Manifold Destiny

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“I’m American . . . more” American than George W. Bush,” declared Mohamad Barakat.\(^1\) Barakat had studied in the United States, visited relatives in Canada, and permanently settled at the border where Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina meet. On the Paraguayan side of the border, his colleague Said Taijen sent orders to Central and North America. Taijen imported consumer goods through Colón- and Miami-based free trade zones before the establishment of the South American trade bloc, known as Mercosur (the Spanish acronym for the Southern Common Market).\(^2\) Taijen and others continued doing business after the trade accord was ratified by Brazilian, Paraguayan, Argentine, and Uruguayan states. The bloc’s motto, “our north is the south” was embodied by Mohamed Ismail, nicknamed Magrão (Big Skinny, in Portuguese), on the Brazilian side of the border. Seeing the hemisphere from his point of view, Magrão granted an interview to the *Washington Post* where he poked fun at what the newspaper cited as “absurd reports of terrorist cells” at the border, much to the chagrin of the US State Department.\(^3\) Such trade and civic affairs concerned Mohamad, Said, Magrão, and other overwhelming numbers of Muslim Lebanese and fewer Muslim Palestinians and Syrians. They self-identified as *árabes* (Arabs) at this hemispheric crossroads, which is usually called the *tríplice fronteira* in Portuguese, the *triple frontera* in Spanish, and the *triborder* in English.\(^4\)
In the “destiny of America,” are Arabs at this border moving “toward continental integration?” In 1965, military heads of state used such language to inaugurate the Friendship Bridge between the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the fluvial border. Arabs had already begun settling in the city of Foz do Iguaçu on the Brazilian side, and in Ciudad del Este on the Paraguayan side (which was known as Ciudad Presidente Stroessner until 1989). Hardly any inhabited the town of Puerto Iguazú on the Argentine side of the border. But in the 1990s, the Argentine state distracted attention from unresolved violence in the capital of Buenos Aires by pointing fingers at Arabs on the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border. Without evidence, Mercosur authorities debated while US counterparts framed Arabs at the border as a threat, especially after 9/11. In response, Arabs led tens of thousands of border residents in the event Paz sem Fronteiras / Paz sin Fronteras / Peace without Borders. Arabs later served as witnesses in the Foz do Iguaçu city government-led lawsuit against CNN that portrayed the border as a “terrorist haven.” Since that time, predominantly US-based scholars of security studies have voiced suspicions that Arabs at the border harbor terrorist affiliations. In this “spurious scholarship,” a turn of phrase I borrow from postcolonial critic Edward Said, Arabs at the border trouble a hemispheric America.

My work instead explores how Arabs fold into a hemisphere historically troubled by US power once characterized in extraordinary terms as “manifest destiny.” Based in the two main cities of the border, Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este, I show that Arabs embody and endure a hemispheric America of exceptional rule without a given center. I focus on their “transnational projects,” by which I mean “economic enterprises” as well as “political, cultural, and religious initiatives” that “take place on a recurrent basis across national boundaries,” borrowing from the work of anthropologists Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, as well as that of sociologist Alejandro Portes. The six chapters of this study examine the projects that Arabs undertake at the border in a “multiplication of the Americas,” which according to historian Felipe Fernández-Armesto, “makes the present state of the hemisphere seem neither inevitable nor indefinitely sustainable.” From
the 1960s to the 1990s, Arabs projected their trade and activism in a semiperipheral America, a Third World America, and an Ummah America. From the 1990s to the 2010s, their business and civic networks continued in a free trade America, a war-torn America, and a speculative America. Neither determining nor determined by any given state agenda or central power, Arabs play in what Magrão characterized as a “much bigger game.”

Arabs fulfill what I call a “manifold destiny.” The figure of speech refers to the many folds or ways Arabs accommodate exceptional or extraordinary measures that state powers enact for an indeterminate time. In this unfinished but not interminable saga, Arabs connect the heretofore separate subjects of authoritarian South America and the counterterrorist US. Arabs opened businesses and community centers at the border during US-backed authoritarian military dictatorships in Brazil (1964–1985), Paraguay (1954–1989), and Argentina (1976–1983). Examining authoritarian and post-authoritarian orders from the 1960s to the 1990s, the book’s first half is made up of three chapters that address how Arabs at the border acceded to state exceptions that drew Paraguay toward Brazil and away from Argentina and the US. Considering the counterterrorist orders of ostensible liberal democracies between the 1990s and the 2010s, the book’s second half, also composed of three chapters, looks at the ways Arabs at the border grew accustomed to the exceptions made by Mercosur member states and the US, scrutinized in intermittent searches for terrorism that failed to find anything of the kind. The two parts of this book show how over some six decades Arabs came to terms with the authoritarian rise of Brazil over the once Argentine- and US-dominated Paraguay as well as the counterterrorist reach of Mercosur and the US. Witness to authoritarian and counterterrorist measures that twisted or truncated real democratic enfranchisement, their “manifold destiny” reveals a hemispheric history of exceptional rule.

Set on the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border shared with Argentina and subject to Mercosur and the US, this study casts Arab traders and activists as circumstantial protagonists on a hemispheric stage where states suspend or enact law by fiat. Taking my cue from their historically informed understandings of being
simultaneously actors and acted upon, I represent Arabs as agents of development and suspects of tax evasion, as activists for solidarity and as persons accused of terrorism. When I undertook the lion’s share of the archival and ethnographic work for this book between 2007 and 2011, I often heard the remark, “a colônia é muito acomodada” (the community is well-accommodated / complacent). Arabs felt that their long-time presence on the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border, where they overwhelmingly live and work, neither erased nor were erased by timeless images of them as suspects that they felt were more common in Argentina and the US. Attentive to such tensions and paradoxes, I explore how Arabs drew upon and were drawn into spheres of influence emanating from Brasília, Asunción, Buenos Aires, and Washington, DC, at an American crossroads of authoritarian legacies and counterterrorist liaisons. Arabs point not to liberal democratic fits and starts in Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, Mercosur, and the US, but rather an illiberal hemispheric experiment whose current equivocation is itself par for the course.

**Transnational Turns at a Crossroads**

Moving aside, or decentering, “manifest destiny,” this book transposes the “trans-” of transnational Arab projects onto the “trans-” of a “trans-American” scale of analysis. Since the 1990s, scholars have reconceptualized not only the world areas of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, but also ethnicized and racialized peoples, including African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinas/os, and Arab Americans. This transnational thinking has produced alternative units of analysis such as a Black Atlantic, an American Pacific, Latina/o Americas, and an Arab Atlantic. In this vein, my work draws upon a new understanding of the “Middle East” as “sets of networks holding together, and held together by, people and things, places and practices,” as articulated in the *Mashriq & Mahjar* journal and several other books in Middle East migration studies. I extend this transnational approach to the Middle East across three fields with dis-
tinct understandings of the hemisphere: American studies, Brazilian studies, as well as Latin American and Latino studies.

My thinking commences with a recent intervention in American studies, a field that historically distanced itself from area and ethnic studies. Since the 1990s, literary critics, historians, and social scientists have redirected the field’s object of study from the “United States of America” toward peoples and places straddling its borders. But critics note that this move beyond the nation-state failed to adequately dislodge US-centrism or expose disavowals of exceptionalism. Transnational turns in American Studies left more or less intact US exceptionalist beliefs of being “distinctive,” “exemplary,” “exempt,” or “unique.” In one recent corrective, Kristin Hoganson and Jay Sexton brought US history into “trans-imperial terrain” occupied by other expansionist state agendas. In yet another mediation “between the Middle East and the Americas,” Ella Shohat interrupted “an American’ nationalist teleology” by proposing a new synthesis of area and ethnic studies where a particular region or geography “constitute not a point of origin or final destination” but rather a “terminal in a transnational network.” These approaches guide my analysis of transnational Middle Eastern ties amid rival states and overlapping orders in the hemisphere.

Accordingly, I traverse the field of Brazilian studies, whose object of study, Brazil, took shape in hemispheric debate despite its fraught location within the idea of “Latin America.” Scholars mapped Brazilian exceptions, and accompanying discourses of exceptionalism, across territorial boundaries. They focused on Brazilian monarchical and republican distance from the idea of Latin Americanness envisioned by Spanish-speaking counterparts. They looked at the Brazilian state’s own engagement with Americanism, which shifted between rapprochement and rivalry with the US. They also followed Brazil’s expansive influence leading up to and during the aforementioned period of authoritarian rule. From that time to today, political scientist and anthropologist Paul Amar recently explored how Brazil is “increasingly asserting itself on the world stage” by “reaching out commercially and culturally to the Middle East.” His vision of a “new Global South” applied the “polycentric” perspective of cultural critics Ella Shohat and Robert
Stam, which “does not refer to a finite list of centers of power but rather introduces a systematic principle of differentiation, relationality, and linkage.”31 In this regard, to paraphrase Shohat and Stam, my aim is for Brazil and Brazilian studies to “travel more” through a transnational Middle East that decenters the US and American Studies in hemispheric formation.32

These current modes of thought dovetail with transnational turns in Latin American and Latino Studies. Moved by Gloria Anzaldúa’s La Frontera/Borderlands that questioned not only physical but also epistemic borders, Sonia Álvarez, Juan Flores, George Yúdice, José David Saldívar, and others reimagined las Américas (the Americas) from the border (la frontera, in Spanish).33 As Latin American studies entered into dialogue with Latino studies, corporations, governments, and universities likewise sought to capitalize on their rapprochement.34 Attentive to the possibilities and pitfalls of such “turns” beyond the nation, cultural critic Juan Poblete envisioned these fields on a “transamerican and transatlantic scale” across the “whole hemisphere, its political economy, and the interconnectedness of its politics, cultures, and societies.”35 Poblete remarked that the significance of studying “Middle Eastern immigrant populations in the Americas” is not to displace “nation and area-centered paradigms” but rather to emphasize “cross-border processes” in the making of “national and regional geographies.”36 My work advances his insights by mapping Middle Eastern transnational projects on a hemispheric scale.

As an original fusion of American studies, Brazilian studies, as well as Latin American and Latino studies though transnational Middle East studies, this account about Arabs at the border makes headway on José David Saldívar’s idea of “trans-Americanity.”37 Saldívar drew upon Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein’s idea of “Americanity” that reconceived the “New World” not as a pre-existing space that was brought into the wider world but rather as a sui generis “pattern” of Eurocentric power that expanded globally.38 Saldívar emphasizes the idea of “Americanity” as a space of not only coloniality, but also subalternity, by which he means “a subjected state of being” among “minoritized” peoples. Rather than the epistemic “delinking” option that Walter Mignolo proposed,
Saldívar opens up a wider range of subaltern possibilities through a transamerican hemisphere. In this way, I approach Middle Easterners as “subaltern elites,” below those dominating but above those dominated on the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border marked by Argentina, Mercosur, and the US. Connections and connected by many Americas, they circulate ideas, goods, and monies at and beyond the hemispheric crossroads under examination here. By way of a transnational Middle East, my goal is to take a first step in broadening the meaning of “trans-” in a “trans-American” hemisphere.

Instead of the “template” of the Mexican-US border that serves as a reminder of the nineteenth-century belief in “manifest destiny,” my study is based at a boundary that Iberian empires invented centuries earlier in the Treaty of Tordesilhas (in Portuguese) or Tordesillas (in Spanish). Signed in 1494, this “first division of the world,” according to historian Bartolomé Bennassar, still reverberates at the crossroads where Portuguese-dominant Brazil meets Spanish-dominant Paraguay and Argentina, and where the indigenous language of Guarani endures among others. Geographer Adriana Dorfman mapped estudos fronteirços (border studies) on the Brazilian side while anthropologist Alejandro Grimson began theorizing “borderization” from the Argentine side. Meanwhile, sociologists Silvia Montenegro and Verónica Giménez Béliveau led an ever-growing scholarship on identity, belonging, and inequality across the border’s cities of Foz do Iguaçu, Ciudad del Este, and Puerto Iguazú. Anthropologists Fernando Rabossi, Rosana Pinheiro Machado, Paulo Pinto, and others joined them in focusing on migrants settling from elsewhere in South America as well as from the Middle East and East Asia. Between 1973 and 1984, the world’s largest hydroelectric dam was built on the Paraná River that serves as the border between the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides, a half-hour north of the aforementioned Friendship Bridge. Consequently, the population of Foz do Iguaçu soared from under 34,000 in 1970 to over 136,000 in 1980, and nearly doubled again by 2010. The Paraguayan border city skyrocketed from some 7,000 in 1970 to nearly 50,000 inhabitants in 1980, again doubled by 1990, reaching over 300,000 as the largest urban center at this crossroads by 2002.
contrast, the Argentine town of Puerto Iguazú is three times smaller. It grew from under 3,000 in 1970 to nearly 10,000 in 1980, to some 20,000 in 1990, and just over 80,000 by 2010. Home to the world famous waterfalls, called Iguacu (in Portuguese), Iguazu (in Spanish), or Iguazu (in English), the Argentine and Brazilian sides of the border are separated by the homonymous river, a tributary of the Paraná. In 1985, this trinational borderland’s second and only other bridge was inaugurated between the Argentine and Brazilian sides, officially named Tancredo Neves and sometimes called the Puente de la Fraternidad (Fraternity Bridge, in Spanish). Under scrutiny from Mercosur member states and the US, this crossroads must be understood in not only national or regional but more broadly hemispheric terms.

Locating a transnational Middle East across many Americas, and many Americas across a transnational Middle East, my work contributes to a trans-American configuration of area and ethnic studies amid what anthropologist Bruce Knauft calls the “provincialization of the United States.” Toward the end of the George W. Bush era, Knauft argued that US geopolitical influence is not disappearing but rather diminishing relative to rising powers on the periphery. His political-economic prognosis of “manifest destiny” drew upon but also diverged from historian Dipesh Chakrabarty’s Provincializing Europe, which asked how universalized categories such as capital, the nation-state, and modernity that stem from Europe are both “indispensable and inadequate” to grasp the “margins” of the world. For Knauft, the paradox that peripheral areas and groups “can neither fully escape . . . nor be reduced” to dominant centers and blocs demands not new thinking, but rather “recovered countervoices” that unsettle “larger patterns of political and economic domination.” By recovering such voices among Arabs at the border, this book contributes to the provincialization of the US in a hemispheric history of exceptional rule. Over more than six decades, Arabs came to terms with governmental suspensions of rules and rights. Their accommodation of state exceptions continued through the impeachment proceedings that respectively took place in Paraguay (2012), Brazil (2015–16), and the US (2019–20). They and others bore witness to the extraordinary measures
that anticipated the right-wing presidencies of Mario Abdo Benítez (2018–present) in Paraguay and Jair Messias Bolsonaro (2019–present) in Brazil and epitomized that of Donald John Trump (2016–present) in the US. The “manifold destiny” that Arabs fulfill at a crossroads sheds new light on this hemisphere’s exceptional rule not yet over.

Transnational Accommodation of State Exceptions

This study points to a heretofore unacknowledged hemispheric trajectory of exceptional rule. I follow anthropologist Aihwa Ong’s rethinking of the exception “as an extraordinary departure in policy that can be deployed to include as well as to exclude.” 53 Whether enabled or constrained, Arabs came to terms with varying forms of Brazilian, Paraguayan, Argentine, Mercosur, and US exceptional rule. From the 1960s to the 1990s, Arabs traded and mobilized under US-backed authoritarian and post-authoritarian governments in Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina, which made exceptions that opened markets and sought ties with the Middle East. Between the 1990s and the 2010s, Arab trade and activism continued under Mercosur and US counterterrorism (called antiterrorismo, in Portuguese and Spanish), which suspended liberal democratic and market norms in search of terrorism associated with, but not found among, Middle Easterners at the border. Despite the sea-change in “normative orders,” Arabs’ accommodation of authoritarian legacies and counterterrorist liaisons point to an American epoch of not liberal democratic advances but more equivocally state exceptions.54

The liberal economic exceptions made by otherwise illiberal governments brought Paraguay toward Brazil and away from Argentina and the US.55 The first chapter looks at Lebanese, Palestinian, and Syrian traders in this hemispheric shuffle between the 1960s and the late 1980s. On the Brazilian side of the border, Arabs exported Brazilian-made manufactures to Paraguayan consumers, leveraging Brazil’s military government that exempted exportation from some taxes amid the wider suspension of civil rights. Meanwhile, Arabs on the Paraguayan side imported through a simplified tax system at the border set up by the otherwise imperious Paraguayan
dictatorship, bringing in East Asian–made merchandise from US-dominated Panama that was sold to Brazilian consumers criss-crossing the bridge. Arabs expanded Brazil’s manufacturer and consumer markets over the once Argentina- and US-dominated Paraguay. Through liberal exceptions in illiberal regimes, Arabs animated a semiperipheral America that neither led to nor derived from US influence in the hemisphere.

States with authoritarian legacies curbed liberationist prospects in a hemispheric America as well as made exceptions for a transnational Middle East. The second chapter asks how Arabs came to terms with Third Worldist agendas at this crossroads. Under the liberal exceptions of illiberal regimes in the 1970s and 1980s, mostly Lebanese but also some Palestinians and Syrians took up Arab and Islamic activism. On the Brazilian side of the border, their advocacy aligned with the military as well as the civilian opposition that eventually took over the state. Meanwhile on the Paraguayan side of the border, they remained in compliance with the regime’s party that kept power after an internal military coup ended the dictatorship. But this transition from authoritarian rule was cut short by the unresolved 1992 attack on the Israeli embassy in the Argentine capital of Buenos Aires. Scrutinized but never charged, Arabs at the border faced illiberal exceptions to nascent liberal democratic rule. Arabs responded by mobilizing on the Brazilian side of the border, but not in solidarity with counterparts on the Paraguayan side where the state suspended their rights under post-authoritarian Argentine and US pressures.

In 1994, the Argentine state failed to prevent a second bombing, this time of a Jewish community building in Buenos Aires, testing Arabs’ decades-long institution-building of an Ummah, a universal Islamic community. As will be seen in the third chapter, the post-authoritarian Argentine state took exceptional measures to militarize its side of the border against Muslim Arabs on the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides. Under US pressure, Argentine border patrol detained Arabs venturing onto the Argentine side while Argentine government ministers pressured Brazilian and Paraguayan counterparts to scrutinize Arab religious leaders in Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este. Downplaying Shia and Sunni differences, Lebanese,
Palestinian, and Syrian Muslims condemned anti-Jewish violence and spoke of themselves as scapegoats for Argentina's failure to investigate and prosecute the attack. In this Ummah America, Arabs accused Argentine, US, and other authorities of unduly blaming them and organized through Islam on the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border. Through illiberal exceptions made by liberal democratic rulers, Arabs became the targets of antiterrorismo, an authoritarian legacy in post-authoritarian governments.

At this conjuncture, state powers founded Mercosur, which not only standardized tariffs but also stimulated illiberal security. The fourth chapter chronicles Arabs' efforts to accommodate new tariff rates while the democratic norms of the accord were suspended for them. On the Brazilian side of the border, Arabs began to import from outside the bloc by using Mercosur's Common External Tariffs (CETs). On the Paraguayan side, Arabs obtained exemptions to Mercosur CETs, importing from free trade zones in Panama and increasingly from Florida. US and Argentine authorities, however, alleged that their cross-border trade threatened security in Mercosur. Brazilian officials investigated such liaisons to shore up the bloc. The Brazilian state set up additional checkpoints at its border with Paraguay, detaining and releasing migrants of mostly Arab origin who resided in Foz do Iguaçu and ran stores in Ciudad del Este. Arabs at the border sought to accommodate the Mercosur bloc as an economic accord but they became intermittently labeled as “non-Mercosur” residents. Facing illiberal security exceptions in a liberal economic bloc, Arabs faced and followed a free trade America.

In declaring war with no end after September 11, 2001, US government authorities demanded South American counterparts take exceptional measures against Arabs at the border. As will be shown in the fifth chapter, Brazilian officials demurred to US counterterrorism but Paraguayan counterparts deferred, as Paraguayan territory witnessed dozens of US military missions in the next five years. Ensuing debates about whether Arabs at the border were or would be complicit with terrorism distracted attention from prior, decades-long US support of South American dictatorships that alleged to combat terrorism as well. In this war-torn America, Arabs at the border drew upon, and were drawn into, distinct Brazilian

US officials continued to scrutinize Arabs at the border in what Marieke de Goede called the “extralegal targeting” of “suspect monies.” The sixth chapter will examine these speculative accounts that Arabs at the border were cast and performed in, economically and imaginatively. In 2002, Brazilian, Paraguayan, Argentine, and US states established the “3+1 Group on Tri-Border Security” that prioritized the pursuit of terrorist finance. Subsequently, the US Treasury Department blacklisted a handful of Arabs at the border despite finding no traces of terrorist monies while the Brazilian state investigated systemic banking irregularities that laundered billions to Paraguay. Arabs tried to settle accounts in this speculative America. They helped the Foz do Iguaçu government sue CNN for defaming border trade as terrorist finance, curtailed Islamic and Middle Eastern philanthropy in Foz do Iguaçu, and donated to a new mosque in Ciudad del Este, buoyed by sales of name brand East Asian-made imports. Under exceptions to democratic and market norms, Arabs grew accustomed to counterterrorist financial monitoring that still found no such cases at the border.

My account of Arab transnational projects rethinks an American history of exceptional rule. From the 1960s to the 1990s, Arabs traded and mobilized through the liberal exceptions made by illiberal and post-illiberal governments that otherwise guarded domestic markets and suspended legal norms for purported security. From the 1990s through the 2010s, Arabs continued business and civic engagement through the illiberal exceptions of now liberal governments that otherwise opened markets and eschewed military rule. Fouad Fakih bore witness to such state exceptions since migrating from Lebanon to Brazil’s side of the border. In the 1970s and 1980s, Fakih was president and served on the board of the
Commercial and Industrial Association of Foz do Iguaçu (known as Acifi), working with authoritarian state officials from Brazil, Paraguay, and elsewhere. From the 1990s to today, he continued to work with state authorities in the Peace without Borders movement, and the Foz do Iguaçu city government lawsuit against US counterterrorist coverage of the border. Accordingly, Fakih voiced an exceptional view of “all that América [sic], and especially Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina, have represented” for Arabs.\(^64\) Having accommodated shifting forms of exceptional rule for decades, Fakih also expressed cynicism about condoning and condemning it, remarking that “when there’s a dictatorship, 80 percent of people approve of it. And when the dictatorship ends, 80 percent of people disapprove of it.”\(^65\) Mindful of his and others’ uncommitted view toward exceptional rule in the hemisphere, my study casts Arabs with circumstantial roles in the authoritarian past and counterterrorist present of America.

**Arabs in and beyond “Our América”**

Arabs at the border extend the boundaries of what Cuban intellectual José Martí called *nuestra América*.\(^66\) In 1895, Martí spoke of “our América” in reference to what is now usually denominated as Latin America and the Caribbean and warned of incipient US interventionism. Not using his distinction between “our America” and “the America that is not ours,” Middle Easterners as well as Muslims were already migrating across what they designated as *Amrika* (America, in Arabic).\(^67\) A century or so later, Martí’s vision inspired the aforementioned hemispheric turn in American studies.\(^68\) And again, case studies of Middle Easterners as well as Muslims appeared in circuitous hemispheric trajectories.\(^69\) Accommodating but not seamlessly fitting into any given hemispheric vision, Arabs inhabit and transcend “our América.”

In 1892, the grandfather of Mohamad Barakat, introduced at the start of this book, headed to “América,” because “era tudo América” (it was all America), whether north or south of the equator.\(^70\) Departing the village of Baaloul in the Beqaa Valley, then part of the Ottoman Empire, he settled in the Brazilian city of São Paulo, with an
intermittent stint in Argentina. After some time, the grandfather’s brothers moved to Ontario, Canada, while the grandfather himself returned to Baaloul. Subsequently, the grandfather sent two sons to live with his brothers in Canada. By 1900, other villagers from Baaloul arrived in Argentina. By 1920, their sales routes led them to Colombia, with many converging in Maicao, a Colombian town bordering with Venezuela in La Guajira peninsula, where their descendants thrive today. They and other Arabs also moved westward from Barranquilla to Santa Marta as well as eastward to the island of San Andrés. In 1945, Ahmad Mattar listed villagers from “Balloul” in these and other Colombian towns. Soon after, some migrated to US-dominated Panama when the “largest free trade zone of Americas” opened in Colón, a commercial boon to their ties across the hemisphere.

Arising from the Eastern Mediterranean, these patterns of chain, step, and circulatory migration merged and merged with America. Interrupted by World War I and the Interwar years, migration from the Eastern Mediterranean resumed after World War II, the moment that the Arab border presence began in earnest. In 1951, the father of Mohamad Barakat departed the same village of Baaloul and settled in Foz do Iguaçu on the Brazilian side of the border, around the time that the Nasser, Osman, and Rahal families started settling and trading too. With his father’s remittances, Mohamad Barakat himself left Baaloul for Toledo, Ohio, in the US, and afterwards, moved to the capital of the Canadian province of Ontario, London, where extended kin had migrated previously. In 1961, he traveled to and ended up settling with family in Foz do Iguaçu, just as the signature arcs at the base of the Friendship Bridge were put into place and when, in his words, the few town roads had “not even a meter of asphalt.” In the following decades, tens of thousands of Middle Easterners repeated this journey. Some set out from Palestinian and Syrian metropoli as early as 1960, but the vast majority stemmed from Lebanon, from not only Baaloul but also Lela, Qillaya-Darafa, and elsewhere in the Beqaa Valley as well as from Dibbine, Jebbayn, Kabrikha, Khiam, and numerous other villages elsewhere in South Lebanon. They were destined for Amrika.

Arabs continue to straddle Luso, Hispano, Anglo, South, Central, Latin, North, and other Americas. In the mid-1990s, a newspaper in
Foz do Iguaçu observed that some Arabs “divide their time between Brazil, where they prefer to live, and Ciudad del Este in Paraguay, where they are storeowners specializing in imports.” Introduced earlier, Magrão reiterated that some Arabs reside on the Brazilian side and run businesses on the Paraguayan side. Their daily routines start by leaving homes in Foz do Iguaçu, commuting through the border controls on the congested three-lane Friendship Bridge, arriving at businesses in Ciudad del Este, and after an eight to twelve-hour workday, returning along the same route. Less frequently, some Lebanese at the border visited and received relatives from the Canadian provinces of Alberta and Ontario. In 1999, a member of the Omairi family from Alberta visited his sister in Foz do Iguaçu. As an elected public official, Omairi defended an end to visas between Brazil and Canada. Some others possessed business interests in the free trade zones of not only Colón, Panama, but also south Florida, where they imported goods from. The Hammoud brothers opened the Monalisa shopping center in Ciudad del Este in 1972 and, later on, offices in Miami as well as New York City. Mohamad Jebai likewise established the Galeria Jebai Center, on the Paraguayan side of the border in the 1970s and, afterward, financed the building of a mall in Miami and even a gated community in Fort Meyers. Arabs make, and are made by, this hemispheric America.

Identifying with countries or regions of origin and settlement, Lebanese, Palestinians, Syrians, and other Arabs at the border exercise what Aihwa Ong called “flexible citizenship” in responding “fluidly and opportunistically to political-economic conditions in transformation.” Whether born or naturalized in Foz do Iguaçu, those with Brazilian citizenship use the standard state-issued identity document, known as the RG (the acronym for “General Registry”), and like other Brazilians, speak Portuguese as well as portanhol (a blend of Portuguese and Spanish) with Spanish-speakers. Fewer actually residing in Ciudad del Este, born or naturalized as Paraguayan citizens, use the cédula de identidad civil, and speak Spanish and some Guaraní, the country’s two official languages, alongside some Portuguese which is usually learned by Paraguayans of varied origins near the border with Brazil. Recent migrants, mostly from Lebanon, have Paraguayan and/or Brazilian
visas on their passports, and speak a mix of Portuguese and Spanish, often residing in Foz do Iguaçu and working in Ciudad del Este. Lebanese migrants and some descendants have the Lebanese ID card, the bitaqat, and show varied fluency in Arabic. Nearly everyone has some knowledge of English, as is the norm for middle and upper classes in Brazil, Paraguay, and Lebanon, as well as Palestine and Syria too. Despite varied negotiations of identity and language, non-Arab and non-Muslim interlocutors identified Islam as a religião dos árabes (“the religion of Arabs”). Equally common are nationally specific labels such as “Lebanese,” “Palestinian,” or “Syrian,” as well as the more generic turco (Turk), a Portuguese- and Spanish-language nod to the Ottoman origins of earlier migrants. Since local journalists have grown up alongside them, media in both Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este generally use the moniker “Arab,” not only as a synonym of “Muslim,” but also interchangeably with “Brazilian” and “Paraguayan,” respectively. As local border media reported in 1993, “the ‘Turks,’ as they were called until a short time ago, came to the two borders (Brazil and Paraguay) more so in the 1970s. Today, they are part of the daily life of the cities and the ‘salamaleiccom’ (peace be with you) and ‘chucran’ (thank you) are words taken up by all non-Arab merchants when they do business with ‘um brimo’” (an Arab cousin, substituting the letter p in primo (cousin) with a b). “Flexible citizenship” was practiced by many at the border.

Attentive to anthropologist Aisha Khan’s point that “Islam becomes as well as is” in a hemispheric America, it must be noted that most Arabs at the border identify as Sunni and Shia Muslims, alongside smaller numbers of Druze, Alawi, and Ismaili, as well as Maronite Christians. The first arrivals were mostly Sunni. Since the 1970s, Shia migrated in increasing numbers and became a slight majority by the mid-1990s. Relatively few attend mosques or prayer halls on a regular basis, so shuyukh (religious leaders, in Arabic) emphasize not dawa (proselytization, in Arabic), but rather the maintenance of descendants in the religion of migrant forebears. The long-distance religious practices of Sunni and Shia, Druze and Alawi, “converge” in the hajj to Mecca, as well as differ in pilgrimages to holy cities in Iraq, which for Shia Lebanese are “the focal
center” during ‘Ashura and Arba‘iyyn. In Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este, Arabs integrate Islamic holy days into Catholic-dominant Brazilian and Paraguayan calendars. In Foz do Iguaçu, in 1983, Muslims, Christians, and others laid the cornerstone of the first mosque, Omar Ibn al-Khattab, supported by Brazilian reformists under the surveillance of a fading authoritarian apparatus. A decade later, a second mosque, the Mezquita Profeta Mohamed, was inaugurated in Ciudad del Este, where Shia Lebanese tend to pray under the watch of counterterrorist authorities from Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil, and the US. Most recently, in 2015, Sunni Lebanese led the founding of a third mosque, also in Ciudad del Este: the Mezquita Alkhaulafa Al-Rashdeen, nicknamed the “Mezquita del Este” (Mosque of the East, in Spanish). Amid such institution building, one religious leader noted his exasperation when asked if there is “terrorist activity” at the border. When intelligence or police officers question him, he quips, “I know terrorism,” relating the kidnappings, muggings, and akin everyday violence which is “neither Arab nor Islamic” but rather stem from growing social inequalities under hemispheric-wide market reforms since the 1990s. Under circumstances not of their own choosing, Muslim Arabs draw and are drawn into many Americas from authoritarian to counterterrorist times.

**Familiar and Strange Fields**

My anthropological view of hemispheric history brings together what are usually taken for granted as a separate past and present. Fittingly, I take as my guide Eric Wolf, who first undertook an anthropological approach to history in *Europe and the People without History*. Wolf’s “unfinished” aim to rectify “large gaps in anthropological knowledge” not only vindicates so-named “people” but also scrutinizes the states that tried to incorporate or erase their history, as anthropologist Engseng Ho more recently gathered. Working this field, I repurpose an old ethnographic guidepost to make “the strange familiar, and the familiar strange.” In the first part of this book, I make “familiar” the “strange” exceptions of past authoritarian regimes, which Arabs accommodated at the border. In the second part of the book, I make “strange” the “familiar”
counterterrorist interruptions of the present-day democratic status quo, which Arabs at the border also grew accustomed to. This framework not only redeems the decades-long Arab presence at the border that was under erasure but also redresses the still ongoing broader hemispheric epoch of exceptional rule.

Disrupting the binaries between “home” and “field” critiqued by anthropologists Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, I studied not only in the border cities of Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este, and to a lesser extent in Puerto Iguazú, but also in Asunción, Brasília, Buenos Aires, Curitiba, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Washington, DC. I did archival and ethnographic research with business and civic organizations as well as news and government agencies for some fifteen months between 2007 and 2011, and for two months in 2019. At the border, I carried out some four dozen informal conversations or interviews, and I took notes on nearly eighty Brazilians and Paraguayans who were overwhelmingly of Lebanese origin, as well as some with Palestinian and Syrian backgrounds. Early in the research, interlocutors were hesitant to speak with me because of corporate media that demonized the border as a “terrorist haven.” As a result, I turned to local border newspapers and government reports where Arabs frequently appeared as civic and business protagonists. The materials I collected became useful resources methodologically; reviewing documents with interlocutors elicited greater details about their far-flung connections and compromises at the border. From private and public archives, these written sources also provoked unease among Arabs themselves. “Karam está investigando todo mundo” (Karam is investigating everybody), once joked a colleague, likening my academic research to journalistic or even police “investigations.” However, the vast majority of my interlocutors were men, due to their preponderance in Arab-led business and civic associations at the border as well as in Brazilian, Paraguayan, Argentine, and US states. That is, male dominance was both Arab and American. But I chose not to prioritize gender and sexuality as my research had done elsewhere. Accordingly, this study addresses Arab trade and activism in the authoritarian ascension of Brazil over once Argentina- and US-dominated Paraguay as well as the counterterrorist emergence of Mercosur and US-led war.
Metamorphosing across academic fields, I initiated this research as an anthropologist and specialist in Brazil, but I came to see myself and this book in area and ethnic studies about the hemisphere. I studied anthropology in my undergraduate and graduate years, when I first became interested in what George Marcus called “multi-sited ethnography.” With an excessively literal understanding of what Marcus meant, I intended to live on each side of the trinational border during a short two-month project in 2007. Upon speaking with colleagues and working in archives during the first month, I realized that I needed to focus on the Brazilian and Paraguayan cities linked by the Friendship Bridge, Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este, respectively. As noted earlier, some Arabs live and work on the Brazilian side while others only reside there and commute daily to stores on the Paraguayan side. Fewer both live and work on the Paraguayan side. On whichever side of the Friendship Bridge they spend more time, Arabs would venture onto the Argentine side of the border only on an occasional weekend or intermittent holiday. So, during an eleven-month stay in 2008–9, I first resided in Foz do Iguaçu, mostly out of habit. With fluency in Portuguese and portanhol (a mix of Portuguese and Spanish), it occurred to me that my place of residence and language ability drew upon and reflected Brazilian hegemony over Paraguay. I took measures to guard against my Brazilian-centrism by investing a good deal of energy not only in Ciudad del Este but also Asunción, the capital of Paraguay a few hours westward, where I studied the border in state archives. Unexpectedly, colleagues on the Paraguayan side of the border were more open when I arrived from Asunción rather than the closer Brazilian border town. After this research stint ended in August 2009, it became evident to me that I needed to better grasp Puerto Iguazú on the Argentine side. As was mentioned, hardly any Arabs have ever lived on that side, but Argentine government and military responses to the still unresolved 1992 and 1994 bombings in Buenos Aires carried lasting effects for Arabs and America. Between June and August 2010, I undertook mostly archival work in Buenos Aires on Argentine state and media reports about the border. In 2011, I carried out analogous work on US government and media reports, which nearly always refer to “the tri-border area,” and even used
the acronym TBA, as if this border was some sort of self-contained zone. As I put the archival and ethnographic pieces together from Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, and the US, I became conscious of my own folding of anthropology into area and ethnic studies, and Brazil into the Americas. As is seen in the scholarship that I draw upon, these fields possess common substrates and porous boundaries.

The multi-sited hemispheric field of this study took shape in a dozen places, some twenty newspapers, four governments, and more than six decades. It all began by reading and taking notes from the bi-monthly magazine *Revista Painel* (1973 to present), the weekly newspaper *Nosso Tempo* (1980 to 1989), and the daily *A Gazeta do Iguaçu* (1989 to 2016), each written in Portuguese and published in Foz do Iguaçu, on the Brazilian side of the border. The respective editors-in-chief of the latter two publications, Juvêncio Mazzarollo and Rogério Bonato, emphasized to me that local journalists already knew “since childhood” Arab families, and vice-versa, a point reiterated by Magrão, introduced earlier. In each newspaper, Arabs appeared as traders, neighbors, activists, and acquaintances, not one-dimensional suspects as portrayed in corporate media since the 1990s. As the longest running periodicals that covered Brazilian, Paraguayan, and Argentine sides of the border, *Revista Painel*, *Nosso Tempo*, and *A Gazeta do Iguaçu* provided me with a timeline and a roll call of key players that I used when I spoke with colleagues on each side of the Friendship Bridge and when I worked in archives there and elsewhere. With a list of dates and names from each periodical, I worked with several Asunción-based Paraguayan newspapers, including *ABC Color* (1965 to present) and *Ultima Hora* (1973 to present), which maintained branches in Ciudad Presidente Stroessner / Ciudad del Este in the absence of a local Paraguayan press at the border. In the final leg of research, I used the dates and names from Brazilian and Paraguayan sources to examine major newspapers in Buenos Aires, including *Clarín* (1945 to present) and *La Nación* (1870 to present), neither of which maintained a branch office in Puerto Iguazú. To ensure a broader understanding of the Argentine side, I also worked with *El Territorio*, a newspaper in Posadas, the capital of Misiones, an Argentine *provincia* (equivalent to a state in the US), where the border town of
Introduction

Puerto Iguazú is located. I also collected media reports from the US and cross-checked the moments that entangled Arabs across the hemisphere. With this range of sources, I use oral histories and archival materials in the first half of the book that culminates in the 1990s while I integrate some ethnography in the second half of the book that ends in the 2010s.

In what anthropologist Michael Kearney called the “changing fields of anthropology,” my first book on a national scale, Another Arabesque, led to this second book project with hemispheric scope, but not the way I had initially planned. The first book addressed ethnic politics in Brazil’s neoliberal turn and this second book turns to transnational dynamics in a hemispheric America. As each work spotlights Middle Eastern migrants and descendants, the doubts that Another Arabesque raised about whether post-9/11 US politics would gain traction in Brazil came to serve as the springboard for Manifold Destiny’s new hemispheric understanding of exceptional rule from authoritarian to counterterrorist times. This change of course occurred after I fielded unexpected responses to my first book and its Brazilian edition, Um outro arabesco, at the border. When I gave the paperback to one interviewee on the Paraguayan side in efforts to gain rapport, I was given a fifty-dollar bill as a gesture of goodwill. After promptly returning the money, I joked that I was not selling my work but instead trying to give an idea of what the outcome of my research at the border would look like. Other Arabs at the border were also unsure or hesitant to accept the book because, I suspect, they too had grown accustomed to bearing some cost from akin interactions with media reporters and government officials. Far from earning credibility and the confidence of interlocutors, my distribution of Another Arabesque / Um outro arabesco succumbed to the political conjuncture whose impact I had raised doubts about in the first book. Destiny did not go the way I expected.

So I have been grappling with the “ethics of connectivity” that involve me, the scale of analysis in this book, and my interlocutors at the border in “fieldwork that is not what it used to be,” to borrow insights from anthropologists George Marcus and James Faubion. My interest in the subject matter of this book originally stemmed from a diasporic family history marked by my grandmother of
Lebanese origin who was born and raised on the Brazilian side of the border with Bolívia. At the same time, the hemispheric angle I adopt here subsumes, but refrains from centering on, the US where I myself was born and brought up, and now live and work. Without the relatives and friends in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro who were key to *Another Arabesque*, I nearly abandoned the idea for this book after the aforementioned two-month research stint in Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este in 2007. Many Arabs found it too difficult to disassociate the US part of my background from claims regarding terrorism at the border that they viewed as being most vociferously made in the US. A colleague on the Brazilian side of the border clarified that most could not “figure me out,” despite sharing akin diasporic family histories across the hemisphere. My first name disclosed US Americanness, but my last name and appearance showed Arabness, and my speaking ability in Portuguese implied a claim to Brazilianness as well. I remembered the advice that a US-based Brazilian anthropologist gave me a decade earlier, that it would be difficult to cultivate the rapport necessary to study this border amid the “surveillance and militarization” that anthropologist Carmen Ferradas had noted from Posadas on the Argentine side. But the border kept popping up in the US when I made presentations from my earlier research. At one talk I gave in California, an audience member asked about Muslim Arabs at the “Iguazu” falls in relation to the bombings in Buenos Aires. I replied that such violence remained unresolved and years of investigation failed to produce evidence incriminating the so-called tri-border. But the lack of research precluded saying much else. So, as much as the ties I claimed with Arabness and Brazilianness, it was what cultural critics Ella Shohat and Robert Stam might characterize as an “anti-US-policy” stance that kept me going in the research that resulted in this book. That is, I take my place alongside Arabs at the border and other circumstantial protagonists on a hemispheric field of exceptional rule.