Lebanese, Palestinian, and Syrian migrants on both sides of the Friendship Bridge mobilized in what Vijay Prashad called a “Third World project.” Though historically aligned with South American and Middle Eastern governments, their activism was twisted after the Israeli embassy bombing in the Argentine capital of Buenos Aires in 1992. Authorities in Argentina, backed by the US, unduly laid blame with Arabs at the border following governmental failures to bring to trial the authors of the still unresolved attack. Speaking out on the Brazilian side but more openly targeted on the Paraguayan side, Arabs at the border came to embody the “dramatic decline” of Third Worldism.

Arabs experienced this historic arc of the Third World (terceiro-mundo, in Portuguese, or tercer mundo, in Spanish). Under military- and civilian-led governments at the border, many Lebanese, and some Palestinians and Syrians, called for solidarity with Palestine, as well as Libya or Iran, respectively. On the Brazilian side of the border, Arabs’ activism shifted from the military to civilian successors that eventually took over the state. Meanwhile, on the Paraguayan side of the border, Arabs’ activism complied with an internal military coup that ousted the dictator but retained the political party of the old regime that won nominally liberal democratic elections. After the unresolved 1992 Israeli embassy attack in Buenos Aires, Arabs on the Brazilian side of the border continued
mobilizing, but not in solidarity with counterparts on the Paraguayan side who were targeted by Paraguayan state authorities in collaboration with Argentina and the US. Arabs’ activism came to terms with illiberal states that made liberal exceptions as well as liberal states that made illiberal exceptions across the hemisphere.

Set between the 1960s and early 1990s, this chapter intervenes in scholarship on the “Third World” and “Global South” by exploring not only the possibilities but also the limitations of such visions during and after the Cold War.4 On the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border, migrants mobilized for Palestinian self-determination, as well as Libya’s self-declared revolutionary regime or Iran’s self-styled Islamic Revolution. Drawing on the work of Pamila Gupta, Christopher Lee, Marissa Moorman, and Sandhya Shukla, this chapter considers the “texture of interpersonal exchanges” in mobilization efforts that “challenge(d) the geopolitical frameworks of the United States and Europe.”5 I locate Arabs at the border in “more vertically oriented South-South engagements,” reinforcing the military- and civilian-led Brazilian administrations that “sustained” Paraguay’s dictatorship and its political party that held onto power and became increasingly at odds with Argentina and the US.6 In the authoritarian and post-authoritarian rise of Brazil over the historically Argentine- and US-dominated Paraguay, Arab transnational activism folded into this Third World America.

Arabs at the border accommodated US-backed South American state exceptions toward a transnational Middle East.7 In the 1970s and 1980s, Arabs mobilized through Third Worldist deviations in what sociologists Cecilia Menjívar and Néstor Rodríguez called the “US-Latin American interstate regime,” infamous for the state terror network Operation Condor (1968–1989).8 But after the 1992 Israeli embassy bombing in Buenos Aires, the Argentine state, with US support, put pressure on Brazilian and especially Paraguayan counterparts to take exceptional measures against Arabs, effectively suspending their enfranchisement after the formal end of authoritarian rule. At this time, transnational activism for Middle Eastern causes became overshadowed by multiple government investigations that neither clarified the still unresolved bombing in the
Argentine capital nor found evidence implicating Arabs at the border. Once animating authoritarian state exceptions that sought rapprochement across the Third World, Arabs at the border later abided by post-authoritarian US and South American states’ revanchism toward a transnational Middle East.

**Arab and Islamic Associations in US-South American State Exceptions**

Arabs at the border mobilized under states of exception. The first civic association, the Clube União Árabe (Arab Unity Club), was inaugurated in Foz do Iguaçu’s downtown in 1962 and was later relocated to larger facilities on the main highway near the airport. Through the following decades, the club was monitored by Brazil’s Serviço Nacional de Informações (SNI, National Intelligence Service). Repeatedly reporting that the club served “cultural and recreational ends,” SNI reports expressed not alarm but rather routine information-gathering, containing details that suggest Arabs might have reported on their own community organizing, if only to remain on good terms with the status quo. The club’s founding members, with businesses on Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border, “modeled” the organization as a “country club,” with “social, cultural and sporting” activities for some 150 families, most of whom were Lebanese but also included some Palestinians, Syrians, and others. The club’s name evokes the Arab nationalism of Egyptian president Gamal Abd el Nasr (1956–1970), captivating not only Barakat, Rahal, and others mentioned in the first chapter, but also Brazilian and Paraguayan heads of state. At the time of the club’s founding, the civilian Brazilian president hung a photograph of Nasr on the walls of the presidential office, and in the following decade, military successors began “advocating closer relations with Arab nations.” Meanwhile, the Paraguayan military head of state Alfredo Stroessner bestowed upon Nasr the highest national honor, the Mariscal Francisco Solano López medallion, and Stroessner declared three days of official mourning upon the Arab nationalist leader’s death in 1970.
Arabs registered this and other civic organizations in what anthropologist Matthew Hull called a “regime of paper documents,” including facsimiles and photocopies, adhering and adapting to an authoritarian bureaucracy. In 1978, in order to formulate a “charter” for another civic organization, the Sociedade Beneficente Islâmica (Islamic Benevolent Society), Barakat, Rahal, and others in Foz do Iguaçu consulted with the Sociedade Beneficente Muçulmana (Muslim Benevolent Society) in São Paulo, founded by Syrians, Lebanese, and Palestinians decades previously. Barakat received a faxed copy of the former’s charter sent from São Paulo and asked one of his Brazilian employees to “retype the charter, switching ‘São Paulo’ to ‘Foz do Iguaçu,’” in order to officially obtain civic, not-for-profit status from the military government. Mohamad Barakat convinced the then president of the Clube União Árabe, Mohamad Rahal, to found this Islamic charity organization. Rahal, whose export firm distributed a well-known beer, Skol, initially expressed reservations about compromising support for the country club. But Barakat reasoned that the duly-registered “Islamic” civic association would attract donations from Muslim-majority Arab member states of OPEC (Organization for Petroleum Exporting Countries). At that time, South American military regimes redoubled diplomatic efforts toward Middle Eastern and Islamic states.

As authoritarian Brazil sought rapprochement with Tehran after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, despite its demonization by Washington, DC, Shia Lebanese coalesced around the Islamic Benevolent Society. In 1984, their Islamic Benevolent Society hosted Shahmard Kanani Moghaddam, the Iranian ambassador, then posted to Brasilia, as well as the Mullah Mohammed Tabatabai from Curitiba, who “enjoyed prestige and respect among Shia Muslims spread across the Three Borders.” Kanani and Tabatabai prayed with Shia Lebanese “at a location on the Rua da República do Libano” (sic) in the neighborhood next to the Friendship Bridge. Kanani and Tabatabai later spoke about Islam and Iran to a “packed” audience in the “Diamond Salon” at the Hotel Salvatti in downtown Foz do Iguaçu. “A Muslim Shia from Ciudad Presidente Stroessner” in attendance declared: “he (the Iranian diplomat, Kanani) came here because we
asked” and “with the Mullah (Tabatabai), we are more united, following the teachings of Islam in all senses and praying five times a day.”¹⁹ Tabatabai was born in Najaf, Iraq, and recounted to the newsweekly Veja that he was “sent to Brazil by the Ayatollah Khomeini” to ensure Islamic precepts of halal in Brazilian meat exports as well as to “publicize the basics of Islam.”²⁰ Though the Brazilian foreign ministry asked its Iranian counterpart for a replacement, the Shia Lebanese public embrace of Iran at the border dovetailed with Brazil’s “institutionalized” diplomatic relations with and increased exports to Iran.²¹ These ties with Tehran cultivated on Brazil’s side of the border and the capital of Brasília hardly drew any concern in Washington, DC, even at the time of the US Iran-Contra scandal.

The fact that Brazil’s authoritarian bureaucracy maintained relations with Middle Eastern and Muslim states that were sanctioned by the US is key to grasp another important association founded in 1981, the Centro Cultural Árabe-Brasileiro (Arab-Brazilian Cultural Center).²² Located on the Brazilian side of the border, this center championed Muammar Qaddafi’s Libya with an explicitly “Third Worldist” (terceiro-mundista) ethos. At the time, the Brazilian
military regime ran up a chronic trade deficit with the oil-rich Libyan state yet distanced itself from Qaddafi’s self-declared revolutionary rhetoric.23 Walking this fine line, the Arab-Brazilian Cultural Center offered Arabic language courses, sponsored folkloric and commemorative events, ran food distribution drives during Ramadan, and hosted speakers and diplomats from the Arab world.24 In the center’s marches and statements, two key founders, Mohamad Barakat and Ali Mohamad Sleiman, represented Qaddafi as standing up to US interventionism in Central America, expressing solidarity
with Sandinistas in Nicaragua as well as supporting the people’s struggle in El Salvador. The Arab-Brazilian Cultural Center also distributed the Portuguese translation of Qaddafi’s *The Green Book*, which claimed a “third way” beyond capitalism and communism, and hosted commemorations of the 1969 defeat of the US in Libya as well as Qaddafi’s victory. Such events often included the military-appointed mayor of Foz do Iguaçu Clóvis Viana, mentioned last chapter, among other authoritarian officials at the border.

Shortly after its founding, the Arab-Brazilian Cultural Center welcomed the Libyan ambassador then posted to Brasília. *Nosso Tempo* covered the event and clarified: “Arab immigrants in Foz do Iguaçu and in Ciudad Presidente Stroessner are not from Libya but rather nearly all stem from Lebanon and Syria.” Lebanese speakers condemned “capitalist exploitation” and praised Qaddafi’s Libya, rebuked “North American imperialism” and Zionism, and exalted liberation struggles in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Palestine. What aroused the consternation of *Nosso Tempo*, however, was not the some three hundred attendees of predominantly Lebanese origin from the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border. Rather, it was the presence of authorities “committed to the rightist, reactionary ideology of the three countries,” including Foz do Iguaçu’s army commander and Federal Police chief, Ciudad Presidente Stroessner’s appointed mayor, and the Argentine consul in Foz do Iguaçu, about whom Arabs were “reluctant to speak.” In 1982 and 1983, the center again hosted the Libyan ambassador at events that brought together Foz do Iguaçu’s military-appointed mayor and the municipal council opposition leader Arialba Freire, in addition to others who ostensibly reported on such events to the SNI. At the start of what, in Spanish, is called *la guerra de las Malvinas* (Malvinas War), or, in English, the Falkland’s War (1982), the ambassador declared that “Libya supports Argentina on the issue of the Malvinas Islands and we are certain that . . . just as the territories occupied by Israel will soon be Arab, the Malvinas Islands will be Argentine.” Tacitly approved and monitored by military governments at the border, Qaddafi’s Libya tried to appeal to South American sentiments against Euro-American imperialism.
Also accommodated in an authoritarian regime, the Centro Cultural Beneficente Islâmico (Islamic Benevolent Cultural Center) was organized by Ali Said Rahal and Ahmad Ali Osman. They and others convened a meeting on the Avenida República do Líbano in 1982 that outlined the not-for-profit charter of this “charity, cultural, and social-service” center and fundraised among fifteen founding members with businesses in Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad Presidente Stroessner. Months later, this center sponsored page-long articles about “Islamic culture” in Nosso Tempo. The articles stressed Islam as a “universal brotherhood” and cited verses of the Quran as well as ideas from Pakistani theologian Sayyed Abul Ala Mawdudi alongside British convert Marmaduke Pickthall. Noted in the first chapter, Kamalito Magazine advertised on the same page but stopped doing so because the Federal Revenue Service sought retribution on “the businesses that advertised in the newspaper,” according to Nosso Tempo editor Juvêncio Mazzarollo. Subsequently, the founding members of the Islamic Benevolent Cultural Center requested that the Foz do Iguaçu military government donate land
in order to build a mosque and community center for families with “school-aged children.” Approved by the city council and signed by the military-appointed mayor, the municipal law “authorize[d] the Head of the Executive Branch of the Municipal Government to donate a plot of land to the Centro Cultural Beneficente Islâmico of Foz do Iguaçu.”

Arabs accommodated both military rulers and civilian aspirants at the Islamic Benevolent Cultural Center’s ceremony that laid the cornerstone of the future “Mosque of Foz do Iguaçu.” After the official welcoming that presented the goals of the mosque and community center, the president of the Foz do Iguaçu city council Arialba Freire took the podium. As a member of the permitted political opposition, and married to a career military man opposing the 1964 coup, Freire spoke “in the name of Foz do Iguaçu,” and emphasized “the participation of the Arab community in the development” of the border. Her mention of Arabs as agents of development accommodated the board members present, including Ali Said Rahal as president; Mohamad Ali Omairi, vice-president; Kamal Oman, secretary; Ahmad Ali Osman, treasurer; and others from the Barakat, Rahal, Safa, and Safadi families. This cornerstone-laying ceremony also welcomed diplomats from the Arab League of States, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, and Saudi Arabia; and a half-dozen religious leaders from Curitiba, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro; as well as officials of the Foz do Iguaçu city and Paraná state governments. The MC was Mohamad Abouferes, a representative of the Islamic Conference of South America and the Caribbean, part of the Saudi-supported Muslim World League. More fully explored in the next chapter, hundreds of onlookers celebrated what was called the *comunidade islâmica fronteiriça* (Islamic border community, in Portuguese).

Palestinians also mobilized at the border, soon after Brazilian military and civilian leaders permitted representation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in Brasília. Wafa Abdel was co-founder and president of the Associação Cultural Sanaúd, the “We Shall Return [in Arabic] Cultural Association [in Portuguese].” She and her brother, Arafat, arrived with their Palestinian family in Foz do Iguaçu when she was six years old. In front of Barakat’s
Novo Mundo (New World) store in 1984, Sanaúd exhibited panels with images of “the massacre perpetrated by Israel in the refugee camps of Sabra [and] Chatila, killing thousands of Palestinians.” In 1986, months after the Clube União Árabe welcomed the PLO representative from Brasília, another Palestinian-led association, the Sociedade Árabe Palestino Brasileira (Arab Palestinian Brazilian Society), organized the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. According to Nosso Tempo, the commemoration included “innumerable Brazilian authorities” from centrist and leftist political parties, Brazilian student union leaders, and newly democratically elected Foz do Iguaçu city government officials. In 1988, members of these Palestinian organizations were flanked by mostly Lebanese counterparts in a march of more than seven hundred people that celebrated the precocious declaration of a Palestinian state. “The march was an expression of joy for the declaration,” reflected the Lebanese trader Ali Osman, who called for Palestine to be “officially recognized” by “the world’s governments and the UN.” Wafa Abdel added, “We, Palestinians and Arabs of all states, want the wider acceptance of the UN resolutions that recognized the right of Israel and Palestine to constitute themselves as sovereign and independent states.”

Neither openly condoning nor condemning US-backed South American authoritarian rule and the post-authoritarian transition, Arabs felt far more ease in voicing criticism of US policy toward the Middle East as well as related Israeli incursions there. In June 1982, the Lebanese-led Islamic Benevolent Society and the Arab-Brazilian Cultural Center co-organized “one of the most stirring acts of life of the municipality” against the Israeli occupation of Lebanon that would last for nearly two decades. Advocates “took to the streets of the city in a protest march condemning Israeli aggression.” After the Sabra and Shatila massacres the same year, they and others again collaborated in a declaration of “Solidarity with the Palestinian People,” not mentioning Lebanese complicity in the killing of Palestinians. In Revista Painel, a collective statement denounced the “massacre of the Palestinian and Lebanese peoples” at the hands of Israel with the “active complicity of the US American administration” and the “indifference of most governments.”
Best understood as “new social movements” that “recreated civil society” in a hemispheric borderland, to borrow from the work of sociologist Howard Winant, Lebanese shored up events for Palestinian self-determination, Sunnis frequented what became the Shia-led Islamic Benevolent Society, and Christians and Jews, as well as Muslims, contributed to the construction of the mosque.44

Arab and Islamic civic associations negotiated their own boundaries of national and religious difference, as more fully explored in the following chapter, but they were nonetheless monitored through a sectarian lens by authoritarian Brazilian intelligence. In 1984, the SNI identified a disconnect between “a Sociedade Islâmica de Foz do Iguaçu, whose members are Shia and support Iran” and “the Centro Cultural Beneficente Islâmico de Foz do Iguaçu, formed by Sunnis that are attached to Iraq.”45 Indeed, Shia members of the Islamic Benevolent Society tended to empathize with the ideals of the self-declared Islamic revolution in Iran, in addition to defending Palestinian self-determination.46 In 1984, during the visit of the Iranian ambassador and religious leader mentioned above, Nosso Tempo featured a photograph of some one hundred muçulmanos xiitas (Shia Muslims) marching on Avenida Brasil in Foz do Iguaçu with images of Ayatollah Khomenei, banners calling for the return of
“Jerusalem,” and pictures of the Dome of the Rock. Meanwhile, the mostly Sunni founders of the Centro Cultural Beneficente Islâmico “didn’t want anything to do with Shia” and leaned toward Sadaam Hussein’s brand of Arab nationalism, explored later. Mohamed Barakat reflected that the Arab-Brazilian Cultural Center that championed Muammar Qaddafi also tended to alienate Shia Lebanese at the border, due to Qaddafi’s presumed role in the disappearance of Musa al-Sadr, a popular Shia leader in Lebanon. Occasionally conflicting with each other, these Third World projects were based on the Brazilian, not Paraguayan, side of the border, though both states shared surveillance in a rapprochement that outlasted formal authoritarian rule itself.

Transnational Middle East in Brazil’s Authoritarian Abertura

A transnational Middle East gained visibility on the Brazilian side of the border during a time of distensão, a top-down political liberalization process controlled by the military regime’s last two heads of state, Ernesto Geisel (1974–1979) and João Batista Figueiredo (1979–1985). The ascendancy of Geisel and what later became the abertura política (political opening) shifted course from the 1964 military coup and the “hard-liners” that enforced the “National Security Doctrine,” a Cold War-era state policy “constantly looking for new targets, and etching its violence ever deeper into society,” according to historian Jerry Dávila. President Geisel, and later President Figueiredo, worked to “diminish” the autonomy of military forces that hard-liners enabled previously in what was envisioned to be a controlled and incremental transition. As a result, the politically liberalizing Brazilian regime continued surveillance over Arabs and others at the border but began to reign in repressive “enforcement.”

As easy targets of retribution, Arabs tended to steer clear of any opposition to the Brazilian state, whether in authoritarian or post-authoritarian times. Antônio Vanderli Moreira, a one-time activist of the Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (MDB) in Foz do Iguaçu, stated that no Arabs at the border dared join before the 1979 legalization of political parties at which time the MDB added a P for Partido (Party), becoming the Party of the Brazilian Democratic
Movement (PMDB). PMDB members grew increasingly critical of the military government’s classification of Foz do Iguaçu and other municipalities as “Áreas de Interesse da Segurança Nacional” (Areas of National Security Interest), which enabled federal authorities to appoint the mayor, briefly mentioned last chapter. In 1983, Arabs were generally absent in a series of protests and strikes for eleições diretas (direct elections) in Foz do Iguaçu. At one of the comícios (rallies), the city council president Arialba Freire called for the departure of Clóvis Viana and the return of the people’s right to elect their own representatives, emboldened by the democratic victory of the Paraná state governor José Richa, born in Rio de Janeiro to Lebanese migrant parents. Mentioned earlier, Arialba Freire had spoken at the mosque’s cornerstone laying ceremony, and officially represented PMDB at a congress in Tripoli, Libya. In 1984, Arabs at the border did not publicly appear with these or other pro-democracy forces that demanded the return of “direct elections.” Arabs tended to avoid outright political stands for and especially against authoritarian or post-authoritarian regimes.

But Brazilian intelligence continued to monitor Arabs at this crossroads. In 1983, in the middle of the protests for direct elections, the SNI requested information about Mohamad Barakat, for “spreading the ideology of Qaddafi” among “certain segments of PMDB of Foz do Iguaçu” and “more radical factions of the party.” The report gave details about Barakat and other “Arab organizations,” but no repressive measures were taken against him or the Arab-Brazilian Cultural Center, reflecting the aforementioned detachment of intelligence gathering from repressive measures. Barakat himself recalled that he tended not to fear reprisals from Brazil’s authoritarian regime because the militares (military men) in command of both Brazilian and Arab states were similarly anti-communist and cultivated trade as well as diplomatic ties with one another. Moreover, he pointed out, Arab-Brazilian Cultural Center events were attended by none other than Foz do Iguaçu’s appointed mayor before his departure with civilian rule. What is striking about state intelligence, however, is not that the SNI took note of Barakat’s rapprochement toward progressive political parties, but rather that such surveillance continued through 1990, after the return of liberal democracy.
Barakat’s stances did not change all that much, continuing to champion Palestinian self-determination and Libyan revolutionary pretensions, it was Brazilian democratic forces that had taken over the state that still collected information about him. Neither targeted for repression nor taken into custody, Barakat bore witness to surveillance after the formal eclipse of an authoritarian order.

In a Third World project, Barakat supported Nosso Tempo, the newspaper with a “critical editorial line” founded in 1980 and harassed by military rulers, mentioned in the introduction. Its co-founder

Figure 2.5. Advertisement of the Centro Cultural Árabe-Brasileiro (Arab-Brazilian Cultural Center) expressing solidarity with journalist and activist Juvêncio Mazzarollo. © Nosso Tempo
Juvêncio Mazzarollo remembered that Arabs tended to avoid local politics because they settled in Foz do Iguaçu to *ganhar a vida* (earn a living), and their status as migrants made them easy targets. Mazzarollo knew the security state apparatus first-hand. He was the last journalist imprisoned by the National Security Law that Brazil's Minister of Justice was allegedly “rethinking” in 1983, at the very twilight of military rule. Targeted and imprisoned by the authoritarian regime, Mazzarollo emphasized the role of Mohamad Barakat, who “opened my eyes to the Palestinian cause.” Mazzarollo stated, “Barakat was, ideologically speaking, of the same political stripe as us.” He concluded, “In making solidarity with us, he [Barakat] naturalized as Brazilian and entered into the struggle for freedom.” Indeed, when Mazzarollo was still in jail during Christmas time in 1983, the Arab-Brazilian Cultural Center that Barakat founded took out a quarter-page advertisement, stating: “The best gift for this newspaper . . . would be the liberation of its director, Juvêncio Mazzarollo.”

In another distinct Third World project, one of *Nosso Tempo*’s co-founders, Aloysio Palmar, was invited to Tehran in order to observe a “week of war” with Iraq, arranged after Shia Lebanese at the border hosted the aforementioned Iranian ambassador in 1984. Palmar had been in the Brazilian armed resistance group MR8, imprisoned and tortured by the Brazilian dictatorship, hunted by the covert Operation Condor state network, and had just returned from living in exile. In concluding a lengthy article about his visit to “the land of the Ayatollahs,” the resistance-fighter-turned-journalist criticized Iran as “just one more country of the Third World serving the interests of imperialism that needs wars in order to sell people-killing machines,” especially in the Iraq-Iran war from 1980 to 1988. Having taken up arms and endured state violence himself, Palmar criticized the war that the Iranian state waged, but he concluded that the “Iranian people will bring front and center their popular and national revolution.” Critical of the continued subjugation of the Third World to the arms industry based in the First World, this former Brazilian insurgent upheld the broader ideals of the self-styled Islamic revolution that appealed to many Shia Lebanese at the border.

In yet another Third World project, Barakat and the Arab-Brazilian Cultural Center arranged for *Nosso Tempo* and other pro-democracy
activists to participate in the “International Congress of Solidarity,” held in the Libyan capital of Tripoli, in 1984. Fourteen people made up the Brazilian delegation. Mazzarollo had been invited by the Libyan ambassador in Brazil “out of recognition of the revolutionary mission of the newspaper Nosso Tempo and the attention it always sought to give to the advances of the Libyan revolution.” In retrospect, Mazzarollo reflected that he saw in Qaddafi a critic of the US, and in Libya, a way to see “our own” lack of “egalitarian” prospects in Brazil. Arialba Freire was the only woman in the delegation, officially backed by her party, PMDB. The Foz do Iguaçu City Council “conceded permission to the City Councilor Arialba do Rocio Cordeiro Freire . . . to undertake an official trip in interest of the municipal government . . . in the International Congress in Solidarity with the Arab Libyan People.” Freire, for her part, prepared a speech that she delivered at the congress about the adherence of PMDB and a liberalizing Brazil that returned to civilian rule the following year. As Barakat helped make the travel arrangements (but did not accompany the delegation), Brazilian reformists joined with Arab self-styled revolutionaries in what they considered to be a Third World project with democratic aspirations.

But activists in the Arab-Brazilian Cultural Center and akin Lebanese-led associations refrained from transgressing the limits of state-led Third Worldism. Such activists were absent from the Jornada de Solidariedade ao Povo Paraguaio (March in Support of the Paraguayan People) that criticized the Paraguayan dictator Alfredo Stroessner and his alliance with Brazil. In 1984 and 1985, Nosso Tempo organized Paraguayan solidarity campaigns. But Lebanese, Palestinians, Syrians, and other Arabs steered clear of any protest against Stroessner, which would have brought the Paraguayan state’s retribution on their businesses and clients at the border. In 1984 and 1985, Paraguayan forces gathered intelligence at Paraguayan pro-democracy events held on the Brazilian side of the border, recording the names of the organizers and speakers. Indeed, the last two Brazilian military heads of state that led the “political opening” process, Geisel and Figueiredo, renewed ties with the Paraguayan dictatorship and its security apparatus, headed by Pastor Coronel in the Departamento de Investigaciones (Department
of Investigations), which engaged in the “torture, exile, and execution” of Paraguayan citizens. In Third World projects, Arabs at the border remained silent about Brazilian state complicity in authoritarian Paraguay.

Arabs accommodated the exceptional alliance between a liberal democratic Brazilian government and illiberal Paraguay. In 1985, Arabs attended the campaign rally that the aforementioned Governor José Richa headlined for PMDB candidates in the Foz do Iguazu municipal elections that concurrently hosted Antonio Sarubbi, the military-appointed governor of the neighboring Paraguayan state, Alto Paraná. Accompanying the Brazilian democrat and Paraguayan autocrat were three Arab traders: Abdo Rahal whose Exportadora Líder in Foz do Iguazu sold significant quantities of merchandise to Paraguay; Hussein Taijen, president of the Cámara de Comercio de Ciudad Presidente Stroessner, whose Casa Colombia sold consumer imports from Panama; and Mohamad Barakat of the Arab-Brazilian Cultural Center. A month later, Arabs and others at the border overlooked the embrace between Brazil’s first civilian president, José Sarney, and the Paraguayan military dictator at the border, but praised Sarney’s censure of an Israeli offensive against Palestinians. After the formal end of the authoritarian Brazilian regime, Arabs at the border accommodated PMDB’s post-authoritarian rapprochement toward the Paraguayan dictatorship in what heads of state declared to be “continental unity.”

Authoritarian oversight persisted in a civilian-ruled Foz do Iguazu, evident in the inauguration of the mosque and adjacent school in 1988. The mosque’s cornerstone had been laid five years previously and the final stages of construction were publicly celebrated by the first democratically elected civilian mayor, Dobrandino da Silva (PMDB). Arialba Freire, president of the city council at the time, was also in attendance. Impromptu, she was called upon to give a speech, thanking local leaders but forgetting to mention the “director of the Receita Federal” (Revenue Secretariat, equivalent to the IRS), who was at the time one of the SNI’s cachorros (dogs), public servants who provided intelligence in exchange for favors from government authorities. The particular official was offended and threatened to use his sundry connections to enact retribution.
Days after the inauguration, the offended official sent an emissary to Freire’s office who threatened to provoke “an even bigger misunderstanding.” Freire shrugged her shoulders and explained that she was surprised to have been asked to speak and forgot to acknowledge his presence. Her self-assured response perhaps presumed that the offended official could not make good on his threat because the SNI’s new director was General Ivan de Souza Mendes, who historian Thomas Skidmore characterized as a “moderate” in favor of “democratic government” with little prior experience. The mosque inauguration ceremony in 1988 throws into relief the residual influence of military-controlled intelligence in post-authoritarian Brazilian rule over Arabs and others at the border.

Arabs on the Brazilian side of the border, instead of being enfranchised, were audited by the one-time democratic opposition that took over the reins of the state. In 1988, Brazilian state tax inspectors targeted Arab businesses near the Friendship Bridge after PMDB victories in municipal, and mayoral, and gubernatorial contests. Arabs and other traders in Foz do Iguaçu supported PMDB in the lead-up to elections partly because the slate of candidates promised “to not do the feared ‘operation fine-comb’” that would audit state tax returns. According to A Gazeta do Iguaçu, “it was public and notorious that a large number of state tax inspectors from ICM [Imposto Sobre Circulação de Mercadorias, akin to a state sales tax in the US], intended to audit at the border, especially in the area of exportation” in the Vila Portes and Jardim Jupira neighborhoods near the Friendship Bridge. Having been suspected of economic duplicity, mentioned last chapter, Arab and other commercial exporters ended up being targeted by some sixty-six state tax inspectors after having declared their support of the victorious PMDB. Many exporters received steep fines for not paying the state tax or not declaring their entire stocks. One disillusioned trader complained that “it’s lamentable that this takes place soon after the election.”

Paisanos in Paraguay’s Authoritarian Legacies

Arabs working and/or living on the Paraguayan side of the border faced the stronato, the moniker for the “personalist-authoritarian
regime” of General Alfredo Stroessner (1954–1989). According to political scientists Frank Mora and Jerry Cooney, as well as Marcial Antonio Riquelme, the Paraguayan dictator tried to appear “reserved and mild-mannered,” presiding over the regime’s political party, the Asociación Nacional Republicana (ANR), usually called the Partido Colorado (Colorado Party), which far outlived the dictator himself. Early on, Stroessner quelled divisions among party members through a “patrimonial” style with “personal, reciprocal ties of faithfulness and obligation” that political scientist Paul Sondrol assessed. With the support of the Colorado Party, Stroessner had unchecked control over “the functioning of the state’s institutions,” enshrined by Paraguay’s 1967 Constitution. The most “dreaded” entity of this rule was the aforementioned Department of Investigations, under the Ministry of Interior, led by Sabino Augusto Montanaro and “shielded from controversy” in intelligence and enforcement. This authoritarian power remains a living legacy in Paraguay.

Arabs accommodated and were accommodated by this exceptional rule. Mentioned earlier, HDD was likely granted ample discretion by his father-in-law, the dictator, to found the Paraguayan branch of the Federación de Entidades Árabes (Federation of Arab Entities, or FEARAB). Life-long Colorado Party member of Syrian-Lebanese origin, Bader Rachid Lichi, likewise wrote about Palestine for the anti-Stroessner newspaper, Nosso Tempo in Foz do Iguaçu, without retribution. Though enabling this freedom of expression for Arab liberationist causes, the stronato could also make or break any business by granting or revoking importation licenses and trademark rights for whiskey, tobacco products, jeans, and other high-brow consumables from abroad. For this reason, “todos los árabes eran stronistas” (all Arabs were Stroessner supporters), quipped a long-time resident and journalist on the Paraguayan side of the border. He explained that Mohamad Jebai, Ali Said Rahal, and others previously mentioned made sure “para estar bien con el régimen” (to be on good terms with the regime). Introduced last chapter, Jebai was said to have struck a business partnership with Stroessner’s wife, Eligía Mora Delgado, in the Galeria Jebai Center. He also hosted Stroessner at the shopping center’s official
inauguration in 1977. Other storeowners likewise financed Colorado Party candidates who consistently won in the skewed municipal, departmental, and national elections.

Arabs’ accommodation of Colorado rule continued during the party’s infighting in the 1980s. Arabs got used to the polarization between so-called *militantes* (militants) and *tradicionalistas* (traditionalists). The key point of contention regarded Stroessner’s successor. Militants readied Stroessner’s son while traditionalists looked to the party’s ranks. As the reigns of the dictatorship were pushed and pulled, the mayorship of Ciudad Presidente Stroessner changed hands from Carlos Barreto Sarubbi to Hugo Martínez Cárdenas in 1986. As the dictator tried to ensure the ascendancy of his son and everyday civilians increasingly questioned the regime, the armed forces general, Andrés Rodríguez, led an internal military coup in early 1989. Three months after deposing Stroessner, General Rodriguez, with the support of the military and the Colorado Party, ran for and won the presidency, having “co-opted the rhetoric of the opposition—concern for democracy, social justice and human rights.” For the Paraguayan border town, Rodríguez changed the name to Ciudad del Este (City of the East) and replaced the Stroessner-era-associated mayor with Óscar Ovelar Rojas. Marking continuity, and not rupture, this so-called “democracy” allegedly “audited” and “approved” the ledgers of its predecessor, the dictatorship-appointed mayoral administration. As the military and the Colorado Party retained power in Paraguay, most Arabs continued to be on good terms with an illiberal state apparatus that outlived authoritarian rule itself.

Having grown accustomed to this sort of power, Arabs shifted allegiances from the deposed dictator to the military coup leader, General Rodríguez. In 1989, Mohamad Jebai allegedly invited the general-cum-president Rodríguez to become his new business partner, cutting out his original associate, Eligia, the wife of the overthrown dictator. The once influential “ña Eligia” (Mrs. Eligia, in Guaraní) allegedly took revenge and denounced Jebai for tax evasion. The battle was said to have ended up in the courts. In this or some other mishap with an illiberal Paraguayan state, Jebai was said to have placed some of his property in the name of his nephew. Some
of the lucrative real estate consisted of a vacant lot behind the mayoral building (*Intendencia*). The nephew allegedly never returned it. Though not unscathed, Mohamad Jebai was said to have won the judicial case put forth by Stroessner’s wife, undoubtedly with the support of his novel business associate, President Rodríguez, the newly elected president in an illiberal democratic Paraguay.

At the dusk of Third World solidarity, Arabs came to terms with this alliance between an illiberal Paraguay and a liberalizing Brazil, symbolized by the close ties between (former general) President Rodríguez and Fernando Collor de Mello, the democratically elected civilian president of Brazil in 1989. Since Paraguay’s largest creditor and trading partner was Brazil, Rodríguez met twice with Collor, who characterized Paraguay and Brazil as “brotherly peoples,” in an embrace at the border. Arabs at the border led a sizeable protest not against this illiberal exception to liberal democratic rule but rather against Collor’s unsuccessful intention to close the PLO office in Brasília. Covered by *Nosso Tempo*, Arab activists at the border were said to defend Palestinian “self-determination” because “we are Brazilians” and “we want a Brazil that is progressive, democratic, and that stands in solidarity with the oppressed.” Collor ended up canceling his trip to Foz do Iguaçu, alleging a busy schedule, but for protestors, primarily of Lebanese origins, his absence was due to the “stupendous demonstration of repugnance.” As one of many acts of solidarity with Palestine in the second half of the 1980s, this protest accommodated liberal Brazilian democrats’ renewed alliance with the illiberal Paraguayan old guard at the end of state-led Third Worldism.

Arabs and others at the border expressed solidarity with Palestine but kept silent about the illiberal status quo in Paraguay that was itself supported by the Brazilian state. In 1989, just after the internal military coup in Paraguay that led Stroessner to seek exile in Brasília, “the Arab community of Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad Presidente Stroessner hosted one of the leaders of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Lebanon.” Not mentioning the illiberal status quo that continued at the border, the PLO leader urged the “local Arab community . . . to remain committed to the struggle for liberation” and the “popular Palestinian uprising known as
‘Intifada.’ Later the same year, after the Paraguayan border city changed its name to Ciudad del Este, the “Arab community of Foz do Iguaçu and Cidade del Leste [sic]” celebrated the second anniversary of the Intifada, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, as well as the first anniversary of the proclamation of the Palestinian State. Arabs at the border publicly mobilized for Palestine and avoided taking a stand on the authoritarian legacies of the Paraguayan state underwritten by post-authoritarian Brazil.

Arabs came to terms with Paraguay’s illiberal regime. Less beholden to the Colorado Party, Hussein Taijen exercised some leverage through his presidency of the Paraguayan border town’s Chamber of Commerce that mitigated relations between local businesses and suppliers abroad. Indeed, a day after the internal military coup, Taijen publicly lashed out at the Colorado Party–dominated Chamber of Deputies and Senate of the Paraguayan government, which had raised the import taxes on a range of products that jeopardized business in the Paraguayan border town. Taijen complained that higher taxes “only came to hurt trade and the government, because

Figure 2.6. From left to right, Hussein Taijen, Sra. Hussein Taijen, Tércio Albuquerque, and Mohamad Barakat, at an Arab community event. © Nosso Tempo
the traders imported less, sold less, and consequently, generated less taxes.” A year later, Andrés Rodríguez vetoed the measure and reinstated the old system of 7 to 10 percent tax depending on the country of origin of the imported merchandise. Business as usual returned. After Rodríguez changed the name of the Paraguayan border town that had referenced the deposed Paraguayan dictator, Taijen likewise renamed the chamber of commerce as the Cámara de Comercio de Ciudad del Este (Chamber of Commerce of Ciudad del Este). Neither condemning nor condoning illiberal government, Arabs on the Paraguayan side of the border defended business interests and generally accommodated the status quo.

But Third Worldist sentiments outlived the demise of the states that claimed to be the vanguard. It was mostly Lebanese who still found a place for long-distance Arab nationalism in Paraguay. Hussein Taijen and his brother, Said, broadly identified with Arab nationalism. Having migrated from Lebanon to the Paraguayan side of the border, Said Taijen stated that he and his brother considered themselves Arabs, because Lebanon was part of Syria, and Greater Syria was linked to Iraq and Palestine before British and French colonialism. Indeed, Hussein Taijen participated in the street protests that condemned Israeli violence in Lebanon and Palestine as well as in the welcoming parties for Libyan diplomats and visitors at the Arab Brazilian Cultural Center and the mosque. With righteous convictions, Hussein Taijen attracted members of the Partido Revolucionario Febrerista (PRF, or Februayan Revolutionary Party), a socialist party banned by Stroessner and allowed to return after the coup. Ricardo Jimenez, a PRF activist who had lived in the Paraguayan border town since 1980, stated that he “brought Taijen along with other Arabs to join the party.” Jimenez broached the topic of “febrerismo” (Febrero ideology that mixed Third World nationalism and socialism) with Hussein Taijen after the fall of Stroessner. Jimenez remembered that Taijen initially retorted, “soy colorado” (I am of the Colorado Party). Nonetheless, when Jimenez explained the history of the party, and its leanings toward social justice, Taijen allegedly responded, “quiero apoyar este partido, porque soy socialista en mi país” (I want to support this party, because I’m a socialist back in my country, in Spanish). In connecting the PRF
to Arab nationalism, Taijen was said to have “economically supported” the party, “providing transportation and funding” according to Jimenez. For another PRF activist, most Arabs in the Paraguayan border town needed to be Colorado Party members in order to do business, but “ideologically . . . they don’t get along . . . they are anti-imperialists,” because “Arabs” experienced US imperialism in the lands they departed and settled. Third Worldist sentiments survived the “dramatic decline” of state-led visions.

Like most Arabs at the border, Hussein Taijen maintained a measured distance from Paraguay’s illiberal democratic government, which still looked similar to the deposed military regime. Taijen recurrently stated, “Soy comerciante, no mercachifle” (I am a businessman, not a huckster, in Spanish), especially meaningful amid mounting accusations of state-led profiteering after the internal military coup. In the 1991 elections, Paraguayan voters could choose new representatives for the Paraguayan national constituent assembly as well as municipal governments. Colorado Party candidates from rival factions accused one another of corruption while drawing the same indictments from candidates in previously banned oppositional parties. Many front-runners for a constituent assembly seat or municipal office were suspected of smuggling merchandise, especially through the department, or state, of Alto Paraná, whose capital is Ciudad del Este. With less popularity than when he assumed the presidency two years previously, General Rodríguez vowed to put an end to this corruption and claimed to investigate the department’s alleged four hundred clandestine air strips, especially those associated with his political competitors. In the mayoral election of the newly renamed Ciudad del Este, a former university rector, Amado Benitez Gamarra, became the official candidate of the Colorado Party. Promising to remove street vendors from the city streets and “increase the integration between Ciudad del Este and Foz do Iguaçu,” the Colorados prevailed by a narrow margin. The same political party of the overthrown Paraguayan dictatorship won electoral victories, maintaining the illiberal status quo in post-authoritarian times.

In this authoritarian legacy, Arabs found their businesses under greater scrutiny, especially by the Dirección General de Aduanas
(Directorate General of Customs). Federal Paraguayan government officials removed thirty border customs employees from the office in newly designated Ciudad del Este. They also publicly announced a list of merchants suspected of paying off those employees. As stated in A Gazeta do Iguaçu from the Brazilian side of the border, “The majority of the names on the list are Arab . . . all having stores and import businesses in Paraguay.” The article listed several names, including Hassan Assad, Imadi Assim, Hassan Diab, Hassan Nasser, Ali Narakat, Mohamed Mabousi, Abou Ltaif, and Abas Mossem. By actually naming and placing blame on Arab traders, the illiberal democratic Paraguayan government drew attention away from its own systemic profiteering that had for decades underestimated the value of requisitioned cargo in exchange for payoffs from importers, explored in the last chapter. Illiberal democratic state powers, rather than enfranchise, audited Arabs with greater fiscal surveillance at the limits of the Third World.

Disenfranchisement in a Post-Authoritarian America

Unresolved violence in Argentina further limited enfranchisement after the formal end of authoritarian rule. On March 17th, 1992, a vehicle loaded with explosives blew apart the five-story Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires. Thirty persons were killed and over 250 were wounded. The force from the explosion shattered windows for a half-dozen city blocks, blew apart trees, and covered the sky with smoke. After an emergency cabinet meeting convened by Argentina’s democratically elected president, the intelligence director characterized the attack “as a derivation of the conflict in the Middle East inside Argentina and with the participation of Argentines.” Media coverage focused on a statement issued by the amorphous “Islamic Jihad” in Beirut, taking at face value the claim that it authored the attack in retribution for Israel’s killing of Sheikh Abbas Musawi, then Hizbullah’s Secretary-General, and much of his family, in Lebanon. In the same press, Hizbullah disavowed the attack and the Islamic Jihad in Beirut was said to have confirmed that an Argentine convert to Islam carried out the bombing. Despite domestic suspects, the Argentine president “asked
both Israel’s Mossad secret service and the United States Central Intelligence Agency [CIA] to help in the investigation.” In framing the violence as a “derivation” from the “Middle East,” and reaching out to the US, the nominally liberal democratic Argentine state took steps to disavow its own accountability in the still unresolved 1992 Israeli embassy bombing.

Liberal governments now made illiberal exceptions toward a transnational Middle East, obfuscating hemispheric America’s own past of state-sponsored terrorism. The US Department of State’s *Patterns of Global Terrorism 1992*, declared that, “The bombing of Israel’s Embassy in Buenos Aires” bore not a resemblance to authoritarian-era state terrorism that it had supported in South America, but rather served as an example of specifically “Middle Eastern violence and the single most lethal terrorist event of the year.” Without evidence, the US State Department conjectured that, “communities of recent Shiite Muslim émigrés in the remote border areas of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay could provide cover for international terrorists,” and in particular “Hizballah activity in Latin America.” Just days after the bombing, the State Department admitted lacking “information to confirm this reported claim” regarding Islamic Jihad or other suspects that carried out the bombing. As explored more fully in the next chapters, the US did not disclose evidence but nonetheless associated the still unresolved violence in Argentina with Arabs and Muslims on the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border.

Backed by the US, the Argentine state pressured the Paraguayan National Police to search for “two Arab citizens” (*dos ciudadanos árabes*) in Ciudad del Este suspected of holding sympathies for the Islamic Jihad. Claiming their names were withheld due to the secret nature of the investigation, *ABC Color* stated that, “the Arabs who are wanted may be sympathizers of the Islamic Jihad, the pro-Irani terrorist group that claimed authorship of the explosive attack in a statement released in Beirut, according to information compiled by the police forces of Argentina, Paraguay, and Israel.” The chief of the Paraguayan National Police was cited as saying: “In Ciudad del Este, there are people of Arab and Lebanese nationality, and for this reason, we are doing secret intelligence work, if
by chance there’s a relation. But for now, there doesn’t exist any suspicions.” In the same breath, he added, “work is in progress to track Arab and Lebanese citizens [ciudadanos árabes y libaneses] in Ciudad del Este.” Such tracking was ostensibly undertaken by military commanders in Paraguay’s National Police since Paraguay’s 1992 constitution reserved domestic security matters for the armed forces.124 Embodying the continued influence of the armed forces in civilian governance, the military-led Paraguayan National Police set its sights on Arabs at the border.

Arabs on the Paraguayan side of the border pointed out not continued surveillance in post-authoritarian times, but rather migrant suffrage and migrants’ right to vote in elections for city councils and mayorships. The 1992 Paraguayan constitution ensured that “foreigners with permanent settlement will have the same rights in municipal elections.”125 This migrant suffrage was reinforced by Paraguay’s Electoral Code, which obliged “foreigners with permanent residence” to enroll in a Civic Registry of Foreigners that was used to ensure voting rights.126 Said Taijen explained that, since the new constitution, “anyone who settles in Ciudad del Este,” or any other city in Paraguay for that matter, has the right to elect the mayor (intendente) and the city councilors (concejales). He surmised: “This is probably the only country in the world that gives the right to vote to migrants who are neither native nor naturalized.” Overstating the influence of the Arab electoral bloc, Said added that, “here in Ciudad del Este, we [Arabs] number seven thousand voters. If we wanted to elect the city government, we could, but we are not zealots.”127 Despite migrant suffrage, the backlash from the unresolved 1992 bombing in Buenos Aires limited substantive enfranchisement.

Especially evident on the Paraguayan side of the border, Arab transnational ties could no longer be articulated on their own terms, a civic and collective right otherwise expected after the formal end of authoritarian rule. Though most Arab civic organizing historically took place on the Brazilian side, Lebanese, Palestinians, and Syrians had begun to debate the forms their advocacy took. A month before the bombing in Buenos Aires, in early 1992, “commercial establishments of Ciudad del Este in Paraguay and Foz
do Iguacu” closed their doors “in protest” of Israel’s assassination of Hizbullah’s Secretary General Abbas Musawi and his family in Lebanon. Some participated in this protest while Hussein Taijen, as president of the Chamber of Commerce of Ciudad del Este, criticized the work stoppage for “diminishing the flow of merchandise at a difficult time for storeowners.” But Argentine- and US-derived suspicions cast a shadow over this and any other form of Arab or Muslim civic engagement as allegedly precipitating the bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires.

After the formal end of the authoritarian-era covert Operation Condor network, the scrutiny over Arabs’ presence at the border legitimated exceptional surveillance and intelligence-sharing among multiple government authorities. Paraguay’s National Police chief specified that “we are in permanent contact with Argentina’s Interior Minister, Jose Luis Manzano, and we are exchanging information.” This police chief and Paraguay’s “Commander in Chief,” General Rodríguez, separately met with “Brigadier General Yehuda Duvdevani,” who was an attaché in the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires. But Brazilian intelligence officials, not mentioned in contemporaneous Paraguayan, Argentine, or Brazilian news coverage, later affirmed that “those actions that occurred in Buenos Aires had a very different origin from that which was claimed,” which led the Brazilian state to adopt the position that “there was not . . . planning or logistical support or people for those attacks from our territory.” At the time, Brazilian officials did not express concern about the border but rather shored up the security of the Israeli embassy in Brasilia and Jewish associations in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. The state increased security but eschewed charging Arabs at the border with any infringement of the law.

Arabs spoke out on the Brazilian side, but remained silent about the Paraguayan side in limited Third World solidarity at the border. In Foz do Iguacu, Mohamad Barakat criticized democratically elected governors of three Brazilian states bordering on Argentina who released a collective statement in condemnation of the bombing in Buenos Aires. The governors of Paraná, Rio Grande do Sul, and Santa Catarina condemned “the barbarity and political impositions
apparent in the terrorism recently practiced against the embassy of Israel.” Roberto Requião, the governor of the state of Paraná who will be mentioned again in later chapters, added that “Arabs, Palestinians, and Israelis should take Brazil as an example, where the three peoples live in peace.” In his open rebuke, Barakat criticized the Brazilian governors who “never took a stand against the acts of barbarism practiced by Zionists. If in some moment they had done so, we could accept the collective statement signed by these governors. But no, when massacres happened to the Palestinian people, they were silent.” Barakat went on to characterize Israel as “anti-human” and “racist,” and condemned the violence that it has enacted on Palestine for some fifty years. Rather than express empathy for those who suffered from the bombing in Buenos Aires, Barakat emphasized Israel’s victimization of Palestinians and Lebanese. Barakat explained that Israel had just unilaterally assassinated the aforementioned Abbas Musawi and his family in Lebanon. Barakat spoke out against Israel and Brazilian governors but said nothing of the state surveillance targeting Arabs in Ciudad del Este.

Indeed, on the Brazilian side of the border, Arabs accommodated greater governmental power with the ascendancy of PMDB, despite the tax audits undertaken years previously, as discussed last chapter. Electorally, “Arabs conceded their unlimited support to then candidate Dobrandino Gustavo da Silva” of PMDB in the 1993 municipal elections. Having already served as mayor with the return of democracy, Dobrandino thanked his Arab supporters by improving the infrastructure in the neighborhoods of Vila Portes and Jardim Jupira, next to the Friendship Bridge. Ali Osman thanked the mayor by stating that “the restoration of the streets of Vila Portes was an old demand of the Arab community and it positively resonated among community members.” Dobrandino’s administration included Arabs: Ahmad Nagib Al Ghazaqui headed the department of human resources, Geber Nasser ran the department of commercial and industrial development, and Hichen Mohamad Hachan became the director of public works. Hachan stated that “All public works undertaken . . . are determined by the mayor, who has answered most of the demands of the Arab community.” Arabs
joined the political party that once opposed the Brazilian authoritarian regime but accommodated the illiberal Paraguayan status quo that continued to limit the fuller enfranchisement of the border.

Arabs and their liberationist causes took center stage in the PMDB-led Foz do Iguaçu government. One telling moment was the issuing of a municipal decree that instituted Foz do Iguaçu’s annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on November 29, proclaimed by the UN some fifteen years previously. Álvaro Neumann, the successor of the first democratically elected mayor, signed it into law. At the ceremony at a luxury hotel, he stated, “November 29 is a date of deep importance for the Arab-Palestinian people because it’s in tune with the love of all peoples for their cause.” The aforementioned Sanaúd Cultural Association, as well as the Arab Palestinian Brazilian Society among others, helped coordinate the festivities. Lebanese, Palestinians, Syrians, and others spoke out for Palestine and against Israel in Foz do Iguaçu, and not Ciudad del Este. Having avoided public stands on the Colorado-dominated Paraguayan side of the border, the event they organized again came under surveillance by Brazilian state intelligence in liberal democratic times.

From the 1960s to the early 1990s, Lebanese, Palestinians, and Syrians experienced the clarion and decline of state-led visions for the Third World. At the border, they mobilized under the liberal exceptions of authoritarian leaders and the illiberal exceptions of post-authoritarian successors. In advocating for Middle Eastern and Islamic causes alongside South American civilian and military authorities, they accommodated forms of exceptional rule, engaging reformists and reactionaries in Brazil and Paraguay, maintaining some distance from Argentina, and occasionally criticizing US interventionism. Their support of Middle Eastern and Islamic liberationist movements, however, precluded criticizing the illiberal status quo in Paraguay, which depended on Brazilian military- and civilian-led governments. At the border, Arabs folded into these Third World possibilities and limits. Nonetheless, their enfran-
chisement after the formal end of authoritarianism was interrupted by the 1992 bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires. Following another attack in the capital of Argentina two years later, their faith in the rule of law would be again tested on the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border.