizations such as the League of Nations, he framed the Riffian struggle as part of a broader debate on colonialism, sovereignty, and justice. In doing so, he engaged in a deliberate form of impression management, presenting the Rif Republic as a legitimate, civilized, and politically organized entity worthy of international recognition. By shaping foreign perceptions of the Riffian resistance, Abdelkrim sought to counter colonial portrayals of the Riffians as "tribal" or "barbaric" and instead portrayed the movement as modern, rational, and grounded in principles of self-determination and sovereignty.

[1] For details, see: Balfour, *Deadly Embrace: Morocco and the Road to the Spanish Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); & Kunz & Müller, *Giftgas gegen Abd el Krim: Deutschland, Spanien und der Gaskrieg in Spanisch-Marokko 1922-1927* (Freiburg: Verlag Rombach, 1990).

This article argues that Abdelkrim should be understood not only as a military strategist, but also as a political thinker and international actor who articulated a sophisticated critique of the colonial international order. His interventions reveal three interconnected dimensions of anti-colonial politics during the Rif War. First, he developed an early form of public diplomacy on behalf of the Rif Republic, which functioned as a proto-state seeking international legitimacy despite lacking formal recognition. Second, he challenged the colonial “civilizing mission” used by European powers to justify imperial domination, reversing accusations of barbarism by presenting colonial violence itself as fundamentally uncivilized. Third, his engagement with the League of Nations reflected a broader critique of the post-First World War international order. Although the League presented itself as a guarantor of peace and collective security, Abdelkrim and his supporters increasingly viewed it as structurally incapable of protecting colonized peoples from imperial aggression.

This critique resonated across Europe, the Islamic world, and South America. In countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Peru, intellectuals, journalists, and political activists interpreted the Rif War through the lens of their own experiences with imperialism and foreign intervention. Newspapers and political journals frequently portrayed Abdelkrim as a symbol of anti-colonial resistance and national dignity. The Rif War thus became part of a wider transnational debate on colonialism, sovereignty, and the unequal foundations of the international order.

Drawing on a wide range of primary sources, including Abdelkrim’s correspondence with diplomats, journalists, and the League of Nations, this article reconstructs his conceptions of civilization, sovereignty, and political legitimacy. Situating Abdelkrim within a broader anti-colonial intellectual history, it re-evaluates him as both a political thinker and a major critic of colonialism whose ideas continue to resonate in contemporary debates on international law, global governance, and postcolonial relations.

In an era of limited communication technologies, Abdelkrim relied on a broad network of intermediaries to project the Riffian struggle beyond the battlefield. He made use of *rakkās*[2], couriers who transported letters and official documents on foot, as well as journalists, merchants, sympathizers, and foreign visitors travelling between the Rif and the outside

[2] For further information on this profession, see: Boum, Aomar., & Boum-Mendoza, Madjouline. *The last Rekkas* (Casablanca: Langages du Sud, 2024).

world.[3] Through these networks, information about the war circulated internationally and transformed the Rif War into a powerful anti-colonial symbol.

The significance of these efforts becomes clearer when placed within the broader history of Morocco’s incorporation into the European colonial order. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Morocco came under growing military, economic, and diplomatic pressure from European powers with overwhelming industrial and technological advantages. Its geopolitical position was further weakened by colonial expansion in neighbouring regions, especially French Algeria. This process culminated in the Treaty of Fez of 1912, through which the Moroccan sultan accepted French protectorate rule. Parallel agreements between France and Spain granted Spain control over northern Morocco, including the Rif.

These arrangements, however, did not reflect broad local consent. Particularly in the Rif and the Atlas Mountains, colonial intervention generated sustained resistance among communities that regarded the protectorate system as an externally imposed political order lacking legitimacy. This perception was later articulated by Abdelkrim himself. In a 1926 interview, he declared:

> We have not invited you into the Riff, neither you French nor the Spaniards. We had been living, badly commanded perhaps, badly directed, badly governed, but we had the satisfaction of being free. You have drawn up between yourselves treaties dividing up our country, based on the fiction that we were subjects of the Sultan and had only to submit. You thus disposed of us as if we did not exist.[4]

With this statement, Abdelkrim not only problematizes the legal foundations of the protectorate, but also the underlying assumption that the Riffian population could simply be subjected to external agreements between European powers and the sultan. His words underscore a fundamental tension between formal sovereignty and de facto autonomy, and make clear that the colonial reordering of Morocco was not recognized as legitimate by local actors.

[3] To illustrate this, Abdelkrim entrusted a letter to the Swedish journalist Hans Langlet, intended for Prince Charles, then president of the Swedish Red Cross. Through the American journalist Paul Scott Mowrer, he also had a message circulated. This letter was published in various newspapers, in which he addressed the inhabitants of North America.

[4] The New York Times, 25 April 1926.



Figure 1. Rakkās in the service of Mohammed ben Abdelkrim al-Khattabi, photographed with French officials, date unknown. Private archives of the author.

The outbreak of the Rif War in 1921, nine years after the establishment of the protectorate, is directly linked to Spain’s attempt to consolidate and expand its control over the region. Until then, that control had remained fragmentary, partly due to persistent local resistance and the geopolitical instability of the First World War (1914–1918). Although the Ottoman-German alliance during that war attempted to incite resistance in Morocco, including from the Rif - where Abdelkrim and his father were involved - these efforts did not lead to lasting results.[5]

In the years before the Rif War, Abdelkrim adopted a pragmatic position by serving in several roles within the Spanish administration in Melilla. There he acquired not only fluency in Spanish, but also insight into the political, military, and cultural structures of the European powers. This experience later enabled him to understand the logic, strengths, and weaknesses of the colonial system and to challenge it effectively.

[5] Akouh, Yassin. *Koloniale vloek: de relaties tussen de Marokkaanse staat en de Rif* (Antwerpen/Amsterdam: Houtekiet, 2025), 30-36.

His distrust of Spanish intentions nevertheless grew as Spanish troops advanced into the central Rif to complete their colonial occupation. For Abdelkrim, who emerged as the leader of the resistance, this marked a decisive turning point. As he later stated, the Spaniards brought their “civilization” not with textbooks, but with rifles - a sharp critique of colonial civilizing rhetoric.[6] In June 1921, the Rif War broke out. Within weeks, Riffian forces liberated most of the eastern Rif, despite years of Spanish military and administrative efforts to secure the region. These victories, culminating in the Battle of Annual, quickly attracted international attention.

The Rif War soon acquired a significance that extended far beyond Morocco. Anti-colonial movements across the world identified with Abdelkrim’s resistance. *Le Paria*, the newspaper founded by Ho Chi Minh, devoted considerable attention to the war. The Senegalese anti-imperialist activist Lamine Senghor captured its symbolic importance when he wrote: “From all corners of the world, the colonized peoples see in Abdelkrim’s victory the star that will lead them to their liberation.”[7]

After a summer of successful military engagements, around November 1921 Abdelkrim sought contact with several so-called “civilized” nations, including France, Great Britain, and the United States.[8] With this diplomatic step, he aimed to clarify internationally the nature of the Rif War and the abuses allegedly committed by the Spanish authorities. He addressed letters to their representatives in Tangier, in which he emphasized that the Riffian tribes were not opposed to modernization or progress, but were resisting colonial oppression: “In the name of humanity we appeal to you, Oh men of the whole world, and, in order that you may inform the entire civilised world, we desire to state that these Riff tribes are not opposed to the spirit of civilisation, nor do they combat it by force so long as it accords with the Islamic religion.”

In his letter, he stated that the Spaniards were abusing the honour and freedom of the people under the pretext of the protectorate granted to them during the Algeciras Conference (1906). What was presented as a humanitarian and order-establishing mandate, he argued, had become a system of oppression and military domination. Spain was therefore, in his view,

6 Villain, Jean. *Fellah ohne Faruk: eine Ägyptenreise* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1958), 6-7.

7 Le Paria, June-July 1925, p. 1.

8 I am particularly grateful to three individuals for making these letters accessible. To the best of my knowledge, no researcher has previously brought these documents together and analyzed them in relation to one another. I received the letter addressed to the French representative from Ahmed Bouasria (CADN, 675PO/B/1/425); the letter to the British representative was obtained via Jonathan Wrytzen (Yale University) from The National Archives (Kew) (FO, 371/7086); and thanks to the American researcher Frederic Wehrey, I was also able to obtain a copy of the letter to the American representative, preserved in the archives of the State Department.

entirely unfit to fulfil this role. He stressed that Riffian resistance did not arise from hostility toward “civilization,” but from opposition to tyranny, violence, and colonial arrogance.
Abdelkrim goes on to state that the Riffian population had long hoped that injustices would cease, but that in practice oppression had only increased. Ultimately, they were therefore compelled to take up arms in order to defend their existence, despite their military inferiority. Meanwhile, he had formed an independent government that guarantees freedom of movement and trade. He also emphasizes that the Riffians are not opposed to the establishment of schools, nor to cooperation with foreign powers that contribute to infrastructure, communication, and peaceful relations.

At the same time, he places responsibility on Europe, which, in his view, failed to foresee that entrusting the mandate to Spain would result in abuse of power and systematic violations of rights. In this context, he explicitly refers to the use of destructive weapons against the Riffian population. Despite this violence, he states that Riffian fighters treat Spanish prisoners correctly, in stark contrast to the use of dumdum bullets, asphyxiating gases, artillery bombardments, and aerial bombing by Spanish forces.[9] He acknowledges that the Riffians abhor war, but that they refuse to live in humiliation. Should the conflict ultimately be lost, Europe, in his view, bears part of the responsibility, as it refused to intervene or to provide an alternative mandate that could have enabled stability and self-government. Finally, he requests that these statements be brought to the attention of the League of Nations.

The League of Nations, established in 1919 in Geneva after the First World War, functioned as a supranational organization aimed at promoting collective security, international cooperation, and the prevention of future large-scale wars. Within this idealistic context, characterized by a strong belief in diplomacy and a multilateral order, Abdelkrim seeks to engage with the rhetoric of the international community by appealing to the so-called “civilized” nations and their institutions.

Despite his attempts to reach France, Great Britain, and the United States, his appeal appears to have been ignored. British archival records show that there was little inclination to engage with the substance of his letters, and instead they advised informing the Spanish authorities.[10] This response illustrates the reluctance of European powers to intervene directly in the conflict or to question Spain’s position. During the same period, Abdelkrim also

[9] He refers to the Spanish troops who were taken prisoner by the Riffians in the first weeks of the war. For more details, see: de Oteyza, Luis. *Abd-el-krim y los prisioneros* (A Coruña: Ediciones del Viento, 2018).
[10] The National Archives (Kew) (FO 371/7086).

addressed Sultan Moulay Youssef, indicating that he sought mediation rather than unlimited escalation.[11] In his appeal, he asked the sultan to intervene in the conflict between the Riffians and the Spaniards:

> We shall continue the war until the European nations have judged our cause. Through His Majesty we address our pleas to these nations, because we consider ourselves part of (…) Morocco, of which You, the Sultan and supreme leader, officially recognized by the great powers, are the head, with the aim of freeing us from the treacherous hands of this criminal nation.

Abdelkrim also attempted to reach the League of Nations directly through his British contact, John Arnall. In a letter entitled *To the Civilised Nations*, he explained that he had already informed representatives in Tangier about Spanish conduct, but doubted whether his complaints had reached the League.[12] He therefore renewed his appeal in sharper language. Spain, he argued, claimed to bring civilization to the Rif, but its actions suggested otherwise. He asked: “Does reform consist in destroying homes through the use of prohibited weapons, in interfering in religion, or in usurping the rights of others? Or is it a cover for the annexation of someone’s land under the guise of protection?”

According to Abdelkrim, Spain invoked its European identity to legitimize its mission while behaving more like a conquering force than a civilizing power. Once again, he stressed that the Riffians did not reject modernity, reform, or economic cooperation with Europe. If the “civilized” nations intervened justly, this would prove that their claims to humanity and civilization were sincere. Otherwise, he warned, it would become clear “that Europe only means to fight against the whole Islamic world, with no matter what weapons or in what ways.”

The Rif War was arguably one of the first colonial conflicts in which the double standards of the League of Nations were exposed and criticized in real time by a colonized actor. Abdelkrim’s interventions therefore anticipate later and better-known critiques of the League, most famously those of Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia in 1936, placing him more than a decade earlier within a broader tradition of anti-colonial critique of collective security’s failure to protect colonized peoples.

When Abdelkrim uses the concept of “ḥaḍāra” (civilization) in his letters, it should not be read as a contrast between a supposedly “civilized” Europe and a “backward” Rif or

[11] The original Arabic letter and its French translation can be found in: CADN, 1MA100/197. My thanks go to Dr. Mathieu Marly, who provided me with these documents.

[12] ’Mr. John Arnall. The Riff Delegation. London – Dispute between Spain and Morocco – Claims on behalf of the Riffians independence from Spain and recognition as a free country’, 6 September 1922, League of Nations Archive, UN Archives Genève, doc. 11/23217/12861.

Morocco. On the contrary, his intellectual formation within the Islamic scholarly tradition of the al-Qarawiyyin University in Fez is crucial in this regard. Within this context, knowledge was not approached from a sense of cultural inferiority but embedded in a centuries-old tradition of legal, theological, and philosophical reflection. In this intellectual milieu, to which his teacher Mohammed ben Jaafar al-Kettani also belonged, there existed a strong historical awareness of one’s own intellectual continuity and political traditions in Morocco and the wider Maghreb.[13] Against this background, Abdelkrim’s use of “civilization” refers not to hierarchy, but to a program of reform and modernization.

This program included the construction of infrastructure such as roads and communication networks, the reform of education, and the creation of administrative and economic institutions. In this sense, “civilization” is not a ranking of peoples, but a practical project of order, stability, and progress in a changing world. In a 1925 appeal to all Muslims in Morocco, Abdelkrim clarifies his project and intentions as follows:

> Our only aim, the aim we pursue, is to drive the enemy out of the land of the Muslims and to carry out reforms, both material and moral, in order to rebuild the ruins of the past and revive the glory of our ancestors. This would not be an impossible task for the men and thinkers of Morocco, if they were to rise as one and act, in word and deed, in the direction that would make this hope a reality.[14]

The objective, then, is the restoration of Morocco’s former glory. This interpretation is further reinforced by his later intellectual positioning. In the preface to the work of the anti-colonial militant and advocate of Maghrebi unity, Aly el-Hammamy, Abdelkrim pays tribute to major figures from the Maghrebi and broader Islamic intellectual tradition, including Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Battuta, Ibn Tumart, and Ibn Rushd.[15] By invoking these thinkers, he situates himself within a long genealogy of knowledge production and political reflection, thereby fundamentally relativizing and historically undermining the European monopoly on the concept of “civilization.”

During the Rif War, Abdelkrim repeatedly sought to confront European powers, particularly France and Spain, with their own claims to “civilization.” After the outbreak of war with France in 1925, for example, he discussed this European civilizing rhetoric with A. Montagne, to which he had once attached a certain degree of “belief.”[16] In that conversation,

[13] al-Kettani, Mohammed ben Jaafar. *Naṣīḥah ʾAhl ul-Islām: Tahlīl islāmī ʿilmī liʿawāmil suqūt ad-dawlah al-islāmiyyah waʿawāmil nuhūḍihā* (Rabat: Maktabat Badr, 1989).

[14] Tahtah, Mohamed. *Entre pragmatisme, réformisme et modernisme: le rôle politico-religieux des Khattabi dans le Rif (Maroc) jusqu’à 1926* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 1999), 174-177.

[15] el-hammamy, Aly. *Idris: roman nord-africain* (Algiers: Sociéte Nationale d’Edition et de Diffusion, 1977), 5-6.

[16] The New York Times, 25 April 1926.

he stated: "We saw the European countries as lands of law and order, enjoying a liberty and justice, a comfort, a science, which we could only admire. And we, poor little tribes, incapable of keeping peace even among ourselves, felt very puny and feeble beside your great peoples.” He continued this line of reasoning by identifying the experience of the First World War as a turning point:

> Then came the World War, and we saw the nations of Europe plunged in madness, and the wisest and strongest of them employing all their intelligence, all their science, all their industrial capacity to creating greater weapons to destroy more men. We have not known, here in our little Moroccan war, a tenth of the horrors you have experienced in Europe. Think of the atrocities committed in Europe, the rage for destruction, the incessant production of arms ever more powerful and more murderous. Think of the poison gasses, the bombardment of undefended towns, the liquid fire. We can no longer respect your 'civilization' as we once did.

His emphasis on order, reform, and technological development can, in this context, hardly be reduced to mere rhetoric, but should rather be understood as a genuine response to the structural challenges facing the Rif. At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, the region, and Morocco more broadly, was only marginally integrated into processes of industrial and technological modernization. Historically, the Rif during this period was characterized by a weak institutional infrastructure and a fragmented political order, a situation that was later described in local memory as a period of disorder and instability.[17]

Against this background, from 1921 onward, with the outbreak of the war, Abdelkrim sought to establish a form of political centralization and order within the Riffian context through the creation of his own administration and the application of Islamic legal principles. In his discourse, these elements are presented as necessary conditions for stability and self-determination. The recognition he expresses in conversations with European actors of certain aspects of European technological and institutional development should therefore not be read as uncritical admiration, but as a strategic positioning within a fundamentally unequal international power system.

This combination of local governance, ambitions for modernization, and anti-colonial struggle did not remain confined to the Rif itself, but quickly gained broader international resonance. Abdelkrim’s resistance found particular resonance in South America among intellectuals and political actors who themselves, directly or through historical memory, shared the experience of Spanish colonial domination. This shared colonial legacy created a

[17] Hart, David Montgomery. *The Aith Waryaghar of the Moroccan Rif: An Ethnography and History* (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 1976), 313-338.

transcontinental parallel, in which local struggles for independence were interpreted as part of a broader global anti-colonial movement.

This historical resonance is clearly reflected in a letter by Abdelkrim from 1924, which was published in several South American newspapers on the occasion of the centenary of the Battle of Ayacucho.[18] This battle, which took place in 1824 in present-day Peru, marked a turning point in the Spanish American wars of independence. The army of the independence fighters, led by Antonio José de Sucre, decisively defeated the Spanish forces, thereby largely bringing an end to Spain’s military and political dominance in South America.

By referring to Ayacucho, Abdelkrim situates his own struggle within a broader transcontinental framework of anti-colonial resistance. The battle thus functions not only as a historical reference point, but also as a symbolic anchor for the possibility of successful decolonization. In this reading, Ayacucho becomes a paradigm of imperial retreat, in which European power is not presented as self-evident or permanent, but as historically bounded and ultimately defeatable. Abdelkrim positions his conflict with Spain within this genealogy of independence struggles, in which Latin American emancipation serves both as a precedent and as a source of inspiration for contemporary anti-colonial movements elsewhere in the world.

Abdelkrim’s letter on the occasion of the commemoration of Ayacucho likely evoked strong emotions in South America, as is evident from the reactions of intellectuals in the region. The Peruvian thinker Haya de la Torre aligned himself with Abdelkrim in his writings.[19] In an article entitled “The Murder of a People,” published after France became involved in the Rif War, he wrote:

> By supporting the Spanish crime, French imperialism brutally murders a people before the eyes of an indifferent world. Christian civilization looks on with indifference at one of the most outrageous expressions of European imperialist cruelty in recent history. French militarism has withdrawn from the Ruhr in order to invade the Rif. It is merely a shift of front and a reorientation of the attack against a people even more defenceless than postwar Germany. France - the glorious France of Liberty and Justice - acts with the same brutality and the same injustice as the Kaiser’s armies during the invasion of Belgium. But the invasion of Belgium provoked a cry of horror throughout the world because it was a ‘civilized’ country. The invasion of Morocco, by contrast, provokes no protest, because it is said to be a ‘barbarous’ country. The suffering of the Belgian people is identical to that of the Moorish people. But within capitalist morality, it was proper to be outraged at the invasion of Belgium, and it is proper to remain silent about the invasion of Morocco.

[18] Renovacion, December 1924, p. 1.

[19] Delatorre, Haya. *Por la emancipacion de America Latina: Artículos, Mensajes, Discursos (1923-1927)* (Buenos Aires: M. Gleizer – Editor, 1927), 131-135.

In doing so, Haya de la Torre, in line with Abdelkrim, questions the moral legitimacy of European civilization and its selective sense of justice. He then situates Abdelkrim’s struggle within a broader global and anti-imperialist context, in which Morocco becomes a symbol rather than an isolated case. The Rif War is presented as part of a wider reality in which colonized peoples repeatedly face invasion and oppression. As he writes:

> But there is Morocco as a symbol. It is the Río de la Plata facing the English invasion; Peru and Chile facing the Spanish invasion; Mexico facing the French invasion; Cuba, Central America, Panama, and Santo Domingo facing American invasion. Morocco is nothing more than a repetition of our past and an announcement of our future. The greatness of Bolívar, of Hidalgo, of San Martín, the greatness of our leaders, can it be denied to Abd-El-Krim, champion of his people?

From this perspective, Morocco is part of a recurring global pattern of imperial domination. Haya de la Torre places Abdelkrim within a broader tradition of anti-imperial struggle, alongside figures such as Bolívar, Hidalgo, and San Martín, framing the Rif War as both a continuation of earlier colonial experiences in the Americas and a warning of their possible future repetition.

The Argentine intellectual Alfredo L. Palacios also positions himself on Abdelkrim’s side.[20] He emphasizes that the Arab-Islamic world, particularly through its presence in medieval Spain, played an essential role in the transmission of knowledge that was later presented as the foundation of European “civilization.” At the same time, he formulates a sharp critique of the League of Nations, which he considers morally inconsistent in its stance toward the Rif War. Although he initially welcomed the organization’s creation as a step toward international justice, he argues that in practice it had become an instrument that legitimized the interests of colonial powers, rather than upholding its original ideals of peace, equality, and collective security.

This critical attitude toward the League of Nations was not limited to Abdelkrim and Latin American intellectuals; it was also present within the Islamic world. Abul Kalam Azad, chairman of the *Central Khilafa Committée Bombay*, for instance, sent a telegram to the League of Nations in which he raised fundamental questions about its actual role.[21] While emphasizing his trust in God, he questioned whether the League truly functioned as a guardian of freedom and a protector of small nations - as it claimed - or rather as a collaboration of Christian European great powers aimed at dividing Eastern territories among themselves. According to Azad, the way in which the League of Nations responded to the

[20] Renovacion, September-October 1925, p. 2.

[21] “Dossier concerning various requests for League intervention in the Riff war”, 26 September 1925, League of Nations Archive, UN Archives Genève, doc. 11/41612/12861.

aggression of France and Spain against the Riffians would ultimately determine which of these interpretations corresponded to reality.

In South America, a support committee was established during the Rif War to defend the Rif. On behalf of this committee, the Sudanese Ahmed Hassan Mattar sent a letter to the League of Nations, stating that the leader of the Riffian resistance enjoyed esteem and trust not only in Morocco, but throughout the Islamic world.[22] He rejected the portrayal of Abdelkrim and his people as “barbarians” as colonial propaganda aimed at delegitimizing their struggle. According to Mattar, it was in fact the French who behaved as barbarians:

> France claims to be the guardian of humanity and culture. But this is merely a cover for the annexation of the Rif and other lands. (…) And if France sees itself as a guardian of humanity and culture, then it can demonstrate this in a peaceful manner and truly become the greatest guardian of humanity and culture. The spread of culture is not achieved through wars, not through the slaughter of the elderly, women and children, by dropping bombs, poison gas, and burning down villages and other places. France must surely know this.

He emphasizes that the League of Nations bears a great responsibility toward humanity, yet has completely failed in this Moroccan matter - because it remained silent about the bloodshed in the Rif. Nevertheless, he calls upon the League of Nations to:

1. Immediately put an end to the actions of the French and the Spaniards and spare the poor, unarmed, justice-seeking people of the Rif.
2. Through the mediation of the League of Nations, bring the warring parties to peaceful negotiations and recognize the right of this freedom-loving people to exist as an independent state.
3. Urge France and Spain to remedy their violations of international law and human rights, and not to obstruct medical assistance.

That the Rif was capable of self-government was something Abdelkrim sought to demonstrate from the very beginning of the war through concrete institutional and administrative reforms. He established a central government, set up an organized administration, and put an end to the previous political fragmentation and local anarchy. At the same time, he took steps toward material state-building by promoting the development of basic infrastructure, including roads, an airstrip, and a telephone network.

In addition, he developed a form of diplomatic representation by sending delegates to European countries, with the aim of drawing international attention to the Riffian cause while also obtaining practical resources and supplies. In this way, he sought to achieve both external

[22] Ibid.

recognition and internal consolidation of his authority. In 1925, at the height of the war against France, he travelled by car to the French front to visit his fighters in combat, highlighting his direct leadership and his emphasis on mobility and modern organization in the Riffian state-building project.[23]

When the American journalist Paul Scott Mowrer visited Abdelkrim in 1924, Abdelkrim told him that they already had telephones and were actively engaged in building roads. According to Abdelkrim, this was only the beginning: “When you come back again to Ajdir[24], you will see a modern city, like London – New York!”[25] A year later, he told the Italian journalist Mirko Ardemagni that the Rif had drawn such lessons from the war that it now considered itself fully capable of governing itself. In the major European capitals - among them Geneva, Paris, and London - to which he had repeatedly sent his representatives, the rapid progress of their movement, he claimed, could not go unnoticed.[26]



Figure 2. Mohammed ben Abdelkrim al-Khattabi, on his way to the front in his car. Illustrirte Zeitung, 30 August 1925.

[23] Illustrirte Zeitung, 30 August 1925, p. 1093-1094.
[24] This is his birthplace and also the headquarters from which he leads his resistance.
[25] Mowrer, Paul Scott. *The House of Europe* (Cambridge: the Riverside Press, 1945), 476.
[26] Il Popolo d’Italia, 16 June 1925, p. 2.

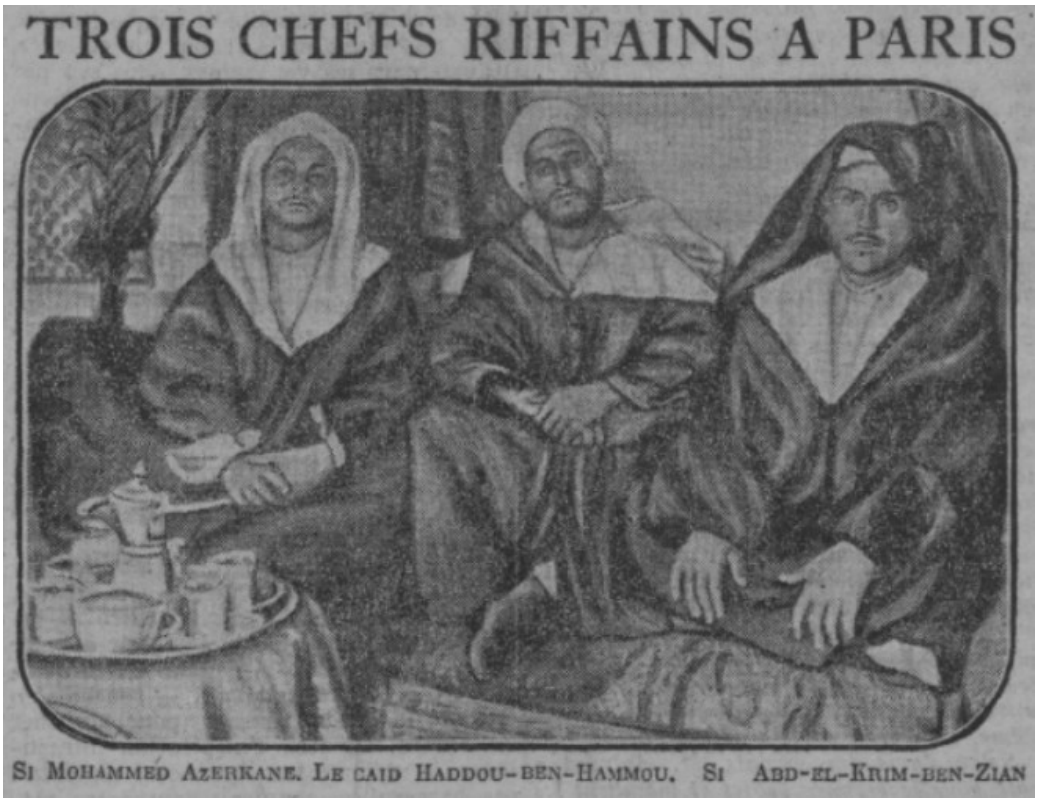


Figure 3. Three representatives of Abdelkrim in Paris. Le Journal, 30 January 1922.



Figure 4. A Riffian delegation in London. The Muslim Standard, 7 September 1922. The photograph was previously published by Yahya Birt.

The international efforts of Abdelkrim continued unabated until the end of his struggle, and he remained critical of the European civilizing narrative. On 27 January 1926, he sent a letter to the correspondent of *The London Times* in Tangier. According to him, this letter was “in the interest of truth,” since that truth was being distorted by “the enemies of humanity.”[27] He stated that he sought only justice and peace, but that whenever he was willing to extend a hand, his opponents - the Spaniards and the French - accused him of weakness. According to them, the Riffians were the weaker party in the war and sought peace only because they no longer had the power or means to continue the struggle. He found it ironic that, when he chose instead to continue the fighting and abandon the idea of peace, he was immediately accused of barbarism.

In South America, support for Abdelkrim was not limited to the verbal solidarity of an intellectual elite. On 30 March 1926, the two Bolivians Luis V. Céspedes and Moisés Jimenes voluntarily offered their services to Abdelkrim, whom they described as a “very courageous libertarian.” More specifically, they wrote: “Since the attitude of France and Spain deeply outrages us, we have firmly resolved to travel to your territory in order to join your side and fight courageously for the cause of Morocco’s freedom.”[28]

Should Abdelkrim accept their proposal, they requested that he send them instructions and, if possible, geographical maps indicating how they could enter the Rif, so that they might place themselves at his disposal as quickly as possible.

The Bolivians were by no means the only ones to entertain such ideas. The French archives contain dozens of similar letters, including correspondence from Germans who, in the aftermath of the First World War, regarded France as a common enemy. This should moreover be situated within a broader historical context. During the First World War, a German–Ottoman alliance attempted to organize a large-scale armed uprising against the French Protectorate from the non-occupied territories of the Spanish Protectorate. Emir Abdelmalek, son of the renowned Algerian resistance leader Emir Abdelkader, played an important role in these efforts. The al-Khattabi family also joined these initiatives.[29]

Nevertheless, these efforts - international appeals for solidarity and condemnations of the Spanish-French intervention - remained largely without effect. The outcome of the war was not determined in the diplomatic arena, but on the battlefield, in a manner difficult to reconcile with the professed values of “civilization.” Large-scale bombardments of villages

[27] Richmond Planet, 20 March 1926, p. 4.

[28] AN, F/7/13413. I got access to this document thanks to Ahmed Bouasria.

[29] Akouh, Yassin. *Koloniale vloek: de relaties tussen de Marokkaanse staat en de Rif* (Antwerpen/Amsterdam: Houtekiet), 30-36.

and civilian populations, as well as the systematic use of chemical weapons from the air, underscored the violent reality of the conflict. In this sense, the Rif War exposes the tension between rhetoric and practice: “civilization” proves to be a flexible and politically instrumental concept, whose meaning diverges sharply from the actual actions of colonial actors.

In 1926, Abdelkrim ultimately surrendered to the French. He was exiled, together with his family, including his brother and uncle, to the island of Réunion in the Indian Ocean. On the eve of his departure, he was interviewed in Casablanca by a *United Press* correspondent. Notably, he spoke relatively mildly about France in this conversation, while directing sharp criticism at Spain - possibly a strategic choice given his situation under French custody. Regarding Spain’s role, he stated: “They have sown seeds of everlasting hatred by bombardments of villages and the use of poison gas.”[30]

More than twenty years later, in 1947, Abdelkrim managed to escape during a transfer to France and reached Egypt. In the aftermath of the Second World War, Egypt had become an important political and intellectual center for anti-colonial movements from the Arab-Islamic world. There, he was free enough to articulate his ideas openly. He called for the independence of the entire Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia) and expressed support for anti-colonial movements worldwide, from Africa to Asia and Latin America.

By then, the League of Nations had been dissolved and replaced by the United Nations, which once again articulated the ambition to guarantee international peace and cooperation. Shortly after his arrival in Egypt, Abdelkrim told the British journalist Nina Epton that he was willing to act as a “peaceful ambassador” in the struggle for Maghrebi independence.[31] At the same time, he warned that he would again assume the role of military and strategic leader if diplomacy failed and the case - now brought before the United Nations - was ignored by the dominant powers in the region. “But I hope,” he added, “that it will be possible to negotiate; it would be more civilized.” According to Epton, there was irony in his voice when he used the word “civilized” - a nuance difficult to separate from his experiences during the Rif War, in which extreme forms of violence were justified in the very name of civilization.

His words about “civilized” negotiations would ultimately achieve little. The struggle for independence would once again turn into armed conflict. Shortly after his arrival in Egypt, Abdelkrim already began preparing for this struggle. He sent Maghrebi students to military

[30] The San Diego Sun, 4 September 1926, p. 14.
[31] Epton, Nina. *Journey Under the Crescent Moon* (Djakarta: Penerbitan Timun Mas, 1954), 125.

academies in, among others, Iraq and Syria, where they were trained in preparation for the liberation of North Africa. However, it did not remain limited to training alone: he also actively deployed them in the anticolonial struggle. The influence of Abdelkrim on the liberation and independence of the Maghreb still deserves in-depth historical study.

In 1956, Morocco and Tunisia gained their independence. Abdelkrim, however, considered these to be “pseudo-independences,” because this strategy allowed France to fully focus on Algeria, the colony it was determined to retain for as long as possible. A few months before his death, in 1962, he nevertheless witnessed the independence of Algeria — a country in which he had always believed.

During his exile in Egypt (1947–1963), Abdelkrim attracted intellectuals, journalists, and anti-colonial fighters from across the world, who came to Cairo to seek his counsel and draw inspiration from him. Among them were also frequent visitors from Latin America. Abdelkrim served not only as a military model, but also as a profound moral and intellectual inspiration to many of them. Reflecting on the Rif War in his memoirs, Fidel Castro later wrote: “Later, in the twenties, Franco took part in a colonial war, in Morocco, in which the army had massive casualties. There was one battle, at Annual, in which Spain lost over 3,000 men. I've read the whole history of that war.”[32]

Furthermore, he stated that the guerrilla techniques that Che Guevara learned from Alberto Bayo were based on Abdelkrim’s tactics:

> Che attended all those classes in tactics. Bayo said he was his best student. They both played chess, so every night, there in the camp where they were before the arrests, they'd play chess every night. Bayo never went beyond teaching what a guerrilla fighter should do to break through a perimeter when he's surrounded, on the basis of his experience of the times Abd el-Krim's Moroccans, in the war in the Rif, broke through the Spanish lines that encircled them. He didn't formulate a strategy, however; it never occurred to him that guerrilla fighters might become an army, and that that army might defeat the other army - which was our essential idea.[33]

Abdelkrim ultimately died on 6 February 1963. He had devoted his entire life to the struggle for freedom and independence. On the occasion of his death, the Argentine magazine *Vea y Lea* published an extensive article on 28 February in which his life was commemorated and analysed.[34] The author of this article, Raul Jassen, was on several occasions in a position to meet Abdelkrim. According to Jassen, Abdelkrim often drew parallels between his own struggle and that of the Argentine independence fighter Martín Miguel de Güemes. He is said

[32] Castro, Fidel., & Ramonet, Ignacio. *My Life* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 496.
[33] Ibid., p. 174.
[34] Vea y Lea, 28 February 1963, p. 46-49.

to have remarked: “I know Argentine history well and I am aware that there are great similarities between you and us.”

Despite the geographical distance and differences in religion and language, these fighters recognised each other’s situations as a form of shared colonial oppression. This recognition formed the basis for a sense of mutual solidarity. Abdelkrim built on the experiences of South American independence movements, while later South American revolutionaries in turn drew renewed inspiration from his struggle.

Bibliography

Archives

Belgium
Private archive of Yassin Akouh (author), Antwerp
France
Archives nationales de France (AN), Paris
Centre des Archives diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN), Nantes
Switzerland
League of Nations Archives, Genève
United Kingdom
The National Archives, Kew

Books

Akouh, Yassin. *Koloniale vloek: de relaties tussen de Marokkaanse staat en de Rif*. Antwerpen/Amsterdam: Houtekiet, 2025.

al-Kettani, Mohammed ben Jaafar. *Naṣīḥah ʾAhl ul-Islām: Tahlīl islāmī ʿilmī liʿawāmil suqūt ad dawlah al-islāmiyyah waʿawāmil nuhūḍihā*. Rabat: Maktabat Badr, 1989.

Balfour, Sebastian. *Deadly Embrace: Morocco and the Road to the Spanish Civil War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Boum, Aomar., & Boum-Mendoza, Madjouline. *The last Rekkas*. Casablanca: Langages du Sud, 2024.

Castro, Fidel., & Ramonet, Ignacio. *My Life*. London: Penguin Books, 2008.

Delatorre, Haya. *Por la emancipacion de America Latina: Artículos, Mensajes, Discursos (1923-1927).* Buenos Aires: M. Gleizer – Editor, 1927.

de Oteyza, Luis. *Abd-el-krim y los prisioneros*. A Coruña: Ediciones del Viento, 2018.

el-hammamy, Aly. *Idris: roman nord-africain*. Algiers: Sociéte Nationale d’Edition et de Diffusion, 1977.

Epton, Nina. *Journey Under the Crescent Moon*. Djakarta: Penerbitan Timun Mas, 1954.

Hart, David Montgomery. *The Aith Waryaghar of the Moroccan Rif: An Ethnography and History*. Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 1976.

Kunz, Rudibert & Müller, Rolf-Dieter Müller. *Giftgas gegen Abd el Krim: Deutschland, Spanien und der Gaskrieg in Spanisch-Marokko 1922-1927*. Freiburg: Verlag Rombach, 1990.

Mowrer, Paul Scott. *The House of Europe*. Cambridge: the Riverside Press, 1945.

Tahtah, Mohamed. *Entre pragmatisme, réformisme et modernisme: le rôle politico-religieux des Khattabi dans le Rif (Maroc) jusqu’à 1926*. Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 1999.

Villain, Jean. *Fellah ohne Faruk: eine Ägyptenreise*. Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1958.

Newspapers and magazines

Illustrirte Zeitung
Anonymous. (1925, 30 August). Bei Abd-el-krim: Aufnahmen eines amerikanischen Berichterstatters, der durch die französischen Linien ins Lager der Rifkabylen gelangte. *Illustrirte Zeitung*, 35, p. 1093-1094.

Il Popolo d’Italia
Ardemagni, Mirko. (1925, 16 June). L’offensiva riffana nel Marocco: Abd el Krim asserisce a un nostro inviato che egli, volendo, sarebbe già a Fez. *Il Popolo d’Italia*, 11(142), p. 2.

Le Paria
Senghor, Lamine. (1925, June-July). Les Riffains ne sont pas seuls! Ils ont avec eux le monde des opprimés. *Le Paria,* p. 1.

Renovacion
Abdelkrim. (1924, December). Mensaje de Abd-El-Krim a los pueblos de la América Latina en el centenario de Ayacucho. Renovacion, p. 1.
Palacios, Alfredo Lorenzo. (1925, September-October). Abd-el-krim. *Renovacion*, p. 2.

Richmond Planet
Ybarra, Thomas Russell. (1926, 20 March). War in Morocco. *Richmond Planet*, p. 4.

The New York Times
Special Correspondent. (1926, 25 April). *ABD-EL-KRIM TELLS OF HOPE FOR PEACE*. *The New York Times*.

The San Diego Sun
United Press. (1926, 4 September). Spain Will Never Conquer Riff, Says Exiled Chieftain: Abd El Krim Declares Bombardments and Use of Poison Gas Have Caused Undying Hatred. *The San Diego Sun*, 13418, p. 14.

Vea y Lea
Jassen, Raul. (1963, 28 February). El ultimo gran jefe de caballeria. *Vea y Lea*, 407, p. 46-49.

From Oriental Despotism to Anti-Imperialist Vanguard: The Image of North Africa and the Middle East in Latin American Political Thought[1]

Zeyad el Nabolsy
York University, Canada
&
Migdalia Arcila-Valenzuela
Cornell University, USA

Bolívar on the Afro-Arab Origins of Spanish Despotism

While it may be surprising to some, ideas about North Africa and the Middle East have played a salient role in Latin American political thought since the early nineteenth century. For Simón Bolívar the description, explanation, and critique of Spanish colonial rule required an understanding of the influence of North Africa on the political and social structures of the Spanish empire. In the famous *Jamaica Letter* (1815) Bolívar describes the Spanish colonial system as being an instantiation of Oriental despotism. Bolívar turns to the examples of the Ottoman empire and Iran under Safavid and Qajar rule in order to illustrate the concept of Oriental despotism: "in absolute governments there are no limits to the authority of public functionaries. The will of the Grand Sultan, the Khan, the Bey, and other despotic sovereigns, is the supreme law, and is arbitrarily executed by the pashas and inferior governors in Turkey and Persia, where the system of oppression is completely organized, and is submitted to by the people because of the authority from which it emanates" (Bolívar 2009 [1815], 48). We can observe that in referring to "the Bey," Bolívar might have been aware of the Beys of Tunisia, who were nominally under Ottoman rule. Bolívar might also have been aware of Muhammad Ali Pasha's activities in Egypt, since by 1815 Muhammad Ali Pasha's modernizing project was being covered in the European press (Al- Sayyid Marsot 1984), which Bolívar regularly read.

[1] The authors would like to acknowledge the detailed comments that were provided by Hisham Aïdi on this paper.

Moreover, Bolívar was an avid reader of Montesquieu (Gallegos-Ordorica 2018; Lynch 2006). Montesquieu, drawing on Jean Bodin (1530 – 1596) and François Bernier (1620 – 1688), had developed a full-fledged theory of Oriental despotism (Anderson 2013, 463 – 465). Interestingly, Montesquieu had also drawn parallels between Spanish institutions and the institutions of Oriental despotism. For example, in the *Persian letters*, Montesquieu's imaginary Persian travelers describe Catholic priests in Spain as fanatical "dervishes" (Montesquieu 2008 [1721], 39). Montesquieu had also described Spanish conduct in the Americas as "barbaric" and despotic (Montesquieu 2008 [1721], 164).

According to Bolívar, the Spanish colonial system is even more despotic than classical Oriental despotism. This is so because the classical Oriental despotisms did not depend on foreign functionaries, "the key difference is this: the governors of Isfahan are Persians, the viziers of the Great Lord in Turkey are Turks, and the Sultans of Tartary are Tartars" (Bolívar 2009 [1815], 49). Bolívar's comparison is apt in the sense that the Ottomans had co-opted local Arab elites in their system of governance by the mid-18th century, e.g., the 'Azm family who served as governors of Damascus from 1724 to 1783 (Rogan 2009, 40). However, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Ottoman drive for defensive modernization in the form of centralization took on the mantle of Turkification, which eventually drove local Arab elites to revolt (Hourani 1991, 309)

For Bolívar, the Spanish empire is worse than the Ottoman empire because it does not allow Creoles (Spaniards born in the Americas) to acquire experience in administration by serving as functionaries of the Spanish monarchy: "it is for this reason that I say that we are deprived even of active tyranny because we are prohibited from serving as its functionaries" (Bolívar 2009 [1815], 49). The Creole elite in fact had access to administrative positions from the mid-seventeenth century to the mid-eighteenth century (Lynch 2006, 93). Over the course of the seventeenth century, the influx of silver from the Americas had encouraged the neglect of productive enterprises in agriculture and manufacture in Spain (Anderson 2013, 72 - 75). By 1700, "Spain was the sick man of Europe" (Stein and Stein 1970, 21). The exclusion of Creoles from administrative positions was the product of the centralizing reforms that were pursued by the Bourbon dynasty in the mid-eighteenth century (Elliott 2006, 323). This centralizing project was, in turn, driven by the realization that the Spanish state had become weaker vis-a-vis its French and British competitors. However, this centralizing drive excluded the Creole elite who

had hitherto been co-opted into the Spanish imperial system. This exclusion created a deeply unstable situation since the native-born Creoles still dominated ownership of the means of production while the *peninsulares* (Spaniards born in the Iberian Peninsula) came to dominant administrative positions (Bushnell and Macaulay 1988, 5). If we hold that political power is ultimately grounded in economic power, we can say that the Spanish empire had sealed its fate with its own hands.

The exclusion of the Creole elite from the system of governance eventually drove them to pursue the path of nationalist revolts against the Spanish crown when the opportunity arose with Napoleon’s invasion of Spain in 1807. Bolívar himself understood the revolt against the authority of the crown as a product of the attack on Creole elite interests by the Spanish crown (Lynch 2006, 29). The schema of defensive modernization taking the form of centralization and excluding local elites, who in turn try to mobilize local proto-nationalist grievances for the sake of defending their interests, shows the clear parallels between Latin American nationalism and Arab nationalism. It also allows us to explain the manner in which non-elites ended up experiencing disappointment with this first wave of decolonization. The key difference is that the Spanish drive for defensive modernization, starting in the 1750s, took place earlier than in the Ottoman case. This is arguably what explains the seemingly paradoxical fact that while the societies of Latin America are much “younger” than the societies of North Africa and the Middle East, Latin American nationalism, as expressed in the form of nation states, is about a century more mature than Arab nationalism. This in turn reflects the fact that nationalist forms of social and political mobilization are about a century older in Latin America when compared to nationalist forms of social and political mobilization in the Arabic-speaking provinces of the Ottoman empire.

There are, of course, complicating elements in this comparison. For Arabic speakers under Ottoman rule, the metropole, Istanbul, was increasingly coming under European domination. Moreover, in some cases, e.g., Egypt from 1882 onwards, there was direct European occupation of some of these territories. In fact, European occupation was complete with the dismemberment of the Ottoman empire after World War I. Hence, nationalism in the Arabic speaking provinces of the Ottoman empire took the form of rebellion against both Turkish rule and European rule. Latin American nationalism took a different path because, despite the fact that the wars of liberation were initially triggered by the metropole coming under Napoleonic

occupation, there was no significant foreign invasion of the territories of the nascent nation states in the early nineteenth century. Moreover, direct European occupation of the Arabic-speaking territories of the Ottoman Empire created a cultural rupture for the Arabic-speaking elites (and non-elites) in a way that never occurred for the Creole elites in the Americas, who for obvious reasons identified with Spanish and European culture.

Bolívar returned to the claim that Spanish colonial rule was worse than classical Oriental despotism in the *Angostura Address* (1819): “in the exercise of authorized absolute power, there are no limits. The despot’s will is the supreme law, which is arbitrarily carried out by subalterns who participate in the organized oppression in proportion to the authority they hold. These inferiors are entrusted with all functions, civil, political, military and religious. America received all these from Spain and was not permitted to share in the administration of her domestic concerns and arrangements” (Bolívar 2009 [1819], 81). According to Bolívar, classical Oriental despotism at least allowed the elites of the local population to acquire some experience in ruling as functionaries operating on behalf of the despot, but the Spanish did not allow Americans this opportunity. When it comes to explaining the despotic character of the Spanish empire, Bolívar turns to the claim that Spain is not really a purely European country, but rather a partially African one: “Spain herself is not strictly European due to its African blood, institutions and character” (Bolívar 2009 [1819], 87). Here Bolívar is clearly referring to the North African influence on Spain due to the long period of Berber-Arab rule in the Spanish Peninsula. In this context North African influence appears as an explanation of the Spanish monarchy’s despotic nature. To put it simply, in Bolívar’s view, Spanish imperial despotism is really the product of the transplantation of North African blood and institutions to the Americas. Consequently, according to Bolívar, the struggle for liberty is a struggle against this Spanish-North African inheritance. Bolívar was thus anticipating the quip, attributed to Alexandre Dumas (1802 – 1870), that “Africa begins at the Pyrenees” (Bolufer 2016, 452). In the eighteenth century, British travelers such as Alexander Jardine (d. 1799) had described the Spanish monarchy as very similar in nature to the monarchy in Morocco (Bolufer 2016, 457), and the German philosopher Christoph Meiners (1747 – 1810) had emphasized the ethnic mixture (Arab, Berber, and European) that characterized Spain (Bolufer 2016, 462). Bolívar was essentially synthesizing two currents of European thinking about Spain to develop his thesis, namely that it is Spain’s prolonged contact with African Berbers and Arabs that explains its despotic political institutions.

By the mid-nineteenth century English travel writers such as Richard Ford would explicitly describe Spanish customs and institutions as “African” and “Oriental” (Bolufer 2016, 462).

Bolívar’s thesis would find Latin American defenders in the second half of the twentieth century. For example, the Mexican philosopher Octavio Paz sought to explain the phenomenon of the strong man or *caudillo* in Latin American politics by appealing to a North African inheritance which was transmitted to Latin America via Spain: “fanatical respect for the person of the *caudillo* is of Arabic origin and can be found throughout the Hispanic world” (Paz 1972, 30). For Paz, the explanation of Mexico’s political history is to be found in the fact that the Spanish conquerors, already shaped and formed by North African Oriental despotism, admired the conquered Aztecs and sought to replicate their despotic rule. For Paz, Mexico is the product of a synthesis between Spanish despotism, which is really North African Oriental despotism wearing a Catholic religious robe, and the pre-existing despotic structures which characterized Aztec imperial rule (Paz 1972, 85). For Paz, just as it was the case for Bolívar, the pursuit of liberty required a break from the Spanish political inheritance which in the final analysis was understood to be a North African and Middle Eastern political inheritance.

The idea that the Iberian conquerors of the Americas carried with them a North African Oriental heritage was not only used to explain despotism, in the Brazilian context it was also used to explain tolerance for racial diversity and interracial mixing. In the 1930s Gilberto Freyre presented Portugal as the heir to a significant Moorish heritage and he invoked this heritage in order to explain what he took to be Brazil’s receptivity to racial and cultural diversity (Cesar Melo 2013). This was a kind of Orientalism with a positive hue. However, this positive Orientalism was not deployed towards emancipatory purposes, the myth of Lusotropicalism would go on to become the official ideology of the Portuguese empire under Salazar (Castelo 2021).

The Impact of Nasserism on Latin America

By the mid-twentieth century, there was another competing image of North Africa and the Middle East in Latin American political thought. The advent of national liberation movements had transformed the image of the region. Gamal Abdel Nasser’s rise to power captivated the attention of people across the world and, in the aftermath of the Tripartite Aggression in 1956, he became a symbol of anti-imperialism across the world.

Despite the fact that Egypt had attained nominal independence from British rule in 1922, the monarchy in Egypt was still subordinate to the British (Mansfield 1969, 27). This subordination was exemplified in the Abdeen Palace incident which took place on February 4th in 1942. British tanks surrounded King Farouk’s palace and forced him to replace a government suspected of anti-British pro-Axis sympathies with a government led by the Wafd party (Kandil 2014, 10). This incident disgraced King Farouk who was seen as a powerless puppet of the British, and it led to the undermining of the legitimacy of the Wafd party, which now appeared to be an opportunistic and collaborationist party. The army was further demoralized by the disastrous defeat of 1948 during the Palestinian Nakba. In the hearings of 1949, it was revealed that the king’s corrupt courtiers had bought obsolete and defunct weaponry for the Egyptian army (Kandil 2014, 11). The army’s trust in Egyptian politicians was completely dissipated.

At the social level, the key question which dominated Egypt before the coup of July 23rd 1952 was the agrarian question. In 1952, there were around 11 – 14 million peasants in Egypt without land (Abdel-Malek 1968, 61), and 6 % of landowners held 65% of the land under cultivation (Abdel-Malek 1968, 16). The example of the Chinese Revolution brought the question of agrarian reform to the forefront in Egyptian politics in the post-WWII period. There was American pressure for carrying out land reform as a way to pre-empt a communist takeover of Egypt (Abdel-Malek 1968, 67-68). Despite the urgency of the agrarian question, the Wafd party did not engage with it in a serious manner (Abdel-Malek 1968, 14). This can be explained by the fact that the party was dominated by big landowners who were unwilling to embark on land reform. Moreover, at the level of national industrial development, the political dominance of the big landowners was preventing the further development of industrialization in Egypt (El Nabolsy 2021).

With the promulgation of the Agrarian Reform Law in 1952, the Free Officers’ coup took on the dimensions of a social revolution and undercut the legitimacy of established parties like the Wafd (al-Shelq 2010, 66). Moreover, by distinguishing between “flag independence” or juridical independence on the one hand and substantive independence on the other hand, the July Revolution created a discourse that resonated with some Latin Americans. After all, most Latin American countries had attained “flag independence” in the early nineteenth century, but they still suffered from imperialism. Colonialism, involving direct political control and the denial of juridical sovereignty, is only one way in which imperialism takes form. Depending on historical

conditions, imperialism can also take the form of neocolonialism, whereby the juridical sovereignty of a specific territory is internationally recognized but mechanisms are implemented that allow for the exploitation of its raw materials and its cheap labor reserves. A state may have juridical sovereignty that is the product of recognition by the international community, while at the same time lacking the hallmarks of statehood as understood from an empirical sociological standpoint, e.g., it may lack the capacity to exercise a monopoly of force over its territory (Jackson and Rosberg 1982, 3). From a Weberian standpoint the key empirical sociological criterion for statehood is monopoly over the exercise of force. However, we may also think of other empirical sociological criteria for statehood, e.g., the capacity to undertake development projects in the interest of the majority of the population. A state under neo-colonial domination may be said to have juridical sovereignty without empirical sovereignty (or sovereignty as defined by empirical sociological criteria). As Mehdi Ben Barka put it, “[juridical] independence by itself is nothing more than a form in need of content” (Ben Baraka 1967, 166). Imperialism is a genus, of which colonialism, of the kind that was manifested in the “Scramble for Africa” for example, is a species (El Nabolsy 2022). Nasserist discourse resonated globally precisely because it articulated this distinction clearly and acted upon it. Nasser and the Free Officers had discovered upon attaining power that, in the words of Mohammed Hassanein Heikal, “the Egyptians do not own anything in Egypt [!]” (al-Qa ʿid 2013, 385). The drive for nationalization was thus an attempt to attain some measure of real self-determination.

The Nasserist government fixated on social issues that were of importance in Latin America. For example, the agrarian question was a pressing issue in Cuba which passed its own land reform law in 1959 in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution. Before the agrarian reform there were 200,000 peasant families without land in Cuba (Castro 2007 [1960],148). The agrarian reform law set an upper limit of 402 hectares for each individual (Guerra Vialboy and Loyola Vega 2010, 80). The agrarian reform law also targeted the American companies which owned massive *latifundios* in Cuba (Castro 2007, 245), which set the revolution on a collision course with the U.S. The leadership of the Cuban Revolution admired Nasser, whose nationalization of the Suez Canal served as a model, and sought to establish contact with him. Che Guevara went to visit Cairo in June 1959. However, he did not, as Federico Vélez notes, make a positive impression on Nasser, who thought that he was too rash (Vélez 2016, 29). Nasser only came to trust the Cubans after Raul Castro’s visit in July of the same year (Morsi

2019, 152). However, Che’s visit highlights another important Cuban-North African connection. Mohammed ben Abdelkrim El Khattabi, the Moroccan leader of the Rif War (1921 – 1926) against Spanish and French forces, was in exile in Cairo at the time and Che met with him (Aïdi 2017). In fact, Che and Castro were both influenced by the guerilla tactics deployed by Abdelkrim El Khattabi against the Spanish. Alberto Bayo, a Spanish veteran of the Rif War, provided military instruction in guerilla tactics to the Cuban revolutionaries (Aïdi 2017).

The Cubans had a much more radical political orientation than Nasser. Nonetheless, Nasser was an important figure for both Castro and Che who took him to be a trailblazer in the struggle against imperialism in its colonial and neo-colonial form. Che had told Nasser that “when things were going badly for Castro fighting his war up in the Cuban hills [sic], he used to be encouraged by the way Egypt had overcome the attack by Britain, France, and Israel” (quoted from Vélez 2016, 29). In fact, the 1956 nationalization of the Suez Canal and the Tripartite Aggression were a pivotal moment in the transformation of the image of North Africa and the Middle East in Latin American political thought. For Bolívar, the struggle for liberty was a struggle to move away from anything having to do with North Africa and the Middle East. For Castro and Che, the struggle for liberty meant emulating, in some important respects, a political figure from North Africa and the Middle East.

The nationalization of the Suez Canal also sparked demands in Panama for the nationalization of the Panama Canal. Panamanian university students launched protests in 1956 demanding that their government nationalize the Panama Canal following the Egyptian example and that their government publicly support Egypt’s right to the Suez Canal (Vélez 2016, 14 - 15). The Eisenhower administration was increasingly worried about Nasser’s influence on Panamanian demands for nationalization and it sent stern warnings to Panama about drawing any analogies between the Egyptian case and the Panamanian case (Vélez 2016, 10 - 11). The Tripartite Aggression also galvanized support for Nasser in Latin America among sectors of the left and the center-left. In Brazil, senator Kerginaldo Cavalcanti held that the British, French, and Israeli invasion of Egypt set a dangerous precedent of direct imperialist military intervention that could one day jeopardize Brazil: “as they intervene today in Egypt, in order to take the Suez Canal, tomorrow either England or the United States could intervene in Brazil in order to fulfill their interests. They might want us to subordinate our interests in our national oil industry ‘Petrobras’ to their whims” (quoted from Vélez 2016, 18). Cavalcanti held that the British,

French, and Israeli invasion of Egypt, if left unopposed, would provide support for the Monroe Doctrine, insofar as it would set a precedent for military intervention. Fundamentally, the transformation of the image of North Africa and the Middle East in some strands of Latin American political thought was the product of internal political transformations in North Africa and the Middle East, associated with the advent of Nasserism, the Algerian Revolution, and other nationalist mobilizations, coupled with a disillusionment in some sectors of Latin American societies with the limitations of formal independence. This transformation would in turn shape the reception of North African and Middle Eastern intellectual production amongst progressive circles in Latin America, e.g., the reception of Samir Amin’s work in Latin America and his visits to the Centro de Estudios Socio-Económicos (CESO) of the Universidad de Chile, which operated from 1965 until its closure after the Pinochet coup in 1973 (Ellner 2024, 746).

Juan Pablo Pérez Alfonzo, OPEC, and the rise of Global South Solidarity

By the time of the rise of Nasserism, most Latin American states were already a playground of neocolonialism. As pointed out by Samir Amin (2017), this resulted in Latin American states’ general lack of engagement with the NAM (Non-Aligned Movement), with the exception of Cuba. According to Amin, there are three main factors that explain how neocolonialism undermined Global South solidarity in the context of the NAM: “(1) Latin American countries were formally independent since the beginning of the nineteenth century and did not share the recent struggles of Asian and African nations to reconquer their sovereignty; (2) U.S. domination of the continent through the Monroe Doctrine was not challenged by any of the state powers in office (except Cuba)—the Organization of American States included the master (the United States) and was qualified for that reason by Cuba as ‘the Ministry of Colonies of the U.S.’; (3) the ruling classes, of ‘European extraction,’ looked to Europe and the United States as models to be copied. For those reasons, the attempt to build a ‘Tricontinental’ did not succeed: it was joined only by movements in struggle (often armed struggle), but rejected by all state powers on the continent at that time” (Amin 2017, 613).

Latin American foreign policy, at the state level, was dominated by a false sense of political independence and economic parity with the empire, reflecting the aspirational character of the governing elites rather than the dire need for social and economic development in Latin American countries. However, a notable exception to this line of thought was the Venezuelan

lawyer, diplomat, and political leader Juan Pablo Pérez Alfonzo (1903–1979), best known today as the founder of OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries). Pérez Alfonzo was also one of the founding members of *Acción Democrática*, the political party that won the first democratic elections in Venezuela with the candidacy of Rómulo Gallegos in 1947.

As Minister of Development in Gallegos' government, Pérez Alfonzo was the main promoter and author of the legal reforms that limited foreign oil concessions and established what came to be known as the "fifty-fifty" rule. This tax scheme raised the state's share of oil revenues from 43% to 50%, and it was later implemented by other oil-producing countries through OPEC. Just a year after being elected, Gallegos' government was overthrown by a military coup orchestrated by the U.S. (Kovalik 2019), forcing Pérez Alfonzo to flee the country and live in exile for the next decade (Porras 1979; Mayorbe 2005).

In 1959, during the presidency of Rómulo Betancourt, Pérez Alfonzo returned to Venezuela as Minister of Mines and Hydrocarbons. In April of that same year, he led the Venezuelan delegation to the First Congress of Oil Exporting Countries in Cairo, where Pérez Alfonzo proposed the formation of OPEC as an important strategy for regulating oil prices. In his book *El Pentágono Petrolero* [*The Oil Pentagon*] (1967), Pérez Alfonzo describes the foundation of OPEC as a "historical necessity" to counteract the pressures of imperialism (Pérez Alfonzo 1967, 129).[2] This was of particular relevance in a context in which international oil companies were actively trying to pit Venezuela against Middle Eastern countries to achieve lower oil prices. However, instead of engaging in this competition, Pérez Alfonzo began holding conversations and building alliances with Arab countries as early as 1947 (Dugarte Rangel 2021).

As recognized by Pérez Alfonzo and other Venezuelan intellectuals (e.g., Pérez Alfonso and Rangel 1976; Sánchez 2000), the key factor that boosted the Venezuelan–Arab alliance, materialized in the founding of OPEC in 1960, was the rise of Arab nationalism. In the words of the economist Domingo Alberto Rangel, "this nationalism had as its prophet in Egypt Gamal Abdel Nasser, and in Iraq Kassim, whose coup took place precisely in mid-1958. In those same years, the Algerian insurrection was underway, winning victorious campaigns and exerting a strong influence on the political sensibility of the Arab peoples. I recall that in Cairo, when Dr. Pérez Alfonzo and others were there as representatives of Venezuela at the Congress of the Arab

[2] Translations from Spanish are the authors' own translations.

League, we noticed the tremendous influence that the Algerian insurrection was exerting in the Arab world […] Thus, the spark of Arab nationalism was something decisive in the formation of OPEC, and Pérez Alfonzo, along with those in Venezuela who supported the idea of an international regulation of the oil trade, took advantage of it” (Pérez Alfonzo and Rangel 1976, 132).

Likewise, Pérez Alfonzo clearly stated the role of Arab nationalism, and in particular the role of the nationalization of the Suez Canal, in the creation of OPEC: “I mentioned as a decisive factor in the creation of OPEC the rise of the Arab peoples and the opportunities that the nationalization of the Suez Canal created for those aspirations. Arab nationalism can also be considered a contributing factor that helped facilitate the creation of OPEC […] The situation of the Suez Canal demonstrated the possibility that the Arabs could efficiently manage something as complex as canal traffic” (Pérez Alfonzo and Rangel 1976, 134).

Besides the mutual need to regulate the oil market, there was a further awareness of the underlying problems that both Latin American and Arab countries were facing: “The other point I wish to note is that this resurgence of Arab aspirations for self-determination was also of decisive importance. The purpose of the Congress was already being fulfilled even before the drop in prices. Thus, they had been inviting Venezuela to the oil congress since 1956. The Arab League had been planning the oil congress since that year, as stated in one of the most recent books they published on the subject. And this was true” (Pérez Alfonzo and Rangel 1976, 134).

Historical developments in North Africa and the Middle East, such as the nationalization of the Suez Canal, the Iraqi coup of 1958, and the Algerian Revolution, brought to the forefront the “historical necessity” to which Pérez Alfonzo was referring in his presentation of the first oil-regulating laws for Venezuela. Despite the apparent historical misalignment between Latin American countries, formally independent since the early-nineteenth century, and Arab and North African countries that were just attaining independence in the mid-twentieth century, these historical events helped establish the need to develop a common agenda for the Global South based on the necessity of protecting natural resources, establishing full sovereignty, and the creation of a more just international order.

Furthermore, the development of a consciousness of a common anti-imperialist struggle in Pérez Alfonzo’s thought is also evident in the fact that he was among the first intellectuals in Latin America to openly oppose Zionism: “One cannot side with the Third World only at times,

and at other times detach ourselves in order to flirt with international capitalism, which uses extremist Zionism as its spearhead, encouraged by that very capitalism. It is not because of our position in OPEC, nor out of unwavering solidarity with the Third World, that we must be firmer against that far-reaching and dangerous Zionism. It is simply for the sake of justice, which is something of greater importance for world peace and the future of humankind” (Pérez Alfonzo 2011, 357–358).

Conclusion

We can see how the image of North Africa and the Middle East in Latin American political thought was transformed from an image dominated by the concept of Oriental despotism in the early nineteenth century to an image dominated by the idea that North Africa and the Middle East were the focal points of the struggle against imperialism. This transformation was a function of internal developments in North Africa and the Middle East, i.e., the rise of a nationalist movement which directly challenged the dominance of European and U.S. imperialism in the mid-twentieth century, as well as internal transformations in Latin American societies themselves, especially the realization that “flag independence” is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for pursuing the developmental goals which would meet the aspirations of the majority of Latin Americans. This transformation of the image of North Africa and the Middle East in Latin American political thought is what provided the context for the emergence of a pro-Palestinian discourse in Cuba (after the Revolution), Venezuela (with the Bolivarian Revolution), Nicaragua (with the Sandinistas), and Colombia (with Gustavo Petro).

Bibliography:

Abdel-Malek, Anouar. 1968. *Egypt: Military Society: The Army Regime, the Left, and Social Change under Nasser*. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Random House.

Aïdi, Hisham. 2017. “Juan Goytisolo.” *Middle East Research and Information Project* (MERIP), December 12: https://www.merip.org/2017/12/juan-goytisolo/

Al-Qa‘id, Youssef. 2013. *Mohammed Hassenein Heikal Yetazekar: Abdel-Nasser wa al-Mouthaqafoun wa al-Thaqafa*. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization.

Al-Shelq, Ahmed Zakaria. 2010. *Thawrat Yuliu wa al-Hiya al-Hizbeya: Al-Nizam wa Ihtewaʾ al-Gamaheer*. Cairo: Dar al-Shorouq.

Amin, Samir. 2017. “From Bandung (1955) to 2015: Old and New Challenges for the States, The Nations and The Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America.” *Interventions* 19 (5): 609 – 619.

Anderson, Perry. 2013. *Lineages of the Absolutist State*. London: Verso.

Ben Barka, Mehdi. 1967. *Opción Revolucionaria para Marruecos*. Barcelona: Ediciones de Cultura Popular.

Bolívar, Simón. 2009. “The Jamaica Letter, 1815.” In *The Bolívarian Revolution*, edited by Matthew Brown. London: Verso.

Bolívar, Simón. 2009. “Angostura Address, 1819”. In *The Bolívarian Revolution*, edited by Matthew Brown. London: Verso.

Bolufer, Mónica. 2016. “Orientalizing Southern Europe?” *The Eighteenth Century* 57 (4): 451 – 467.

Bushnell, David and Neill Macaulay. 1988. *The Emergence of Latin America in the Nineteenth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Castelo, Cláudia. 2021. “Freyre, Gilberto (1900–1987).” In *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, edited by George Ritzer, Chris Rojek, and Michael Ryan. **https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeos1760**

Castro, Fidel. 2007 [1960]. “At the United Nations General Assembly.” In *Fidel Castro Reader*, edited by David Deutschmann and Deborah Shnookal, 137 – 188. Melbourne: Ocean Press.

Castro, Fidel. 2007. *My Life*. Edited by Ignacio Ramonet. Translated by Andrew Hurley. London: Allen Lane.

Cesar Melo, Alfredo. 2013. “(De-)Latinizing America: How Gilberto Freyre and Mário de Andrade Imagined the Global South.” *MLN* 128 (2): 298 – 316.

Dugarte-Rangel, Ramón Alonso. 2021. “Juan Pablo Pérez Alfonzo: pensamiento fundador de la OPEP.” *Humania del Sur* 15 (30): 15 - 35.

Elliott, J. H. 2006. *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492 - 1800*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Ellner, Steve. 2024. “Dependency Theory and Its Revival in the Twenty-First Century.” *Latin American Research Review* 59: 744 – 757.

El Nabolsy, Zeyad. 2021. “The Military, the Developmental State and the 2013 Coup in Egypt.” In *Democratization and Military Coups in Africa: Post-1990s Political Conflicts*, edited by George Klay Kieh Jr. and Kelechi Kalu, 97 – 128. Lexington: New York.

El Nabolsy, Zeyad. 2022. “Lenin in East Africa: Abdul Rahman Mohammed Babu and Dani Wadada Nabudere.” In *The Future of Lenin: Power, Politics, and Revolution in the 21st Century*, edited by Alla Ivanchikova and Robert Maclean, 203 – 230. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Gallegos-Ordorica, Sergio Armando. 2018. “The Racial Legacy of the Enlightenment in Simón Bolívar's Political Thought.” *Critical Philosophy of Race* 6 (2): 198 – 215.

Guerra Vilaboy, Sergio and Oscar Loyola Vega. 2010. *Cuba: A History*. Melbourne: Ocean Press.

Hourani, Albert. 1991. *A History of the Arab Peoples*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Jackson, Robert H. and Carl G. Rosberg. 1982. “Why Africa’s Weak States Persist: The Empirical and the Juridical in Statehood.” *World Politics* 35 (1): 1 – 24.

Kandil, Hazem. 2014. *Soldiers, Spies, and Statesmen: Egypt’s Road to Revolt*. London: Verso.

Lynch, John. 2006. *Simón Bolívar: A Life*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Mansfield, Peter. 1969. *Nasser’s Egypt*. London: Penguin.

Mayobre, Eduardo. 2005. *Juan Pablo Pérez Alfonzo*. Caracas: El Nacional-Fundación Bancaribe.

Baron de Montesquieu, Charles-Louis de Secondat. 2008 [1721]. *Persian Letters*. Translated by Margaret Mauldon. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Morsi, Eman. 2019. “Cuba in Arabic and the Limits of Third World Solidarity.” *The Global South* 13 (1): 145 – 177.

Kovalik, Dan. 2019. *The Plot to Overthrow Venezuela: How the US Is Orchestrating a Coup for Oil*. New York: Hot Books.

Paz, Octavio. 1972. *The Other Mexico: Critique of the Pyramid*. Translated by Lysander Kemp. New York: Grove Press.

Pérez Alfonzo, Juan Pablo. 2011. *Hundiéndonos en el excremento del diablo*. Caracas: Banco Central de Venezuela.

Pérez Alfonzo, Juan Pablo. 1967. *El pentágono petrolero*. Caracas: Ediciones Revista Política.

Pérez Alfonzo, Juan Pablo y Domingo Alberto Rangel. 1976. *El Desastre*. Valencia, Venezuela: Vadell Hermanos.

Porras, Eloy. 1979. *Juan Pablo Pérez Alfonzo: El hombre que sacudió al mundo*. Caracas:

Editorial Ateneo de Caracas.

Rogan, Eugene. 2009. *The Arabs: A History*. New York: Basic Books, 2009.

Sánchez, R. 2000. “La Organización de Países Exportadores de Petróleo (OPEP)”. In *Venezuela y Los países hemisféricos, ibéricos e hispano hablantes*, edited by Kaldone G. Nweihed, 1013-1038. Caracas: Universidad Simón Bolívar.

Al-Sayyid Marsot, Afaf Lutfi. 1984. *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stein, Stanley J. and Barbara H. Stein. 1970. *The Colonial Heritage in Latin America: Essays on Economic Dependence in Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Vélez, Federico. 2016. *Latin American Revolutionaries and the Arab World: From the Suez Canal to the Arab Spring*. London: Routledge.

What we are: Poems from Arabic-Triqui Collective Translation Workshop, Oaxaca

Beatriz García Fuentes
&
Shadi Rohana
El Colegio de México, México

The following text is an English translation of the introduction to Lo que somos. Taller de traducción colectiva árabe-triqui*, a booklet soon to be published by El Colegio de México in Mexico City and edited by Beatriz García Fuentes and Shadi Rohana. It is followed by poems translated between Arabic and Triqui during the collective translation workshop held in Oaxaca, Mexico, in May 2025.*

The two poems translated into Arabic and Triqui are the result of a collective translation workshop between the two languages held on 17-18 May 2025 at the Casa de Cultura in the community of San Adrés Chicahuaxtla, in the state of Oaxaca, the Mexican southeast. The workshop was organized by the recently established José S. Helú Chair for Arabic Language and Culture (Cátedra José S. Helú de Lengua y Cultura Árabes), based at El Colegio de México in Mexico City, in collaboration with the Juan de Córdova Library and the Triqui Collective (Colectivo Triqui), a long-standing group dedicated to preserving the indigenous Triqui language through community work, education, book production and translation into and from Triqui.

The workshop's main goal was to bring two geographically and culturally distant languages closer through literary translation. With this aim in mind, two poems were selected for collective work during the workshop. The first, مريم غزة, ("Maryam of Ghazza"), written by the Palestinian poet Ibrahim Nasrallah, a long poem from which ten verses were selected for

translation into Triqui. The second poem *CHRĒJ HUÍN* ("What I am"), was written in Triqui by Marcos Sandoval, a poet and promoter of Triqui culture from San Andrés Chicahuaxtla.

Both poems emerge from the historical, emotional and contemporary realities experienced by their respective peoples: Palestinians and Triquis. The first poem responds to–while also denouncing–the absence of real peace for the Palestinian people, who have endured decades of colonization and impunity since the Nakba, as the Triqui Collective perceived in their translation of the poem's opening verse. The second poem, draws from the cultural sources of the Triqui people, flowing through their songs and worldview, transmitted across generations and sustaining their identity and communal cohesion.

The poems were translated by members of the Triqui Collective together with graduate students of Middle Eastern and North African Studies the Center for Asian and African Studies Center at El Colegio de México. The translation project invites readers to reflect upon the genocide and destruction currently taking place in the Gaza Strip, which also recalling the historical experiences of dispossession and violence suffered by the Indigenous peoples of the Americas more than five centuries ago. At the same time, the poems call for people to rise and walk again upon the earth, pointing toward the cultural sources that sustain this journey.

Collective translation poses its own challenges, particularly when it comes to integrating different perspectives and modes of reading. At the same time, the workshop allowed us to work directly with our communities and to deepen our understanding of the structures of both languages and the cultural and political contexts in which they are spoken and written. In this process, Spanish functioned as a bridge language, facilitating dialogue and enabling us to examine each word and verse in the source texts with care.

We hope this exercise in linguistic solidarity and poetic hospitality will open a space for the discovery of other cultures and bring closer–through translation–the realities experienced in distant places.

<u>From Arabic to Triqui: fragments of "Maryam of Ghazza" by Ibrahim Nasrallah</u>

MARYAM GAZA

(NUGUAN’ NAGUI ÑÛNJ)

SA GACHRÛN: IBRAHIM NASRALLAH

Nu gīrì’ nì’hiaj ñûnj gā nìn gimàn ñûnj riña hio’ó nan

Nu gīrì’ nì’hiaj da’nîn nī nu gīrì’ nì’hiaj da’nínt

Gatāj Maryam riña Rihiâ

Nùhuin saj hua nìn mân nej sa ata rūhuà ni’in ñûnj gunîn sò’ huînt ñan’ānj an

Nī huā nìn’ â’nïnjt arâj sun ni nej aga’ aché yātà’a da’ dugahuij ñûnj nda gisîj nī nakāj ñût nimân ñûnj

Ô’ nī sa nasà’ a’min a’ngaj, diga’ñu’un nī rân’an nuj

Giri’ nì’hiaj a’ngô guìi gā nìn gimàn ni sanī nej dà’nïnj ñûnj giri’ nì’hiaj sañuun

Dín chre hua gi’hiát nga gàchin guyumàn sañuun riñan ñûnj, nī dínt chre ga gi’hiát nga giran’ nûnj sañun nùkuaj

Dín gahuin ngà gisîj dugahui’ ni nej dūguì’ ñûnj, dín ga ngà gàchin gīran’ sāñū ñûnj

Dín gahuin ngà gisîj dugahui’ ni nej dūguì’ ñûnj, dín ga nga ran’ sāñūn ñûnj màn ñûnj

Dín ga ngà gaguâj ñûnj

Dín ga ngà nu gāguāj ñûnj

Nu gīrì’ nì’hiaj ñûnj gā nìn gimàn ñûnj riña hio’ó nan

Dàj rû’ nu gīrì’ nì’hiaj Jesus, sanī tun ñûnj, nè kú ñûnj gi’hiaj na’nïnj si, riña do’ó ñûnj anà’huìj ñûnj nà’nïnj ñûnj nej

Nu gīrì’ nì’hiaj ñûnj gā nìn gimàn ñûnj riña hio’ó nan

Dàj rû’ nu gīrì’ nì’hiaj yiñánt Jerusalén nī yuman’ gè huin man dàj rû’ gè profetâ Muhammad ngà Korân

Nu gīrì’ nì’hiaj ñûnj gā nìn gimàn ñûnj riña hio’ó nan

Translated to Triqui by Adolfo Ramírez Rosas, Beatriz Adriana Fuentes García, Fausto Sandoval Cruz, Fidel Hernández Mendoza, José Manuel Hernández Fuentes, Juan Vázquez Ramírez, Lea Elisama Dolores Domínguez, Marcos Sandoval Cruz, Serena Margarita López Ramos y Yesenia Bautista Sánchez, members of the Colectivo Triqui of San Andrés Chicahuaxtla, Oaxaca.

مريمُ غزّة
(مُقتطَفات)
إبراهيم نصرالله

(The following 16 verses from a poem by Ibrahim Nasrallah were selected for the purposes of the workshop. The full version of the poem can be read in Al-Quds Al-Arabi, *31 January 2024, https://www.alquds.co.uk/3294102-2).*

١. السّلامُ على الأرضِ ليسَ لَنا
٢. ليس لِابني أَو ابنِكِ
٣. مريمُ قالَت لِمريمِ
٤. السّلامُ لِأعدائِنا يا إلهي
٥. ولِلطّائراتِ، ولِلموتِ يهبُطُ، لِلموتِ يَصعَدُ
٦. لِلموتِ يحكي، ويكذُبُ، يرقصُ
٧. السّلامُ لِغيري وغيرَ صِغاري
٨. لِلصّمت بعدَ مجازِرِنا، لِلصّمتِ قبلَ مجازِرِنا
٩. لِلصّمتِ بعدَ مجازِرِنا، لِلصّمتِ بينَ مجازِرِنا
١٠. ولِلصّمتِ إنْ نحنُ كُنّا صرخنا
١١. ولِلصّمتِ إنْ نحن كُنّا صمتنا
١٢. السّلامُ على الأرضِ ليسَ لَنا
١٣ لا لِيسوعَ الذي قامَ من دمِنا، ثُمّ من لحمِنا، ثُمّ من أرضِنا وقياماتِنا
١٤. السّلام على الأرضِ ليسَ لَنا
١٥ .لا لِقدسِكَ العاليةِ بالنبيّ وقرآنِنا

١٦. السّلامُ على الأرضِ ليسَ لَنا

From Triqui to Arabic: “CHRĒJ HUÍN” by Marcos Sandoval

في الحياة أكون
ماركوس ساندوبال

وأنا أمشي إلى المدرسة أتخيّل نفسي أجري في سبيل جدّاتي القديمات.
حيث تطأ قدماي أعرف أنهما تطآن ما وطِئن.
هنّ حافيات، تقول الذاكرة، وأنا منتعلة حذاء رياضي.
الزمن يغيّرنا، لكن أمّنا الأرض دائمًا تجذّرنا.
خطاهن تطالب بأن يجذّرني علمهنّ أيضاً.
صرن فراشات يكتبن أحلامهن.
بأوتاد جدتنا غاءا اصطدن النجوم لتشكيل السّدى بها.
بهذه السّدى أستمتع.
فراشة تتجدد، في الحياة أكون.
قال الأجداد: للاحساس أغنية الاحساس.
وهكذا، ومع تأرجح القلب، يا ترى: على أي تلّة شوقي موجود؟
وعلى أي سبيل تمشي خطى الذي سيجذّرني؟
أي غطيطة ستجمعنا لنصير واحداً؟
وها أنذا،
ما زلتُ اللوحة القماشية التي نسجتها الجدات بالنّول.
وها أنذا،
ما زلت يرقة وفراشة.
التحوّل داخلي.
دون أن أكف عن أن أكون أثر جداتي القديمات.

Translated to Arabic by Diego Hernández Galván, Edgar Daniel Maldonado Juárez, Paula Fernández Rojas Sánchez and Paula Rosado Ayala, students of Arabic at the Centro de Estudios de Asia y África, El Colegio de México, under the guidance of Shadi Rohana.

CHRĒJ HUÍN

SA GACHRÛN: Marcos Sandoval

Nanîn ruhuâj nga huāj nan’án hue’ digi’ñúnj,

Nanîn ruhuâj sisī achê ñan gaché nej yuguan’ân,

Ñan hùa nī, ni’ín sisī dakô aché ñan guru’man yi’î nej sachīj dan,

Ga chre dakó ni, tāj nuguan’ nâ, ñùnj ‘nīn̄j ganïnj tenis,

Diû nadunâ ñùn’, sanī Ña’ānj hio’òj o āta man ñùn’ nenı̀n’ diû.

Da’nga’ dunâj ni tna’nga riñanj sisī sa chrūun guchrūj ni tna’huēj ra yi’í.

Sa ganîn ruhuâ ni nata’ ni, si chrēj yahuìi gida’a ni.

Dâj rô’ nikïn’ atï’ï ngà chrun yináan gi’hiaj yugu’ûn’ Ga’aj, nī huê dan gi’hiaj ni ngà gu’ ni yináan,

Riñan ñan gu’ ni yináa nahuin nihià’ ruhuâj,

Nahuin ‘ngō yahuì nàkàa, nī huê danj huín.

Nej yî’ gatāj, ngà nanîn rô’ nī chra’ nanîn rûhua ruguñu’ūnj,

Yi’ì dan, ngà ‘hiaj gītsi ruhuâ nimânj nī anîn ruhuâj

¿Danè’ dākan huāj sa nūn ruhuâj gà’ ûn’?

¿Ahuin chrēj riñān uchrūj yi’î sa nùkuaj ruhuâj gà’ ûn’?

¿Ahuin nga rūgûñu’ūnj da’ nī nāhuin nugua’àn ñûn’ gà’ ûn’?

Huê nan né,

‘Ngo man gurugui’ riñan si yīnànj yugu’ûn’ huín.

Nī huê nan né,

Hué huin lúu, hué huin yahuìi,

Dàj rô’ nadunâ yahuìi, dan huín,

dadin’ chrēj guchrūj nej yugu’ûn’ narikî sa nùkuaj ruhuâj.

Decolonizing Solidarity: Puerto Rico and Palestine from the Bay Area to North Africa

Biel Delgado Trabal

The violent global expansion of Europe in the sixteenth century entangled the Caribbean and Mediterranean worlds across the Red, Black, and Sephardi-Moorish Atlantic.[1] Today, connections between Northern California-based Latin American and Arab SWANA networks of cultural production can be drawn in their movements for sociopolitical liberation against the global order imposed by that violent expansion. Chicanx graphic artist Juan Fuentes is one example of a 1960s-era revolutionary left's capacity to bring together Latinx and Arab struggles in solidarity. In other examples, contrary to the case of Fuentes, Islamophobia and a paternalistic white left often obstruct South-South solidarity struggles. All the while, many a Latino-Moorish connection is evident in the relations between the rhythms and instruments utilized by North African and Afro-Caribbean performers under the roof of Latin American rooted cultural centers like the Mission Cultural Center in San Francisco and Berkeley's La Peña Cultural Center.

All the social *artivists*, movements, centers, and vignettes to be presented here are linked by the desire to empower vulnerable communities, as well as by an intellectual vacuum preventing the development of culturally nuanced thinking that can enhance the efficacy of their solidarity actions. These mutually imbricated problems of thought and practice in community are exacerbated by the financial precarity of those poor and working-class people of color whose centeredness and representation in the struggle remains wholly subject to the whims of sometimes well-meaning middle- and upper-class white allies who take the metaphor of their being "cultural workers" far too literally. Decolonizing notions of solidarity as they are currently

[1]Ella Shohat, "The Sephardi-Moorish Atlantic: Between Orientalism and Occidentalism" in *Between the Middle East and the Americas: The Cultural Politics of Diaspora*, eds. Ella Habiba Shohat and Evelyn Azeeza Alsultany (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 42-62.

promoted in these transcultural settings proves necessary to resolving these problems. A solidarity that does not take seriously contemporary European and North American imperialism is one that leaves the power to center and decenter community representatives squarely in the hands of a well-off white left whose own thinking remains Eurocentric, paternalist, and absent of any view toward transitioning away from white power. A colonized solidarity fails to recognize the difference between cultural production with a truly combative decolonial solidarity aesthetic on the one hand and, on the other, a tokenizing multiculturalism that unthinkingly replicates white settler-colonizer domination, discrimination and dehumanization.

Imperial (de)coloniality and Anti-imperial decolonization

Cases of Latin American/SWANA anti-imperial liberation culture in solidarity in the San Francisco Bay Area include work from the Maghribi, African, and Arab diasporas in Latinx-rooted cultural centers, a Chicanx graphic artist of the Mission District and his poster art in support of Palestine, and the experience of Puerto Rican cultural leaders grappling with their independence movement history. Two broad questions are asked in each case: What does it take for a center of culture to foster sociopolitical solidarity and intersectionality in the visual and performing arts? And what is the decolonial potential of conjunctures between Latin American, Maghribi, and Middle Eastern cultural production, when attuned to other sociocultural movements where indigenous and Afrodiasporic communities are centered?

What does the intriguing prospect of decolonizing decoloniality entail, precisely? I would understand it to mean something more profound than the mere replacing of concepts and frameworks produced in Harvard and Berkeley with those made in Stanford, UCLA, or under Columbia's crown, still squarely ensconced in the Global North. What does a new solidarity front confront decades apart from the revolutionary sixties and in cultural centers miles away from the world system's periphery where it is supposed to be rooted? Epistemic freedom and intellectual sovereignty can have meaning only insofar as it is tied to a responsibility: a responsibility on the part of scholars and students either in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America, and the Caribbean, or in their respective Global North diasporas, to think and move with the peoples of the Global South, the Indigenous and the Afrodescendent everywhere, the dispossessed and the refugee, the laborer, and the poor. It also presupposes anti-imperialism.

A survey of the current state of the decolonial turn in Berkeley and the San Francisco Bay Area is needed, with a focus on cultural decolonization between Latin American/Latinx diaspora communities and Arab/Arab American, Asian, and North African groups in the area. Attunement to the Bay Area's Indigenous communities, whose history of activism and resistance goes back at least as far as the occupation of Alcatraz Island from 1969 to 1971, is also in order. Social movements rooted in gender/sexual identity and class-based movements interact with the race/ethnicity-based movements through intersecting matrices of oppression,[2] as do ever-present issues surrounding antisemitism and Islamophobia. I have come to find that the more a decolonial turn turns away from discussions of imperialism and Zionism, and the more it is divorced from economic, legal, and political decolonization, the more it goes the way of postcolonial studies or liberal multiculturalism, the distinctness of which I hope to make clear.

Maghribi Music – Latinx platforms

Yassir Chadly of Casablanca has lived in the Bay Area for decades. In addition to providing Friday sermons for local mosques, most recently at Oakland's majority-Black Lighthouse Mosque, he regularly performs traditional Moroccan Gnawa and Sufi music at venues like Berkeley's Ashkenaz Music and Dance Community Center. In previous decades, Chadly often performed at La Peña Cultural Center, founded in 1975 by U.S. supporters of Chile's democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende, and in partnership with its post-coup political refugees and exiled activists.[3] As early as 1992, and as late as 2013, Chadly performed there. His last shows were with a band that included American musicologist and convert to Islam, Tim Abdellah Fuson. But the most coordinated effort at cultural exchange between this Latin American—rooted nonprofit organization and Arab SWANA arts occurred in 2007. Called the Arab Cultural Initiative, it was headed by Nadine Ghammache in partnership

[2] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 18, 276.

[3] Margaret Power. "The U.S. Movement in Solidarity with Chile in the 1970s." *Latin American Perspectives* 36 (2009): 57-60.

with the Arab Cultural and Community Center in San Francisco,[4] and organized with the express intent of repudiating post-9/11 and Iraq War anti-Arab discrimination.[5]

With funding support from the National Endowment for the Arts and UC Berkeley's Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Beirut-born La Peña staff member Ghammache's *Beyond Walls, Beyond Wars: Arab Cultural Initiative* showcased spoken word poetry, classical and popular music from Lebanon and Iraq, the Arab American socio-politically conscious hip-hop of The Rogue State (with support from Michigan's Arab National Museum), and Caribbean-North African fusion music by Abdellah Fuson's band, The Dunes.[6] Fuson recalls[7] the event as a positive experience, a receptive crowd, an enjoyable gig overall, but no deeper awareness of the history or mission of the center he was playing in and no longer-lasting connections made for future collaborations and cultural exchanges with La Peña regulars.

Sheikh Chadly has, alongside fellow Moroccan Bouchaib Abdelhadi, collaborated musically with Afro-Cuban pianist Omar Sosa, the results of which included a San Francisco concert in summer of 2001, and Chadly's participation in two of Sosa's albums, 2000's "Prietos" (Blacks) and 2002's "Sentir" (Feeling). But since then, such forms of cultural solidarity have been few and far between. La Peña was a center that from its very beginning hosted events for the American Indian Movement (AIM), whose financial contributions ensured the center's opening in the first place,[8] founding members of the Black Panther Party, leaders in the Black Arts Movement, Chicano Arts movement, Boricua independence activists, veterans of the Spanish Civil War, feminist, and gay rights movements, and much more. Yet any further development as an outgrowth of 2007's Arab Cultural Initiative, with that same level of intentionality and organization, is not readily apparent.

[4] "Beyond Walls, Beyond Wars: The Arab Cultural Initiative," posted April 7, 2008, by La Peña Cultural Center, YouTube, 10 min., https://youtu.be/oPr30eWcIHE?si=OPO2ucSWzJcfB47b.

[5] Paul Chin, retired La Peña Cultural Center programming director, Interview conducted February 11, 2026.

[6] La Peña Cultural Center Event Calendars, March and April 2007; May and June 2007; July and August 2007; September and October 2007, https://californiarevealed.org/partner/lapenaculturalcenter.

[7] Tim Abdellah Fuson, Interview conducted, November 21, 2025.

[8] Eric Leenson, La Peña Cultural Center co-founder, Interview conducted May 24, 2023.

Also in 2007, at the same time as the Arab Cultural Initiative, La Peña hosted the Cepeda Family, the most important preserver-practitioners of the two main Afro-Caribbean music genres of Puerto Rico, bomba and plena. Later that year was the Grito de Lares celebration, titled "We Will Not Forget!" with guest poet Aya de Leon and others described as "the Bay's most talented Boricuas."[9] Organizing credit went to the Bay Area Boricuas collective, of which there will be more to say later. For now there is another, far more recent, cultural confluence between the Maghrib and Latin America to discuss. This took place not in Berkeley or San Francisco, but further north in the city of Ukiah. Part of the wider "Wine Country" region that was inhabited by Native people for at least 20,000 years and whose descendants still struggle for sovereignty,[10] the area was colonized first by Spain, then Mexico, then the U.S. in the 1850s. All three engaged in a white supremacist settler colonial project that enslaved and massacred the Indigenous Pomo.

Palestine, Political Poster Art and Pan-Indigenous Solidarity

The opening reception of the exhibition, "Mission Gráfica: Reflecting a Community in Print," took place on Friday, November 7 (2025) from 5:00 to 8:00 pm. Featuring live music from Jazz/Flamenco/North African guitarist Yoba Bouabid, a Ukiah resident, the exhibition was shown at the Grace Hudson Museum until February 2026. The Grace Hudson preserves a great deal of material history from the native Pomo community, including evidence of their enslavement under Spanish, Mexican government, and Anglo-American colonization. The art being showcased comes from San Francisco's Mission Gráfica, the premier art studio for the production of political posters rooted in the radical Chicano Arts Movement of the 1970s and 1980s. Mission Gráfica centered the Indigenous roots of Mexican Americans and decolonizing their cultural production away from Hispano-Eurocentrism. At the opening was Juan Fuentes, the graphic artist who was Mission Gráfica's director from 1997 to 2007 during a period of significant decline in the popularity of political posters.[11] Direct linkages between the music of

[9] See La Peña Cultural Center Event Calendars, July and August 2007; September and October 2007, https://californiarevealed.org/partner/lapenaculturalcenter.

[10] Kim Bancroft and Priscilla Hunter, *Coyote Valley: Building a Tribal Nation* (Willits, CA: Stories Saved Press, 2024), 9, 151.

[11] Art Hazlewood, *Mission Gráfica: Reflecting a Community in Print* (San Francisco, CA: Pacific View Press, 2022), 15-31.

Bouabid and the art of Mission Gráfica might not have been obvious, but there was much to connect Fuentes to Western and Northern Africa, as well as to the wider SWANA region.

Juan Fuentes was one of the very first to benefit from the Third World Liberation Front strikes of 1968 led by African American, Latine (primarily Chicano and Puerto Rican), Asian American, and Native American student groups, first in San Francisco State University and the University of California, Berkeley, before spreading across the nation. Avoiding the tracking system that pushed Mexican American/Chicanx high school students away from higher education and towards vocational training, Fuentes entered the fine arts program at SFSU. The 1968 strikes birthed the many colleges and departments of ethnic studies, linking anti-imperial and decolonizing movements from Africa, Asia, and Latin America to their respective diasporas as well as to North American Indigenous movements. A combative, radical, revolutionary decoloniality was developing. It would take, among other things, the illegal counterintelligence program known as COINTELPRO, Reaganomic neoliberalism, neoconservative attacks on affirmative action in the 1990s, the legalization of COINTELPRO's tactics under the Patriot Act, and all the anti-Black, anti-Latinx, Islamophobic, and anti-Palestinian legislation in California, Arizona, Texas, Florida, and elsewhere, to ensure the near death of combative decoloniality.

But in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Fuentes had the opportunity to witness cultural decolonization in tri-continental solidarity at its most kinetic. He was convinced by Michelle Mouton, now his wife and then a member of the Alliance Against Women's Oppression, originally known as the Third World Women's Alliance, to participate in the *Venceremos* Brigade.[12] An annual project to do volunteer work in struggling communist Cuba, its formidable years ran from late 1969 to the summer of 1972. Mouton participated in the first trip, and through that and subsequent visits, Fuentes was introduced to causes ranging from Chile's Popular Unity alliance of socialists, communists, and Christian leftists that would lead to Salvador Allende's election as president in 1970, to the fight against apartheid in South Africa, on down to that of the Palestinian Liberation Organization under its then recently elected chairman, Yassir Arafat.

A few months before the first brigade, an arson attack on Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque had already led to the Rabat Conference of Islamic Nations, precursor to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation which assisted in strengthening mass support for Palestinians. The first

[12] Juan Fuentes, Interview conducted, November 03, 2025.

iteration of *Souffles* had just organized a speaking tour for Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier in February 1969, and three years prior had launched their publication as part of a movement rooted in Havana's Tri-Continental Solidarity Conference of 1966. The Palestinian struggle and the U.S. Civil Rights Movement had come together via transatlantic conjunctures linking the Maghrib to the Caribbean and Latin America.

Fuentes produced posters in support of Indigenous rights, women's rights, the anti-war movement, La Raza/Chicano movement, and much more. It was in 1977 that his first two pieces of poster art on Palestine were commissioned, commemorating the second anniversary of the U.N. Resolution declaring Zionism to be a form of racism.[13] One was done at the behest of the Organization of Arab Students in the U.S. and Canada while the other was for the General Union of Palestinian Students, two of the many Arab and Palestinian student groups active in Berkeley and San Francisco at the time. They are perhaps the two works that garnered for Fuentes the most controversy. He continued producing posters for Palestine: 1980s *Forward to Palestine Not Backward to Settlement*, another in 1982 for a San Francisco march in protest of Israeli and U.S. troops in Lebanon, in 1987 calling for an end to the twenty-year occupation of the West Bank and Gaza right at the start of the First Intifada, and 2001's *Stop U.S. Financed Genocide in the Middle East* during the Second Intifada. In return, over the years Fuentes was gifted a treasure trove of Palestinian poster art produced by artists connected to the PLO. With family roots close to the U.S.-Mexico border, and the anti-Chicano violence and abuse that took place there, Fuentes recounts,[14] he had no problem feeling a connection to what was happening in Palestine.

This connection is also felt by many Chicanx youth, like "Jackie," a high school student member of the Chicano Student Movement of Aztlán (M.E.Ch.A.). Jackie bravely stood up at UC Berkeley's Latinx Research Center (LRC) and spoke out against the abject silence with respect to the genocide taking place in Gaza at an event in late October, 2023. The event, proving little more than a fundraising benefit for the Democratic Party, hosted famed labor leader Dolores Huerta as its keynote speaker. Huerta, to her credit, did criticize the U.S. threat to

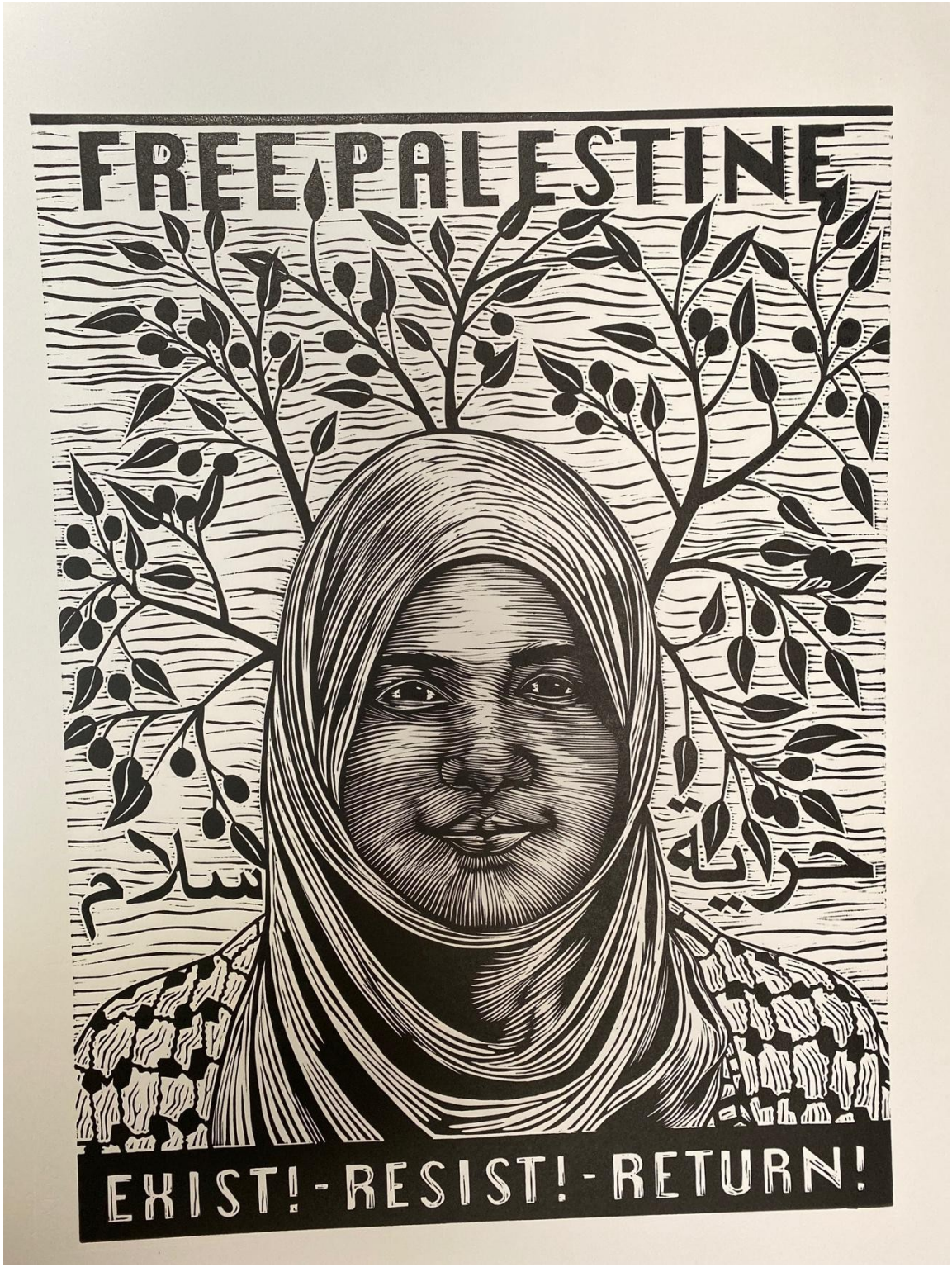
[13] All cited artworks can be viewed via Juan R. Fuentes, "Posters," *Juan R. Fuentes*, https://www.juanrfuentes.com/posters

[14] Juan R. Fuentes, "Solidarity Across and Between Borders," Artist Talk at *(re-)Unión de los Pueblos (des)Colonizados" – Toward a (re-)Union of (de-)Colonized Peoples*, La Peña Cultural Center, Berkeley, CA, March 16, 2024, in-person.

Venezuela and the communal projects emerging there. But Gaza was ignored by the event’s organizer-handlers, of the same sort who promoted wars on Afghanistan and Iran “justified” on feminist grounds. After Jackie’s intervention, some LRC fellows present, including former M.E.Ch.A. members, and even some of those who may have initially egged her on, ignored her as if their lives, or their jobs, dependent on it. I, in an act of combative decolonial solidarity, immediately and publicly expressed my gratitude to her for standing with Gaza.



Juan R. Fuentes, Chicano, Artist, Activist (b. 1950), *We Stand With Gaza*, 2023. Screenprint on paper. Photo courtesy of Lincoln Cushing (Docs Populi). Taken from the exhibit, *(re-)Unión de los Pueblos (des)Colonizados" – . Toward a (re-)Union of (de-)Colonized Peoples* (curator: Biel Delgado Trabal)



Juan R. Fuentes. Chicano, Artist, Activist (b. 1950). *Exist! – Resist! – Return!*, 2021. Screenprint on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

Fuentes's work is part of a larger history of international solidarity with Palestine through the arts, and North Africa is an important center for that story. Starting around 1972, PLO representatives, some with "organic and rich connections" to "the radical cultural journal *Souffles*, as well as the anti-establishment art scene that coalesced around the Casablanca group" organized exhibitions that would include "a poster design competition for graphic artists around solidarity with the Palestinian struggle"[15] in Damascus (1972), Baghdad (1974), Rabat (1976), Beirut (1978), and Europe. Most Moroccan participants belonged to the Moroccan Association of Plastic Arts (AMAP), headed by Farid Belkahia.[16] Many "collaborated with poets and writers…in the birth of the literary review *Souffles* which at the time had a great impact on cultural life."[17] Since the mid-to-late 1960s, the Moroccan artists who formed AMAP in 1972 "had already banded together…in the cause of decolonizing the modern arts of their country while also looking outward to…the transcolonial arena."[18] Chile was prominent in that arena, and its post-coup traveling museum-in-exile, named after Salvador Allende, influenced PLO representatives' approach to showcasing Palestinian art, and art in solidarity with Palestine. Chilean painter Roberto Matta donated his works, and the Iraqi artist Jawdat Haseeb produced his 1974 piece, *Portrait of Chile*, a "painting of a martyr of the Chilean coup d'état reduced to tense muscle on bone."[19]

AMAP showcased the works of Palestinians Tamam Alakhal and Ismail Shammout in a 1974 exhibition in Rabat, sought "to address in full the Palestinian thematic" in the 1976 biennial, and "eventually forwarded their Palestinian-themed works to Beirut" for the biennial to be held there in 1978. When PLO leadership relocated to Tunisia, an international poster competition was held there in 1985. Fuentes had no recollection of such a competition, though

[15] Kristine Khouri and Rasha Salti, eds., *Past Disquiet: Artists, International Solidarity and Museums in Exile* (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2018), 70.

[16] Khouri and Salti, *Past Disquiet*, 107.

[17] Khouri and Salti, *Past Disquiet*, 112.

[18] Khouri and Salti, *Past Disquiet*, 152-153.

[19] Khouri and Salti, *Past Disquiet*, 155.

apparently notices in the form of poster copies were "sent to embassies and institutions in… Australia, Canada, Sweden, and the United States."[20] It was a lost opportunity for widening and strengthening networks of decolonial solidarity, though his 2010 trip to a Palestinian refugee camp in Beirut to workshop with young artists-in-training more than made up for it. Transnational solidarity[21] went beyond networks of graphic artists, poets, and writers. It included the decolonization of popular music, through the promotion and rejuvenation of folkloric forms like the U.S. folk revival, South American *nueva canción*,[22] Latin Caribbean *nueva trova*, Catalan *nova cançó*,[23] and the bomba revival. In the 60s and 70s, it involved the decolonizing of film through Third Cinema.[24] It even hoped to decolonize religion through liberation theology.[25]

We have presented here the history of a decolonial network connecting cultural movements in the Maghrib, Europe, Southwest Asia, and Chile, the latter from which La Peña Cultural Center was born. I had this history in mind when curating an exhibition at La Peña in March of 2024 that utilized OSPAAAL (Cuba's Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa, and Latin America) posters preserved by La Peña's archives of transnational solidarity, and art by Chican@s Juana Alicia and Fuentes, Ecuadorian Sandra Fernandez, Dominican Pepe Coronado, and Jewish American Lisa Kokin, one-time head of La Peña's radical arts series. Fuentes and wife Mouton, one of the most fruitful collaborations between the Chicano, Black, and Feminist movements, also have family, through marriage, that includes Muslims of the Sahel region, the purported birthplace of Gnawa music connecting North, West, and Central Africa. I'm sure it is at least one of the reasons I never noticed even the slightest hint of Islamophobia coming from their down-to-earth corner of the Bay Area Activist Left. The same cannot be said with respect to my experiences elsewhere in post-October 7th pro-Palestinian protest movements. It can sometimes seem as if Islamophobia—alongside pernicious forms of

[20] Khouri and Salti, *Past Disquiet*, 215; Juan Fuentes, Interview conducted, November 03, 2025.

[21] Khouri and Salti, *Past Disquiet*, 317, 329-30.

[22] Khouri and Salti, *Past Disquiet*, 246.

[23] Khouri and Salti, *Past Disquiet*, 370.

[24] Khouri and Salti, *Past Disquiet*, 247.

[25] Khouri and Salti, *Past Disquiet*, 243.

Eurocentrism and race/class privileging—permeates the activist left almost as much as it does the right. The connection between the postcolonial Maghrib, Palestine, and U.S. Blacks and Latinos isn't always as readily recognizable for some as it is for Juan Fuentes.

Palestine and "Los Moros"

In the Gnawa musical tradition, Tim Abdellah Fuson tells me,[26] the dancer is led by the three-stringed bass rhythm of the *sinter*, in the hopes of entering a state of trance. The metallic, castanet-like *qraqeb* act almost as sonic obstacles, ensuring only the most dedicated of dancers attain that deeply spiritual state, while the *tbel* drum provides a percussive accompaniment. Afro-Boricua bomba music and dance from Puerto Rico works differently, though some similarities bear out. Puerto Rican bomba music has been a mainstay at Berkeley's La Peña Cultural Center, and in it, unlike the Cuban rumba, it is the dancer who leads the drummer and not vice versa. It begins, however, with the lone maraca which, along with the voice of the singer, sets the tone, keeps the pace and time and introduces which of the many rhythms in bomba is to be danced. The provenance of this seed-filled calabash gourd-on-a-stick is Taíno/Arawak, of the original inhabitants of the Caribbean. The cuá, comprised of two wooden sticks played on a small barrel or bamboo and believed to trace its ancestry to the sacred Taíno Mayohuacán drum, helps to keep the basic rhythm while the *barril*, the African-derived barrel drum leads, improvises, and attempts to anticipate the dancer's moves, derived from Iberian, African, and Caribbean forms.

Bomba performances are known as areítos, taking place in spaces known as bateys, both terms originating with the Caribbean's Indigenous peoples. Words traced back to Hausa, the Arabic-influenced lingua franca of Niger, southern Chad, northern Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, Benin, Togo, and other parts of Western-to-Central Africa, abound in the journals documenting the history of Puerto Rican bomba throughout the archipelago as preserved by the late patriarch of this and its related musical genre of plena, don Rafael Cepeda Atiles (1910-1996). Rhythms from bomba have been, through the work of master musicians like Dimas Sánchez De León alongside the sons and daughters of don Rafael, linked to rhythms from all over Central and Western Africa.[27] Bomba's origins are rooted in African and Afro-Indigenous peoples that

[26] Tim Abdellah Fuson, Interview conducted, November 21, 2025.

[27] Dimas Sánchez, Interview conducted October 9, 2025; Jesús Cepeda and Dimas Sánchez, *Ritmos Afro Puertorriqueños* (Santurce, PR: Fundación Rafael Cepeda, 2022), 15-24, 33-52.

populated Puerto Rico, as enslaved labor in plantations and haciendas, as well as in maroon settlements founded by those escaping bondage. Black history does not begin with the kidnapping and trafficking of Africans across the Atlantic via the genocidal Middle Passage, just as Indigenous history does not begin with the enslavement and genocide of Caribbean natives. But bomba is indeed born from that point in history, a music rooted in survival and resistance, kin not only to other Afro-Caribbean forms, but also to similar music and dance forms born in U.S. plantations of the antebellum South. Bomba’s sister genre, the plena, originates later, around the turn of the twentieth century, its primary instruments being the indigenous Taíno güícharo, a dried and ridged gourd scraped with tines, and the panderos/panderetas, wooden-framed hand drums that bear a striking resemblance to the North African *bendir*, the Arabic term from which the words *pandero* and *pandereta* are derived.





La Familia Cepeda. Stills taken from *Bomba: Dancing the Drum* (2001). Searchlight Films. Directed & Photographed by Ashley James.

Bomba has been performed and taught at La Peña Cultural Center for well over two decades, often as part of the Puerto Rican community’s annual Grito de Lares commemorations. These were being held at La Peña even before the Bay Area’s bomba resurgence brought on by the Cepeda Family’s visits in the late 1990s. Taking place around September 23rd every year, the commemorations were organized by the Puerto Rican independence movement’s many factions to remember the 1868 abolitionist revolt that, while failing to free Puerto Rico from Spain, did usher in rebellions in both Cuba and Spain proper that would lead to the abolition of slavery in 1873. A continued war in Cuba followed, ending with the fall of the Spanish empire and the U.S. annexation of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines in 1898.[28] While Cuba and the Philippines were later made neocolonial states under U.S. hegemony, Puerto Rico remains a direct U.S. colonial possession—or unincorporated territory—to this day, with similar colonial relations

[28] Rafael Bernabe. *Obstinate Star: A History of the Puerto Rico Independence Movement.* (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 53-104.

existing between the U.S. and the Virgin Islands in the Caribbean, and with Guam, the Mariana Islands, and Samoa in the Pacific.

This history also links back across the Atlantic to the Maghrib where, after its 1898 defeat, Spain sought to save face by doubling-down on a military presence in its African colonial possessions. Out of that engagement came another rounding defeat for the Spanish empire and the emergence of a short-lived Arab-Amazigh Republic of the Rif Mountains, established some months after Spain’s most catastrophic military loss in modern history, 1921’s Battle of Anwal. Led by ʿAbdelkrim al-Khattabi (1882-1963), his military victories influenced revolutionaries from Vietnam to Cuba. It is in the Moroccan Rif that the conditions were created for both the emergence of Franco and Phalangist fascism as well as for the emergence of revolutionary republican and radical left movements of the sort that informed the most revolutionary aspects of Spain’s Second Republic (1931-1939). Spearheaded by Catalan and other working-class veterans of the Rif conflict returning home, their will to freedom was inspired by what they witnessed from the freedom fighters of ʿAbdelkrim, who would soon find himself exiled to Abdel Nasser’s Egypt, the epicenter of Arab nationalism at its height. American veterans of the famed Abraham Lincoln Brigade of antifascist volunteer fighters for republican Spain held regular meetings at La Peña during the center’s early years of the mid-to-late 1970s.[29]

Puerto Rican practitioners of bomba face challenges similar to those described by Hisham Aïdi in his article on Gnawa music.[30] Anyone who invests their money, time and energy to learning bomba will find resonances with Aïdi’s criticisms of Chouki El Hamel’s 2013 *Black Morocco* (2013), for its “claim that racism arrived in North Africa with the advent of Islam, and his division of the Moroccan population into three bounded groups, Arab, Berber, and Black, as if one cannot be black and Berber, or black and Arab, or all three identities” as well as for El Hamel’s superimposing U.S. “American racial categories into Moroccan history.” All these claims and superimpositions regarding categories of racialization (keeping Black and replacing Arab and Berber with Spaniard and Taíno) run rampant in the bomba and wider community, up to and including Islamophobic and Anti-Arab prejudices, resulting most recently in the

[29] Eric Leenson, La Peña Cultural Center co-founder, Interview conducted May 24, 2023.

[30] Hisham Aïdi, “Decolonizing Gnawa Music,” *Souffles*, no. 1 (2022). https://www.soufflesmonde.com/posts/decolonizing-gnawa-music

lukewarm at best, nonexistent at worst, show of solidarity with Palestinians in the wake of Israel’s committing a genocide of Gaza’s population since late 2023.

Grito de Lares (The Battle Cry of Lares) commemorations have been held in the U.S. since at least the 1930s. The independence movements organizing such events included the Nationalist Party of Pedro Albizu Campos (1893-1965) whom Salvador Allende eulogized in the Chilean Senate[31] and whom Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral, “the greatest poetess of America, has called the first Hispanic American.”[32] Other groups included the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP), the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP), and the Movimiento de Liberacion Nacional (MLN), the latter born in Chicago and formed in 1977 by anti-imperial Puerto Ricans and Chicanos. The MLN was all but disintegrated by 1983, not long after a federal crackdown on the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN) put an end to the clandestine organization with the arrest and conviction of its leaders. These included Oscar López Rivera, who rejected President Clinton’s 1999 pardon of FALN prisoners and would remain imprisoned until President Obama’s 2017 commutation, and Dylcia Pagan (1946-2024) who accepted the pardon.[33]

Both of these figures have ties to the Puerto Rican community of the Bay Area. An organization of Puerto Rican students in Berkeley in the nineties rallied around a confluence of matters. Culturally there was the bomba resurgence, ushered in by the Cepeda family’s visit to the area and performance in places like La Peña at the end of the 90s. Politically, there was the 100-year anniversary of U.S. colonization in Puerto Rico and the plight of Puerto Rican political prisoners. When López Rivera was freed in 2017, one of the first places he visited was Berkeley and San Francisco, partly sponsored by La Peña, later providing interviews with the previously mentioned LRC. When Dylcia Pagán passed away in 2024, the Grito de Lares commemoration that September was dedicated to memorializing her life. The center was filled to the brim with many an old white lefty radical who had been supporters of Puerto Rican armed clandestine activity, and many who had known Dylcia Pagan personally and had been active in the push for a presidential pardon. But over the course of the event, one thing became abundantly clear to me:

[31] Margaret Power, *Solidarity Across the Americas: The Puerto Rican Nationalist Party and Anti-Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2023), 7.

[32] Power, *Solidarity Across the Americas*, 130.

[33] Claude Marks, Freedom Archives co-founder, Interview conducted April 7, 2026.

outside of the brief talk on the relationship between the 1868 Lares Revolt's leader, Ramón Emeterio Betances (1827-1898), and Haiti—a pan-Antillean "Revolution of Love"[34]—by Pierre Labossiere, there was not a single clear and coherent connection made between the events of 1868, the life of Dylcia Pagan, and Israel's settler-colonial genocide in Gaza.

Between 1979 and 1981, leadership in the Puerto Rican Socialist Party proposed a plan to "redefine itself in less ideological (i.e., non-Marxist-Leninist) terms and…to loosen the party's ideological frame and invite a broader membership (for example, being open to adherents of liberation theology and to activists in various new social movements)."[35] The plan was rejected by a significant number of old school Marxist class-war activists suspicious of all the talk of identity politics including race, sexuality and gender, leading to the 1982 formation of the Worker's Socialist Movement which would in 1990 found the Socialist Front. In 1993, the PSP was dissolved, and its absence in the diaspora meant that events like the annual Grito de Lares commemorations, held in cultural centers like that of La Peña in Berkeley, no longer had any nationwide organizational backing or any cogent intellectual and political commitments. Chicago's MLN had dissolved ten years before that, the Young Lords a decade before the MLN, and Albizu Campos's Nationalist Party had not had an active presence in most Puerto Rican communities, outside of New York City, since his death in 1965.

[34] Kahlila Chaar-Pérez. "'A Revolution of Love': Ramón Emeterio Betances, Anténor Firmin, and Affective Communities in the Caribbean." *The Global South* 7, no 2 (2014): 14-16.

[35] José E. Velázquez, Carmen V. Rivera, and Andrés Torres, eds. *Revolutions Around the Corner: Voices from the Puerto Rican Socialist Party in the United States* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2021), 83.



Promotional poster for the “Arab Cultural Initiative: Beyond Walls & Wars.” Circa 2007.

Courtesy of Nadine Ghammache

While La Peña Cultural Center is the main Bay Area venue holding commemorations of the 1868 rebellion against Spain considered a historical benchmark in the formation of a Puerto Rican national identity, the venue has its own history. It is rooted not in the Puerto Rican or Chicano movements, but in the September 11, 1973 Chilean coup d'etat that caused many a supporter of the world's first democratically-elected socialist government to flee the country's fascist military takeover and anti-leftist crackdown led by dictator General Augusto Pinochet. Every September, La Peña organizes an event to remember what happened in 1973 and, ostensibly, to renew their commitment to the socialist ideals of Salvador Allende, martyred folk musician Victor Jara, and Chile's Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR). One could have walked out of that event in September 2024 having some idea of the historical moment it memorializes. This was not the case when it came to the Lares commemoration a few weeks later.

It was apparent that there were people who were there for celebrating Dylcia Pagan's life and not for the Grito de Lares. I even encountered people in the bomba community who expressed utter indifference bordering on contempt for Betances and his 1868 abolitionist revolt. "Puerto Rico didn't really have slavery," one overconfident community organizer told me. It's hard to imagine the late FALN militant Dylcia Pagan would have felt honored by such a sentiment. The FALN was founded in 1974 seeking the release of the Puerto Rican Nationalist prisoners of the 1950s—including Lolita Lebron (1919-2010) and Rafael Cancel Miranda (1930-2020)—each of whom understood their 1950s actions to be in direct continuity with the 1868 revolt.[36] Had any of them been alive and present for this event, they would have serious issue with pitting the 1868 abolitionist revolution against Spain, the slave revolts that preceded it, and the 1950s Nationalist revolt and FALN actions that proceeded from it, each one against the other. A bomba collective would have failed at its purported goal of teaching both insiders and outsiders what it means to be Puerto Rican when it promotes practitioners who are indifferent to Betances and who look askance at Lolita.

[36] Lolita Lebrón, *En el Origen de Tu Flauta* (San Juan, PR: Ediciones Mairena, 1989), cover illustration of Betances by Ernesto Alvares and, 36; Oscar Collazo, "Interviews by Jonah Raskin," October 20, November 7, 1977, recorded interview, Puerto Rico Collection, Freedom Archives, Berkeley, California; See the extensive discussion by Rafael Cancel Miranda recorded in "El Grito de Lares," *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, hosted by Barbara Lubinski, aired on September 26, 1981, Freedom is a Constant Struggle Collection, Freedom Archives, Berkeley, California.

Pedro Albizu Campos was arguably the main force behind the spread of 1868 Lares commemorations in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Decades before Oscar López Rivera and Dylcia Pagan, it was Rafael Cancel Miranda who made his earliest post-prison appearance in the Bay Area, after President Carter's 1979 commutation. In 1981, Berkeley's democratic socialist mayor, Gus Newport (1935-2023), a man whose legacy the newly elected New York mayor Mamdani might wish to take as an example,[37] declared it "Rafael Cancel Miranda Day" in Berkeley, to which Cancel Miranda remarked how he never imagined such an honor would be granted him within view of Alcatraz, where he spent the first six years of his 25 years in prison, getting to know Black Liberation Movement leaders as well as the recently released American Indian Movement leader, Leonard Peltier. Both Gus Newport and Cancel Miranda expressed decolonial solidarity throughout their lives, including with Palestinians.[38]



Pedro Albizu Campos, seated at his desk with photo of Ramón E. Betances. Circa 1930s.

The *Hispanismo* Challenge, its Traces in *Latinidad,* and the Decolonizing Response

[37] For an interview conducted by my late teacher, see Danny Glover and Gus Newport, "Why we Aspire to the Beloved Community," interview by Rev. Dr. Dorsey Blake, *Commonwealth Club of California*, February 17, 2023, https://youtu.be/s9QMLLeJlkw?si=7k_p8rJbN0UfQfX6.

[38] Sara Awartani, "Puerto Rican Decolonization, Armed Struggle and the Question of Palestine," *Middle East Report* no. 284/5 (Winter 2017).

And so it was to my great dismay to see the invited guest from the Palestinian Youth Movement treated so poorly by a swath of attendees at the 2024 Lares event. She expressed a desire to learn more about Puerto Rico—something the many white lefty, lead-from-behind, éminence grise-style ally-elders, gate-keeping between their favorite pet "ethnics," hadn't helped her with at that point. Instead she was coldly received and heckled off the stage before finishing her solidarity statement. The culprits were some suburban celebrity socialists and upper middle-class "Lake Merritt" or "Marin County" militants. Already having "overcome," some moved straight from the island to the ivy leagues, from the Caribbean to the college towns, skipping the ghetto/barrio entirely. I was already familiar with several of these who in the past, and alongside higher tax-bracketed non-Boricua cultural appropriators, I had witnessed mocking poorer, U.S.-born Puerto Ricans who couldn't afford bomba instruments to practice on outside of class time.

Among some of them are Zionists, "Friends of Israel" who you might say prefer Krav Maga to Kokobalé, and among some of them are those who repeat myths about "*los moros*" in Spain and the Christian "reconquest," attempting to reconcile the ethnic cleansing of Muslims with the struggle of Taínos and enslaved Africans against those very same Spanish conquistadors in the Caribbean. Repeating a racist history, it is more akin to what present-day Spain's fascist Vox Party spews out rather than that of current historians. Some of this is a holdover of the Hispanism to be found in some early post-1898 nationalist thought, inseparable from the very same racism elite Eurodescendant Puerto Rican nationalists directed against Albizu Campos for being "a Negro plus Indian."[39] This Hispanism had already been attacked by Betances back in the nineteenth century,[40] and if the intellectual vacuum had ever been filled after the dissolution of the MLN in the 80s and the PSP in the 90s, this would be known by said leadership and widely deployed to decolonize discourses infected with anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia.[41]

As far back as 1937, Pedro Albizu Campos tied that year's Ponce massacre of Puerto Rican nationalists at the hands of U.S.-backed colonial police to the "Lyatly port massacre in

[39] Bernabe, *Obstinate Star*, 557.

[40] Ramón Emeterio Betances, *Obras Completas*, ed. Felix Ojeda and Paul Estrade, (San Juan, PR: ZOOMideal, 2018), 4:61-62.

[41] It would be a mistake to construe from what is written here that prejudices of this sort are unique to Chicanos, Boricuas, or other Latines. One surely also encounters, in at least an equally abundant measure, anti-Latino and anti-African American prejudices in Arab cultural spaces.

Morocco, carried out by the French to the tune of the Marsaillaise" and "the massacre of Arab nationalists in Palestine the Holy Land, with the British army invoking 'God Save the King.'"[42] The official stated position of the Young Lords, the PSP, the MLN, the FALN, and the *Macheteros* (a clandestine armed group who took their name, the machete-wielders, from the contingent of enslaved rebels meant to initiate the 1868 Lares revolution via plantation revolts), was pro-Palestinian and anti-Zionist. The most recent (2025) Lares commemoration at La Peña received the lowest attendance in its history, and the blame for that lies squarely on the shoulders of the event and venue organizers.

I was heartened to see that, upon completion of the Puerto Rican independence anthem *La Borinqueña* marking the end of the 2025 commemoration, the lead singer let out a cry of "viva Palestina." Dismissed by some as the impetuousness of the youth, she was in fact echoing the position propounded by all of her Puerto Rican *independentista* predecessors. La Peña Cultural Center, as a nonprofit unable to get by without government funding, in October of 2024 appealed to then Berkeley Mayor Jesse Arreguin for a grant. At the city council meeting were representatives of the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC), thanking the mayor for blocking a vote in favor of a Gaza ceasefire. It is the same JCRC that has called for the abolition of ethnic studies, and that referred to Bay Area high school student protests for Gaza in October of 2023 and March of 2024—led by Arab, Latinx, Black, Jewish, and LGBTQ+ youth activists, representing the very communities La Peña caters to—as "pro-Hamas protests." The bad optics were made even worse that evening when some La Peña supporters in attendance looked to be chumming it up with JCRC Zionists.

There had already been a watering down, a colonization of the high school student protests between 2023 and 2024, when Arab youth voices that fearlessly condemned "Genocide" Joe Biden and the Democratic Party for its Zionist complicity were overshadowed—disappointingly enough via the machinations even of people affiliated with Berkeley's Middle East Children's Alliance and, less surprisingly, the DSA—by talking points that obscured the culpability of Biden, Harris and the rest of the Democratic party leadership. A project proposed by university students to translate solidarity statements made by Latinx organizations into Arabic pamphlets for distribution in Gaza was smugly shot down by one ecumenically inclined white savior ally whose own role as leading expert on Latin America would never be de-centered.

[42] Bernabe. *Obstinate Star*, 322.

There is no serious attempt at transitioning power to a nonwhite leadership that better represents the majority of the human race, but instead a resignation to a feeling that there is no fleeing from the white God’s right hand of wrath save in the paternalistic embrace of white power’s left wing.

Mayor Arreguín turned out not to be half the mayor Gus Newport was—no Bay Area mayor or mayoral candidate since Newport has come close—and neither is the La Peña of today quite what it used to be. The same goes for the Bay Area Boricuas. Keeping the brand name alone does not ensure the original quality will be maintained. But things do not have to remain as they currently are. The distinction between decoloniality, on the one hand, and the performativity of liberal multiculturalism, on the other, can be expressed as follows: the multicultural progressive contends that joy is resistance, which it can be, and that just being together in community is enough, which it is not. A combative decoloniality responds with a reminder that *resistance* is also resistance, and that *resistance* can be quite joyful. Solidarity, wrote Enrique Dussel, is *love*, “love for the oppressed and the marginalized…for the destitute, the suffering,”[43] the instrumentalized and dehumanized. Real “celebration is possible,” with “joy, satisfaction, song” only in communities that develop a liberationist character, and that requires solidarity.[44]

[43] Enrique Dussel, *Filosofía de la Liberación: Una Antología* (Mexico City: Akal/Inter Pares, 2021), 317.

[44] Dussel, *Filosofía de la Liberación*, 319.



Album cover art for the Dimas Sánchez Afro Latin Jazz Project’s 2025 album *Afro Antillano*, depicting Ramón Emeterio Betances, as “a musical tribute to the vision of a United Antilles” [Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Puerto Rico and the Caribbean]. Artwork by Alberto Cardona.

At the 2025 annual Alcatraz Sunrise Ceremony celebrating, in lieu of Thanksgiving, the American Indian Movement’s occupation of the island from 1969 to 1971, one speaker remembered fondly the 70s and early 80s when AIM veterans would continue their evening

commemorations at Berkeley’s La Peña,[45] before the challenges of nonprofit progressivism weakened decolonizing anti-imperialism in favor of multicultural liberalism. La Peña has still fared better than similar institutions like San Francisco’s Mission Cultural Center that recently announced its closing. The difference has everything to do with some uncomfortable racial realities that community members have yet to fully confront: the MCC relied on Mexican-American and Central American money—brown people money—which cannot compete with the “white” money that keeps white institutions afloat. La Peña, meanwhile, remains as a site founded by U.S. upper-middle class white leftists in league with Euro-stock South American dissidents of the wealthy professional and racially hyper-humanized “blanco” upper classes.

But also making its presence felt at Alcatraz that early morning was the Palestinian flag and the New Era Young Lords’ newly formed San Francisco Bay Area chapter, a gesture of solidarity highlighting both their centering of Puerto Rico’s African and Indigenous roots and rejection of the “moor”-hating Hispanism of Spanish colonialism and all its inherent Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism. Such intercommunal work at the local, national and transnational level is essential to the task of deepening people’s understanding of what Puerto Rico’s 1868 abolitionist revolt meant and how it connects both to Havana’s Tricontinental Conference a century later as well as to cultural resistance against colonialism in present-day Puerto Rico and Palestine, from the Bay Area to North Africa.



From left to right: Herman Bell (Black Panthers), Leonard Pelletier (American Indian Movement), and Rafael Cancel Miranda (Puerto Rican Nationalist Party). Circa 1970s.

[45] “Special Broadcast: Indigenous Peoples Sunrise Ceremony,” aired November 27, 2025, on KPFA, www.kpfa.org.

Muslimness and Indigeneity in Mexico City[1][2]

Cynthia Hernandez González
Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, México

This paper examines the outcomes of an anthropological study carried out with a small group of Mexican Muslims. The study's aim was to inquire into how they understand indigeneity and Muslimness, 504 years from the fall of Tenochtitlán, modern day Mexico City, and the foundation of the Viceroyalty of New Spain by the Spanish Empire. Exploring the possibility of decolonization and reindigenization with this centuries-old background led to the group's critical assessment of the roles played by racism and *mestizaje* in their own lives, as well as how they define and experience their own Muslimness. The reflections of Mohamed Abdou (2019), an anarcha-Muslim thinker, and those of Houria Bouteldja (2015), a French-Algerian thinker and activist, inspired the discussion presented here, and shed light into how conducting research around Islam can change the terms of the conversation relative to Muslim people, since one of Islam's main tenants involves justice for all sentient beings in the worldwide community, pointing towards potential political implications of Muslim identities.

Islam, Indigeneity, and Reindigenization: A Political Reading

Through Abdou's decolonial critique, notions of indigeneity from the approach of various Native American thinkers and activists —such as Robert Lovelace, an Ardoch Algonquin First Nation Chief, who is also Muslim— are weaved together with Islam, articulating what is indigeneity and how to enact processes of reindigenization. Following Abdou (2019), both

[1] This is an excerpt from the article of the same author named "Muslimness and Indigeneity in Mexico City: Collective Reflections on Racism and Mestizaje through the Political Readings of Reindigenization", published in the *International Journal of Latin American Religions*, June 2025. Vol. 10, no. 1. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41603-025-00299-4

[2] I am infinitely grateful to Montserrat Algarabel Rutter, PhD for the care in proofreading and translating this text into English.

indigeneity and reindigenization are aligned with the Islamic notion of *fiṭrah*, namely, the "originary nature of individuals to incline towards all that is communal and good" (Abdou 2019: 94). According to Abdou's retrieval of Lovelace's teachings:

> […] "anyone can become indigenous to a place" and this does not mean "everyone has to 'become Indian'" or that we engage in white orientalized projects that entail our collective return to innocence[3] […] Lovelace argues for fulfilling acts of compassion (*rahma*), goodness (*iḥsān*) and intelligence, and adhering to non-statist, innate communal bonds and ethical-political, spiritual commitments. These are all synonymous with Islam's notion of *fiṭrah* […] and associated with achieving an anarchistic interpretation of a global Umma and pluriverse spiritual world (Abdou 2019: 94).

Thus, recovering and embodying *fiṭrah* might entail a political reading, since this notion could enable an understanding of humanity and the rest of creation that goes beyond the classifying hierarchies which paved the way for racialization, genderization, fragmentation, and exploitation that were violently imposed since the so-called discovery of America in 1492.

Abdou has not been the only Muslim activist and thinker to advance the notion of indigeneity, and thus reindigenization, in a political sense. Previously, a movement that emerged in 2005, spearheaded by French-Algerian thinker Houria Bouteldja and French-Tunisian thinker Sadri Khiari, became the first French decolonial "political party" - the Party of the Indigenous [People] of the Republic [Le Parti des Indigènes de la République, PIR] - in 2010. By using the notion of "Indigenous," the PIR invited Muslim descendants of colonial migrants to build an autonomous political movement as a means to expose and combat the French State's racism, colonialism, and imperialism, while challenging the apparently solid French national identity based on so-called universalist values.

In Bouteldja's 2015 text, *Islam and modernity: Can we be Muslims in the West*? [*Islam et modernité : Peut-on être musulmans en Occident ?*], she reminds French Muslims of the impossibility of conceiving Islam without focusing on the struggle for justice. Such a reminder is based on the fact that this sacred tradition has the potential to surpass any cultural expression that might be termed Islamic, thus proposing an expansive view of human relations guided by kindness, respect, and fairness. Bouteldja's emphasis on becoming (*devenir*) Muslims and taking responsibility for any complicity with colonialism is evident in her words:

[3] Lovelace refers here to the alleged "innocence" of white people who live in the territories of today's United States and Canada, and its instrumentalization through the recovery of Native American "ancestry" in order to continue to feel that they have the rights to occupy those lands (Abdou 2019).

> If you do not want to escape your conscience, you first must face reality in all its ugliness. This system's first ugliness is that none of us are innocent. But we are not guilty either, because our world is a system that has preceded us, and will probably outlive us. We are not guilty, but we are responsible. We are responsible as human beings, we are responsible as a third people living in the North, and we are responsible as "potential" Muslims. In my opinion, it is based on this awareness and this objective situation, which conflicts with the principle of Islamic justice, that we must forge policy. I would like to make a distinction here between social Muslims and political Muslims. The former are cultural Muslims in the broad sense (they have inherited Islamic culture because they were born in an Islamic environment, they may or may not practice Islam, or they may be converts); the latter are those who, in addition to having faith, are aware of their responsibilities in a structurally unjust world (Bouteldja 2015, paragraph 4).

Given its broad appeal, the PIR's call —and, in particular, that of Bouteldja's— transcends the French context. For instance, Roberto D. Hernández, famed Chicano[4] scholar, establishes the relevance of this decolonial proposal when he links it to the struggles of communities and *othered* peoples in the United States. In *Decoloniality and Politics of Recognition Among the Indigènes de la République* (2016), Hernández asserts that the PIR's retrieval of "that which is Indigenous" through its political lens: "[it] helps to critically re-invigorate our thinking about Indigeneity with a grounding in a decolonial analytic beyond a Western-centric recognition politics frame that operates through the lens of nation-state sovereignty on the one hand or cultural recognition and autonomy on the other […]" (Hernández 2016: 258).

On the basis of Hernández's contribution (2016), the political sense in recognizing oneself as "Indigenous" necessarily entails seeking to transcend the nation-State and the monolithic notion of identity it seeks to dictate and impose. This reflection is a subtle criticism of Leftist political parties that have demonstrated, time and again, how modern/colonial prisons (imperialism, capitalism, exploitation, ableism, racism, Cis-heteronormativity/morality, sexism, classism, and others) remain the norm. Such criticism shares a common spirit with the work of Black American feminist philosopher, writer, and civil rights activist Audre Lorde. Recovering the discussion about systems of oppression in Lorde's essay (2007) "The Master's Tools Will

[4] According to Brookman (2019), the word *Chicano* was a derogatory term to name people of Mexican origin who had migrated to the United States without having obtained a high level of education. However, the term's usage was transformed when a group of field workers appropriated it to politically promote labor demands, in addition to access to education and decent housing. Being Chicano/a has thus become an identity related to activism and has acquired a political undertone, as opposed to identifying oneself as Mexican American or Hispanic, and somehow denying crucial aspects of the struggles and embodied experiences of migrants and descendants of Mexicans in the United States.

Never Dismantle the Master's House," it is relevant to acknowledge how the nation-State and its limited notion of identity will stand unchallenged as long as the master —namely, any person, group, or institution that imposes, benefits from, maintains, and/or enforces such systems— keeps on being legitimized/naturalized and the master's recognition continues to be sought.

With that said, this paper is a response to several research questions: How do Muslims in Mexico City conceive "indigeneity"? How do these perceptions contrast with Abdou's proposal of reindigenization? Do these interpretations account for an expanded sense of Muslimness? Are there any political readings in such interpretations?

Participants' Overview

In short, the 14 research participants can be characterized as people between 30 and 55 years old, who live in or outside of Mexico, and perceive themselves in a manifold of ways. In terms of their sex-gender and sexual orientation, the participants self-identify as cis-men, cis-women, non-binary, queer, heterosexual, bisexual/pansexual, or homosexual. With reference to their racialization, they identify themselves as white, white-*mestizo/a*, *mestizo*/*a*, or Indigenous-Afro-descendant. Their erotic-affective ties are diverse, as some of them live with their partner, with whom they may be married and/or raise children, while others have partners with whom they do not cohabit or are single.

The economic activities that the research participants partake in may or may not correspond to their level of education, or to their use of languages other than Spanish. As a result, during 2022 the trimestral economic decile in which they were situated concentrated between deciles 2 and 4, and deciles 6 and 10. Their income can be described as "secure" or "insecure," depending on employment in public/private institutions or companies, or on having temporary employment/self-employment. With regards to the marking of the trimestral economic decile, during the focus groups and interviews most of the research participants stated that belonging to a social class in Mexico is no longer a credible indicator that points out the issues (or lack thereof) this country faces because of labor precarity.

Data from the exploratory questionnaire shows that the participants' identifications reflect a wide notion of Muslimness. They self-identify as "Muslim," "Muslim convert," "Muslim revert," "Sufi Muslim," or simply as "Dervish." It is worth mentioning that this identification is in no way directly linked to membership in a particular Muslim community: Some of the

participants used to belong to a Muslim community and later on stopped attending, while others continue to attend to and participate in Islamic communities in Mexico City. In this sense, belonging to a community for the participants goes beyond formal enrolment or active/ongoing attendance.

These identifications stem from diverse understandings of what is a community, coupled with a variability in the commitment to it. Some participants expressed that they attend an Islamic community on a regular basis, while others mentioned that they only attend when there are Islamic festivities. However, experiencing their Muslimness can also be independent from community affiliation, given that some participants said they are not interested in being part of a particular Islamic community since attendance is unnecessary for them to feel Muslim, while other participants stated their preference for not attending a particular community because they do not feel comfortable being there.

Regarding their perception of Islam, the majority of participants stated that it is "a spiritual path and practice," followed by saying that Islam is "a sacred tradition," "a state of consciousness," "a religion," and "a cosmology." Lastly, on the basis of the testimonies from the focus groups and individual interviews, it is shown that the participants' Muslimness transcends normative and prescriptive notions of Islam. How they understand themselves responds to critical interpretations of what it means to be Muslim; what being part of the *ummah* (that is to say, the worldwide community) entails, beyond belonging to any particular Islamic community; and, most importantly, what Islam itself represents for their lives.

Racism in the Mexican Nation-State: A Roadblock to Reindigenization

The participants in this focus group chose five quotes from Abdou's work (2019) that examine the character of indigeneity and reindigenization, on the basis of what this thinker recovered from the Native American knowledge of Turtle Island regarding Islam. The quote most relevant to this discussion stated how reindigenization and indigeneity are closely aligned with the Islamic notion of *fiṭrah*. Hence, Muslim reindigenization entails "fulfilling acts of compassion (*rahma* [Arabic term related to the uterus]), goodness (*ihsān*), and intelligence, and adhering to non-statist, innate communal bonds and ethical-political, spiritual commitments" (Abdou 2019: 94).

Reading Abdou's words created an atmosphere of tension, accompanied by multiple silences, a quite different environment to that of previous collective discussions. "That which is Indigenous" was perceived as foreign and distant among the research participants, and even as an identity they had no right to claim, as doing so could be an instance of cultural appropriation. It is worthy of mention that, according to them, cultural appropriation in no way can be equated with having knowledge of or supporting the actual struggles carried out by the country's native nations and peoples. In the collective discussion, Bashir explained the reasons why the word "Indigenous" itself seemed remote to him:

> I think it has to do with the meaning that it has been given in fact, and with how it has been used in this sense of control, power, and marking otherness. In reality, Indigenous is simply "native," "originating from," period. In that sense, we would all be Indigenous. The context and use that has been given to it is what has really fucked us up [...] The struggles of Indigenous people are according to where they are from. So, the struggle of a Zapotec Indigenous person is going to be completely different from that of a Tsotsil, and these are not struggles that touch us in any way.

This lack of personal connection to the notion of Indigeneity in light of its ties to the homogenization of diverse populations and identities, and to control and power as exerted by the institutions of the Mexican nation-State, was also present in Rkia's perspective:

> Off the bat, I wouldn't either identify myself with the word "Indigenous", "indigeneity," or "indigenism" [...] In the context from which I come, I see [the term] as part of a State discourse; it is the true forced inclusion: force-fitting wildly diverse people, with their own roots and traditions, into this square of borders and the delimitation of the State, its territory and its population, and erasing them in order to keep only the typical costume under this idea of "we are all Mexicans." There is even a documentary that is called *We are all Mexicans* [*Todos somos mexicanos*], and it's a thing from the 50s, from the National Indigenist Institute, about our Indigenous brothers, with a voiceover explaining to us why, even though we look so different, we are all brothers, and that we have to bring electricity and pavement, Spanish and health to these "poor Indigenous people" [...] The Indigenous people who recognize themselves as Indigenous do so in spite of the State or instrumentalize the State to obtain rights.

Suleiman stated that claiming to be Indigenous, as proposed by Abdou's quote, "seems, it feels, like a usurpation" to him. He elaborated further: "I think the term wants to be used in a way that doesn't resonate with anybody. So, it's hard to get into the subject because the term is getting in the way quite a lot, because there's an entire heavy burden about it that we grew up with, and it's a thing none of us identifies with."

These testimonies by Bashir, Rkia, and Suleiman point towards historically articulated racism at the hands of the Mexican nation-State from its inception. Several systems of oppression were introduced since the fall of the Mexica “city” of Tenochtitlán in 1521, when native nations and peoples of this territory started being subjected to hierarchical classifications, essentialist in character, by the Spanish Empire. This led, in the 16th century, to the construction of the “Indigenous” self as primarily related to a feminized *other* because, back then, the only referent of “lesser worth” which the Spanish conquerors and colonizers had at hand was “their” women (Ochoa Muñoz, in press).

Creating the feminized *other* subsequently derived in the construction of a racialized *other*, also conceived as “inferior”. According to the analysis of the Mexican feminist sociologist Karina Ochoa Muñoz (in press), these processes of *othering* are explained through the arguments made by several Dominican friars, in the 16th century, with regards to the so-called character of this territory’s native population. They “demonstrated,” before the Spanish Empire, that Spaniards themselves were the only ones qualified to “save” this presumed “otherness” through the imposition of different ways of “development” As a result, and from that moment on, nations and peoples native to this territory have been subjected to “being underage” and to having a servitude status, suited to the interests of the colonial administrators and their descendants.

Added to this characterization of native people was the process of dehumanization and bestialization of Black Africans, who were brought to the American territories, without their consent, for the purpose of enslavement. A consequence of white supremacism, enslavement was introduced in these lands by the Spanish conquerors and colonizers since the supposed discovery of America in 1492. Following Mexican anthropologist Berenice Vargas García, who retrieves the contributions of Aph Ko, an Afro-descendant American writer and activist, white supremacism “is not only a ‘system,’ an ‘order’ or an ‘institution’ specifically manufactured to benefit whites through the control of power and material resources, [but] it is ‘a living, insidious, expansive and colonial force that works to ‘get inside,’ consume and destroy’” (Vargas García 2023: 130).

In turn, the Afro-descendant population have suffered an erasure from official national history which was still in place until a few decades ago. Despite current visibility endeavors, anti-black racism continues to have a presence in Mexican institutions, as well as in the memory

and practices of a large part of the Mexican population. Afro-Mexican sociologist Mónica Moreno Figueroa explains the ties of racism and anti-blackness as follow: "The reading of bodies and the instability of skin color help us understand the necessity of anti-black racism for the *mestizo* project and Mexican society" (2022: 107). Consequently, and due to the imposition of whiteness as the only desirable complexion, a great importance is still placed in a person's skin color not being perceived as "very dark," "very *moreno*," or "very *prieto*."[5] Therefore, all along the 204 years that followed the process of independence of the so-called Viceroyalty of New Spain, completed in 1821, the essentialist, hierarchical classifications devised at the hands of the Spanish Empire for native and Black peoples have not been undone.

Against the backdrop of this context, the reflections of Bashir, Rkia, and Suleiman account for Mexican racism, which they term "indigenism," historically disguised as a "unifying" national project that revolved around *mestizaje*. Their common perception is that "indigeneity": a) "has to do with the meaning that it has been given in fact, and with how it has been used in this sense of control, power, and marking otherness" (Bashir); b) "is the real forced inclusion" (Rkia); and c) "[gets in the way] quite a lot, because there's an entire heavy burden about it that we grew up with, and it's a thing none of us identifies with" (Suleiman).

The shrinkage of the "Indigenous" population in Mexican censuses has not been an accident. Yásnaya Aguilar (2023b), Mixe[6] writer and scholar, suggests that the de-indigenization of the "Mexican" population responds to structural racism in the last 200 years. This is due to the fact that the Mexican nation-State "took away language, cultural elements and belonging from certain Indigenous people to ascribe it to a more whitewashed identity called *mestizo*, a Mexican identity built with mixed elements from different places, peoples and traditions" (p. 55). When Aguilar was asked, in the context of a virtual chat on November 17, 2023, what she thought about the term "reindigenization," she said:

> The danger that I see is that, [after all] de-indigenization gave you advantages, you use that privilege for cultural appropriation while denying [Indigenous] people those rights [...] It can generate these things, right? And because Indigenous is a colonial category,

[5] *Moreno* and *prieto* —both meaning *dark* in complexion— are Spanish adjectives that denote a predominantly pejorative use when employed to refer to someone's skin color as lacking whiteness and, by implication, allegedly being inferior. Nevertheless, both words have been reclaimed and resignified by Afro-descent and Indigenous movements and activists, an even by leftist political parties and initiatives.

[6] The Mixe people and nation are located primarily in the Northeastern part of the Mexican state of Oaxaca. Since many Mixe persons have migrated, they can be found both inside and outside the territory of the United Mexican States.

> I think it should not be reinforced [...] So, we should have some caution there, I think (Aguilar, 2023a).

Aguilar's standpoint (2023a and b) about these potential setbacks of reindigenization is directly linked to the following set of perspectives expressed by three research participants in the final focus group. Samira's reflections deal with what is being Indigenous and with how that identity, in her opinion, means a relation to certain places, struggles, and life trajectories:

> I don't consider myself [Indigenous] because it would be like disguising oneself a little to belong [and] it seems to me that the word "Indigenous" is superimposed […] It seems to me that the idea that the author says about "reindigenization" and "indigeneity" implies a return to inner expectations. So, it seems to me that what he understands is not what we understand with the Indigenous question, which is something totally different [...] I understand that he's referring to this part of "where I was born", and that he's referring to "how much I am identifying myself with this place." In other words, it is the root of the place and not being Indigenous: like [being] Zapotec or Mixtec.

In turn, Abdullah explained his view as follows:

> Reindigenization is a term [with which] I, to start with, obviously do not relate to, because to reindigenize would imply going back to being something that was already Indigenous [...] You can't make me Indigenous again because I have never been [Indigenous], that is who I am as a person. [...] I'm more of a *chilango*,[7] I was born in Mexico City [...] If we're gonna talk about reindigenizing and we're gonna try to refer to that as reconnecting with "naturalness" or with "where you come from," well, I'm native, a Mexico City native and critter.

Hashim's perspective, closely related to identity, continued the reflection with regards to how complicated it was for most of the research participants to connect with notions of indigeneity and, by extension, to define and enact reindigenization: "I want to start by saying that I do not identify myself with the word 'Indigenous,' because I am not Indigenous. That is, I am Indigenous in the etymological sense of the word, because, well, I was born in a place and I am Indigenous to 'such and such' neighborhood."

The contributions of Samira, Abdullah, and Hashim not only refer to how impossible it is to retrieve an Indigenous identity (similar to what Bashir, Rkia, and Suleiman expressed), but they also show that assuming such an identity in Mexico City is difficult, in light of the personal history configuring them as city dwellers. However, there is a hidden history in these narratives that is connected to the efforts of de-indigenization as Aguilar (2023 a and b) defines them: An

[7] The noun *chilango* is a colloquial way of calling people who were born in Mexico City; it might also be used to denote belonging to or living in Mexico City.

underlying and ongoing process of *mestizaje*, connected to both the whitening and whitewashing of identities, inextricably wedded to the ideological project of the modern Mexican nation-State.

The impossibility of identifying with the terms "Indigenous" and, therefore, "reindigenization" —as a process that could be experienced by the research participants— is also explained given two more reasons, besides the ones described in previous paragraphs. The first reason has to do with how the participants identify themselves in the exploratory questionnaire: four of them (Hashim, Rkia, Rihana, and Halim) self-identify as "white," and four more (Layla, Latifa, Yunus, and Rami) state that they are "*mestizos*/*as*," while only one person (Suleiman) selected two categories: "white" and "*mestizo*". The remaining four people (Samira, Habiba, Bashir, and Abdullah) chose to refrain from ascribing to any markings.

From the 14 persons who participated in this research, Hussein was the only one who identified himself as "Indigenous" and "Afro-descendant," since his family's maternal side integrates two types of origins: That of the native peoples absorbed by the Azcapotzalco mayoralty of Mexico City, and the Afro-descendant root, stemming from the state of Veracruz. Hussein's marking in the exploratory questionnaire results from a reflective exercise he began some years ago, triggered by how he perceived his family dynamics, contrasted to the way of life of some "whiter" families he knew. Hussein stated that living in an extended family meant that "the space of intimacy was not so defined, [and he had to] listen to things like such-and-such uncle was called '*indio*,'[8] or things of that nature."

The second reason that made the participants distance themselves from or not identify with the term "Indigenous" and, therefore, with the process of reindigenization, can be attributed to the notion of indigeneity itself, as stated by Abdou (2019). This notion pertains to a different context, that of Turtle Island which, needless to say, entails a different colonization process to the one which unfolded in what we nowadays call Mexico.

However, what ringed true for the research participants is that reindigenization is not solely a metaphor. Understood as a global transnational project parallel to decolonization, according to Abdou (2019), reindigenization cannot be severed from the feelings and thoughts of those who could enact it locally, namely, from their own *sentipensares*. As a result, reindigenization inside the territory constructed as Mexico implies three steps to the participants in the last focus group:

[8] In Mexico, the Spanish noun *indio* (despite its literal translation into English as *Indian*) might be used as a racial slur denoting someone's alleged low origin or status, mostly if it is employed as a substitute for the word *indígena* (Indigenous).

1) to recognize, first and foremost, how "that which is Indigenous" was created in Mexico, thus dismantling the burdens that have been associated with the notion of indigeneity; 2) to assume how one has acted in relation to people classified as Indigenous, taking responsibility for the loads of conscience, for guilt and contempt towards them; and 3) to establish *other* linkages with Indigenous people, based on the recognition of the loss of personal indigeneity.

To the effect of how loaded the notion of indigeneity is in the Mexican context, Hashim expressed:

> In English, the burden of [the word] "Indigenous" has 500,000 kilos less weight than it has in Spanish —and in Mexican Spanish. In fact, I even imagine that [Abdou] used that term, perhaps a little deliberately, because in English the word is used, but not so much, and I insist: with much, much less weight than here [...] I think that what happened was good, I think it also showed how much that term touches us on the inside.

Continuing in the same line as Hashim, Latifa tries out an assessment of what originated the debate about indigeneity in the first place during the final focus group:

> I think that the controversy has a lot to do with this load of conscience, since there is guilt about the way Indigenous peoples are treated. And if you didn't grow up there or you have already lost your mother tongue —which your mother or grandmother did speak— then there is a feeling of guilt and of saying: "I can't call myself that", or [of] feeling contempt as well. It is a term that has an enormous, derogatory, painful charge.

The question of what went missing and what remained in relation to being Indigenous made itself present in Rami's reflection. "I was left wondering at which point, for example, did I lose my Indigenous part?", Rami stated, as he pondered about his own family history:

> I do recall that my great-grandmother spoke Maya, and I know that language is one of the identity elements to say "I am from this group." They [Rami's great-grandmother's family] lived in a village where everyone spoke Maya. So, I kept thinking, at which point do I lose it, at which point do I not keep it? Yes, it is also a process of agency, I guess... I think that, maybe, this is what we were missing, and that came to me much later [...] If all Muslims in Mexico City are connected in one way or another with Indigenous people, how do we bond among ourselves?

Finally, also on the basis of reminiscing about her heritage, Rkia explained:

> I remember my same-old topic and my obsession of "what I can indeed talk about is the whiteness that was imposed on me," but it is undeniable, it is part of who I am [...] I think the word "Indigenous" made noise to many people, and I was talking about "let's look for our origin geologically"; that is, where do we come from. I don't remember who said "my mother or my grandmother identifies herself as Indigenous." How interesting there's talk about moms...

The reflections of Hashim, Latifa, Rami, and Rkia give an account, once again, of how the Mexican nation-State attempted to "unite" a diverse territory, inhabited by likewise diverse peoples, under a single country through implementing a process of de-indigenization/*mestizaje*/whitewashing. Centered on the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being, the Mexican nation-State sought to recover "the good things" of the conquest, colonization, and the colonial order that followed, all based on white supremacy. These so-called positive elements of *mestizaje* were imposed and naturalized, in contrast to the erasure of the "the bad things," represented by recognizing oneself as a descendant of people classified as "Indigenous" and, therefore, as inferior to Spaniards and not as worthy as them. On the basis of what Ochoa Muñoz (in press) advances, this view of de-indigenization/*mestizaje*/whitewashing also attempts to conceal the sexual violence suffered by those among the native people read as "women" ever since the conquest and colonization of these territories.

During the collective discussion, Hashim said that what had happened in the last focus group had been necessary. He went further by stating that it would have even been desirable that "the gang [his friends participating in the study] would have had the ability to get rid of the personal commitment of what happens to them with the word." Rami and Rkia, on the other hand, stated a relevant fact during the collective discussion: How the process of de-indigenization/*mestizaje*/whitewashing, that has been present in their families for generations, has marked their lives and continues to impact them because of the attempts to erase any Indigenous root in their genealogy. Hence, Rami questions himself, both in the discussion group and in his individual interview, about ways in which the relations with people classified as Indigenous could be generated, in light of what it means to experience guilt with regards to losing an Indigenous background and, consequently, acquiring certain "white" privileges. In the course of her interview, Rkia expressed a similar position, given that she is quite cognizant of the weight of de-indigenization/*mestizaje*/whitewashing in her acknowledgement that the women on her maternal side sought, perhaps intentionally, to relate themselves erotically-affectively with European men, so as to offer a better standard of living and a greater access to resources mostly to their female descendants.

In closing, the following testimonies from individual interviews refer to how the process of reindigenization could be viewed and enacted in the Mexican context, as well as which might be its potential obstacles. On the one hand, Hussein is certain that this process "can indeed work, in

the sense that it returns you to an original space and […] it opens yourself to everything you had closed off." However, the process of reindigenization thus conceived also generated certain unease for him:

> It causes me conflict, because I believe that these cultural elements —which are identitarian— lead some people to a point. Then, feeling that you only displace [these elements] to get to zero once more, to that *fiṭrah* that seems to be like a *tabula rasa*... I don't know, I'm a little skeptical about that. I think it's both simultaneously, because even [Abdou] makes use of Islamic language. For example, Rumi did [this process of reindigenization] while being a Muslim. He never stopped being a Muslim nominally, and I don't think anyone gets to that [namely, to that level], but I think [reindigenization] can allow you to realize many things that you take for granted, and that are, in fact, illusions.

Halim also pointed to the personal challenges involved in reindigenization as follows:

> It's difficult for me to say how this process goes through me, with that name —given what it implies for the State—, but this part of "creating communal links, non-statist ones, with ethical, political, and spiritual commitments" is an invitation, a little on the basis of activism, for me to ask myself: Who am I? And not just who am I, but: Where do I come from, and also what do I represent for other people? I think it's brave work to say: "Well, I'm this and I feel this, and I'm angry about this, and you are angry about something else —or about the same thing— and there doesn't have to be uniformity, in the sense of 'we all have to be equal,' but there has to be respect and awareness that nobody is better or worse than..." I think it remains to be said: "Ok, let's talk about racism through a spiritual lens."

These perspectives reveal that reindigenizing, as a continuum, would imply two parallel paths: Recovering Islam as a way to transcend the veils of illusion that subject people to certain cultural elements without criticizing their existence and necessity, while equally appreciating that the diverse embodiments of people cannot escape participation in multiple contexts. Therefore, as Halim stated, talking "about racism through a spiritual lens" is paramount, so that the implications of living in a contextual, holistic body can be recognized, and the existence of those labeled as *other* can be valued.

Partial Conclusions

As can be seen in my text, on the basis of the data collected in the three phases of the study and its analysis, the research participants conceive indigeneity in such a manner that problematizes and goes beyond Abdou's contributions (2019). This critique of the notion of indigeneity is explained due to the participants' embodiment inside the racist Mexican nation-

State, as they continue to bear the burden of de-indigenization/*mestizaje*/whitewashing, making them try to dodge and avoid the wound that this modern/colonial process inflicted in how their family genealogy was configured. Hence, the necessity to acknowledge a possible new *jihad* — namely, an inner effort with external manifestations— arises. This *jihad* would aim at transcending the process of colonial feminization/racialization leading to a manifold racism that not only impacts the participants' daily lives, given their possession of a fragmented whiteness, but also impinges on their very identity, on how they perceive themselves contrasted to what they "are not."

As people who recognize themselves as Muslims or students of Islam in its different expressions in Mexico City, the participants in this research are evidently not entirely to blame for the consequences of the fragmentation, exploitation, and hierarchical classification to which human and non-human beings have been subjected since the so-called discovery of America in 1492. Regardless, they are indeed responsible for such consequences if they seek to approach Islam in order to become (*devenir*) political and "potential Muslims," in Bouteldja's definition (2015). Therefore, becoming political Muslims implies that the participants acknowledge the conscious and unconscious denial of what is classified as Indigenous, as a result of the creation of the Mexican nation-State; likewise, this *devenir* means that the participants are able to contemplate how "indigeneity," in its political sense, would not seek to claim the recognition of the master, but rather its elimination through mutiny ensuing from the exercise of spiritual activism, as understood from an Islamic perspective (Parti des Indigènes de la République 2005; Bouteldja 2015; Hernández 2016; Abdou 2019).

Somehow, the research participants have already begun to take the first steps in this work: They recognize that Islam and Muslimness might be defined and practiced in a broad, non-normative manner, which accounts for performing an anarchic *ijtihad*, albeit under the weight of racism as enacted and enforced by the Mexican nation-State. Undoubtedly, they are aware of how racism, in its multiple dimensions, is manifested in their everyday life, despite the fact that the totality of its impact remains blurry when personal family genealogies are recovered. Hence, the relevance of the reflective processes that some of the participants have already begun emerges, because the *sentipensares* emanating from their different self-identifications endow those very self-identifications with a political meaning. In this manner, the research participants

constitute themselves as theorists of Islam's becoming (*devenir*) in Mexico City, 504 years after the fall of Tenochtitlán.

Bibliography

Abdou M (2019) Islam and Queer Muslims: Identity and Sexuality in the Contemporary World. Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada. A thesis submitted to the Department of Cultural Studies for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Aguilar Gil Y (2023a) Diversidad lingüística y tradición de la memoria. Seminario de Literatura y Feminismos Descoloniales. Available at https://www.facebook.com/selidecofem/videos/3226728804297841 Accessed April 2024.

Aguilar Gil Y (2023b) Tëkëëk piky. Centro de Estudios para el Cambio en el Campo Mexicano, Mexico.

Bouteldja H (2015) Islam et modernité : Peut-on être musulmans en Occident ? Available at https://indigenes-republique.fr/islam-et-modernite%E2%80%AF-peut-on-etre-musulmans-en-occident%E2%80%89/ Accessed September 9, 2017.

Brookman P (2019) Looking for Alternatives: Notes on Chicano Art, 1960–1990. In: González J A, Chavoya C O, Noriega C, and Romo T (eds) Chicano and Chicana Art: A Critical Anthology. Duke University Press, London, pp. 19-29.

Cañas Cuevas, S (2015) The politics of conversion to Islam in southern Mexico. In: Khan A (ed) Islam and the Americas. University Press of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, pp. 163-185.

Cañas Cuevas, S (2006) Koliyal Allah Tsotsunkotik. Gracias a Allah que somos más fuertes. Identidades étnicas y relaciones de género entre los sunníes en San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas. CIESAS, México. Master's degree thesis in Social Anthropology.

Del Val J (2004) México. Identidad y nación. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México,Mexico.

González J A (2019) Introduction. In: González J A, Chavoya C O, Noriega C, and Romo T (eds) Chicano and Chicana Art: A Critical Anthology. Duke University Press, London, pp. 1-12.

Grosfoguel R (2010) Epistemic Islamophobia and Colonial Social Sciences. Human Architecture: Journal of the sociology of self-knowledge, vol. VIII, no. 2, pp. 29-38.

Haraway D (1995) Conocimientos situados: la cuestión científica en el feminismo y el privilegio de la perspectiva parcial. In Ciencia, ciborgs y mujeres. Ediciones Cátedra, Spain, pp. 313-346.

Hernández R D (2016) Decoloniality and Politics of Recognition Among the *Indigènes de la République*. Tabula Rasa 25, pp. 249-265.

Hidayatullah A (2014) Feminist edges of the Qur'an. Oxford University Press, New York.

Hine C (2015) Ethnography for the internet: Embedded, embodied and every day. Bloomsbury Academic, London.
Howlett M (2021) Looking at the ‘field’ through a Zoom lens: Methodological reflections on conducting online research during a global pandemic. Qualitative Research 00 (0), pp. 1-16.

INEGI (2021) Censo de Población y Vivienda 2020. Available at https://www.inegi.org.mx/programas/ccpv/2020/default.html#Tabulados Latest access April 29, 2024.

Leyva Cortés S, González Calderón S T, and Quintana Noriega M C (2023) La da’wa chiapaneca.
Retrospectiva histórica y antropológica sobre el desarrollo del islam en San Cristóbal de las Casas,
Chiapas. In: Paz-González E A and Espino Reyes R J (coords) Entre cruces y protestas. Sobre la investigación religiosa en Centroamérica y el sur mexicano. Seminario de Intersecciones de lo Religioso (SEMIR) and Red Centroamericana de Investigadores del Fenómeno Religioso (RECIFRE), México, pp. 141-183.

Lorde A (2007) The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House. In: Sister Outsider:
Essays and Speeches. Crossing Pres, Berkeley, California, pp. 110-114.

Moreno Figueroa M G (2010) Distributed intensities: Whiteness, mestizaje and the logics of Mexican racism. Ethnicities 10, no. 3, pp. 387–401.

Moreno Figueroa M G (2022) Entre confusiones y distracciones: mestizaje y racismo anti-negro en México. Estudios Sociológicos 40, pp. 87-118.

Morquecho G (2004) Bajo la bandera del Islam. Un acercamiento a la identidad política y religiosa
de los musulmanes en San Cristóbal de las Casas y algunas expresiones de conflicto que se han presentado durante el proceso de construcción de la comunidad islámica en Chiapas. Ediciones Pirata, San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas.

Morquecho G (2013, November 29) Reacomodos en la comunidad islámica en San Cristóbal de Las Casas. América Latina en Movimiento. Available at http://www.alainet.org/es/active/69409 Latest access August 18, 2017.

Murata S (1992) The Tao of Islam. State University of New York Press, New York.

Ochoa Muñoz K (in press) Sobre los desplazamientos en el entendimiento del poder y las violencias: Feminismos en la encrucijada. In: Rodríguez Mancilla M, Zenteno Torres E, Tello Soto A, et al. Feminismos latinoamericanos en la encrucijada. Editorial Quimantú, Santiago.

Parti des Indigènes de la République (2005) Nous Sommes Les Indigènes de la République. Available at https://indigenes-republique.fr/le-p-i-r/appel-des-indigenes-de-la-republique/ Latest access April 24, 2024.

Population and Housing Census (2020) Panorama sociodemográfico de México 2020. Available at:https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/productos/prod_serv/contenidos/espanol/bvinegi/productos/nueva_estruc/702825197827.pdf. Latest access April 29, 2024.

Prado A (2018) Genealogía del monoteísmo. Akal/Interpares, Mexico City.

Schenerock A (2005) Más allá de velos y peinados: Las reelaboraciones étnicas y genéricas de las chamulas sufís en San Cristóbal de las Casas. Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, Chiapas. Master’s degree thesis in Social Sciences.

Vargas García, B (2023) Desprecio encarnado. Redes sociodigitales, racismo antinegro y captaciones sensibles de la caravana africana de migrantes en México. In: Masferrer León, C V et al. Racismos entrelazados: intersecciones de las opresiones racistas en México. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Secretaría de Desarrollo Institucional, Mexico, pp. 119-148

Non-Aligned Women: The Exchanges between the Federation of Cuban Women and the National Union of Algerian Women (1962–1978)

Julieta Chinchilla
University of Buenos Aires

In this article, we attempt to show how the politics of exchange and international solidarity among women’s organizations in Latin America and Africa gave rise to a women’s agenda capable of articulating a distinct political culture—one that set Third World women’s movements apart from North American and European feminism. To do so, we focus primarily on the experience of two organizations that held political significance in their respective regions: the National Union of Algerian Women (UNFA, by its French acronym) and the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC).

In both organizations, the international dimension occupied a privileged place, since it was through this dimension that they sought to strengthen their cause within an international context shaped by the Cold War and the emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement. As a result, the women’s agenda advanced by these organizations became an important tool within an international contest that sought to draw countries into the orbit of one or the other of the two major blocs. In turn, the joint work carried out by these organizations—together with others from Asia, Africa, and Latin America—made it possible, over the years, to outline a women’s politics that could not necessarily be identified either with Western feminist movements or with Soviet women’s organizations. This was no accident: in the international arena, women’s politics was used as one more tool of the policy of non-alignment pursued by countries such as Algeria and Cuba. Along this path, the building of solidarities among women from countries identified with the Non-Aligned policy allowed for the projection of a distinctive image that would become emblematic in the construction of a Third World political identity.

Already in the earliest internal statutes and in the programs of the first congresses of the UNFA and the FMC, we can trace the debates that began to give rise to an agenda that would distinguish this women’s movement from its Western and Soviet counterparts within the Cold War framework: its commitment to prioritizing anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles on its agenda, its goal of “modernizing” women as a means of “modernizing” their societies, its concern with social questions—such as illiteracy—and with the problems of the peasantry, among others. In this respect, we can read the following diagnosis in a document prepared for the 2nd Congress of the National Union of Algerian Women:

> *The challenge in this struggle is the same: it is a matter of women being able to translate into fact the principle of equality between the sexes at every level, respecting women’s political, social, and economic rights. The difference lies in the context of this struggle, since it is not the same in developed countries as in those that make up the Third World. If the main obstacle to the advancement of women lies chiefly in certain retrograde social attitudes, then women of the Third World must think through their problems within the broader framework of the underdevelopment affecting their country.*[1]

On the other hand, as we have already noted, the “woman question” was taken up by both countries as a diplomatic tool that allowed the newly triumphant revolutions of Cuba and Algeria to establish new solidarities and occupy transnational spaces from which to make their cause known and weave networks. It is therefore not surprising to find, in the various documents produced by these organizations, constant references to the need to create and strengthen ties. While the UNFA document already cited points to the need to participate in international forums to advance the Palestinian cause, to promote Arab and African women as a priority, but also to strengthen relations with women from socialist and Third World countries—since “they share the same concerns as Algerian women”—in the case of the Federation of Cuban Women, the following was likewise affirmed as important:

> *To strengthen bonds of friendship and solidarity with women’s organizations around the world, and above all with those of Latin America. To increase solidarity among peoples,*

[1]To make the article easier to read, we have chosen to give the translation of the original source within the body of the text. All translations are the author's own. Documents préparatoires 2e Congrès Nationale UNFA, 1969: 2.

especially their women, who struggle for economic independence and sovereignty against imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism.[2]

In this new context, it should come as no surprise that the growing participation of women in the revolutionary organizations of Latin America, Africa, and Asia built a new women's political identity that identified with the struggles of the Third World. In turn, both Algerian and Cuban women contributed to shaping a new feminine political subjectivity, whether through their own experiences during their wars of national liberation, or through the exchange they developed in the decades following their respective revolutionary triumphs.

Transnational Spaces in the Emergence of an Anti-colonial and Anti-imperialist Women's Movement in Algeria and Cuba

For many years, the history of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) remained largely forgotten. The few references to the Federation's activism described it as a satellite organization of the Soviet Union, one more space for reproducing communist propaganda within the Cold War context. Recent research, however, has begun to complicate this picture of the WIDF's role between women's activism and feminism, particularly in light of the participation of Third World women's organizations within the Federation.[3]

Founded in 1945, as the independence process accelerated across the colonies of Africa and Asia, the WIDF began receiving an increasing number of requests from Third World women asking for help in making their struggles visible, whether through solidarity campaigns or through its magazine, Women of the Whole World, published in several languages. During the Algerian War of Independence, for instance, the WIDF gave prominence to the struggle being waged by Algerian women, especially from 1957 onward, during the "Battle of Algiers." The Federation also promoted the participation of Algerian delegates in various regional and international gatherings and organized campaigns calling on its affiliated organizations to donate clothing and food to Algerian refugees in Tunisia.[4]

[2]Memoria, 1st National Congress of the FMC, 1962: 38–39.

[3]See, for example, Francisca De Haan, «Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organizations: the case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)», Women's History Review 19, no. 4 (2010): 547–73, https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2010.502399.

[4]WIDF, «Resolution on Algeria», June 6, 1961, Bureau Meetings, WIDF Documentation Center – Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office.

By 1960, the WIDF’s discourse had begun a transition in which the themes of peace, disarmament, motherhood, and anti-fascist struggle—typical of the early Cold War period and of a discourse more closely aligned with the USSR — were being reworked in favor of anti-colonial struggle, anti-imperialism, and the legitimacy of wars of national liberation, not without tensions between older and newer members.[5] Yet these same debates were what turned the WIDF into a space where Third World women’s movements found both a discursive synthesis and an agenda. These exchanges within the Federation helped construct an image of the “Third World woman” closer to the figure of the combatant and to the “revolutionary path” toward socialism embodied by both Algerian and Cuban women.

The experiences of Cuban and Algerian women were emblematic in transforming the character of the Federation by the mid-1960s, not least because they knew how to make use of the international platform the WIDF offered them to publicize their cause and then build alliances that would strengthen their governments within the context of Cold War cultural and political confrontation.

Although the Algerian and Cuban revolutions maintained close contact from their earliest days, their women’s movements privileged different regional frames of reference in their own construction: the UNFA privileged the Maghreb and Africa, while the FMC privileged Latin America and the Caribbean. In any case, this strategy did nothing but strengthen the position of each organization within its own region while also amplifying its reach beyond its own continent. In this sense, Mujeres—the FMC’s official publication—acknowledged that the international work carried out by the FMC was key to establishing contacts and political relationships with other Third World women’s organizations, in addition to making the Cuban Revolution known beyond Latin America.[6] For its part, Algeria’s pursuit of a Non-Aligned foreign policy had allowed the country to be identified with the Arab world and the African continent, while also turning it into one of the great symbols of anti-colonial struggle and a capital of national liberation movements worldwide. In this context, the international work carried out by both the UNFA and the FMC became one more tool that their respective governments could use in service of their international strategy.

[5]Elena Vilcoci, «Letter to Vilma Espín on Preparatory Meetings for the 5th Congress», September 26, 1962, WIDF–FMC Correspondence, FMC Documentation Center.

[6]“Ten Years of Solidarity,” in Mujeres, Year 2, No. 7, July 1970, pp. 39–40.

Along this path, the holding of the First Tricontinental Conference in Havana in 1966 gave new impetus to the system of women’s solidarities, broadening these women’s political imagination to encompass the struggles of all three continents within an established political program. One of the great achievements of this conference was to establish a communication structure that made it possible to develop, in a very clear and defined way, international solidarity among Third World revolutionary movements. Through posters, magazines, and bulletins, the image of woman—as revolutionary and as mother—became central to political communication. In this way, the Organization of Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (OSPAAAL) not only contributed to constructing an image of Third World women (characterized by the figure of the guerrillera and mother), but also included in its publications debates on gender relations within revolutionary movements,[7] thereby contributing to the construction of a Third World women’s movement.

In practice, Vilma Espín was chiefly responsible for promoting the Tricontinental Conference among women’s activism across the three continents.[8] To this end, she made use of the WIDF platform, where she emphasized the importance of these gatherings for uniting the will of national liberation movements. The conference’s agenda, centered on solidarity among peoples struggling against imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism, and on the intensification of “all forms of struggle, including armed struggle, across the three continents,” included among its points the coordination of actions by “workers, students, women, and cultural organizations of the three continents.”[9]

[7]Lani Hanna, «Tricontinental’s International Solidarity Emotion in OSPAAAL as Tactic to Catalyze Support of Revolution», Radical History Review, no. 136 (2020): 180, https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-7857344.

[8]Among other reasons, because she was the one chosen by the WIDF to head its representation at the Tricontinental Conference. Jasovich Pantaleón, “Telegram to Vilma Espín, President of the FMC,” December 4, 1965, FMC Documentation Center. It is also worth noting that the Algerian delegation did not take part in this conference, since relations between Fidel Castro and Houari Boumédiène were strained following the latter’s coup against Ben Bella the previous year. Relations between the two leaders would be restored by the end of the 1960s.

[9]El Mahdi Ben Barka and Youssef El Sebai, « Call to the First Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America », September 1965, FMC Documentation Center.



Meeting of women within the framework of the Tricontinental Conference, Havana, 1966. Source: FMC Documentation Center.

The Tricontinental Conference was one of the clearest attempts by national liberation movements to establish a space for political unification outside the reach of possible Soviet—or even Chinese—interference. This kind of activity sought to consolidate the political identity of Third World countries amid the tensions generated by the Cold War—clearly identified with the “revolutionary path” to socialism—and led women’s activism within this space to consolidate certain characteristics that women in these organizations would not only articulate but that would become part of an agenda gaining increasing strength.

Along these lines, in its final resolutions, the Tricontinental Conference devoted a special section to women, in which their contribution to the struggle for national liberation was recognized, and in which it recommended encouraging women’s organizations, proposing that they cooperate with the WIDF “with a view to unifying efforts in the struggle against colonialism, neocolonialism, and imperialism.”[10] In other words, what legitimated these women’s claim to a place in the political life of their countries was having played a leading role in their respective wars of national liberation. It should therefore come as no surprise that much of this movement not only included men within its political agenda, but also that the figure of the combatant became a preferential marker distinguishing it from other kinds of women’s and feminist movements, as was the case for both Algerian and Cuban women.

[10]Isolina Triay, «A Year Ago...», Mujeres, January 1967.

The reinforcement of this imaginary had a strong impact on both the UNFA and the FMC. In the Cuban case, for example, during the first Latin American Solidarity Conference (OLAS), held in Havana in 1967, Cuban organizers took advantage of the gathering of Latin American delegations to hold the first “Meeting of Women from Latin American Countries Struggling for National Liberation,” where delegates from different countries were able to exchange experiences on women’s participation in armed struggle. The UNFA, for its part, worked to establish the permanent headquarters of the Conference of African Women (CAW) in Algiers, thereby securing closer contact with delegates from African women’s organizations and better coordinating the solidarity policy that Algeria had been pursuing toward the region’s national liberation movements. In turn, this allowed the CAW to become increasingly active in weaving solidarities with countries fighting for independence and to become one of the main points of reference for articulating relations with women’s organizations in Latin America.

Spaces of Exchange between the UNFA and the FMC: The Press, Transnational Meetings, and Exchange

Both the UNFA and the FMC had their own publications, whose main purpose was to spread among the women of their countries the policies developed by their governments (both general policies and those focused on women) as well as the organization’s activities. In the case of Mujeres, its director for several years, Carolina Aguilar Ayerra, recalls that when they began editing the new magazine they “had to be very careful,” since the traditional women’s magazine Vanidades had built up a reading habit that they did not think could be changed overnight.[11] This observation may explain why, well into the 1970s, Mujeres kept more than half its content devoted to matters perceived as belonging to traditional femininity: fashion, cooking, and childcare sections. By contrast, in its earliest issues, the magazine Al-Djazaïria featured more politicized content that, over the years, gradually gave way to features on fashion, cooking, and entertainment. Reflecting on this comparison, Carolina Aguilar Ayerra noted that, at gatherings held by the Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF), other national organizations frequently asked them about the FMC’s publication. Among the organizations with which they shared their editorial experience was the UNFA. In that exchange, Carolina recalls, Al-Djazaïria’s editors took note of the idea of producing content more accessible to the magazine’s

[11]Interview with Carolina Aguilar Ayerra, June 6, 2019, in Havana.

new readers—a shift that can indeed be traced in the topics the Algerian publication began selecting in its later issues.

Mujeres grew increasingly politicized in step with rising literacy and education rates among Cuban women; Al-Djazaïria, for its part, only began publication in 1970, in both Arabic and French. This delay (bearing in mind that the UNFA was founded around 1963) may also be linked to factors directly related to Algeria’s literacy rate: recall that at the time of independence, illiteracy among the female population stood at 98 percent, while the Arabization of the education system did not begin until the late 1960s. Fatiha Zemmouchi recalls, nonetheless, that Al-Djazaïria was a great success in the country. While the French-language edition was more widely read within Algeria in its first years, the Arabic edition was more sought after by other countries in the region, through embassies or international women’s gatherings.[12] On its first anniversary, Al-Djazaïria took stock positively, noting not only that it had kept its promise to address “topics of concern to Algerian women in all their dimensions: political, economic, social, and cultural,” but also that it addressed “very feminine” matters such as beauty, culinary arts, fashion, childcare, and pedagogy, thereby becoming a magazine of “formation and information.”[13] The UNFA’s and the FMC’s magazines became discursive spaces of solidarity that fostered the construction of a “sisterhood” and a shared identity—whether among women bound to the revolutionary project of their own countries, or among women struggling against imperialism worldwide.[14] The international affairs columns thus became a space of identification that not only brought otherwise distant realities closer together, but also allowed readers to rethink their own experience as part of a larger community, beyond national—but also cultural—borders. The themes chosen to foster greater identification among women of Asia, Africa, and Latin America centered mainly on the experience of armed struggle, a strong anti-imperialist discourse, and the building of a new society in which women played a leading role by participating, alongside men, in every area of “national construction,” aimed at overcoming underdevelopment.

[12]Interview with Fatiha Zemmouchi, March 28, 2024, in Oran, Algeria.

[13]«Al-Djazaïria, One Year On!», Al-Djazaïria, August 1971.

[14]Laura Bier, Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminisms, Modernity, and the State in Nasser’s Egypt, 1st ed. (Stanford University Press, 2011).

Following this logic, as early as its second issue, Mujeres published, in a central spot, an interview with an Algerian combatant (Algeria had not yet won its independence at the time of this publication), tracing a genealogy readily comparable to that of many Cuban women militants during the insurrectionary period: clandestine militancy, kidnapping and torture, optimism in victory, and a promising future for young women combatants.[15] The identification between Algerian and Cuban guerrilleras was strong in these early years. On the Cuban side, this identification was shaped in part by this kind of reporting, but above all by a highly popular radio drama of the time, “Under the Sun of Algiers,” which had popularized the Algerian women’s struggle. In turn, in another piece devoted to Cuban women, we can see how the magazine Al-Djazaïria used their example as a mirror and a promise of a near future for Algerian women; here we can clearly observe the recurring discursive strategy for constructing that closeness, one that facilitates the sense of belonging to a single community:

> *Although you are already familiar with the Federation of Cuban Women (…) we still wish to underscore the importance of this visit, grounded in the ties of solidarity and friendship we share with the FMC. This solidarity and friendship have found expression through our shared positions on Palestine and Vietnam (…) [The Cuban woman] is present everywhere, conscious everywhere, active everywhere (…) It is through action, everyday action, that woman can affirm her firm will to take part in building her country. The Cuban woman gathers the laurels she herself sowed (…) As for the Cuban woman, upon whom falls the great responsibility of shaping the New Man that Che spoke of (…) she will know how to fulfill the sacred duties of the revolutionary, wife, mother, and educator of future generations, who must carry forward the ongoing work of the Cuban Revolution.*[16]

This quotation clearly captures the internal and external political uses that this kind of feature could serve within women’s activism. On the one hand, it sought to show how women had won a place in the building of the new society thanks to the legitimacy that their participation in the war had conferred upon them. On the other hand, certain roles that reproduced a traditional femininity (such as the role of mother) were retained within a new

[15]«Bekkadour Soulikha, Example of the Algerian Woman», Mujeres, December 1961.

[16]«La vie de l’Organisation», Al-Djazaïria, March 1971, 29–30.

framework specific to radical nationalism, one that now sought to give this role new meaning from the standpoint of reproducing the new revolutionary society. In this sense, this passage could equally describe either group of women.

Now, the exchanges between the UNFA and the FMC were not purely symbolic, nor was the construction of the Third World women’s movement carried out solely through the political imaginaries expressed at international gatherings or in the columns of a magazine. March 8th proved to be a particularly valuable occasion for these organizations to invite delegations from other countries and to develop solidarity campaigns with women from other geographies, as well as to exchange experiences. On such visits, women’s delegations would typically tour various sites where the host organization worked—cooperatives and training schools—and were even invited to take part in tasks during days of voluntary labor. These were also occasions on which the visiting delegation, besides delivering a speech during the March 8th celebrations, would often be interviewed by the country’s major media outlets, allowing their cause to reach and become popular among broad sectors of the population.

The first UNFA delegation to travel to Cuba did so in 1971,[17] at the FMC’s invitation, for the commemoration of International Women’s Day. On this trip, the Algerian delegates got to know the FMC’s work and organizational structure up close. Although the UNFA acknowledged having known of the FMC’s work for several years already—and had even organized cultural activities about Cuban women using materials sent by the FMC—it also understood this visit as an important step toward closer engagement with the popular and revolutionary movements of Latin America. At its most recent national council, it had already resolved to strengthen relations with women’s organizations in the region, and it regarded this trip as a first stage that would allow for a closer and more dynamic relationship between the two organizations.

On this visit, the Algerian delegates were able to see the editorial offices of Mujeres firsthand—a significant encounter, since the UNFA had only recently begun publishing Al-Djazaïria, and much of the experience the Cuban women had accumulated proved highly useful in improving their own publication, as already noted. They also toured textile and agricultural production units run by women, childcare centers managed by the FMC, and paid a visit to the

[17]The first official Algerian delegation to visit Cuba did so in 1963. Among its members was Louisette Ighilahriz, in her capacity as secretary of the Association of Former Detainees. From that visit, Louisette came away with the impression that “Cubans were more politically conscious than in Algeria,” a realization that drove her to want to convey to her compatriots all the euphoria she found in revolutionary Cuba. Louisette Ighilahriz, Algérienne, 1st ed. (Casbah Éditions, 2006), 200–201.

Confederation of Cuban Workers.[18] The Algerian delegates came away deeply impressed by the FMC’s work, and were able to draw on this experience in shaping several of the policies they subsequently pursued, particularly the organization of days of voluntary labor with young women belonging to the UNFA and the JFLN [National Liberation Front Youth], as well as work with peasant women in rural areas.[19]



Al-Djazaïria editors visit the offices of Mujeres magazine, March 1972.

The Algerian women’s visit to Cuba had its counterpart the following year, when the FMC was invited to Algeria, likewise on the occasion of March 8th. There, the Cuban delegation was able to organize meetings with the Conference of African Women (headquartered in Algiers) and to make contact with women from the Palestinian nationalist movement Al-Fatah. On this visit, the Cuban delegation was able to travel across much of the country: they visited the UNFA’s first artisans’ cooperative in Algiers, a self-managed farm in Oran, and several vocational training centers for sewing and embroidery in every region they visited. During a conversation with women working at a craft workshop run by the UNFA, the questions the attendees asked the Cuban visitors offer a glimpse of the shared cosmology then taking shape among the women of these organizations: “What role does woman play in Cuba? What place

[18]Al-Djazaïria, «La vie de l’Organisation».

[19]FMC, Summary of the Report of the FMC Delegation that Traveled to Africa (Algeria, 1973), FMC Documentation Center.

does religion hold there? How are your technicians trained, both men and women? Do women have the same rights as men? What is the national dress? What is the national music? How long did your war of independence last?"[20] These questions echo the main lines of work pursued by both the UNFA and the FMC, while the curiosity about the Cuban "war of independence" allows us to glimpse how, in the minds of these craftswomen, there existed a connection between the possibility of encounter among women from distant countries and the fact of having been part of a triumphant war of national liberation. In the end, although we cannot say with certainty in what spirit that question was asked, it appears to reflect a certain curiosity that not only mirrors the impact the war had on women and their families, but also functions as a factor that would help explain the answers to all the preceding questions—that is, the legitimacy that women's participation in the war of national liberation lent to their claim to political, social, and cultural rights. It is also worth noting how, among these craftswomen, we find a concern with professional training, as well as an echo of the major debate of the time surrounding different readings of Islam regarding the status of women. Finally, the interest in "national dress and music" strikes us as significant, insofar as it suggests that, even as we are speaking of women's movements in which national identity was deeply rooted, this did not stop them from imagining themselves as part of a broader community that included women from other regions who, while different, shared comparable—and thus relatable—experiences.

For its part, in the piece published by Al-Djazaïria on the occasion of this visit, it was noted that this kind of encounter fostered "the cohesion of the revolutionary women's movement," achieving, in this instance:

> *(…) an expanded understanding of the Front uniting us to the pan-African women's movement, on the one hand, and to that of Latin America, on the other. The action of our organization at the international level must foster the strengthening of ties of friendship and cooperation with progressive women's organizations, thereby contributing to anti-imperialist solidarity on a global scale and faithfully reflecting our country's action on the international stage.*[21]

[20]FMC, Report on the FMC Delegation's Trip to the Republic of Algeria, March 7–19, 1972, Trips to Algeria 1972–1980 (1972), FMC Documentation Center.

[21]« La vie de l'organisation », Al-Djazaïria, April 1972, 13.

This discourse was thus part of the strategy that the Algerian government had been deepening since 1969, with the holding of the Pan-African Festival, aimed at making Algeria one of the capitals of the Third World alongside Havana.

The year 1974 was a particularly dynamic one for this kind of exchange, since both organizations were committed to the campaign to have the United Nations declare 1975 International Women’s Year. A Cuban delegation took part in the UNFA’s Third Congress, where a change in the organization’s leadership brought the two organizations closer together, since the new secretary-general, Fatiha Bettahar, was already well known to the Cuban delegates, who had met her at the First National Congress of Women of Guinea in 1968. At year’s end, a UNFA delegation led by its new secretary-general in turn took part in the FMC’s Second Congress in Havana, where they were also able to learn about various aspects of the FMC’s work.[22]

In 1976, Vilma Espín paid a further visit to Algiers. There, through the tours she took—as well as through conversations with Fatiha Bettahar—she found that conditions were becoming increasingly difficult for the Algerian women’s movement to deepen its work, even though the government continued to provide the organization with considerable resources for its development. This was due not only to an increasingly conservative stance among part of the political leadership, but also to the departure of key UNFA cadres, whether to take up other positions or to attend to family matters. Even so, the UNFA remained a key organization for the Cuban women, since, on the basis of the trust built between their leaderships, it continued to serve as an essential link for making contact with other organizations on the continent—the Libyan women’s organization, for example, which was being refounded around this time.[23]

Conclusions

In this article, through the trajectories of the FMC and the UNFA, we have sought to show how, across various transnational spaces, publications, and exchange encounters, an

[22]« Solidarity Resolution of the Second Congress of the Federation of Cuban Women », Tricontinental, December 1974.

[23]FMC, «Visit of Comrade Vilma Espín to Algeria (1976)/ Introduction: Third Congress 1974».

identity gradually took shape that brought Third World women together and allowed them to think of themselves as a unity with a defined program. Both the FMC and the UNFA knew how to make use of international encounters to publicize their revolutions and to support various campaigns on behalf of national liberation movements—chiefly those of Vietnam and Palestine—thereby spreading revolutionary ideas among the women of the Third World.

The exchange sustained by both organizations helped shape a shared discourse and practice, one they also shared with other women’s organizations that identified with the tricontinental and Third World project. In this sense, the unifying threads capable of holding these organizations together across the years examined here were, above all: the experience of colonial or neocolonial rule; anti-imperialist struggle; anti-racism; the “revolutionary path” toward full national independence; the figure of the “mother-guerrilla”; the complementarity of struggle alongside men; the subordination of women’s rights to the “national cause”; and the building of concrete bonds of solidarity. As for the practices these organizations developed, voluntary labor, literacy campaigns, the creation of workshops for vocational training, and the establishment of childcare centers to ease women’s burden of care were all tasks that were developed or refined through the mutual political and militant influence that likewise characterized these organizations.

Translated from the Spanish by Souffles.

Cuba en Árabe y los Límites de la Solidaridad del Tercer Mundo

Eman Morsi
Dartmouth College, USA

Mi análisis muestra que, si bien tales representaciones de la isla-nación se inspiraron en la solidaridad con el Tercer Mundo, sus reminiscencias árabes exponen la naturaleza mediatizada de tales íconos y dejan al descubierto un proceso de asimilación al canon árabe que los vació de su especificidad cubana. La Cuba que aparecía en árabe era un espacio vagamente definido y simbólico para la lucha política y económica del Tercer Mundo. Examinar las limitaciones de la solidaridad cultural en la era de la liberación nacional puede ayudar a los investigadores del Tercer Mundo y a los estudios poscoloniales a reevaluar la solidaridad internacional de mediados del siglo XX y las estrategias de construcción de redes que siguen siendo idealizadas o ignoradas.

La fascinación del mundo árabe por Cuba en el siglo XX comenzó en 1958, cuando las noticias de la revolución cubana recorrieron el mundo. Su relación con Cuba se inicia en 1959 gracias a las entonces incipientes redes de solidaridad con el Tercer Mundo. A mediados de la década de 1960, la isla, sus figuras políticas y sus productos se habían vuelto reconocibles en Oriente Medio. Las colaboraciones diplomáticas, militares y económicas fueron parte integral de la relación entre las revoluciones socialistas institucionalizadas de Cuba y el mundo árabe. Además de estos lazos internacionalistas, los cubanos, al igual que sus homólogos árabes, apoyaron la lucha palestina por la liberación. Desafortunadamente, mientras las redes políticas y económicas prosperaban, las redes culturales permanecieron, en el mejor de los casos, subdesarrolladas y, en el peor, inexistentes.

Este artículo explora las razones del retraso en la formación de redes culturales sólidas entre estas dos partes del mundo, examinando sus prácticas de solidaridad y analizando las representaciones de Cuba en el canon árabe. Como muestro a continuación, la necesidad de

mantener la soberanía política y cerrar la brecha económica con el Norte en el nuevo orden mundial posterior a 1945, así como las barreras lingüísticas y el control centralizado de los intercambios culturales, dificultaron enormemente, si no imposibilitaron, cualquier interacción lateral de base, lo que limitó gravemente las oportunidades para el desarrollo de vínculos culturales significativos.

A pesar del auge de los festivales internacionalistas del Tercer Mundo (algunos de los cuales se celebraron en Cuba), que crearon espacios que permitieron a los intelectuales árabes interactuar en persona con sus homólogos cubanos, muy poca de la producción cultural de la isla —novelas, poesía, artes visuales, cine, etc.— llegó al imaginario cultural árabe (y viceversa). De hecho, a lo largo de la década de 1960, fuera de los encuentros patrocinados oficialmente (y estrechamente supervisados) entre las élites culturales árabes y cubanas en festivales internacionales, conferencias tricontinentales y giras oficiales, ambas partes mostraron muy poco interés en la producción literaria y artística de la otra. La élite cultural del mundo árabe hablaba inglés o francés como segunda lengua. Sus encuentros internacionalistas con la élite cultural cubana —que además solo hablaba inglés o francés como segunda lengua— estuvieron mediados lingüísticamente, lo que dificultó cualquier tipo de interacción cultural productiva a largo plazo y a distancia. Además, cuando Cuba y sus homólogos árabes canalizaron fondos estatales hacia las traducciones de importantes obras de la izquierda internacionalista de todo el mundo, las obras soviéticas y de otros países europeos continuaron teniendo una amplia representación en esas colecciones de libros, en detrimento de los corpus literarios de África, Asia y Latinoamérica. En lugar de convertirse en un espacio más de intercambio internacional, la producción cultural cubana permaneció prácticamente invisible para las masas árabes. Esto significó que la Cuba que aparecía en árabe era un espacio vagamente definido y simbólico para la lucha política y económica del Tercer Mundo. Era un lugar que proporcionaba a los escritores y artistas árabes internacionalistas de izquierda un repertorio de iconos y metáforas fácilmente incorporables al elaborado canon árabe sobre el heroísmo.

Hasta 1967, Cuba aparecía exclusivamente en las secciones de noticias políticas de periódicos y revistas estatales y privados de la región. Solo un par de sus textos políticos y militares fundamentales llegaron a las bibliotecas árabes de izquierda. Tras la derrota árabe en la Guerra de los Seis Días (5 de junio de 1967) y la muerte del Che Guevara cuatro meses después (9 de octubre de 1967), los escritores y artistas árabes de izquierda utilizaron al Che Guevara, el

ícono, para contrastar el verdadero heroísmo revolucionario internacionalista con la corrupción de sus líderes políticos nacionales.

Como muestro en este artículo, estas metáforas, creadas a finales de los años sesenta y principios de los setenta, siguen influyendo en el imaginario popular árabe hasta nuestros días. Sin embargo, aunque estas representaciones de Cuba se inspiraron en nociones de solidaridad con la isla-nación, sus repercusiones árabes reflejan la naturaleza mediatizada de estos íconos y revelan un proceso de asimilación al canon árabe que los despojó de su especificidad cubana. Exponer estas limitaciones puede ayudar a los estudiosos del Tercer Mundo y de los estudios poscoloniales a reevaluar la solidaridad internacional y las estrategias de construcción de redes de mediados del siglo XX, que siguen siendo idealizadas o ignoradas. Este artículo comienza con un breve análisis histórico de tres relaciones bilaterales representativas de la década de 1960: Cuba y Argelia, Cuba y los palestinos, y Cuba y Egipto. Argelia tiene la relación más sólida y duradera con Cuba y desempeñó el papel de embajador o puerta de entrada de Cuba a África y al mundo árabe; la lucha palestina por la libertad fue central en los programas de solidaridad internacionalista de muchos gobiernos de izquierda en todo el mundo, incluida Cuba. Egipto fue la potencia cultural y política hegemónica en el mundo árabe y Oriente Medio durante la segunda mitad del siglo XX, además de ser líder del Movimiento de Países No Alineados. Una vez delineadas las bases de su solidaridad política y económica, analizaré varias caricaturas y obras literarias de Egipto y Palestina.

Argelia y Cuba

> “Hemos encontrado entre [los cubanos] no solo el mismo cielo azul puro de nuestro propio país, montañas tan escarpadas como las nuestras y de las que descendieron, como las nuestras, los primeros mártires de la libertad… sino también el alma de un pueblo para quien vivir libre o morir es, como lo es para nosotros, una realidad cotidiana.”
> Abdelkader Chanderli, “Misión en Cuba” (1960)1

Los vínculos de Argelia con la Cuba posrevolucionaria fueron, y posiblemente siguen siendo, los más fuertes y estrechos de todos los países de Oriente Medio y el norte de África. Esto no sorprende dada la historia compartida de guerra de guerrillas entre ambos estados revolucionarios y su dedicación a la política internacionalista de izquierdas 2, una historia compartida a la que Fidel Castro a menudo se refería como "algo especial".3

La Guerra de Independencia de Argelia duró de 1954 a 1962. La guerra de guerrillas de Castro comenzó en 1956 y terminó en enero de 1959. Tanto argelinos como cubanos eran conscientes de esta coincidencia y admiraban mutuamente sus luchas contra el imperialismo (Gleijeses 1996, 159-61). Cuando las guerrillas cubanas tomaron el poder con éxito tres años antes del fin de la revolución argelina, su primera ayuda militar extranjera fue para los argelinos (160). Tras la independencia de Argelia en 1962, la relación entre ambos países creció exponencialmente.

En 1963, Argelia se convirtió en el primer país en recibir médicos y enfermeras cubanos para brindar la tan necesaria atención médica a zonas del país que habían quedado completamente desatendidas tras la retirada francesa. Esta colaboración continúa hasta la fecha bajo el acuerdo de intercambio de "petróleo por médicos". A lo largo de la década de 1960, Argelia actuó como la puerta de entrada de Cuba a África, al igual que Cuba lo fue para Argelia hacia Latinoamérica (Gleijeses 1996, 159). El primer pelotón militar argelino fue entrenado por cubanos. De igual manera, miembros del nuevo gobierno argelino fueron enviados a Cuba para aprender sobre el gobierno socialista, en un esfuerzo por convertirse en lo que los líderes argelinos denominaban la «Cuba de África» o la «Cuba del Magreb» (Byrne 2016, 73-78).
El vínculo entre ambos gobiernos revolucionarios trascendió el ámbito de la realpolitik. Ambos gobiernos se esforzaron por apoyar mutuamente sus necesidades nacionales, a veces con gran riesgo para sí mismos. Actuaron como mediadores entre sí en los dos polos de la Guerra Fría. Durante la Crisis de los Misiles de Cuba, los argelinos mediaron entre los cubanos y los estadounidenses. De igual manera, Cuba medió entre la URSS y Argelia mientras Castro intentaba convencer a Moscú de que Argelia merecía apoyo durante las Guerras de la Arena (Byrne, 2016, p. 220). Como menciona Jeffrey Byrne en su influyente libro, *La Meca de la Revolución: Argelia, la Descolonización y el Orden del Tercer Mundo* (2016):

> Esta instintiva amistad argelino-cubana constituye un ejemplo particularmente vívido de un patrón central en todo el fenómeno anticolonialista tercermundista, afroasiático e internacionalista. La vitalidad, la ambición y el alcance global del tercermundismo dependían de esta forma de reconocimiento mutuo instantáneo e identificación recíproca, repetida cientos de veces... Pero si bien el tercermundismo expresaba principalmente una sensación de circunstancias político-económicas compartidas entre los países del hemisferio sur, y en este caso los revolucionarios argelinos veían las disputas de Cuba con Estados Unidos como un corolario de su propia relación clásicamente colonial con Francia, las respuestas impresionistas y emocionales fueron quizás al menos tan importantes para la creación de estos vínculos como los procesos más fríamente racionales o intelectuales. (76)

Un vistazo rápido a cualquier número del periódico del FLN, El Moudjahid, respalda la postura de Byrne. En muchas de sus portadas, las luchas argelina y cubana se consideraban una sola. Véase, por ejemplo, la portada del número del 12 de mayo de 1961 del periódico del FLN, El Moudjahid, que mostraba dos imágenes de guerrilleros: un guerrillero argelino marchando en la imagen superior y un guerrillero cubano revisando sus armas en la inferior. Un titular entre ambas fotografías reza: "Argelia, Angola, Cuba: La misma lucha". La coincidencia de sus luchas se afirmaba visual y retóricamente con regularidad.

Como miembros de lo que Jeffrey Byrne denomina la "Red Guerrillera Transnacional", cubanos y argelinos también se apoyaron mutuamente en sus esfuerzos por extender la revolución armada en sus regiones (2016, 107-108). Por ejemplo, los argelinos transfirieron armas y militantes cubanos a los venezolanos, mientras que los cubanos ayudaron a entrenar a guerrilleros palestinos. Pero ningún ejemplo refleja la profundidad de su relación como el apoyo militar y logístico que Cuba brindó a Argelia durante la Guerra de las Arenas. Cuando la disputa fronteriza entre Argelia y Marruecos se intensificó, Marruecos logró obtener ayuda militar de Estados Unidos y Francia. Los cubanos actuaron con rapidez enviando dos buques de carga con tanques y un pelotón a Argelia. Luego, solicitaron el apoyo de la URSS (Byrne 2016, 202-23). Los egipcios, que también habían brindado apoyo a los argelinos, intervinieron rápidamente para marginar a los cubanos, en parte porque no les gustaba la imagen de que los no árabes estuvieran en la primera línea de un conflicto entre dos naciones árabes y en parte porque interfería con su imagen cuidadosamente cuidada de partidarios de las revoluciones de izquierda en el mundo árabe.

La rápida respuesta y demostración de fuerza de Cuba obligaron a Estados Unidos, la URSS y Egipto a interferir y obligar a ambos países a negociar (Ben Bella 1998).

La intervención cubana en la Guerra de las Arenas puso de manifiesto los numerosos obstáculos que los nacientes Estados-nación del Tercer Mundo enfrentaban en sus intentos de crear sólidas redes de solidaridad. El entusiasmo por las redes laterales, tercermundistas y revolucionarias se vio sofocado cada vez que entraba en conflicto con las exigencias polarizadoras del marco de la Guerra Fría.

Además de las arraigadas redes excoloniales o imperiales que se vieron obligados a priorizar por razones económicas, también tuvieron que afrontar sus respectivas obligaciones

regionales e identidades hegemónicas primarias (como ser árabes ante todo en el caso de Argelia).

Si bien la conexión entre la élite política cubana y argelina fue instantánea dadas las numerosas similitudes mencionadas hasta el momento, el choque cultural marcó el encuentro de los médicos cubanos enviados a Argelia. En su artículo, “La primera incursión de Cuba en África: Argelia, 1961-1965”, Piero Gleijeses entrevistó a varios médicos que formaron parte de la primera misión enviada al extranjero, en general, y a Argelia en particular. Uno de ellos, el Dr. Manuel Cedeño, recordó que:

> Antes de salir de Cuba… Nos dieron una conferencia sobre Argelia en el MINREX; el orador era el funcionario encargado del Norte de África. Queríamos saber sobre el clima y qué tipo de ropa empacar. Nos dijo que Argelia era un país tropical y que debíamos llevar camisas de manga corta. ¡Esa fue toda la preparación que recibimos sobre el país! Cuando llegamos a Argelia hacía mucho frío. Pasábamos frío; nadie había traído abrigo. Machado Ventura tuvo que comprarnos abrigos a todos. La verdad es que cuando llegamos no sabíamos si Argelia era un desierto, si íbamos a examinar a nuestros pacientes bajo una tienda de campaña. No teníamos ni la menor idea. *¡Nuestra idea de Argelia venía de las películas de estados unidos!* (1996, 166; cursiva mía).

Otro médico, Pablo Resik Habib explicó que:

> Nuestro trabajo allí fue extremadamente difícil emocionalmente. Primero, me encontré con un país con hábitos y costumbres completamente diferentes a los míos; un país árabe, musulmán, muy diferente a nuestra cultura. Segundo, el idioma diferente: árabe y algo de francés. Hubo situaciones increíbles, como cuando tuvimos que formar una cadena de traductores solo para entender lo que decía el paciente. Para muchos de nosotros, nuestra estancia en Argelia fue una experiencia de aprendizaje extraordinaria; era la primera vez que salíamos de Cuba y nos enfrentábamos a un mundo muy diferente al nuestro (169).

Los médicos que participaron en la primera misión a Argelia se ofrecieron como voluntarios porque querían apoyar a Castro y ayudar al pueblo argelino (Gleijeses 1996, 164-65). Sin embargo, como todos señalan de diferentes maneras, ninguno de ellos, una vez que supieron que los enviaban a Argelia, pudo evocar una sola referencia al país (histórica, geográfica o visual). Solo quienes veían alguna que otra película de Hollywood con sus áridos escenarios "árabes" tenían algunas imágenes vagas y orientalistas que inspirarse. El hecho de que «hubiera poca o ninguna historia de intercambios entre Cuba y Argelia, y que los países no compartieran prácticamente ninguna característica religiosa, lingüística (a pesar del uso del español en el este de Argelia) o imperial» (Byrne 2016, 76) significaba que las personas de ambos lados vivían en

lo que yo llamo mundos «incomunicados», una situación que solo puede remediarse mediante la creación de más espacios y oportunidades para el encuentro directo entre los ciudadanos «promedio» de cada nación. Pero, como ocurre con la mayoría de las formas de solidaridad de la izquierda internacionalista y del Tercer Mundo, los procesos cotidianos de intercambio cultural que solo pueden surgir tras meses, sino años, de coexistencia no eran una prioridad. En cambio, los líderes argelinos y cubanos se preocuparon más por enfatizar los aspectos de su identidad que los diferenciaban del Norte desarrollado.

Cuba y Los Palestinos

Los cubanos apoyaron a varias facciones palestinas de la misma manera que apoyaron a los argelinos antes de su independencia: proporcionaron apoyo militar, entrenamiento, armas, ayuda financiera y logística a la Organización para la Liberación de Palestina (OLP), el Frente Democrático para la Liberación de Palestina (FDLP) y el Frente Popular para la Liberación de Palestina (FPLP) (Meari, 2018, 53). Cuba también otorgó becas a cientos de palestinos para estudiar (principalmente medicina) en universidades cubanas (52-53). A su vez, la década de 1960 presenció una fascinación generalizada entre los jóvenes palestinos por la revolución cubana. Muchos militantes e intelectuales palestinos de izquierda sintieron un gran interés por los escritos de miembros del gobierno cubano, desde "La Historia Me Absolverá" de Castro hasta la obra más popular del Che Guevara, "Guerrilla Warfare", y las presentaron a los lectores árabes tras traducirlas del inglés o el francés.

El acceso a las traducciones al árabe de "Guerrilla Warfare" inspiró a varios grupos palestinos de liberación nacional. Uno de estos grupos fue el FPLP, que contaba con una "Unidad de Comando Che Guevara" y encontró en el marco *foco* de la revolución, que Guevara describió en su libro, una guía para sus acciones militantes (Prestholdt 2012, 525).

Dichas traducciones fueron realizadas y autopublicadas de forma independiente por organizaciones estudiantiles como “al-Itihad al-Aam li-Talabat Filastin” (Unión General de Estudiantes de Palestina). Por lo tanto, fueron grupos internacionalistas de izquierda y de tendencia izquierdista, principalmente palestinos y en ocasiones libaneses y sirios, en lugar de estados socialistas-nacionalistas de izquierda como Egipto o Argelia, con sus bien financiados

ministerios de cultura, quienes ayudaron a introducir al mundo árabe a lo que Jeremy Prestholdt (2012) denomina la “biblioteca transnacional” de críticos radicales de izquierda.

Esta es una biblioteca que incluía a “Karl Marx, Vladimir Ilich Lenin, León Trotsky, Antonio Gramsci, Frantz Fanon, Jean-Paul Sartre, Herbert Marcuse, Mao Zedong y el Che” y “ofrecía conceptos para comprender las circunstancias actuales y una gramática para articular agravios” (510). No es sorprendente que grupos guerrilleros y de lucha por la libertad fueran quienes tradujeran esas obras. A pesar de su retórica y sus iniciativas diplomáticas y económicas tercermundistas, la visión del mundo de los estados árabes de izquierda era generalmente más nacionalista que internacionalista. Que las traducciones al árabe se hicieran a través del inglés o el francés no era inusual. De hecho, casi todas las traducciones al árabe de obras latinoamericanas a lo largo de la década de 1960 se basaron en traducciones al inglés o al francés. Las traducciones directas de obras literarias de escritores cubanos y de otros países latinoamericanos no comenzaron hasta finales de la década de 1970 y a lo largo de la de 1980 por razones que tienen más que ver con el creciente mercado editorial mundial que con cualquier marco nacionalista de solidaridad tercermundista.

La falta de patrocinio estatal para estas traducciones significó que su circulación se limitara a los círculos culturales y políticos comprometidos con los ideales izquierdistas internacionalistas.

Gracias al dominio de los medios de comunicación estatales, de los cuales los más importantes eran las estaciones de radio y televisión de El Cairo, que se transmitían y consumían ampliamente, el conocimiento de la gran mayoría sobre Cuba seguía limitándose a la lucha de la nación insular con Estados Unidos y a las imágenes de Fidel Castro y sus barbudos en uniforme de faena, fumando puros.

Cuba y Egipto

Egipto fue la puerta de entrada de Cuba al mundo árabe en particular y al Tercer Mundo no alineado en general (Vélez 2016, 28-29). Esto se debe a su papel central en la creación del *Movimiento de Países No Alineados,* así como a su dominio político y cultural sobre la región árabe en la segunda mitad del siglo XX. Nada demuestra mejor su posición en el mundo árabe que la hipercorrección generalizada del nombre de Guevara como "Jivara".

En los dialectos cairotas y alejandrinos del árabe (y actualmente en la mayoría de las zonas urbanas de Egipto), la \ˈj\ casi siempre se pronuncia \ˈg\. La primera visita oficial cubana al mundo árabe fue a El Cairo. Tuvo lugar en junio de 1959 y estuvo encabezada por Ernesto Guevara \geˈvärə\. Guevara fue, pues, presentado al mundo árabe a través de diversas emisoras populares de radio y televisión egipcias. Inicialmente, su nombre se pronunciaba correctamente. Sin embargo, rápidamente se cambió a jivara \ˈjiˈvärə\, ya que otros árabes y los propios egipcios hipercorregieron la primera letra para corregir lo que asumieron como una "mala pronunciación" de su nombre en el dialecto cairota.5

A diferencia de la relación entre Argelia y Cuba, la de Egipto y Cuba no fue instantánea. Como menciona Heikal en su libro *Abdel Nasser wa al-Alam* (Nasser y el Mundo) (1972), a Nasser y a su régimen les llevó cierto tiempo confiar verdaderamente en el nuevo gobierno cubano. La vaguedad inicial de las inclinaciones políticas de los cubanos, su teatralidad guerrillera y el apoyo inicial de Washington al derrocamiento de Batista dejaron a Nasser indeciso sobre si considerarlos posibles aliados del Tercer Mundo (Heikal 1973, 458). El primer encuentro de Nasser con los cubanos tuvo lugar en junio de 1959 durante su primera visita oficial a Egipto, una visita encabezada por el Che Guevara que le pareció imprudente. Sin embargo, fue la visita de Raúl Castro para celebrar el octavo aniversario de la revolución egipcia (23 de julio de 1960) la que contribuyó a ganarse la confianza de Nasser.

Durante esa visita, ambos hombres estrecharon lazos gracias a sus críticas al imperialismo y la burocracia estadounidenses (460-61). Y en septiembre de ese año, Fidel Castro y Gamal Abdel Nasser se reunieron durante la Asamblea de la ONU, donde Nasser convenció a Castro de unirse al Movimiento de Países No Alineados (Frankel, 1960).

La relación entre Egipto y Cuba de 1959 a 1970 (es decir, hasta la muerte de Nasser) puede caracterizarse como una relación de respeto mutuo, solidaridad económica periodica y mentoría. La guerra tripartita de Egipto en 1956 inspiró a las guerrillas cubanas a seguir luchando; sus leyes de reforma agraria fueron estudiadas por los enviados cubanos (Heikal 1973, 343-44). Tras la consolidación del poder, el gobierno revolucionario cubano buscó la experiencia egipcia en nacionalizaciones. Egipto envió suministros de alimentos a Cuba una vez declarado el embargo estadounidense (Gott 2004). Sin embargo, la mayoría de los vínculos económicos y políticos entre ambos estados terminaron tras la muerte de Nasser.



Figure 1: Balloon: “It’s not moving!” Caption on the Pyramid: “The Steadfastness Front,” Pitín (Gustavo Prado Álvarez), *Palante*, 29 Sept. 1978

Su sucesor, Anwar al-Sadat (1970-1981) decidió alejar a Egipto del bando soviético y acercarlo al bando estadounidense de la Guerra Fría. La relación se tensó aún más a finales de la década de 1970, cuando Cuba apoyó al Frente de Firmeza y Confrontación, un bloque de la élite cultural y política árabe de izquierda que se oponía a los Acuerdos de Camp David. El apoyo de Cuba fue principalmente retórico. La postura política de los estados también llegó a las páginas de revistas culturales como la humorística Palante, donde Sadat fue criticado con frecuencia por su sumisión a Estados Unidos:



Figure 2: “This dish is just as ordered!” Pitín, *Palante*, 29 Sept. 1978

Mientras que la Figura (1) representa al Frente de Firmeza como un obstáculo para el acuerdo tripartito, la Figura (2) muestra a Sadat como el camarero que sirve el plato solicitado por Estados Unidos e Israel. La expresión "a la orden" utilizada aquí tiene múltiples connotaciones. En este caso, se refiere a obtener lo solicitado, pero, utilizada por sí sola, también significa "a sus órdenes" en contextos militares y "a su disposición" en contextos no militares. La caricatura, por lo tanto, enfatiza el papel servil de Sadat en las negociaciones de paz. Entre finales de 1958, cuando era evidente que la guerrilla avanzaba en su guerra contra Fulgencio Batista, y junio de 1959, cuando una delegación cubana que incluía a Raúl Castro, Camilo Cienfuegos y el Che Guevara visitó Egipto, solo se publicaron artículos esporádicos y discretos sobre Cuba en los principales periódicos egipcios. En septiembre de 1960, ambos líderes se reunieron por primera vez en Nueva York, adonde habían viajado para asistir a la Asamblea General de la ONU.

Según la prensa de la época, ambos mantuvieron la reunión más larga de todas las que Nasser había programado con líderes mundiales (Frankel, 1960). Tras el encuentro de Harlem, la presencia de Cuba como miembro importante de la solidaridad con el Tercer Mundo se

manifestó en forma de artículos de opinión, extensos informes y caricaturas en periódicos y revistas egipcios.

Curiosamente, los artículos seleccionados por los diversos consejos editoriales a menudo, si no siempre, se relacionaban con conversaciones en curso sobre políticas nacionales y otros asuntos de gobernanza interna.

Por ejemplo, el 17 de septiembre de 1960, Al-Ahram informó que Cuba había decidido nacionalizar las fábricas de tabaco debido a la negativa de sus propietarios a adherirse al plan nacional establecido con la intención de mejorar la producción. El énfasis del artículo en la necesidad de que las empresas privadas hicieran lo mejor para la nación se relacionaba con la noción, frecuentemente promocionada por Nasser, de "capitalismo patriótico" (al-ra'smaliyah al-wataniyah) y la necesidad de nacionalizar las fábricas y empresas que se niegan a contribuir al progreso y desarrollo de la nación.6

Además de ese tipo de reportajes sobre Cuba, a principios y mediados de los años sesenta, la imagen de Fidel Castro adornó las páginas de muchos periódicos y revistas culturales de El Cairo en fotografías y caricaturas políticas. La caricatura política, una forma de arte que se convirtió en un elemento central de la prensa impresa en Egipto durante los años cincuenta y sesenta, fue uno de los espacios donde se manifestó el culto a la personalidad nasserista. Y al retratar a Castro, los caricaturistas emplearon muchos de los mismos clichés que emplearon con Nasser.

La presencia de Castro en las páginas de los periódicos y revistas egipcios constituyó un acto de solidaridad que marcó el hecho de que, para entonces, los egipcios veían a Cuba como un aliado del Tercer Mundo. Otros líderes nacionales no alineados, como Nehru, Lumumba y Tito, también fueron representados con frecuencia en caricaturas. Esto también podría interpretarse como una prueba de hasta qué punto la lucha de las guerrillas cubanas contra el imperialismo estadounidense inspiró a la entonces joven generación de caricaturistas, periodistas y editores de izquierda.

La mayoría de las representaciones de Castro en las caricaturas egipcias de principios de los años 60 lo mostraban de una forma imponente y casi siempre con un puro en la boca. Las dos caricaturas a continuación, ilustradas por el famoso caricaturista egipcio George Bahgury, son ejemplos típicos. Publicadas inmediatamente antes y poco después de la invasión de Bahía

de Cochinos, ofrecen a Castro el mismo repertorio con influencias del arte clásico griego que Baghury perfeccionó al representar a Nasser.

La barbilla de Castro está acentuada, y su barba encrespada y cabello ondulado se transforman en rizos perfectos que le dan la apariencia de una de las muchas estatuas grecorromanas famosas. También lo hacen más grande que los aviones de guerra y cohetes estadounidenses que intentan atacar a Cuba. En la caricatura titulada "Estados Unidos ataca a Cuba", Castro fuma un cigarro con la leyenda "El despertar del pueblo".

En los aviones con forma de mosquito, gritan: "¡Regresemos o nos asfixiaremos con el humo!". En la figura 4, los cohetes estadounidenses que se dirigen hacia Cuba son atrapados por los labios de Castro, quien procede a "humearlos", neutralizando así su amenaza. El mensaje detrás de estas caricaturas es claro: aunque pequeña, la nación insular, encarnada y protegida por el busto de su líder “titán”, ve los ataques estadounidenses como poco más que una molestia.



Figure 3: “America Attacks Cuba” with caption “Let’s go back or we’ll suffocate from the smoke!!” *Ruz al-Yusuf*, March 24, 1961

Además de estas representaciones de Castro, Cuba misma solía representarse como una isla o archipiélago impenetrable. La caricatura de la figura 5 muestra a un diminuto Tío Sam con sombrero de copa y gafas dentro de un pequeño bote, intentando desesperadamente desembarcar en la costa cubana, pero sin lograrlo debido a las barreras creadas por los gigantescos barbudos que forman un muro protector alrededor de la isla. Aparecieron primero en las montañas y luego

se multiplicaron en sus playas para protegerlas de los enemigos. El más famoso de ellos es el Bosque Fidel Castro. La adoración que los medios egipcios sentían por Castro no era monolítica ni consistente.

Durante la Crisis de los Misiles de Cuba en 1962, varios artículos periodísticos y caricaturas criticaron lo que consideraban una violación por parte de Cuba de los principios de no alineamiento.

En la figura 6, se ve a los líderes del Movimiento de Países No Alineados (Nasser, Nehru, Tito, etc.) de pie, confiados, sobre una roca con la etiqueta "No Alineación". Un débil Castro está en el borde, mirando con incertidumbre hacia una dirección de la marea alta. La caricatura, titulada "La Roca Alta Entre..."

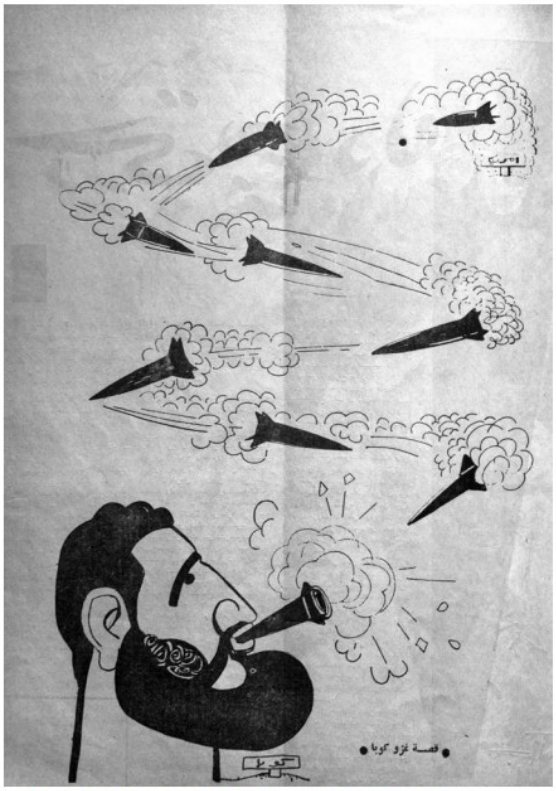
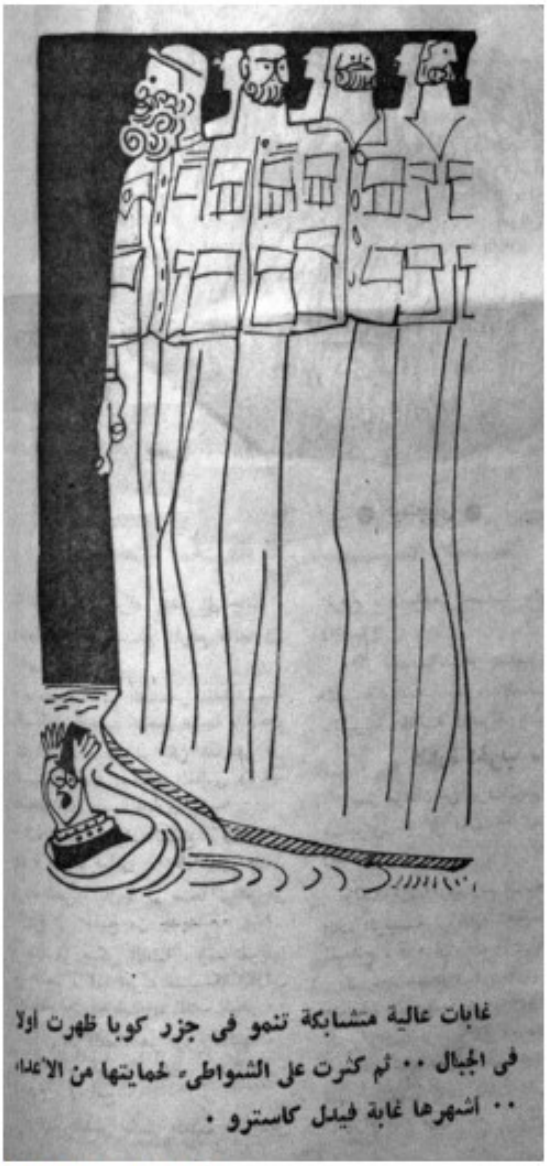


Figure 4: “The Story of the Invasion of Cuba,” *Ruz al-Yusuf*, May 8, 1961

Las olas del Este y del Oeste”, fue una de las muchas representaciones artísticas que enfatizaban la creencia del estado de que la “no alineación” y la “neutralidad positiva” —los dos principios del tercermundismo— son las mejores formas de protección política para las naciones recién independizadas.



غابات عالية متشابكة تنمو فى جزر كوبا ظهرت اولا
فى الجبال .. ثم كثرت على الشواطىء لحمايتها من الاعداء
.. اشهرها غابة فيدل كاسترو .



Figure 6: Abdel Sami', *Ruz al-Yusuf* 1962, from nasser.org[7]

Si bien todas estas caricaturas mostraban apoyo al gobierno revolucionario cubano y el deseo de que siguiera siendo un aliado, también ofrecen una idea de las deficiencias culturales de las prácticas de solidaridad con el Tercer Mundo. La comprensión que los egipcios tenían de Cuba se limitaba a unas pocas referencias: puros, uniformes de faena, la isla o archipiélago y los rostros de sus líderes, nada más. Se podría argumentar que la caricatura como género es, por necesidad, reduccionista: las ideas complejas deben representarse de forma sencilla y accesible. Pero eso no significa que deba ser repetitivo hasta el punto de estereotipar, como ocurre cuando se revisan años de caricaturas de ambos lados. Al igual que con sus contrapartes árabes, en las revistas cubanas, los comentarios caricaturizados sobre Egipto, por ejemplo, solían representar el lugar con pirámides, camellos, la esfinge y arena de fondo.

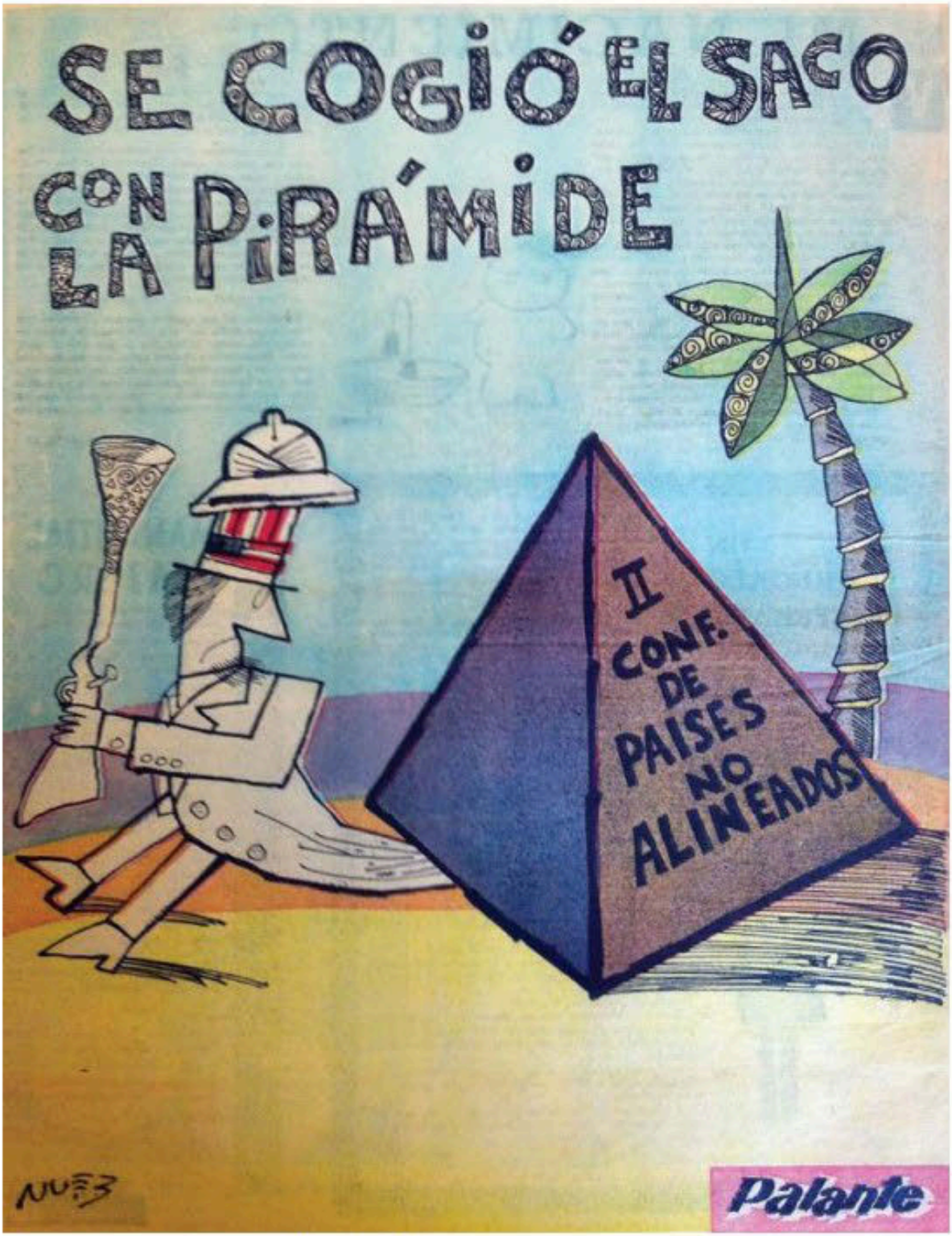


Figure 7: Front cover of *Palante* by Nuez (1964)

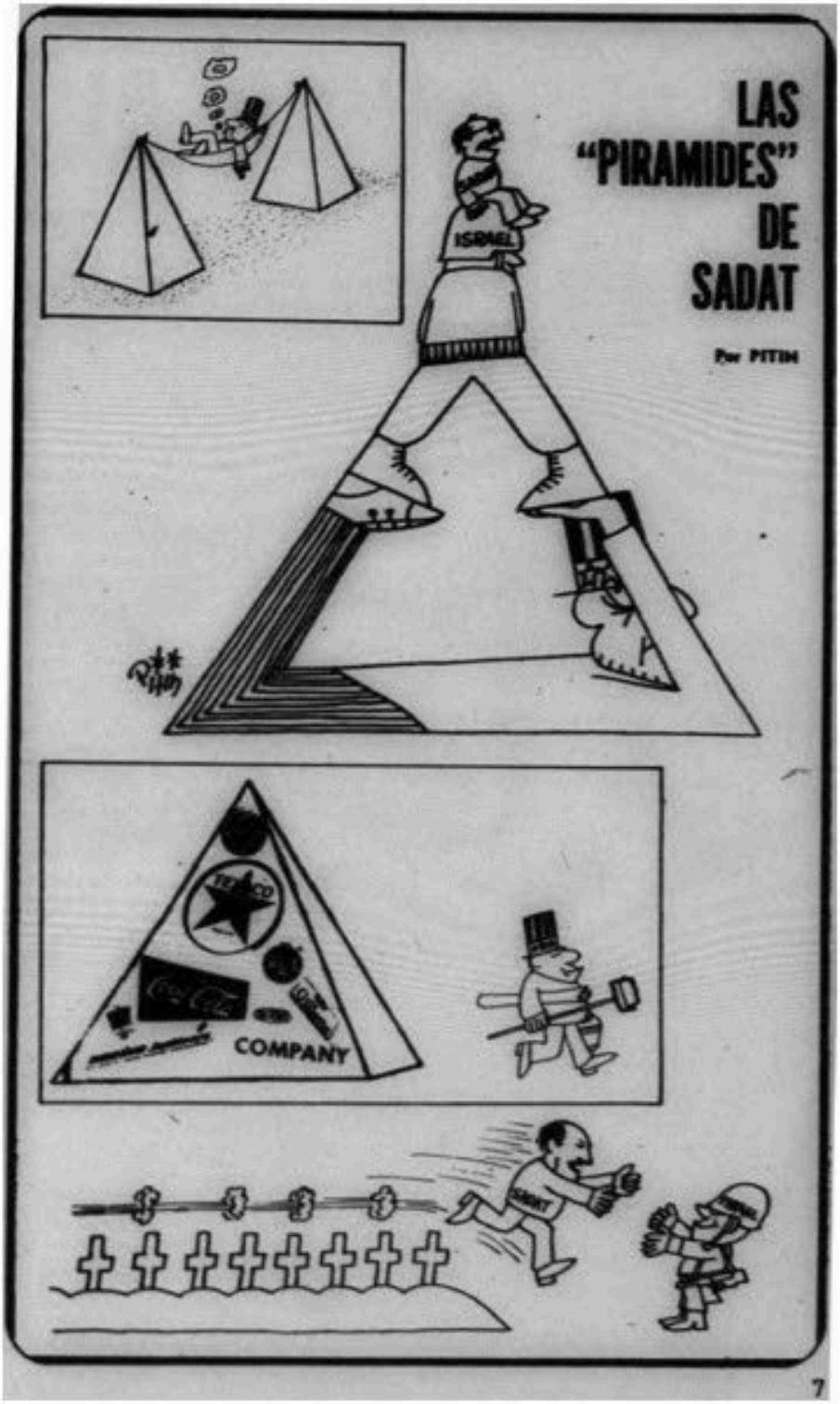


Figure 8: Sadat's "Pyramids". Cartoon by Pitín, *Palante*, Dec 16, 1977

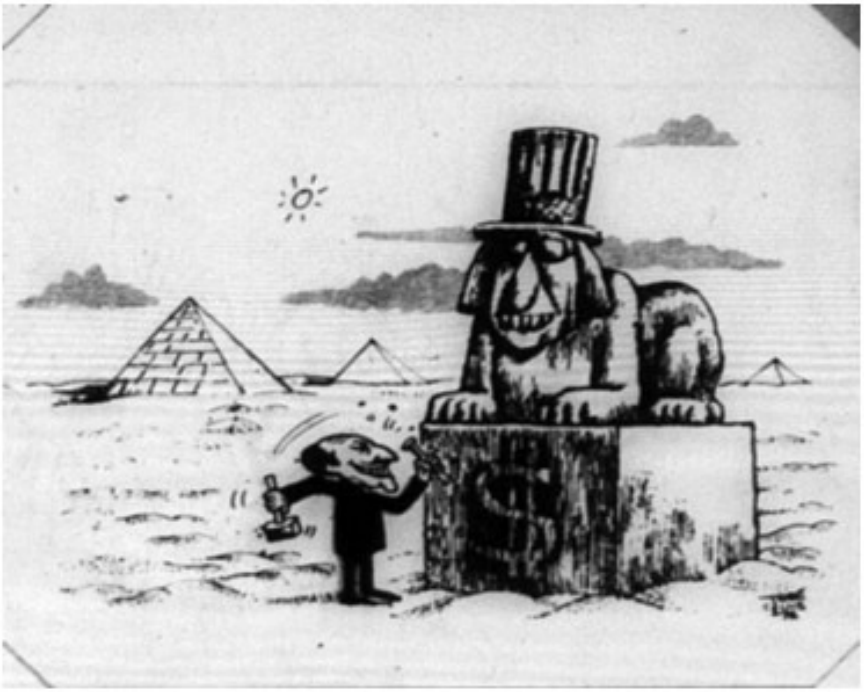


Figure 9: Jose Luis, *Palante*, 6 October 1978

1967 y el Nacimento de un Ícono

La aplastante derrota de Egipto, Síria y Jordania en la Guerra de los Seis Días (del 5 al 10 de junio de 1967) destrozó la confianza de las masas árabes en los regímenes anticoloniales y panarabistas de la época y propició el auge de la «autocrítica» como forma de escritura y expresión artística. En tales obras, escritores y artistas intentaron explicar por qué se produjo la derrota y cómo traumatizó profundamente a las comunidades árabes y aplastó el ideal del panarabismo.8 Con la desilusión vino el auge, a finales de los sesenta y principios de los setenta, de movimientos juveniles de izquierda radical con una postura fuertemente antisistema.10 El momento de la muerte del Che Guevara, casi exactamente cuatro meses después, el 9 de octubre de 1967, en la lucha armada contra una potencia imperial y un régimen autoritario, sumado al hecho de que había renunciado a su cómodo cargo en el gobierno de Cuba para luchar en Bolivia, inspiró a escritores y artistas árabes a adoptar y adaptar su historia de vida e imágenes para reflexionar sobre nociones de autosacrificio y verdadero heroísmo que contrastaban marcadamente con el lujoso estilo de vida del poder de la élite socialista.

Fidel Castro, su gabinete de exguerrilleros y las representaciones de la isla-nación que poblaron los periódicos y revistas árabes a principios y mediados de la década de 1960 fueron

reemplazados casi por completo, a principios de la década de 1970, por el Che Guevara. Pero a diferencia de las representaciones anteriores, que se limitaban a fotografías y caricaturas en los medios de comunicación estatales, el Che de finales de la década de 1960 y principios de la de 1970 ya formaba parte del corpus literario árabe.

Curiosamente, su aparición en árabe se concentra casi exclusivamente en poesía y teatro. Esto puede atribuirse a varias razones. Podría deberse a la naturaleza común de ambos géneros: la poesía, hasta hace poco, se consumía principalmente a través de recitaciones públicas, y el teatro también es una representación pública. Esto también podría atribuirse a que, si bien la poesía árabe tiene una tradición de elegías y odas a mártires y héroes, el teatro cuenta con géneros trágicos clásicos que a menudo exploran la vida de figuras heroicas, tanto ficticias como reales.

Esto también podría atribuirse a que, si bien la poesía árabe tiene una tradición de elegías y odas a mártires y héroes, el teatro cuenta con géneros trágicos clásicos que a menudo exploran la vida de figuras heroicas, tanto ficticias como reales. De las numerosas obras literarias sobre Guevara, las tres que analizo en este artículo son algunas de las más famosas y reproducidas continuamente: el poema de Ahmad Fuad Negm, “Jivara Mat” (Guevara murió), de 1967; la obra lírica de Muin Bseiso, “Ma’sat Jivara” (La tragedia de Guevara), de 1969; y la obra de Mijail Ruman, “Laylat Mawt Jivara al-Azim” (La noche en que murió el gran Guevara), de 1972.

“Jivara Mat”

Ahmad Fuad Negm (1929-2013) es uno de los *poetas de habla hablada* más famosos del mundo árabe del siglo XX. Sus poemas fueron frecuentemente convertidos en canciones por el afamado compositor Sheikh Imam (1918-1995). En la década de 1960, ambos formaban parte de los círculos de izquierda radical en Egipto, que consideraban al Estado socialista egipcio autoritario, defectuoso y fallido. Estuvieron de acuerdo con gran parte de su retórica, pero discreparon con su implementación. Mientras manifestantes de todo el mundo sostenían pancartas con la leyenda "Guevara Vive" como postura desafiante contra los poderes imperialistas que lo asesinaron, Negm e Imam cantaron su popular canción "Jivara Mat" (Guevara Murió) en diversos espacios, desde salones populares hasta las calles. La canción es una elegía hermosamente sencilla que lamenta la muerte de un verdadero héroe, denuncia la corrupción de los líderes izquierdistas árabes y exige venganza de las fuerzas imperialistas que lo

asesinaron y continúan aplastando a las masas.11 La primera mitad del poema es un lamento solemne por la pérdida de un verdadero héroe:

El héroe murió en combate en el bosque.
Encarnó su lucha a través de su fallecimiento.
En silencio.
Sin multitudes que lo vitorearan.
Y sin publicidad. 12

Tras presentar la escena, el poema utiliza al héroe caído para criticar satíricamente a los "héroes" vivos del establishment. En su comentario sarcástico sobre sus lujosos estilos de vida y su "lucha" en yates de lujo, el poema hace referencia a la decadente escena de fiestas en yates y casas flotantes en el Nilo, que se decía que frecuentaban varios oficiales de alto rango del ejército egipcio. También es una referencia al rumor generalizado de que no se pudo contactar a muchos de estos generales cuando Israel atacó porque estaban de fiesta.
Guevara se utiliza, por lo tanto, como el modelo a seguir para el comportamiento revolucionario adecuado. El tono cambia a lo largo del poema. Mientras que la primera mitad alterna entre solemnidad y sarcasmo, la segunda mitad comienza con una profunda tristeza antes de concluir con ira, mientras el narrador canaliza su dolor en un llamado a la lucha armada:

Pobre de él, a la hora de morir,
sin compañeros que lo despidieran,
…
Quizás gritó de dolor
por el escozor de la bala en el estómago
quizás rió
o sonrió
o tembló
o se estremeció
quizás su último aliento
fue una despedida

a los hambrientos,
Quizás un testamento para quienes abrazan la causa
Para luchar
Muchas imágenes
Vienen a la mente
Millones de posibilidades
Pero ciertamente,
E indiscutiblemente
Guevara murió como un hombre de verdad
Tú que trabajas
Y estás privado
Que estás encadenado
De pies y mente
Esto es todo
No hay salvación
Excepto con armas
Y balas
Esta es la lógica de esta época feliz
La era de los negros
y los [latino]americanos.13
El fuego y el hierro gobiernan
justice is mute or cowardly
Guevara’s scream,
O slaves
of any nation
or place,
there is no alternative
there is no escape
either prepare the army of salvation
or bid the world farewell.

“Jivara Mat” está escrito en el estilo conversacional característico de Negm. Estructuralmente, sigue los pasos de un panegírico oral árabe tradicional. Comienza describiendo los atributos del héroe caído y culmina con un llamado a la acción. Sin embargo, difiere en su contenido, ya que el poema oscila entre referencias a la corrupción de la élite izquierdista local y expresiones de solidaridad con las revoluciones en América Latina y la lucha armada de las Panteras Negras y otros movimientos de justicia social. El llamado a tomar las armas y su ética machista izquierdista sin complejos sitúan el poema de lleno a finales de los años sesenta. El Che Guevara no fue el único héroe internacional que Negm celebró en verso (también tiene un poema sobre Ho Chi Minh, por ejemplo), pero ninguna otra canción sobre un héroe contemporáneo alcanzó la popularidad de la canción de Guevara. Las razones pueden atribuirse al contenido y la composición. La melodía de “Guevara murió” es, en muchos sentidos, un ritmo fúnebre típico, fácil de seguir y tan pegadizo que, irónicamente, se usó para el himno que se cantó en honor a Gamal Abdel Nasser cuando falleció. La ironía radica en que este poema fue uno de los varios que metieron a Negm e Imam en problemas con el estado egipcio.

Temáticamente, la popularidad de la canción se relaciona con la forma en que Cuba, en general, y Guevara, en particular, se convirtieron en el complemento literario perfecto para la realidad árabe de finales de la década de 1960. Como afirma Prestholdt al explicar la popularidad de Guevara, el Che era visto como un idealista que actuaba según sus principios. Aunque el Che ocupó cargos ministeriales en el gobierno posrevolucionario cubano, renunció a un puesto cómodo para cumplir con lo que consideraba el 'más sagrado de los deberes': luchar contra el imperialismo (2012, 512). El Che era, por lo tanto, el ícono perfecto para destacar el fracaso moral de la élite izquierdista árabe después de 1967.

Ma’sat Jivara (La Tragedia de Guevara)

Murió Guevara el mito
Ha resucitado Guevara el humano
¡Aleluya, el Señor ha resucitado!

Muin Bseiso es uno de los dramaturgos y poetas palestinos más reconocidos del siglo XX. También fue líder del partido comunista en Gaza y vice-editor de la famosa revista afroasiática de izquierda Lotus. Nacido en Gaza, pasó la mayor parte de su vida adulta exiliado

entre Egipto y Europa. La obra de cinco actos de Bseiso, "La tragedia de Guevara," es una de sus obras más populares. Se ha representado repetidamente en todo el mundo árabe con gran éxito de crítica y público desde su primera publicación en 1969. Además, es una de las primeras obras que trata a Guevara, en árabe, como una deidad: un Jesucristo secularizado.

Ma’sat Jivara comienza con una escena absurda del cuerpo disecado de Guevara, expuesto a turistas en un pueblo boliviano. Los turistas tienen que pagar un dólar estadounidense para verlo, y los aldeanos no tienen ni idea de quién es ni por qué la gente de todo el mundo viene a verlo. El absurdo acto inicial termina con la explosión de un cartucho de dinamita con forma de plátano, que originalmente sostenía un niño cubano que, por alguna razón, ¡estaba de gira por Estados Unidos!

Con la excepción de los nombres de los aldeanos y las referencias a las huelgas mineras, la imaginería de la "Aldea Boliviana" evoca, sin embargo, a una típica "Aldea Árabe" del Levante, desde los proverbios utilizados para comentar los acontecimientos en curso hasta los animales mencionados (conejos, gallinas, gallos, vacas, etc.). En la obra, los aldeanos emergen rápidamente como víctimas tanto de la policía (es decir, del Estado) como de la iglesia (es decir, de las instituciones religiosas). La aldea como alegoría nacional, con sus habitantes como las masas oprimidas, era un tropo artístico típico del teatro árabe de la década de 1960, que veía en el "campesino" la verdadera esencia de la nación. El último acto de la obra se desarrolla en un programa de televisión donde se pide a un panel de tres intelectuales que comenten sobre la muerte de Guevara. Al igual que en otras autocríticas posteriores a 1967, el "intelectual", como representante de diversas instituciones en quiebra, es retratado de la forma más negativa.14
Al reimaginar la muerte del Che Guevara como una tragedia palestina moderna, Bseiso se basó en diversas referencias bíblicas y parábolas para recrear la historia boliviana: desde la negación de Pedro, la traición de Judas y la salvación de la prostituta hasta la resurrección de Jesús (o en este caso, la reencarnación de Guevara como un "campesino boliviano"). Al reescribir los días previos y posteriores a la muerte de Guevara, su martirio y sus sacrificios personales se sacralizan. Como declara uno de los muchos panfletos distribuidos en el pueblo a lo largo de la obra:

Guevara fue asesinado
Por todos los campesinos
Por la espiga y por el árbol

Por la Revolución
Viva la cabeza cortada
Viva el pecho traspasado. (30)

Si Guevara es Jesús, el vago escenario "boliviano" es la antigua Jerusalén. Los eventos y referencias bíblicas secularizadas que se hacen a lo largo de la obra convierten la ubicación en una metáfora extendida de la lucha palestina contemporánea. Y al igual que en el poema de Negm, la obra tiene múltiples escenas donde se dirige al público un llamado a continuar la lucha armada. En uno de los varios casos en que se rompe la cuarta pared, un "hombre que se parece a Guevara" se dirige al público:

No estamos en un teatro.
No estoy actuando.
La revolución no es teatro.
Ahí lo tienen, las armas están en el suelo.
Ahora son suyas.
¿Qué esperan?
(Su voz se alza y ningún espectador se mueve).
Ya les dije que no estamos en un teatro.
No estamos en un teatro.
La revolución no es un teatro.
¿Qué esperan?
¿Qué esperan? (60)

En su tratamiento de la lucha palestina, la obra también encarna una cosmovisión internacionalista y practica una autocrítica panregionalista. La autocrítica de la inacción y el fracaso árabes hacia los palestinos se refleja en el tratamiento de los "intelectuales". La obra presenta tres tipos de intelectuales: el comisario que niega saber nada sobre Guevara, ya que no figura en los libros de historia oficiales; el intelectual de torre de marfil que vive en la biblioteca y se frustra constantemente porque ya nadie lo consulta; y el marxista ortodoxo que cree que Guevara debería haber luchado en un entorno industrializado más propicio para la revolución.

Los intelectuales de torre de marfil están confinados en su biblioteca. El comisario y los marxistas ortodoxos son retratados como incapaces o afeminados. A diferencia del héroe, que se ve constantemente en acción, ya sea en la lucha armada o cultivando la tierra, el intelectual

simplemente ocupa espacio en la televisión. La incapacidad del intelectual para aportar soluciones a la situación en el mundo árabe y su capacidad (todos hombres) de criticar solo a los demás, pero no a sí mismo, lo convierten en un tonto ridículo, ridiculizado por el fantasma de Guevara, que aparece en escena para burlarse de ellos y echarles humo de cigarro en la cara, especialmente cuando uno de ellos declara:

> *Debería haber empezado su revolución*
> *Desde otra capital*
> *No desde las montañas ni el bosque*
> *Debería haber empezado desde una fábrica*
> *168 El Sur Global 13, no. 1*
> *Debería haber empezado con un panfleto*
> *No con una pistola*
> *Esa es la tragedia (156).*

El intelectual que pronuncia estas líneas aparece inicialmente con el rostro vendado. Mientras habla, la venda se afloja lentamente y luego cae, revelando un rostro maquillado y peinado al estilo de los Beatles. En otras palabras, el intelectual queda expuesto como afeminado o castrado. Sus declaraciones y su desenlace literal y metafórico son recibidos con la burla del fantasma de Guevara. El machismo en la escena reitera la frase de Negm sobre que Guevara era un hombre de verdad y da una idea de parte de su atractivo. Como explica Prestholdt, «el compromiso del Che con la acción... resultó atractivo debido a la cultura hipermasculina que caracterizó a los movimientos de izquierda de finales de los años sesenta y setenta... un arquetipo revolucionario imbuido de machismo» (2012, 512). Este acto final también explica por qué Bseiso calificó su obra de tragedia y deificó a Guevara.

Mientras que muchos marxistas ortodoxos podrían ver en la muerte de Guevara una pérdida evitable e inútil, otros, como el dramaturgo, ven su último acto de autosacrificio como un acto inevitable de redención catártica que dio a muchos la oportunidad de volver a tener esperanza y renovar su voluntad de lucha.

Laylat Mawt Jivara al-Azim (La Noche de la Muerte del Gran Guevara)

Mientras que Bseiso glorificó el martirio y el autosacrificio en su relato de la muerte y reencarnación de Guevara, Mikhail Ruman (1922-1973), en su célebre obra Laylat Mawt Jivara al-Azim (La noche en que murió el Gran Guevara), producida en 1972, complicó las nociones de martirio y heroísmo. A diferencia de Bseiso, Ruman no militaba en ningún partido político. Comenzó su carrera como traductor de teatro británico y estadounidense al árabe y no escribió ni produjo su primera obra hasta que tenía alrededor de cuarenta años. Como señala Hazem Azmy en *The Oxford Dictionary of Theatre and Performance*, mientras:

> La mayoría de los escritores del Egipto de Nasser buscaban establecer al intelectual de clase media como el visionario de la emergente sociedad «revolucionaria», culpando implícitamente a las autoridades por no seguir los consejos de esa clase. En cambio, Ruman retrataba persistentemente al visionario burgués como un antihéroe dolorosamente quijotesco... Considerado excéntrico por sus contemporáneos, Ruman era igualmente impopular entre los censores, y menos de la mitad de sus dieciocho obras se representaron durante su vida (Azmy, 2005).

La obra de Ruman es la obra literaria árabe más extensa disponible hasta la fecha sobre Guevara. También es la más elaborada, densa y experimental de las obras escritas sobre el tema. Nada en su obra es fijo. El tiempo, el espacio e incluso los actores cambian constantemente, lo que a veces dificulta discernir una subtrama de otra.

Temporalmente, la obra comienza con referencias a los hijos de Israel y el Faraón, y culmina con una recreación de la muerte del Che y las reacciones internacionales posteriores. El escenario se describe inicialmente como "afroasiático" y continúa transformándose a medida que la trama se desarrolla y se desenvuelve. A veces, se desarrolla en Katanga, Congo; otras veces en Vietnam, y ocasionalmente en Latinoamérica. Con la excepción de un personaje llamado Costa, los demás personajes no tienen nombre propio.

En cambio, se les asignan descripciones diferentes. Por ejemplo, un personaje se llama “Jalisiha” (su pareja sentada), quien comienza como el “Faraón”, luego se convierte en representante de las “potencias internacionales” y finalmente en un “gobernante títere local”. Hay alguien llamado “al-Mar’ah” (La Mujer), quien al principio de la obra se describe como una colonia, pero pronto se convierte en el objeto de amor de “al-Fata” (el joven), quien a veces es simplemente eso, un joven, mientras que otras veces parece ser el propio Guevara. La obra está llena de intertextualidad. Una rica gama de obras culturales árabes (epopeyas orales, hazañas heroicas históricas, etc.) se invocan y se entrelazan con referencias tercermundistas y globales a

instituciones capitalistas como el FMI. Las referencias árabes y la intertextualidad sitúan a Guevara dentro de una genealogía de narrativas árabes de heroísmo. Las referencias internacionalistas ayudan a centrar tanto el corpus literario árabe como a Guevara en lo que Prestholdt llama “una comunidad imaginada radical” (2012, 507) de heroísmo y martirio. Sin embargo, a diferencia de Bseiso, el héroe no es un personaje completamente inocente, ni los enemigos son completamente malvados. Los complejos y continuos cambios en el rol de cada personaje ayudan a problematizar y complicar el tropo del mártir heroico y la noción misma de culto a la personalidad. La obra es densa, pero no reduccionista. Utiliza a Guevara para defender la necesidad de una revolución de masas y la solidaridad, a la vez que destaca la necesidad de erradicar la idolatría para no caer en la misma trampa que condujo a la derrota de 1967 y la posterior desilusión con el establishment político.

Los Guevaras Árabes

El impacto del Che en el imaginario popular árabe ha sido innegable. Entre 1967 y la actualidad, han aparecido en los medios de comunicación multitud de Guevaras "árabes". La historia más antigua que he encontrado trata sobre un campesino del sur de Egipto llamado Abu al-Majd Muhammad Ali, quien "luchó contra los sionistas en 1948 junto con otros ejércitos árabes"; combatió a los británicos como parte de un grupo de guerrilleros antiimperialistas hasta su retirada en 1954"; y luego luchó contra los franceses en Argelia, donde se unió a los luchadores por la libertad argelinos (al-mudjahideen)". En el momento de la entrevista, residía en una aldea del noreste de Egipto, cerca del Canal de Suez, para poder "cruzar a Palestina cuando llegara el momento de liberarla":15



Figure 10: “Guevara in the Canal,” *Sabah el-Kheir*, Dec 28, 1967

Desde 1967, la lista de personas a las que se les ha denominado "el [insertar nacionalidad] Guevara" ha sido larga y sigue creciendo. En 1973, el líder del FPLP con sede en Gaza, Muhamed Mahmud al-Aswad, fue coronado "el Guevara de Gaza" tras su muerte en un enfrentamiento con el ejército israelí.

Más recientemente, Mina Daniel, uno de los activistas de la Primavera Árabe en Egipto, fue nombrado "el Che Guevara egipcio" tras ser asesinado el mismo día que el Che Guevara. La adoración de los militantes de izquierda por Guevara se reflejó en la cantidad de veces que su nombre se usó como apodo para diferentes militantes durante una operación. Los vestigios de esa adulación se pueden ver actualmente en la cantidad de niños y niñas nacidos entre finales de los años 60 y principios de los 80 que recibieron su nombre: Givara Al-Ali es un famoso youtuber sirio y Givara al-Budeiri es un conocido corresponsal de noticias palestino radicado en Cisjordania (ambos pronuncian sus nombres Jivara \ˈjiˈvärə\).

La obsesión con Guevara continúa hasta nuestros días. Durante los levantamientos de la Primavera Árabe, se podían ver carteles de Guevara en todas partes, desde Túnez hasta Yemen. Y las obras literarias que rinden homenaje a Guevara como un ícono inspirador siguen proliferando. Por ejemplo, en 2007, el poeta egipcio Abdul Rahman Yusuf escribió un poema para conmemorar el 40.º aniversario de Guevara titulado "Ala Bu'd Khuld wa Nisf" ("Una eternidad y media de distancia") y en 2012, la escritora saudí Maryam Saidi publicó su

Colección de cuentos, Nawaris Tshi Jivara (Las gaviotas del Che Guevara), en la que el cuento homónimo de la colección utiliza el retrato de Guevara como recurso argumental para hablar de la necesidad de perseguir los propios sueños, incluso si son inalcanzables.

¿Porqué Guevara?

En su artículo, “Resucitando al Che: Radicalismo, la Imaginación Transnacional y la Política de los Héroes”, Jeremy Prestholdt argumenta: “Los héroes fueron elementos cruciales en la imaginación transnacional radical porque condensaron numerosas virtudes en una sola figura humana. Como emblemas de la visión individual, el coraje o el sacrificio, los héroes reforzaron la retórica radical” (2012, 510); además, “El hecho de que el Che fuera a la vez un teórico de la revolución y un joven rebelde idealista garantizó que su perfil fuera multidimensional” (511).

Pero hay más razones por las que Guevara fue el héroe predilecto de varias generaciones de árabes. Entre 1959 y 1965, Guevara estuvo en la región más veces que Raúl y Fidel Castro juntos. En sus viajes, visitó diversas ciudades, pueblos y aldeas e interactuó con los lugareños, entregándoles regalos (principalmente puros cubanos) y hablando con ellos con la ayuda de un traductor. La generación de los años 60 de Kamshish, una aldea en particular del norte de Egipto, aún hoy cuelga con orgullo las fotos que se tomaron con Guevara durante su visita a su aldea (Ansari 1986, 34).

El Che también era un gran conocedor de la historia de algunos de los héroes más importantes de la liberación nacional de la región, algo que impresionó y halagó a sus colegas árabes. Cuando visitó Egipto por primera vez en 1959, una de sus principales peticiones fue reunirse con Abdel Karim el-Khattabi,18 para entonces un héroe anciano y exiliado. El renombrado líder político y militar del Rif había luchado contra los españoles y los franceses a principios del siglo XX y había establecido brevemente la República del Rif en la década de 1920 en lo que posteriormente se convertiría en el actual Marruecos. Como Guevara afirmó repetidamente, las estrategias militares de Al-Khattabi inspiraron a las guerrillas de la Sierra Maestra.¹⁹ Guevara también podría decirse que nunca fue tratado oficialmente con la misma reverencia que recibió Fidel Castro como estadista. Aunque apreciado y respetado, varios estadistas de izquierda de mayor trayectoria, como Nasser, lo consideraban joven y necesitado de orientación (Heikal 1973, 465). Esta actitud contribuyó a distanciarlo de las

instituciones gobernantes de la región y brindó el espacio para que escritores y artistas lo presentaran como un revolucionario antisistema, como he demostrado anteriormente.

Guevara el Ícono

En su artículo “Reinventando la traducción: Íconos y diccionarios”, Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch’ien (2016) explica que los íconos “poseen una especificidad no local”, ya que “ofrecen imágenes inmediatas que explican su significado de manera más eficiente 172 The Global South 13, n.° 1, sin generar conflictos culturales” (38); por ello, “la iconografía puede trascender todos los sistemas de escritura al proporcionar inteligibilidad universal” (40).

Todas las obras analizadas en este artículo abordan a Guevara como un ícono vaciado de su especificidad y significación local. Su acto final, entendido por los escritores como modesto y abnegado, es la única parte de su identidad histórica que lo acompaña. En el proceso, se imbuye de características que son más fáciles de comprender para el lector o público árabe. Al hacerlo, Guevara se integra en el arquetipo local de heroísmo y martirio. La incorporación del ícono al conjunto de obras sobre heroísmo añade una figura histórica más a su repertorio y ofrece otro espacio para defender, reafirmar o cuestionar esa noción tan localizada de heroísmo. Las obras literarias, al igual que las caricaturas, encajan mejor en la categoría de «compromiso» de la izquierda árabe en la literatura y el arte.20

Los escritores que introdujeron a Guevara en el mundo árabe eran todos izquierdistas o de tendencia izquierdista. La reencarnación de Guevara como un ícono antisistema en los círculos de los movimientos juveniles de izquierda internacionales contrasta marcadamente con su institucionalización en Cuba, donde forma parte integral de la "religión civil" del Estado castrista.

Esta disonancia entre la importancia local del Che cubano y la del Che internacional deja claro que la adopción del ícono árabe se produjo a través de izquierdistas del norte angloparlante y francés, con quienes, gracias a las redes coloniales previas, los izquierdistas árabes habían estado y seguían estando en contacto. Mapear las formas en que el Che, como ícono, viajó por el mundo ayuda a arrojar luz sobre los desafíos que enfrenta cualquier intento de crear redes culturales directas entre personas del Tercer Mundo.

Solidaridad con el Tercer Mundo

Como he demostrado hasta ahora, si bien se hicieron esfuerzos por crear y expandir redes políticas y económicas directas entre varias naciones árabes y Cuba, la esfera cultural continuó existiendo en mundos principalmente paralelos y desconectados. Como se ve en la historia de los médicos cubanos en Argelia, los encuentros más allá de lo político y económico se entendían a través de triangulaciones con el Norte (películas de Hollywood, relatos de viajes europeos, clases de historia mundial eurocéntricas, etc.).

Dichas triangulaciones aparecían en todo, desde tropos orientalistas explícitos hasta sutiles elecciones de palabras o suposiciones. Cuando Fidel Castro y Gamal Abdel Nasser se conocieron por primera vez el 25 de septiembre, En 1960, durante la 15.ª sesión de la Asamblea General de la ONU, celebrada en Nueva York, su encuentro se caracterizó simultáneamente por conexiones mutuas y tropiezos culturales. Al final de una reunión inusualmente larga, durante la cual Nasser y Castro coincidieron en cuestiones políticas y económicas, ambos intercambiaron regalos:

> Castro le regaló a Abdel Nasser una hermosa caja de piel de cocodrilo...
> Cuando el presidente expresó su admiración por la piel, Castro dijo:
> "Supongo que tienen muchos cocodrilos en Egipto", respondió el presidente:
> "Sí, tenemos exactamente cuatro, ¡todos están en el zoológico!" (al-Ahram, 28 de septiembre de 1960)

Esta simple anécdota está llena de subtexto. El regalo de Castro pretendía ser un símbolo de Cuba; en el mundo hispanohablante, la isla se conoce como El Caimán o El Cocodrilo en referencia a su forma, una referencia que Nasser desconocía. Sin embargo, ante las miradas inquisitivas de Nasser, Castro se preocupó de que su regalo hubiera fracasado, dada su suposición cultural —basada a su vez en relatos de viajes europeos muy extendidos— de que Egipto tenía "muchísimos" cocodrilos. A pesar de su respuesta jocosa, Nasser era sensible a ese estereotipo y, según Heikal, supuestamente se refirió a Castro con irritación como "cocodrilos Fidel" un par de veces después. Tales anécdotas ponen al descubierto las brechas culturales que limitaban cualquier acto significativo de solidaridad a lo económico y lo político.

La “solidaridad” fue el concepto clave en torno al cual se conectó el Tercer Mundo y buscó reorganizar las redes sociopolíticas y económicas existentes. Sin embargo, como han señalado muchos filósofos contemporáneos, es un término que “comparte el mismo destino que otros conceptos centrales dentro de la terminología ética y política: no estar definido de manera

vinculante y, en consecuencia, usarse de maneras muy diferentes y, a veces, muy contradictorias” (Bayertz, 1999, 3).

Para comprender cómo se veía específicamente la solidaridad con el Tercer Mundo, basta con consultar las recomendaciones de la Conferencia de Bandung, publicadas en un comunicado final el 24 de abril de 1955. La conferencia, de una semana de duración, “consideró problemas de interés y preocupación para los países de Asia y África y debatió formas y medios para que sus pueblos pudieran lograr una cooperación económica, cultural y política más plena” (Asia-África Habla desde Bandung 141). Las recomendaciones para la colaboración económica se centraron en cuestiones que contribuirían a promover el desarrollo económico (141-143). Las recomendaciones para la cooperación política enfatizaron la importancia de respetar la soberanía y la integridad territorial de todas las naciones (148) y la necesidad de abstenerse de intervenir o interferir en los asuntos internos de otro país (Asia-África Habla desde Bandung, 148). Estas mismas recomendaciones se reiteraron en posteriores conferencias afroasiáticas y tricontinentales.

La Solidaridad del Tercer Mundo se basó en una historia compartida de impotencia y marginación debido al control colonial e imperial, y en un objetivo colectivo de redención a través del desarrollo. Como explica B.R. Tomlinson en su artículo "¿Qué era el Tercer Mundo?", el Tercer Mundo se organizó en torno a lo que le faltaba y a lo que no era, en lugar de a lo que era (2003, 307).

Pero el intercambio cultural reside en espacios con puntos en común positivos, por lo que se necesita un contacto más directo y un intercambio de ideas. Los líderes de Bandung eran conscientes de ello y así lo reflejan sus recomendaciones para la cooperación cultural:

> 5. La Conferencia Asiático-Africana consideró que la promoción de la cooperación cultural entre los países de Asia y África debería orientarse hacia:
> (I) la adquisición de conocimientos sobre el país de cada uno;
> (II) el intercambio cultural mutuo; y
> (III) el intercambio de información.
> 6. La Conferencia Asiático-Africana opinó que, en esta etapa, los mejores resultados en materia de cooperación cultural se lograrían mediante acuerdos bilaterales para implementar sus recomendaciones y mediante la acción individual de cada país, *siempre que fuera posible y viable (*Asia-África, Discursos desde Bandung, 1955, p. 145; cursiva mía)

Además de los intercambios estudiantiles, otros actos de solidaridad cultural se relegaron a festivales juveniles y del libro, eventos deportivos y las ocasionales traducciones simbólicas de

algún libro de valor nacional.21 Durante estos festivales, las interacciones entre árabes y cubanos fueron facilitadas por intérpretes. La naturaleza oficial de estos festivales y los órganos de gobierno cada vez más autoritarios del Tercer Mundo significaron que muchos escritores y artistas que participaban en tales espacios tendían a ser comisarios intelectuales más interesados en representar adecuadamente a sus estados-nación que en desarrollar colaboraciones a largo plazo con sus pares.22 Durante la década de 1960, a los ciudadanos comunes de ambas partes del mundo no se les permitía viajar al extranjero sin un permiso oficial difícil de obtener o eran demasiado pobres para costearlo. Además, el desarrollo, tal como lo entendían líderes como Castro, Ben Bella y Nasser, priorizaba la economía sobre cualquier otra forma de actividad cultural. Esto a pesar de que tanto la revolución cubana como la egipcia canalizaron cuantiosos fondos hacia las esferas literaria y artística, estos proyectos culturales patrocinados por el Estado se consideraban algo que contribuía a la imagen del país a nivel nacional, regional e internacional, en lugar de una especialidad urgente y vital como la formación militar o médica. Así, en el caso de Cuba y los países árabes, se envió a estudiantes de ambas regiones a estudiar medicina o agricultura en lugar de composición musical o cine.23

Las limitaciones de la solidaridad, tal como se practicaba durante el auge del Tercer Mundo, plantean una serie de preguntas con las que sigo lidiando: ¿es posible crear nuevas redes laterales basadas en puntos en común y en la comprensión matizada del otro en ausencia de un lenguaje compartido? ¿Puede darse un flujo directo de personas e información cuando el acceso y la circulación de los recursos globales son inequitativos?

Los festivales juveniles y los programas de intercambio estudiantil no cambiaron radicalmente la forma en que las diversas regiones de África, Asia y Latinoamérica se conectaban y percibían culturalmente. Sin embargo, la idea de solidaridad con otras naciones previamente colonizadas permitió a las nuevas generaciones de jóvenes redefinir su autodefinición y cómo se relacionaban entre sí y con el resto del mundo.

Hoy en día, el movimiento de la juventud árabe y cubana sigue limitado, principalmente por razones económicas. Para quienes pueden viajar, ese potencial utópico de solidaridad cultural aún no realizado sigue existiendo. Varios escritores árabes han encontrado en las narrativas de viajes una forma profunda de interacción directa con Latinoamérica. Uno de ellos es el novelista y artista argelino Jaoudet Gassouma, quien publicó en 2017 una novela titulada Cubaniya (un juego de palabras entre Cuba y la palabra argelina para grupo). En cuanto a quienes no pueden

permitirse viajar, la proliferación desde finales de la década de 1970 de traducciones al árabe de novelas latinoamericanas les ha brindado el espacio para comprender e identificarse con una noción más compleja de Latinoamérica.

Notas y Fuentes

1. Jeffrey Byrne’s translation. Quoted in Mecca of Revolution (2016, 77)

2. For more on Cuba’s internationalist ventures see Gleijeses, et al (2007). For a detailed account of Egypt’s internationalism, see Aḥmad (1986).

3. See for instance, Fidel Castro, “Discurso pronunciado por el Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro Ruz en la cena oficial ofrecida por el Presidente de la República Argelina Democrática y Popular,” 6 de mayo del 2001, http://www.fidelcastro.cu/en/node/523.

4. See “Cuba to Exchange Doctors for Crude Oil from Algeria,” Middle East Monitor, Feb. 2, 2018, https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180202-cuba-to-exchange-doctors-for-crude-oil-from-algeria/.

5. One of the earliest instances of the hypercorrection of Guevara’s name can be found in a videorecording of Nasser seeing the Cuban envoy off at http://nasser.bibalex.org/MediaViewer.aspx?VideoID=VID-VID-7352-ar.

6. For more on that concept see his book, Falsafat al-Thawrah (The Philosophy of the Revolution) (1954).

7. Political cartoon by Abdel Sami’, published in Ruz al-Yusuf 1962, and reprinted without specific dates in http://nasser.org/NasserCulture/Arts_Main.aspx?x=7&TP=1&CS=0&lang=ar.

8. See, for instance, the seminal book by Aẓm (2007).

9. One good short survey is Al-Shetawi’s (1989).

10. Abdallah (1985) offers a good survey of radical student movements in Egypt. For a first hand account, see the memoir of Arwa Salih (2018), one of the student activists of the time.

11. Audio of one of the song’s earliest original renditions can be found at https://youtu.be/S2BWKAHH0c0.

12. All translations in this article are mine unless otherwise stated

12. All translations in this article are mine unless otherwise stated.

13. These are references to the many guerrilla and para-military leftist activities in Latin America as well as the rise of the Black Panther Party in the US.

14. For more on the critique of Arab intellectuals in the post-’67 era see Idris (1992).

15. “Guevara in the Canal,” Sabah el-Kheir, Dec 28, 1967.

16. Che Guevara was the only member of the Cuban envoy to visit the Gaza strip.

17. “Mina Daniel: Egypt’s Che Guevara,” Euronews, Feb. 20, 2012, https://www.euronews.com/2012/02/20/mina-daniel-egypt-s-che-guevara.

18. Muhammad Ali Yasin, “جيفارا ألهم الذي الريف أسطورة.. الخطابي الكريم عبد.” Jan. 21, 2019, https://blogs .4/4/2017/تشي-جيفارا-في-زيارة-لشيخ-بلحية-بيضاء/blogs/net.aljazeera.

19. For a detailed comparison of the guerrilla strategies used by the Riffians and the Cubans see Er’s (2017) article.

20. For a quick review of commitment (iltizam) in Arabic literature see Klemm’s (2000) article. For a more in-depth explanation and defense of iltizam see Abdulazim Anis and Mahmud Amin Al-’Alim’s (1989) seminal book on their contemporary Egyptian cultural scene.

21. For an example of Cuban-Algerian sports relations see chapter five in Sugden’s (1996) book. For a look into interactions during Third World youth festivals see Slobodian’s (2012) chapter.

22. Individual exceptions, of course, exist. Cuban poet and minister of culture, Fayad Jamis, for instance, had long standing relationships with several Arab intellectuals such as Mohamad Dakroub, the editorin-chief of Al-Tariq magazine (interview with Mohamad Dakroub).

23. Students went to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe to study literature, film, and the arts—not to other African, Asian, or Latin American countries. For a quick survey of Arab student state funded fellowships for international study see Katsakioris’s (2010) article, 85–106.

OBRAS CITADAS

Abdallah, Ahmad. 1985. The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt, 1923-1973. London: Al Saqi Books.

Anis, Abdulazim, and Mahmud A. Al-’Alim. 1989. Fi Al-Thaqafah Al-Misriyyah. Cairo: Dar al-Thaqafah al-Jadidah.

Aḥmad, Kamāl. 1986. Al-Nāṣirīyah Wa-Al-‘Ālam Al-Thālith. Dār Al-Riqqī.

Aḥmad, Muḥammad F. 1977. Al-ramz Wa-Al-Ramzīyah Fī Al-Shi‘r Al-Mu‘āsiṛ . al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Ma‘ārif.

Al-Shetawi, Mahmoud. 1989. “The Stage as a Political Arena: Arab Drama in the Aftermath of the 1967 War.” Australasian Drama Studies, no. 15, 47.

Ansari, Hamied. 1986. Egypt, the Stalled Society. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Asia-Africa Speaks from Bandung. 1985. Djakarta: The National Committee for the Commemoration of the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Asian-African Conference.

Azm, Sadiq J. 2007. al-Naqd al-Dhati Ba‘da al-Hazimah. Damascus: Dar Mamduh ‘Adwan lil-Nashr wa al-Tawzi‘.

Azmy, Hazem M. 2005. “Ruman, Mikhail.” In The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Date accessed 27 Dec. 2018.

Bayertz, Kurt. 1999. “Four Uses of ‘Solidarity.’” Solidarity. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Ben Bella, Ahmed. 1998. “Che Guevara, Cuba, and the Algerian Revolution.” The Militant 62, no. 4, 2 February 1998. http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/40/058.html.

Bseiso, Muin T. 2016. Mu‘īn Bisīsū: Al-Masrah al-Shi’ri. Bayrūt: Dar al-Farabi.

Byrne, Jeffrey J. 2016. Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order. New York: Oxford University Press.

Chanderli, Abdelkader. 1969. “Mission à Cuba,” El Moudjahid. 25 March 1960, ANA, GPRA-MAE, dossier 117.1.4. Qtd in Mecca of Revolution.

Ch’ien, Evelyn Nien-Ming. 2016. “Reinventing Translation: Icons and Dictionaries.” CR: The New Centennial Review 16, no. 1: 37-64.

Er, Mevliyar. 2017. “Abd-El-Krim Al-Khattabi: The Unknown Mentor of Che Guevara.” Terrorism and Political Violence 29, no. 1: 137-59.

Frankel, Max. 1960. “Nasser Asks Cuba to Join Neutrals; Invites Castro to Help Build ‘Cold War’ Buffer Castro Is Invited By Nasser to Join Neutral Alliance.” New York Times, September 26, 1960, 1 and 5.

Gleijeses, Piero.1996. “Cuba’s First Venture in Africa: Algeria, 1961-1965.” Journal of Latin American Studies 28, no. 1: 159-95.

Gleijeses, Piero; Jorge Risquet; Fernando Remírez. 2007. Cuba y África: Historia común de lucha y sangre. Editorial De Ciencias Sociales.

Gott, Richard. 2004. Cuba: A New History. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Heikal, Muḥammad Ḥasanayn. 1972. ‘Abd al-Nāṣir wa-al-‘ālam. Beirut: Dār al-Nahār lil-Nashr.

Idris, Samah.1992. Al-Muthaqqaf al-‘Arabī wa-al-Sulṭah: Baht fi Riwāyāt al-Tajribah al-Nāṣirīyah. Dār Al-Ādāb: Beirut.

Katsakioris, Constantin. 2010. “Soviet Lessons for Arab Modernization: Soviet Educational Aid to Arab Countries after 1956.” Journal of Modern European History 8, no. 1: 85-106.

Klemm, Verena. 2000. “Different Notions of Commitment (Iltizam) and Committed Literature

(al-adab al-multazim) in the Literary Circles of the Mashriq.” Arabic and Middle Eastern Literatures 3, no. 1: 51-62.
Ma, Shu-Yun. 1998. “Third World Studies, Development Studies and Post-Communist Studies: Definitions, Distance and Dynamism.” Third World Quarterly 19, no. 3: 339-56.
Meari, Lena. 2018. “Reading Che in Colonized Palestine.” NACLA Report on the Americas 50, no. 1: 49-55.
Nasser, Gamal Abdel. 1966. Falsafat Al-Thawrah. Cairo: Maṣlaḥat Al-Isti‘lāmāt.
Prestholdt, Jeremy. 2012. “Resurrecting Che: Radicalism, the Transnational Imagination, and the Politics of Heroes.” Journal of Global History 7, no. 3: 506-26.
Rūmān, Mīkhā’īl. 1972. Laylat Maṣra‘ Zhīfārā Al-‘aẓīm. al-Qāhirah: al-Hay’ah al-Miṣrīyah al-‘Ammah lil-Kitāb.
Salih, Arwa. 2018. The Stillborn: Notebooks of a Woman from the Student-Movement Generation in Egypt. Translated by Samah Selim. Kolkata: Seagull Books.
Slobodian, Quinn. 2012. “What Does Democracy Look Like? (And Why Would Anyone Want to Buy It?): Third World Demands and West German Responses at 1960s World Youth Festivals.”
In Cold War Cultures: Perspectives on Eastern and Western European Societies, edited by Annette Vowinckel, et al, 254-75. New York: Berghahn Books.
Sugden, John Peter. 1996. Boxing and Society: An International Analysis. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
Tomlinson, B. R. 2003. “What Was the Third World?” Journal of Contemporary History 38, no. 2 (April): 307-21.
Vélez, Federico. 2016. Latin American Revolutionaries and the Arab World: From the Suez Canal to the Arab Spring. Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge.

Eman S. Morsi, eman.s.morsi@dartmouth.edu, es profesora adjunta en Dartmouth College. Es investigadora de estudios literarios y culturales árabes y hispanoamericanos del siglo XX. Como investigadora de literatura comparada con formación en estudios regionales, su investigación se sitúa en la intersección de lo cultural y lo político. Su trabajo actual se centra en cuestiones de modernización y autoritarismo en el mundo árabe y Latinoamérica. Actualmente trabaja en su primer libro, titulado provisionalmente "Utopía Encarnada: Consumo Cotidiano y el Cuerpo en

Cuba y Egipto, 1950-1990", que rastrea el omnipresente tropo de carne/lahm —que significa tanto carne como carne en español/árabe— en diversas obras literarias y culturales durante y después de la creación de los estados socialistas de Cuba y Egipto para comprender mejor los legados paradójicos de las "revoluciones institucionalizadas" de mediados del siglo XX.

AMÉRICA LATINA EN LA REVISTA PALESTI *AL-KARMEL*

Shadi Rohana
El Colegio de México

Este artículo fue publicado originalmente en la revista Mashriq & Mahjar*, vol. 13 No.1 (2026), como parte del número especial* Locating Palestine in the Arab Americas. *Traducción del inglés al español por* Souffles*.*

AL-KARMEL, EDICIÓN NÚM. 3

Desde una perspectiva latinoamericana, el número más interesante de la revista literaria y cultural palestina *Al-Karmel* es el número 3. Publicado en Beirut en enero de 1982, apenas cinco meses antes del asedio israelí y de la expulsión de la Organización para la Liberación de Palestina (OLP) del Líbano, este número de *Al-Karmel* otorgó a América Latina un lugar privilegiado. En la sección “Awraq min Amrika al-Latiniyya” (Hojas desde América Latina), encontramos cuatro textos que conforman un dossier dedicado a importantes figuras literarias e intelectuales de la región:

1. “Maʿ Ghabriyil Gharsiya Marqiz fi al-maqha” (En el café con Gabriel García Márquez), una entrevista realizada por la autora y filósofa sirio-mexicana Ikram Antaki;
2. “Qasaʾid min al-Maksik” (Poemas desde México), también por Antaki, donde presenta y traduce a poetas mexicanos contemporáneos;
3. “Qissa min al-Baraghway” (Un cuento del Paraguay), traducción del francés de “Chepé Bolívar”, realizada por el autor tunecino Muhammad Rida al-Kafi;

> 4. “Shihada min al-Arjantin” (Un testimonio de Argentina), un ensayo sobre literatura y exilio escrito por Julio Cortázar y traducido por el poeta y traductor iraquí Kadhim Jihad Hassan. [1]

Previo al dossier, el número incluyó una extensa entrevista con Julio Cortázar en su domicilio de París, realizada por el novelista libanés Elias Khoury y el poeta y diplomático iraquí Shawqi Abdul Amir.[2]

¿Cómo llegaron a encargarse de compilar un dossier sobre América Latina? Además, ¿por qué se seleccionaron a estos autores latinoamericanos en particular para el dossier, así como otros que aparecieron en números posteriores de *Al-Karmel*?

Este artículo busca responder a estas preguntas centrales, centrándose en el número mencionado de *Al-Karmel*, aunque también aludiendo a números posteriores que, en menor medida, incluyeron a escritores e intelectuales latinoamericanos. Examino la presencia de autores latinoamericanos en la revista, analizo a quiénes refleja dicha presencia e indago cómo esta representación se entrelaza con un marco ideológico y político más amplio que modeló a la política editorial de *Al-Karmel*.

LOS DOSSIERS DE *AL-KARMEL*

El número 3 no fue la única ocasión en que *Al-Karmel* dedicó un dossier o sección especial a una región o tema en particular. Además de sus secciones habituales —generalmente organizadas por géneros literarios, periodísticos o más amplios—, la revista solía incluir apartados especiales dedicados a la literatura de un país específico, un tema determinado o un acontecimiento político urgente que requería atención. Por lo general, una nota editorial —ya

[1] أقواس ورسائل: أوراق من أمريكا اللاتينية، الكرمل، العدد ٣ (يناير ١٩٨٢): ٢٦١-٢٨٤.

Los dos primeros artículos del dossier ya pueden consultarse en traducción al español. Véase Shadi Rohana, “Una entrevista peregrina”, *Al-Zeytun: Revista iberoamericana de investigación, análisis y cultura palestina* 1 (abril de 2017): 52-55; y Shadi Rohana, “Canasta de poetas mexicanos para la Revolución palestina”, *Periódico de Poesía* 90 (junio de 2016), https://archivopdp.unam.mx/?view=article&id=4244&catid=46.

[2] إلياس خوري وشوقي عبد الأمير، "رسالتي بسيطة جدا.. والمنفى حقيبة كبيرة"، الكرمل، العدد ٣ (يناير ١٩٨٢): ٢٣٦-٢٦٠.

Para una traducción al español de la entrevista, acompañada de una presentación, véase Shadi Rohana, “Julio Cortázar entrevistado por la Revolución Palestina”, *Badebec: Revista del Centro de Estudios de Teoría y Crítica Literatura* 6, núm. 12 (marzo de 2017): 82-118.

fuera la introducción habitual escrita por Mahmud Darwish en la mayoría de los números o una declaración independiente— explicaba la decisión editorial de incluir el dossier.

Por ejemplo, los números 11 (1984) y 25 (1987) se dedicaron a la literatura y la cultura marroquíes, mientras que el número 14 (1984) presentó una selección de veinticinco cuentos contemporáneos de Egipto, seleccionados por el novelista y crítico egipcio Edwar al-Kharrat, bajo el título “Al-Adab fi Misr al-an” (La literatura en Egipto hoy). Previo un prólogo escrito por al-Kharrat, una breve nota firmada por *Al-Karmel* aclaraba que el dossier no estaba motivado por intenciones políticas, afirmando: “El Egipto interior ha estado ausente de nosotros, literariamente, durante un tiempo. Ahora, al recuperar lo que estuvo ausente —con todas sus corrientes—, nuestro único objetivo es examinar la escena creativa, sin ninguna otra intención”.[3] Este comentario aludía claramente al resentimiento que los palestinos, incluidos los editores de *Al-Karmel*, seguían sintiendo hacia Egipto tras el tratado de paz con Israel y la exclusión de la OLP, medida apoyada por algunos círculos intelectuales del país.

En cuanto a los dossiers dedicados a un tema, autor o acontecimiento político acuciante, el número 12 (1984) incluyó dos: uno sobre el filósofo francés Michel Foucault, publicado con motivo de su fallecimiento, y otro compuesto por conferencias sobre los imaginarios árabes y españoles en Al-Ándalus, impartidas por diversos intelectuales árabes e hispánicos en un simposio celebrado en Ronda, Andalucía, ese mismo año. El número 17 (1985) regresó Al-Ándalus con un dossier extraído de la segunda edición del simposio celebrado el año anterior.

En los números 27 y 29 (ambos de 1988), durante el apogeo de la Primera Intifada, *Al-Karmel* publicó un dossier en dos partes: “An Takuna Hunak” y “An Takuna Hunak (2)” (Estar allí), en que intelectuales europeos y árabes, invitados por la revista, respondieron en diversas formas literarias a la pregunta planteada por *Al-Karmel*: “¿Qué impacto ha tenido la Intifada palestina en la conciencia humana?”

En el caso del dossier latinoamericano del número 3, los cuatro artículos mencionados se agruparon en la sección “Aqwas wa rasa’il” (Paréntesis y cartas), mientras que la entrevista con Julio Cortázar constituyó el único artículo de la sección “al-Hiwar” (Entrevista o Diálogo). No existe una indicación clara de por qué la entrevista con Cortázar se presenta por separado del dossier de *Al-Karmel*. Una posible explicación es su extensión: la entrevista abarca exactamente veinticuatro páginas, el mismo número que el dossier completo. Por razones editoriales, es

[3] الكرمل، العدد ١٤(١٩٨٤): ٤.

posible que los editores hayan buscado mantener un equilibrio en la extensión de los artículos individuales del dossier (cuatro, siete, cinco y ocho páginas, respectivamente).

Además, el cuarto artículo del dossier, “Un testimonio desde Argentina”, como se mencionó anteriormente, es una traducción de un ensayo de Cortázar realizada por Kadhim Jihad Hassan. La inclusión de un texto de Cortázar en el dossier podría haber llevado a los editores a presentar la entrevista por separado, especialmente porque cada uno de los cuatro artículos estaba dedicado a un escritor latinoamericano diferente.

1982, AMÉRICA LATINA REFLEJA PALESTINA

En cuanto a las razones que llevaron a la publicación del dossier en este número y en ese momento concreto, ni la introducción de Mahmud Darwish, “Fi wasf halatna” (Al describir nuestra condición), ni ninguna otra anotación paratextual ofrecen una explicación clara. Sin embargo, el contexto histórico y cultural en ambos extremos geográficos —Beirut y América Latina— proporciona pistas importantes. En enero de 1982, la diáspora literaria palestina aún experimentaba lo que Refqa Abu-Remaileh denomina la “Edad de Oro en el exilio”.[4]

Aunque 1982 también presenció la invasión israelí del Líbano, el asedio de Beirut y la expulsión de la OLP —acontecimientos que marcaron el inicio de un “período de extrema fragmentación, dispersión y exilio complejo”—, antes de esta interrupción la “Edad de Oro” representó un “breve momento de concentración, consolidación e intensificación de la literatura y la cultura palestinas: una suerte de unión”.[5]

En el centro de esta “Edad de Oro” se encontraba Beirut, donde, como señala Abu-Remaileh, surgieron periódicos, instituciones y editoriales dirigidas por palestinos, atrayendo a intelectuales árabes palestinos como no palestinos, que apoyaron y contribuyeron a la causa palestina como propia. Este contexto explica la fuerte presencia de colaboradores no palestinos en *Al-Karmel* (llama la atención que ninguno de los colaboradores árabes del dossier latinoamericano ni de la entrevista con Cortázar era palestino), así como la capacidad y el interés de la revista por establecer vínculos con otras regiones que atravesaban luchas revolucionarias paralelas, como América Latina.

[4] Abu-Remaileh, “1967-1982” Literary Diasporas: A Golden Age in Exile”, en *Country of Words*, https://countryofwords.supdigital.org/periods/literary-diasporas-a-golden-age-in-exile/.

[5] Abu-Remaileh, “Post-Beirut Fragmentation” y “Golden Age in Exile”.

En cuanto a Latinoamérica, 1982 representó un momento revolucionario particularmente impactante, tanto política como literariamente, desde la perspectiva de la vida política e intelectual palestina. En aquel entonces, muchos países latinoamericanos, si no la mayoría, funcionaban como campos de batalla contra los designios imperialistas y coloniales de Estados Unidos. En el Cono Sur (Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Brasil y Paraguay), las dictaduras militares respaldadas por Estados Unidos aún ostentaban el poder y mantenían estrechos vínculos militares y de inteligencia con Israel. En Centroamérica, países como El Salvador y Guatemala se vieron envueltos en sangrientas guerras civiles entre regímenes apoyados por Estados Unidos y fuerzas antiimperialistas. Mientras tanto, los gobiernos revolucionarios de Cuba y Nicaragua buscaban principalmente resistir la influencia estadounidense e impedir la intervención directa.

En términos políticos, las décadas de 1970 y 1980 fueron testigos del auge y caída del pan-latinoamericanismo, tanto en los estados como en los movimientos revolucionarios. Literariamente, este espíritu alcanzó su máximo auge simbólico en 1982, cuando el colombiano Gabriel García Márquez recibió el Premio Nobel de Literatura. Tanto el título como el contenido de su discurso de aceptación del Nobel, “La soledad de América Latina”,[6] sugieren que el galandrón fue percibido —tanto por el autor como por la Academia Sueca— como un homenaje no solo a las letras colombianas, sino también a la literatura latinoamericana en su conjunto.

El discurso de García Márquez abordó las realidades contemporáneas de la opresión y la resistencia política y social en América Latina, así como las condiciones históricas que las produjeron, reflejando los temas de su propia obra y de la de sus contemporáneos latinoamericanos, aún agrupados por el mercado editorial europeo bajo la etiqueta del *Boom*. Para los palestinos, que entonces (como ahora) buscaban el reconocimiento internacional de su existencia, historia y causa política, este preciado reconocimiento de la literatura latinoamericana por parte del máximo exponente mundial del poder cultural ofreció un modelo exitoso para considerar y, potencialmente, emular.

Además, como señala Tahia Abdel Nasser, los palestinos no fueron los únicos escritores que recurrieron a la literatura latinoamericana en busca de inspiración. Los escritores árabes en general

[6] Gabriel García Márquez, “La soledad de América Latina”, Discurso de aceptación del Nobel, 8 de diciembre de 1982, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1982/marquez/25603-gabriel-garcia-marquez-nobel-lecture-spanish/.

> se inspiraron en la literatura y la iconografía política latinoamericana en numerosas ocasiones, renovando vínculos a lo largo de distintos momentos históricos. Lo hicieron en el marco de dos factores importantes: por un lado, la literatura latinoamericana tenía una amplia circulación en el mundo árabe; por otro lado, una generación de escritores árabes de izquierda se involucró con los movimientos del Tercer Mundo. La literatura latinoamericana reflejaba luchas políticas compartidas contra el colonialismo y el neoimperialismo. Otro atractivo para estos escritores fue una literatura tropical y exótica que fomentaba la solidaridad transnacional. La traducción y circulación de las novelas del *Boom* latinoamericano en el mundo árabe tuvo efectos de gran alcance, incluyendo adaptaciones del estilo del realismo mágico, relaciones intertextuales y reelaboraciones de novelas conocidas.[7]

Como revista cultural palestina cuyos colaboradores eran predominantemente intelectuales árabes de izquierda alineados con la causa palestina, *Al-Karmel* consideraba a América Latina un modelo tanto estético como político. ¿Quiénes fueron, entonces, los intelectuales árabes que contribuyeron al número 3 de *Al-Karmel*, centrado en Latinoamérica? Me centraré aquí en dos escritores que, tanto por su obra literaria como por sus trayectorias intelectuales y personales, resultaron fundamentales para la proyección de *Al-Karmel* hacia Latinoamérica: Elias Khoury e Ikram Antaki.

LOS CONTRIBUIDORES: ELIAS KHOURY E IKRAM ANTAKI

¿Cómo surgió el dossier sobre América del número 3 de *Al-Karmel*, que incluye la entrevista con Julio Cortázar? Más allá del interés general de la revista por Latinoamérica, la naturaleza de las tres piezas “originales” —es decir, aquellas que no son simplemente traducciones de textos ya existentes— sugiere que la iniciativa personal y el trabajo en red jugaron un papel clave en su creación e inclusión. Me refiero a la entrevista realizada por Elias Khoury y Shawqi Abdul Amir con Julio Cortázar, así como a las dos contribuciones de Ikram Antaki: la entrevista con Gabriel García Márquez y la presentación y traducción de diversos poemas de México.

[7] Tahia Abdel Nasser, *Latin America and Arab Literature: Transcontinental Exchanges* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), 115.

Si bien la obra literaria y el compromiso intelectual de Shawqi Abdul Amir, el poeta iraquí recientemente nombrado director del Instituto del Mundo Árabe en París, aún están por explorar, la fascinación y curiosidad de Elias Khoury por la literatura latinoamericana son bien conocidas en los círculos literarios árabes. El escritor libanés insinúa este interés repetidamente en sus entrevistas y obras literarias, en particular en su novela *Majmaʿ al-asrar* (1994), que reelabora la *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* (1981) de García Márquez. Además, a través de su trabajo editorial con múltiples publicaciones, Khoury desempeñó un papel clave en la presentación de muchos autores latinoamericanos al público lector árabe. Como curador de la serie *Dhakirat al-Shuʿub* (*La memoria de los pueblos*) para el Mu’assasat al-Abhath al-ʿarabiyya (Instituto Árabe de Investigación), supervisó las traducciones al árabe de obras como *Las armas secretas* de Julio Cortázar y *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* de Carlos Fuentes. Además, en varias ocasiones, Khoury se refirió a Julio Cortázar como su “amigo” durante su estancia en París a principios de la década de 1970 y en visitas posteriores.[8]

Así, en la introducción a su entrevista de 1982 con Cortázar, Shawqi Abdul Amir y Elias Khoury relatan brevemente su visita a la casa de Cortázar en París: “Lo encontramos en París... Es alto, y tuvimos en una larga charla con él en su casa, cuyas paredes, cubiertas de bibliotecas, están llenas de muchos discos y pocos libros”. Los entrevistadores libanés e iraquí enfatizan que esta pieza marca la primera vez que Cortázar se lee en árabe: “Cortázar, quien dice haber tenido influencia de *Las mil y una noches* y quien no sabe nada de literatura árabe contemporánea, habla por vez primera, a través de *Al-Karmel*, con el lector árabe”.[9] Aunque no hay indicios sobre qué idioma utilizaron durante la entrevista, se puede asumir razonablemente que hablaron en francés, lengua que compartían.

También es probable que la entrevista fuera grabada y posteriormente transcrita por una cuarta persona o por uno de los entrevistadores. Esto lo sugiere la forma en que el título del libro de cuentos de Cortázar, *Bestiario*, se tradujo al árabe como *Ghurfat al-malabis*,[10] es decir, confundiéndose con “vestuario”.

[8] Jeremy Harding, “Jeremy Harding Goes to Beirut to Meet the Novelist Elias Khoury”, *London Review of Books* 28, no. 22 (16 November 2006), https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v28/n22/jeremy-harding/jeremy-harding-goes-to-beirut-to-meet-the-novelist-elias-khoury.

[9] إلياس خوري وشوقي عبد الأمير، "رسالتي بسيطة جداً.. والمنفى حقيبة كبيرة"، الكرمل، العدد ٣ (يناير ١٩٨٢): ٢٣٦-٢٣٧.

[10] إلياس خوري وشوقي عبد الأمير، "رسالتي بسيطة جداً.. والمنفى حقيبة كبيرة"، الكرمل، العدد ٣ (يناير ١٩٨٢): ٢٣٩

La escritora sirio-mexicana Ikram Antaki, en cambio, entrevistó a Gabriel García Márquez en español, en un café de la Ciudad de México. En su segunda contribución al dossier, “Poemas desde México”, Antaki presenta traducciones al árabe de ocho poetas mexicanos —muchos de los cuales siguen siendo prácticamente desconocidos en el mundo árabe hasta la fecha—, cada una acompañada de una breve viñeta que refleja su relación personal con el poeta. Las selecciones, junto con sus comentarios, subrayan el profundo conocimiento de Antaki y su activa participación en los círculos literarios de la Ciudad de México, ciudad a la que emigró el 14 de diciembre de 1975 y donde vivió hasta su fallecimiento en 2000.[11]

Nacida en Damasco el 9 de julio de 1948, Ikram Antaki no fue una voz típica de *adab al-máhyar* –literatura de la diáspora– en Latinoamérica. Mientras que la literatura árabe del *máhyar* era en gran medida un esfuerzo colectivo de escritores varones, quienes se agrupaban en torno a revistas literarias específicas en árabe o en medios comunitarios bilingües, a menudo al margen y con poca o ninguna interacción con la escena literaria e intelectual local, Antaki se convirtió en una intelectual y crítica activa en la esfera pública mexicana, plenamente inmersa al participar en debates filosóficos, políticos e históricos en el idioma nacional, el español.

Antaki era una invitada frecuente en importantes programas de radio y televisión. En la década de 1990, también presentó un programa semanal en Radio Red titulado *El banquete de Platón*, cuyo contenido se publicó posteriormente en una serie de libros de varios volúmenes bajo el mismo título. Antaki era conocida por su aguda crítica de la sociedad mexicana, postura que le valió numerosas polémicas, como se refleja en su ensayo alegórico *El pueblo que no quería nacer*, publicado por primera vez de forma anónima en 1996 bajo el seudónimo de Polibio de Arcadia y republicado póstumamente bajo su propio nombre en 2010. Además, escribió varios libros de poesía y novelas en español, así como dos obras reeditadas sobre temas árabes y andaluces: *El espíritu de Córdoba* (1994) y *La cultura de los árabes* (1989).

En comparación con su extensa obra en español, la producción de Ikram Antaki en árabe es muy limitada. Aparte de sus dos contribuciones al dossier latinoamericano de *Al-Karmel* en 1982, solo publicó un poemario en árabe: *Mughamarat Hanna al-Muʿafa hatta mawtih*, que apareció en Beirut con Dar al-Farabi en 1975, antes de su llegada a México.

[11] “14 de diciembre de 1975 llega a México Ikram Antaki donde vive hasta su muerte”, Instituto Mexicano de la Radio (IMER), 14 de diciembre de 2017, https://www.imer.mx/14-de-diciembre-de-1975-llega-a-mexico-ikram-antaki-donde-vive-hasta-su-muerte/.

Como le explicó Ikram Antaki al novelista sirio Nabil al-Mulhim durante su visita a Damasco tras emigrar a México: “Allí, en México, no hablo árabe ni leo en árabe. Esta es también la primera vez que regreso a Siria después de veinte años de ausencia. Y ahora regreso para ajustar cuentas con mi alma”.[12]

La conexión de Antaki con *Al-Karmel* y la causa palestina se remonta a 1980, cuando asistió a la primera conmemoración anual de la Revolución sandinista en Managua, Nicaragua. Dada su orientación política de izquierdas en ese momento —había sido activista del Partido Comunista Sirio antes de salir de Siria[13]—, era natural que visitara el país centroamericano y participara en las celebraciones. Más aún, como izquierdista árabe, buscó a la delegación palestina y al líder de la OLP, Yasser Arafat, quien también estaba presente, y le realizó una entrevista documentada en el libro *Encuentro con Yasser Arafat* (1980). Es fácil imaginar que, como resultado de este encuentro y del fervor revolucionario del momento, Antaki fue invitada —o se ofreció voluntariamente— a colaborar con el portavoz intelectual de la OLP, *Al-Karmel*.

AL-KARMEL Y LA REVOLUCIÓN PALESTINA

Con este conocimiento contextual bien establecido, la presencia de un libanés, dos iraquíes y una siria-mexicana en una revista literaria y cultural palestina no debería sorprender. Además, el editor de la revista *Al-Karmel*, el poeta y novelista kurdo sirio Salim Barakat —segundo en la línea editorial después del director de la revista, el poeta palestino Mahmud Darwish—, tampoco era palestino. De hecho, un repaso de los colaboradores árabes de *Al-Karmel* muestra que los palestinos constituían una minoría entre quienes escribían en esta revista palestina.

El primer número de *Al-Karmel* se publicó en 1981 en Beirut, entonces sede de la OLP y centro de sus operaciones militares, políticas y culturales. Durante sus veintiocho años de existencia, la revista acompañó a sus dos principales editores, Mahmud Darwish y Salim Barakat, a sus sucesivos lugares de exilio. Tras el asedio israelí a Beirut en 1982, que culminó en la expulsión de combatientes, intelectuales y dirigentes de la OLP de la ciudad hacia un destino

[12] نبيل الملحم، "إكرام أنطاكي: القدم والخطوة"، الجديد، ١ يناير ٢٠٢٣.

[13] ميسون شقير، "إكرام أنطاكي.. دمشقية نقلت إلى المكسيك روح قرطبة"، ضفة ثالثة، ٢٦ نوفمبر ٢٠١٩, https://diffah.alaraby.co.uk/diffah/print//revisions/2019/11/26/إكرام-أنطاكي-دمشقية-نقلت-إلى-المكسيك-روح-قرطبة.

incierto, la publicación de *Al-Karmel* se trasladó sin interrupción a la isla de Chipre, nuevo lugar de exilio de Barakat.

La revista continuó publicándose desde Chipre hasta que la OLP y el Estado de Israel firmaron los Acuerdos de Oslo en 1993, tras la cual Mahmud Darwish renunció posteriormente al Comité Ejecutivo de la OLP en señal de protesta. En consecuencia, *Al-Karmel* suspendió temporalmente su publicación hasta 1997, poco después de que Darwish decidiera establecerse en Ramala, Cisjordania, y reconciliar sus diferencias ideológicas y políticas con la OLP y la recién creada Autoridad Palestina.

Como resultado, *Al-Karmel* reanudó su publicación desde la ciudad ocupada de Ramala, aunque ya sin la colaboración editorial de Salim Barakat, y continuó apareciendo hasta su último número en 2006, dos años antes del fallecimiento de Mahmud Darwish.

Aunque *Al-Karmel* era el portavoz oficial de la Unión General de Escritores y Periodistas Palestinos (Al-Ittihad al-ʿam li-al-kuttab wa-al-sahafiyyin al-filastiniyyin), el interés intelectual de la revista no se limitaba a asuntos palestinos. Un análisis de los índices de todos sus números muestra que, junto con colaboradores palestinos procedentes de “todas las geografías literarias palestinas dispersas” –son palabras de Rifqa Abu-Remaileh–, participó también una amplia gama de autores árabes que escribieron no solo sobre la lucha y la literatura palestinas, sino que analizaron igualmente la producción literaria de sus propios países (como en los dossiers sobre Marruecos y Egipto mencionados anteriormente).

Al mismo tiempo, la traducción fue fundamental para el proyecto intelectual de *Al-Karmel*. La revista publicó traducciones de autores literarios e intelectuales europeos, especialmente de los círculos parisinos, como Tzvetan Todorov, Juan Goytisolo, Jean Genet y Michel Foucault, además de un número relativamente menor de escritores latinoamericanos. Como mostraré más adelante, estas características fueron fundamentales para la manera en que la revista abordó algunos de los dilemas políticos y literarios más urgentes de su tiempo.

Sin embargo, la inclusión en *Al-Karmel* de contribuciones muy diversas procedentes de todo el mundo árabe y de la diáspora, así como su perspectiva internacionalista, se explica por la causa política que defendía la revista. Desde el principio, *Al-Karmel* se convirtió en la voz literaria, cultural e intelectual oficial de lo que se conoció como la Revolución Palestina, término

con el que la OLP identificó su lucha armada contra el Estado de Israel y sus aliados en la región.[14] A pesar de su naturaleza nacionalista, la Revolución Palestina atrajo la atención, la solidaridad y el apoyo de innumerables personas y organizaciones árabes e internacionales.

Así, entre las bases de la revolución se encontraban, codo con codo, combatientes e intelectuales palestinos, árabes y extranjeros que luchaban y escribían por la liberación de Palestina. *Al-Karmel*, como portavoz literario de la Revolución Palestina, pretendía reflejar el internacionalismo y el panarabismo de la causa palestina a través de sus escritos y traducciones literarias. En este contexto, los combatientes e intelectuales árabes no palestinos que se unieron a la revolución no fueron concebidos como extranjeros solidarios con la causa, sino como parte integrante de ella.[15]

Por lo tanto, no se hicieron distinciones entre árabes palestinos y no palestinos dentro de las múltiples facciones de la OLP (Frente Popular para la Liberación de Palestina, Frente Democrático para la Liberación de Palestina, Frente de Liberación Árabe y, en cierta medida, Fatah). Este sentimiento de unidad se trasladó a *Al-Karmel*, ya que los escritores árabes de la revista también se consideraban parte de la revolución.

Este panarabismo de la causa palestina impregna el mencionado tercer número de *Al-Karmel*, ya que los colaboradores árabes del dossier "Hojas desde América Latina" actuaron como emisarios y representantes de la Revolución Palestina, a pesar de no ser palestinos. Con este compromiso políticos en mente, no sorprende el siguiente diálogo publicado entre la sirio-mexicana Ikram Antaki y el colombiano Gabriel García Márquez:

> Dije [Antaki]: ¿Hasta qué punto usted está dispuesto a apoyarnos?

[14] El término *al-Thawra al-Filasṭīniyya*, la *Revolución Palestina*, fue adoptado en la década de 1960 por las facciones de la OLP. Sin embargo, su facción dominante, Fatah, sostuvo retrospectivamente que el inicio de la revolución tuvo lugar en la madrugada del 1 de enero de 1965, cuando el ala militar del movimiento, al-ʿAsifa, llevó a cabo su primera operación militar en Israel (véase “The Palestinian National Liberation Movement – Fatah (I), 1957-1990”, *Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question*, Institute of Palestine Studies and the Palestine Museum, https://www.palquest.org/en/highlight/23292/palestinian-national-liberation-movement-–-fatah-i). Con el uso de este término, la OLP buscó alinearse con los movimientos revolucionarios en otras partes del mundo.

[15] “Palestine in the World: Palestinian Solidarity and Solidarity with Palestine”, *Teach the Revolution*, http://learnpalestine.qeh.ox.ac.uk/teach/week/10.

> Dijo [García Márquez]: Hasta la última gota que tengo.
> Dije: ¿Hará una declaración pública?
> Dijo: Hay miles de maneras para apoyarles a ustedes.[16]

García Márquez reiteró su apoyo a la causa palestina un año después de esa entrevista. Apenas once días después de la masacre de Sabra y Chatila, y dos meses antes de recibir el Premio Nobel de Literatura, lamentó los recientes acontecimientos en su artículo “Beguin y Sharon, premios ‘Nobel de la muerte’”, publicado en el periódico colombiano *El Espectador* el 29 de septiembre de 1982. Allí escribió: “Si existiera el Premio Nobel de la Muerte, este año lo tendrían asegurado sin rivales el mismo Menájem Beguin y su asesino profesional Ariel Sharon”. García Márquez señaló además que, aunque muchos de sus amigos desean condenar públicamente la masacre cometida por las Fuerzas Libanesas respaldadas por Israel, no se atrevían a alzar la voz “por temor a ser señalados de antisemitas… [mientras que] yo no le temo al chantaje del antisemitismo”.

En este contexto, cabe preguntarse si la exigencia de Ikram Antaki de que García Márquez manifiesta públicamente su apoyo a los palestinos durante la entrevista de *Al-Karmel* pudo haber influido en la contundencia de sus protestas contra la masacre de Sabra y Chatila.

En consecuencia, en el mismo número de *Al-Karmel* de 1982, el libanés Elias Khoury y el iraquí Shawqi Abdul Amir también actuaron como emisarios y representantes de la Revolución Palestina en su búsqueda de apoyo público del novelista y cuentista argentino Julio Cortázar. Aunque la entrevista se centró casi por completo en temas literarios, con escasa mención a la política a lo largo de sus veinticinco páginas, Khoury y Abdul Amir lograron preguntarle al escritor argentino:

> –Una última y pequeña pregunta: ¿Cuál es su relación con la Revolución Palestina?

A lo que Cortázar respondió:

[16] إكرام أنطاكي، " مع غابرييل غارسيا ماركيز في المقهى..."، الكرمل، العدد ٣ (يناير ١٩٨٢): ٢٦٢.

> –Como es una pregunta pequeña, mi respuesta será pequeña, pero llena de verdad. Vos me preguntás por mi relación con la Revolución Palestina, y te digo que es una relación de solidaridad, simpatía y amor. Apoyo a su causa desde lo más profundo de mi ser.[17]

Sin embargo, como ya se mencionó, las veinticinco páginas de la entrevista de Khoury y Abdul Amir con Cortázar abordaron la política y la causa palestina en muy poca medida. Los entrevistadores plantearon cuestiones sobre Palestina únicamente una vez, y solo al final de la conversación. De hecho, el encuentro entre el poeta iraquí, el novelista libanés y el escritor argentino se centró principalmente en temas literarios: la traducción literaria, los rituales de escritura, la escritura en lengua extranjera (discuten los escritos de Conrad, Eugène Ionesco y George Schéhade) y la obra de Jorge Luis Borges.

Además, aunque ninguno de los escritos de Cortázar había sido traducido al árabe antes de enero de 1982 –y por lo tanto el autor era prácticamente desconocido para los lectores árabes–, una parte sustancial de la entrevista se centró en cuentos y novelas específicas escritos por él a los que los lectores de *Al-Karmel* no tenían acceso en su lengua materna. Es probable que los entrevistadores los hubieran leído en francés. En otras palabras, *Al-Karmel* actuó como un agente literario voluntario, promoviendo a autores cuya obra, según sus editores, merecía ser traducida al árabe tanto por su relevancia local (en este caso, latinoamericana) como internacional, así como por su postura política en apoyo a la causa palestina.

Julio Cortázar no fue el único escritor latinoamericano cuya obra no había sido traducida ni publicada en árabe y que apareció en *Al-Karmel*. En números anteriores y posteriores de la revista también se realizaron entrevistas originales y traducidas con otros autores latinoamericanos, en las que se analizaban sus obras literarias específicas sin necesidad de que estuvieran disponibles previamente en árabe. Tal es el caso, por ejemplo, de los escritores mexicanos Carlos Fuentes y Octavio Paz, así como del escritor cubano Severo Sarduy, quienes fueron entrevistados por *Al-Karmel* antes de que sus obras literarias estuvieran traducidas al árabe.

¿Qué tenían en común todos estos escritores latinoamericanos cuya obra fue traducida y entrevistada por *Al-Karmel*? ¿Por qué aparecieron ellos en las páginas de la revista palestina y otros no? Para responder a estas preguntas, la siguiente sección mostrará cómo las obras de estos

[17] إلياس خوري وشوقي عبد الأمير، "رسالتي بسيطة جداً.. والمنفى حقيبة كبيرة"، الكرمل، العدد ٣ (يناير ١٩٨٢): ٢٦٠.

autores —su reconocimiento internacional y sus posturas frente a los procesos políticos en sus propios países— influyeron en las decisiones editoriales de *Al-Karmel* al seleccionar a quiénes entrevistar y traducir al árabe.

EN BUSCA DE AMÉRICA LATINA

Escritores como Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, Julio Cortázar y, en menor medida, Octavio Paz se identificaron con el fenómeno literario conocido durante las décadas de 1960, 1970 y 1980 como el Boom latinoamericano.[18] Este fenómeno literario y comercial fue, en muchos sentidos, más europeo que latinoamericano, pues marcó la repentina y estridente irrupción de escritores latinoamericanos en el mundo editorial, el periodismo y la vida intelectual europeas. A partir de entonces, la literatura latinoamericana comenzó a percibirse como un corpus que, en su conjunto, parecía “nuevo e interesante, no solo a los ojos de los sino a los lectores del resto de los lectores del planeta”.[19] Para la Revolución Palestina y su revista literaria *Al-Karmel*, varios aspectos del fenómeno resultaron especialmente significativos y, por lo tanto, dignos de atención.

En primer lugar, la mayoría de los escritores del Boom latinoamericano, al menos en sus inicios, se identificaron plenamente con las causas políticas y sociales de su subcontinente. Irrumpieron en la escena literaria europea durante lo que se ha descirto como el “momento más utópico de su historia moderna”,[20] es decir, la primera década posterior al triunfo de la Revolución Cubana.[21] Su exilio en Europa estuvo motivado, en muchos casos, por la “necesidad de escapar de situaciones oprobiosas, asfixiantes y hasta peligrosas” en sus propios países.[22]

En el caso de Gabriel García Márquez y Julio Cortázar, por ejemplo, ambos apoyaron públicamente las revoluciones cubana y nicaragüense, así como la resistencia chilena contra la dictadura de Augusto Pinochet. Los dos defendieron repetidamente estas causas en la prensa

[18] El término “Boom latinoamericano” fue acuñado por el traductor y crítico literario chileno Luis Harss en un artículo publicado en agosto de 1966 en la revista bonaerense *Primera Plana*. Véase Aguirre et al., *Las cartas del Boom* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 2023).

[19] Aguirre et al., 14.

[20] Aguirre et al., 14.

[21] Como señalan Aguirre et al., no es de sorprender que los escritores del Boom, como colectivo, comenzaron a desintegrarse en el momento en que empezaron a aparecer diferencias políticas en relación con el régimen cubano.

[22] Aguirre et al., 30.

internacional y en discursos pronunciados con motivo de premios literarios, e incluso en ocasiones actuaron como emisarios informales ante líderes mundiales.

Para la Revolución Palestina, el contacto con estos escritores latinoamericanos se desarrolló en paralelo a los esfuerzos de la OLP por establecer alianzas trans-Tercer Mundo con causas políticas afines. Así, Yasser Arafat y posiblemente Mahmud Darwish estuvieron presentes en Managua durante la primera conmemoración de la Revolución Nicaragüense en 1980 –hecho documentado en *Encuentro con Yasser Arafat* de Ikram Antaki–, mientras que Cuba fue el primer país latinoamericano en romper relaciones diplomáticas con Israel y permitir la apertura de una representación de la OLP en su territorio.

En segundo lugar, el reconocimiento internacional de estos comprometidos escritores latinoamericanos –que culminó con la concesión del Premio Nobel de Literatura a Gabriel García Márquez en 1982– representó un ejemplo literario y político de gran relevancia para la Revolución Palestina. Cabe decir que el discurso de aceptación de García Márquez fue traducido inmediatamente al árabe y publicado en *Al-Karmel*.[23] Para la Revolución Palestina, el prestigio alcanzado por estos autores ofrecía un modelo de legitimidad cultural que podía contribuir también a reforzar el reconocimiento internacional de la existencia, la lucha y la causa del pueblo palestino. Si bien las obras de estos exitosos autores e intelectuales latinoamericanos se integraron en la corriente literaria dominante y contribuyeron a convertirlos en algunos de los escritores más influyentes del mundo, sus opiniones políticas también los situaron en las portadas de los principales periódicos europeos.

En tercer lugar, estos escritores latinoamericanos de renombre internacional ofrecieron un modelo literario de una estética capaz de reconciliar la política y el arte. Mientras los intelectuales europeos debatían la relación entre la literatura y el compromiso político, los escritores cercanos a la Revolución Palestina sostenían que todo autor debía apoyar la causa política de su pueblo o, en otras palabras, “llevar dos sandías bajo el mismo brazo: la sandía de la política y la de la literatura”, para usar la conocida metáfora del escritor y político palestino Emile Habibi.[24] En consecuencia, el compromiso político –especialmente el apoyo a la Revolución Palestina– debía manifestarse también en la obra literaria. Desde esta perspectiva,

[23] غابرييل غارسيا ماركيز، "عزلة أمريكا اللاتينية"، ترجمة سلوى نعميمي، الكرمل، العدد ٧ (يناير ١٩٨٣): ٣٦٧-٣٧١.

[24] إميل حبيبي، سرايا بنت الغول (خرافية)، رياض الراشي للكتب والنشر، لندن-قبرص: ١٢.

muchos escritores árabes percibieron que los autores latinoamericanos habían logrado encontrar una forma estética para reconciliar de conciliar las exigencias del arte con las de la política. Por lo tanto, la revista *Al-Karmel* se puso en contacto con varios de estos escritores y les planeó directamente esta cuestión, como lo demuestran las siguientes preguntas:

> [Kadhim Jihad a Severo Sarduy:] Por favor, cuéntenos sobre las revoluciones lingüísticas y literarias que ustedes, los latinoamericanos, han llevado a cabo. Lo maravilloso aquí es que pasaron de ser colonizados a convertirse –como dice Carlos Fuentes– en colonizadores de la lengua española.[25]

> [Kadhim Jihad a Carlos Fuentes:] En los últimos años hemos escuchado voces que exigen una contribución plena a las experiencias revolucionarias en América Latina (como Gabriel García Márquez y Julio Cortáza), y otras voces –entre ellas las de Octavio Paz y Vargas Llosa– que cuestionan los logros revolucionarios en el continente. ¿Cuál es su postura?[26]

> [Elias Khoury y Shawqi Abdul Amir a Julio Cortázar:] El Che Guevara, que también era argentino, fue un ejemplo de flujo revolucionario en América Latina. ¿Cuál fue la influencia que ejerció sobre usted?

Por supuesto, no se halaron soluciones fáciles ni prefabricadas. No obstante, al formular estas preguntas a los escritores latinoamericanos, *Al-Karmel* buscaba indagar posibles soluciones estéticas a los dilemas que enfrentaban los escritores palestinos y árabes al intentar vincular, a través de la literatura, su obra con las causas políticas de sus propias regiones.

Si bien las causas políticas respaldadas por estos escritores latinoamericanos –específicamente las revoluciones cubana y nicaragüense– habían alcanzado en ese momento logros tangibles, la causa palestina permanecía, entonces como ahora, a la deriva en un mar de incertidumbre. Por ello, a través de estas indagaciones, los editores y contribuidores de *Al-*

[25] سيفيرو ساردوي وكاظم جهاد، الباروكية اقتصاد آخر، الكرمل، العدد ٣٨ (أكتوبر ١٩٩٠): ٩١.

[26] كاظم جهاد، "كارلوس فونتيس: تقول الرواية ما يحجبه التاريخ"، الكرمل، العدد ١٨ (أكتوبر ١٩٨٥): ١١٣.

Karmel también buscaban identificar formas en que la contribución estética de los escritores pudiera respaldar y fortalecer la causa política.

EN BUSCA DE UNIVERSALIDAD

La insistencia de la Revolución Palestina en interrogar e interactuar con la vida literaria y los debates de otra cultura –en este caso, Latinoamérica–constituyó, en su momento, un esfuerzo cultural en sí mismo.

Entonces, como ahora, los palestinos se encontraban inmersos en una agotadora lucha por la liberación nacional, sometidos a constantes bombardeos, asesinatos y acoso por parte de Israel y los regímenes árabes; enfrentándose a la negación de su identidad nacional y a un exilio forzado y permanente. Lo que estaba en juego, para *Al-Karmel*, eran los deseos palestinos de normalidad y de participar en los debates literarios y culturales contemporáneos con el resto del mundo.

Como se mencionó anteriormente, la política y la causa palestina no fueron el tema central de la mayoría de las entrevistas. Un análisis de los números de *Al-Karmel* entre 1981 y 2008 muestra que la revista se centró principalmente en difundir la literatura mundial y exponer a los lectores árabes a temas y debates contemporáneos de otras regiones que resultaban relevantes para la vida intelectual, cultural y literaria árabe. Dado el enfoque primordial de la revista en la literatura, *Al-Karmel* no excluyó necesariamente, como podría esperarse, la traducción o la publicación de escritos sobre autores cuyas posturas políticas se alineaban con el apoyo a la ocupación israelí y al sionismo. Por ejemplo, la revista presentó a escritores como Jorge Luis Borges y Octavio Paz,[27] ambos conocidos por sus opiniones proisraelíes y galandronados con el el Premio Jerusalén de la Municipalidad israelí de la ciudad ocupada de Jerusalén en 1971 y 1977, respectivamente.[28]

[27] Véase, por ejemplo, los siguientes artículos de Octavio Paz que fueron traducidos al árabe por *Al-Karmel*: القوس والقيثارة (الكرمل ٨٠، ٢٠٠٤) y عوالم بورخيس الخيالية (الكرمل ٥٧، ١٩٩٨).

[28] Véase Ángel Alberto Adame, “El Premio Jerusalén de 1977”, *Zona Paz*, https://zonaoctaviopaz.com/detalle_conversacion/480/el-premio-jerusalen-de-1977; y el catálogo de la exhibición *Borges e Israel: diálogo* de la Biblioteca Nacional de la República Argentina (Buenos Aires: Biblioteca Nacional, 2022).

LA LITERATURA COMO NECESIDAD

En una carta al peruano Mario Vargas Llosa, escrita en 1964, Carlos Fuentes afirmaba: “[En América Latina] la literatura surge de una necesidad y no de un arreglo comercial o de una imposición política, como a menudo sucede en otras partes”.[29]

La declaración de Fuentes resuena con la importancia que la literatura ha tenido en Palestina desde la Nakba, cuando no se trataba de política, sino funcionaba como el medio a través del cual los palestinos podían expresar la complejidad de sus vidas bajo la ocupación y el exilio, así como resistir las tendencias culturales dominantes que buscaban suprimir su lengua, cultura, memoria e identidad. Al igual que los latinoamericanos, los palestinos escribieron por necesidad.

En el contexto de la literatura y la producción cultural palestinas, *Al-Karmel* profundizó su compromiso con la vida intelectual global, traduciendo e introduciendo al árabe una amplia gama de obras literarias contemporáneas y debates que tenían lugar en otras partes del mundo. En esta tarea, la revista colaboró con escritores y traductores de todo el mundo árabe y se dirigió a otras regiones, como Latinoamérica, para reflexionar sobre la urgente relación entre política y estética.

Sin embargo, para *Al-Karmel*, América Latina representaba más que un simple lugar geográfico: junto con su literatura, constituía un exitoso modelo del "Tercer Mundo" (para usar la terminología de la época), donde los escritores lograron conciliar política y literatura, conquistando las escenas literarias del "Primer Mundo" sin renunciar a sus convicciones políticas ni comprometerse con las luchas políticas de sus países de origen.

[29] Aguirre et al., 81.

Teaching Al-Andalus to Peru

Mhammad Benaboud
The Mhammad Ahmed Benaboud Foundation, Morocco

I have been invited to numerous esteemed universities across various continents to share my expertise and research in my fields of interest; especially the history of Al-Andalus my main field of specialization. Notably, I was invited to the University of the Punjab in Lahore, Pakistan, where I had the opportunity to deliver a series of lectures on diverse topics that I am passionate about, as well as areas where I have been conducting extensive research. My travels have taken me to many academic institutions worldwide, offering me unique opportunities to engage with different academic communities.

One of the most significant and memorable invitations I received was from the University of Tokyo in Japan. In the academic year 1997-1998, I was invited to teach for a full year, which proved to be a transformative experience both professionally and personally. This experience allowed me to contribute to the rich academic culture in Japan while simultaneously expanding my own knowledge and understanding through interaction with students and faculty members from various disciplines. Additionally, my academic journey also took me to Latin America, where I was invited by the Catholic University of Lima as well as the University of Lima, both of which are prominent institutions in Peru. There, I conducted a two-week seminar on various topics that align with my academic focus, particularly the history and culture of Al-Andalus, which I would like to elaborate on in greater detail.

The invitation from the universities in Lima was both an honor and a unique academic opportunity. I was tasked with delivering a series of lectures every other day, each lecture focused on themes of my choosing. In response to the invitation, I proposed two central themes that were both integral to my research interests: the history and culture of Al-Andalus, and the concept of Orientalism. With regard to the first theme, I dedicated my lectures to exploring the history, culture, and legacy of Al-Andalus, presenting it as a universal cultural heritage that continues to resonate across the world. Over the course of the lectures, I would

deliver two-hour discussions every other day, offering a deep dive into the richness of Al-Andalus’ legacy and its far-reaching influence on global history.

Al-Andalus, the name given to the Muslim-ruled territories in the Iberian Peninsula, represents a unique blend of cultures, civilizations, and religions, which contributed to the flourishing of a distinctive and vibrant culture. The contributions of Arabs, Berbers, Latins, Romans, and the coexistence of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism led to the emergence of a dynamic intellectual, artistic, and scientific tradition. These groups contributed to the development of architecture, science, literature, and philosophy, and the resulting culture continues to be recognized and celebrated in societies, including Morocco, where it is regarded as an integral part of the national identity.

The historical narrative of Al-Andalus is intricately tied to the expulsion of Muslims and Jews from the Iberian Peninsula following the fall of Granada in 1492. After the Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella conquered Granada, many Andalusian Muslims and Jews sought refuge in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Mauritania. These individuals carried with them a wealth of knowledge, craftsmanship, and scholarly expertise, enriching the societies they settled in and contributing to the cultural fabric of the Maghreb. As a result, the cultural influence of Al-Andalus extended well beyond the Iberian Peninsula, leaving an indelible mark on the region’s intellectual and artistic landscape.

My primary area of specialization is the 11th century, a period that saw both political decline and remarkable cultural flourishing in Al-Andalus. Despite the political fragmentation and turmoil that marked this time, the cultural and intellectual life continued to thrive. Arabic, as the dominant language of culture and science in Al-Andalus, became the medium through which numerous fields of knowledge, including medicine, astronomy, philosophy, and mathematics, advanced. This period witnessed the rise of many prominent scholars whose work laid the foundations for future intellectual pursuits. Notable figures such as Ibn Hazm, a distinguished scholar in jurisprudence, comparative religion, and literature, made significant contributions during this period. His famous work, The Dove’s Neck-Ring, is often considered the first book on the subject of love in Western literature.

Other key intellectuals from Al-Andalus include the poet Ibn Zaydun, renowned for his romantic poetry, the geographer al-Bakri, who documented the geography of the Muslim world, and Ibn Bassam al-Shantarini, whose literary anthology preserved important poetry and historical records. These scholars, along with many others, played a pivotal role in shaping the intellectual traditions of Al-Andalus. Even the rulers of the time, such as

Abdullah ibn Buluqīn of Granada, contributed to the literary heritage by writing autobiographies, offering rare first-person accounts of life in Al-Andalus.

The intellectual legacy of Al-Andalus was meticulously documented in biographical dictionaries, which cataloged the lives and contributions of scholars across the centuries. These works not only provide us with a detailed account of the intellectual life of Al-Andalus but also helped preserve the memory of its great scholars for future generations. These scholarly works influenced the Maghreb and beyond, shaping the academic and intellectual traditions of the wider Arab and Muslim world. In modern scholarship, debates between scholars such as Sánchez Albornoz and Américo Castro, as well as the contributions of Arabists like Miguel Asín Palacios, Huici Miranda, and Juan Vernet, continue to shape the study of Al-Andalus, offering fresh perspectives on its history and cultural contributions. During my time teaching in Peru, the discussions surrounding these topics were so engaging and thought-provoking that many of the sessions often extended beyond the scheduled hours. One particularly memorable encounter involved a Peruvian student of Japanese descent, who, after attending one of my lectures, approached me with thoughtful and insightful questions. This exchange was a clear demonstration of how the cultural and intellectual legacy of Al-Andalus has resonated beyond the boundaries of the Arab world, highlighting the universal appeal of its history and ideas. It also underscored the interconnectedness of global cultures and the continuing relevance of Al-Andalus as a subject of scholarly inquiry.

This opportunity in Peru was truly a wonderful chance to deepen my understanding of the importance of knowledge exchange between different cultures. In each lecture, I felt that I was not only presenting historical facts or academic information, but I was also creating a bridge between the diverse cultures represented by the universities that had invited me. The questions posed by the students in Peru proved to me that history and culture do not recognize geographical boundaries, and they can spark interest and mutual understanding between people from various cultural backgrounds. For instance, there was a student of Japanese descent who showed a particular interest in how Andalusian culture had influenced art and architecture in Japan—an area I had never discussed before. This allowed me to view Andalusian heritage from a new perspective, far beyond the traditional framework I had been addressing.

In my lectures, I delved into the profound impact of Andalusian culture on various societies, including Morocco, the Mashriq, and even Europe. After the fall of Granada, knowledge and scholarly traditions were transferred to regions that welcomed the Andalusians, including North Africa. This knowledge extended beyond the arts and literature,

influencing fields such as medicine, astronomy, and philosophy, and it helped transport Islamic thought to medieval Europe. The influence of this Andalusian heritage can be seen in many areas we consider foundational to our modern civilization today, such as the astrolabe and astronomical sciences, in addition to the development of Arabic philosophy in Europe.

When discussing Andalusia, I cannot overlook the significant role that scholars and philosophers played in shaping European thought. Scholars like Ibn Rushd, whose influence on Western philosophy was profound, and Ibn Sina in the field of medicine, were instrumental in transmitting knowledge from the Islamic world to Europe. Andalusian philosophy also left a deep imprint on Christian thought, especially through figures like Thomas Aquinas, who was greatly influenced by the works of Ibn Rushd. These thinkers, along with others such as Al-Farabi and Al-Ghazali, helped shape the intellectual framework that would later lead to the European Renaissance.

Throughout my lectures, I also reflected on how the legacy of Andalusian culture transcends historical time and geographical space. Its impact is still felt today, not only in academic circles but also in popular culture. The themes of coexistence, intellectual exchange, and cultural synthesis that characterized Andalusian society continue to inspire people around the world. These discussions were not just about the past but also about how we can use the lessons from Andalusian history to address the challenges of today’s multicultural and interconnected world. The integration of different cultures and the exchange of knowledge, as exemplified by Al-Andalus, offer valuable insights for cob contemporary global society.

I surfed through the internet and came across this account of my trip to Peru which I published at the time. I will reproduce it here because it is such a fresh account:

It has been about ten years now or so since Mr. Tayyib Chaudri who was then Morocco’s ambassador at Lima kindly asked me to give a two-week seminar at ‘La Cattolica’ and a couple of lectures at two other universities, the University of Lima and another private university, the Ricardo Palma University. I accepted, because it was a unique experience for me. I therefore agreed with the university people about the themes, and I gave two-hour lectures for two weeks.

The experience was positive from my perspective for a number of reasons. The lectures were in Spanish, but the public was different. This is important for lecturers, because I believe that a writer or lecturer has to be conscious of the public he addresses, whether he is aware or unaware of it. The students who attended my lectures were very enthusiastic and the question time tended to be very long. There was a lot of interaction with the students, because

they were fascinated by the themes which I treated which included the history and culture of Al-Andalus, Interculturalism, the cultural heritage of the Medina of Tetouan. From my point of view, I was stimulated by their questions which obviously differed from the ones I would be asked in other countries. It is incredible for example to observe how people in different countries of different cultures are so interested in different dimensions of this universal culture. Their ideas tend to be preconceived, but the passions that Al Andalus can arouse are unbelievable. Some people think that they know all they need to know, while others deploy themes related to Al Andalus to achieve their own objectives, sometimes completely unrelated to what I would call the historical reality of Al Andalus. They seem to be satisfied with their images of Al Andalus and are unconcerned about the dimension of historicity.

I will never forget a man who approached me after I had given a lecture about the Andalusian culture. From his physical features, he appeared to me to be a Japanese as he waited for his turn to ask me a question while I was answering others. However, when he spoke, he did so in Spanish with a Peruvian accent. There is a community of Peruvians of Japanese origin, and they even had one for a president and his daughter has recently been involved in politics recently. For a second, I felt as if I was at the University of Tokyo, but then I set things straight I my head when the man asked me questions about “our Andalusian origins.” In other words, he was a Peruvian, spoke Spanish obviously with a Peruvian accent, considered himself to be a Peruvian and was asking me about his Andalusian cultural origins as a Peruvian. At the time, I was not aware of Fujimori. He was not the problem, I was the problem, because I had confused his physical Japanese features with his own perception of his cultural identity as a Peruvian. I remember answering his question by referring to the cultural influence of the Andalusian culture in North Africa, the Middle East, Spain and Portugal, and through the latter in Latin America.

Another interesting point that I remember is the transportation system which they had in Lima. I used to take a taxi from my hotel to the university and discovered that there were two systems. There were the normal taxis, and anyone could put a sign saying taxi in front of his steering wheel and actually transport people. That solved many problems, and I do not remember seeing people in lines waiting for taxis.

During my stay, I was invited for a fifteen-minute interview in a television program called *Presencia Cultural* in the 7th Channel which is the state television channel. The discussion was about the cultural heritage of the Medina of Tetouan and they showed part my interactive CD-ROM of the Medina of Tetouan which was a big deal at the time, not only because interactive CD-ROMs on themes related to the cultural heritage of historical cities

was not very common, but because CD-ROMs were the fashion before the internet developed into what it is today. I will always remember visiting the historical quarter of Peru, which like the Medina of Tetouan, was created five centuries ago. There are also similarities between the two and the Andalusian influence in their architecture was clear to me.

Taking a one-hour flight to Cusco and landing 3000 meters above the sea level, only to take a train, a really old-fashioned train across the mountains to Machu Pichu, the sacred city of the Incas was truly exciting. During the train raid, we were shown a video explaining the history of every rock that we would visit at Machu Pichu. We had lunch at a place called Aguas Calientes in a beautiful restaurant in the middle of the way before heading for the peak of the mountain. The scenery of the mountains in that place is truly unique. I remember talking to a shop keeper at Aguas Calientes who told me how a terrorist group which the government had crushed used to dominate all that area before the tourist industry began to flourish there. Some of the stories were electrifying.

I visited a couple of museums and the one which impressed me most was the Museum of the Inquisition. The first floor was the original court where the proceedings and the degrees of the Holy Catholic Church took place. Then we descended to appreciate the different techniques used to torture those who were forced to confess their supposed crimes which were mostly related to accusations of apostasy. Those who were accused were either Jews or curiously Muslims had converted to Christianity but were accused of having done so falsely. They were therefore condemned to prison where they were tortured and or condemned to death.

I had previously read about the influence of the Andalusian culture in Latin America through the Spanish language thanks to important works by important specialists of the Moriscos in Latin America like Lucy Baralt professor at the University of Puerto Rico and some French eminent specialists like Professor Louis Cardillac both of whom I met at Abdeljelil Temimi’s international conferences at Tunis. However, standing in what was a real court of the Inquisition in Latin America where Andalusian were sent chills through my body.

Finally, Al-Andalus is an area that I will keep studying for the rest of my life without answering all my questions about this unique universal culture. It is for the Islamic culture what Greece has been for Europe. It is also a fantastic field of experimentation for the modern social sciences.

In conclusion, my teaching experience in Peru was both enriching and eye-opening. The engaging discussions and thought-provoking questions I encountered were a testament to

the enduring relevance of Andalusian history and culture. It is clear to me that the legacy of Al-Andalus, which once thrived in the Iberian Peninsula, continues to resonate globally, shaping intellectual and cultural exchanges across continents and generations. This enduring influence is a reminder of the power of knowledge to transcend borders and unite diverse cultures in shared understanding.