



Manifold Destiny

Arabs at an American
Crossroads of
Exceptional Rule

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Para Josephine e Nur

قدري أنتما

El camino es el destino

O caminho é o destino

The Road is Destiny

الطريق هو الوجهة

Los hijos de los días, Eduardo Galeano (2012)

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Acknowledgments

One's destination may or may not be destiny. In Spanish and Portuguese, *destino* can mean destination and destiny. In Arabic, *al-wijha* is destination whereas *al-qadr* evokes a pre-determined destiny. Likewise, in English, destination is the end of a journey while destiny suggests one's eventual fate. Notwithstanding the title, this book is neither a literal destination nor an actual destiny but rather a "history of the present" that I hope will soon take another, more progressive, direction that would make the story recounted in these pages the past of a future with greater equity, justice, and belonging. The research that resulted in this book began at a more optimistic time, in 2007 specifically. I completed most of the research by 2011, when it seemed that this hemisphere was headed for somewhere other than the conjunction where we now find ourselves. Over these years, I met and married my wife, and we welcomed into the world our daughter whose vibrant light gives me energy each and every day. I know not where we are bound for, but I am content that we are bound together.

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our daughter flips through the pages of the dusty hardcover or used paperback, or perhaps more likely glances at a digital copy of this book, I hope that the world that she and her generation inhabit will be a better one.

Urbana-Champaign, September 2, 2020



Figure 0.1. The border where Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina meet in hemispheric perspective. © OpenStreetMap contributors



Figure 0.2. A map of the border where Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina meet. On the right is the Brazilian city of Foz do Iguaçu. On the left is the Paraguayan city of Ciudad del Este. At the bottom of the map is the Argentine town of Puerto Iguazú. © OpenStreetMap contributors

INTRODUCTION

Destined for America

“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 *tri-border* in English.⁴

In the “destiny of America,” are Arabs at this border moving “toward continental integration?”⁵ In 1965, military heads of state used such language to inaugurate the Friendship Bridge between the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the fluvial border.⁶ 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.⁷ 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 affinities.⁸ In this “spurious scholarship,” a turn of phrase I borrow from postcolonial critic Edward Said, Arabs at the border trouble a hemispheric America.⁹

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.¹⁰ 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.”¹¹ 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.¹² In this unfinished but not interminable saga, Arabs connect the heretofore separate subjects of authoritarian South America and the counterterrorist US.¹³ 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.¹⁴ I advance transnational turns in area and ethnic studies that began nearly three decades ago. 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,¹⁵ an American Pacific,¹⁶ Latina/o Americas,¹⁷ and an Arab Atlantic.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ I extend this transnational approach to the Middle East across three fields with dis-

inct 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.²⁰ 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.²¹ But critics note that this move beyond the nation-state failed to adequately dislodge US-centrism or expose disavowals of exceptionalism.²² Transnational turns in American Studies left more or less intact US exceptionalist beliefs of being "distinctive," "exemplary," "exempt," or "unique."²³ In one recent corrective, Kristin Hoganson and Jay Sexton brought US history into "trans-imperial terrain" occupied by other expansionist state agendas.²⁴ 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."²⁵ 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."²⁶ 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.²⁷ They looked at the Brazilian state's own engagement with Americanism, which shifted between rapprochement and rivalry with the US.²⁸ They also followed Brazil's expansive influence leading up to and during the aforementioned period of authoritarian rule.²⁹ 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."³⁰ 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 “Americanness” 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 “Americanness” 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.³⁹ Connecting 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).⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ Geographer Adriana Dorfman mapped *estudos fronteiriços* (border studies) on the Brazilian side while anthropologist Alejandro Grimson began theorizing “borderization” from the Argentine side.⁴² Meanwhile, sociologists Silvia Montenegro and Veronica 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.⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ 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 2010.⁴⁵ 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 2002.⁴⁶ In

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 2010.⁴⁷ Home to the world famous waterfalls, called Iguaçú (in Portuguese), Iguazú (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 trilateral 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).⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹

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."⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹ 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."⁵² 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 crisscrossing 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.⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹ 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.⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹ 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

and Paraguayan state positions in US-led counterterrorism. Some joined with Brazilian officials wary of US counterterrorist accusations by organizing the aforementioned event, Peace without Borders. Others on the Paraguayan side became duplicitous informants and finger-pointed business rivals as terrorists, later jailed for tax evasion. Under exceptional militarization in civilian rule, Arabs at the border neither openly confronted nor entirely conformed to US-led war.

US officials continued to scrutinize Arabs at the border in what Marieke de Goede called the “extralegal targeting” of “suspect monies.”⁶² 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.⁶³ 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 Fakhri bore witness to such state exceptions since migrating from Lebanon to Brazil’s side of the border. In the 1970s and 1980s, Fakhri 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, Fakihi 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, Fakihi 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.⁷¹ 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.⁷² 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.⁷³ 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.”⁷⁴ 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.⁷⁵ As an elected public official, Omairi defended an end to visas between Brazil and Canada.⁷⁶ 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.⁷⁷ 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.⁷⁸ 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.”⁷⁹ 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”).⁸⁰ 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.⁸¹ 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 ‘salamaleicom’ (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).⁸² “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.⁸³ The first arrivals were mostly Sunni. Since the 1970s, Shia migrated in increasing numbers and became a slight majority by the mid-1990s.⁸⁴ 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.⁸⁵ 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‘iyyin*.⁸⁶ 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*.⁸⁷ 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.⁸⁸ 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.⁸⁹ 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.⁹⁰ 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.”⁹¹ 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 *portunhol* (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 Painei* (1973 to present), the weekly newspaper *Nosso Tempo* (1980 to 1989), and the daily *A Gazeta do Iguaçu* (1989 to 2016),⁹² 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 Mazza-rollo 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 Painei*, *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

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.⁹³ 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.⁹⁴ 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 Bol via.⁹⁵ 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 S o 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 Igua u 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.⁹⁶ 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.⁹⁷ That is, I take my place alongside Arabs at the border and other circumstantial protagonists on a hemispheric field of exceptional rule.

PART I

AUTHORITARIAN LEGACIES

(1960S–1990S)

CHAPTER 1

Semiperipheral Marches

Lebanese, Palestinians, and Syrians traded westward and eastward, hardly upsetting the north-south asymmetry of this hemisphere. On the Brazilian side of the border, their exportation of Brazilian manufactures to Paraguay converged with Brazilian military heads of state who renewed the westward expansion previously known as the *marcha para o oeste* (march toward the west, in Portuguese).¹ Likewise, Arabs in the Paraguayan border town imported consumer goods from Panama that were then sold to a mostly Brazilian clientele, fitting into the Paraguayan military head of state's own geopolitical agenda, denominated as the *marcha hacia el este* (march toward the east, in Spanish).²

In step with state-led marches, Arabs helped draw Paraguay, theretofore dominated by Argentina and the US, into Brazil's expansive manufacturer and consumer markets from 1960s to the 1980s. Arabs led transnational trade and presided over business associations on each side of the Friendship Bridge between Foz do Iguaçu and what was then called Ciudad Presidente Stroessner (named after the Paraguayan military head of state, Alfredo Stroessner). Attracting attention in neither Argentina nor the US, Arabs at the border were investigated and absolved by the Brazilian military government after the 1970 attack on the Israeli embassy in the Paraguayan capital of Asunción. On the Brazilian side of the border, Arabs exported Brazilian-made manufactures to Paraguayan traders.

On the Paraguayan side of the border, they imported consumer goods from Panama's free trade zone for sale to mostly Brazilian clients. Through liberal trade exceptions in illiberal regimes, Arabs animated a semiperipheral America that neither simply led to nor derived from US sway in the hemisphere.

This chapter engages with Paul Amar's emphasis on the autonomy of the semiperiphery.³ World systems theorists in the 1960s viewed semiperipheral countries like Brazil and Argentina as mitigating between an economic core or center, namely the US, and a periphery, such as Paraguay. Building on Amar's rethinking of the semiperiphery as "generative," instead of primarily derivative, this chapter looks at economic hierarchies that cannot be reduced to or explained by US influence in Latin America during the Cold War.⁴ On the Brazilian side, Arabs extended Brazilian manufacturing over Paraguay. On the Paraguayan side, Arabs expanded Brazilian consumption with imports from the Colón Free Zone (CFZ), which the Panamanian government opened to wrest some economic benefit from US control of the Canal Zone.⁵ In helping Brazil "replace Argentina and the United States as Paraguay's principal source of capital and technology,"⁶ Arabs folded into this semiperipheral America that can "neither fully escape . . . nor be reduced" to America's so-called core.⁷

Arabs provide a refreshing approach to well-studied liberal economic agendas under authoritarian rule.⁸ Turning from state capitals to frontiers, this chapter asks how migrant traders negotiated liberal economic policies of otherwise illiberal, inward-oriented regimes during the construction of the Itaipu hydroelectric dam between Brazil and Paraguay.⁹ On the Brazilian side, Arabs used the military regime's tax exemptions in order to export Brazilian-made manufactures to Paraguayan clients across the Friendship Bridge. On the Paraguayan side, Arabs used the dictatorship's "special" import taxes to bring in consumer items that were sold to Brazilian "shoppers" (called *compristas* or *sacoleiros*, in Spanish and Portuguese) who crisscrossed the same bridge. These state fiscal exceptions begun by illiberal authorities were continued by liberal successors, who became increasingly suspicious of Arab traders

due not to perceived political subversion but rather presumed tax evasion and other speculations about economic duplicity. In authoritarian and post-authoritarian times, Arabs came to terms with exceptional rule in ways that undermined their fuller enfranchisement later on.

Redrawing Borders Westward and Eastward

Early Arab migrants helped expand the manufacturing center of São Paulo westward into one of Brazil's economic fringes, then called *a região das três fronteiras* (the region of the three borders, in Portuguese) or *tres fronteras* (three borders, in Spanish). As mentioned in the introduction, in 1951, a sojourner from Baaloul, Ibrahim Barakat, headed to Brazil while his brothers and co-villagers went to Canada and the US. After "peddling with some friends" in the state of São Paulo, Ibrahim's sales routes led him southwestward into the state of Paraná. Eventually, he reached Foz do Iguaçu on the western edge of Paraná that borders with Paraguay. His son recalled: "My father said that at the time, there was not any cloth or clothing. In two or three weeks, he sold everything and, like this, he kept traveling between São Paulo and Foz do Iguaçu."¹⁰ Supplied from São Paulo, Ibrahim set up a shop of clothing and accessories on Avenida Brasil (Brazil Avenue), the main street of the then small town of Foz do Iguaçu.¹¹

Ahmed Hamad Rahal extended the influence of São Paulo even further. In 1951, with empty pockets, he departed the same village of Baaloul for São Paulo. As his sales routes led him into the state of Paraná, this Rahal continued westward until he reached Foz do Iguaçu, encountering a few other Arab families, including the Barakat's. Rahal sold clothing and accessories by boat on the Paraná River between Brazil and Paraguay, a decade and a half before the building of the Friendship Bridge. In 1953, his brother, Mohamad, arrived in Foz do Iguaçu. Ahmed's wife followed three years later. By 1958, with start-up capital saved by commercializing goods from São Paulo and other coastal industries, the Rahal brothers opened A Casa das Fábricas (The Factory Outlet, fig., in Portuguese) on

Avenida Brasil. Later, the brothers founded an export firm on the Brazilian side of the Friendship Bridge, catering to clients from Paraguay's then underdeveloped *este* (East, in Spanish).¹²

Likewise drawing upon, and being drawn into, the expansion of São Paulo into Brazil's west and Paraguay's east, Mohamed Ali Osman traded amid the São Paulo coffee boom overflowing into the northern part of the Paraná state where he settled with his brother.¹³ In the early 1950s, Osman was given a trunk full of clothes, and as he recalled, "I went off peddling. . . . I would sell on the farms, plantations, and in the coffee fields of the region." This Osman soon started a business buying and selling coffee beans and other grains. In 1959, his younger brother Mustafa arrived and also peddled in northern Paraná, still dependent upon São Paulo's coffee boom. With their savings, the brothers headed westward to Foz do Iguaçu and opened a *lojinha* (little store) of clothing and knick-knacks (*armarinhos*) on Avenida Brasil, with suppliers based in São Paulo and elsewhere. As examined later, these and other Osman brothers went on to establish an export firm, Têxtil Osman Ltda., with mostly Paraguayan customers.

At the time, these continental marches were led by migrants from villages in Lebanon's Beqaa Valley. Originally from Baaloul, the aforementioned Ibrahim Barakat, and his wife, Amine, sponsored the migration of the Omairi family from the neighboring village of Lela where Amine was born. In 1967, Akra Omairi arrived from Lela and was later joined by his brother, Mohamad. Together they set up shop on the Brazilian side of the border. Years later another Omairi family from Lela opened an import/export tire company, Ferrari Cubiertas S.R.L. (Ferrari Tires), on the Paraguayan side. Migrants from the Ghotme, Mannah, Tarabain, and other families repeated such trajectories from Lela and equaled in number their counterparts from Baaloul who ran businesses on the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border. Others departed from elsewhere in the Beqaa Valley and South Lebanon, but the largest portion of migrants in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s stemmed from Baaloul and Lela.

These and other Arabs helped redraw a hemispheric border between west and east without upsetting the north-south order of the US Alliance for Progress in Latin America.¹⁴ Mohamad Rahal

stated that he and other migrants chose Foz do Iguaçu because “bordering with two other countries was really important. We knew that Paraguay wasn’t industrialized . . . so we were certain that Paraguay would be a great market for industrialized goods” (from Brazil).¹⁵ As noted, he and others peddled manufactures from mostly São Paulo on the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border. Abdul Rahal, another member of *beyt Rahal* (Rahal “house,” lit., or “lineage,” fig., in Arabic) who arrived on the Brazilian side at mid-century, remembered the “cold” nights he spent on his sales routes that brought Brazilian goods into the “East of Paraguay.” Rahal continued, “at that time, around 1959, Argentina was the power over Paraguay. Only Argentine products were allowed.” So when he straddled the river by boat selling Brazilian-made wares to Paraguayans, Rahal laughed, “it was if they had seen a snake with two heads.”¹⁶ Indeed, in 1960, Argentina and the US were the largest sources of imports into Paraguay, while Brazil accounted for less than 1 percent.¹⁷ Arab traders helped strengthen Brazil’s economic expansion over Paraguay with continental ramifications.¹⁸

In sidestepping the town of Puerto Iguazú on the Argentine side of the border, Arabs signaled the end of Argentina’s “long-run advantage” over Paraguay, to borrow a phrase from historian Harris Gaylord Warren.¹⁹ In 1969, the Argentine official, Isaac Rojas, warned of Argentina’s loss of influence to Brazil in the River Plate Basin (*Bacia do Prata*, in Portuguese, and *Cuenca del Plata*, in Spanish), a watershed basin of three million kilometers whose center is the border where Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina meet.²⁰ At the time, Argentina’s largest newspaper, *Clarín*, bemoaned this geopolitical loss in a series of reports on “Puerto Iguazú,” located in the Argentine province of “Misiones,” named after the ruins of Jesuit missions, flanked by Paraguay to the west and Brazil to the east. Though mentioning the *cataratas* (waterfalls) as a “Giant of America,” *Clarín* bemoaned Puerto Iguazú’s lack of “progress” in relation to not only other parts of Argentina but also the “booming” Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border.²¹ “Argentina is losing the battle against Brazil and Paraguay,” decried *Clarín*, expressing envy of the “developed infrastructure” along “the Friendship Bridge, over the Paraná River.” The Argentine daily called to connect the Argentine side of



Figure 1.2. Border view of the connection between the Brazilian federal highway BR-277 and the Friendship Bridge that leads to/from the Paraguayan Ruta 7. © OpenStreetMap contributors

of manufactures westward from Brazil to Paraguay, and in return, agricultural goods eastward from Paraguay to Brazil.²⁵ The Paraguayan military head of state characterized this link to the Brazilian coast as a “second lung,” in addition to the port of Buenos Aires in Argentina that had theretofore been landlocked Paraguay’s primary maritime access.²⁶ Not jeopardizing relations with the US, Paraguay’s turn from Argentina toward Brazil gained momentum after the founding of “Ciudad Presidente Stroessner” (as noted, later renamed “Ciudad del Este”) at the border in 1957.²⁷ At the Friendship Bridge, Arab importers and exporters embarked upon a new west-east passage in a hemispheric America generally imagined on a north-south grid.

Paraguay’s eastward turn toward Brazil materialized in the new Paraguayan border town where Arabs increasingly led much of the trade and finance. Initially, Christian Syrians from the Paraguayan capital of Asunción acquired real estate in what became the town’s “microcenter.” Known by his initials, HDD, Humberto Domínguez Dibb obtained sizeable properties and was said to have owned shares in the Paraguayan border town’s *Acaray Casino*.²⁸ HDD was

born to Syrian-Lebanese parents in Asunción in 1943. His marriage to Stroessner's daughter, Graciela, magnified his sway.²⁹ Known for imported cloth in Asunción, Elias Saba constructed one of the first buildings in the Paraguayan border town in 1973, and Saba's own son married the daughter of General Andrés Rodríguez before the latter led an internal coup that toppled Stroessner, discussed later.³⁰ With such high-profile marriages, Arabs' image transformed from that of lowly peddlers to high rollers.³¹ On his own path of upward mobility, Mihail Bazas hailed from the same Syrian village as HDD's parents, Mharde (Muharda), near Hama. Bazas was based in his uncle's wholesale business in Asunción and followed a sales route that ended in the Paraguayan border town.³² Having arrived in 1967, Bazas recalled that his uncle's store specialized in imports from Germany and Japan, such as personal care accessories, like nail clippers, as well as gift items including stainless-steel cutlery sets and ceramic or crystal decorations. His uncle placed the orders through a German importer in Asunción, and Bazas served as the distributor to predominantly Muslim Lebanese retailers based in Ciudad Presidente Stroessner, who in turn sold such products to mostly Brazilian customers temporarily crossing over the bridge.

Catering to these Brazilian clients, Muslim Lebanese from Baaloul and Lela established brick and mortar stores in the Paraguayan border town while their Christian counterparts, with the exception of Bazas, generally remained in the Paraguayan capital. In the mid-1960s, Ali Said Rahal from Lela opened the Casa de la Amistad (Friendship Outlet, *fig.*, in Spanish) named after the bridge. Located on Avenida San Blás, the main thoroughfare of the Paraguayan border town, this Rahal catered to Brazilian consumers in search of name-brand imports without the high taxes of Brazil's then protectionist economy. According to his son, Fawas, the father "would sell whiskey, imported spirits that you didn't have here, as well as Lee jeans."³³ Hussein Taijen from Baaloul, who soon sponsored the migration of his brother, Said, opened the Casa Colombia (Colombia Outlet, *fig.*, in Spanish). According to Said, the brothers set up their shop "next to Rahal's store."³⁴ The name of the store derived from Hussein's migration route from Lebanon to Colombia, around 1963.³⁵ Moving from Barranquilla to Maicao on the

Colombian-Venezuelan border, this Taijen subsequently headed to Foz do Iguaçu until permanently settling in the Paraguayan border town in 1969.³⁶ His Casa Colombia sold clothing, perfume, liquor, electronics, and other items for Brazilian and Argentine customers. As explored later, in the 1970s and 1980s, Rahal, Taijen, and other Arabs in the Paraguayan border town imported consumer goods from Panama for sale to consumers based on the other sides of the border.

Arabs at the border became subjects of interest of the Brazilian state after an unrelated shooting occurred at the Israeli embassy in Asunción on May 4, 1970.³⁷ Brazilian, and not Paraguayan,³⁸ media directed suspicion toward Arabs at the border, citing the Paraguayan police as a source in questioning whether “the guns used by two Palestinians in the attack against the embassy of Israel in Asunción could have been bought in Brazil.” By September 1970, the Department of Political and Social Order (DOPS) of Brazil’s Federal Police in Curitiba solicited the police commissioner in Foz do Iguaçu to investigate several allegations.³⁹ On a mimeograph entitled “Activities of Arab Terrorist Organizations in Brazil,” DOPS asked whether Arabs at the border were involved in Palestinian causes and helped plan the embassy attack in Asunción. Three Lebanese in Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad Presidente Stroessner were named as suspects and alleged *contrabandistas* (tax-evasive “smugglers”). After a month, however, the officer responded that no evidence linked the shooting in Paraguay’s capital to this border. His report, however, provided details about mostly Lebanese and Palestinians who lived in Foz do Iguaçu and operated businesses in Ciudad Presidente Stroessner, including passport or ID information as well as home and business addresses. The Brazilian state used the incident in the Paraguayan capital to surveil Arabs at a border of increasing significance.

Gaining institutional influence the same year in Paraguay’s east, Hussein and Said Taijen co-founded what was called the Centro de Comerciantes de Ciudad Presidente Stroessner (Center for Traders of Ciudad Presidente Stroessner).⁴⁰ In 1972, it was renamed the Cámara de Comercio (Chamber of Commerce) of Ciudad Presidente Stroessner “by a decree made by Stroessner.”⁴¹ Said explained

that the chamber of commerce was established with the intention to “help the city’s commerce progress” and “represent the interests of traders before the government.” Although the first president was a “paraguayo” (Paraguayan), Said pointed out that mostly Arabs and Asians were founding members since they controlled much of the border town’s trade. By the early 1980s, Hussein became president of the chamber of commerce and held the post for the next two decades. In interacting with other chambers of commerce as well as governments and businesses, Taijen’s presidency put him in a key position to arbitrate disputes among importers in the Paraguayan border town and suppliers abroad.

Likewise gaining influence in Brazil’s west, Fouad Mohamed Fakih was invited to become president of the Commercial and Industrial Association of Foz do Iguaçu, known by its acronym, Acifi, mentioned in the introduction. Founded by lumber traders decades before,⁴² Acifi expanded into commercial affairs under Fakih’s two mandates from 1974 to 1980. Born in Baaloul, Fakih migrated to Brazil as a young boy after his father, Mohamed (nicknamed sr. Júlio), returned to Lebanon after a short stint in Colombia.⁴³ With his parents and five siblings, Fakih studied in schools on the outskirts of Foz do Iguaçu. Attentive to news reports about the Itaipu dam project, Fakih decided to settle in the city because, as he later recalled, Foz do Iguaçu had “a very promising perspective” since “it bordered on two countries.”⁴⁴ Initially, Fakih opened “uma lojinha de roupas” (a small clothing store) on Avenida Brasil.⁴⁵ His subsequent appointment as Acifi president put him in a position of influence in relation to Foz do Iguaçu’s military-appointed mayor, Coronel Clóvis Viana, who Fakih lobbied to ensure the donation of a public plot of land where Acifi’s headquarters were built.⁴⁶ This Arab-led trade took shape as Brazilian and Paraguayan states signed the Itaipu Treaty in 1973, flowing alongside the “pharaonic” construction of the world’s then largest hydroelectric dam.⁴⁷

Centering Brazil on the Continent

Arabs’ exportation of Brazilian manufactures to Paraguay side-stepped Argentina and avoided taking on the US. From Avenida

Brasil in the city center of Foz do Iguaçu, most Arabs opened export-trading firms (*exportadoras*) in the neighborhoods of Jardim Jupira and Vila Portes next to the Friendship Bridge. Introduced earlier, Ahmed and Mohamed Rahal used profits from their shop to open Exportadora Tupy (Tupy Export) in 1968, selling several lines of Brazilian-made manufactures to Paraguayan clients.⁴⁸ Abdul Rahal established the Exportadora Líder (Leader Export) that earned “12 million cruzados a month selling processed foods and cleaning supplies to Paraguay.” According to this Rahal, “Early on, we would sell only to buyers in the Paraguayan capital of Asunción . . . [but] Itaipu brought the clientele almost to within our stores.”⁴⁹ Akra and Mohammad Omeiri opened the Exportadora Real (Royal Export), which a Brazilian newspaper later characterized as “an example of immigrants [in Brazil] taking initiative with Paraguayans in commercial affairs.”⁵⁰

Arabs applied for Brazilian state fiscal exceptions and avoided questioning the National Security Doctrine that suspended constitutional processes, more fully addressed in the next chapter. The bureaucratic state’s first Minister of Finance, Roberto Campos (1964–1967), and his successor, Antônio Delfim Netto (1967–1974), expanded an “export incentive program” for “the rapid growth and diversification of exports,” prioritizing the creation rather than distribution of wealth.⁵¹ Passed in 1969, “Law-Decree Number 491” provided “fiscal incentives,” mostly tax exemptions, for the “exportation of Brazilian manufactures.”⁵² Arabs and others at the border used this law and avoided questioning “Law Number 5449” that gave federal authorities the right to appoint mayors in “Áreas de Interesse da Segurança Nacional” (Areas of National Security Interest), including Foz do Iguaçu. In 1974, Brazil’s National Security Council appointed the former army colonel, Clóvis Cunha Viana, as mayor of Foz do Iguaçu, just before Itaipu dam construction began.⁵³ Viana remained in that position for the next decade while nominal elections with a censured list of candidates took place elsewhere.⁵⁴ Arabs, like other merchants, applied for tax rebates and avoided challenging the military government.⁵⁵

In what came to be called the *comércio de exportação* (commercial exportation) in Foz do Iguaçu, Arabs leveraged the liberal

exceptions of illiberal government. Ibrahim Barakat and his son, for instance, cultivated long-lasting friendships with Brazilian state tax inspectors and high-level authorities through their businesses in Foz do Iguaçu which served clientele across the border. Although they were unduly investigated by intelligence and police forces after the unrelated May 1970 shooting at an Israeli diplomatic office in Asunción, mentioned above, the son, Mohamad, today emphasized not this repression but rather the policy that enabled exporters in Foz do Iguaçu to cut nearly in half their taxable income by selling Brazilian-made goods to Paraguayans.⁵⁶ In an “area of national security,” on Brazil’s side of the border, Arabs’ most common experience with the military government was filling out a carbon-copy application form for exportation, the “guia de exportação” (Export Delivery Note) attached to the sales receipt of the exported goods and filed in the office of the Carteira de Comércio Exterior (Foreign Trade Portfolio, known by the acronym in Portuguese, *Cacex*) of the *Banco do Brasil* (Bank of Brazil). The Cacex branch in Foz do Iguaçu “was the agency that emitted the largest number of *guias de exportação* in Brazil.” When this paperwork procedure was digitalized years later, it was reported that the city of Foz do Iguaçu alone was annually generating 300,000 delivery notes, “the largest in volume” in Brazil.⁵⁷ Rather than the intelligence and surveillance forces, Arabs emphasized greater contact with fiscal exceptional rule in authoritarian times.

Arab-run export businesses gained renown among financial and governmental officials in authoritarian times. The respective export firms of the Rahal and Osman brothers that sold “cloth and food staples to Paraguay” were etched into the memory of Tibiriça Botto Guimarães, a Brazilian of Portuguese origin born in the city of Joinville in the neighboring state of Santa Catarina. Guimarães recalled that, when he arrived in Foz do Iguaçu as a branch manager of the *Banco Nacional do Comércio* in 1967, “I would pick up the cash from these export firms in sacks. A lot of money was being made and the export firms were really growing.”⁵⁸ In 1974, so many Arabs ran businesses in the aforementioned neighborhood of Jardim Jupira that a bill was proposed to rename one of the streets Rua República Árabe Unida (United Arab Republic Street), after the short-lived



Figure 1.3. Map of the location of the Avenida República do Líbano in the neighborhood of Jardim Jupira in Foz do Iguaçu, just north of the BR-277 and minutes from the Friendship Bridge. © OpenStreetMap contributors

polity that brought together Egypt and Syria.⁵⁹ Although that legislation never passed, two years later city councilor Aguinello Favero Haus proposed another bill that successfully renamed another thoroughfare in the same neighborhood Avenida República do Líbano (Republic of Lebanon Avenue).⁶⁰ With the support of the military government's political party (ARENA) that Haus belonged to, the bill related that, "one finds innumerable Lebanese there, constructing new buildings" and "they came here when the city still did not offer the best conditions of prosperity, helping our development." The military-appointed mayor signed the bill into law the same year. For authoritarian-era bank employees and government officials, Arabs helped give rise to Brazil at this crossroads.

Arabs in Foz do Iguaçu utilized their networks with São Paulo in expanding Brazilian industrial influence westward into Paraguay's east. In the mid-1970s, the Rahal brothers' Exportadora Tupy became a beer and soft-drink distributor for Brazilian and multi-national companies based in São Paulo, starting out "with

two trucks and a thousand bottles” that they refilled in Foz do Iguaçu and delivered to Paraguayan customers.⁶¹ Exportadora Líder, owned and operated by their fellow migrant from Baaloul, Abdul Rahal, went on to become the distributor of the São Paulo-based textile company, Alpargatas, allegedly selling thirty thousand pairs of blue jeans every month to Paraguayan businesses in the early 1980s.⁶² Similarly, the Omeiri’s Exportadora Real became “the largest reseller of C&S,” a household electronics manufacturer in São Paulo, distributing refrigerators, stoves, and the like across Paraguay as well as other “Latin American countries.”⁶³ Mohammed Osman’s Têxtil Osman Ltda. represented Kraft Foods and “various Brazilian brands with the exclusive right to exportation across Latin America.”⁶⁴ The non- and semi-durable goods commercialized by Arab-owned *exportadoras* arrived from coastal Brazilian industries for storage in warehouses next to the Friendship Bridge. After being sold, shipments were transported westward across the bridge into Paraguay.

Arabs in Foz do Iguaçu specialized in Brazilian-based industrialized goods that were purchased by everyday Paraguayans. On the Brazilian side of the border, Arabs led commercial establishments that annually doubled in number “to attend to the neighboring country [Paraguay].”⁶⁵ The “system of commerce” in Foz do Iguaçu, observed *Nosso Tempo* in 1983, included “supermarkets” and “stores that sell electrodomeestic appliances and heavy machinery.”⁶⁶ In 1986, the estimated three hundred “export businesses” in Foz do Iguaçu transacted an estimated one-hundred million dollars of external sales to Paraguay.⁶⁷ From the neighborhoods of Jardim Jupira and Vila Portes, Arab-run firms commercialized canned foods, grains, textiles, household appliances, and some heavier machinery.⁶⁸ In 1987, the former president of Acifi, Fouad Fakih, noted that “Paraguayans are responsible for 75 percent of all this [commercial] movement.”⁶⁹ He continued: “Paraguay doesn’t produce practically anything and its population can’t afford to buy what is sold in Ciudad Presidente Stroessner, expensive products directed toward [Brazilian] tourists.” As a result, Fakih concluded, everyday Paraguayans shopped for clothing and foodstuffs as well as home appliances in Foz do Iguaçu. The familiarity of Arab-driven border trade was

evident when a Paraguayan client gave a blank check to Mohamed Osman and asked him to fill in the cost of her purchase. "It's trust," Osman remarked.⁷⁰ Another Paraguayan farm owner purchasing supplies in Foz do Iguaçu noted, "we came by car to get supplies and other necessary products for the start of the harvest."⁷¹

But Arabs in Foz do Iguaçu avoided criticism of authoritarian Paraguay and Brazil's support of it, despite exercising a range of political affiliations after the most repressive years of Brazilian military rule under Emílio Garrastazu Médici (1969–1974). In 1975, Mohamad Barakat became a naturalized Brazilian citizen.⁷² He and his father ran Novo Mundo Eletrodomésticos Ltda (New World Appliances), which the progressive newspaper *Nosso Tempo* called "one of the largest commercial businesses in Foz do Iguaçu." Barakat later opened Barakat Free Shop, which specialized in domestic home supplies. Having studied in Canada and the US, Barakat cultivated this business savvy as he drifted toward the Partido Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement, known by the acronym in Portuguese, PMDB), after the legalization of a plural political party system in 1979. In contrast, Kamal Osman distanced himself from *Nosso Tempo* when the progressive newspaper drew the ire of the military-appointed mayor, who Osman welcomed at the grand opening of his store, Kamalito Magazine, on Avenida Brasil.⁷³ This Osman had previously settled in the town of Assaí in northern Paraná and earned his degree in economics at the Universidade Estadual de Londrina before establishing his store that specialized in women's, men's, and children's clothing, sports accessories, toys, house utensils, and kindred goods.⁷⁴ Later, this Osman founded the mosque and inaugurated Kamal Osman Exportação to export Brazilian textiles and clothing to Paraguay.⁷⁵ Discussed more in detail next chapter, Arabs on the liberalizing Brazilian side of the border did business with but avoided criticizing illiberal Paraguay.

Centering Brazil on the continent, Arabs and others in Foz do Iguaçu lobbied to export goods in Brazilian currency, the cruzeiro (Cr\$, 1970–1986, 1990–1993) and the cruzado (Cz\$, 1986–1990). According to Fakihi, in 1975 Brazil's Federal Revenue Secretariat passed a normative resolution to "do away with exportation" in Brazilian

currency and attempted to standardize Brazilian exportation in US dollars. Fakihi recalled, “we had a fight of two years to maintain the system” in Brazil’s currency.⁷⁶ At the end of his second term, in 1980, this “Homeric struggle” was continued by incoming Acifi president Wádis Benvenutti, a Brazilian of Italian origins, born and raised in Rio Grande do Sul. Benvenutti explained that Brazil’s exportation to Paraguay had the advantage over neighboring Argentina, whose exported goods in US dollars were more expensive. In Foz do Iguaçu, commercial exporters’ preference for Brazilian currency was also probably due to the practice of “profiting through stockpiling” (“ganhar em cima do estoque”), when they purchased large amounts of manufactures from Brazilian industries at a set price (in Brazil’s currency) and placed them in storage.⁷⁷ With time, these stockpiles were worth several times their original value, as price indexes rose with skyrocketing Brazilian interest rates.⁷⁸ Exporting in the US dollar would have curbed this lucrative tactic. Whichever was the key motivating factor, Arabs and other exporters successfully sought to export merchandise in Brazilian currency by repeatedly meeting with Cacex and other Brazilian government officials. Even in 1988, “Arab community leaders who commercially export via Foz do Iguaçu to Paraguay asked authorities to pressure Cacex in order to safeguard their (Arabs’) ability to make transactions in cruzados for all merchandise.”⁷⁹ In a semiperipheral America, Arabs and others in Foz do Iguaçu secured “a freer exchange between the three countries (Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina), since no one had US dollars.”⁸⁰

Not taking on but unable to escape from the US, Arabs paid attention to Paraguayan purchase power that was tied to Brazilian exchange rates relative to the US dollar. When Brazil’s currency lost value relative to the US dollar, Paraguayans could afford to buy greater quantities of goods in Foz do Iguaçu, whether or not paying in Paraguayan currency, the Guaraní (₲). In 1980, a Brazilian reporter took note of the devalued cruzeiro that made Foz do Iguaçu into a “center for shopping . . . with the prices of foodstuffs and clothing cheaper than in Paraguay. . . . All kinds of goods are acquired in Foz and it’s obvious that there was a daily increase of Paraguayan . . . shoppers in Foz do Iguaçu, in order to obtain supplies of canned

goods, cereals, meats, and fruits and vegetables.”⁸¹ Contrastively, when Paraguay’s Guaraní lost value in relation to the US dollar, Paraguayans curtailed shopping on Brazil’s side of the border. In 1985, commerce in Foz do Iguaçu nearly ground to a halt when the Guaraní was devalued, losing more than half its value in relation to the US dollar.⁸² Accordingly, Arabs in Foz do Iguaçu priced exports in Brazilian currency and kept an eye on the value of the US dollar because the purchase power of their Paraguayan customers was tied to it. Arabs strengthened trade on the semiperiphery, neither escaping nor adopting the US currency in a hemispheric America. Moving aside but not removing so-called “manifest destiny,” Arabs folded into and took ownership of this semiperipheral America.

Paraguay’s “Port” Linking Central and South America

Meanwhile, Arabs on the Paraguayan side of the border helped transform Ciudad Presidente Stroessner into a kind of “port” on land (*puerto*, in Spanish, or *porto*, in Portuguese). In Paraguay’s *este*, they opened stores on or near Avenida San Blás and Avenida Monseñor Rodríguez, parallel to the Ruta 7 highway that leads to and from the Friendship Bridge. In 1972, Faisal Hammoud, alongside his brothers Sadek and Sharif, established the Monalisa store that specializes in imported spirits, perfumes, cosmetics, and electronics. Faisal had departed Baaloul for São Paulo and eventually landed in Paraguay with the equivalent of five dollars in his pocket.⁸³ After some success, the Hammoud brothers constructed their six-story complex, and a decade and a half later, Faisal became the president of the Paraguayan border town’s branch of the US-sponsored Cámara de Comercio Paraguayano Americano (further discussed in Chapter 4).⁸⁴ Arriving in 1972, the Mannah brothers, Mohamed (nicknamed Alexandre) and Atef, opened La Petisquera (On a Silver Platter, fig.), which came to specialize in imported spirits, high-brow foods, perfumes, and cosmetics.⁸⁵ Alexandre co-founded the Cámara de Comercio de Ciudad Presidente Stroessner and much later headed the local branch of Paraguay’s Federation of Production, Industry, and Commerce (whose acronym, in Spanish, is FEPRINCO).⁸⁶ Five Hijazi brothers likewise departed Kabrikha in

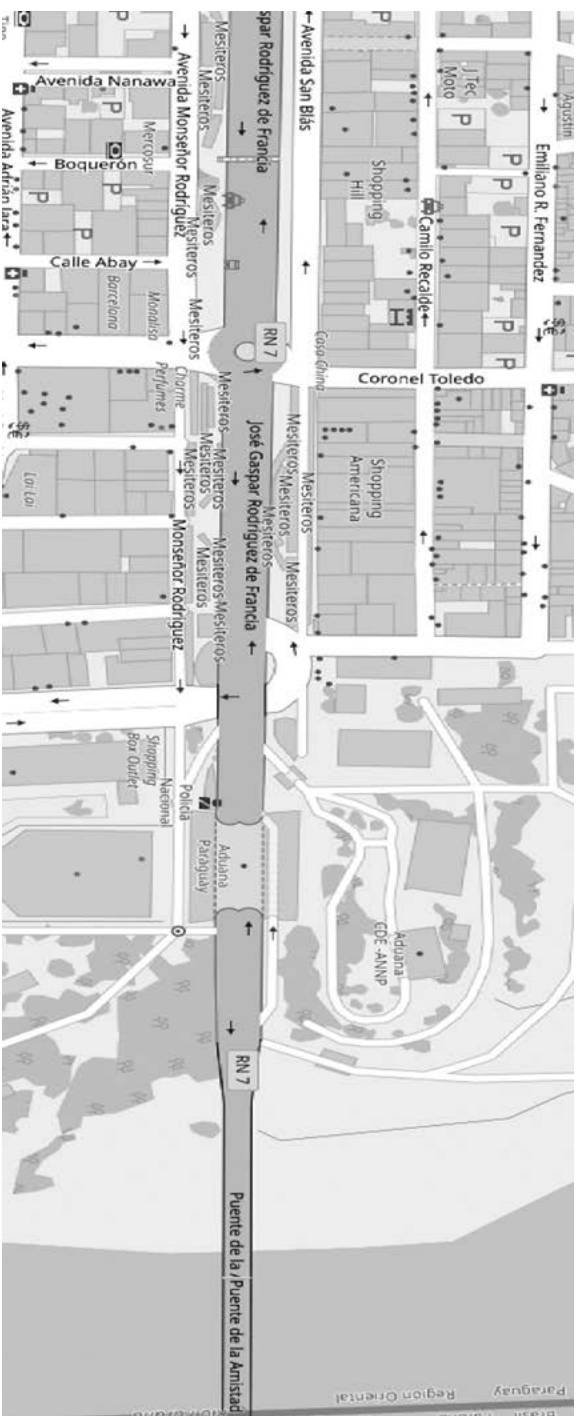


Figure 1.4. Partial view of the Paraguayan national highway Ruta 7, in Ciudad Presidente Stroessner (which became Ciudad del Este after 1989). Avenida San Blas is just to the north and Avenida Monseñor Rodríguez is just to the south of Ruta 7. © OpenStreetMap contributors

South Lebanon in the 1970s and opened Mundo Electronico (Electronic World). Led by Adnan and Hassan, their business was called “one of stores that has the largest commercial movement of this city,” specializing in electronic goods of “North-American, Japanese, German, and Panamanian origins.”⁸⁷ In the 1980s, “Arab, Chinese, and Korean immigrants”⁸⁸ made up most of seven-hundred or so shops in the Paraguayan border town that was often called “Puerto” or “Porto” Presidente Stroessner.

On this Paraguayan side of the border, Arabs served Brazilian consumers amid the relative suspension of authoritarian-era border controls and tariffs. Bazas, Rahal, and Taijen explained that stores on the Paraguayan side of the border “always” catered to “Brazilian buyers” (*compristas brasileiros*, in Spanish). Their clients were formally called “tourist-shoppers” (*turista-compristas*, in Portuguese and Spanish), but were also known by the pejorative label *sacoleiro* (bagger, lit., shopper fig., in Portuguese). At least since the 1960s, everyday Brazilians traveled to Foz do Iguaçu, crossed the Friendship Bridge to shop for the day in Ciudad Presidente Stroessner, and later returned to their homes elsewhere in Brazil. These tens of thousands of Brazilian shoppers could meet formal border-crossing requirements such as a police exit visa (*visto policial de saída*) from Brazil’s Federal Police or a provisional tourist card (*tarjeta de facilitación turística*) from Paraguayan police.⁸⁹ With exceptional ease in crisscrossing this policed border, Brazilian shoppers headed to mostly Arab-owned shopping complexes in Ciudad Presidente Stroessner, including the Jebai Center, the Galeria Rahal, and the Hijazi Shopping Center.⁹⁰ Arab-owned stores carried everything from “sophisticated electronics” to the “famous Chinese ointment” (tiger-balm).⁹¹ Brazilian shoppers sought out Sony video-cassette recorders, Olympus cameras, Toshiba or Brother word-processors, and to a lesser extent, carpets from Iran, perfumes from France, and spirits from Scotland, or cheaper imitations.⁹² This merchandise was prohibitively expensive in Brazil due to authoritarian and post-authoritarian government tariffs of “up to 300 percent of the imported item’s value.”⁹³ Between the 1960s and 1980s, so many Brazilian “housewives, senior citizens, students, liberal professionals, and idle folks” crossed the Friendship Bridge to

buy lower-priced consumer goods that it was like “a Brazilian party in Ciudad Presidente Stroessner.”⁹⁴

Arab trade on the Paraguayan side of the border developed in tandem with Brazil’s growing influence.⁹⁵ In 1973, a Paraguayan border trader, Luis O’Hara, associated each “foreign” presence with one another at an event in the Asunción headquarters of FEPRINCO. O’Hara bemoaned not only that “60 percent of commerce” was “in the hands of Syrian-Lebanese” (*sirio-libaneses*) but also that 70 percent of agricultural production was dominated by “ciudadanos extranjeros de otras nacionalidades” (foreign citizens of other nationalities), in reference to (non-Arab) Brazilians who owned large plots of land on the Paraguayan side of the border.⁹⁶ Hailing from the state of Paraná where Foz do Iguaçu is located, the state of Rio Grande do Sul to the south, and later, elsewhere, (non-Arab) Brazilian migrants settled in Paraguay’s east,⁹⁷ namely in the Paraguayan *departamento* (department, or state) of Alto Parana, tripling the percentage of foreign-born residents between the early 1970s and early 1990s.⁹⁸ Thanks to the Paraguayan dictator’s repeal of the law that forbid foreigners from buying land, (non-Arab) Brazilian citizens owned agricultural fields around the Paraguayan border town, fitting into the Brazilian state’s goal for sway over the one-time Argentine- and US-dominated Paraguay.⁹⁹ Though the grandson of migrants from Ireland, O’Hara claimed that he and other Paraguayans defended “national sovereignty,” and he called upon the Paraguayan state capital to “rescue” the borderland. His position rallied no support. “Syrian-Lebanese” commercial puissance had transformed Ciudad Presidente Stroessner into the second largest city of Paraguay, which now breathed through what the military head of state called a “second lung” in Brazil.

Arabs imported goods into the Paraguayan border town that were then sold to Brazilian consumers thanks to the “complementary” liberal economic exceptions of illiberal regimes.¹⁰⁰ In 1971, the Paraguayan dictatorship simplified customs procedures and lowered import tariffs for businesses specifically in Ciudad Presidente Stroessner.¹⁰¹ Dubbed the Régimen de Turismo or Régimen Especial, this “tourism duty regime” or “special tax regime” levied a one-time tax on imports upon entrance to the country, based on the

expectation that the government inspector would verify the value of merchandise declared by importers and their suppliers.¹⁰² Hussein Taijen later recalled that the tax ranged between 7 and 10 percent for non- and semi-durable merchandise.¹⁰³ Paraguayan customs officers next to the Friendship Bridge determined the tax amount after inspecting shipments to verify the country of origin and weighing the container.¹⁰⁴ These procedures took place under the jurisdiction of the appointed mayor (*intendente*) of Ciudad Presidente Stroessner, Carlos Barreto Sarubbi, and his uncle Antonio Oddone Sarubbi, the administrative and police head of the Alto Paraná department. Appointed in 1975, the imperious Sarubbi family was said to “boost trade and traders, with the intention of collecting more for the municipal treasury” and allegedly for themselves too.¹⁰⁵

Arab trade in Ciudad Presidente Stroessner drew upon and was drawn into this authoritarian Paraguayan apparatus as well as its newfound rapprochement toward Brazil. Take for instance Mohamed Jebai, who I introduce here and more fully explore in the next chapter. Having migrated from Jebba in South Lebanon to South America in the 1960s, Jebai claimed that Paraguay’s dictator urged him to go into business because of the so-called “free trade policy” of the border town.¹⁰⁶ Others opined that Jebai got his start in commerce only after accepting Stroessner’s wife as his business partner. Temporarily heading the Cámara de Comercio de Ciudad Presidente Stroessner in the 1970s, Jebai imported JVC, Roadstar, and other electronics from Southeast Asia.¹⁰⁷ He and other importers benefited from the Paraguayan Central Bank’s policy that suspended the requirement to deposit 100 percent of the value of the imported goods, allowing importers to reimburse the bank after full payment was transferred to creditors abroad.¹⁰⁸ With dizzying sales to a mostly Brazilian clientele through such Paraguayan governmental exceptions, Jebai used his profits to build Ciudad Presidente Stroessner’s largest shopping and residential complex in the 1970s. The Galeria Jebai Center, explained a manager later on, had around four hundred store spaces, roughly 40 percent run by Arabs.¹⁰⁹ Arabs reaped the rewards of being “on good terms with the regime” in authoritarian times.

Arabs’ transnational trade highlights the heretofore unacknowledged economic flows between Central and South America. In the

1970s and 1980s, Bazas explained, Arabs in Paraguay used the *zona franca* in the Panamanian city of Colón, which attracted businesses with tax benefits and exemptions, strategically located near the then US-dominated Canal Zone.¹¹⁰ His uncle's store telexed orders for cutlery sets and other merchandise to French, German, and akin companies, which arranged for deposits in Panama to ship the cargo to Paraguay. Jebai and the Hijazi brothers, mentioned earlier, likewise used this shipping entrepôt in requisitioning electronic goods from Japan and other parts of East Asia. In the 1970s, the Taijen brothers also brought many goods—at the time, spirits, jeans, and cigarettes—from Panama. Bazas even wondered whether the commercial tie between Panama and Paraguay had been initiated by Hussein Taijen, or another *paisano* (countryman, lit., Arab countryman, fig., in Spanish) with relatives along the Panamanian and Colombian coasts. Taijen, or another Baaloul villager, was allegedly asked to *llevar en su mala* (to carry in his luggage) some items *para vender* (to sell) in Paraguay. As mentioned, Lebanese from Baaloul were listed as merchants in small towns near and on the Colombian coast just before the mid-twentieth century.¹¹¹ Said Taijen, Hussein's brother, shrugged off this possibility and noted that Panama's *zona franca* was common knowledge and had competitive shipping rates and times.¹¹² Regardless, Arabs traded through liberal economic exceptions among illiberal states in a Central-South America.

From Panama to Brazil and then to Paraguay, Arabs fashioned a supply chain for the Brazilian consumer market. Varied water and land routes connected Panama's free trade zone to landlocked Paraguay. Before the 1960s, shipments from Colón would first pass through the canal, still under US "stewardship," and then southward to the port in Buenos Aires, whence they were transported north to Asunción. After the aforementioned interstate and infrastructural developments in Brazil, cargo was also shipped to Paraguay's duty-free zone in the Brazilian port of Paranaguá where the BR-277 begins. From there, shipments on trucks headed westward and crossed the Friendship Bridge into Paraguay's east. In the ever-growing customs inspection offices in Ciudad Presidente Stroessner,¹¹³ cargo containers were weighed, and customs officials

calculated the tax to be paid by the importers, based on weight and the country of origin. Arab and other importers on the Paraguayan side of the border had cargo shipped from Colón to Paranaguá, and then transported across the BR-277 highway. After transiting through the Paraguayan customs terminal beside the Friendship Bridge, the merchandise in Arab stores was finally sold to consumers mostly stemming from Brazil.

Arabs in Ciudad Presidente Stroessner linked Central and South America in ways that distanced but did not escape North America. On the Paraguayan side of the border, Arabs bought goods from Panama priced in US dollars for sale to Brazilian customers. So, a more expensive US dollar decreased Brazilian purchase power in Paraguay. In 1982, for instance, Arabs and other traders in Ciudad Presidente Stroessner complained that the expensive US dollar after the “devaluation of the cruzeiro” had “completely stopped Brazilian shoppers from coming.”¹¹⁴ But when the US dollar later lost value, according to Brazil’s finance minister, Brazilian shoppers made a “large volume of purchases in Puerto Stroessner.”¹¹⁵ In Hassim Mahmoud’s Casa Astor in the Paraguayan border town, for instance, the price of a Panasonic videocassette recorder with remote control dropped from \$400 to \$300, and then to \$250.¹¹⁶ A year later, however, the Brazilian Central Bank’s intervention strengthened the US dollar and reduced Brazilians’ purchasing power in Ciudad Presidente Stroessner. At the time, Hussein Taijen observed that most shoppers “enter, ask the price and dollar quote, and leave without buying anything.”¹¹⁷ Arab businesses on the Paraguayan side of the border kept on eye on the US dollar in order to gauge Brazilian purchase power. Arabs bolstered trade in a semiperipheral America that could “neither fully escape . . . nor be reduced” to the US.¹¹⁸

A Semiperipheral “Economy of Appearances”

On the semiperiphery, Arabs played leading roles in what anthropologist Anna Tsing called an “economy of appearances.”¹¹⁹ As the “economic structure of Paraguay” became “directly linked” to the “large economic growth” in Brazil, according to a UN report in 1987, Arabs appeared to be profiting as well as profiteering at the border.¹²⁰

On the Brazilian side, Arabs attracted most Paraguayan clients in March, April, and May, the start and high-point of soy, cotton, and other harvests. Meanwhile on the Paraguayan side, Arab stores drew Brazilian consumers year-round, except for January and February, summer vacation months in the southern hemisphere when most people traveled elsewhere. A *mélange* of authoritarian and post-authoritarian state officials kept close watch over the resultant daily “traffic jams” with “heavy shipments” and “hundreds of vehicles,” as well as “antlike” lines of pedestrians and porters crisscrossing the Friendship Bridge.¹²¹ Whether trading westward or eastward across this semiperipheral America, Arabs appeared to consumers, suppliers, state authorities, and even one another as agents of development as well as suspects of double-dealing.

Arabs gained visibility and notoriety in their economic roles. In 1981, the *Diário do Paraná* noted that the members of “the Arab community of Foz do Iguaçu” are “persons with an elevated sensibility” through “their active participation, especially in commerce.”¹²² Indeed, Mohamad Barakat characterized Arab commercial exportation to Paraguay as “the Arab contribution to Brazilian development.”¹²³ But Humberto Domínguez Dibb, mentioned earlier, accused Arabs on the Brazilian side of the border of economic duplicity. In the *HOY* newspaper he owned in Asunción, Dibb endeavored to show that between 1977 and 1982, not even half of the exports from Brazil were disclosed to Paraguay’s Central Bank, relative to the data in Brazil’s government export agency, Cacex.¹²⁴ Moreover, Paraguayan garment industrialists complained of being undersold by “export firms in Foz do Iguaçu” that had “large warehouses near the bridge,” which shipped Brazilian-made clothing to Paraguay each day “without paying any taxes” in Paraguay itself.¹²⁵ They pointed fingers at Abdul Rahal’s Exportadora Líder in Foz do Iguaçu, which according to the São Paulo-based Alpargatas jeans factory, “sold to the Paraguayan market more jeans than all the jeans factories of Paraguay put together.”¹²⁶

Suspensions of double-dealing came to overshadow Arab exporters on the Brazilian side of the border. Their “exported” manufactures that qualified for Brazilian tax breaks were allegedly sold to domestic Brazilian customers. As early as 1973, *ABC Color* took

note of “exporters” manipulating “Brazilian policies of stimulation and promotion of exportation” in order to earn a “financial return on top of the value of their exportation that would reach around 40 percent.”¹²⁷ *ABC Color* found that “one would obtain a delivery or return note in Foz do Iguaçu to export to Paraguay” but the goods never reached “Paraguayan territory.”¹²⁸ A Brazilian tax inspector much later observed, “at least three hundred businesses from Foz do Iguaçu” filed for tax breaks but the “Brazilian merchandise marked for exportation” came to be “sold to domestic customers” in order “to generate larger profits.”¹²⁹ According to an Acifi employee, exporters near the Friendship Bridge commonly undertook this practice.¹³⁰ He explained that household appliances, foodstuffs, textiles, or other goods marked for exportation to Paraguay were sold domestically in Brazil. He gave the example of Brazilian-made air-conditioners built to work on 120 volts, the electric current in Paraguay. But since 110 voltage is more common in Brazil, exporters sold both the air-conditioner and an “electronic converter box,” presumably to use in Brazil. Without Paraguayan verification, the Brazilian government’s export agency, Cacex, granted the fiscal exemption when export firms in Foz do Iguaçu filed tax rebate forms with the receipts from ostensible “export” sales. Arab profit-earning could be imagined as profiteering too.

Such suspicions of Arabs distracted attention from authoritarian Brazilian state officials who capitalized on what was still idealized as an “ordered march” of development.¹³¹ In 1980, Foz do Iguaçu’s military-appointed mayor “defended” a new “customs office” and undertook infrastructural projects such as the widening of traffic lanes near the bridge to facilitate “export commerce with Paraguay.”¹³² Located next to the bridge, businesses exporting merchandise to Paraguay did not comment on the fiscal controls but “felt the benefits” of improved roadways.¹³³ With greater state controls, Brazilian Federal Revenue took charge of inspecting goods and Brazilian Federal Police had jurisdiction over persons, which led to a “war on the backstage.”¹³⁴ In one instance in 1983, a shipment of goods approved by revenue authorities was stopped by Brazilian police officers ostensibly intending to verify the papers of the individuals transporting the merchandise. “The constant tensions”

were not only “disputes over dominion” but also “who got a slice of the lucrative business of *acertos*” (kickbacks, fig.).¹³⁵ Not only Arabs and other merchants, but also border government officials could appear as suspects of profiteering if a free press were permitted to more fully undertake investigative reporting.

Similar dynamics took shape on the Paraguayan side of the border, once considered a beacon of “development.”¹³⁶ In 1982, *ABC Color* noted that “Arabs and Chinese (*arabes y chinos*) were “vying for supremacy in business,” with “up-to-date” businesses that sold “valuable, imported products.”¹³⁷ Their “commercial outlets” (*casas comerciales*) stocked and sold “Scotch whiskies, Japanese electronic equipment, French perfume, Chinese and Japanese silks” and other “foreign products” (*productos extranjeros*). A storeowner in Ciudad Presidente Stroessner related that such goods were “predominantly” sold to “Brazilians,” said to be arriving daily in some ten thousand vehicles from Foz do Iguaçu.¹³⁸ Another storeowner emphasized that he and others contributed to the development of the zone not by “creating” agricultural or industrial wealth, but rather by “paying for patent rights and other import taxes to the local government” as well as employing local Paraguayan residents. Meanwhile, Brazilian media occasionally lauded some businesses for importing “legitimate” name-brand products, namely the Mannah brothers’ La Petisquera and the Hammoud brothers’ Monalisa.¹³⁹

But Arabs and the Paraguayan border city also drew suspicions of dealing in *contrabando*, or the tax-evasive smuggling of goods. Early on, *ABC Color* warned of the Paraguayan border city being connected to Panama’s Free Trade Zone, which served as “the center of contraband for South America.”¹⁴⁰ An Asunción-based business association likewise alleged that the dictatorship’s “Special (Tax) Regime” at the border facilitated the clandestine entry of whiskey, cigarettes, and other merchandise that skirted the tariffs stipulated in Paraguayan legislation.¹⁴¹ Humberto Domínguez Dibb claimed to expose a tax-evasive practice that took advantage of the customs procedure for cargo containers arriving in Ciudad Presidente Stroessner. According to Dibb, importers and state customs officials colluded to reduce the estimated worth of the merchandise, so importers would be charged less tax and state authorities could take

their *mordidas* (bites).¹⁴² This *subfaturamento* (under-billing), wrote Dibb, was the “most important economic crime ever committed in the history of our country” of Paraguay.¹⁴³ State fiscal exceptions not only underwrote but could also undermine the Paraguayan side of the border, including Arab-led business there.

Authoritarian Paraguayan state officials gained notoriety for lining their own pockets.¹⁴⁴ The mayor of Ciudad Presidente Stroessner, Barreto Sarubbi, allegedly charged importers to use his family’s clandestine airstrip to avoid taxes by flying in merchandise, from Panama or elsewhere, splitting the pay-offs with “authorities from Asunción.”¹⁴⁵ Juan Pereira, the president of both the city council and the local branch of the regime’s political party, started smuggling not long after the founding of Ciudad Presidente Stroessner. In 1983, Sarubbi and Pereira, alongside the aforementioned administrator, Coronel Antonio Sarubbi, attempted to distract attention from their own defrauding of the state by associating “the grave evil of contraband” with *paseros* (porters, fig.), everyday Paraguayans who transported goods from Paraguay to Brazil. Subsequently targeted by state border officials, *paseros* complained that the “authors of the repressive measures ‘are the biggest smugglers of the country.’” Paraguayan state-sponsored profiteering expanded by alleging to crackdown on small-time tax-evasive smuggling. Border authorities began “demanding” double the regular amount of kickbacks for each time they “looked the other way” to allow porters to pass across the bridge. These lower-level officials likewise complained of being shaken down by even higher-level authorities who reported to Paraguay’s dreaded Interior Minister and Stroessner’s own private secretary, Abdo Benitez, addressed more fully next chapter.¹⁴⁶ The regime’s leaders drew attention away from their own systematic profiteering by targeting the small-scale “smuggling” of goods, which were purchased from Arab-owned and other stores in Ciudad Presidente Stroessner.

Not speaking of profiteering, Hussein Taijen pointed to the profits on the Paraguayan side of the border. With a nod to liberal exceptions in an otherwise illiberal state, Taijen later stated that the Paraguayan border city is “privileged by certain government concepts. Here we buy merchandise from the world and sell it to Latin

America.”¹⁴⁷ With a transcontinental vision, he continued that the Paraguayan side of the border was home to “hundreds of distributors and resellers of products from five continents” that contribute to the “relations between the three countries,” Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina. Taijen affirmed that this “commercial exchange” brought “benefits . . . effectively shared” by Foz do Iguaçu, Ciudad Presidente Stroessner, and Puerto Iguazú. In the Paraguayan border city, he and others “sell imported products from five continents for Brazilians” and the cash they collect “is deposited in bank establishments in Foz do Iguaçu or used to acquire Brazilian merchandise for consumption or commercialization within Paraguay.”¹⁴⁸ More fully explored in the sixth chapter, Taijen was referring to a type of bank account in Foz do Iguaçu used by businesses from the Paraguayan side of the border.

Regardless, in a semiperipheral “economy of appearances,” any sales transactions on the Paraguayan side, often quoted in the Brazilian currency, could appear as either bolstering or undermining the Brazilian side of the border. Similar to Taijen, Brazilian federal deputy Sergio Spada surmised “a certain balance at the border” since “the Brazilian spends cruzados in Paraguay [and] Paraguay uses these same cruzados to buy foodstuffs, clothing, electronic appliances, and thousands of other products in Foz do Iguaçu, in Brazil.”¹⁴⁹ Another Acifi director likewise stated, “The Brazilian tourists leaves many cruzados in Paraguay, but this money, in large part, ends up re-entering Brazil through Paraguayans who buy in Foz do Iguaçu.”¹⁵⁰ But Arab and other storeowners in Foz do Iguaçu, like everyday Brazilians traveling to Ciudad Presidente Stroessner, tended to deride Paraguay as synonymous with “counterfeit” goods and “low-brow” tastes.¹⁵¹ Kamal Osman complained that “the millions of [US] dollars that enter Paraguay could stay in Foz do Iguaçu.”¹⁵² Hassan Wahab, a commercial exporter in Foz do Iguaçu, protested that his own Paraguayan clients could not find parking because of Brazilians who “leave their vehicles here and go shopping in Paraguay.”¹⁵³ Likewise on the Brazilian side of the border, Nagib Assaf observed that “Paraguayans, our biggest clients” could not “even see (our) stores” because of so many Brazilian shoppers parking and heading to the Paraguayan side. The conflicting ways

that Arabs and others saw their economic role in this semiperiphery would inform what would become their destiny in subsequent South American state accords for free trade, addressed in Chapter 4, as well as more recent US-led pursuits of allegedly terrorist monies, explored in Chapter 6. Suffice it to say now that on western and eastern sides of the border, as well as of the hemisphere, Arabs served as agents of development as well as suspects of double-dealing during and after authoritarian rule.

From the 1960s to the late 1980s, Arab transnational traders connected and were connected by continental marches: Brazil's "march to the west" and Paraguay's "march to the east." Through commercial networks that reached across the Brazilian coast, landlocked Paraguay, the Panamanian free trade zone of Colón, and beyond, migrants from mostly Lebanon, as well as Palestine and Syria, on both sides of the Friendship Bridge helped link and were linked by this hemisphere. They exported Brazilian-made manufactures to Paraguay and imported goods from Panama into Paraguay for resale to Brazilian consumers. Arabs' respective supply chains and customer bases drew Paraguay away from Argentina and the US and toward Brazil. Neither beginning nor ending in the US, their transnational trading networks folded into this semiperipheral America. But Arabs' accommodation of liberal economic exceptions in authoritarian times made them into easy targets for allegations of economic duplicity, which would come to work against their full enfranchisement in seemingly post-authoritarian transitions.

Third World Limits

Lebanese, Palestinian, and Syrian migrants on both sides of the Friendship Bridge mobilized in what Vijay Prashad called a “Third World project.”¹ 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.² 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.³

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.⁹ Through the following decades, the club was monitored by Brazil's Serviço Nacional de Informações (SNI, National Intelligence Service).¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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.¹² 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."¹³ 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 1970.¹⁴

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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶

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.¹⁷ In 1984, their Islamic Benevolent Society hosted Shahmard Kanani Moghaddam, the Iranian ambassador, then posted to Brasília, as well as the Mullah Mohammed Tabatabai from Curitiba, who “enjoyed prestige and respect among Shia Muslims spread across the Three Borders.”¹⁸ Kanani and Tabatabai prayed with Shia Lebanese “at a location on the Rua da República do Líbano” (*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



Figure 2.1. Picture of Mohammed Tabatabai speaking at an event. Note the Lebanese flag in front of the table. © *Nosso Tempo*

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 news-weekly *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



Figure 2.2. Picture of the Centro Cultural Árabe-Brasileiro (Arab-Brazilian Cultural Center). © *Nosso Tempo*

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.²⁵ 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.²⁶ 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."²⁷ 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."²⁸ 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.²⁹ 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.

COM EMBAIXADORES E SHEIKS É INICIADA CONSTRUÇÃO DA MESQUITA

Foi lançada no dia vinte a obra fundamental da Mesquita Foz do Iguaçu, no terreno do Centro Beneficente Islâmico, doado pela municipalidade. Estiveram presentes embaixadores de sete países árabes, de várias cidades brasileiras, autoridades locais e aproximadamente 300 membros da comunidade islâmica fronteiriça.

A mesquita será construída em terreno de 1.990 metros quadrados, localizada no Porto Foz. As estimativas para a sua conclusão é de um ano aproximadamente.

O cerimonial foi conduzido pelo secretário geral assistente da AC, Monamad Aboufereh, seu irmão, o Alcorão recitou a presença das autoridades. Em seguida Aboufereh pediu o empresário Kamal para a sua dedicação oficial e expressão dos objetivos do Centro Islâmico e da construção da mesquita.

O Sheik Ahamad Mohairi, mesquita do Rio de Janeiro, e em nome dos religiosos de Foz do Iguaçu.

O momento mais emocionante da solenidade foi quando as autoridades religiosas árabes foram convidados a colocar os tijolos no local destinado à obra fundamental. O Sheik Ahmad Jamal Atia, nazi gesto de amor e fé, quando chegou a sua vez, beijou um tijolo.

Estiveram presentes os embaixadores Ali Zakaria Alansari (Kuwait), Faik Makie Ahmed (Irã), Abdulrahman Saleh Hakeim (Arábia Saudita), embaixadores participaram também da cerimônia os sheiks Ali Rifai (São Paulo), Ahmad Mohairi (Rio de Janeiro), Ahmad Jamal Atia (Curitiba), Abdul Nasser El Khatib (Paraná), o presidente da Confederação das Sociedades Islâmicas do Brasil Hussein El Zakawi e o presidente do Centro Islâmico de Foz do Iguaçu Ali Said Rahal.

A coordenação dos trabalhos de construção da mesquita estará a cargo do Centro Cultural Beneficente Islâmico de Foz do Iguaçu, que goza de autorização do governo brasileiro desde 1981 e tem entre uma de suas missões fundamentais, segundo seus estatutos construir e manter uma Mesquita em Foz do Iguaçu, fundar e administrar uma escola que ensine árabe e português e difundir a cultura islâmica. A diretoria do Centro é constituída por Ali Said Rahal (presidente), Muhammad Ali Omani (vice-presidente), Kamal Daman

(secretário), Omar Tajal (secretário), Ahmad Ali (tesoureiro), Mohamad (2º tesoureiro), Asim (diretor cultural), Mohamud Safa (diretor social e Ahmadi Hamad Rahal (patrimônio), Hussein (diretor patrimonial) e Mohamad Hassan Safadi (religioso). Kallil Aboud (diretor de beneficência) e mohamad Mohamad Jomra (diretor de beneficência).




Figure 2.3. News article: “With ambassadors and sheiks, mosque construction begins.” Arialba Freire is pictured near the center of the photograph on the right.
© *Nosso Tempo*

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.³⁰ Months later, this center sponsored page-long articles about “Islamic culture” in *Nosso Tempo*.³¹ 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.”³² 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.”³³

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.”³⁴ 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.³⁵ More fully explored in the next chapter, hundreds of onlookers celebrated what was called the *comunidade islâmica fronteira* (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.³⁶ Wafa Abdel was co-founder and president of the Associação Cultural Sanaúd, the “We Shall Return [in Arabic] Cultural Association [in Portuguese].”³⁷ 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.”³⁸ 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.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ “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.”⁴² 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 Painei*, 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.”⁴³



Figure 2.4. Picture of a street march in favor of Palestinian self-determination led by Arabs on Avenida Brasil in Foz do Iguaçu. © *Nosso Tempo*

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 Khomeini, banners calling for the return of

“Jerusalem,” and pictures of the Dome of the Rock.⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰ 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).⁵¹ 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.⁵² 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."⁵³ 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."⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶ Though

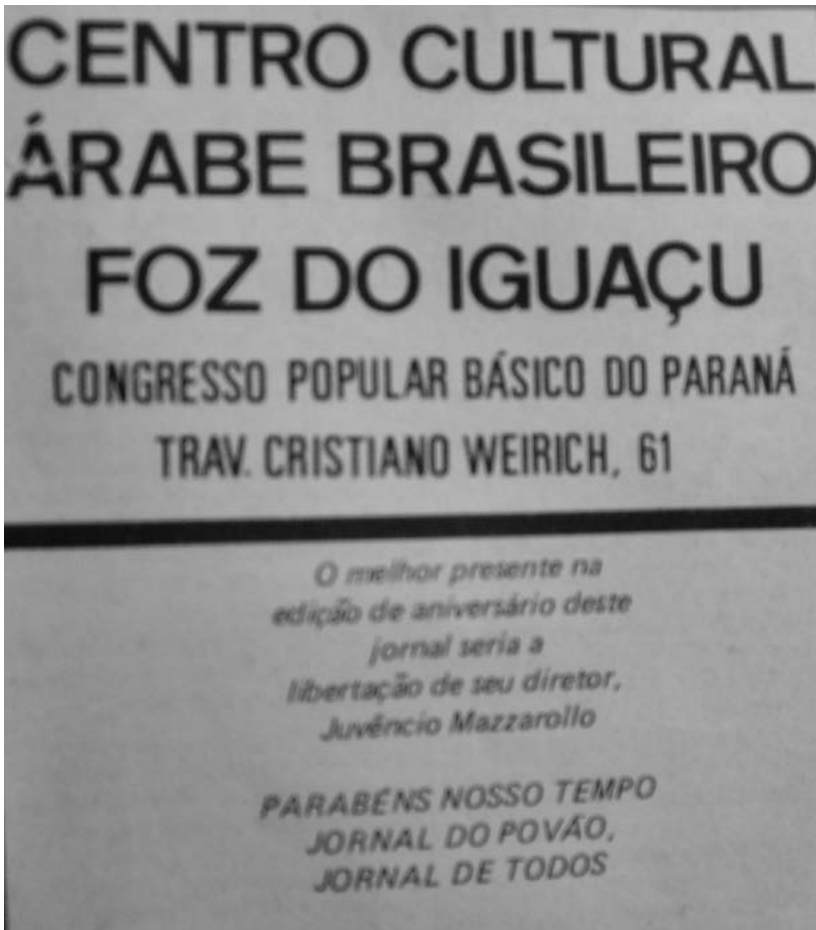


Figure 2.5. Advertisement of the Centro Cultural Árabe-Brasileiro (Arab-Brazilian Cultural Center) expressing solidarity with journalist and activist Juvêncio Mazzarollo. © *Nosso Tempo*

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.⁵⁷ Its co-founder

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.⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹ Targeted and imprisoned by the authoritarian regime, Mazzarollo emphasized the role of Mohamad Barakat, who "opened my eyes to the Palestinian cause."⁶⁰ 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."⁶¹ 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."⁶²

In another distinct Third World project, one of *Nosso Tempo's* co-founders, Aluizio 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 1984.⁶³ 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.⁶⁴ 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 1988.⁶⁵ 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 1984.⁶⁶ 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.”⁶⁷ 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.⁶⁸ 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.”⁶⁹ 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.⁷⁰ As Barakat helped make the travel arrangements (but did not accompany the delegation),⁷¹ 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.⁷² 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.⁷³ 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.⁷⁴ 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 Iguaçu municipal elections that concurrently hosted Antonio Sarubbi, the military-appointed governor of the neighboring Paraguayan state, Alto Paraná.⁷⁵ Accompanying the Brazilian democrat and Paraguayan autocrat were three Arab traders: Abdo Rahal whose Exportadora Líder in Foz do Iguaçu sold significant quantities of merchandise to Paraguay; Hussein Taijen, president of the Cámara de Comércio de Ciudad Presidente Stroessner, whose Casa Colombia sold consumer imports from Panama; and Mohamad Barakat of the Arab-Brazilian Cultural Center.⁷⁶ 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.⁷⁷ 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.”⁷⁸

Authoritarian oversight persisted in a civilian-ruled Foz do Iguaçu, 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).⁷⁹ 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.⁸⁰ 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.⁸¹ 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.⁸² 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.⁸³ 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.⁸⁴ 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."⁸⁵

***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).⁸⁶ 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,”⁸⁷ 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.⁸⁸ 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.⁸⁹ 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.⁹⁰ 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).⁹¹ 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.⁹² 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.⁹³ 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.⁹⁴ 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, Eligia 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-named *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 1986.⁹⁵ 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 Rodríguez, 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."⁹⁶ 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.⁹⁷ Marking continuity, and not rupture, this so-called "democracy" allegedly "audited" and "approved" the ledgers of its predecessor, the dictatorship-appointed mayoral administration.⁹⁸ 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, Elígia, the wife of the overthrown dictator.⁹⁹ 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.¹⁰⁰ 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."¹⁰¹ 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."¹⁰² As one of many acts of solidarity with Palestine in the second half of the 1980s,¹⁰³ 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 Cidade Presidente Stroessner hosted one of the leaders of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Lebanon."¹⁰⁴ 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



Figure 2.6. From left to right, Hussein Taijen, Sra. Hussein Taijen, Tércio Albuquerque, and Mohamad Barakat, at an Arab community event. © *Nosso Tempo*

‘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.¹⁰⁵ 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

the traders imported less, sold less, and consequently, generated less taxes.”¹⁰⁶ 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.¹⁰⁷ 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.¹⁰⁸ With righteous convictions, Hussein Taijen attracted members of the Partido Revolucionario Febrerista (PRF, or Febrerist 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.”¹⁰⁹ 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.¹¹⁰ Third Worldist sentiments survived the “dramatic decline” of state-led visions.¹¹¹

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.¹¹² 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.¹¹³ 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.¹¹⁴ 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 Iguçu* 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.”¹¹⁵ The article listed several names, including Hassan Assad, Imadi Assim, Hassan Diab, Hus-san 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.¹¹⁶ 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.”¹¹⁷ 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.¹¹⁸ 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."¹¹⁹ 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."¹²⁰ 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.¹²¹ 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.¹²² 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."¹²³ 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 Iguaçu” closed their doors “in protest” of Israel’s assassination of Hizbullah’s Secretary General Abbas Musawi and his family in Lebanon.¹²⁸ 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.”¹²⁹ 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.”¹³⁰ 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.¹³¹ 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.”¹³² At the time, Brazilian officials did not express concern about the border but rather shored up the security of the Israeli embassy in Brasília and Jewish associations in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.¹³³ 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 Iguaçu, 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."¹³⁴ 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."¹³⁵ 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.¹³⁶ 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.¹³⁷ 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."¹³⁸ 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.¹³⁹ 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.¹⁴⁰

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.

Test of Faith

Arabs led mosques and prayer halls as well as commemorated '*eidun* (holy days, in Arabic) at the border under a fading authoritarian apparatus. But in 1994, their faith was questioned after the post-authoritarian Argentine state neither deterred nor detained the perpetrators of an attack in Buenos Aires which leveled a historic building home to Jewish Argentine associations, referred to as AMIA (Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina, or Jewish Argentine Mutual Association, in Spanish).¹ Arabs on the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border found themselves being accused of complicity in the still unresolved violence.

Having mobilized around Sunni and Shia markers of difference at the border during and after authoritarian rule, Lebanese, Palestinians, and Syrians came to collectively see themselves as foils for the AMIA attack that remains without resolution. In the immediate aftermath and since that time, Argentine and US authorities perceived Arabs at the border as suspects who would or could kill Jews, and expected Brazilian and Paraguayan officials to do likewise. Argentine security forces detained and released Arabs venturing onto the Argentine side of the border, while Argentine and US government officials put pressure on Brazilian and Paraguayan counterparts to scrutinize Arab religious leaders who were apprehended, investigated, and released as well. Without evidence against them in the still unresolved bombing, Arabs rebutted Argentine, US,

and other powers that they felt scapegoated them. In this Ummah America, Arabs shaped and were shaped by the ideal of a universal Islamic camaraderie, condemning the anti-Jewish violence in Argentina that had been similarly denounced in the US and further consolidating Islam on the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border.

This chapter explores what political scientist Olivier Roy called “the new frontier of the imagined ummah” in this hemisphere’s unresolved anti-Semitism.² Since arriving at the border, Arabs began to institutionalize an Ummah by accommodating state power and steering clear of its violence, including Argentina’s “Dirty War” (1976–1983). After the bombing of AMIA in Buenos Aires, however, Arabs at the border felt “compelled . . . to apologize for acts they did not commit [and] to condemn acts they never condoned,” to paraphrase anthropologists Sally Howell and Andrew Shryock in their critique of post-9/11 backlash in the US.³ In consonance with the considerable scholarship on Jewish suffering after the AMIA bombing, this chapter shifts focus from ground zero in Buenos Aires to the subsequent backlash at the border.⁴ Argentine and US officials, having failed to redress attacks against Jews in the Argentine capital, pressured Brazilian and Paraguayan counterparts to profile and pick up “Muslims” or “Arabs” at the border, who were later discharged. Folding into an Ummah America, Arabs mobilized on the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border in response to accusations that they perceived to be emanating from Argentina and the US.

This chapter contributes to scholarship on military power in Latin American political transitions by directing attention to a seldom acknowledged shift after authoritarian rule.⁵ In historically US-backed Argentine, Brazilian, and Paraguayan authoritarian regimes, the military was deployed on domestic territory by alleging to combat *terroristas* (terrorists), who were construed as neither Arabs nor Muslims but rather communists, dissidents, or anyone perceived as such. With the formal end of authoritarian rule, civilian-led administrations attempted to limit the military in domestic affairs, but the Argentine state suspended such norms in order to search for suspects in the unresolved bombings in Buenos Aires, pressuring

Brazilian and Paraguayan counterparts to do likewise under US scrutiny.⁶ Consequently, an array of civilian and militarized security forces helped carry out exceptional domestic operations that targeted Muslim Arabs at the border in the name of so-called *antiterrorismo* (counterterrorism, in Portuguese and Spanish), an authoritarian legacy in the transition toward civilian rule. Arabs' faith was tested as a target proxy in post-authoritarian times.

Crossing, Redrawing, and Debating Borders

Arabs "crossed and reinforced" borders.⁷ Ali Said Rahal stated that the mosque and school, introduced last chapter, fostered "community union, integration into Foz do Iguaçu society, and the . . . development of Arab cultural values in the region of the Three Borders."⁸ But in naming the mosque, Rahal and other Sunni chose Omar Ibn Al-Khattab, a figure they claimed was "considered by Muslims as the 'prince of believers.'"⁹ This naming estranged Shia for whom Omar Ibn Al-Khattab usurped power from 'Ali, who they theologically imagined as the true heir to lead the Ummah. "Wealthy Sunnis," it was said, chose the designation so that "no Shia would want to go" to the mosque. Meanwhile, the adjacent school was named 'Ali Ben Abi Taleb, because this caliph was a "gateway to knowledge" according to Kamal Osman, not the wronged Muslim leader as Shia believe.¹⁰ As a result, Shia tended to coalesce around the Islamic Benevolent Society in a nearby building they named after Iran's religious leader, Imam Al-Khomeini, and frequented its prayer space (*mussalah*, in Arabic) that they called the *huseiniya* (in Arabic), after Husein, the martyred son of 'Ali. Arabs traversed the borders of the Ummah but also redrew "Sunni" and "Shia" boundaries within it.

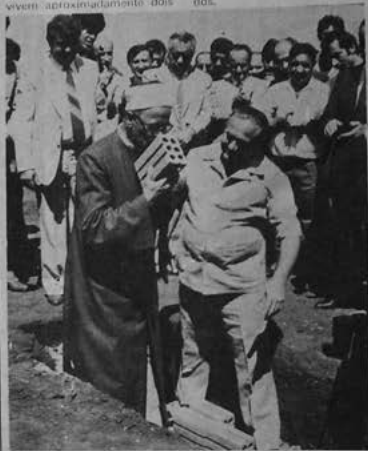
Sunni and Shia at the border also debated the 1991 Gulf War that Washington, DC, initiated, Brasília kept watch over, Asunción sat out, and Buenos Aires sent troops for.¹¹ "Impassioned Sunnis . . . backed Saddam Hussein" and ignored his brutality toward Shia, remembered a Shia shaykh in the *huseiniya*.¹² Indeed, Sunni Lebanese and Palestinians called for renewed support of the Iraqi leader as "the gateway of the Arab world to the east." Both Mohamad

MESQUITA PODERÁ SER INAUGURADA EM ABRIL

Uma das mais belas construções de Foz do Iguaçu é a mesquita situada atrás do INPS, ou Jardim Porto Belo. A belíssima arquitetura, com suas linhas arredondadas, tem sido motivo de admiração não só dos iguaçuenses, mas também de todos que nos visitam. Vista desde a avenida Paraná, a mesquita tem como fundo o Paranaíba.

Sua construção começou em 1983 e já em fase de terminação será inaugurada no mês de abril. É um símbolo da universalidade de Foz do Iguaçu, cidade que abriga comunidades de todas as raças e credos.

mil muçulmanos, muitos com mais de vinte anos de residência na região. Todas as sextas-feiras são realizados encontros de oração no prédio semi-enterrado. Além de ser um local de orações a mesquita será um local de pesquisas, escola e guardião dos costumes. A altura de sua cúpula é de 19 metros, com um minarete de 37 metros, tendo a mesquita 1200 metros quadrados em área. É um símbolo da universalidade de Foz do Iguaçu, cidade que abriga comunidades de todas as raças e credos.



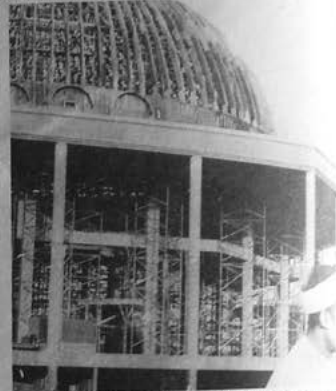
Começo da construção



São colocados os primeiros tijolos



Armação pronta...



A mesquita será um local para cultivar a fé e os costumes



Sua inauguração está prevista para abril

Figure 3.1. Article on the upcoming inauguration of the Omar Ibn Al-Khattab mosque. © *Nosso Tempo*



Figure 3.2. Front page of a special supplement of *Nosso Tempo* commemorating the official inauguration of the Omar Ibn Al-Khattab mosque. © *Nosso Tempo*

Barakat and Kamal Osman euphemized Iraq's invasion of Kuwait as "the Iraqi state's recuperation of an area that belonged to it," which in fact precipitated the US declaration of war.¹³ Wafa Abdel, president of Sanaúd, likewise considered "that Iraq has historical rights in the region." In contrast, a Shia Lebanese, Ali Farhat, "expressed his opinion" that "Iraq's invasion of Kuwait is unjust and Iraq's president is a true war criminal." Another Shia Lebanese, Hussein Abbas, then director of the Islamic Benevolent Society, pointed to the US equivocation of having previously supported Iraq against Iran. The then shaykh of the *huseiniya*, Ibrahim Kassir, echoed that the US had been aligned with Iraq against Iran. Having gained salience during the Iraq-Iran War mentioned last chapter, Sunni



Figure 3.3. Article on the Arab cultural center and school attached to the mosque.
© *Nosso Tempo*

and Shia boundaries at the border became further entrenched by US-led war in the Middle East.

At the border, as well as across and beyond the hemisphere, liberal progressives and Sunni counterparts coalesced in the “demonization” of Shia and Iran.¹⁴ Having collaborated with Sunni Lebanese, the *Nosso Tempo* editor Juvêncio Mazzarollo criticized the “religious fanaticism” of Khomeini, in particular.¹⁵ Mazzarollo expressed concern over the “silencing” of the press after Khomeini issued the edict against Salman Rushdie.¹⁶ But Mazzarollo’s stand against censorship drew on standard orientalism in labeling Iranian mourners as “the largest manifestations of fanaticism in human history” after “the death of Ayatollah Khomeini.”¹⁷ Ali Said Rahal in

the Islamic Benevolent Cultural Center shared this stance by calling Iran's Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini "a fascist" in response to a reporter's question about the decree issued against Salman Rushdie after the publication of *The Satanic Verses*.¹⁸ After his statement caused a "controversy" at the border about Khomeini's "application of Islamic principles," the new president of the Islamic Benevolent Cultural Center, Ahmad Hamad Rahal, "clarified" that "Khomeini simply leads one faction of Muslims."¹⁹

Exercising a short-lived enfranchisement after the ostensible end of authoritarian rule at the border, Shia reasserted themselves not as a "minority" or "faction" but rather as defining a global Ummah. The Shia-led Islamic Benevolent Society characterized Khomeini as the "maximum leader" of not only "Muslims" but also "the oppressed of the world."²⁰ In 1989, the Islamic Benevolent Society took out a quarter-page announcement in *Nosso Tempo* to "express its grief and consternation at the death of Ayatollah Ruhollah Al-Khomeini."²¹ Verse 156 of the Surat Al-Baqarah of the Quran was recited: "when sadness befalls, state, we are of God and to him we will return." The piece reminded the public that Khomeini, before his death, called upon "Muslims of the entire world to defend the Islamic Republic of Iran as a 'present of God.'" The Islamic Benevolent Society expressed "sincere condolences" to "the entire Islamic community" at the border and extended an invitation to "religious worship in praise of his (Khomeini's) soul that will be celebrated . . . at the community center."²²

Having migrated predominantly from Lebanon, Shia at the border advocated for Iran against the backdrop of the Brazilian state's own rapprochement with the self-declared Islamic republic, as explored last chapter.²³ Accordingly, in 1990, on the one-year anniversary of Khomeini's death, Shia Lebanese in the Islamic Benevolent Society invited "the general public" to a religious observance and an "ideological symposium" about the "persona of the deceased Imam Khomeini and his generous and blessed revolution."²⁴ Instead of being held in the Omar Ibn Al-Khattab mosque, the Shia religious observance was carried out at the society's own building and the political symposium in an upscale hotel. The new sheikh, Khaled Atai, led the events as well as the distribution of

two hundred food baskets to the needy who formed lines in front of the society's building. Based in the state capital of Curitiba, Atai was called the "spiritual leader of the Colônia Islâmica [Islamic Community] of Foz do Iguaçu." Atai clarified that the symposium intended to explore "the different sides of the Imam's personality . . . and to clarify some subjects that the audience can ask in regards to him and the Islamic Republic." With Iranian diplomats visiting from Brasília, Atai expressed his goal to break "the barriers of contradictory and confusing propaganda . . . against the personality of Khomeini and the Islamic revolution." Shia Lebanese put their historic disenfranchisement in perspective, articulating a "politics based on Islamic principles."²⁵ Brazilian state intelligence, meanwhile, characterized them as "defend[ing]" not an Ummah, but rather "the regime of the government of Iran."²⁶

At this time, Shia Lebanese made up a slight majority of migrants, though greater numbers of Sunni counterparts began settling earlier. Overwhelmingly stemming from the Beqaa Valley and South Lebanon, Shia came in hopes to make a better life and "because of constant Israeli attacks on the region," according to *A Gazeta do Iguaçu*.²⁷ Take for instance a migrant who left the village of Khiara in the Beqaa Valley in 1980, sometimes referred to by the initials of his full name, MYA, Muhammad Yusef Abdallah. MYA initially joined his brother who had settled on the outskirts of Uberlândia in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais, just before their ancestral village and much of South Lebanon was invaded by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). Deciding to try his luck at the then booming border, MYA reached Foz do Iguaçu, and after some tepid business ventures, he and his family crossed the bridge from Brazil to Paraguay and opened a store in the Jebai Center. Just as Israel occupied their villages, Shia Lebanese migrated and equaled in number their Sunni counterparts at the border.

MYA mobilized an Ummah at what seemed to be the twilight of authoritarian rule. Before Stroessner was ousted in 1989, MYA helped establish the Centro Árabe Islámico Paraguayo (Arab Islamic Paraguayan Center).²⁸ MYA recalled that he never experienced a brush with the *stronato* or the successive regime because he steered clear of criticizing "military men." In that transition, MYA idealized

a nineteen-story residential building whose forefront houses the green-domed Mezquita del Profeta Mohammed (*sic*, Mosque of the Prophet Mohammed). At the time, Andrés Rodríguez (1989–1993) led the internal military coup and became Paraguay's first elected president,²⁹ integrating the military into the new police force, the *Policia Nacional*.³⁰ Although this police force harassed Arab store-owners, mentioned earlier and more fully explored later, MYA did not express fear of reprisals from this illiberal democratic Paraguay. Located in downtown Ciudad del Este, the mosque began to be built in 1993 and opened in 1994. After the mosque, the adjacent nineteen-story building was constructed floor by floor. As Sunni continued to congregate in the mosque in Foz do Iguaçu, Shia frequented MYA's mosque in Ciudad del Este. An Ummah became institutionalized at the post-authoritarian border.

In gaining greater visibility, Shia Lebanese at the border, like Brazilian and Paraguayan state authorities, expressed empathy as well as indifference toward Hizbullah and AMAL, self-styled resistance movements that took shape during Israel's nineteen-year occupation of Lebanon that started in 1982, briefly mentioned last chapter. Respectively identified with each movement, the son of Fadlalla, from Beirut, and the shaykh of the Shia mosque in São Paulo, Mohsen Bilal Wehbi, came for the inauguration of the Mezquita del Profeta Mohammed in Ciudad del Este.³¹ Yet the idealizer, MYA, emphasized that he built the mosque for the "Muslim community," the Ummah, of the border, not for any political party or movement. MYA's father, for instance, arrived in the Paraguayan border town shortly after Israeli incursions in their Lebanese hometown of Khiara, in 1983 and 1984. When the Israeli military invaded their house to detain the father, the latter fled and found shelter with his son and daughter-in-law who had just settled at the border. Not only in the case of MYA, unfounded suspicions that Shia Lebanese could be formally organizing or fundraising for Hizbullah or any armed resistance had to do with their forced departure from then Israeli-occupied Lebanon.

Hardly conspiring between war-torn Lebanon and post-authoritarian Paraguay, Shia and other Lebanese in Ciudad del Este established the Centro Educacional Libanés (Lebanese Educational

Center), often called the Colégio Libanés (Lebanese School). According to anthropologists Paulo G. Pinto and Silvia Montenegro, the school began to be organized in 1992 when a Catholic priest from Qabrikha secured “the donation of land and afterwards the economic collaboration of some Arab merchants.”³² Eventually, the school was linked to the Asociación Benéfica Islámica del Alto Paraná (Islamic Benevolent Association of Alto Paraná), integrating educational materials approved by the Supreme Islamic Shia Council in Lebanon. A key figure in the school’s development was Ziad Fahs, born in Qabrikha and educated in Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran. In 1992, Fahs arrived on the Paraguayan side of the border, working with Lebanese and Paraguayan officials for an accredited curriculum.³³ With official recognition from Paraguayan and Lebanese government education ministries, the Colégio Libanés is now authorized to transfer credits and coursework between Paraguay and Lebanon.³⁴ Such institutional ties were likely mitigated by the AMAL movement that drew the sympathies of “various Shia leaders of Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad Presidente Stroessner” since Nabih Berri first came to the border in 1986 (and returned a decade later, discussed shortly).³⁵

In post-authoritarian times, Islamic institutions at the border bifurcated into, on the one hand, Sunni partial to pan-Arab nationalism, and, on the other, Shia sympathetic to the Iranian revolution as well as the Lebanese movements of Hizbullah and AMAL.³⁶ Mentioned earlier, Said Taijen, nominally Sunni, opened a musallah on an upper floor of the building that he and his brother owned, ostensibly avoiding the Shia-led mosque that MYA established down the street on the Paraguayan side of the border. Initiated in 2012 and inaugurated in 2015, Said Taijen also led the construction of a new, ostensibly Sunni mosque in Ciudad del Este, discussed in the sixth chapter. Nonetheless, Said Taijen stressed to the Paraguayan statesman and writer, Alejandro Hamed Franco, “our religion makes no distinction of nationality, neither culture nor ethnicity. Every Muslim is a brother in religion, equal in rights, in all aspects.”³⁷ Though praying in separate spaces, Sunni and Shia alike abided by the ideal of a universal Islamic camaraderie, an Ummah, unexpectedly interrupted by violence in Argentina.

Aftershocks of Anti-Semitic Violence in Post-Authoritarian Argentina

The bombing of AMIA on July 18, 1994, made the legacy of authoritarian-era violence and impunity all too real in post-authoritarian Argentina. President Carlos Menem (1989–1999) declared a state of emergency and the *gendarmería* (gendarmerie) closed the country's borders, including in Puerto Iguazú.³⁸ The still unresolved 1992 Israeli embassy attack was etched in the minds of victims. First-responders and reporters in Buenos Aires called the bombed-out AMIA building *la embajada* (the embassy [of Israel]) in a “verbal lapse” that made the two places “synonymous with one another.”³⁹ *Clarín*'s caption over news articles about the AMIA bombing put the watchwords in caps, *OTRA VEZ* (AGAIN). As the public perceived a repetition of violence similar to the state-sponsored terror that was then on trial, Argentina's Interior Ministry proposed National Decree Number 2023, reserving “permanent funds” in order to “clarify the international terrorist attacks perpetrated against the EMBASSY OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL in our country and the headquarters of the ASOCIACIÓN MUTUAL ISRAELITA ARGENTINA, on March 17, 1992, and July 18, 1994.”⁴⁰ Argentina's “deferential” Supreme Court, having reversed censures of former military heads of state, took charge of formal investigations into both the 1992 Israeli embassy bombing and the 1994 AMIA bombing. In a larger systemic “operation of ‘forgetting’” that critic Beatriz Sarlo observed, militarized power benefited and redefined its targets elsewhere.⁴¹

Accordingly, US-backed Argentine intelligence bureaus profiled Muslim Arabs at the border as terrorists who would or could kill Israelis and Jews in Buenos Aires. *Clarín* related that “the CIA” gave “the Argentine government a map . . . where it detected the presence of Hizbullah. . . . One of the marked zones is the tri-border between Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay.”⁴² Though not stated, the CIA's map would have likely reached Argentina's “civilian intelligence agencies” then dominated by “military officers,” namely the Central Nacional de Inteligencia (CNI, or National Center of Intelligence) that directly answered to the Argentine president, and the more independent Secretaría de Inteligencia del Estado (SIDE, or Intelligence State Secretariat).⁴³ Indeed, such agencies claimed a

“terrorist structure” at the border “would provide logistical assistance for the attack against Jewish targets [*objetivos israelitas*].” A day after the bombing, the CNI “dusted off a report . . . about the supposed existence of a ‘support base’ of the pro-Irani organization, Hizbullah, . . . in the Brazilian south and in Paraguay, in Ciudad del Este.”⁴⁴ Arabs and Muslims on the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border became undue foils of the lack of justice in post-authoritarian Argentina.

Under pressure from Argentina and elsewhere, Paraguay’s National Police and Interior Ministry were strong-armed into targeting “Muslims” and “Arabs” at the border. Initially, Enrique Martinetti, the Paraguayan National Police chief, dismissed as “exaggerated” the Argentine claim that Hizbullah established a base among “Lebanese or other Arab residents in Ciudad del Este” whose political sympathy for resistance against Israel did not indicate any institutional link, let alone complicity in violence against innocent civilians.⁴⁵ However, Paraguay’s Interior Minister, Miguel Ramírez, reproached Martinetti, relating that the police failed to assist “the Israelis” in locating a suspect who “would be protected by the numerous foreign colony (presumably Lebanese Arab [*sic*]) settled in the Ciudad del Este border city.”⁴⁶ As a result, Martinetti toughened his position, stating that “Paraguayan, Argentine, Israeli, and Brazilian special agents continue to question Arabs at the tri-border.”⁴⁷ A year later, Martinetti went so far as to say that Ciudad del Este was “a sanctuary of sleeper cells of Hizbullah.”⁴⁸

The post-authoritarian Brazilian state rejected Argentine allegations of terrorism at the border but also increased security and “update(d)” police “files” on “Arab communities.”⁴⁹ Brazil’s Federal Police as well as the Strategic Affairs Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic reported “no signs” that “the terrorist acts . . . in Argentina” were “planned from Brazil, as the Argentine government has come to suspect.”⁵⁰ Later on, the Brazilian consulate in Buenos Aires wrote that “investigations pointed to the involvement of police officials of the province of Buenos Aires,” despite the Argentine government “discreetly insinuating that the blame lies with neighboring countries,” Brazil and Paraguay.⁵¹ Having discovered “small traders, some having been there” for some time, “the Brazilian government

maintained that there are no signs of the presence or even passage of terrorists on Brazilian territory,” repeated the Agência Brasileira de Inteligência (ABIN, Brazilian Agency of Intelligence), founded in 1999 and headed by career military men after the dissolution of the aforementioned Serviço Nacional de Informações (SNI, National Service of Information) of the “old authoritarian regime.”⁵² Though dismissing Argentine suspicions that the AMIA attack was planned from Brazil, in 1995, Brazilian foreign minister, Luiz Felipe Lampreia “ended up bending toward” an Argentine proposal for a security accord between the three states of the border “in the fight against terrorism, drug-trafficking, and smuggling,” explored later in this chapter.⁵³

Arabs and others on the Brazilian side of the border spoke with Argentine media in order to denounce anti-Semitic violence in Buenos Aires as well as to represent themselves as scapegoats. The Imam of the Omar Ibn Al-Khattab mosque dedicated his sermon to condemning violence and expressing solidarity with “the victims of the brutal attack on the AMIA headquarters.”⁵⁴ Kamal Osman stated that there is no place for terrorists at the border because “I would be the first to turn them in.”⁵⁵ Hussein Taijen specified to *La Prensa*, “the press wants to put all the blame on us.”⁵⁶ Mohamad Barakat echoed that “they always throw blame on Arabs.”⁵⁷ Mayor Dobrandino da Silva, having ushered in the return of civilian rule and inaugurating the mosque six years previously, reassured the *Clarín* reporter that “there are no undocumented Arabs” who are “well integrated in our society.”⁵⁸ However, Argentine media diminished such standpoints by emphasizing the “armed guards” around Arab-owned stores on the Avenida República do Líbano in Foz do Iguaçu and lending more credence to predominantly Argentine and US suspicions of terrorists allegedly lurking at the border.

On Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border, Arabs again “condemned violence they never condoned” and portrayed themselves as easy marks.⁵⁹ In *A Gazeta do Iguaçu*, they rebuked “the CNI” and Argentina for blaming “the Arab community of Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este” for “the terrorist attack against Buenos Aires.”⁶⁰ Mohamad Rahal repeated, “we are against the terrorist attack in Buenos Aires” and no terrorists exist in Foz do Iguaçu

and Ciudad del Este because “We all know one another . . . we are relatives, friends, and acquaintances. . . . There are no strangers among us.” Kamal Osman warned that “national and international news coverage” about alleged terrorists is “bad for the city, for tourism, for business, and bad for all of us who live here at the border.” Osman also repeated his declaration to *Clarín* the day before, “I myself would denounce to the authorities anyone with terrorist or extremist tendencies.” Mustafá Jaber, a Palestinian Brazilian, likewise stated, “I will be the first to turn into the police any person who I mistrust may be a terrorist,” adding “Islam condemns criminal acts like that which occurred in Buenos Aires where innocents died and hundreds were wounded.” On the following day, the Imam of the mosque again condemned the AMIA bombing and “the suppositions of Argentine authorities and the international press in linking the attack . . . to the resident Arab community in Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este.”

Shortly after the bombing, Argentina’s gendarmerie took exceptional measures against Arabs. The gendarmerie retained power over the country’s infrastructure, including borders, after authoritarian rule, having aided the Argentine military junta’s repression and disappearance of tens of thousands of alleged “subversives.”⁶¹ With new orders to “minutely examine” the “foreigners” crossing onto the Argentine side of the border, in Puerto Iguazú, the gendarmerie commander admitted that: “We don’t have either a name or a face. Nothing. We are totally up in the air. . . . The only thing is that one speaks about the Arabs in general, so everything gets directed toward them.”⁶² Aware of Argentine “prejudice,” “Arabs in Foz do Iguaçu” began “avoiding crossing the border to the Argentine side” because the “climate is very tense at the tri-border.”⁶³ Soon after, the gendarmerie in Puerto Iguazú detained six Shia Lebanese as AMIA bombing suspects.⁶⁴ Living in Foz do Iguaçu and working in Ciudad del Este, they allegedly entered Argentina in order to pick up friends arriving at the airport in Puerto Iguazú. Argentine media spun conspiracy theories that they were a “sleeper cell of Hizbullah” at the border that planned the bombing.⁶⁵ After transferring and holding them incommunicado in Buenos Aires for ten days, the Argentine state released the “suspects” since they “had nothing to do with the AMIA case.”⁶⁶

Arabs both appealed to and held the Argentine state responsible for exceptional measures. An Argentine lawyer of Lebanese origins, Alfredo Jalaf, came to the defense of Shia Lebanese migrants being held in extraordinary circumstances in Buenos Aires. Jalaf was the grandson of a distinct wave of Maronite Lebanese migrants from Zahle, growing up in the Argentine cities of Mendoza and Córdoba, before moving to the Misiones province.⁶⁷ Called a *misionero* (inhabitant of Misiones) in the press, Jalaf was a member of the post-authoritarian constituent assembly that revised democratic municipal governing legislation in 1994. Jalaf defended the Lebanese citizens after their detention in Puerto Iguazú and while they were held incommunicado in Buenos Aires.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, on the Brazilian side of the border, in Foz do Iguaçu, Mohamad Barakat spoke out against “the government of Argentina” for “practicing terrorism in arresting . . . Lebanese who appear in their country. If there are suspects here at the border, then Argentina should release the list. We cannot accept that honest traders, family fathers, be despised by incompetent authorities . . . and kidnapped by the Argentine state.”⁶⁹

Argentine scapegoating of Arabs at the border failed to redress the violence in Buenos Aires. In 1995, the Argentine state itself came under fire for hindering the prosecution of both the 1992 Israeli embassy bombing and the 1994 AMIA bombing. The Israeli ambassador complained that “not much has been done” by Argentina’s Supreme Court “to clarify the attack.”⁷⁰ Rubén Beraja, the president of DAIA (Delegation of Jewish Argentine Associations), asked a Supreme Court judge to resign “if he could not advance the case.”⁷¹ The AMIA president likewise regretted that “Argentina is still a place where the attacks go unpunished.”⁷² Meanwhile, Argentine policemen were detained for interfering in the investigation, the Argentine Minister of Justice, Rodolfo Barra, resigned amid alleged Nazi sympathies, and the Argentine Minister of the Economy, Domingo Cavallo, stepped down and denounced not only the new Minister of Justice, Elias Jassan, but also the Minister of the Interior, Carlos Corach, for meddling with judges and prosecutors in each case.⁷³ Public perceptions of a state cover-up exacerbated orientalist representations of the president Carlos Menem who was the son of Muslim

Syrians, and his ministers of Jewish origins, derogatorily called *los judíos de Menem* (Menem's Jews).⁷⁴

The US likewise faulted the Argentine state for failing to prosecute the violence perpetrated in its own capital. In 1995, the US House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee convened a hearing on "international terrorism in Latin America, in particular Argentina and the bombing of the Jewish Community Center (AMIA) in Buenos Aires."⁷⁵ Though another hearing on authoritarian Argentina had been held less than a decade and a half previously, there was no substantive engagement with the country's past of state-sponsored violence and human rights abuses that were often justified by allegations of combating terrorism.⁷⁶ The nearly two-hundred-page report on the AMIA bombing instead made a few references about Arabs or Muslims at the border and more frequent criticisms of the Argentine state's handling of the two attacks in Buenos Aires. Philip Wilcox, the US Department of State's Coordinator for Counterterrorism, explicitly blamed the unsolved bombings on Hizbullah, and claimed there were Hizbullah "cells" at the "tri-border area of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay."⁷⁷ However, the majority of Jewish Argentine testimonies, and their answers to US committee members, put greater emphasis on the "failings" of Argentine officials in punishing the perpetrators of the 1992 and 1994 bombings.

Failing to redress anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish violence, the Argentine state continued to point fingers at the border. President Menem took up a suggestion made on Capitol Hill, and proposed a "system of information" for Argentine, Brazilian, and Paraguayan law enforcement agencies to guard against alleged "terrorist cells" at the border.⁷⁸ "Menem's proposal," reported *Folha de S. Paulo*, was "linked to recent pressures the Argentine government received from the local Jewish community and the United States."⁷⁹ A year later, in 1996, Menem's plan spawned the *comando tripartite* (Tripartite Command), a security network with shared intelligence and rotating leadership between the Argentine and Paraguayan Ministers of the Interior, and Brazil's Minister of Justice, the first of its kind since Operation Condor.⁸⁰ Operationalized by Brazil's PF, Paraguay's PN, and Argentina's gendarmerie, the security accord mitigated Argentine and Brazilian states' distinct agendas in relation to Paraguay,

more fully explored in the next chapter. Argentine officials were interested in “fighting terrorism” and pushed for the “identification and documentation of foreign citizens who reside in the [border] region, principally those of Arab origin.”⁸¹ Brazilian authorities rejected the Argentine idea of IDs for Arabs as “discriminatory,” but they welcomed stricter border controls to curb tax-evasive trade and what was called “Paraguay’s endogenous banditry.”⁸² Argentina’s Interior Minister still blamed Arabs and “lax” border controls, but Brazil’s Foreign Minister retorted that Argentine officials used “conspiracy theories” in order “to excuse themselves” due to “unsuccessful Argentine efforts at finding the culprits” of the attacks in Buenos Aires.⁸³

Making an Ummah America

Without full enfranchisement, Arabs in Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este nonetheless forged an Ummah that “signified both a common heritage and new modes of Muslim identity, unity, and difference,” to borrow from the work of religious studies scholar Jamilah Karim.⁸⁴ Sobhi Mohamad Issa, for instance, migrated to Brazil in the 1980s where he met and married his wife, Cabura, born to Lebanese parents in northern Paraná. Settling at the border, this couple participated in the baptism of the son of Catholic Brazilian friends. Their children studied Arabic in the morning, and in the afternoon, they attended “a traditional high school of Foz do Iguaçu.” Cabura reflected, “we aren’t distorting our culture, but integrating into the society of the country that received us.”⁸⁵ Likewise, the daughters of Hussein Taijen studied in Paraguayan and Brazilian schools, and after earning degrees, opened law and business offices in their father and uncle’s building in Ciudad del Este. The aforementioned prayer space functioned in this same building, typifying what Alejandro Hamed Franco called the “free exercise of Islamic worship in Paraguay.”⁸⁶ Arabs enmeshed with such everyday dynamics, experiencing no inherent conflict in being Muslim, Brazilian, and/or Paraguayan.

Suspected of complicity in still unresolved violence in Argentina, Muslim Arabs at the border commemorated religious holidays

alongside Brazilian and Paraguayan authorities. Year after year in *A Gazeta do Iguçu* during the 1990s, Sunni members of the Islamic Benevolent Cultural Center and the Omar Ibn al-Khattab mosque explained the meaning of Ramadan, the month of fasting from dawn to sunset, as a time of sacrifice and reflection. The “principal characteristic of Ramadan,” explained one adept, is “the integration of Muslims,” with the rich and poor coming together at the end of the day as well as a “more just distribution of wealth.”⁸⁷ Through the 1990s, the mosque invited and hosted local government officials in celebrating Eid al Fitr that marks the end of Ramadan as well as Eid al Adha that commemorates Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son.⁸⁸ Local media even covered children, like twelve-year old Leila who fasted during Ramadan: “The first Sunday was difficult. My mother was cooking and I took a plate to eat three times, but I overcame [the temptation] and learned to practice patience.”⁸⁹ Thirteen-year old Iman Safa added that “the fasting doesn’t count if we have bad thoughts about others.” Twelve-year old Hanan concluded, “we come to know the suffering of poor people . . . when we feel hungry during this month.” Notwithstanding Argentine and US vitriol that disembodied them as threats, Arabs continued making an Ummah America.

Like their Sunni counterparts, Shia Lebanese publicly collaborated with government, media, and civil society at the border. Shia members of the Islamic Benevolent Society commemorated *Arba’iyyin*, “the fortieth day,” after *Ashura*, which observes “the martyrdom of the Imam Hussein, grandson of the Prophet Mohamed.”⁹⁰ Instead of the public banquets sponsored by the Omar Ibn al-Khattab mosque, Shia used this and other holy days to organize clothing or food drives, donating two and three “tons of clothing” for “the needy of the city” through a local, non-Arab NGO in 1996 and 1997. Speaking in the name of the Islamic Benevolent Society, Ali Abdallah reflected that “we collect the donations among the members of the Society and we store everything so we can donate to the most needy. The key is to collaborate with people.” In the following years, he and his wife, Hayat, continued to oversee the donations. Hayat Abdallah stated, “We are commemorating a very important date, because this is the month of Ramadan, in other

words, the month of God when we feel the religious and human obligation to help others. That way, we collaborate to diminish suffering in the world.”⁹¹ The Foz do Iguaçu mayor’s wife headed the NGO that received Muslim donations and redistributed them in Foz do Iguaçu, calling the Islamic Benevolent Society “an example for other civil society groups. . .”

As Argentine and US authorities unduly associated Arab Muslims at the border with the AMIA and Israeli embassy bombings in Buenos Aires, Brazilian everyday citizens and government officials formalized the mosque in Foz do Iguaçu as an icon. A long-time staple of tourist maps and attracting thousands of visitors every month,⁹² the Omar Ibn al-Khattab mosque was formally opened for visitation in 1998, especially for elementary and high school students. The mosque’s cultural director, Ale Ahmad Ghazzaoui, reflected, “the last school we received touched us with the creativity of the questions made by the students. Sometimes, Muslims are not even that interested.”⁹³ In the same year, the Brazilian post office branch inaugurated a commemorative stamp in homage to the mosque. Showing the mosque’s dome flanked by two minarets and its official title as the “Mesquita Omar Ben Al-Khattab,” the stamp was used on “all correspondence of the Islamic Benevolent Cultural Center.” Having frequently rebuked associations with lawlessness and violence in Argentina, the mosque’s secretary, Kamal Osman, called the Brazilian postage stamp “a historic mark,” literally and figuratively.⁹⁴

Arabs even enmeshed Islam with the *Dia de Finados* (All Souls Day, in English), a date in the Catholic religious calendar whereby the souls of the departed are remembered in prayer and through visitation to grave sites, officially recognized by the state in Brazil but not Paraguay. Stores and schools are closed in Foz do Iguaçu, as many head to the city’s cemeteries, São João Batista or Jardim São Paulo. Ali Ghazzaoui recounted that “Muslims of Ciudad del Este and Foz” partake in this Brazilian ritual of visiting the deceased “out of respect for the customs of the people who welcomed them.” Muslim families headed to the corner of the Jardim São Paulo cemetery, originally purchased in 1981 by and for Muslims to “bury their dead with the feet facing east.”⁹⁵ Ghazzaoui noted that Muslims generally avoided the use of candles in the cemetery. Many, however, adopted

the Catholic practice of bringing flowers and placing them on the tombs. Whereas Catholic counterparts recited the “Hail Mary” and the “Our Father,” Muslims read aloud “Yā sīn, 36th surah [chapter] of the Quran” in front of the graves of loved ones whose “faces were turned toward Mecca, toward the sunrise, because on the final day of judgment, when the dead will rise, they’ll look toward the holy city.”⁹⁶

Amid Argentine and US machinations that vilified their transnational reach, Muslim Lebanese on the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border maintained long-distance ties, including with Lebanon’s AMAL party, headed by parliamentary president Nabih Berri. In 1996, Berri and twenty-one Lebanese parliamentarians visited Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este. Berri stated his intention to “reinforce the ties between the Arab Community and the “Government of Lebanon.”⁹⁷ Border media explained that “Berri commands the radical political organization, AMAL (Shiite)” and transformed himself from “one of the most feared terrorists of the world” to “an internationally respected persona.”⁹⁸ Arabs hosted a banquet for a thousand people in the luxurious Hotel Bourbon and accompanied Berri on visits to the Iguaçu waterfalls, the Itaipu dam, and Islamic charity associations. In these venues, Berri referred to the nearly twenty-year Israeli occupation in southern Lebanon and emphasized that “the invaders are them [Israelis].” Lebanese at the border “wanted to show the parliamentary president the development that they brought to the region and reinforce support for the reconstruction of Lebanon.”

Arabs at the border imagined themselves as victims, not victimizers, publicly raising the question of whether Israeli incursions in Lebanon could fuel Argentine offensives against the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border. After Berri’s visit, in 1996, Israel shelled South Lebanon and the Beqaa Valley. Called “Grapes of Wrath,” the Israeli attack allegedly aimed to stomp out Hizbullah bases but it resulted in thousands of civilian casualties that provoked fear on the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border. As Israel attacked Lebanon, a Foz do Iguaçu newspaper reported on “a rumor in the Arab community that the region would be a possible target of Israeli terrorists who would try to strike at Hizbullah and

the Lebanese government through their compatriots in Latin America.”⁹⁹ It was feared that “Israeli terrorists” would enter via Argentina in order to attack Arabs on the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border. A military spokesman in Puerto Iguazú dismissed the rumor, attempting to disassociate Argentine stances toward Brazil and Paraguay from the Israeli attack on Lebanon.

At this hemispheric crossroads of an Ummah, Arab traders from Brazilian and Paraguayan sides organized a street march in protest of Israel’s shelling of Lebanon. “Stores run by Arabs in Ciudad del Este,” related *A Gazeta do Iguazu*, “closed their doors . . . in protest and went to Avenida Brasil (in Foz do Iguazu) where the demonstration began.”¹⁰⁰ They joined some three thousand civic demonstrators who condemned the Israeli war on Hizbullah that resulted in thousands of innocent deaths in Lebanon. Although the Israeli offensive targeted Shia-majority areas of Lebanon, the protest’s most outspoken critics were Sunni. Kamal Osman, Mohamad Barakat, and others condemned Israel’s shelling that resulted in civilian and non-combatant deaths. To commemorate the forty-day anniversary of the war, in tribute to the civilians murdered, the Shia-led Islamic Benevolent Society held a ceremony that included these as well as other Sunni and non-Muslim residents.¹⁰¹ Together at an Ummah American border, Sunni and Shia Muslims mourned and protested the killing of innocent civilians.

With the unlikely return to villages attacked or occupied by Israel, Shia Lebanese deepened their roots at the border by founding a new school, the “Escola Libanesa Brasileira” (Lebanese Brazilian School). According to Reda Soueid, “this school” would “better connect the Arab community into the Iguazu community” and “the cultural exchange between them.”¹⁰² Mohsen Bilal Wehbi from São Paulo collaborated with the Islamic Benevolent Society, arranging for a Lebanese migrant, Ali Khazan, to become the school principal.¹⁰³ Opened in 2000, the school is located on a main highway outside the city center in Foz do Iguazu. It started offering “elementary education” for some six hundred children on three floors and around twenty-seven classrooms, expanding later on.¹⁰⁴ According to the Brazilian principal, Regina Venâncio, the Escola Libanesa Brasileira and the previously established Colégio Líbano

Brasileiro, “have the goal of attending to the children, descendants of the Islamic community, as well as all the students from other communities.”¹⁰⁵ Brazil’s Ministry of Education approved the school curriculum with classes in Arabic, English, and Portuguese, as well as Islamic religion and history.¹⁰⁶ “Dona Regina,” as she is known, observed that parents would arrange for children enrolled at the Escola Libanesa Brasileira to study abroad in Lebanon, who after a short time, returned to Foz do Iguaçu. Migrant parents wanted their children to renew family ties, improve language skills, and attend Lebanese schools based on a US curriculum, which offered special classes for study abroad students from Brazil and Paraguay.¹⁰⁷

Arabs folded into this Ummah America in ways that precluded the Argentine side of the border. In 1998, *Veja* stated that “Arab immigrants of Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este avoided visiting Puerto Iguazú. . . . They know they are not welcome.”¹⁰⁸ The news-weekly pointed out that the Argentine state suspected Arabs of providing “shelter to terrorists of Hizbullah” and “it hopes to blame” them “for the two anti-Jewish attacks [*sic*] that killed more than 100 persons in Buenos Aires.”¹⁰⁹ A month later, Brazilian diplomats in Asunción made the same observation that Argentine counterparts blamed the border for the violence that the Argentine state failed to prevent and prosecute in Buenos Aires.¹¹⁰ *Veja*, reflecting Brazilian government policy, explained that “there is no proof” of Argentine accusations against Arabs, but “the immigrants are suspected because the majority come from the south of Lebanon and belong to the Shia branch of Islam.” *Veja* qualified that “sympathy for Hizbullah is no secret in the community,” but also that Brazilian and Paraguayan states did not consider Hizbullah (or AMAL) “terrorist organizations.”¹¹¹ *A Gazeta do Iguaçu* more explicitly criticized the Argentine government for having “ceded to the interests of the United States and Israel,” which “demanded energetic actions from the Brazilian and Paraguayan governments to undertake surveillance of Arab communities.”¹¹² Having helped in the authoritarian rise of Brazil over Paraguay, Arabs at the border became a target of post-authoritarian Argentina and the US.

“Muslim First . . .” in America

The “Muslim First . . .” configuration of identity that anthropologist Nadine Naber studied among Arabs in the US was both imputed to and taken up by counterparts on the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border.¹¹³ State authorities in the aforementioned “Tripartite Command” referenced the Muslimness of the border especially in relation to unresolved violence against Jews in Argentina.¹¹⁴ Just after the command’s representatives met in Buenos Aires, the Brazilian Federal Police apprehended a Shia shaykh, Seyed Mohsen Tabatabai, for allegedly conspiring in the AMIA bombing.¹¹⁵ Usually characterized as “Islamic,” Tabatabai’s Iranian passport had a Paraguayan residency stamp that apparently dated back to 1984, which had been just renewed. For some two years previously, Tabatabai used legitimate credentials as the religious leader in the Shia-led Islamic Benevolent Society in Foz do Iguaçu and in the Mezquita del Profeta Mohamad in Ciudad del Este. Without this backdrop, *ABC Color* reported that Tabatabai was one of the “kingpins” of Hizbullah, protecting other “Arab terrorists who participated in the attack” on AMIA, though Brazil’s Federal Police maintained that Tabatabai had not infringed upon any law.¹¹⁶ Tabatabai’s Iranian passport with the necessary visas was confiscated in Foz do Iguaçu and forwarded to Interpol. After a week, Brazil’s Federal Police declared that Tabatabai was innocent. Years later, upon verification from the embassy in Tehran, the Brazilian state extended official Brazilian visas for Tabatabai and his family.¹¹⁷ State authorities detained, defamed, and absolved a Shia religious leader at the border.

Without reference to Arab, Iranian, or other Middle Eastern categories of difference in this Ummah, Muslims came together to represent Shia identity on its own terms. After Tabatabai explained to a journalist that Shia uphold a “more democratic” form of governing, his Sunni counterpart, Mohamad Barakat, then Secretary of Industry and Commerce of the Foz do Iguaçu government, added, “in this system, the way of governing among us is by consultative means, through popular councils, where the members are chosen by the people.” Tabatabai and Barakat stressed that Muslims at the border were “blamed” for the AMIA bombing in Buenos Aires.¹¹⁸

With overwhelmingly Sunni and Shia Lebanese by his side, Tabatabai explained, “the first thing that I learned was tolerance amid any false accusation. We always hope that the accuser apologizes. That way, we are obliged to forgive, especially when we are in a position of power.” Indeed, Tabatabai had authority, bearing a distant relation to the prominent scholar of Shia Islam, Muhammad Husayn Tabatabai. He concluded that “false news reports” about alleged ties to the AMIA bombing “committed violence against truth, democracy, humanity, and above all, the security of the peoples of the *três fronteiras* (three borders).”¹¹⁹

Shia Lebanese in Ciudad del Este likewise supported Tabatabai. Ibrahim Hijazi conceded an interview to *ABC Color* as “the official representative of Lebanon’s AMAL party,” explaining that AMAL was “against violence” and guaranteed that Tabatabai was “guiding, helping, and encouraging the religious customs of his community and has no connection with terrorism.”¹²⁰ Without referencing Tabatabai’s Iranian background, or his scholarly pedigree, Hijazi explained that the title of Tabatabai as *shaykh* meant that he was a “religious” leader in Islam, “respected for his charity work.” Likewise, not commenting on the shaykh’s undeserved association with the unresolved violence perpetrated against Israeli and Jewish institutions in Buenos Aires, Hijazi emphasized that Muslims are against terrorism because the “founder of the AMAL party,” Musa al-Sadr, was kidnapped and killed by terrorists. As a Muslim and self-identified AMAL representative, Hijazi declared that fellow “Lebanese merchants living in Ciudad del Este” sought to escape, not spread, conflict. Lebanese Shia defended Tabatabai and portrayed Muslims not as the perpetrators but rather as victims of violence.

Post-authoritarian Brazilian authorities defended Tabatabai and associated him with the Muslim-majority “Arab community.” The Workers’ Party (PT), the Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB), the Party of Brazilian Social Democracy (PSDB), and the Communist Party of Brazil (PC do B), among others, wrote an open “Statement of Support to the Arab Community of the *Tríplice Fronteira*.”¹²¹ The letter began, “Political parties in Foz do Iguaçu publicly denounce the existence” of a “biased and smear campaign”

levied “against the region of the Three Borders and principally against the Arab Community that has lived and worked here for dozens of years.” It continued that “since the attack against AMIA,” mainstream media portrayed the border as a “central base of operations for Arab Terrorists who control all terror in Latin America.” The letter explained that Tabatabai’s ordeal began when an unspecified “Paraguayan newspaper from Asunción” claimed “the Muslim priest and missionary [*sic*]” was “the leader of a terrorist group in charge of spreading terror in Latin America.” However, “after an investigation through Interpol, the untrue allegations led the local Federal Police chief to challenge the news.” The letter concluded that Muslims and Arabs “always contributed to the construction and development of the *tríplice fronteira*,” and thus, “should be respected in their dignity and citizenship.” Without taking note of the difference between Tabatabai and the predominantly Arab public at the border, the Foz do Iguaçu city government defended a wrongly detained Islamic religious leader.

Shortly after Tabatabai’s vindication, the Shia-led Islamic Benevolent Society celebrated the end of Ramadan by donating food, toys, and clothing for the needy. In subtle reference to the conspiracy theory spun by big media, Ali Abdallar stated, “it’s important that the press covers this kind of action, so this example can be followed by other persons, independently of nationality or belief.”¹²² Abdallar made a “call to fraternity. This border is so rich. If each of us gives a little, we wouldn’t have poor people.” He paraphrased the Quran, “Never will one arrive at the altar of fraternity or goodness, if they don’t give away a little of what they enjoy.” Repeating the gesture in subsequent years, another member, Ali Abdala, made it clear that “Our goal in making donations is to fulfill a religious and humanitarian obligation to help who is near.”¹²³ Their donations went to the local NGO known by the acronym Provopar (Programa do Voluntariado Paranaense, or Paraná State Volunteer Program). After a Shia shaykh was wrongly detained by law enforcement, the Islamic Benevolent Society where he led prayer carried out an annual donation event for the needy.

Nonetheless, the Argentine state strong-armed its Paraguayan counterpart to produce any Muslim Arab suspect for still unresolved

anti-Semitic violence in Buenos Aires. In 1998, “Paraguayan and Argentine police forces” together issued “an international arrest warrant” for Khaled Taki Eldin, a Sunni religious leader allegedly wanted “in the AMIA case.”¹²⁴ The case began when Argentina’s SIDE, navy, and gendarmerie published a report that *grupos chiitas* (Shia groups) in Ciudad del Este “benefited from the backwardness of the Paraguayan government in the implementation of security measures.”¹²⁵ At first, Paraguay’s Foreign Relations Ministry rebuked this Argentine report as an excuse for “failing to investigate the attacks.”¹²⁶ Even the *stronista* strongman of Alto-Paraná, Carlos Barreto Sarubbi, expressed disbelief at the accusations levied against “the Islamic population” because “they are people who all of us know.”¹²⁷ His son, just elected as mayor of Ciudad del Este, echoed, “Here, we never had any attacks and never detected terrorist cells.”¹²⁸ In the following months, however, Paraguayan authorities carried out what *Clarín* called an “anti-terrorist dragnet” in Paraguay, detaining Lebanese Muslims with purported “connections” to “the massacres of the Embassy of Israel in 1992 and AMIA in 1994 in Buenos Aires.”¹²⁹ When this roundup failed to produce evidence, Argentina’s Interior Minister, Carlos Corach asked for better results from his Paraguayan counterpart,¹³⁰ and on the same day, Paraguay’s National Police received a judicial order to search and detain the Egyptian-born Eldin in Ciudad del Este.

But the post-authoritarian Brazilian state pushed back against Paraguay in spite of Argentine pressure. After all, Eldin was a naturalized Brazilian citizen living in Foz do Iguaçu for twelve years with his wife and four Brazilian-born children.¹³¹ Brazilian officials asked Eldin to wait for Paraguayan authorities to follow diplomatic protocol and request Eldin’s testimony at the Brazilian embassy in Asunción, which then would be forwarded to Brazil’s Foreign Ministry.¹³² “If the request was approved,” *A Gazeta do Iguaçu* explained, “Eldin would have the right to be heard in Brazil by a Brazilian judge.”¹³³ Eldin spoke of his religious duties under Brazilian sovereignty, “I exercise my religious responsibilities in strict obedience to Brazilian law and supported by the constitution, which guarantees freedom of consciousness and religious worship.”¹³⁴ Eldin likewise spoke of neither Sunni nor Shia but rather of the “comunidade

árabe-islâmica.”¹³⁵ Although Eldin expressed his willingness to meet with Paraguayan authorities alongside Mohamad Barakat, Said Taijen, Atef Manah, and others in the Centro Cultural Beneficente Islâmico, the Brazilian state intervened against Argentine-influenced Paraguay.¹³⁶

Sunni and Shia came together against post-authoritarian Argentina’s “diplomatic offensive” that vilified the Ummah as being “responsible for two major anti-Jewish attacks in the country’s capital.”¹³⁷ After *ABC Color* alleged that Eldin had “supposed ties with the terrorist arm of Hizbullah,”¹³⁸ Reda Soueid, a Shia from Khiam in South Lebanon, replied that “Khaled Eldin is Sunni, which shows the wrong-headedness of the accusations” that associated him with “Hizbullah and Iran” that are of “the Shia line of Islam.”¹³⁹ Soueid lobbied against anti-migrant “dragnets” in Brazil, discussed in the next chapter, delivering to Brazil’s Minister of Justice a report about the “persecution of Arabs” that was exacerbated by baseless accusations of “Islamic terrorist cells in the region.”¹⁴⁰ A one-time member of the Lebanese communist party, Soueid lived in Foz do Iguaçu since 1978, presided over a local branch of the Worker’s Party (PT), and ran a store in the Paraguayan border town. Around this time, Soueid noted, “We have a hidden war here, and we Arabs are on the defensive.”¹⁴¹ Indeed, Muslim Arabs’ sense of being under collective attack heightened after Paraguay’s National Police claimed that Eldin used the “Sunni mosque of Foz do Iguaçu” as a cover for ties to “ Hamas and Al Gamat al Islamiya” [*sic*].¹⁴²

Arabs again pointed fingers not at Paraguay but rather at Argentina for the anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish violence that the state failed to prevent and prosecute. In Ciudad del Este, Hussein Taijen stated to *Clarín* that “AMIA is an internal problem of your own” in Argentina. Argentine authorities, he counter-accused, sought “to transfer the problem to the *triple frontera* because they couldn’t clarify the attack and because there’s a lot of cash moving here.”¹⁴³ Taijen even defended Hizbullah. This nominally Sunni Lebanese stressed: “Hizbullah does not exist in Paraguay, but at any rate, this group is a political party that struggles for the liberation of its land, as you, Argentines, struggled for the Falkland Islands.”¹⁴⁴ Taijen likened Hizbullah’s struggle with Israel to Argentina’s past war with

Britain. Taijen dismissed the Argentine Interior Minister's allegation of Hizbullah support at the border, reflecting "Is it right that we send cash to the Islamic cause? We would have no problem sending money. But it just so happens that Hizbullah has a lot more cash than we do." But the *Clarín* newspaper headline read "All of us Arabs here are of Hizbullah." Taijen criticized Argentina's scapegoating of Arabs at the border, but his position was glossed as monolithic support for Hizbullah.

Though critical of the Argentine state and media, Taijen's stance "was not well received" by some Shia Lebanese.¹⁴⁵ Whether misreading the headline or misconstruing his words, some Shia Lebanese thought that their Sunni counterpart had characterized Ciudad del Este as a "cueva de terroristas" (cave of terrorists) or labeled Shia or Hizbullah as terrorists. Viewed as Sunni, Hussein Taijen had a better image beforehand, but he lost some respect among Shia after his remark from the Argentine press circulated on the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border. Although Taijen criticized Argentine attempts to blame Muslims and Arabs for unresolved violence in Buenos Aires, Shia Lebanese and others hardly thought of Taijen as defending them. As scapegoats of the Argentine state's failure to thwart or resolve the 1992 bombing of the Israeli embassy and the 1994 bombing of AMIA in Buenos Aires, Muslim Arabs at the border likewise failed to shore up the politics of religious difference among themselves.

Such circumstances exacerbated violence against Muslim Arabs at the border, as three leaders were gunned down in the span of a year.¹⁴⁶ In one case, Sheikh Ziad Fahs was shot twice in the head and survived.¹⁴⁷ Fahs ran the Shia-majority Centro Educacional Libanés in Ciudad del Este, brought up earlier. Suspicions were raised that the shooting was an attempt to silence his criticisms of the impunity surrounding the prior shooting of Taijen himself, addressed in the next chapter. In one of Fahs's sermons, the religious leader "demanded more seriousness on the part of Paraguayan authorities to investigate the assassination."¹⁴⁸ In fact, the Centro Educacional Libanés pleaded for his case to be investigated as an act of terrorism.¹⁴⁹ But the anti-terrorist division of Paraguay's National Police alleged that the violence stemmed from Muslims' internal

“sectarian” divisions.¹⁵⁰ Accordingly, the Paraguayan state side-stepped Fahs’s own request “to investigate my case, which is very grave, because we still don’t know what happened.”¹⁵¹ Assailants were arrested and charged, but Sunni and Shia were increasingly uncertain of due legal process at the border more than a decade after the formal end of authoritarian rule.

Muslim Arabs were subject to, and not executors of, authoritarian legacies. Lebanese, Palestinians, and Syrians brought Islam into Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este, and that border into a wider Ummah. Tending to steer clear of authoritarian and post-authoritarian regimes, their Islamic community-organizing accommodated state exceptions. But as the anti-terrorist or counterterrorist mantras of past authoritarian regimes crept into subsequent post-authoritarian administrations, Muslim Arabs saw themselves as taking the blame for anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish attacks that the Argentine government neither prevented nor prosecuted in a checkered history of state-sponsored violence. Arabs on the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border distanced the Islam they practiced from the exceptional demands made by Argentine and US authorities, but the concomitant rise of liberal economic blocs made matters more uncertain.

PART II

COUNTERTERRORIST LIAISONS

(1990S–2010S)

CHAPTER 4

Free Trade Security

Arabs at the border could hardly foretell the Southern Common Market, better known as Mercosur, mentioned at the start of this book. Unexpectedly, their cross-border businesses came to face restrictive terms of trade and security in what historian Aylê-Salassié Filgueiras Quintão called a “common destiny” in a “vector of Americanness.”¹ Ratified by Brazilian, Paraguayan, Argentine, and Uruguayan states, the Mercosur bloc took little account of Arab-led commerce at the border, but kept tabs on the US-led North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as well as the unsuccessful Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

Lebanese, Palestinians, and Syrians carried on doing business through Mercosur’s standardized tariffs and monitoring mechanisms in the 1990s. On the Brazilian side of the border, Arabs curtailed exportation and imported into Brazil from outside the bloc using Mercosur’s Common External Tariffs (CETs). On the Paraguayan side of the border, Arabs continued selling to Brazilian clientele by obtaining exemptions from Mercosur’s CETs, importing goods from the Colón free trade zone, discussed earlier, and increasingly from South Floridian free trade zones. However, after US and Argentine authorities alleged that Arab trade threatened the bloc and hemisphere, Brazilian officials set up checkpoints on the Friendship Bridge at the border with Paraguay, detaining and releasing Arabs who resided on the Brazilian side and ran stores

on the Paraguayan side. Categorized as “non-Mercosur” subjects, Arabs shored up their insecure status with heavy stakes in real estate. Amid illiberal exceptions in a liberal economic bloc, Arabs promoted and persevered in this free trade America.

This chapter builds on scholarship that eschews the dichotomies of domination and resistance in “free trade,” a misnomer for otherwise “inherently asymmetric” tariff reduction agreements.² But I turn from government officials, corporate elites, activists, and consumers to cross-border traders in a continental bloc of economic belonging. Lebanese, Palestinians, and Syrians adjusted or defended their trade as integral to Mercosur at the same time the US pressured the bloc’s member states to join the unsuccessful FTAA, which historian Moniz Bandeira saw as an attempt to “revive the Monroe Doctrine.”³ On the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border, Arabs adopted and appealed for exemptions to Mercosur tariffs in efforts to shore up the cross-border commerce that they had led over the previous decades. Nonetheless, Arabs were targeted, apprehended, and discharged by mostly Brazilian state officials seeking to redress the demands of Argentine and US counterparts. Neither dominating nor resisting Mercosur, Arabs finessed and folded into this free trade America.

Arabs at the border reveal that Mercosur was not only a “customs union” but also an “incipient security community” that made illiberal exceptions to liberal democratic expectations in the bloc’s accords.⁴ In dialogue with scholarship on liberal democratic states that adopted market and security reforms in the 1990s, this chapter charts Mercosur member states’ neoliberal and counterterrorist policies that intersected and reinforced each other at the border.⁵ I show that after having adapted to the liberal economic strictures of Mercosur, hundreds of Arabs were detained and discharged as “non-Mercosur” subjects in operations that suspended due process and expanded security sharing between Brazil and other Mercosur member states. By stopping, searching, and sending on their way mostly Arabs, government authorities put into place monitoring mechanisms that controlled the cross-border flows of persons, goods, and monies that preceded, and competed with, the bloc. Through exceptional measures targeting Arabs at the border,

liberal democratic member states of Mercosur sanctioned free trade security.

Changing Customs in Foz do Iguaçu

Arabs were not necessarily welcome in this common market with continental pretensions. On the Brazilian side of the border, they and other exporters were “extremely pessimistic” when Mercosur eliminated “tariffs on 95 percent of intraregional trade.”⁶ Mahmud Dawas, owner of the Calce Bem shoe store, lamented, “Ninety-five percent of my sales were to Paraguayans, and now with the implementation of Mercosur, business at the border has ended,” since Brazilian “manufacturers are selling directly to Paraguayans” at a price “40 to 50 percent cheaper.”⁷ His counterpart, Ali Ahmad Ismail, owner of Malhas Tex, agreed that Paraguayan clients found cheaper textiles, shoes, and other goods elsewhere.⁸ Mohamed Saleh observed that his and others’ Paraguayan customers simply stopped coming.⁹ Mohamed Ali Osman concluded “The city looks like it’s dying . . . with Mercosur, practically everything we had got sunk.”¹⁰ Arabs’ export-driven commerce at the border was under-sold by the Mercosur agreement that opened the exportation of Brazilian manufactures across the continent.

Neither exporting in nor escaping from the US dollar, Arabs’ aforementioned struggle to export Brazilian merchandise in Brazilian and not US currency backfired with the real (reais, pl.), the new Brazilian money introduced in 1994. Mohamad Rahal of Exportadora Real complained that Brazilian goods became more costly because “the real appears with a value of US\$1.10.”¹¹ Aref Bakri of Exportadora Marina explained, “an increase of ten cents on the US dollar is considered abusive by Paraguayan standards.” According to Zein Barakat of Exportadora Vemo, the “overvalued” real made “Brazilian merchandise 10 percent more expensive, and for this reason, Paraguayans have disappeared.”¹² Hassan Waken of the Casa da Sogra later summarized that “Paraguayans generated 70 to 80 percent of sales,” but “they stopped buying” with “high-priced Brazilian merchandise.”¹³ Ali Osman opined that the overpriced Brazilian real forced him and other exporters to mark up prices. “We export

to Paraguay” in Brazilian currency, Osman noted, so “we now compete in disadvantaged terms” with a cheaper US dollar.¹⁴ Mustafa Osman surmised, “The situation is very critical. Due to our prices rising a lot in Brazil, we end up losing a competitive advantage in the Paraguayan market. The crisis has been coming.”¹⁵ Mohamad Barakat concluded that “the trajectory of export commerce is ending because there is no way to compete.”¹⁶ Though accustomed to exchange rate fluctuations, discussed in the first chapter, Arabs had never before experienced a Brazilian currency worth more than the US dollar, which led to plummeting sales.

Even more consequentially, “free trade” meant more, not less, governmental regulation. Mercosur inverted authoritarian-era state exceptions that had facilitated cross-border trade, as explored in the first chapter. According to an Arab storeowner in Ciudad del Este, the “customs integration” between Brazil and Paraguay shared more data about cross-border sales and shipments through integrated computerized systems.¹⁷ The “most adversely affected,” recounted a news article, were the “exporters of Vila Portes [in Foz do Iguaçu] and the small merchants of Ciudad del Este.”¹⁸ The integrated customs systems detected major irregularities in 1995. While Brazil’s Secretariat of International Commerce (Secex) counted nearly four hundred million dollars of Brazilian goods sent to Paraguay, the Paraguayan Dirección General de Aduanas (General Directorate of Customs) tallied less than two hundred million. This discrepancy meant that half of “Brazilian products irregularly enter Paraguay” or that “fictitious (Brazilian) exports” to Paraguay were sold in Brazil, discussed earlier.¹⁹ “Many Brazilian traders,” surmised Rubén Fadlala, the head of Paraguayan customs, declared “false exports to Paraguay” in order to evade “high taxes.”²⁰ Mercosur’s regulatory mechanisms brought greater, not lesser, scrutiny to the cross-border trade that Arabs dealt in.

Subsequently, significant numbers of Arabs in Foz do Iguaçu shut down commercial export firms, especially in the neighborhoods of Jardim Jupira and Vila Portes next to the Friendship Bridge. In 1996, Abdul Rahal observed that most of the five hundred or so export businesses closed. The news reporter qualified that only a third did, but nonetheless ascertained that “one of the showpieces

of success of the Arab community,” the Jardim Jupira neighborhood specializing in export-commerce, is “today bankrupt.” Amid a wave of business closures, the rental value of Rahal’s property plummeted: “We weren’t able to rent for one thousand reais a piece of property with a thousand square meters.”²¹ In 1994, Jardim Jupira became a “ghost-neighborhood,” exacerbated by the construction of the off-ramp for the BR-277 highway that complicated access for Paraguayan customers and cut in half the neighborhood, jeopardizing Mohamad Rahal’s Exportadora Tupi and Aref Bakri’s Exportadora Marina.²² On the Brazilian side of the border, Arabs expressed greater uncertainty in the free market.

Yet some Arab businesses in Foz do Iguaçu found a niche in Mercosur.²³ Mostly in the neighborhood of Vila Portes, some five dozen firms continued exporting to Paraguay.²⁴ By 1999, their stores specialized in *exportação formiga* (ant-like exportation), catering to Paraguayan buyers who crisscrossed the Friendship Bridge in order to purchase consumables and carry them back over to the Paraguayan side.²⁵ Magrão, mentioned in the introduction, served such customers in his Loja Descontão (Big Discount Store) that carried clothing for men, women, and children.²⁶ In 2000, Magrão’s and other stores numbered among a hundred or so, selling “manufactured products, made in other [Brazilian] cities” to Paraguayan retail clients. Consequently, Foz do Iguaçu became the Paraná “state champion of exportation,” and lost its former title as “one of the largest centers of exportation in the entire country,” as shown in the first chapter. Although the *Anuário Estatístico* (Statistical Yearbook) of Foz do Iguaçu the same year surmised that commercial exportation came to an “end” with “the formation of Mercosur,” some Arab businesses on the Brazilian side of the border continued to “export” to small-scale Paraguayan clients within Mercosur.²⁷

Many other Arabs on the Brazilian side of the border began importing into Brazil’s own domestic market through Mercosur’s Common External Tariffs. Introduced in the first chapter, Fouad Fakihi opened the Fouad Center—New Time in 1997, bringing in sporting goods, clothing, and household goods that lined the store’s aisles from “all parts of the world,” according to former Acifi president, César Cabral.²⁸ Cabral characterized Fakihi as possessing

a “totally international mentality” and knowing “where such-and-such a product exists and where it is most needed.”²⁹ Cabral concluded that Fakih “is leading one of the boldest and most dynamic commercial undertakings that exists in the world,” which “honors the blood that he carries, the blood of a businessman that comes from his origins, the origins of world commerce, started by the Phoenicians.”³⁰ Fakih’s new store had over one hundred employees, seventy thousand clients on the books, and over four thousand square meters of retail space. Fakih opened his store not beside the Friendship Bridge where commercial exporters struggled, but rather on Avenida Juscelino Kubitschek in the “heart” of Foz do Iguaçu and targeted “clients on the periphery.” Fakih explained that his new business “catered to clients with less buying power,” fifteen thousand of whom were registered on opening day.³¹ Asked about the “crisis so often heard about nowadays,” Fakih responded, “I believe in my state, in my country, and principally in Foz do Iguaçu and its people.”³² In reversing the direction of transnational trade, Arabs used Mercosur tariffs to import and invest in Brazil’s side of the border.

Arabs also expanded real estate investments beyond the neighborhoods of Vila Portes and Jardim Jupira where their commercial export firms closed down. Having founded his Kamalito store a decade previously, Kamal Osman invested in two real estate agencies, Fly Móveis (Fly Real Estate) and Mobilye Móveis e Decorações (Mobilye Real Estate and Decorations), and founded a third, Amo Foz (I love Foz), that specialized in middle-class residential developments.³³ Working with one of Brazil’s largest civil construction firms, Encol (until it closed in 1999), Osman chose the name Amo Foz because he “loves this city a lot and it’s here that his first seeds were planted, and it’s here that his work in local commerce has developed.” Osman’s choice to invest was based in “love” and not “real estate speculation,” though many considered him to be a *latifundiário urbano* (large urban land owner).³⁴ Likewise, Mohamad Barakat had accumulated so “many properties” in Jardim Jupira and elsewhere in Foz do Iguaçu that he ended up donating a piece of land for a public school named in honor of his mother, Escola Municipal Najla Barakat (Najla Barakat Municipal School). In 1995,

the school expanded services with a children's daycare that was named after his wife, Creche Municipal Amina Barakat (Municipal Daycare Amina Barakat).³⁵ On the Brazilian side of the border, Arabs solidified their status as a propertied, and not just mercantile, class.

Far from using profits to threaten the security of the bloc or hemisphere, Arabs invested in myriad property ventures and drew the "invidious comparison" of other elites.³⁶ Rodrigo, a propertied Brazilian of Italian origins, recounted with delight that he was mistaken for a *turco* by the brother of the then governor of the state of Paraná, Roberto Requião (1991–1994, first mandate), mentioned in the second chapter. Rodrigo had just purchased a spacious apartment in an upper-middle class building in Foz do Iguaçu, and Requião's brother, part of a well-known Jewish Brazilian family and a real estate investor, bought another apartment on the same floor. Requião's brother expressed interest in buying Rodrigo's apartment, even asking a realtor, "Quem é esse turco que tem o apartamento na frente?" (Who is this Turk who has the apartment in front?). Later, this realtor relayed to Rodrigo that the governor's brother wanted to buy his apartment, and thought he was Arab, calling him by the common label of *turco*. Rodrigo soon after ran into Requião's brother, joking that he was the *turco* with the coveted apartment.³⁷ In contrast to Argentine and US suspicions of Arabs harboring ulterior financial motives, to be discussed later, Arabs were taken for granted as real estate owners at the border.

Hardly in unison, and often at odds with one another, Arabs with businesses on the Brazilian side made their own invidious comparisons with counterparts on the Paraguayan side of the border. According to the son of an early migrant in the Rahal family in Foz do Iguaçu, "Ciudad del Este is full of Lebanese who buy merchandise in a store and sell it a hundred meters ahead. They make their lives that way, slowly, saving money, until the day when they have their own business."³⁸ Such transactions, for Mohamad Barakat, benefited "the traders from Ciudad del Este, many of them are *meus patrícios*" (my countrymen), at the cost of Foz do Iguaçu.³⁹ Barakat claimed that "the Friendship Bridge only serves the Paraguayans," criticizing *sacoleiros* and Brazilian consumers that used Foz do Iguaçu as a stopover to and from Ciudad del Este.⁴⁰ He and others

on the Brazilian side of the border lamented that “the buildings once home to long-time traditional commercial exporters” came to serve as restaurants, storage, or parking for Brazilian consumers who arrived from all over Brazil to buy consumer items in Ciudad del Este.⁴¹ Not long after, Barakat proposed a “shopping festival of the três fronteiras,” which would “attract Brazilian buyers” to shop on the Brazilian, and not Paraguayan, side of the border.⁴²

Exempting Imports in Ciudad del Este

Arab traders in Ciudad del Este continued to attract Brazilian clientele due to the exemptions that the Paraguayan state obtained in Mercosur. After signing the treaty in 1991, the Paraguayan general-cum-president threatened to pull out if thousands of imports into Paraguay were not exempted from the customs treaty.⁴³ In 1994, he reiterated this stance when member states negotiated the list of products exempted from Mercosur’s standardized tariffs in relation to non-Mercosur countries. While Brazil listed some thirty items and Argentina roughly three hundred, Paraguay asked to exempt over four thousand products.⁴⁴ Noted in the first chapter, the authoritarian Paraguayan state taxed some 7 to 10 percent on imports in Ciudad del Este, but the Mercosur treaty would have replaced that customs norm with a more expensive rate equivalent to that of other Mercosur member states vis à vis non-Mercosur or external countries. Amid fears that business in Ciudad del Este would languish, Domingo Daher, then vice president of the Cámara y Bolsa de Comercio (Chamber and Stock Exchange) in Asunción, himself of Syrian origin, doubted that Paraguayan leaders would “assume the socioeconomic costs” of failing to obtain exemptions from Mercosur’s Common External Tariffs.⁴⁵ Subsequently, Paraguayan authorities convinced Mercosur member states to exempt thousands of imported items in Ciudad del Este from the bloc’s external tariffs.⁴⁶

In contrast to Argentine and US images of jeopardizing security, Arabs and others netted profits in Ciudad del Este made possible by the exemptions obtained by the Paraguayan state within Mercosur. This governmental backdrop was overshadowed by almost

immediate record-breaking sales registered by Arabs and others in the six thousand or so stores of Ciudad del Este's downtown.⁴⁷ *Forbes* allegedly estimated that they moved more than sixteen billion US dollars in 1994, though the *New York Times* claimed a "\$10-billion-a-year trade" in 1995.⁴⁸ Hussein Taijen retorted, "We don't accept any number above the estimate of US\$4 billion."⁴⁹ Whatever the case, Arabs in Ciudad del Este remember that profits hit a climax in the mid-1990s. A Palestinian Brazilian, Fátima, recalled the flood of hard currency inundating her husband's electronics store. "We would close the store at 6 p.m., and we would count money until 10 p.m.," she stated.⁵⁰ She alleged that the store pulled in anywhere from US\$20,000 to US\$30,000 a day. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, traders in Ciudad del Este often received payments in Brazilian currency that they could deposit and exchange for dollars in Foz do Iguaçu. At least momentarily, Arabs in Ciudad del Este secured trade in Mercosur.

Importing goods from outside Mercosur that were exempted from the Common External Tariffs, Arabs on the Paraguayan side of the border drew the interest of major brand name companies in computers and electronics.⁵¹ In 1995, Samsung invited over five hundred merchants from Ciudad del Este to a dinner and show at a five-star hotel in Foz do Iguaçu. Daewoo sent special emissaries. Brand-name manufacturers supplied shops in Ciudad del Este with monitors, recorders, and other merchandise carrying Brazilian and Argentine types of analog transmission signals.⁵² Indeed, most of the imports in the Paraguayan border town ended up in Brazilian or Argentine homes, according to the Central Bank itself in Paraguay.⁵³ Even the newsweekly *Veja* claimed that Paraguay was the source of nearly half of the electronics being sold in Brazil and the lion's share of computer keyboards.⁵⁴ Many goods passed through the hands of so-called *compristas* or *sacoleiros*, who charted buses from all over Brazil to shop in Ciudad del Este, as they had done for decades, noted in the first chapter. Arabs on the Paraguayan side of the border continued to serve a still overwhelmingly Brazilian clientele through corporate provisions and tariff exemptions in Mercosur.

Arabs on the Paraguayan side of the border served as hemispheric protagonists, not antagonists, in this free trade America. In

the 1990s, they increasingly imported from free trade zones around Miami, rather than those in Colón, as noted previously. Said Taijen recalled that he, his brother, and others shifted from Colón to Miami at this time, depending on product availability and price.⁵⁵ Mihail Bazas believed that most turned toward Miami and South Florida as part of a US strategy to replace Colón since the Panama Canal was being returned to the Panamanian government in 1999. Bazas added that free trade zones in Miami afforded merchants the added benefits of beaches, restaurants, and other tourist attractions lacking in Panama's Colón.⁵⁶ Fátima traveled regularly to Miami, taking advantage of the tourist infrastructure and making purchases that were shipped to her husband's business and then sold to mostly Brazilian consumers.⁵⁷ Another merchant in Ciudad del Este quipped that free trade zones in and around Miami "called almost daily" when Brazilians curtailed their shopping, "because if we don't sell, we can't buy imports" from Miami.⁵⁸ Exempted from standardized external tariffs in Mercosur, Arabs helped make Ciudad del Este into a "Paraguayan Miami" for mostly Brazilian clientele in this hemispheric America.

Arabs on the Paraguayan side of the border likewise continued to accommodate Brazilian influence. In 1995, the Brazilian state lowered the monetary limit of goods that Brazilians purchased abroad and brought into the country. *A Gazeta do Itajaí* specified that the "import quota of merchandise at the border" was reduced "from \$250 to \$150 per person."⁵⁹ The Brazilian state justified the quota reduction as a way to stem the increase of imports into Brazil that dwarfed exports and negatively affected the trade balance. But news of the quota reduction provoked a temporary surge in the numbers of *sacoleiros* in the weeks before the actual measure took effect. Mohamed Sleiman on the Paraguayan side of the border joked that his store turned into an "anthill" with Brazilian shoppers, wondering whether "the Brazilian government could prolong the debate surrounding the quota, that way we'd sell more."⁶⁰ This short-term boom, however, tailed off, allegedly decreasing Paraguay's GNP growth from 4.5 percent in 1995 to 2 percent in 1996.⁶¹ Arabs on the Paraguayan side of the border worked within the limits posed by Brazilian influence, even after the dawn of Mercosur.

Rather than directly challenge the Brazilian state's quota reduction, Arabs on the Paraguayan side of the border voiced appeals in the language of Mercosur. Faisal Saleh, a director in the "Paraguayan American Chamber of Commerce," called upon the leaders of Mercosur's capitals in "Montevideú, Buenos Aires, Asunción, and Brasília" to learn "about integration" from store owners near the Friendship Bridge as the true "representatives of our region."⁶² Saleh concluded that Ciudad del Este was "treated as a problem city," though it "could leverage the economic redemption of the region."⁶³ Hussein Taijen, in the Chamber of Commerce of Ciudad del Este, blamed greater restrictions at the border not on the bloc but rather on the aforementioned media allegations that tens of billions of US dollars changed hands on the Paraguayan side of the border. But "with the drop in the quota from \$250 to \$150," Taijen concluded, "this value fell a lot."⁶⁴ Saleh, Taijen, and other Arabs in the Paraguayan border town avoided defying Brazil in order to secure economic livelihoods in Mercosur.

Sharif Hammoud likewise steered clear of criticizing Brazilian or Paraguayan states in his attempt to draw "attention to the problems faced by commercial importers" in Ciudad del Este.⁶⁵ As a founder of the Centro de Importadores y Comerciantes del Alto Paraná (Center of Importers and Traders of Alto Paraná, known by its acronym in Spanish, CICAP), Hammoud had just participated in the commemoration of the thirty-ninth anniversary of the founding of Ciudad del Este.⁶⁶ Avoiding any direct discussion of the Brazilian quota reduction, Hammoud called for stores to "paralyze" business and shut down for a day while storeowners partook in a rally. Hammoud proffered a speech while CICAP released an official statement, condemning "illicit activities carried out in Ciudad del Este" that contributed to the city's image as "the haven of terrorist organizations and the paradise for counterfeit goods."⁶⁷ In faulting traders for tax evasion and commercial forgery as well as censuring the media's demonization of the city, Hammoud made no mention of the states that made exceptions for Ciudad del Este.

Hussein Taijen also used Mercosur keywords but opposed Hammoud's call to paralyze business. Taijen spoke of the importance of the "integration" between the "peoples of all the region of the

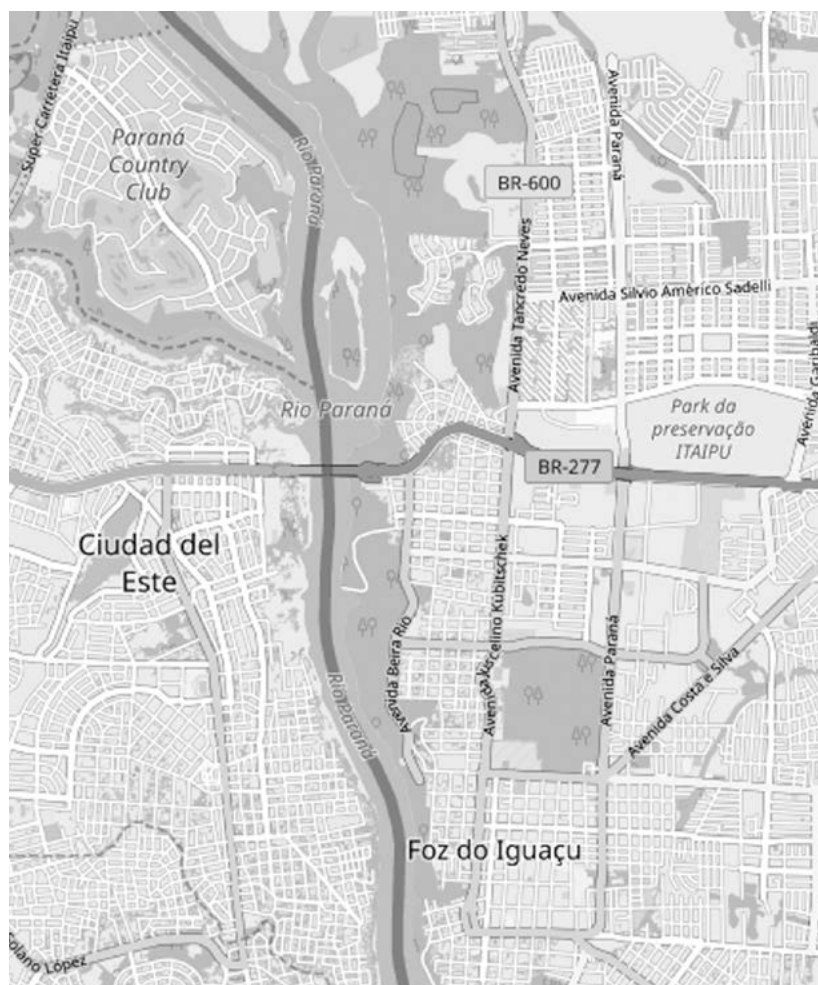


Figure 4.1. Map of the Paraná Country Club on the Paraguayan side of grounds that belong to the bi-national Itaipu hydroelectric dam between Paraguay and Brazil. © OpenStreetMap contributors

Triple Border.”⁶⁸ He surmised that “the biggest problem faced by commerce at the border is the pressure exerted by the Brazilian government . . . and it is not up to traders in Ciudad del Este to debate it.”⁶⁹ In opposing Hammoud’s call to paralyze business, Taijen stated, “We do not accept this position of the importers who shut down commerce since it’s not up to them to resolve the problems” in

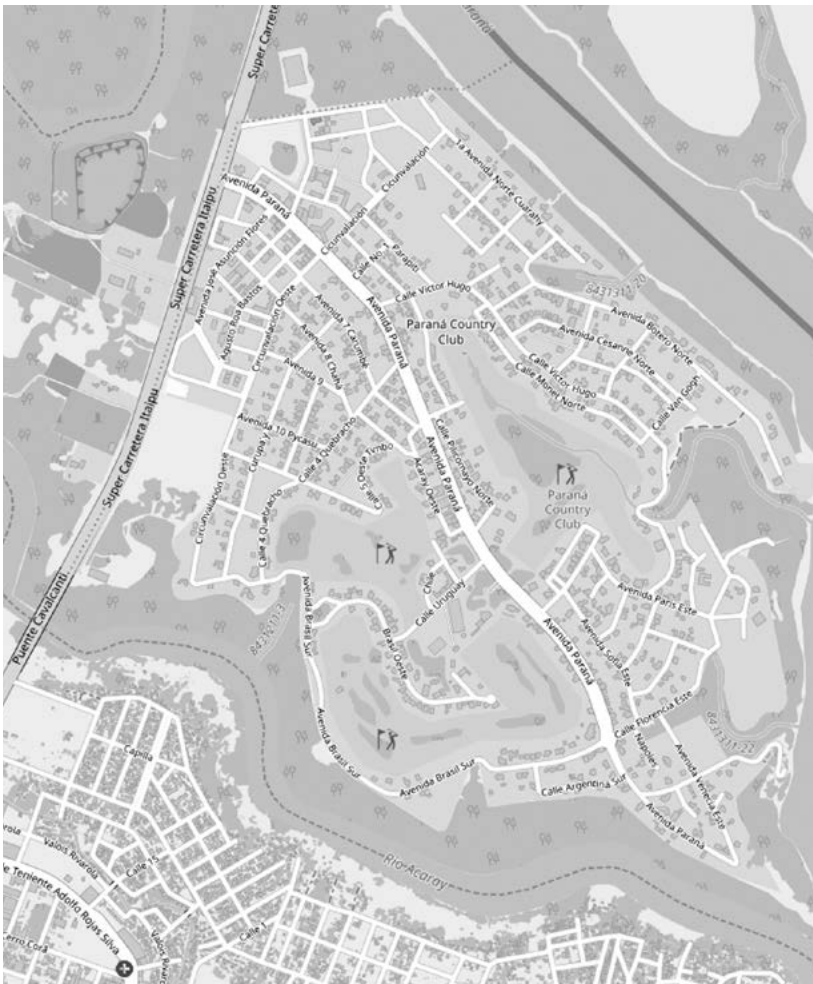


Figure 4.2. Detail map of the Paraná Country Club gated community. © Open-

Brazil.⁷⁰ Taijen admonished fellow importers in Ciudad del Este with Brazilian customers that “the protest has to come from the Brazilians, who are capable of inverting the situation and loosening the fence erected by” Brazil’s “national industry and government.” He concluded that “if nothing is done, Ciudad del Este will pass through the same situation as Puerto Iguazú in Argentina” and follow the “commercial crisis” in Foz do Iguaçu. Having been incorporated into

Brazil's expansive consumer market since authoritarian times, Arabs on the Paraguayan side hardly expected higher tariffs in Mercosur.

Indeed, Arabs in the Paraguayan border city still served mostly Brazilian consumers, selling an array of consumer imports, including electronics, toys, spirits, and cigarettes, as well as seasonal items, with generally lower prices thanks to exemptions from Mercosur's standardized external tariffs. "We have the latest releases in the world of technology, fashion, cosmetics, and perfume," opined Hammoud. "And to top it off," he concluded "the prices in Ciudad del Este are as competitive or even cheaper than those in Miami or Hong Kong."⁷¹ Hammoud emphasized that his store served "Brazilian consumers" from São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Belo Horizonte, who were the "most important," though he implied that most purchases in the Paraguayan border city were actually for resale in Brazil. Among a select number of businesses, Hammoud catered not only to middle classes but also high rollers, carrying luxury brands such as Armani, Cartier, and Gucci, more fully explored in Chapter 6. In fact, in 1997, Hammoud celebrated the 150-year anniversary of Cartier at the border, making the high-society pages of Brazilian and Paraguayan newspapers.⁷²

Far from undermining security, Arabs in Ciudad del Este invested in exclusive sanctuary. Putting "a lot of capital" into Paraguay's side of the border, the Hammoud family helped bankroll the Paraná Country Club located between the Rio Paraná and the Rio Acaray, sharing the same entrance with the Itaipu dam complex. Sharif Hammoud and another Lebanese migrant, Emile Sayegh, as well as other (non-Arab) Paraguayans, came together in 1989 to build the gated community of more than a thousand acres on what had originally been a golf course in the 1970s. In the condominium's foundational act and statutes passed in 1992, Arabs numbered three of the original thirty signatories, but they took up two of the six board posts, including Sharif Hammoud whose own residence was said to be worth millions of US dollars.⁷³ The Paraná Country Club's residential zone has family mansions spread across 1,500 lots, in addition to two hotels, a golf course, and a "club house" with sports and banquet facilities. The commercial zone has a campus branch

of the Catholic University, the Anglo American Paraguayan School, banks, restaurants, and high-end stores. Less than ten minutes from their businesses in Ciudad del Este's downtown next to the Friendship Bridge, Arabs bought into a gated community.

Burden on the Bloc

But Arabs on the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border found themselves targeted by the "close alliance" between US and Argentine authorities, studied by political scientist J. Patrice McSherry.⁷⁴ In his visit with Argentine president Carlos Menem in late 1997, US president Bill Clinton (1992–2000) not only pushed for the FTAA but also expressed "concern" about "Hizbullah in Ciudad del Este."⁷⁵ Two months later, a US counterterrorism task force visited Brazilian, Paraguayan, and Argentine capitals.⁷⁶ In the last stop in Buenos Aires, an Argentine official confided that "the Argentine government has been converted into the spearhead for a US plan to impose new standards of police and political control onto Paraguay."⁷⁷ Indeed, the Clinton administration had restructured the Southern Command of the US armed forces in prioritizing "counterterrorism" among "Latin American militaries."⁷⁸ Consequently, from late 1997 onward, US and Argentine authorities similarly associated Arabs at the border with "Islamic fundamentalist terrorism."⁷⁹

Weeks after meeting the US counterterrorism task force, Argentine officials vilified the border at a Mercosur summit.⁸⁰ "Top-level Argentine authorities identified the border zone with Brazil and Paraguay as 'a difficult point' in the fight against . . . 'fundamentalist Islamic terrorism'" related *ABC Color*.⁸¹ Argentina's interior minister Carlos Corach derided the Paraguayan border city as "a unique refuge" for terrorists.⁸² Two months afterward, in Washington, DC, Corach visited the CIA, FBI, and State Department, warning of the border's alleged risk to US and Argentine "shared security concerns" for "the entire continent."⁸³ The FBI director subsequently claimed "a terrorist threat" lurked at the border during his follow-up meeting with President Menem, minister Corach, and army and police officials in Buenos Aires.⁸⁴ Though never finding any terrorists at

the border, the Menem administration's "alignment" with US *anti-terror* (counterterror) and flirtation with the FTAA ensured greater leverage in relation to other Mercosur member states.⁸⁵

Arabs on the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border adjusted and appealed to Mercosur, but US and Argentine media circulated images of them as an actual or possible fifth column throughout the 1990s. *US News and World Report* glossed "Lebanese and Palestinians" in Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este as Hizbullah accomplices in the unresolved bombings in Buenos Aires.⁸⁶ The *New York Times* highlighted "Lebanese merchants" with "profitable border businesses" at the "remote junction of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay" that the CNN En Español network described as a "triangle of terror."⁸⁷ In Argentina, *El Cronista Comercial* opined that "15,000 Arabs, with their prosperous businesses . . . have been identified as supposed financial supporters of Hizbullah."⁸⁸ *La Nación* cast "Lebanese" and "Arabs" as merchants of mayhem, pushing knock-off cigarettes and "unbelievable counterfeit goods."⁸⁹ *Clarín* reported that Lebanese and Arabs in the Paraguayan border town profited from tens of thousands of Brazilian shoppers but also provided "support and shelter to presumed terrorists."⁹⁰ For Brazilian diplomats, these baseless images of treacherous Arabs in lawless Brazilian and Paraguayan border towns shielded the Argentine state from being "pressured to resolve the case of the terrorist attacks against the Jewish community" in Buenos Aires.⁹¹

Advocating for Arabs in a free trade America, Faisel Saleh hoped to change the narrative by arranging for Mannah, Hammoud, and others to appear in Brazilian corporate media, namely *Veja*. Mentioned earlier, Saleh is a Brazilian citizen of Lebanese origin from the neighboring state of Mato Grosso do Sul who settled at the border and worked for Hammoud's Monalisa before opening the store Prisma in Ciudad del Este. Despite Saleh's intentions, *Veja* ended up reinforcing suspicions about Arabs.⁹² *Veja* related that "some Lebanese merchants" in Ciudad del Este and Foz do Iguaçu dodged taxes and dabbled in forgery, with putative ties to the unresolved bombings in the Argentine capital. Introduced in the first chapter, Mohamed Said Mannah (nicknamed Alexandre) was cited as saying: "Here [in Ciudad del Este] the sun rises for everyone. Whoever

didn't get rich didn't want to." With nothing said of Paraguayan state exemptions in Mercosur that benefited his and other businesses in the Paraguayan border city, Mannah appeared as suspiciously owning shopping centers that annually generated tens of millions of dollars. Faisal Hammoud, one of the brothers who own Monalisa, likewise seemed too wealthy, purportedly raking in a half billion a year and owning a multi-million-dollar mansion. After *Veja* reproduced the dominant image of "reel bad Arabs" conniving at the border, Saleh admitted that his colleagues "chastised me for bringing people only interested in denigrating and shaming our business activities."⁹³ Saleh asked *A Gazeta do Iguacu* to publish his rebuke of *Veja's* representation of the border in terms of tax evasion, counterfeit merchandise, and "organized crime."

Far from being a burden on the bloc, Arabs represented themselves as a kind of free trade vanguard. Ahmed (Armando) Kassem spoke in such terms about the Arab-Paraguayan Chamber of Commerce in Ciudad del Este that he helped to found, perhaps to wrest some influence from the Cámara de Comercio de Ciudad del Este.⁹⁴ Paying a visit to the offices of *A Gazeta do Iguacu* on the Brazilian side of the border, Kassem criticized the "avalanche of accusations" against Arabs. Kassem began by rhetorically asking, "We are in difficult times with this commercial crisis in Foz do Iguacu and Ciudad del Este. . . . How are we going to send [money] to terrorists?"⁹⁵ Having inaugurated his chamber alongside Carlos Barreto Sarubbi, then governor of Alto Parana and a political strongman since the days of Stroessner, Kassem spoke of Arabs as a "link for integration" between Latin America and Asia.⁹⁶ At the border, Arabs embodied a "direct contact between Paraguay and China," which for Kassem, could disrupt US plans for "China to sell to Miami and Miami to sell to Latin America."⁹⁷ Kassem rebuked the scapegoating that infringed on civil rights and instead located Arabs at the forefront of a free trade America.

Arabs pointed to the exceptional suspension of democratic norms under counterterrorism. During a Mercosur meeting in Foz do Iguacu, Mohamad Barakat, Fouad Fakih, and Abdul Rahal delivered an open letter to Brazil's Justice Minister, Iris Rezende, who was the official Brazilian representative in the bloc.⁹⁸ Their letter emphasized the "integration" of the "Arab community of Foz do

Iguaçu,” just a day after Kassem’s statements. At the time, Barakat was the Foz do Iguaçu government’s Secretary of Social Action and Fakihi and Rahal had posts in Acifi. “Arabs,” the letter stated, have been “always considered hard-working, orderly, pacific.” Implying the adjustments and appeals that Arabs made in Mercosur, the letter emphasized that they were “dumbfounded by defamatory news regarding alleged ‘terrorist cells in this region.’” The letter concluded that Arabs were more than willing to help “competent authorities” but rebuked accusations against the “colônia árabe iguaçuense” (Arab Iguaçu Community, named after the Iguaçu falls) at “this important pole” of Mercosur.

Nonetheless, Mercosur member states enacted extraordinary monitoring mechanisms and expenditures that went far beyond Arabs themselves. In 1998, Mercosur authorities met in Buenos Aires and approved the US-supported “General Plan for Security at the Tri-Border.”⁹⁹ For Argentine minister Corach “who served as host,” the accord “established mechanisms of cooperation” in the “fight against terrorism” and signified a “huge step” for “regional integration” that would be “followed by cooperation and solidarity in the rest of the American continent.”¹⁰⁰ The plan proposed the Sistema de Intercambio de Información de Seguridad del Mercosur (Security Information Interchange System, in English), known by its acronym, SISME, an “automated database for storing and exchanging intelligence information” that connects “the operational activities of those organisms responsible for the security of each member state.”¹⁰¹ The system enables police and military forces in Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, and other member states to share information on persons, goods, and monies across borders. Another Mercosur accord passed shortly thereafter paved the way for the Center for the Coordination of Police Training (CCCP), bringing together “security and police forces of the countries of the region” to combat “drug trafficking, terrorism, and arms smuggling.”¹⁰² Mercosur used speculations about Arabs in order to increase security mechanisms that went far beyond Arabs themselves in the bloc.

Meanwhile, Arabs dealt with the added burden of US authorities questioning their visas, which they had used to enter Miami’s free trade zones to requisition the merchandise sold at the border. In

1998, the *New York Times* reported that Arabs and Asians were “profiled” as “fraud suspects” by US foreign service officers in South America and elsewhere.¹⁰³ Said Taijen specified that it was the US that “treated us Arabs badly.”¹⁰⁴ Taijen recounted his experience attempting to renew his expired visa at the US embassy in Asunción around this time. A line led to the “counselor” behind a glass window with a microphone. The counselor stated that Taijen’s visa renewal application “was denied.” Taijen asked why, and was again told, “you are denied.” He recounted, “it was humiliating,” because everyone in the line behind him heard the counselor. The next Paraguayan applicant in the line tapped him on the shoulder, and remarked, “*Baisano* . . . it’s not worth arguing with them.” Taijen emphasized that his interlocutor replaced the *p* in *paisano* (countryman) with a *b*, mimicking an Arabic accent in Spanish. Without knowing of the *New York Times* report on US consular profiling, Taijen felt minoritized by the US embassy in ways that contradicted his and other Arabs’ propertied and elite status at the border. Taijen and other Arabs traded between Ciudad del Este and Miami in ways that did not fit into dominant US visions of a free trade America.

Even with proper US visas, Arab Paraguayans traveling to Miami free trade zones were targeted by US customs and border control. Taijen recounted that Alexandre Mannah, the owner of La Petisqueira, “had to wait twelve hours in the airport.”¹⁰⁵ Having been portrayed as a suspect nouveau riche in *Veja*, Mannah carried the proper documentation but was stopped by officials from the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) that obliged him to wait in a separate room. They asked him questions about what he intended to do in the US. He explained his business and reiterated his willingness to answer questions. INS officials brought a metal detector and scanned him and his shoes. Without clarification, hour after hour, Mannah waited and bore the “humiliation,” which Taijen saw as directed at both Arabs and Paraguayans. Mikhail Bazas likewise qualified that the US government made it difficult for Arabs and others in Ciudad del Este to do business in Miami’s free trade zones.¹⁰⁶ More fully explored in the sixth chapter, such experiences in the US arguably led Arabs and others at the border to turn toward East Asia in their own endeavors to secure trade in the coming years.

But other Arabs on the Paraguayan side of the border still sought to accommodate the US in Mercosur. In 1995, one of the brothers who own Monalisa, Faisal Hammoud, became the first president of the Ciudad del Este branch of the Paraguayan-American Chamber of Commerce (CCPA). In the inauguration ceremony, the US ambassador to Paraguay stated that the branch opening in Ciudad del Este symbolized the closer relationship that the US hoped to cultivate with “Mercosur member countries.”¹⁰⁷ As “a private, independent, nonprofit association founded in 1981 by a group of Paraguayan and [US] American firms” in Asunción, CCPA garners close ties to the US embassy and, according to Taijen, worked to attract traders in Ciudad del Este to Miami’s free trade zones since its founding.¹⁰⁸ Members included Arab-owned businesses, such as the Mannah brothers’ La Petisquera, Moussa Ali and Heider Hijazi’s Megatek Importadora/Exportadora, Nasser Chamseddine’s Nasser Cubiertas S.A.C.I., and Ali Mohamed Osman’s Macedonia S.R.L.. Though often seen to threaten trade and security, Arabs continued to do business on the terms set by the US and Mercosur member states.

Exceptional Measures in Mercosur

In a liberal economic bloc, due process could be suspended in order to redress the “concerns” of member states, specifically about undocumented migrants, or in official parlance, “irregular foreigners.”¹⁰⁹ Shortly after the respective visits of Clinton and the US counterterrorism task force, in early 1998, the Brazilian Federal Police set up a checkpoint on the Brazilian side of the Friendship Bridge that stopped cars and pedestrians heading toward the Paraguayan side during the morning rush. This Brazilian operation “searched for foreigners who reside in Foz do Iguaçu and work in Ciudad del Este,” according to Cleber Alves, the Federal Police chief in the Maritime, Air, and Border Division.¹¹⁰ Over ninety persons were detained, “the majority Arabs and Asians”; four were deported to Paraguay and eighty-eight were fined or notified to vacate the country. Alves noted that those apprehended had home residences in Foz do Iguaçu with Paraguayan IDs or visa stamps on passports, but lacked Brazilian IDs or visas. In a subsequent Mercosur meeting

that addressed the question of undocumented migrants and “security at the tri-border,” Argentine ministers fretted about the possibility of “another action by Islamics [*sic*], who already authored two attacks in the country,” while Brazilian and Paraguayan counterparts instead called for the need to counter “arms-smuggling and money-laundering.”¹¹¹

Arab traders again were targeted the day after the Mercosur security meeting in another operation led by Brazil’s Federal Police. Mostly Arabs, one reporter observed, “are easily stopped near the Friendship Bridge, principally in the early morning when they go to work in the neighboring country and also in the late afternoon, when they return” to the Brazilian side.¹¹² An estimated forty police officers checked the documentation of some 200 “clandestine foreigners,” around 150 of whom were brought to the precinct for further questioning as relatives and friends waited in front of the police station. According to Alves, over one hundred were from Lebanon, three from Syria, two from Kuwait, one from Jordan, and one from Morocco. Living in Foz do Iguaçu and working in Ciudad del Este, they were fined less than the equivalent to one thousand dollars. Alves added, “We sent them all back to Paraguay because they carried legal documents from there.” In a harsh criticism of the geopolitics of the operation, *A Gazeta do Iguaçu* suggested that “Argentina is pressuring Brazil so that Brazil pressures Paraguay into cleaning up its side of the border.”¹¹³

After rounding up mostly Arabs, Brazil’s Federal Police delivered a report to Mercosur member states, asking to “intensify the control” over “non-Mercosur [*extra-Mercosur*] citizens, especially at the tri-border.” *A Gazeta do Iguaçu* went on to define “non-Mercosur citizens” as “all those who were born in countries outside” of Mercosur, “made up by Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay.” The police report explained, “The majority of those with irregular documentation were found in the Arab community. But Foz do Iguaçu is home for . . . the majority of these citizens” who “carry legally Paraguayan documents.” Mercosur accords enabled Paraguayan citizens with state-issued IDs to legally enter Brazil, but a migrant from a non-Mercosur member state with a Paraguayan visa in his or her passport would still be required to obtain a visa to enter

Brazil. Mercosur ministers claimed not to be profiling Lebanese and other migrants with Paraguayan visas living in Brazil, but rather fugitives and traffickers as well as anyone “financing political-terrorist actions in the territory of Mercosur,” though none were ever found.¹¹⁴

Accordingly, “non-Mercosur” subjects were stripped of liberal democratic norms that Mercosur member states otherwise safeguarded. Irregular or missing documentation among migrants was not a crime in Brazil, but federal police officers nonetheless brought “Arab citizens to be interrogated at the police headquarters” after being detained on the bridge to Paraguay. Fouad Fakih remembered that some lacked documentation, but those apprehended were handcuffed without an explanation. Others objected to the interrogations taking place during Ramadan, with little consideration of some detainees’ fasting. The Foz do Iguaçu city councilor Dilton Vitorassi condemned the “discriminatory persecution against Arabs” and lamented that “Brazil is acting like a Third World colony.” Vitorassi “blamed Argentina to be behind the pressure and accused the neighboring country of trying to repay debts to the United States through such favors.” Vitorassi, however, qualified that “one can’t overstep one’s place in the hierarchy,” so he aired grievances about such exceptional measures with the local police chief, not Brazil’s Minister of Justice who coordinated the operation “in the context of Mercosur.” Without checks on extraordinary measures in a bloc of states, Brazil’s Federal Police led another exceptional operation at the Friendship Bridge.¹¹⁵ In the morning rush, the police detained between “twenty-four and thirty-seven people.” The police deported one and issued summons and fines to others in a kind of profiling that masqueraded as due process.

Arabs living or working on the Paraguayan side of the border responded by asking for more, not less, security. Armando Kassem of the Arab-Paraguayan Chamber of Commerce requested a meeting with Paraguayan President Juan Carlos Wasmosy (1993–1998), the handpicked successor of Andrés Rodríguez who had ensured the continued rule of the political party of the dictatorship even after the dictator had been overthrown. Kassem asked Wasmosy for “more security for the border” by taking “a census of all the Arabs of

the region as a first step to regulating the migrant situation at the tri-border.”¹¹⁶ Diplomats and police officers on each side of the border commented that Kassem’s idea was “very well viewed and considered positive.” According to *A Gazeta do Iguacu*, “the census in Paraguay would support the activities of the Federal Police in Brazil and migration control in Argentina.” Though nothing came of the problematic plan, and no one else spoke up, Kassem repeated, the “Arab-Paraguayan Chamber of Commerce works for the border. Foz do Iguacu, Ciudad del Este, and even Puerto Iguazú are like one city.”

Having been once privileged by tariff exemptions in Mercosur, Arab-owned stores on the Paraguayan side of the border were subsequently targeted in order to be brought under “control,” in the Argentine Interior Minister Carlos Corach’s phrasing.¹¹⁷ SISME, the aforementioned security data network in Mercosur, “marked” and monitored Arabs as “as non-Mercosur foreigners.”¹¹⁸ The data in SISME seems to have expanded during the Brazilian police roundup of hundreds of mostly Arab migrants at the bridge to Paraguay, which Corach applauded as “progress” and an “advance” in the “security of the tri-border.”¹¹⁹ Corach saw Arabs at the border as a matter of security, not trade, in Mercosur, and he saw Mercosur in purely transactional terms. “I am neoliberal,” Corach once remarked to Paraguayan strongman Carlos Barreto Sarubbi. “And for this reason,” he quipped, “I believe that the rich have to get richer in order to help the poor.”¹²⁰ With US and Argentine insistence, Mercosur emerged as a security network by tracking Arab border-crossing between Foz do Iguacu and Ciudad del Este, and in so doing, undermined farther flung commercial networks that preceded and vied with the bloc itself.

By effectively suspending due process for Arabs and other migrants, the Brazilian state also put to rest empty accusations of terrorism and shored up the “security” of Mercosur. One of the last and most injurious operations “planned by the ministers of Mercosur countries” targeted Arabs “more intensely in Foz do Iguacu,” with “inspections [*vistorias*] of apartment buildings, restaurants, and bars.”¹²¹ Vicente Chelotti, head of Brazil’s Federal Police, took charge. Dubbed Rede Brasil (Brazil Net), the operation involved nearly seven thousand inspections over six days and arraigned

nearly five hundred foreigners.¹²² Dilton Vitorassi, Mohamad Barakat, and authorities from the Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil (OAB), akin to the American Bar Association, visited the individuals and families victimized by the operation. They reported on “abuses of power” that drew the interest of the local Procuradoria da República, akin to the office of the district attorney in the US, which affirmed that “the constitutional rights of foreigners” were violated in the “inspection.”¹²³ Brazil’s then Minister of Justice, Renan Calheiros, also asked for Brazil’s Federal Police to be investigated for violating the rights of foreigners in Foz do Iguaçu.¹²⁴ Indeed, agents failed to show the required judicial warrant when entering homes in Foz do Iguaçu “and put residents, the majority Arabs and descendants, in a difficult position.”¹²⁵ Through this suspension of liberal democratic rights, Brazilian police chief Chelotti declared at a subsequent Mercosur meeting that “no evidence was found of terrorist groups or groups who support them in the tri-border region.”¹²⁶

Arabs grew accustomed to contradictory state exceptions that not only constrained but also enabled their presence at the border. Some months after the anti-migrant operations, the Brazilian state declared a nationwide amnesty for foreigners to apply for permanent residence.¹²⁷ Lebanese “led the statistics” of foreign groups applying for amnesty and Foz do Iguaçu had the second largest number of grantees.¹²⁸ The state needed to take such steps, one federal police officer reiterated, instead of searching for “terrorist folklore.”¹²⁹ He added, “our (Brazilian) children live with the children of foreigners” including “Arabs, Chinese, and Koreans,” and so everyday citizens are best positioned to “advise them about the Statute of the Foreigner” (Estatuto do Estrangeiro). But not long after, ABIN, the Brazilian Agency of Intelligence mentioned in the previous chapter, opened a “public call” (*concurso publico*) for a new agent in Foz do Iguaçu.¹³⁰ In secret documents subsequently leaked to the press, ABIN was monitoring “Islamic Ethnic Groups,” including the “Identification and Localization of Islamic Ethnic groups in the Country,” especially at the border.¹³¹

Arabs likewise faced the extraordinary measures taken by Paraguayan authorities. Lebanese, Palestinians, Syrians, and others were extorted by “lawyers, judges, [and] police officers” in Ciudad

del Este, according to Hector Guerín, a journalist for *ABC Color* and long-time resident.¹³² Based on a news report or any speculation regarding terrorism, a Paraguayan judge would issue an arrest warrant for a given Arab or migrant storeowner.¹³³ After serving the warrant, police officers or others would informally offer acquittal in exchange for payment to be divided up among governmental authorities. This issuing of arrest warrants that rarely produced a conviction, for Guerín, exposed an “industry of extortion.”¹³⁴ Brazilian diplomats similarly reported that Hussein Taijen complained that traders shouldered this “permanent pressure” for “extorted money” in Ciudad del Este, though not pointing fingers at the Paraguayan state itself.¹³⁵ As in the undue arrest warrants issued for some *shuyukh*, explored in the previous chapter, Paraguayan authorities capitalized on counterterrorist liaisons, especially after 9/11, as will be seen in the following chapter.

Paraguayan state officials ruled by exception, manipulating false accusations of terrorism to extort Arab businessmen as well as unscrupulously emitting Paraguayan passports and visas to “hundreds of Lebanese who entered irregularly into Paraguay.”¹³⁶ In 1996 and 1997, the scheme drew “official support” from the Migration Department at the international airport near Ciudad del Este and the Paraguayan consulate in Foz do Iguaçu. The alleged brain of the operation was Lebanese-Paraguayan Ali Ahmed Zaion, to be discussed more in detail next chapter.¹³⁷ After paying off the Paraguayan consul on the Brazilian side of the border, a thirty-day tourist visa to Paraguay was emitted and sent to Lebanon. With a Paraguayan tourist visa from Foz do Iguaçu, Lebanese could depart Beirut and reach the Minga Guazú airport in Paraguay, where Zaion allegedly paid off other officials to stamp a Paraguayan residential visa onto Lebanese passports. With support from Paraguayan authorities, Lebanese and other migrants possessed irregular documentation that made them easy targets in a vicious circle of state exceptions.

Amid such increasingly ordinary exceptions to the rule of law, Arabs in Ciudad del Este were detained and released by the Paraguayan state in shows of force inspired by Brazilian anti-migrant operations in Foz do Iguaçu.¹³⁸ Reda Soueid wondered whether Argentine, Brazilian, and Paraguayan powers had “exchanged



Figure 4.3. The monument dedicated to Hussein Taijen in Ciudad del Este. Picture taken by author.

information,” perhaps through SISME or the Tripartite Command.¹³⁹ As brought up last chapter, after the US and others demanded progress on the still unresolved bombings in Buenos Aires, Argentine authorities had “presented to Mercosur ministers” a report that doubted Brazilian and “Paraguayan governmental abilities to exercise effective control” over the “increasing settlement of Arab immigrants.”¹⁴⁰ By targeting Arabs, Brazilian and Paraguayan states offset Argentine as well as US pressures in the context of the bloc



Figure 4.4. A close up of the plaque on the monument dedicated to Hussein Taijen in Ciudad del Este. The plaque reads, “Hussein Taijen, defender, fighter, and martyr for a better city.” Picture taken by author.

and hemisphere. With the suspension of due process, Mohamad Barakat in Foz do Iguaçu declared that the targeting of “Arabs and their descendants,” especially on the Paraguayan side of the border, “served as a pretext to destroy the region’s economy” and remake it as a putative “zone of peace” in a liberal economic bloc that served other interests further afield.¹⁴¹

This growing precariousness culminated in the killing of Hussein Taijen, gunned down as he opened his store, Casa Colombia, in Ciudad del Este on November 8, 1998.¹⁴² The wake occurred in the house of his son-in-law Hassan Osman, near the Sunni-majority Omar Ibn Al-Khattab mosque in Foz do Iguaçu. The fifty-eight year old was buried in the Islamic section of the Jardim São Paulo cemetery on the Brazilian side of the border.¹⁴³ A thousand border residents, Arab, Argentine, Paraguayan, Brazilian, and others, participated in a tribute to the slain leader held at the Shia-majority Mezquita del Profeta Mohamed in Ciudad del Este a week later.¹⁴⁴ His assassination sent shockwaves of outright fear across the “Arab collectivity” at the border.¹⁴⁵ Arabs felt “unsafe, if not outright

persecuted,” declared the Lebanese ambassador to Paraguay, Nizar Ahmed Chamas.¹⁴⁶ Paraguay’s National Police arrested and convicted two gunmen, a (non-Arab) Brazilian resident and (non-Arab) Paraguayan citizen in Ciudad del Este, while Brazilian diplomatic staff wondered whether the real author of the assassination was a Chinese citizen in São Paulo who had been “expelled from Paraguay.”¹⁴⁷ Although *ABC Color* alleged at one point that Hizbullah was the mastermind,¹⁴⁸ Ali Assi, Taijen’s Shia colleague in the Chamber of Commerce of Ciudad del Este, dismissed the rumor.¹⁴⁹ Speaking “as a friend of Taijen,” Assi stressed that Taijen not only “cultivated friendship with Brazilian and Paraguayan politicians” but also “always defended the Brazilian shoppers as well as the storeowners of Ciudad del Este.”¹⁵⁰ On the occasion of the one-year anniversary of his murder, Arabs, Brazilians, Paraguayans, and Argentines inaugurated a statue of his bust and renamed the street where his store was once located Calle Hussein Taijen in Ciudad del Este.

The murder of Taijen transpired and remained without resolution under free trade security. Paraguayan president Raúl Cubas Grau (1998–1999) condemned the murder and reiterated his “obligation to provide security to all citizens” just as he signed another round of Mercosur accords that ensured essential exemptions for imports to the Paraguayan border city.¹⁵¹ The Brazilian ambassador to Paraguay similarly regretted Taijen’s death as well as the “negative climate” it “creates” for Brazilian commercial investments across the border that would “not stop,” he reassured Paraguayan counterparts.¹⁵² Paraguayan elites in Asunción denounced the killing and lauded “redoubled security measures” against purported “permissiveness” in safeguarding the country’s image “among partners in Mercosur.”¹⁵³ The Paraguayan-American Chamber of Commerce president, and Monalisa co-owner Charif Hammoud eulogized Taijen as a “pioneer” and called on the Paraguayan state to promote a “positive and respectable image” of the border. Only mayor Juan Carlos Barreto tried to imply Taijen was involved in *cosas raras* (odd things) that putatively prevented police from “saving” him.¹⁵⁴ Regardless, those close with Hussein Taijen’s family suspected the “Paraguayan police” of conspiring in the assassination. It was an open secret that officers in the counterterrorist division of

Paraguay's National Police were "molestando en demasía" (harassing too much, in Spanish) "Arabs and Chinese" through extortion and blackmail, to be taken up again next chapter.¹⁵⁵

At the border, Arabs leveraged and leaned on Mercosur throughout the 1990s. On the Brazilian side, they used standardized external tariffs, importing from outside the bloc into Brazil's consumer market. On the Paraguayan side, they also continued to serve Brazilian consumption through exemptions to the bloc that ensured lower tariffs on imports from the free trade zones in Colón as well as Miami. Meanwhile, US authorities pushed FTAA and counterterrorist agendas that enabled Argentine counterparts to play off other member states in Mercosur. Subsequently, US and Argentine allies pointed fingers at Arabs on the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border as jeopardizing the bloc and hemisphere. But Arabs continued making their own adjustments and appeals to a free trade America. In order to shore up Argentine demands in Mercosur and preempt the US, the Brazilian state clamped down on Arab border-crossings. With Arabs detained and denied due process in a relatively unaccountable bloc, Mercosur member states triumphantly cracked down on antecedent and rival cross-border commercial circuits. With their rights suspended and Mercosur secured by member states, Arabs could hardly predict that their destiny would be to summarily "begin" a "war without end."

CHAPTER 5

Beginning the “War without End”

Arabs and everyone else at the border sought shelter and safety after the attacks on September 11, 2001. As part of the soon-to-be-declared war on terror, the FBI asked akin “Brazilian and Paraguayan federal police” agencies “to identify all of the Arabs” in Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este.¹ A month later, a US diplomat fretted, “What are all these Muslims doing at the border?”² Lebanese, Palestinians, and Syrians responded through Brazilian and Paraguayan states with distinct agendas vis à vis the US. In the ensuing series of incriminations and recriminations, Arabs at the border became entangled in what American Studies critics Amy Kaplan and Melani McAlister respectively called a “war without end.”³

Arabs took on the roles of activists as well as informants in a war on terror. Some mobilized for peace in a mass-mediated spectacle, *Paz sem Fronteiras / Paz sin Fronteras / Peace without Borders*, mentioned at the very start of this book. Bringing together tens of thousands of spectators from each side of the border for a one-day event in Foz do Iguaçu, their calls for peace garnered support from Brazilian civilian and military leaders leery of US suspicions of terrorism at the border. Meanwhile, a few Arabs in Ciudad del Este served as Paraguayan police informants, pointing fingers at business competitors of Arab or Muslim origin as terrorist suspects.

Their unfounded allegations served Paraguayan state interests still dominated by the same political party of the old military regime, which unsuccessfully tried to corroborate US suspicions. In a war-torn America, some Arabs rebuked US counterterrorist claims in Foz do Iguaçu while others attempted to substantiate those same claims in Ciudad del Este. In accommodating Brazilian state demur as well as Paraguayan state deference to the war on terror, Arabs neither openly confronted nor entirely conformed to the US.⁴

Centering Arab transnational mobilization in a post-9/11 hemispheric America, this chapter reformulates a key question in the vast literature on the US war on terror. How did this "war without end" begin? I return to Edward Said's point that "beginnings" are "intentional acts of power," entailing a "reversal" as well as "an authorization for what comes after."⁵ Declared and covered as a war allegedly without historical precedence, state and media authorities ignored prior US-supported South American dictatorships that analogously alleged to combat terror.⁶ Instead of recalling this beginning of a war on terror, US, Brazilian, Paraguayan, Argentine, and Mercosur officials ahistorically fixated on Arabs at the border and the suspicions still looming over them from the aforementioned 1992 and 1994 attacks in Buenos Aires, despite the sheer lack of evidence in ongoing investigations. In response, Arabs downplayed their own histories under US-backed South American military regimes, folding the near-erasure of authoritarian antecedents into this truncated origin story of a war-torn America.

Whether censuring or condoning war, state authorities similarly used Arabs at the border as pretexts in what anthropologist Catherine Lutz called "militarization" that "legitimate[d] the use of force" across the hemisphere.⁷ Under George W. Bush (2001–2009), the Department of Defense's Southern Command justified larger budgets and sway through "mission creep" over Arabs in the "tri-border area" or "TBA," as it became called in English.⁸ In Brazil, Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2003) and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–2011) refuted US claims of lawlessness at the border amid their "revitalization" of the "defense industry."⁹ In Paraguay, Luis Ángel González Macchi (1999–2003) and Nicanor Duarte Frutos (2003–2008) witnessed dozens of US military missions on the

Paraguayan side of the border.¹⁰ US and South American states justified military influence under ostensible civilian rule by creating, debating, and exchanging information about Arabs at the border. In this exceptional militarization, Arabs censured, capitalized, and came to terms with counterterrorism.

America at War

Arabs at the border found themselves in the crosshairs of civilian and military authorities after the 9/11 attacks in the US. Interpol (the acronym for the International Criminal Police Organization) inundated police bureaus in Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este with the “names and sketches” of terrorist suspects and requests for more information that produced no leads.¹¹ FBI agents from the US “were in Brazil” and crossed the border into Paraguay but they failed to find any evidence.¹² Staff in the Pentagon, the headquarters of the US Department of Defense, circulated and discarded an “unsigned, top secret memo” that proposed an armed “attack on terrorists” at “the border of Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil.”¹³ The US State Department expressed panic about non-existent “terrorist groups” operating “in the tri-border area of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay.”¹⁴ Francis Taylor, a former military commander who became the counterterrorism coordinator in the State Department, went so far as to declare, without evidence, “The terrorists operating at the tri-border worry us. We want to work with governments to disrupt these operations.”¹⁵ The US ambassador in Brazil echoed, though later retracted, that Arabs at the border harbored a “terrorist support network.”¹⁶

Even refuting such claims of terrorism at the border underscored militarization in an ostensibly civilian-led hemisphere. Brazil’s General Alberto Cardoso, head of the Gabinete de Segurança Institucional (GSI, or Office of Institutional Security, similar to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the US government), urged the aforementioned Francis Taylor in the US State Department “to not ‘sat-
anize’ the region of the tri-border,” or accuse it of being an area of terrorism “without proof.”¹⁷ General Cardoso publicly stated in Brazilian media, “we didn’t detect anything at the tri-border” from

investigations that began "ten years ago" after the "attacks that occurred in Argentina."¹⁸ Top Brazilian officials also met with the US Southcom commander, qualifying that "illicit activities" at the border include "money-laundering, tax evasion, and smuggling," but not "international terrorism."¹⁹ In consonance with this military standpoint, Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso (known by the acronym FHC) downplayed US president Bush's unease "about the tri-border" a month after 9/11.²⁰ Mentioned later in this chapter, the Brazilian ambassador in Washington, DC, Rubens Barbosa, likewise "expressed concern" about US accusations "without proof of terrorist activities in the tri-border," when he met with Steven Monblatt, the State Department's deputy coordinator of counterterrorism.²¹ Whether making or refuting claims of terrorism at the border, the military exercised influence in civilian-led governments with continental reach.

Arabs at the border found some refuge from US accusations in the Brazilian state, which overlooked its own militarization after the formal end of military rule. The Foz do Iguaçu mayor, Sâmis da Silva, of the center-right Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB) opined that "the US government has a bone to pick with trade in the region, coupled by the fact that there are many immigrants of Arab origin."²² The city council passed a motion that "condemned" the backlash against the "Arab community of this *tríplice fronteira* after the attack on the US" as well as expressed "solidarity with the Arab community in Foz do Iguaçu."²³ The author of the motion, Chico Brasileiro of the Communist Party of Brazil (PC do B), admonished the "brutal persecution that the Arab community was suffering at the border."²⁴ Then city council president, Dilton Vitorassi, of the center-left Worker's Party (PT), "condemned the persecution of Arab people," while Vilmar Andreola, of the centrist Party of Brazilian Social Democracy (PSDB), rebuked policemen in Ciudad del Este who were "blackmailing Arabs under the pretext of looking for terrorists."²⁵ Even the one-time opposition leader to the Brazilian military regime who became FHC's Minister of Justice, José Gregori, resigned because, as he explained, "I suffered . . . pressure from various sectors, internal and external, who wanted me to find a terrorist."²⁶

Arabs in Foz do Iguaçu embraced Brazilian rebuffs of US counterterrorist suspicions, which they saw as beginning not during authoritarian rule but rather after the unresolved bombings in Argentina. In the Argentine *Clarín*, Ali Said Rahal lamented “for the past eight years,” since the AMIA bombing, “the FBI plays the same music, and everyone dances.”²⁷ In a local Brazilian newspaper, Rahal continued that US politicians and pundits “are trying to say that our region is at risk for terrorism because we live here.”²⁸ Kamal Osman condemned “misleading new stories” about the border that had begun some eight years previously with the AMIA bombing. He protested, “We led a life to build our names. Now, any news will destroy the image of the city” that Arabs helped build.²⁹ Mentioned in the introduction and fourth chapter, Magrão also recalled “For nearly a decade, after attacks . . . in Argentina, there’s been a hunt for terrorists in this border zone, but no one was ever jailed and no one ever found any terrorists.”³⁰ Leila Ahmed, a Lebanese-born professor of English with a Brazilian permanent residence visa, warned “the eyes of the world turned to Arabs” after 9/11.³¹

An “anti-terrorist witch hunt” targeting “foreigners of Arab origin” in Ciudad del Este was set into motion by the Paraguayan state in consonance with US suspicions.³² Paraguay’s National Police raided the Galeria Pagé and other shopping centers, detaining dozens of Arabs and scurrying them off.³³ Some lacked appropriate documentation in Paraguay. Others did not have business receipts or proper tax documentation. José Antonio Moreno Ruffinelli, the Paraguayan foreign minister, stated that “Paraguay is not against citizens from Arab countries” but stressed that the “national government will combat terrorism” as “the best ally” of the US.³⁴ Indeed, “counterterrorism” had become “a more important component, if not requirement” in Paraguay-US relations.³⁵ But Paraguay’s own vice-minister of foreign relations let it slip that most Arabs in custody had “problems with documentation” and were not “linked to extremist groups.”³⁶ A police commissioner on the Paraguayan side of the border, Carlos Alsina, also affirmed that “we believe” Arabs “are good people.”³⁷ Indeed, Arabs in Ciudad del Este were released from custody since “there was no proof of their involvement with terrorism.”³⁸

Arabs understandably avoided dwelling on Paraguay's authoritarian legacies, appealing instead to precarious democratic civics now engulfed by a war on terror. One of the Hammoud brothers, Alex, wrote an open letter to *ABC Color*, "express[ing] his concern with the treatment . . . that Arabs in Paraguay have been receiving since the terrorist attacks of September 11 in the United States."³⁹ Noting that he arrived in Paraguay in 1975, Hammoud witnessed the "birth of Ciudad del Este," not mentioning the previous name of the city's eponymous founder, Stroessner, and the uninterrupted rule of the latter's erstwhile Colorado Party. Hammoud called upon the Paraguayan state to defend the "public interest and attract investment . . . so that Paraguay protects itself from the wave of violence and injustice that the world is immersed in." He dismissed the "distorted information" and "baseless rumors" about "some members of the Arab community" who were "accused of deeds not proven by any judicial, legislative, or executive power." Hammoud concluded, "Arabs dedicated themselves to the construction and development of this region through the decades," making Paraguay "our second country and the first country for our children."

Feeling under attack, Arabs in Ciudad del Este sought accommodation with the status quo. Samir Jebai, owner of the shopping center mentioned earlier, stated "we are ready to collaborate in any way we can" because "we are confident" in "the investigations."⁴⁰ He reflected that "we came here escaping war in Lebanon," and that "the community here is very small, we all know one another, so if there was some activity linked to terrorism, we would know about it."⁴¹ Said Taijen, whose brother had been murdered without accountability, as addressed last chapter, declared that "we would be the first to condemn" terrorism but "there is no evidence."⁴² Mikhal Meskin Bazas "dismissed claims that terrorist groups exist in the border zone" because authorities spent years investigating and never found anything.⁴³ Arab traders in Ciudad del Este emphasized past and present records of cooperating with state officials and investigations that failed to find any terrorist link in the Paraguayan border city.

Arabs in Ciudad del Este feared the further erosion of civil rights in a Paraguayan state that the US praised as "an active and

prominent partner in the war on terror,” not unlike the decades-long alliance between Washington, DC, and Stroessner’s dictatorship.⁴⁴ The new president of the Arab-Paraguayan Chamber of Commerce in Ciudad del Este, Ahmed (Armando) Khalil Chams, declared that Paraguayan militarized forces were “selling out the security of the United States” as well as undermining “citizenship rights” in the Paraguayan border city. He “accused policemen in Paraguay’s anti-terrorism secretariat of being part of a group carrying out extortion against Arab traders in Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este.”⁴⁵ Chams stated that “anti-terrorist policemen” were “blackmailing us” for reasons such as irregular visa status or seemingly tax-evasive transactions. Chams was allegedly accused of fraud in Panama’s free trade zone of Colón, but it was the anti-terrorist division of the Paraguayan police who paid a visit to his store without arresting him.⁴⁶ Chams explained that “the Arab who pays [extortion] is the good Arab, if he doesn’t pay, he’s a bad one.”⁴⁷ Meanwhile, Reda Soueid accused the Paraguayan state of “terrorizing” and “spreading panic” in a “climate of insecurity” exacerbated by the US-led war on terror. Soueid put it simply, “We [Arabs] are afraid.”⁴⁸ In Foz do Iguaçu, Mohamad Barakat repeated that the “Paraguayan government” failed “to defend . . . Ciudad del Este” in the US-led war.⁴⁹ Lebanon’s diplomat Hicham Hamdan likewise expressed concern over whether “his compatriots detained in Paraguay” would be considered “innocent until proven guilty.”⁵⁰

Arabs on the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border also felt scrutinized by post-9/11 Argentina. “After September 11,” remembered Fawas, the son of the founder of Galeria Rahal, “a lot of journalists from Argentina came here” to the Paraguayan side of the border. These journalists, he surmised, “queriam pegar os grandes,” (they wanted to get the big ones, in Portuguese), ostensibly trying to associate wealthy families such as the Hammouds, Jebais, and Mannahs with terrorism.⁵¹ In 2001, *Clarín* conjectured that none other than Bin Laden and the Taliban passed through Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este.⁵² This and other Argentine media warned of “security gaps” on the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of the border.⁵³ The Argentine gendarmerie chief in Puerto Iguazú, Hugo Miranda, likewise juxtaposed “what we are doing” on the Argentine side of

the border in relation to the allegedly "minimal . . . border controls between Brazil and Paraguay."⁵⁴ The former president Carlos Menem called on Argentines to join the US fight against terror and for a "joint action with Brazil and Paraguay" to improve "security at the tri-border."⁵⁵ In response, the US State Department highlighted Argentina's "continuing strong support for the global war on terrorism throughout 2002."⁵⁶ In the "close ties" between Buenos Aires and Washington, DC, the US lauded Argentine counterterrorist visions of Arabs at the border.⁵⁷

Suspicion was the *sine qua non* of not only past authoritarianism but also present-day counterterrorism. A month after 9/11, the "Tripartite Command" reported "nothing concrete" at the border, after looking into alleged "terrorist activities."⁵⁸ Neither incriminated nor fully exonerated, Arabs remained in a double bind, exacerbated by the transnational security network of military and civilian authorities initiated years before 9/11. As mentioned in the third chapter, the Tripartite Command was then headed by Brazil's Federal Police chief in Foz do Iguaçu, Joaquim Mesquita, who had repeatedly investigated suspicions that produced no evidence. Argentina's representative, José Domingo Battaglia, the gendarmerie commander in Misiones, admitted that "for now, the subject" of "cells that shelter or support terrorists" is "totally discarded, but monitoring continues." Augusto Lima, the Paraguayan National Police spokesman who started his career during Stroessner's thirty-five year reign, echoed, "we haven't found anything that ties the region to the presence of terrorists." But Lima qualified that "the Paraguayan judicial system continues its investigations of foreigners, principally those of Arab origin" as well as "their legal identification on Paraguayan territory," in a state apparatus still run by the defunct dictatorship's political party.⁵⁹

Any transnational activity undertaken by Arabs at the border became "truncated, questioned, (and) re-politicized" amid counterterrorist suspicions and authoritarian silences, to again paraphrase anthropologists Sally Howell and Andrew Shryock.⁶⁰ Take for example Lebanese-led call centers scrutinized by Interpol and raided by Brazil's Federal Police soon after the US declaration of war on terror.⁶¹ The US State Department claimed that "possible links"

existed between these “clandestine telephone centers” and “terrorist activities.”⁶² But a month of investigations discovered that the accused would run a telephone switchboard from a rented house and abandon it after two or three months “leaving behind a series of bills that sometimes surpassed R\$100,000” (nearly \$90,000 US dollars at the time).⁶³ A suspect, Lebanese Brazilian Mohamed Omar Matar, said that the call center had nothing to do with terrorism but was rather “motivated by the high cost of making international phone calls,” monopolized by the Brazilian telecommunications company, Embratel. Originally founded in 1965 and owned by the authoritarian state, Embratel expanded control over long-distance communication after re-democratization and privatization in 1998.⁶⁴ Brazil’s Federal Police chief Joaquim Mesquita concluded that the Lebanese-Brazilian-run “call center was used to fool telephone companies” and offer cheaper calls “mainly to the Middle East.”⁶⁵ Neither saints nor subversives, Arabs were being called out on a hemispheric field of exceptional rule.

Peace without Borders in Foz do Iguaçu

Some Arabs responded by organizing an *ato* (act of observance), “Paz sem Fronteiras / Paz sin Fronteras / Peace without Borders.” They explicitly avoided characterizing the event as a protest, demonstration, or rally, language which could exacerbate media coverage of an allegedly unruly border. Their “act of observance” was slotted for November 11, 2001, the two-month anniversary of 9/11, in order to condemn “acts of terrorism practiced on American soil” as well as reaffirm the “integration” and “peace” of the border stigmatized by the US war on terror. A founding member, Marcelle, one of the few Christian Lebanese at the border, recalled that the movement originated before 9/11 when she and two other women, a Muslim Lebanese Brazilian and an Israeli-born Jewish Argentine, planned an event “for peace in the Middle East.” They intended to plant trees at a tourist spot, Três Marcas (three border markings) between Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina. They invited the press to cover what was then idealized as an event for peace among adherents of the three Abrahamic faiths. After September 11, 2001, they decided to

put on a larger event for peace as well. The movement grew to more than two hundred rank-and-file members with nine directory board members: the Maronite Christian Marcelle; four Sunni Muslim Arab Brazilians; and others from Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, and Israel. Though affirming peace without borders, the movement's directory planned for the event to take place on the Brazilian side of the border, on the grounds of the Itaipu complex, folding into the Brazilian government's own demur toward war.

Fouad Fakih was a key figure in this multi-ethnic, multi-religious movement for "peace without borders" at a time of war. Mentioned in the first and fourth chapters, Fakih helped run the Acifi business association since the 1970s, undertook trade ventures across the Friendship Bridge in the 1980s, and opened a successful department store in the 1990s. He and others from each side of the border oversaw the production and distribution of more than twenty-thousand shirts imprinted with the symbol of a dove and the slogan "Peace without Borders," which financed some of the movement's costs.⁶⁶ Fakih, Marcelle, and other idealists reasoned that US counterterrorist allegations were against not just Arabs, but also Brazilians, Paraguayans, Argentines, and others at the border.⁶⁷ "This border region," Fakih explained, "brings together communities of around sixty different ethnicities, who have lived together for more than one hundred years," that is, until "the 9/11 attacks" when Arabs were "irresponsibly included in the list of suspects."⁶⁸ Despite such framing, some local detractors characterized the movement as "eminently Arab," so another director in the movement, Jacob Schneider, went on record that, "I am of Jewish origin and at my side are members with dozens of other backgrounds."⁶⁹ Planning for the "participation of ethnic groups" and "the participation of religious authorities," movement leaders acknowledged Arabness but also avoided being framed as only Arab in efforts to gain wider appeal on the three sides of the border and beyond.

Accordingly, Arab board members renewed their protagonism in a hemispheric America, reaching out to government authorities from Foz do Iguaçu, Ciudad del Este, Puerto Iguazú, and beyond. Marcelle convinced border authorities that US-government claims of terrorism implied they were "incompetent" and "unaware" of

what was happening “under their noses.” Fouad Fakih traveled to Brasília and met with the Brazilian president’s secretary, delivering a personal letter that asked him to attend and to “defend the society of Foz do Iguaçu,” while *A Gazeta do Iguaçu* reported on the invitations that had been extended to not only Brazilian but also Paraguayan and Argentine presidents.⁷⁰ Fakih and other movement leaders also relayed an official invitation to George W. Bush through the US embassy in Brasília.⁷¹ The respective city government leaders at the border as well as several state-level officials participated in the event, whereas South and North American presidents sent representatives. Drawing upon their history of civic engagement since authoritarian times, discussed in the second and third chapters, Arabs sought to include the US on the terms set in South America atop a hemispheric stage.

Indeed, Peace without Borders endeavored to change the dominant narrative of the war on terror, not by accusing the accusers but rather by conscientiously opting “to not pay with the same currency in order to uphold ‘peace,’” as *A Gazeta do Iguaçu* put it.⁷² With a business-friendly “currency” at a time of war, the movement’s communications team, made up of mostly Brazilian media authorities in the Foz do Iguaçu government, Acifi, Itaipu, and a local journalists’ union, worked on local as well as “regional and world levels,” reaching out to the Atlanta-based CNN network (which had just publicized negative images of the border, addressed in the next chapter). Paraguay’s *Diario Vanguardia* likewise wrote that this “movement of peace and against war’ . . . forms part of another kind of war that unites the inhabitants of Foz do Iguaçu, Ciudad del Este, and Puerto Iguazú: war against the economic crisis and against the ‘evil image’ that has ruined this season’s tourist business.”⁷³ Charif Hammoud echoed that “we are organizing the great event Paz sin Fronteras” in order to reinvigorate border commerce that had been “drastically reduced” by the negative image of Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este disseminated by corporate media.⁷⁴

Paz sem Fronteiras staged the border’s national, ethnic, and religious accommodation as a counterpoint to dominant images of intolerance and lawlessness. After the national anthems of Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina at the event, representatives of seventy-two

ethnic groups at the border marched through the audience and took their place in front of the stage. Subsequently, "national representatives" from Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and the US, alongside the "religious representatives" of Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Spiritism, and Buddhism, read respective messages of peace and fraternity. The event culminated in the signing of a "trinational agreement" between Brazilian, Paraguayan, and Argentine authorities, without the US.⁷⁵ Indeed, the "mission of unity and integration between Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina" was not to criticize the US-led war on terror but rather to change its narrative that vilified the border.⁷⁶ As the Paraná state governor Jaime Lerner (PFL) declared, the *ato* was "proof of tolerance, respect, and solidarity of the border community."⁷⁷

Arabs at the border tried to shift the dominant narrative of a war they neither began nor could finish. They emphasized accommodation by echoing Brazilian, Paraguayan, and Argentine leaders' emphasis on solidarity and peace without explicit criticisms of US counterterrorist claims. Fakihi declared, "the power of mobilization at the tri-border is greater than the criticisms and accusations made about the region."⁷⁸ Foz do Iguaçu mayor Sâmis da Silva repeated that the border is "an example of peaceful coexistence [*convivência*],"⁷⁹ while Governor Lerner repeated: "The unity of the border is stronger than any attempt at stigmatizing it."⁸⁰ The governor of Alto Paraná in Paraguay, Jorvino Urunaga, stated that the border's "message of peace to the world" should not be overshadowed by terror.⁸¹ And the intendente of Puerto Iguazú in Argentina, Timoteo Liera, called upon residents of the three sides of the border to "fight" unproven "accusations" in order to defend their shared tourist economy. Having sought security in a free trade bloc that suspended due process, as explored in the previous chapter, Arabs now mobilized with local border authorities for peace at a time of war.

Effectively eliding a hemispheric history of state exceptions, the headliners in the *ato* declared solidarity with Arabs and Muslims, as a market-friendly assertion of the plurality of an otherwise maligned borderland. Calls for Third Worldist or Global South solidarity, as explored in the second chapter, were replaced by pronouncements of "peace" and "faith," resonating with the

movement's aims to build an alternative narrative to war and sanitize the border through the strategic display of "diversity." In avoiding the vitriol of US authorities, business and government leaders in the event also made no mention of past authoritarian regimes or present-day counterterrorist controls in ostensibly civilian-led governments that ruled by exception. The *ato's* liberal democratic ethos remained silent about the aforementioned suspension of basic liberal democratic norms for many Arabs at the border, which was occurring at that very moment.

The *ato's* message of peace that avoided confrontation fell short of neutralizing the dominant narrative of war and barely caught the attention of big media in Brasília, Asunción, Buenos Aires, and Washington, DC. Covering the ostensible start of a war with no end, US mainstream media nearly ignored the act for peace at a border that did not fit into what Ulf Hannertz critiqued as a counterterrorist "story line."⁸² Only brief notes were issued by news media such as *Folha de S. Paulo*, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, and *O Globo* in Brazil, or *Ultima Hora*, *Diario ABC Color*, and *La Nación* in Paraguay.⁸³ Major media in these cities downplayed the message of peace at the border and gave equal weight to counterterrorist accusations. Meanwhile, newspapers in Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este ran front-page stories that read: "Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina said no to terror in the Peace without Borders event";⁸⁴ "Peace without Borders, a message of communion in Foz do Iguaçu";⁸⁵ and "War on the evil image,"⁸⁶ not dwelling on the limited reach of the movement's message.

Indeed, US authorities again voiced suspicion of the border. Some months after "Peace without Borders," US vice-president Dick Cheney expressed concern with "terrorist activities in Latin America, specifically in the tri-border region."⁸⁷ During the New Realities in the Hemisphere conference in Washington, DC, Cheney stated that "terrorists continue to take root in the region." This vitriol continued in Paraguay during the visit of the US Southern Commander, General James Hill, who claimed that the tri-border not only financed terrorist organizations but was home to "sleeper cells" as well.⁸⁸ A week later, his vice-commander General Peter Page added that the border "remains relatively free from the activity of security controls." The Foz do Iguaçu mayor asked for Brazil's foreign ministry to issue

a formal rebuke while Fouad Fakhri decried the resultant "economic and social terror" at the border.⁸⁹

Historically denied full enfranchisement at the border, as seen in the second chapter, Arabs and others were well aware of the *ato*'s limited impact. As one rank and file participant put it, after Peace without Borders ended, "everything went back to the way it was."⁹⁰ *A Gazeta do Iguaçu* editor-in-chief Rogério Bonato surmised that "the Peace without Borders movement was a failure. . . . We supported the movement in the newspaper and what happened? . . . We can't make headlines in big media?"⁹¹ Even Fouad Fakhri's rising "popularity" provoked fears of his political aspirations among some local government power brokers who "expelled" him from Acifi and "instigated" students to protest against him at the university that he co-founded.⁹² Peace without Borders was no match for war without end.

Arabs likewise left intact a border among themselves, as addressed in Chapter 3. Shia stated that they were the *peões* (peons), *mão-de-obra* (manual labor), and *serviçais* (servants) in the movement, whether driving visitors around town or delivering materials. Sunni Muslims, Christians, and Jews made up the movement's upper circles, with no Shia Muslims on the directory board.⁹³ Allegedly, the movement's leaders failed to extend an invitation to the Shia-majority Sociedade Islâmica Beneficente, though the *ato* was attended by Bilal Mohsen Wehbi, the Lebanese Shia shaykh from São Paulo who had inaugurated the mosque in Ciudad del Este a decade previously. In 1997, Wehbe naturalized as a Brazilian citizen but remained on the radar of the US.⁹⁴ A second-generation Brazilian of Arab origins whose father is Shia ended up serving as the guide for Bilal, and for this reason, "many of my Sunni friends," he remarked, "stopped talking to me." Sunni Muslims "don't want to give space" for Shia to have a real say, he noted. Arabs redrew boundaries between themselves in this war on terror.⁹⁵

Counterterrorist Informants in Ciudad del Este

Some Arabs criticized their own role in post-9/11 extraordinary measures taken by state powers, especially on the Paraguayan side of

the border. The aforementioned Armando Chams called out Arabs who were “fake informants” of “Paraguayan authorities,” conspiring with the “police to take action” against other Arabs “without the slightest investigation” after 9/11.⁹⁶ “Informants” were “traders of Arab origin who accuse their co-nationals of having ties with terrorist groups in order to commercially extort or ‘eliminate them.’”⁹⁷ Chams approached the Paraguayan Ministry of Justice, Interpol, and the US embassy in Asunción “to expose the blackmailing” that Arabs “were subject to.” He explained that Arab “traders with ties to police authorities utilized their contacts to prejudice competitors with false allegations.” On the day before the Peace without Borders *ato* in Foz do Iguaçu, complicit officers in Paraguay’s National Police raided stores in Ciudad del Este, detained Arab owners, and apprehended computers, documents, and safes. An onlooker shouted, “This is nonsense! Everyone here is at work! We are tired of all these lies. It’s all a show!”⁹⁸ Not long after, the police officers themselves became the target of scrutiny in Ciudad del Este’s city council.⁹⁹ When city councilors considered legal action, one of the Arab informants “was quicker and accused the city council president, Alício Peralta Martinez, of being the accountant of the terrorists.”¹⁰⁰ Complicit police officers followed up, threatening city councilors with allegations of collusion with terrorists.¹⁰¹ Said Taijen expressed dismay at this vicious cycle: “There aren’t any Arab terrorists at the tri-border . . . the accusations are lies. . . . Local and national authorities and the Ministry of Foreign Relations assure us that the accusations are slanderous but they keep coming.” His colleague added, “more than thirty persons” accused of terrorism “were freed” because there is “no connection.”¹⁰²

A handful of Arabs accommodated Paraguayan state deference to the US-led war on terror. Ali Ahmed Zaioun was allegedly an informant for a Paraguayan state apparatus still overseen by the political party of the defunct dictatorship. Introduced last chapter, Zaioun gained notoriety in the fraudulent Paraguayan state-supported emission of visas for Lebanese migrants during the 1990s.¹⁰³ After 9/11, Amnesty International accused Zaioun of “extortion, death threats, and the appropriation of businesses . . . in the Lebanese community of Ciudad del Este.”¹⁰⁴ Hector Guerín, the journalist

then working at the *Diario Vanguardia*, explained that Zaioun was "an informant for the Anti-terrorist Police" accusing "his commercial rivals of being terrorists."¹⁰⁵ Guérin suspected that another Lebanese Paraguayan, Kassan Hijazi, was also an informant because Paraguayan public prosecutors suspended probes into his purportedly million-dollar, tax-evasive remittances to "the Middle East, Asia, and the US."¹⁰⁶ Based on these cases, Guérin argued that the "accusations about the presence of terrorists" investigated by state powers actually "stem from the [border] zone itself."¹⁰⁷

Arab informants capitalized on the Paraguayan state's alignment with the US agenda "to find terrorists," since "counterterrorism" had become a "major component" in Paraguayan-US relations, as political scientists Frank Mora and Jerry Cooney observed.¹⁰⁸ In particular, Zaioun allegedly colluded with Esteban Aquino Bernal, the "counterterrorist counsel of the Supreme Court of Justice" and influential in the Secretaría de Prevención e Investigación del Terrorismo (SEPIT, or Secretary of the Prevention and Investigation of Terrorism).¹⁰⁹ One of the so-called "questionable figures" of the Colorado Party that stayed in power after the end of the dictatorship,¹¹⁰ Aquino publicly took credit for the US State Department's "praise" that "Paraguay continues being an active partner in the war on terror in 2002."¹¹¹ Through Aquino's influence, the anti-terrorist division of the Paraguayan National Police allegedly gave "protection" to the merchandise that Zaioun shipped to his store.¹¹² Zaioun and Aquino together were said to "make a living by extorting other merchants" through accusations of terrorism, and Aquino himself was later investigated for owning "luxurious residencies" on a modest government salary.¹¹³

Bringing notoriety to Ciudad del Este in this war-torn America, Zaioun pointed to a rival businessman, Assad Ahmed Barakat, as a "terrorist." In turn, Barakat himself accused Zaioun of turning "a commercial dispute with me . . . into a terrorist war."¹¹⁴ Shortly before 9/11 in 2001, Zaioun and Barakat met before a Paraguayan judge to settle a "commercial dispute" over distribution rights to a popular video game for which both claimed to be the sole distributor.¹¹⁵ The owner of the video game, A.B. United of Hong Kong, sent documentation to Paraguay's public prosecutors and

Ministry of Industry and Commerce, “complaining” that the licensing agreement had been made with Barakat, not Zaioun.¹¹⁶ According to Guerín, Zaioun had falsely registered the game in his name in order “to demand large sums of money from Arab merchants” who would “commercialize the product.”¹¹⁷ Just as the court leaned toward Barakat, Zaioun allegedly raised the question, “Madame judge, are you going to pronounce the verdict in favor of a terrorist?”¹¹⁸ Zaioun’s claim against a rival merchant as an alleged terrorist drew upon a Paraguayan state-supported extortion racket, discussed last chapter, exacerbated by the US war on terror. Under scrutiny of investigative reporting, Zaioun declared himself to be a victim of Guerín and an unidentified “group of persons with international arrest warrants.”¹¹⁹

The Barakat case served as a proxy war between Brazil and the US over Paraguay. Born in Lebanon and naturalized as a Paraguayan citizen, Barakat ran a profitable electronics business in Ciudad del Este and resided with his Brazilian wife and their Brazilian-born sons in Foz do Iguaçu. The day before the Peace without Borders event, Zaioun’s accusation against Barakat led Paraguayan police to raid Barakat’s store, Casa Apolo, in Ciudad del Este. As Barakat remained free on the Brazilian side of the border, a Paraguayan prosecutor related that “no proof” but rather only “signs” of terrorist affiliation were found, specifically, Arabic recordings of and a mass-produced red parchment card from Hassan Nasrallah, Hizbullah’s secretary-general, as well as money transfer receipts, discussed later.¹²⁰ Subsequently, the Paraguayan foreign minister requested that Brazilian authorities detain and hand over Barakat, but Brazilian legislation at the time prohibited the extradition of anyone with a Brazilian-born child, and considered Barakat’s own appeals. As the Brazilian judicial system deliberated over the case, the US State Department publicly praised “Paraguayan authorities” who “pursued the extradition from Brazil of local Lebanese Hizballah leader Assad Ahmad Barakat.”¹²¹ Only later did the highest court in Brazil agree to extradite Barakat to Paraguay on the condition that he would not be tried for allegedly supporting Hizbullah in what Brazilian government ministers considered to be a “politically motivated” case.¹²²

Barakat himself accused Paraguayan government officials of defrauding the state in the aforementioned extortion schemes, marked by both authoritarian legacies and counterterrorist liaisons. He alleged that Carlos Cálcena, the Paraguayan *fiscal* (public prosecutor, in Spanish) and future vice-minister of the Interior who led the raid on his store, tried to blackmail him in exchange for looking the other way, and Cálcena had been, in fact, denounced to the Organization of American States and later put on trial for pocketing drug money after another arrest.¹²³ Barakat explained that the raid on his store found only a red parchment card from Hassan Nasrallah, secretary general of Hizbullah, which "does not mean that I support terrorism or terrorists," but was rather a mass-produced "thank you" acknowledgement for donations Barakat made to orphanages, not prohibited by Brazilian or Paraguayan law.¹²⁴ Asked about money transfer receipts, Barakat explained, "I do business with Miami, New York, Chile, so there's remittances to Lebanon for these purchases, through the credit card, for products that pass through Hong Kong."¹²⁵ Barakat's wife characterized her husband as a "scapegoat" and affirmed, "he wouldn't support a terrorist group that goes around killing children like our own."¹²⁶ While awaiting a judicial decision in Brazil and leery of US involvement, Barakat categorically stated, "I don't trust the police in Paraguay."

Arabs at the border tended to view Barakat's commercial affairs as "business as usual" in a Paraguayan state that sought to conceal its own illiberal ways under intense US scrutiny. Nasser, an importer in Ciudad del Este and resident of Foz do Iguaçu, opined that Barakat's problem probably started with "one of those money exchanges" in Ciudad del Este where he wired the payment for goods ordered from China. Once the shipment of merchandise arrived in Paraguay, Barakat likely arranged for a "manager" to pay import taxes. Nasser explained that "managers" often offer to "*despachar por mais barato*" (deal for cheaper, literally, in *portanhól*), evading the payment of the total amount of government taxes by up to two-thirds. Generally, a "manager" pays off government officials and pockets the remaining amount in state-sponsored fraud, similar to dynamics explored in Chapters 1 and 4. Barakat was perhaps issued

a tax receipt for imports at a third or so of their actual value that could have been recorded in his own accounting records. With post-9/11 US scrutiny, the real amount of money that Barakat transferred could be traced back to him and authorities perhaps found that the value was far greater than that registered in his own records. With the discrepancy between the amount of money transferred and the lower sum in his accounting books, Barakat could be tried for tax evasion in Paraguayan courts. Not only would the Paraguayan state then avoid investigating its own illiberal liaisons, but US authorities could also spin the case as a victory in the war on terror, though there was no actual evidence regarding terrorism.

Alleged informants exerted a perverse power that bent the self-declared Bush doctrine to serve the purpose of personal profiteering. They were said to “create boogymen among their countrymen” (*crean zozobras entre sus paisanos*, in Spanish), with unaccountable economic and imaginative influence that expanded in the US-led war on terror.¹²⁷ Zaioun was even asked to testify that Barakat owned the business in question, Casa Apolo, since their stores faced each other, shoring up Paraguayan fiscal auditing that demonstrated Casa Apolo transferred money without paying taxes of almost a billion guaraníes (at the time, nearly US\$500,000) between 1999 and 2001.¹²⁸ The amount was hardly significant in comparison to the tens of billions of US dollars irregularly wired from the Brazilian side of the border to Ciudad del Este and then elsewhere, to be discussed in the following chapter. After Barakat was found guilty of tax evasion and jailed in Paraguay, Zaioun stepped up “pressuring merchants of Arab origin,” to buy products imported by Zaioun, including a new electronic console game, at elevated prices.¹²⁹ Zaioun shot back that “there are many who sell this product” in Ciudad del Este.¹³⁰

These counterterrorist informants signaled Paraguay’s move toward the US and away from Mercosur. The US State Department praised the conviction of who it called “Hizballah fundraiser Assad Ahmad Barakat on charges of tax evasion” as a “major accomplishment,” without saying anything of informants like Zaioun who seemed to operate above the law.¹³¹ In the next two years, the US put “\$37 million of investment” into “various areas” in Paraguay,

including "continued cooperation on counterterrorism and anti-money-laundering activities in the Tri-Border area."¹³² Indeed, Paraguayan president Duarte had "made a strategic decision to align Paraguay with the United States" and exercised some distance from Brazil and Argentina.¹³³ Duarte's shift toward the US grew out of a "disenchantment" with the "regional solidarity" that he once professed alongside fellow Mercosur member states, which refused to renew long-standing economic concessions in the bloc, discussed earlier.¹³⁴ Accordingly, Barakat's conviction for tax evasion became framed as a Paraguayan victory in a US-led war on terror, and not another illiberal outcome in a Paraguayan state still overseen by the defunct dictatorship's political party in league with US counterterrorism.¹³⁵

Arabs in Ciudad del Este accommodated but tended to keep a low profile under these exceptions to the rule of law. Indeed, accusations of being a terrorist continued to be "used for extortion and blackmail . . . in the cut-throat marketplace in Ciudad del Este, where most storeowners likely have some accounts to settle, whether due to tax evasion or forgery," in the view of Brazilian investigative reporter Lourival Sant'anna.¹³⁶ One Arab storeowner reflected, "we won't be surprised" if other Arabs were arrested "as terrorists. They've been doing that for some time now. For them, this tri-border zone is a shelter for terrorists." His colleague confided, "Today we cannot speak in public, because if we say something, tomorrow they'll come for us and here, who will defend us?"¹³⁷

Exceptional Equivocations and Enlistments

But the US government equivocated. In 2002, the State Department's new deputy coordinator of counterterrorism, Cofer Black, admitted "no concrete signs of a terrorist presence" during the meeting of the 3+1 group, a security network made up of Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina "plus" the US.¹³⁸ At the same time, Black raised suspicions of "piracy and money-laundering" at the border in "financing terrorism," qualifying that the US would support the 3+1 group to combat "possible remittances . . . to Arab extremists." The State Department reiterated Black's position, writing that "available

information did not substantiate reports of operational activities by terrorists,” but rather pointed to “international terrorist financing and money laundering in the area.”¹³⁹ For Brazilian diplomats, the US government’s “more moderate” posture indicated a “rebuttal of the fallacies” regarding putative “terrorist activities” at the border.¹⁴⁰ Since the matter of terrorist finance is addressed in the following chapter, suffice it to say that some other US authorities echoed this shift, including Stephen Monblatt, then serving on the Organization of American States’ Committee against Terrorism,¹⁴¹ the new ambassador to Brazil, Donna Hrinak,¹⁴² and Southern Command General James Hill.¹⁴³

Seemingly upending this foreign policy stance, then FBI director Robert Mueller declared “al-Qaeda . . . has a presence in the Tri-Border Region in South America.”¹⁴⁴ Rather than follow the State Department, the FBI exacerbated matters by lending greater credence to a *Washington Post* story that broke months previously, alleging that none other than Osama Bin Laden visited the Omar Ibn Al-Khattab mosque on the Brazilian side of the border.¹⁴⁵ The Hollywoodesque plot originated with the Brazilian newsweekly *Veja*. The “world’s most wanted terrorist,” wrote *Veja*, “passed three pleasant days in Foz do Iguaçu” and met with “Arab community members in the Sunni mosque of the city.”¹⁴⁶ A “twenty-eight-minute video” of Bin Laden’s visit to the mosque, further embellished the magazine, “still exists today,” though no sources were ever found.¹⁴⁷ As seen in the second chapter, the cornerstone-laying ceremony of the actual mosque took place at the end of authoritarian rule and the inauguration was held after the return of civil society. Ignoring that history of accommodation, *Veja* alleged that Bin Laden visited the mosque in the 1990s, when the congregation was led by Egyptian-born shaykh Mahmoud Badran. The latter’s replacement, Taleb Jommaa, underscored that Badran “deserves respect,” having fulfilled the responsibility that the Egyptian government gave him in the mosque at the time.¹⁴⁸ Far from being a closet al-Qaeda sympathizer, Badran had actually made headlines celebrating commonalities between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.¹⁴⁹ The news story about Bin Laden also “baffled” the Centro Cultural Beneficente Islâmico that constructed the mosque. A founding member,

Ali Said Rahal, felt obligated to state on record: "Bin Laden was never in Foz" do Iguaçu.¹⁵⁰

Arabs at the border enlisted the help of a homeland statesman in what cultural critics Ella Shohat and Robert Stam call the "burden of representation," the pressure that historically misrepresented subjects shoulder in representing themselves.¹⁵¹ At the border, they hosted none other than Lebanon's prime minister Rafic Hariri. Upon arriving in Foz do Iguaçu, the Lebanese prime minister was greeted by flower-bearing students from the Escola Libanesa Brasileira. Praised for building a bridge between the border and Lebanon, Hariri had been invited to a business conference in São Paulo and was entertained in Brasília by the then newly elected president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.¹⁵² Amid a busy schedule, Hariri allegedly asked Lula to intervene on behalf of Barakat.¹⁵³ In his address to the welcoming party at the border, Hariri declared that "we are with you" and empathized with "the problems you are suffering from in this sensitive area of Brazil and Paraguay."¹⁵⁴ Although "there is talk of many plots being weaved against those living in this area" where "the eyes of the world are all turned," Hariri "heard from the Brazilian authorities" of the "moral and noble" stances of Lebanese at the border. His entourage, which included his future successor, Fouad Siniora, privately met with "public figures" and "expatriates" at the border. Hariri openly acknowledged the "pressures being felt by the Lebanese, whether in Brazil or Paraguay," and questioned the "large group of countries and intelligence agencies" that made unfounded allegations against them. For Fouad Fakihi, "the Lebanese Prime Minister reaffirmed" the absence of "terrorist cells" and "disproved the unfounded and calumnious news stories of the international press."¹⁵⁵

Fakihi, Magrão, and other members soon organized the Conselho Anfitrião da Comunidade Árabe Libanesa (Welcome-Party Council of the Arab Lebanese Community) in order to host the visit of another entourage of homeland statesmen.¹⁵⁶ Three months after the visit of the Lebanese prime minister, they welcomed the Lebanese vice minister of foreign relations, Mohammad Issa, the director of emigrant affairs, Haitham Joumaa, and the Lebanese ambassador in Brazil, Joseph Sayagh.¹⁵⁷ Hariri's emissaries explored the

establishment of a Lebanese consulate in Foz do Iguaçu, which never materialized. Not necessarily strengthening ties with the homeland, Lebanese authorities joined the Foz do Iguaçu mayor to commemorate Brazil's independence day in the official parade on September 7, the Dia da Pátria; they were photographed together under a banner that read "181 Years of the Independence of Brazil."¹⁵⁸ Providing a spotlight otherwise dimmed by suspicion, Lebanese and Arabs at the border again felt vindicated by Lebanese state officials who praised "civic spirit" at the border.¹⁵⁹

Perhaps at the urging of migrants themselves, Lebanese prime minister Hariri announced the "re-opening of the Embassy of Lebanon in Paraguay" during his 2003 visit. However, the task of representing Lebanese and Arabs in Paraguay was a greater challenge due to Paraguayan-US rapprochement.¹⁶⁰ Around the same time of the announcement, the Paraguayan vice president Luiz Castiglioni had spent a week in Washington, DC, where he expressed pride in the State Department's "satisfaction" with the Barakat conviction and bilateral counterterrorist agreements.¹⁶¹ Not long after, the Lebanese diplomat Hicham Hamdan met with this Paraguayan vice president, publicly downplaying the case of Barakat and other Lebanese detainees as "problems" whenever "there is a large collective."¹⁶² Mentioned earlier, Hamdan had asked Paraguayan authorities to maintain due process for Lebanese citizens a month after the 9/11 attacks. After being officially appointed ambassador and taking up the post in 2004, Hamdan again asked why Lebanese citizens from Ciudad del Este were held without charges at the Tacumbú penitentiary in Asunción where the political prisoners of the dictatorship used to be locked up.¹⁶³ Authoritarian legacies haunted counterterrorist liaisons today.

With no exorcism in sight, military influence and expenditures increased in tandem. Brazilian President Lula's administration increased military personnel in intelligence and public security while remaining vigilant that no terrorist ties had been found at the border. Lula appointed his "close friend," General Jorge Armando Félix, to head the Gabinete de Segurança Institucional, mentioned previously.¹⁶⁴ In 2003, General Félix testified before the Committee on Foreign Relations of Brazil's Chamber of Deputies. General Félix

explained that the Federal Police and army had carried out investigations at the border since 1990 and never found any sign of terrorism.¹⁶⁵ He admonished the federal government to avoid "disrespecting" and "discriminating" against migrants. At the same time, General Félix and others allegedly exerted pressure on President Lula to dismiss then head of ABIN, Mauro Marcelo Lima e Silva, since he "was the first civil police officer to command this intelligence department."¹⁶⁶ In agreement, President Lula appointed Márcio Paulo Buzanelli, "a veteran of the extinct SNI" as head of ABIN.¹⁶⁷ In 2004, Buzanelli observed that no signs of terrorism were found at the border, but wrote that it was "imperative" to improve the "state apparatus" to carry out further investigations and counter "potential threats."¹⁶⁸ Indeed, Buzanelli's call for militarization presaged the doubling of arms purchases between 2005 and 2009 as well as the 25 percent surge in public safety expenditures.¹⁶⁹

This increasingly militarized Brazil not only demurred to US counterterrorism but also quietly monitored Arabs at the border. At the UN in 2003, President Lula denounced the human and civil costs of the US war on terror. At the same time, he dodged discussing Arabs at the border by skipping part of his speech's original text previously distributed to the press and posted on the Brazilian Foreign Relations Ministry website.¹⁷⁰ In the excerpt that was not read, Lula would have stated, "there is no proof of any activity linked to terrorism at the tri-border between Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil." In 2005, General Félix likewise distanced the US war on terror and carefully acknowledged Brazil's continued surveillance of the border during his meeting with the US ambassador.¹⁷¹ In response to the US ambassador's question about the border, General Félix remarked that ABIN "targeted individuals of interest" through a private border security firm, RMAS (Regional Movement Alert System). General Félix reassured the US ambassador that ABIN and Brazil's Federal Police were addressing the "serious problems in the region," including the "illegal movement of arms, money, and drugs." The US ambassador noted General Félix's fastidious avoidance of the terms "terrorists" and "terrorism." The Brazilian general stressed that security measures must be "packaged properly so as not to negatively reflect upon the proud and successful Arab community in Brazil."

Instead of acknowledging the authoritarian legacies of counterterrorist interventions today, the Brazilian state took aim at persistent US stereotypes of a South American border supposedly run amok by Middle Eastern boogeymen. In 2004, the aforementioned Brazilian ambassador in Washington, DC, Rubens Barbosa, rebuked a US writer in *Foreign Affairs* who called the border a “new Libya” where terrorists “meet to swap tradecraft.”¹⁷² For Ambassador Barbosa, the US writer “perpetuate[d] a damaging stereotype that in no way does justice to Brazil’s struggle against terrorism” through state surveillance of the border for over the previous decade.¹⁷³ Ambassador Barbosa pointed out that “no evidence has been produced to prove the presence of terrorist organizations (or even the existence of fund-raising activities) in the area.” He cited a list of corroborating US authorities, including Monblatt, Hrinak, and General Hill, mentioned earlier. Serving in Washington, DC, during the mandates of FHC and Lula, Barbosa questioned US visions by underscoring Brazil’s own militarized presence at the border.

Not as leverage against but rather in alignment with the US, the Paraguayan state also used Arabs at the border as a pretext for militarization. In 2002, Paraguay’s ambassador in Washington, DC, Leila Rachid, herself of Syrian-Lebanese origins, stated, “We have been working very closely with the State Department’s office of counterterrorism” against what she thought was a Hizbullah outpost at the border.¹⁷⁴ At the time, Rachid claimed that the Paraguayan government “lent more support to Washington’s anti-terrorism efforts than any other country in Latin America,” allegedly detaining and extraditing subjects of interest from the border. After becoming foreign minister in the Duarte government, in 2004, Rachid stressed that the 3+1 working group “was able to demonstrate to the world that the tri-border has no terrorist cells.” In step with the equivocation in the US State Department, the now Paraguayan foreign minister alleged that “followers of Hizbullah” allegedly send money “to support this political party” in Lebanon.¹⁷⁵ The same year, she neither confirmed nor denied Duarte’s concession that permitted US military operations on Paraguayan territory.¹⁷⁶ Whether demurring or deferring to war on terror, civilian governments across the hemisphere justified militarization through Arabs at the border.

Beyond the border, Arab transnational ties even became entangled in the 2006 Israeli war on Lebanon. According to long-time Islamic Benevolent Society member Mohamed Hijazi, many families from Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este had been vacationing in southern Lebanese villages when the US-backed Israeli airstrikes and shelling began.¹⁷⁷ The Fakih family recounted that members were vacationing in the Beqaa Valley, and with the start of the Israeli offensive, they crammed into a single vehicle and fled into Syria. They needed at least two or three cars, but reasoned that several vehicles might have drawn Israeli artillery, and if one of them had been hit, the other would have been faced with an unimaginable choice to either continue on or stay with those killed or wounded.¹⁷⁸ Downplaying these tolls on everyday civilians, President George W. Bush claimed Israeli military incursions were, in fact, part of the US war on terror.¹⁷⁹ At the same time, President Lula sent the Brazilian military to evacuate Brazilians of Lebanese origin.¹⁸⁰ President Duarte's "Paraguayan government," though, failed to take action to assist "Paraguayan citizens [of Lebanese origin] trapped in Lebanon."¹⁸¹ Meanwhile, back in Foz do Iguaçu, some two thousand Brazilians and Paraguayans of Arab origin, among others, organized a peaceful protest against Israeli military aggression, which the US embassy in Asunción claimed could "turn violent, anti-Semitic, or anti-American in nature."¹⁸² Disturbingly, US diplomats in Paraguay saw Arabs at the border as capable of acting militaristically, instead of how they were actually being acted upon by ever more powerful militarized forces across and beyond the hemisphere.

After the September 11, 2001, attacks, US officials in the Pentagon, State Department, and elsewhere alleged that "Arabs at the tri-border" were organizing or supporting terrorism in a putatively lawless South America. This chapter instead showed that Arabs folded into Brazilian and Paraguayan state agendas that respectively demurred and deferred to this "war without end." Being accused of terrorist complicity, some Arabs responded by organizing the event Paz sem Fronteiras / Paz sin Fronteras / Peace without Borders, with support from Brazilian authorities who dismissed US accusations.

Meanwhile, a few Arabs in Ciudad del Este became informants and pointed out their business rivals as terrorists, who were then jailed for tax evasion by Paraguayan government officials from the same political party that had backed the thirty-five-year-long dictatorship. With no terrorists to be found at the border, US authorities equivocated and instead emphasized terrorist finance, explored in the next chapter. Whether Arabs at the border rebuffed or tried to substantiate such stances, they and their interlocutors overlooked the past of state-led terror in the present-day. In this beginning of a “war without end,” terrorism was never found among Arabs at the border, but its endless search advanced exceptional military influence in civilian governments across the hemisphere.

Speculative Accounts

Arabs remained subject to speculation amid systemic financial irregularities at the border. They remitted money from the border “to relatives in Lebanon,” unduly drawing suspicions of “terrorist” finance among some authorities and pundits, according to Mohamad Barakat.¹ In fact, far larger fortunes had dubiously moved from Brazilian banks to the Paraguayan side of the border and then elsewhere in what became known as the *caso Banestado* (Paraná State Bank case).² After signs of state complicity in the bank scandal, Fouad Fakih asked officials to absolve the “remittances that Arabs sent,” but suspicions nonetheless loomed.³

This chapter asks how Arabs performed and were cast in such accounts from the 1990s through the 2010s. Lebanese, Palestinians, Syrians, and others traded in Brazilian and Paraguayan currencies relative to the US dollar, remitting a portion of their livelihoods to Middle Eastern homelands. After 9/11, however, US authorities more vocally conjectured that such remittances could finance terrorism and tried to convince Brazilian and Paraguayan counterparts likewise. In an attempt to neutralize such speculation, Arabs joined the Foz do Iguaçu city government’s lawsuit against the Atlanta-based CNN network that depicted them as terrorist financiers. The US Treasury Department subsequently blocked the assets of some Arabs at the border, a few with reputations as *trambiqueiros* (tricksters) but not terrorists. Under such circumstances, Arab

charity-giving diminished in Foz do Iguaçu but coalesced around a new mosque in Ciudad del Este, buoyed by sales in upscale imports from East Asia. Arabs tried to offset illiberal security with liberal exchange that neither absolved nor incriminated them. Arabs drew upon and were drawn into a speculative America.

Building on Anna Tsing's work, I grasp speculative accounts at the border as "economic" and "dramatic," or as Bill Maurer likewise theorized, "numeric and narrative."⁴ My point of departure is a special account, called the CC5, used at Paraná State Bank agencies to remit tens of billions of dollars from Foz do Iguaçu to Ciudad del Este, and then elsewhere, during the 1990s and 2000s. Much earlier, Brazil's authoritarian regime created CC5 accounts as exceptional conduits for money sent abroad. However, Brazilian, Paraguayan, Argentine, Mercosur, and US officials debated not this authoritarian-era financial exception but instead whether Arabs at the border could fund terrorism. Likewise lacking a broader understanding of financial exceptions and irregularities, CNN represented border trade as terrorist finance after 9/11, leading the Foz do Iguaçu public prosecutor, a vocal critic of authoritarian rule in his youth, to initiate a lawsuit with Arab witnesses. Taking on economic and dramatic roles, Arabs folded into speculative accounts of a hemispheric America.

The suspicions of economic duplicity that had loomed over Arabs since authoritarian times, as noted previously, morphed into more recent counterterrorist financial conjectures that Marieke de Goede called "speculative security."⁵ This state exception to liberal democratic and market norms purports to identify and interrupt monies that presumably fund terrorist acts not yet conceived or carried out. The resultant "finance-security assemblage," for de Goede, is a "transnational landscape of laws, institutions, treaties, and private initiatives that play a role in fighting terrorism financing."⁶ In step with de Goede's emphasis that "speculative security" criminalizes migrant monies and overlooks big capital, I focus on the tactics employed by the accused. At the border, Arabs kept doing business and publicly mobilizing amid Brazilian, Paraguayan, Argentine, Mercosur, and US speculations. Neither freed from suspicions of financial wrong-doing nor formally charged with funneling money

for terrorist ends, Arabs at the border accommodated state exceptions in economic and dramatic ways.

Not Banking on Scandal and Suspicion

Arabs at the border sent money to the places they migrated from, such as Baaloul, Kabrikha, Lela, and elsewhere in the Beqaa Valley as well as in South Lebanon, and to a lesser extent, the West Bank, Jordan, and Syria. Their wealth underwrote what geographer Husein Amery called the “remittance economy” of Lela specifically.⁷ In 1989, Amery found that “ninety-seven out of 125 sampled households in Lela received remittances” from the Americas. This money financed house construction as well as public works, such as the building of a new mosque, repairs to an electrical grid, and a water well. Remitters thought of new houses not as permanent dwellings but rather as “summer retreats,” which they hoped would “attract and attach migrants’ foreign-born children to their parents’ homeland.”⁸ Indeed, *veranear* (“to pass the summer,” in Spanish and Portuguese) in Lebanon is a common transnational practice that required significant investment. As the largest migrant group at the border, Lebanese remitted most funds, but other Arabs sent monies too. Having been displaced from Palestine to Jordan before settling “in Brazil twenty years ago,” Mustafá Jaber likewise related, “I would send \$150, \$200, even \$300 dollars every month to my family, always with the expectation of returning to my land after the independence of Palestine.”⁹ Remittances from the border funded intermittent family vacations or eventual returns to respective homelands.

Multiple state powers monitored such financial flows. In 1992, Brazil’s Federal Revenue Secretariat (RF) expressed concern over “cases of repatriating money without taxation,” in the words of the RF director of Foz do Iguaçu, Adonis da Cunha Ramos.¹⁰ At the same time, US Treasury Department authorities met with Paraguayan counterparts to institute “binational mechanisms for the control and prevention of money-laundering” at this and other borders.¹¹ Six years later, in 1998, central banks from Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay signed accords to track bank accounts suspected of tax evasion and “money deposited in international accounts in bank agencies at

the border.”¹² In a Mercosur meeting at the border in the same year, the then General Director of Brazil’s Federal Police, Vicente Chelotti, stated that he and his counterparts investigated “money remittances sent outside the region,” finding that they “didn’t have anything to do with money remittances for terrorist groups.”¹³

Meanwhile, liberal democratic governments made exceptions for big capital to traverse this border through an authoritarian-era type of financial account. The account was known by the acronym CC5, after the Carta Circular nº 5 of 1969, issued by the then authoritarian regime.¹⁴ In 1996, the now liberal democratic Brazilian state passed an extraordinary measure for this account to operate specifically in Foz do Iguaçu, so that business owners in Ciudad del Este could continue to “exchange [Brazilian] reais spent in Paraguay for US dollars in Brazil,” as they had done up until that time, mentioned in the first chapter.¹⁵ State officials sought to encourage high-grossing businesses in Ciudad del Este to deposit Brazilian currency from Brazilian customers in CC5 accounts in Foz do Iguaçu, which could then be exchanged for US dollars and remitted back to businesses in Paraguay. For a Brazilian foreign ministerial official, who I call Victor, it was thought that enabling businesses on the Paraguayan side of the border to purchase US dollars on the Brazilian side would stabilize exchange rates as well as “facilitate and make more dynamic commercial relations at the border.”¹⁶ Brazil’s Central Bank selected branches of the Paraná State Bank (Banestado) in Foz do Iguaçu and chose managers in those branches to oversee the accounts.¹⁷ Consequently, traders in Ciudad del Este allegedly remitted “truckloads full of reais,” and later, electronic money transfers, to be exchanged for US dollars in Foz do Iguaçu and then sent back to Ciudad del Este.¹⁸

Instead of attracting only Brazilian currency disbursed in Ciudad del Este, this state exception enabled domestic Brazilian fortunes to be irregularly sent abroad. “Word spread” about CC5 accounts, according to Victor, and “a lot of people” set them up in order to send money from Brazil to Paraguay, and then elsewhere.¹⁹ Using the names of Paraguayan *laranjas* (fig., stooges, in Portuguese) to open the accounts in Foz do Iguaçu, Paraná State Bank managers received kickbacks by approving CC5 accounts for clients to

send money first to Paraguay, and then elsewhere. Money transfers through this kind of account in the 1990s and early 2000s were “colossal,” to use the Victor’s expression. One report estimated that some \$124 billion US dollars were sent abroad between 1992 and 1998, a staggering amount that persisted in subsequent years.²⁰ “Money was coming from every corner and funneled through Foz,” related a report from Brazil’s Federal Police.²¹ Victor reflected that “the rising cost of the US dollar between 1997 and 2004 had to do with this hole that opened up in Foz do Iguaçu.”²² As remitters bought US dollars in Brazil and then transferred those US dollars to Paraguay, the US dollar became more expensive and the Brazilian real became cheaper. Though one of the many players was the *doleiro* ([black-market] money-exchanger) Alberto Youssef, of Lebanese origin, originally from Londrina, a city some seven hours away by car from the border, Arabs in Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este were not suspects in these financial irregularities.²³

Arabs at the border did not bank on state scandal and scrutiny, but they had grown accustomed to subsequent fluctuations in hemispheric currencies. On the Paraguayan side, in 1999, Cherif Hammoud from Monalisa reflected that “the devaluation of the real” curtailed Brazilian buying power that hurt business in Ciudad del Este “because Brazilians make up 80 percent of our sales.”²⁴ Hassan Diab echoed that the weak Brazilian currency would “bankrupt” traders in Ciudad del Este, citing the case of his brother who lost 25 percent of the value of the “thirty thousand reais” he had “in his safe” when he exchanged them “for dollars.”²⁵ An electronics store manager, Hassan el Farras put it simply, “the dollar rose and everything got worse.”²⁶ Meanwhile, on the Brazilian side of the border, Ali Osman noted that Paraguayan clientele hoped for “a greater reduction in the price of Brazilian products” with the ongoing overvaluation of the US dollar.²⁷ His cousin in textiles noted that despite the “uncertainty in exchange rates,” the expensive dollar lowered the prices of Brazilian goods for Paraguayan customers. Akin businesses in the neighborhood of Vila Portes adjacent to the Friendship Bridge, featured in the first and fourth chapters, saw sales slightly improve due to a cheaper Brazilian currency that attracted clientele from the other sides of the border.

Arabs folded transnational projects into these hemispheric exchange rates. Mohamad, a twenty-something Brazilian of Palestinian origins, narrated his family's relocation in terms of Brazilian currency fluctuations relative to the US dollar. Mohamad was born in Foz do Iguaçu, but when he was five or so, his father moved the family to Jordan, in order for him and his siblings "to learn the language and religion." With a business at the border, the father converted earnings from the Brazilian real to the US dollar, and then into Jordanian dinars. In the 1990s, the family lived on these money transfers, and "every once in a while" they would visit "friends and relatives" in Foz do Iguaçu as his father oversaw the business at the border. But Mohamad specified that the real's devaluation and the dollar's overvaluation in the 1990s and early 2000s "didn't make it worthwhile," so the family returned to live in Foz do Iguaçu, where he studied at a nearby university. For Mohamad and others, the value of the Brazilian currency diminished after being remitted to the homeland. With a more expensive US dollar, Arabs themselves narrated the diminishing numeric value of their remittances to Arab homelands.

Consequently, "the Arab community" *pagou o pato* (fig., took the fall) for the multi-billion-dollar financial irregularities in the Paraná State Bank scandal, according to the Brazilian foreign ministerial official Victor.²⁸ In his view, US authorities speculated, "Why is there so much money sent" from the border? Mentioned last chapter, the US ambassador to Brazil Cristobál Orozco ostensibly answered the question by presuming "an economic support network of terrorism" around Foz do Iguaçu, though he admitted lacking proof.²⁹ The US State Department's counterterrorism coordinator Francis Taylor "worried" about "the darker side of commercial trade" at the border that could shelter "clandestine networks of persons and money" which "support terrorist organizations in the Middle East."³⁰ The US Subsecretary of State, Otto Reich, likewise speculated that "financial networks" at the border might garner "terrorist ties" without "necessarily" being "terrorist groups."³¹ Monblatt, Hrinak, and other US diplomats referenced last chapter, having failed to substantiate allegations of actual terrorists, repeated these conjectures concerning terrorist finance at the border.

US suspicions of terrorist finance at the border enabled the Brazilian state to avoid its own entanglement in irregular financial flows. Without any mention of the bank scandal, President FHC acknowledged that he did not know if “international terrorism could be laundering money in South America.”³² The highest-ranking general, Alberto Cardoso, surmised that the border “remains more conducive for laundered money to finance illegal activity, including terrorism.”³³ FHC’s foreign minister Celso Lafer went on the record that “money laundering” concerned “the Brazilian government,” and “the possibility” of financing terrorism “exists,” but any allegation needed to be investigated by the pertinent authorities.³⁴ Brazil’s ambassador to Paraguay, Luiz Augusto de Castro, hypothesized that some of the money laundered in Ciudad del Este “could finance Arab terrorism.”³⁵ But Brazil’s Justice Minister, José Gregori, dismissed “suspicions” of terrorist finance for the lack of evidence, verified by the Federal Police in an “anti-terror” working group under his command.³⁶ In the group, one officer expressed the hope to find “some financier of terror” while another qualified that the remittances “came from elsewhere” in Brazil.³⁷ Indeed, looking for terrorist financiers clouded rather than clarified domestic irregularities in state-approved financial conduits.

The drama of terrorist finance ended up rhetorically subsuming state investigations of financial irregularities committed by others with greater sums of wealth. The head of Paraguay’s Secretaría de Prevención de Lavado de Dinero (Money-Laundering Prevention Secretariat), César Arce, looked for but did not find “financial flows” to “terrorists” at the border, having just participated in a seminar on how to track terrorist monies in Washington, DC, after 9/11.³⁸ Paraguay’s Central Bank president, Raúl Vera Bogado, likewise opined that “there is grounds to suspect possible money-laundering . . . could be connected . . . to terrorist activities.”³⁹ He added that Paraguay and the US “closely collaborated” in order “to detect suspicious financial operations.” But a Paraguayan economist opined that tycoons, not “terrorists,” remitted fortunes from Brazil to Paraguay and then elsewhere because the Paraguayan state had lacked the technical means to follow monies sent abroad.⁴⁰ A Paraguayan journalist echoed that Brazilian moguls undertook

the lion's share of remittances to evade taxes, but the "blame" was placed on Paraguay.⁴¹

Under US pressures to pursue terrorist monies and Brazilian concerns with complicity in irregular money-transfers, the Paraguayan state "prevented" Arabs in Ciudad del Este "from sending money remittances abroad" a month after 9/11.⁴² Paraguay's Central Bank (BC) "blocked the bank accounts of holders of Arab origin due to suspicions that local traders could be helping to finance terrorist organizations that operate in the Middle East." The BC allegedly possessed a list of some forty names, mostly of Arab origin, who allegedly "sent more than US\$50 million to the Middle East in the last five years."⁴³ Fouad Fakih condemned the "recent steps to block bank accounts and imprison traders of Arab origin in Ciudad del Este."⁴⁴ Having led the Peace without Borders movement in Foz do Iguaçu, Fakih stated that money transfers from the border "pass through the Clearing House of New York and all that is needed is to identify the sender and receiver."⁴⁵ Government authorities subsequently failed to find any evidence between the frozen bank accounts and terrorist finance, but established a drama that drew attention away from state complicity in much larger financial irregularities.

From Terrorist-Finance Suspects to Victimized Appellants

Some state authorities tried to cast Arabs at the border as terrorist-finance suspects soon after 9/11. Celso Trê, the Brazilian federal prosecutor who investigated CC5 accounts, entertained the possibility of "terrorist participation" in the banking scandal. Trê conjectured that perhaps "there were many CC5 [accounts] utilized by persons of Arab origin," offering no evidence but mentioning Foz do Iguaçu's "dense population linked to the Arab world" and the "intercepted phone calls" from the border that he claimed were connected to the "terrorist act that occurred in Argentina."⁴⁶ Trê's showboating drew little support in Brazil but likely aided the state-supported extortion rackets shaking down Arabs on the Paraguayan side of the border, addressed in Chapters 4 and 5. Mentioned last chapter, Paraguay's federal prosecutor Carlos Cálcena cited Trê to

claim that Ciudad del Este was one of the “strongholds of the financial support of terror,” before Cálcena was denounced to the Organization of American States and tried for embezzling hundreds of thousands of dollars.⁴⁷

At the same time, other state authorities cast Arabs at the border as victimized appellants. Ten days after the baseless allegations, Antônio Vanderli Moreira, then public prosecutor of the Foz do Iguaçu government, filed a lawsuit for “compensatory damages” against Três.⁴⁸ Without stipulating a monetary amount, Moreira reasoned that the claims made by Três would worsen the “prejudice” against Arabs at the border and carry “negative repercussions” for the “imminently touristic” city of Foz do Iguaçu. Moreira implied that Três made the accusations as a self-serving publicity stunt because he took “no measures” to investigate.⁴⁹ Moreira called on long-time traders to testify, including Fouad Fakihi. In his deposition, Fakihi stated that Três “was offensive” to not only Foz do Iguaçu but also “Arabs who reside here,” voicing fears of a plummeting economy amid talk of terror. At the time, Fakihi criticized similar US speculations that “hurt all commerce in the region,” evident in “flight cancellations” and drops in hotel reservations that would enable the “US to finish off with the Treaty of Mercosur.”⁵⁰ In this account, Arabs at the border were not suspects but rather litigants in a defamation case.

Arabs at the border were both constrained and enabled by extraordinary measures, not only as suspects of terrorist finance but also as subjects of solidarity. Moreira, the public prosecutor taking up the defense of Arabs and the border, was born into a family of Italian and Portuguese origins in Rio Grande do Sul and moved to Foz do Iguaçu as a young lawyer, penned criticisms of authoritarian rule in the 1970s, and mounted the defense of Juvêncio Mazzarollo and *Nosso Tempo* in the 1980s, mentioned in the second chapter.⁵¹ Moreira explained, “since I arrived here [at the border], I’ve lived with Arabs and I knew that everything that was being published about them was a lie.”⁵² His defense earned accolades from Rogério Bonato, editor of *A Gazeta do Iguaçu*, which took up a similar public stance.⁵³ Bonato remembered an anonymous call made to his newspaper after 9/11, claiming that “Muslims were fundraising for

a terrorist organization” at an event hosted by the Omar Ibn al-Khattab mosque. *A Gazeta do Iguaçu* refuted the accusation because a journalist from the newspaper had covered the event, an ‘*eid* (holy day) marking the end of the fast during Ramadan, annually making headlines since the 1990s, as shown in the third chapter. The journalist stated, “I went to that event and nothing was collected for terrorists!”

Notwithstanding such civic solidarity, Arabs made prime-time news as seemingly rich racketeers on the Atlanta-based CNN. In the broadcast “Terrorists Find Haven in South America,” CNN portrayed the border as one of the world’s “busiest black markets” that sheltered and supplied “terrorists.”⁵⁴ The author, Harris Whitbeck, then a CNN correspondent based in Mexico City, twisted Arabs’ economic and political patrimony at the border as suspicious terrorist finance.⁵⁵ Whitbeck saw Arab businesses not as a half-century-long investment in real estate and civil society, but rather as a “revolving door for Islamic extremists” and “hundreds of millions of dollars of transactions” that allegedly “support terrorism.” Citing nameless authorities from Paraguay, Argentina, and the US, the CNN reporter ignored the objections of Brazilian officials, who were then investigating CC5 accounts. Attentive not to authoritarian legacies, but rather to counterterrorist liaisons, CNN twisted Arab trade and finance, occulted Brazilian demur, and emphasized Paraguayan and Argentine deference to the US after 9/11.

But Arabs at the border found recourse in the next day’s local news headline that read, “CNN Practices Terrorism against the Border,” which criticized the network for driving away tourists and wreaking “immeasurable” damage to “our economy.”⁵⁶ The Foz do Iguaçu mayor Sâmis da Silva characterized the CNN report as “verbal terrorism” and led an official delegation to meet with Brazil’s Justice Minister, José Gregori.⁵⁷ With Fouad Fakihi by his side, Silva related that tourists cancelled hotel reservations due to the speculative news coverage. Gregori responded that “the entire city” of Foz do Iguaçu “is victim of a defamatory campaign” akin to a “true witch-hunt” and he vowed to take measures to “redress the economic damage already done.”⁵⁸ Two weeks later, none other than Brazilian president FHC went on CNN and “guaranteed” that no

evidence of terrorism at the border was found in ongoing investigations.⁵⁹ Brazilian government and media authorities safeguarded Arabs and the border against what they perceived to be the deleterious repercussions of US speculations.

In efforts to change the dominant narrative, Arabs tried to accommodate foreign correspondents who reported on the border from metropolises like São Paulo, Buenos Aires, or even Mexico City, as in the case of CNN's Harris Whitbeck.⁶⁰ In one of several such instances, Magrão recounted his interaction with a US foreign correspondent for the Associated Press (AP) who reported on the border from his base in São Paulo.⁶¹ The AP reporter requested a phone interview, but Magrão insisted that he would only speak in person at his store near the Friendship Bridge. As discussed in the first and fourth chapters, the neighborhood of Vila Portes where Magrão opened his store reached prominence in the 1980s and endured Mercosur in the 1990s. Upon meeting Magrão, the AP correspondent admitted that he expected to land on a secret airstrip and travel through the jungle until reaching "Taliban-type soldiers" at the border. Instead, the reporter passed through an international airport, four-lane highways, urban neighborhoods, and more than a dozen and a half military or government posts around the Friendship Bridge. According to Magrão, the correspondent ditched his initial story based on speculation and ended up writing an account actually about this border.

But US media continued to cast Arabs at the border as suspects in a counterterrorist drama. CNN's Christiane Amanpour found a photograph of what she purported to be the Iguaçu/Iguazú waterfalls while she was embedded with US armed forces in Kabul, Afghanistan in 2001. On camera, Amanpour reported, "while we were scouring this now-abandoned house, we came across this picture on the wall. These are the falls of Iguazu [*sic*] in Brazil, and this is where US intelligence officials say they've identified terrorist cells that they say are linked to Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda network."⁶² The photograph was not of Iguaçu/Iguazú, but CNN avoided issuing any rectification. A year later, in 2002, another CNN reporter, Mike Boettcher, speculated that a "terrorist meeting" in Ciudad del Este brought together "groups linked to Osama Bin

Laden,” a recurrent charge made some six months before the *Veja* and *Washington Post* reporting, discussed last chapter.⁶³ Boettcher ignored Brazilian authorities with contrary views and referenced Argentine and Paraguayan counterparts who alleged “an increase of terrorist activity in the region.” Ignoring the multi-billion dollar state bank scandal, Boettcher thickened the plot of a counterterrorist drama, observing that “thousands of dollars move through Lebanese[-owned] currency exchanges, millions of dollars are spent on telephone bills, and there is an intense transfer of bank funds between the [South American] region and the Middle East.”⁶⁴

Both Brazilian and Paraguayan state authorities rebuked CNN’s vilification of Arabs at the border.⁶⁵ As in the previous year, the Foz do Iguaçu mayor characterized media coverage as the “terrorism of CNN.”⁶⁶ The mayor called for a “greater monitoring of the media to identify defamatory material” against the border. Likewise, Foz do Iguaçu city councilors unanimously approved a “motion of repudiation against the news story released by the CNN network.”⁶⁷ Javier Zacarías Irún, the mayor of Ciudad del Este, echoed that the border was “prejudiced by the irresponsible publication.”⁶⁸ Even the city council of Ciudad del Este voted to take legal action “against whom-ever accuses Ciudad del Este and the tri-border zone of being a nest of terrorists,” but opted for silence after alleged threats ostensibly made by the informant mentioned last chapter.⁶⁹ Having witnessed the steady decrease of historically high profits since the mid-1990s, Arabs at the border asked state authorities to “demand explanations” from CNN.⁷⁰

Arabs drew upon an established track record of seeking legal recourse on Brazil’s side of the border. In 2002, then secretary of tourism in Foz do Iguaçu, Neuso Rafagnin, compared “Arabs and Chinese” to “clouds of locusts” because they “devastate everything wherever they pass and afterwards go away.”⁷¹ Arabs threatened to sue the official for “xenophobia, racism, and prejudice and they demanded explanations for such declarations.” This litigious strategy worked. The following year, the same official dismissed US counterterrorist suspicions of Arabs, speculating that the US “began looking for terrorists” only after Arabs at the border bypassed Miami and the US by importing directly from East Asia.⁷² Rafagnin

characterized Arab residents as “good people” and the border as “being a victim of the international press.”⁷³ The point is that Arabs knew and exercised their rights at the border.

Arabs served as *testemunhas* (legal witnesses) in the lawsuit filed by the Foz do Iguaçu public prosecutor mentioned earlier, Antônio Vanderli Moreira. The lawsuit asked “for the reparation of moral damages” against Turner Internacional do Brasil Ltda., the owner of the now defunct website *cnn.com.br*, which translated and published Boettcher’s story.⁷⁴ Moreira declared that “the US government and its media stations” alleged “terrorism” at the border “due to the concentration of Arab immigrants” and “cannot continue stigmatizing an orderly people who helped shape this border.”⁷⁵ Moreira reasoned, “it was the duty of the public prosecutor to defend the people and the region.”⁷⁶ He showed that the number of tourists to the border decreased after calumnious reports of sheltering terrorists, and called upon Fouad Fakhri, Mohamed Barakat, Mohamad Ismail, and others to provide depositions, narrating their decades long history at the border as well as attesting to the “moral damage” caused by the unfounded reportage.⁷⁷

Through this legal performance, Arab traders were recast by themselves and others as appellants and witnesses, rather than terrorist financiers, in a speculative America. In 2004, the Second District Court of Foz do Iguaçu convened the first judicial conciliation between the Foz do Iguaçu city government and the CNN network. It ended without an agreement because the defendant, Turner Internacional do Brasil Ltda., alleged that it was not “the one responsible for the journalistic content produced by the network’s headquarters’ in the US and reproduced in Brazil.”⁷⁸ It argued that the lawsuit would have to be filed against the headquarters, Turner Broadcasting System, Inc., in Atlanta. At the time, Moreira considered this sort of response as “part of big international capital; they don’t want to know anything, they are above it all.” Moreira added that he did not expect to win the case but rather to “show that we didn’t agree with the defamatory campaign that was made” against Arabs and the border.⁷⁹

US Drama of Pursuing Terrorist Finance

Nonetheless, US authorities maintained that Arabs were shady money handlers at the border. In 2004, New York district attorney Robert Morgenthau testified to the US senate that his probe into Manhattan banks uncovered “millions of dollars” being “transmitted on behalf of parties from the tri-border region of Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay,” with no mention of the authoritarian-era bank accounts being investigated in Brazil.⁸⁰ A couple years afterwards, Morgenthau mused that he “broke up” a Middle Eastern terrorist-finance network at the border, though admitting “we know very little about the ultimate recipients and who the transmitters were.”⁸¹ In fact, some named in his report had been already indicted by a Brazilian task-force on the CC5 account scandal.⁸² Officials in Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este considered that more senior US officials invalidated Morgenthau’s claims, having declared that the border showed no signs of terrorism in a previous 3+1 meeting, mentioned last chapter.⁸³

But the US government had revised, not relinquished, this drama, which became about pursuing “terrorist finance,” and not just “terrorism.” In this new plot, in 2006, the US Treasury and State departments classified nine residents and two organizations at the border as “Specially Designated Nationals,” an exceptional euphemism for suspected terrorists and narcos.⁸⁴ Overseen by the Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), this black-listing was made possible by US president George W. Bush’s Executive Order 13224, “Blocking Property and Prohibiting Transactions with Persons Who Commit, Threaten to Commit or Support Terrorism,” signed into law soon after 9/11.⁸⁵ It aimed to freeze assets of “individuals and entities that commit, or pose a significant risk of committing, acts of terrorism,” including those who knowingly or unknowingly donate to groups denominated as terrorist by the US.⁸⁶ The executive order contributed to jurisdictional tensions between the US Treasury Department and the US State Department. In the pursuit of terrorist finance, Treasury and State department officials would have equal discretion over how to designate and block the assets of Specially Designated Nationals. As a brief instance, the

aforementioned case of Assad Ahmed Barakat was particularly complex. As a Specially Designated National, Barakat possessed assets in Paraguay and Brazil, and at the time, Paraguayan officials had requested his extradition from Brazil.⁸⁷ US government authorities were conflicted over how to freeze business and residential assets across domains under other sovereign states.

In this drama of pursuing terrorist finance, US embassies in Brasília and Buenos Aires recommended the Treasury “postpone” the plan to announce the “special designation” of some Arabs at the border.⁸⁸ A foreign service officer in Brasília requested more time to apprise Brazilian officials, who would otherwise “react poorly” and “decline to move forward with any asset freezes” if they were not previously given “evidence” of terror-finance that they “repeatedly questioned.”⁸⁹ Referring to the “tri-border area” by the acronym TBA, this officer called for “a strategy on TBA terror finance” that took seriously Brazilian requests for the US to “share . . . evidence of terror finance in the TBA.”⁹⁰ To do otherwise would “alienate the decision-makers whose actions are required to freeze any Brazilian assets belonging to these individuals” and “would leave the door wide open to asset flight,” as designees could move their finances elsewhere.⁹¹ An officer in Buenos Aires wrote that he “fully supports AmEmbassy Brasilia arguments” for the need to consider “local sensitivities” and coordinate “with local and regional security and intelligence agencies.”⁹² Two years previously, he remembered, the US agreed that no “operational acts of terrorism” existed at the border in the 3 + 1 meeting.⁹³ So the “public designation” of some residents as terrorist financiers would be understood as a US equivocation.⁹⁴ The designation was slightly postponed in a thickening plot.

Intrigue developed between US attorney-general Alberto González and Brazil’s Minister of Justice Márcio Thomaz Bastos, himself of Lebanese origins. In 2007, González stated that “more can be done” about terrorist financing at the border, but Bastos shot back that Brazilian intelligence used the latest technology to “constantly monitor the situation” at the border.⁹⁵ Brazilian officials from the ministries of Justice, Defense, and Foreign Relations, moreover, related to US counterparts that “Arab immigrants at the border with Argentina and Paraguay send money to the Middle East

that goes to their families. They're personal remittances."⁹⁶ Though "difficult" to differentiate between donations "all immigrants make," and "supposed actions to finance terrorism,"⁹⁷ the ABIN director, Márcio Paulo Buzanelli, mentioned last chapter, affirmed that the "money going there [Lebanon] doesn't feed terrorism," but rather charity and social services. He added, "since we [in Brazil] don't work with terrorist lists," as the US does, it would be "very difficult to pinpoint if some of this money goes to terrorism," adding that even the US government permits fundraising among Shia Lebanese in Dearborn, Michigan.⁹⁸ Still keeping Arabs under watch, Brazilian authorities rebuked the US.

In an unexpected plot twist, the US Treasury Department's OFAC issued a press release, publicizing the actual names of nine "special designated nationals" at the border, Muhammad Yusif Abdallah, Hamzi Ahmad Barakat, Hatim Ahmad Barakat, Mohammad Fayez Barakat, Saleh Mahmoud Fayad, Sobhi Mahmoud Fayad, Ali Muhammad Kazan, Farouk Omairi, and Mohamad Tarabain Chamas. It characterized them as members of "Assad Ahmad Barakat's network in the Tri-Border Area" and a "major financial artery to Hiz-bullah in Lebanon." OFAC's director declared that freezing their assets would "disrupt this channel" and "further unravel Barakat's financial network."⁹⁹ Over the course of the next year, Brazilian, Argentine, Paraguayan, and US news stories cited this press release from the Treasury Department's OFAC.¹⁰⁰ In 2007, *Revista Época* published an article about these "Muslims settling in Brazil and Paraguay," noting they "appear in a report of the US Department of Treasury."¹⁰¹ "According to the document," wrote *Revista Época*, they allegedly raised money through "contraband, drugs and arm-trafficking, counterfeiting dollars and passports," which allegedly "would help bankroll the activities of terrorist groups from the Middle East." Though noting that "Brazilian authorities complain" of unsubstantiated US claims, *Revista Época* and big media tended to de facto legitimize US counterterrorist speculations.

In another dramatic twist, some Arabs suspected that counterparts at the border deceptively accused other Arabs as terrorists, similar to the dynamics explored last chapter which fuel and fool counterterrorist measures. The *shaykh* of the Islamic Benevolent

Society, Mohamad Khalil, pointed out that the nine men on the list of terrorist-financiers *não são da mesma massa* (fig., are not cut from the same cloth), some are honest while others are unscrupulous. Khalil was born and raised in Lebanon, educated in Qom, and lived in Iran for some thirteen years. In 1998, he arrived in Curitiba to administer the mosque and came to serve the Islamic Benevolent Society in Foz do Iguaçu, whose members often run businesses in Ciudad del Este. After asking about the “specially designated nationals” on each side of the Friendship Bridge, Khalil and others discerned that all were owed money by the same Arab trader in Ciudad del Este, himself suspected of being an informant of Paraguayan law enforcement. The sheikh reasoned that the individual perhaps tried to free himself of debts by listing his Arab creditors as terrorist financiers at the border. Animating this America, Arabs speculated about their own business rivalries at the border in a US-led drama of pursuing terrorist monies.

Hardly upstaged, US government authorities expressed increasing suspicion over Arab donations and remittances. In 2003, Steven Monblatt, then the US head of the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism, called upon Arabs at the border to make more “transparent” their donations to charities in Lebanon and Palestine, in order to prevent such money from being suspected as terrorist finance.¹⁰² Two years later, the State Department warned against the “bulk cash smuggling and the abuse of charities” in “potential terrorist fundraising activities” at the border.¹⁰³ In agreement, the US Treasury Department speculated that alleged terrorist financiers at the border may use “corrupt charities” and take advantage of “those who wittingly and unwittingly donate to them.”¹⁰⁴ In a 2006 interview with Brazil’s *Folha de S. Paulo*, the FBI director of international operations likewise qualified that “the money that was or is being transmitted to the Middle East” from the border is “a grey area,” because Arabs “donate money with good intentions.”¹⁰⁵ But Brazil’s ambassador to Paraguay observed that “Arab community members in the region of Ciudad del Este” make “remittances . . . with the sole objective of financially supporting their families.”¹⁰⁶ Recurrently questioned by Brazilian counterparts, US authorities failed to provide the sort of evidence to consolidate their performance.

Nonetheless, Arab fundraising became emblematic not of civic engagement but rather of its suspension in an exceptional order. In 2010, the US Treasury Department's press release alleged that Ali Kazan and Sheikh Sayyed Bilal Mohsen Wehbe "raised more than \$500,000 for Hizballah from Lebanese businessmen in the TBA [Tri-Border Area]" after Israel bombed Lebanon four years previously.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, the US Treasury had already listed Kazan as one of the Specially Designated Nationals, and later added Wehbe. But at the border, most associated each of them with organizing civic associations and running educational institutions. According to Reda Soueid, Wehbe assisted the Islamic Benevolent Society in Foz do Iguaçu, raising support for the Escola Libanesa Brasileira that opened in Foz do Iguaçu in 2000.¹⁰⁸ As mentioned previously, Wehbe appointed Kazan as director of that school, but the US list of terrorist finances distorted community fundraising that has a long history at the border. In the 1990s, Ziad Fahs, featured in Chapter 3, claimed that on the occasion of 'Ashura, traders donated some US\$800,000 for the Centro Educacional Libanés in Ciudad del Este.¹⁰⁹

Arabs speculated that government authorities twisted this and other acts of charity in order to validate the drama of terrorist finance. In the 1990s and 2000s, some Lebanese-owned stores at the border made room near cash registers for small donation boxes whose proceeds were destined for war victims in Lebanon and Palestine. In these taken-for-granted containers, customers would place small bills of reais or guaranis, whose worth relative to the US dollar was low, for reasons mentioned earlier. Immediately after 9/11, however, Paraguayan authorities raided the stores in Ciudad del Este and confiscated the boxes, and some storeowners that had the donation boxes on countertops were listed as potential financiers of terrorism. "That's how they [government authorities] fabricated the connection" between Arab trade and terrorism, explained Khalil, "collecting money in these small boxes for families in Lebanon turned into 'financing the terrorists of Hizbullah and Hamas.'" ¹¹⁰

Accordingly, public-spirited collections diminished amid fears of what Sociedade Beneficente Muçulmana (SBM) president Jamil Ibrahim Iskandar called Islamophobia, which for him meant

“Muslims becoming synonymous with terrorists.”¹¹¹ According to Iskandar, the CNN report in 2001 that associated Islam with terrorism at the border worsened some six years later when *Revista Época* publicized the US Treasury Department allegations. As a result, he reflected, “the community is reluctant in expressing its culture and religion,” especially through charity. This aversion arose when SBM’s religious leader Sheikh Khalil floated the idea of sponsoring a dinner to raise money for victims of the Israeli war on Lebanon in 2006, mentioned at the end of last chapter. He got the idea from a similar event in Curitiba that raised a humble sum of money for war relief in Lebanon. But most at the border feared that any act to raise funds for the homeland would be twisted as “financing Hizbullah.”¹¹² Khalil explained that many lack any sympathy for Hizbullah, despite assumptions to the contrary. Though the SBM president and religious leader concurred that migrants continued remitting “money to family members in the Middle East,” some shied away from fundraising under such surveillance.

The Arab Unity Club in Foz do Iguaçu, the first civic association at the border explored in the first and second chapters, temporarily closed its doors under such circumstances in the 2000s. Previously, the club had made local news for board elections and commemorative galas.¹¹³ Twenty or so traders had served as major patrimonial donors, each contributing R\$50,000 to provide the club’s financial basis of some R\$1,000,000 “or 500,000 dollars” (then currency exchange estimates).¹¹⁴ But the club’s regular members stopped giving amid US-derived suspicions of charity donations, exacerbated by *Revista Época* and the widely disseminated US Treasury Department list with names of specially designated Brazilians and Paraguayans of Arab origin. Indeed, Arab Unity Club members failed to raise even a modest sum requested by the board of directors to keep the club’s doors open. Given the fact that Arabs at the border would not even contribute to maintain a non-profit entity with civic ends that was established decades previously, Nasser rhetorically asked, why would they be sending millions of dollars to “terrorists in the Middle East”?¹¹⁵

“The community feels very watched,” emphasized Sheikh Khalil from the Islamic Benevolent Society.¹¹⁶ Khalil recalled a visit from a young man with Lebanese parents, born in Brazil, who “speaks

Arabic well.” The young man gave his card, and asked to be contacted if any questionable activity arose. “If I discover something,” reasoned Khalil, “I’m going directly to the police. Why would I call this man?”¹¹⁷ With mosques and religious gatherings open to the public, Khalil explained, “I’m not afraid of informants. I’m afraid of the informant who lies, who adds or invents things.” Khalil, and everyday Arabs, drew attention to the role of state authorities and unaccountable informants with vested interests in speculative security.

The Exceptional Rise of the Este

Arabs in Ciudad del Este expanded supply chains through, and not in spite of, state exceptions to democracy and the market. In the mid-1990s, Samir and Ibrahim Jaber, naturalized Paraguayan citizens of Lebanese origin, opened the Centro Pioneer, specializing in car audio and home theatre electronics.¹¹⁸ Importing from China, Japan, the US, Panama, and elsewhere, their business earned annual profits of over US\$100 million by the 2000s. At the same time, the Centro Pioneer and other businesses in Ciudad del Este made headlines for alleged “tax evasion” whereby Paraguayan tax officials initiated and later suspended audits for what *ABC Color* called “huge” kick-backs.¹¹⁹ Without referencing state tax irregularities, the Pioneer Corporation in Japan honored Samir Jaber “for the quantities of sales reached” in 2012. A Paraguayan colleague stated that Jaber deserved this “international distinction” for “working in legal, formal, and transparent” ways “that have their costs.”¹²⁰ He noted Jaber’s “entrepreneurial spirit” and his leadership in the Chamber of Commerce of Electronics and Appliances of Paraguay (CIEEP) as “summarily positive for Ciudad del Este.”

In Ciudad del Este, Arabs’ own accounts of their trade underscore not Paraguayan or US exceptional pursuits of financial assets but rather the rise of China. Arabs increasingly imported from China in the 2000s, though trade relations between Paraguay and East Asia date back decades.¹²¹ Within the first decade of the twenty-first century, a manager in La Petisquera, Khaled, witnessed Chinese businesses grow seven-fold in trade fairs across Europe, Asia, and elsewhere. Khaled migrated from Lela to Ciudad del Este, like

the Mannah brothers who own the business. As the acquisitions manager in perfumery, Khaled explained that the pump, glass, and packaging of the perfume are produced in China, which now supplies much of the higher-end line in La Petisquera. Matter-of-factly taking note of what anthropologist Arjun Appadurai called “production fetishism,” Khaled explained that “the end-product” is “Made in France” because “the perfume itself,” which “is more difficult to produce,” is “still made in France.”¹²² Khaled implied that many in Ciudad del Este share the same understanding in importing luxury brands, such as Armani, Gucci, Louis Vuitton, and others, which are mostly manufactured in China.¹²³ Having brought in goods from Panama since the 1960s and Miami since the 1990s, as explored previously, La Petisquera and other businesses in Ciudad del Este helped China make up 34 percent of all imports into Paraguay as of 2011.¹²⁴ Arab transnational trade at the border, like elsewhere in South America, turned to the *Este*.

Arabs gave distinct reasons for the border’s turn toward Asian-centered supply chains. Said Taijen reflected that he and others initially shifted away from US free trade zones due to the politics of obtaining a US visa. Arabs experienced difficulty traveling to Miami in the 1990s, as related in Chapter 4, but Taijen explained that, after 9/11, a rumor spread that Arab Paraguayans were asked to become informants when they requested or applied to renew a visa at the US embassy in Asunción. “We want to help you . . . to give you a visa,” US consular officers supposedly told Taijen’s interlocutors, “but you need to help us too.”¹²⁵ As this perhaps apocryphal tale spread, Taijen concluded, Arabs started to look for other places to do business, namely in “Popular China, Taiwan, Korea, and India,” as well as in “Singapore, Malaysia, and even Pakistan.” For Fouad Fakih, though, Arab businesses, “as in any other part of the world went to China for the price.”¹²⁶ He explained that the turn toward Asian market suppliers has not diminished the power that the US still possesses over patents and intellectual property that underwrite such manufacturing.¹²⁷ Taijen and Fakih made distinct speculations about the US in the border’s economic shift toward Asia.

Arabs also led Paraguayan-US joint commercial ventures in order to serve a still predominantly Brazilian clientele. In 2005, Ghassan

Nassar and his brother Hicham brought together Paraguayan and US investors in the group Initial SA.¹²⁸ As naturalized Paraguayan citizens of Lebanese origins, the Nassar brothers ran the firm Pioneer Internacional that competed with the Jaber's, mentioned earlier. Their transnational group acquired property to build a new shopping center one hundred meters from the Friendship Bridge that Brazilians still crisscross to shop in Ciudad del Este. Paraguayan government officials sold this property, once owned by the "deceased dictator Alfredo Stroessner," at allegedly below-market values, raising suspicions of pay-offs.¹²⁹ The construction of the shopping center's marble-like floors and clear glass windows proceeded and retail space was rented out by 2008. Named Shopping del Este, this "sophisticated side" of Ciudad del Este featured high-end boutiques of clothing and accessories as well as shops for home decoration and design. Imported from mostly Asia, name brands like Calvin Klein, Casa Bella, Nike, and Ralph Lauren "attract consumers with greater buying power," overwhelmingly from Brazil.¹³⁰ Financed by US investors and patronized by Brazilian consumers, the Nassar brothers' ventures were apparently investigated but never formally charged by Paraguayan fiscal authorities.¹³¹

Arabs invested profits back into the Paraguayan border city still governed by the same political party of the defunct dictatorship. In 1996, the children of Ali Said Rahal from the Casa de la Amistad, introduced in the first chapter, inaugurated the Grupo Rahal, after their father's store had expanded into the Galeria Rahal with more than seventy-five retail spaces. Under this group, they opened the Fenix Trading Company, an authorized dealer for Panasonic with distribution rights for Nokia in Paraguay and Bolivia, as well as Anovo, which serviced respective warranties and provided other assistance for East Asian-led electronics companies.¹³² Their suppliers and buyers can stay at the Hotel California they also own in Ciudad del Este, which annually receives tens of thousands of visitors. Most importantly, the Grupo Rahal runs the multi-million-dollar Fenix Emprendimientos Inmobiliarios SA (Fenix Real Estate Developments). In 2011, it constructed the Don Alí building, named after the father, in an upper-middle-class part of Ciudad del Este.¹³³ For the group's CEO, Maaty Rahal, the technologically integrated

building introduced a new legal model for apartment building ownership and land trusts in Paraguay.¹³⁴ The mayor, Sandra MacLeod, whose Colorado Party ruled the Paraguayan border town for more than six decades, stated that the building represents “all the pride of Ciudad del Este.”¹³⁵

Arabs have grown used to doing business at the border under exceptional rule. Next to the Galeria Rahal but across from the Shopping del Este is S.A.X. in the King Fong shopping center, inaugurated by Armando (Ahmad) Nasser in 2008. Featured in the Brazilian *Isto É*, Armando explained that the store’s insignia stands for “Style, Arts, and Xtras,” in reference to the Saks on Fifth Avenue.¹³⁶ Dior, Giorgio Armani, Prada, and Versace brands occupy a retail space as large as a NFL football field that includes a bistro and café too. Nasser reflected, “I wanted to offer Brazilians and Paraguayans the chance to buy quality products, in a sophisticated atmosphere, and without the exorbitant prices like those of São Paulo.” The store’s website shows illustrious clients such as Brazilian Minister of Justice José Eduardo Cardozo and Brazilian senator Álvaro Dias, as well as the Paraguayan minister and vice-minister of Industry and Commerce.¹³⁷ Today, Nasser noted that 60 percent of his customers are Brazilian and their purchases individually average around two thousand US dollars. Only fourteen years old when he arrived in Paraguay in 1979, his first store specialized in imported spirits and cigarettes, and with the profits, a decade later Nasser founded the Grupo Fenícia.¹³⁸ In 2014, the group’s real estate arm, 5 Star Empreendimentos Imobiliários Ltda, sealed a “management services agreement” with Hyatt Hotel Corporation for a Park Hyatt hotel in Foz do Iguaçu.¹³⁹ At the same time, his business drew the scrutiny of Paraguayan state authorities who pressed charges of tax evasion and considered dismissing the charges a year later.¹⁴⁰

Arabs contributed to what a Paraguayan economist called Ciudad del Este’s “more independent position,” less beholden to Asunción, Brasília, and even Miami. In 2007, Arabs co-founded Fedecamaras, the Federation of Chambers of Commerce of Ciudad del Este.¹⁴¹ Fedecamaras brought together several trade associations, including Samir Jaber’s Cámara de Importadores de Electrónica y Electrodomésticos del Paraguay, mentioned earlier in this chapter;

the Hammoud brothers' Cámara de Importadores y Comerciantes del Alto Paraná, discussed in the fourth chapter; the Cámara de Comércio de Ciudad del Este that Said Taijen helped found and run, introduced in the first chapter; and others headed by Chinese, Koreans, and Paraguayans. In 2008, they hosted a delegation of Miami free trade zone representatives, US and Paraguayan state authorities, and Paraguayan-American Chamber of Commerce members. The CEO and officers of the Miami free zone promised "a faster, more efficient, and cheaper supply chain" for Ciudad del Este through the free trade zones in southern Florida.¹⁴² In the Q&A, Taijen asked the delegation to explain why US consular offices in Asunción revoked or failed to renew visas for Arab Paraguayans and why US customs singled them out in Miami. US representatives replied that they were not aware of such matters.¹⁴³ For Taijen, the delegation made an unconvincing pitch to regain its once voluminous trade with Ciudad del Este.

Arabs' snub of a US commercial mission occurred just as Paraguayan president Fernando Lugo (2008–2012) interfered in the six-decades-long rule of the Colorado Party, the political party of Stroessner's regime that had remained in power after the internal military coup. Soon after his surprise electoral victory, Lugo declared his intention to debunk the myth of "sleeper cells" at the border because "Ciudad del Este, just like Paraguay, has the right to look at the world with its head high."¹⁴⁴ Around this time, Assad Ahmad Barakat earned parole from prison in Paraguay and returned to Foz do Iguaçu.¹⁴⁵ Sobhi Mahmoud Fayad, previously jailed for tax evasion by Paraguayan law enforcement,¹⁴⁶ and "specially designated" by the US Treasury Department, was released in 2008 as well. Shortly afterward, in Foz do Iguaçu, Fayad made an appearance at a three-hundred-person dinner that the Sociedade Beneficente Islâmica held in honor of visiting Lebanese deputy Ali Khalil of the AMAL party, who represented the Lebanese state at Lugo's inauguration in Asunción. At the resort hotel where the reception for the visiting Lebanese dignitary was held, an Arab Brazilian colleague characterized the release of Barakat and Fayad as "signs" of Lugo's "attempt to curb" US influence in Paraguay.¹⁴⁷ In 2008, the US State Department's annual report on terrorism

commented not on the release of Barakat and Fayad, but only continued concerns “that Hizballah and HAMAS sympathizers were raising funds in the Tri-Border Area by participating in illicit activities and soliciting donations,” and repeated those concerns in subsequent years.¹⁴⁸ Before President Lugo was forced to leave office through what neighboring states judged to be an unconstitutional impeachment process in 2012, Arabs speculated that Paraguay had tried to limit US influence at the border.

Arab investments in Ciudad del Este interrupted the drama of terrorist finance. Under Lugo’s administration, in 2011 Arabs began mobilizing for a new mosque.¹⁴⁹ One of the organizers, Khaled from La Petisquera, called the new mosque a “contribution to . . . Ciudad del Este as well as a *destino* (destination) that people like to visit.”¹⁵⁰ At the ground-breaking ceremony in 2012, Lugo’s vice-minister of culture, Hugo Brítez, characterized the mosque in similar terms. “This city will have a new icon,” he began. “It will be a meeting place, not only for the exercise of faith, but also . . . for those who visit us from afar.”¹⁵¹ Community organizers and state authorities alike spoke of the new mosque in terms of tourist development, citing the example of the mosque in Foz do Iguaçu that attracts thousands of tourists each month, brought up in the third chapter.¹⁵² Accordingly, Sunni Lebanese organizers avoided publicly discussing the previously mentioned Mezquita del Profeta Mohammed where Shia Lebanese prayed in Ciudad del Este during the past two decades. Khaled emphasized that in the new mosque, “anyone can enter, Shia, Sunni, and so on, like a Muslim can enter in any church.”¹⁵³ In 2015, Paraguayan president Horácio Cartes (2013–2018) of the Colorado Party inaugurated the new mosque.¹⁵⁴ The Sunni Lebanese organizers chose the official name of Alkhaulafa Al-Rashdeen (Rightly-Guided Caliphs or Rulers, in Arabic, a phrase not used by Shia), but the mosque is usually referred to as the Mezquita del Este (Mosque of the East, in Spanish), some blocks south of the microcenter. The Ciudad del Este mayor, Sandra McLeod of the Colorado Party, and the Foz do Iguaçu mayor, Rení Pereira, among others, participated in the inauguration of the mosque that Said Taijen called a “symbol of cosmopolitan multiculturalism” in Paraguay.¹⁵⁵

But Hollywood refused to let go of the drama. A “big budget action film” about “organized crime” at this “notorious” border, called *Triple Frontier*, was announced by Kathryn Bigelow and Paramount Pictures in 2009.¹⁵⁶ Bigelow reunited with screen writer Mark Boal, from the Academy Award-winning *The Hurt Locker*, but they put aside the project after Brazilian, Paraguayan, and Argentine authorities declared their unanimous opposition.¹⁵⁷ The Foz do Iguaçu city government issued an official statement that asked to approve the script before “the release of any touristic image” because “the supposed theme of the film” may ignore “the lack of proof that traders, associations, or persons of Arab origin at the border are connected to the financing of Islamic terrorist groups.”¹⁵⁸ The Paraguayan Minister of Tourism in Lugo’s government, Liz Cramer, likewise warned of the “prejudice” that the film “will bring to us all” at the border.¹⁵⁹ A year later, however, José Padilha of the famed *Tropa de Elite* (*Elite Squad*) announced his intention to make a similar movie called *Tri-Border*. In his words, the movie would be set at “the frontier of three countries, in which one finds many different players operating . . . including Lebanese smugglers suspected of helping Hamas and Hizbullah, as well as corrupted police and politicians from Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina.”¹⁶⁰ Padilha went on to co-produce and co-direct *O Mecanismo* (*The Mechanism*) on Netflix.¹⁶¹ It dramatizes a political crisis surrounding corruption investigations and features scenes from the Friendship Bridge and Ciudad del Este that perpetuate long-standing Argentine, Brazilian, and US denigrations of Paraguay.¹⁶² In 2019, Bigelow’s script writer, Mark Boal, teamed up with director J. C. Chandor for another Netflix production starring Ben Affleck, Oscar Isaac, and other A-list actors. With the original title, *Triple Frontier*, the film was shot on the outskirts of Bogotá in Colombia, southern California, and the O’ahu island of Hawaii, but the fictional storyline of money and mayhem still took place at a vague South American borderland.¹⁶³ Big media globalized US-derived visions of a fictional, lawless land “down south of the Rio Grande.”

Meanwhile, Arabs remained under suspicions of terrorist finance while (non-Arab) suspects in the multi-billion-dollar financial irregularities of the Banestado case went unpunished. A then

little-known federal judge in Curitiba, Sérgio Moro, presided over the case between 2003 and 2007. Moro subsequently served as judge in the *lava-jato* or Car Wash case, investigating systemic financial irregularities overshadowing the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff (2012–2016) and leading to the imprisonment of former President Lula, each of the center-left PT. In both cases, Moro gained nationwide recognition through proceedings against hundreds of suspects and was even mythologized by the aforementioned José Padilha in the first season of *O Mecanismo*. But according to former governor and senator Roberto Requião, most of the proceedings in the Banestado case overseen by Moro resulted in “acquittal due to lack of evidence” or were de facto suspended by the “inertia of the Federal Police and of the Attorney General’s Office” (Ministério Público Federal).¹⁶⁴ Used to irregularly remit tens of billions of dollars in the 1990s and 2000s, the CC5 accounts in the Banestado case allegedly implicated the center-right PSDB-led coalition that commanded the federal government at the time. But the elite Brazilian suspects implicated in the Banestado scandal remained exempt from investigations. This exceptional rule of justice threw the book at some, turned a blind eye to others, and failed to exonerate speculations about Arabs at the border.

Arabs in Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este were subject to speculation in multiple accounts, economically and imaginatively, from the 1990s to the 2010s. Importing and exporting goods since they settled at the border, Arabs were suspected of evading taxes or unduly taking advantage of liberal trade policies at the border under authoritarian military rule. But their cross-border trade and finances came under closer scrutiny after the transition to civilian-led democratic and market regimes, which produced exceptions that selectively expedited and exploited as well as distorted and defended them. Investing in transnational lifestyles by sending monies to Lebanon, Palestine, and other Middle Eastern homelands, Arabs became embroiled in probes of irregular bank transfers as well as pursuits of terrorist monies. Though Arabs in Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este were not involved in the state bank accounts that

irregularly remitted massive sums of money from Brazil to Paraguay and then elsewhere, their trade and finances remained as matters of speculation among Argentine, Brazilian, Paraguayan, Mercosur, and US powers.

CONCLUSION

Make America Exceptional Again?

Arabs animate and abide in an American hemisphere where US power was once considered a “manifest destiny.” In 2019, a Brazilian colleague of Lebanese origin, who I call Guilherme here, provided a telling instance that took place in the US Immigration and Customs Area of the Miami International Airport, infamous for the profiling of Arabs from South America discussed in the fourth chapter.¹ Guilherme handed over his Brazilian passport with the appropriate visa. The visibly nervous US immigration and customs official inquired about his ostensibly Arabic-sounding last name. Though not surprised by this particular line of questioning, Guilherme grew perplexed when asked if he lived in Foz do Iguaçu or near the “waterfalls.” In response, Guilherme explained that he was from Brasília, the capital of Brazil. The border official promptly stamped his passport and bid him entry to the US. At American border-crossings in Foz do Iguaçu, Ciudad del Este, or even Miami, Arabs grew accustomed to not democratic due process but rather the state exception denying or granting it. Their decades-long accommodation reveals a hemispheric history of making America exceptional again.

In what I have called a “manifold destiny,” Arabs came to terms with exceptional rule, connecting and connected by a hemispheric America. From the 1960s to the 1990s, Arabs helped the

authoritarian and post-authoritarian rise of Brazil over historically US- and Argentina-dominated Paraguay. Their trade and activism lent greater autonomy in a semiperipheral America, bore the limits to liberation in a Third World America, and tested faith in an Ummah America. Subsequently, from the 1990s to the 2010s, Arabs negotiated the counterterrorist reach of Mercosur and the US. Their trade and activism paid a high price for a free trade America, negotiated peace but also profited in a war-torn America, as well as dramatized a speculative America. Lebanese, Palestinians, and Syrians were constrained, enabled, and came to terms with authoritarian and counterterrorist powers. Though spurious security studies allege their border presence contravenes the hemisphere, my work contends that Arabs drew and were drawn into this American crossroads of exceptional rule.

Attentive to this folding, the account here extended the transnational turn of Middle East studies into American studies, Brazilian studies, and Latin American and Latino studies. I inserted a mobile Middle East into what Juan Poblete called the “unmarked center” of area and ethnic studies once inhabited by the US.² By redrawing fields with hemispheric proportions through a Middle Eastern border presence, the aim was to achieve a more “fully globalized study of the Americas,” to again paraphrase José David Saldívar.³ At the border, Arabs’ transnational projects draw upon and are drawn into a hemispheric America. Instead of beginning or ending in Euro-American metropolises, Arabs at the border bring the “trans-” of a transnational Middle East into the “trans-” of a transamerican hemisphere. Though not questioning the categories of coloniality that created this hemisphere,⁴ they are hardly bearers of a false consciousness, acknowledging their own relative accommodation of extraordinary measures in Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, Mercosur, and the US.

Arabs at the border are circumstantial protagonists in nothing less than a novel understanding of the contemporary American hemisphere. They bore witness to the past decades of authoritarian rule that did not simply culminate in liberal democracy, but rather presaged present-day counterterrorist controls, involving militarized forces that never entirely returned to the barracks but instead

took up positions in domestic security and intelligence operations. Heretofore presumed as separate subjects, authoritarian and counterterrorist politics constitute the crossroads where Arabs have lived and worked in Brazilian and Paraguayan states, under the watch of Argentina, Mercosur, and the US. Accordingly, the first part of this book, set between the 1960s and the 1990s, explored Arab trade and activism under authoritarian and post-authoritarian governments that made liberal exceptions to an illiberal status quo, and illiberal exceptions in a liberalizing transition. The second part of this book looked at Arab trade and activism in Mercosur and the US war on terror, which made mostly illiberal exceptions to liberal market and democratic norms. During the second half of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first century, Arabs experienced not democratic fulfillment but rather exceptional measures in this hemispheric America.

In contrast to books titled “before and after 9/11” that emphasize September 11, 2001,⁵ my work centers around the 1990s as the key decade of change and continuity. While the book’s first half culminates in the aftermath of the still unresolved bombing of AMIA in Buenos Aires in 1994, the second half takes off with the Mercosur accords that had been signed previously but went into effect in 1995. Military rulers had been replaced by, or reinvented themselves as, civilian successors, but states continued making exceptions in trade and diplomacy. Arabs at the border accommodated extraordinary measures, but shifted from semiperipheral to free trade, from Third World to war-torn advocacy, as well as from Ummah to more speculative ventures. Attentive to such changes at the border, this study has put greater emphasis on the degree of continuity that Arabs have experienced under varying forms of exceptional rule. Under circumstances not entirely of their own choosing, Arabs at the border have come to terms with authoritarian legacies as well as counterterrorist liaisons.

Arabs’ accommodation, and not rejection, of state powers took shape under seemingly “strange” authoritarian norms and continue today under more “familiar” counterterrorist intrusions. Indeed, anthropology’s old tenet, “to make the strange familiar, and the familiar strange” guided my approach to hemispheric formation.

Rather than relativize the boundaries between “us” and “them” originally indexed by the expression, I blurred those categories by projecting the “strange” and “familiar” onto a hemispheric field of exceptional rule. I sought to make familiar the authoritarian and post-authoritarian governments whose strange exceptions enabled semiperipheral commerce, Third World activism, and Ummah organization. I likewise endeavored to make strange democratic regimes that oversee counterterrorist controls whose familiar exceptions authorized free trade security, war with neither a beginning nor an end, as well as dramatic and economic speculation. This anthropological approach to the hemisphere relativizes authoritarian and counterterrorist rule in “our America.” It critically redirects attention from what Arabs at the border did, and didn’t do, to what sorts of state exceptions they and others came to terms with, in a process not yet over.

At a crossroads of exceptional rule, Arabs renewed what Ella Shohat and Robert Stam called the “struggle over representation,” mentioned earlier.⁶ In 2016, on the Brazilian side of the border, some of the traders and activists from the Barakat, Ghazzaoui, Hassan, Hijazi, Osman, and Rahal families participated in the documentary *Árabes no Paraná*.⁷ Sponsored by Itaipu, with support from the Foz do Iguaçu city government, Arabs told their own stories within the matrix of modernity/coloniality that decolonial critics Aníbal Quijano and Walter D. Mignolo theorized.⁸ The documentary opened with black and white images of Guaraní Indians and a quote from the Spanish explorer Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, the first European chronicler of the Iguaçu/Iguazú falls, introducing Arabs as one of the more recent groups that settled at this crossroads. On the Paraguayan side, Said Taijen, Khaled Ghotme, and others in the city’s newly constructed Mezquita del Este and the older Centro Educativo Libanés collaborated in “Migración Árabe en Paraguay,” an episode of the *Invisibles* program of RPC (Red Paraguaya de Comunicación, Paraguayan Network of Communication).⁹ Also within the modernity/coloniality matrix, this program referenced both the Guaraní and Spanish languages in the “cosmopolitan spirit”

of Ciudad del Este where Arabs “don’t feel like strangers.” Taijen expressed his “sincere thanks to successive government administrations, not only the present-day one” (in 2016), carefully acknowledging both the Paraguayan military regime’s political party that monopolized power for some six decades as well as the only elected president not from that party, Fernando Lugo, under whose mandate the Mezquita del Este began to be built, noted last chapter. Without the “epistemic difference” of “border thinking,” Arabs sought accommodation, not “radical exteriority,” to the status quo in an exceptional order not yet over.

Folding into the hemisphere, their transnational ties varied in respective national settings. On the one hand, Arabs in Foz do Iguaçu and Ciudad del Este had a long-standing interplay with national metropolises in Brazil and Paraguay. As noted, Arabs on the Brazilian side of the border engaged in commercial and civic exchanges with suppliers and community associations in São Paulo while Arabs on the Paraguayan side did so with Asunción. Today, some of their children and grandchildren, born and raised at the border, now pursue undergraduate and graduate study or work opportunities in São Paulo, Asunción, or elsewhere. On the other hand, however, Arabs at the border occupy distinct positions in respective national public spheres. In Foz do Iguaçu, Arabs speak or are spoken about as “a segunda maior comunidade árabe do Brasil” (the second largest Arab community in Brazil), after São Paulo. Once a colleague remarked that Foz do Iguaçu would become the largest because “a colônia em São Paulo está morrendo,” (the community in São Paulo is dying), allegedly.¹⁰ But I never heard Arabs in Ciudad del Este represented in such ways. As discussed, many who operate stores on the Paraguayan side actually reside on the Brazilian side of the border, but even those who both live and work in Ciudad del Este prefer to keep a lower profile. Indeed, José Daniel Nasta’s moving documentary *Árabes en el Paraguay: Migrantes y descendientes* mentioned Ciudad del Este only once in passing, attending to early and mid-twentieth-century Lebanese and Syrian migrants and their descendants in Asunción, Encarnación, and Villa Rica, before the Paraguayan border town was even built.¹¹ However, these national comparisons and contrasts, of which there are many, must

not distract from the hemispheric scale of analysis that I emphasized in this book.

Whatever the national context, Arabs at the border, like everyone else, witnessed the rise and fall of the hemispheric “pink tide” of progressive rule. In Brazil, Arabs and others leveraged the market- and Global South-friendly policies of Luis Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–2011), though less so under Dilma Rousseff before her aforementioned impeachment (2012–2016). In Paraguay, some viewed Fernando Lugo (2008–2012) as standing up to Brazil and the US before Lugo’s own forced removal from office. In Argentina, Arabs at the border continued to be suspected of some sort of collusion in the still unresolved 1992 and 1994 bombings in Buenos Aires during the mandates of Néstor Kirchner (2003–2007) and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007–2015). But Arabs at the border expressed more frustration with the US, even under Barack Obama (2009–2017). On the eve of the latter’s election, one elderly Lebanese gentleman at the border remarked that “US Americans say that there is terrorism here . . . because Arabs did well in business here . . . and the US Americans don’t like it.”¹² With their criticism directed at “the [US] government” and “not the people,” Arabs at the border saw themselves being vilified as an “enemy” in order to influence “public opinion in the United States.”¹³ But it was not uncommon for some to personalize the “US government,” having grown accustomed to visits from US officials and reporters. One member of the Rahal family, for instance, recalled his own encounter with an unnamed US politician visiting the border as part of an official delegation.¹⁴ At the border, Arabs tended to accommodate the US government, from Bush through Obama, faring neither better nor worse in this hemisphere’s seemingly progressive wave.

Arabs now tried to keep a measured distance from revanchist efforts that “make America exceptional again.” They neither condemned nor condoned the Cúpula Conservadora das Américas (Conservative Summit of the Americas, in Portuguese), originally slated for July 2018 and later held on the Brazilian side of the border.¹⁵ In the middle of his underestimated presidential bid, then candidate Bolsonaro organized the summit as his “most ambitious initiative in foreign policy,” which would declare the hemisphere’s

conservative era after decades of progressive rule.¹⁶ Erroneously, *Veja* reported that Bolsonaro would “participate in an event of the Arab community . . . in Foz do Iguaçu.”¹⁷ In response, Arab and Muslim institutions at the border issued a *carta aberta* (open letter) on social media.¹⁸ Muslim Arabs wrote that they held nothing against then candidate Bolsonaro, but felt a public statement was necessary after *Veja*’s mistaken news reporting, given their past experience of “xenophobia and Islamophobia” spread by “big commercial media” and “echoed” by unnamed “politicians.” Neither declaring support for nor opposition against Bolsonaro, the letter was signed by the Islamic Benevolent Society, the Islamic Benevolent Cultural Center, the Arab-Palestinian Brazilian Society, as well as the Arab Palestinian Federation. Whether or not due to this letter, the conservative summit with hemispheric pretensions was postponed. It took place after Bolsonaro was sworn in as president. The summit’s headliner ended up being Jair Bolsonaro’s son Eduardo, then a Federal Deputy who had just returned from Washington, DC, where he met with White House officials, attended Steve Bannon’s birthday party, and sported a “Trump 2020” baseball cap.¹⁹ Though Bolsonaro’s stated aim to “fazer o Brasil grande” (make Brazil great, in Portuguese) borrowed from the Trump campaign and administration’s slogan “Make America Great Again,” this Conservative Summit of the Americas failed to shore up otherwise disparate right-wing exceptional movements that call for an allegedly “new course in the world.”²⁰ Their goal to make America exceptional, again, has a much longer history.

Arabs at the border avoided wholesale alignments in American politics, but they continued to express solidarity with Palestinian self-determination, as they had done for decades. On the Brazilian side of the border, they disapproved of the Bolsonaro administration’s stated goal to move the Brazilian embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, which would defy not only the UN but also decades of Brazil’s own foreign policy.²¹ On the Paraguayan side, Arabs at the border backed “Marito,” Mario Abdo Benítez, who promised to “stop the blackmailing in Ciudad del Este,” though he was the son of dictator’s fixer and defended the Paraguayan dictatorship throughout his career.²² In a reversal of his predecessor’s decision, Marito

moved the Paraguayan embassy in Israel from Jerusalem back to Tel Aviv.²³ Meanwhile, on the Argentine side of the border, Mauricio Macri (2015–2019) renewed the militarization of Puerto Iguazú with Israeli technology, and his successor, Alberto Fernández (2019–present) embarked on his first foreign trip to Israel.²⁴ In response to Donald Trump’s declaration of Jerusalem as “the capital of Israel,” Palestinians, Lebanese, and others organized an event in the Foz do Iguaçu city council chambers that called for the “peaceful coexistence” among all peoples and a more inclusive recognition of Jerusalem.²⁵ As Argentine, Brazilian, Paraguayan, and US administrations now leaned toward Israel, Arabs took collective stands at the border for causes and homelands farther afield.

Exceptional rule continues in the increasing ordinariness of extraordinary legal enactments or suspensions. As the hemisphere’s so-called “pink tide” neared a crescendo in 2007, Argentina’s president added an article to the penal code that punished terrorist finance, and four years later, his successor and spouse revised the code to include any “illicit association with terrorist ends.”²⁶ In 2011, the aforementioned Fernando Lugo signed Paraguayan Law 4024 that made “terrorism,” “terrorist association,” and “terrorist finance” into punishable offenses.²⁷ In 2016, Dilma Rousseff approved Brazil’s Law 13,260 that defined terrorism in terms of “xenophobia, discrimination, or prejudice . . . with the goal of causing widespread or social terror.”²⁸ Across hemispheric American metropoli, progressive activists and organizations made the most vocal critiques of such legislation, fearing that such a broad legal definition of *terrorismo* could criminalize any civic dissent as had been the case under authoritarian regimes. With consequences for and far beyond Arabs at the border, state powers now exercised authoritarian discretion through counterterrorist oversight.

An increasing array of authorities became what philosopher Judith Butler calls “petty sovereigns . . . delegated with the power to render unilateral decisions, accountable to no law and without any legitimate authority.”²⁹ As such, US Treasury Department officials and proxies renewed accusations that Arabs at the border financed

Hizbullah, using Obama-era regulations after Trump became president.³⁰ In the US House of Representatives in 2018, experts recycled inflammatory claims about Arabs at the border and concurrently tried to justify Treasury Department budget increases.³¹ As the Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence conducted a hearing on Iran's Global Terrorism Network, a "witness" from the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), gave testimony on "Iran's proxy terror networks in Latin America," headed by Hizbullah operatives allegedly in "Foz do Iguassu [*sic*]" as well as "Ciudad Del Este [*sic*]," naming Assad Ahmad Barakat among others referenced in this book.³² Citing a narrow selection of media articles and government press releases, the witness noted that despite "corrupt" local officials susceptible to terrorist financiers, "the governments of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay are more receptive than at any time in the past 10 years to US leadership in the fight against terror."³³ His written testimony concluded by asking the US congress to "provide additional resources to treasury," requesting an increase of more than 10 percent for the upcoming year, noting the more than 10 percent increase authorized the previous year.³⁴ Echoed in conservative and right-wing media,³⁵ and exerting pressure on South American states, this non-governmental authority justified ever-increasing counterterrorist government spending by representing Arabs at the border as a threat to the hemisphere. His narrative ignores the nearly three decades that Arabs at the border have been recurrently investigated and the many extraordinary measures that states took to do so.

His alarmist tone was echoed by Argentina's Financial Intelligence Unit (UIF) in a press release about "suspected financiers of Hizbullah" supposedly in the "tri-border area."³⁶ With newfound clout under the aforementioned legislation in Argentina, the UIF head also garnered praise from the director of the US Treasury Department's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (known by the acronym FinCEN). The FinCEN director had been just appointed by the Trump administration. The FinCEN head expressed pride in "the role that FinCEN played" in "recent anti-terrorism financing actions by Argentina's Financial Intelligence Unit."³⁷ Not long afterward, these Argentine and US bureaucrats co-wrote newspaper

articles that were simultaneously published in Argentina and the US, congratulating their “fact-finding mission” that assessed “the money laundering and terrorist finance threats in the Tri-Border Area between Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil.”³⁸

These Argentine and U.S. officials exercised what Butler called “spectral sovereignty.”³⁹ They came to “‘deem’ as dangerous” none other than Assad Ahmad Barakat for having carried out suspicious million-dollar transactions in a casino in Puerto Iguazú on the Argentine side of the border.⁴⁰ As already examined in this book, around the time of the 9/11 attacks, Barakat was accused of laundering money with alleged terrorist ends by a Lebanese business rival, leading to Barakat’s conviction for tax evasion in Paraguay. After serving his sentence, Barakat returned to live with his Brazilian wife and children on the Brazilian side of the border. But with the new round of accusations, it was Paraguay, not Brazil, that was pressured by neither Argentine nor US officials but rather the FDD witness who had previously testified to the US House of Representatives.⁴¹ The FDD witness stated that Paraguay is a “fiscal paradise for terrorism” due to “the very low level of public integrity among those who govern in Paraguay.”⁴² This “FDD member,” as characterized in Paraguayan media, lacked the legal authority that he effectively exercised by claiming such lawlessness at the border.

His “exaggerated” and “catastrophic” allegations of terrorism elicited critical responses from the Paraguayan foreign minister, finance minister, interior minister, and vice-president.⁴³ But Paraguayan judges filed arrest warrants for Barakat, alleging not financial crimes with purportedly terrorist ends but rather the irregular acquisition of a Paraguayan passport despite having been stripped of Paraguayan nationality.⁴⁴ The right-wing Paraguayan president called for an investigation into the irregular emission of passports while his ministers held meetings with US diplomats who praised the Paraguayan state for cooperating on matters of money laundering. As “law is either used tactically or suspended,” writes Judith Butler, “populations are monitored, detained, regulated, inspected, interrogated, rendered uniform in their actions, fully ritualized and exposed to control and regulation in their daily lives.”⁴⁵ This “indefinite” status of Arabs at the border, to again cite Butler, “does

not signify an exceptional circumstance, but, rather, the means by which the exceptional become established as a naturalized norm.”⁴⁶

Arabs on the Paraguayan side of the border attested to this ordinariness of extraordinary rule. Ali Farhat, cited in the third chapter, surmised that “every year or two we are confronted by a wave of allegations about Hizbullah and the terrorist threat in the region.”⁴⁷ Jihad Aoun, with his business in the Galeria Zuni in Ciudad del Este, echoed, “it is an account that no one ever buys” at the border, explaining that “tax-evasive smuggling, money laundering, arms and drugs trafficking” exist but not “terrorist cells” or “traders . . . giving away their money to extremist groups.”⁴⁸ “Alwie Moustaff Hijazi [*sic*]” affirmed that Lebanese “came to this area because they are tired of terrorist attacks that only cause pain and war, they want peace, and to say that they are encouraging violence and hatred is something that does not enter anyone’s head. . . . We do not understand this.”⁴⁹ Farhat, Aoun, Hijazi, and others grew accustomed to being denied the rule of law through what Butler called “the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not.”⁵⁰

Under such circumstances, Barakat applied for asylum from Paraguay and turned himself into Brazil’s Federal Police in Foz do Iguaçu.⁵¹ His appeal for accommodation drew support from *Gazeta Diário* (formerly *A Gazeta do Iguaçu*), whose editorial column declared that whatever financial irregularity Barakat may have engaged in, “it doesn’t have anything to do with terrorism.” The (non-Arab) Brazilian editorial writer called for mobilization among Lebanese “countrymen” and “we Brazilians” as well as vigilance against using “an isolated case . . . to denigrate the Lebanese community of the border.”⁵² Meanwhile, Barakat’s family led a protest of “at least 100 people,” in front of Brazil’s Federal Police headquarters in Foz do Iguaçu. Barakat’s son declared, “We are not terrorists. We are here asking for support from the Lebanese Embassy in Brasília and even [former Brazilian] President Michel Temer who is a Lebanese descendant and whose father also came from Lebanon as a refugee.”⁵³ Supreme Court judge Raquel Dodge declared that Barakat would remain in “preventive detention” in Brazil until the “National Committee for Refugees of the Ministry of Foreign

Relations” evaluated his request for asylum, after Argentine and US allegations provoked Paraguayan officials to issue a warrant for his arrest, neither for financial infringements nor alleged ties to Hizbullah.⁵⁴ Since “to seek asylum is precisely to seek legal status,” wrote Butler, states can scrutinize cases by fiat in an actual suspension of international law.⁵⁵ After nearly two years, the Brazilian state extradited Barakat to Paraguay where he now again stands trial, this time for the irregular possession of a Paraguayan passport, and not for financial transactions in Puerto Iguazú alleged by Argentine and US authorities.⁵⁶ In this “manifold destiny,” Arabs still await a final verdict in the more than sixty-year history of exceptional rule at an American crossroads.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. Mohamad Barakat, 24 July 2007.
2. Said Taijen, 28 November 2008. The Portuguese acronym is Mercosul, which also refers to the Southern Common Market. The Spanish acronym, Mercosur, is more commonly used in the US.
3. Mohamad Ismail, 12 July 2007; Mohamad Ismail appears in Jon Jeter's "Laughing in the Face of Terrorist Reports," *Washington Post*, 11 April 2004.
4. Brazil alone has nine tri-national borders, but the term is commonly used to refer to this crossroads.
5. "Marco inicial para a integração continental," *Folha de S. Paulo*, 28 March 1965, 10; "Presidentes inauguram Ponte Brasil-Paraguai," *Folha de S. Paulo*, 28 March 1965, 1; "Testemunho de fé nos destinos da América," *Folha de S. Paulo*, 28 March 1965, 10; "Castelo a Stroessner: 'Não nos deteremos na justa contemplação da tarefa que foi realizada,'" *Diário do Paraná*, 29 March 1965, 5.
6. Ceres Moraes, *Paraguai: A consolidação da ditadura de Stroessner, 1954-1963* (Porto Alegre: EdIPUCRS, 2000), 97. In Portuguese, the bridge is called Ponte da Amizade and, in Spanish, Puente de la Amistad. In 1961, the base of the Friendship Bridge was commemorated by Brazil's democratically elected Juscelino Kubitschek and Paraguay's military head of state Alfredo Stroessner. After completion in 1965, the fully operational bridge was inaugurated by Brazil's Marechal Castelo Branco and Paraguay's Stroessner. In 2019, another bridge between the Brazilian and Paraguayan sides of this border began to be constructed.
7. The Argentine state had long kept watch over this border. After the Friendship Bridge was built between Brazil and Paraguay in 1965, a series of reports from the Buenos Aires-based *Clarín* expressed malaise about the "stagnant" Argentine side of the border. See "Por la Ruta de Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca," *Clarín*, 17, 18, 19, 21 June 1968. See also Isaac Francisco Rojas, *Intereses*

- argentinos en la Cuenca del Plata* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Libera, 1969).
- Rojas saw Brazil eroding Argentine interests in these borderlands of the Rio de la Plata Basin. The bridge that connected the Argentine side to the Brazilian side of the border was inaugurated only in 1985, mentioned later.
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CHAPTER 1

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CHAPTER 3

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37. Franco, *Los árabes*, 216. In Spanish, “nuestra religión no hace distingo de nacionalidades, ni culturas, ni etnias. Todo musulmán es hermano de religión, iguales en derecho, en todos los aspectos.”
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 39. “Igual que la Embajada,” *Clarín*, 19 July 1994, 19.
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 42. “El Hizbullah en colores,” *Clarín*, 31 July 1994, 3. But Hizbullah released a statement in Beirut: “We deny any relationship with the attack of Buenos Aires,” “Hezbollah negó haber tomado parte del atentado en la AMIA,” *Clarín*, 21 July 1994, 22.
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53. Denise Chrispim Marin, "Brasil faz acordo para combater terror," *Folha de S. Paulo*, 17 October 1995.
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CHAPTER 4

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CHAPTER 5

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CHAPTER 6

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Acronyms

ABIN: Agência Brasileira de Inteligência (Brazilian Intelligence Agency)
ACIFI: Associação Comercial e Industrial de Foz do Iguaçu (Commercial and Industrial Association of Foz do Iguaçu)
AMIA: Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (Jewish Argentine Mutual Association)
ANR: Asociación Nacional Republicana (National Republican Association)
ARENA: Aliança Renovadora Nacional (National Renewal Alliance)
BB: Banco do Brasil (Bank of Brazil)
Banestado: Banco do Estado do Paraná (Paraná State Bank)
BC: Banco Central (Central Bank)
Cacex: Carteira de Comércio Exterior (Foreign Trade Portfolio)
CCPA: Cámara de Comercio Paraguayo-Americana
CET: Common External Tariff
CIA: Central Intelligence Agency
CICAP: Centro de Importadores y Comerciantes del Alto Paraná (Center of Importers and Traders of Alto Paraná)
CIEEP: Cámara de Comercio de Electrónica y Electrodomésticos del Paraguay (Chamber of Commerce of Electronics and Household Appliances of Paraguay)
CC5: Carta Circular nº 5 (Circular Letter Number 5)
CNN: Cable News Network
DAIA: Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas (Delegation of Argentine Jewish Associations)
DOPS: Departamento de Ordem Política e Social (Department of Social and Political Order)
FBI: Federal Bureau of Investigation
FDD: Foundation for Defense of Democracies
FEARAB: Federación de Entidades Árabes (Federation of Arab Associations)

- FEPRINCO:** Federación de Producción, Industria y Comércio (Federation of Production, Industry, and Commerce)
- FinCEN:** Financial Crimes Enforcement Network
- FTAA:** Free Trade Association of the Americas
- MDB:** Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (Brazilian Democratic Movement)
- Mercosul:** Mercado Comum do Sul (Southern Common Market)
- Mercosur:** Mercado Común del Sur (Southern Common Market)
- MR8:** Movimento Revolucionário Oito de Outubro (October 8th Revolutionary Movement)
- NAFTA:** North American Free Trade Agreement
- OAB:** Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil (Bar Association of Brazil)
- OFAC:** Office of Foreign Asset Control
- PC do B:** Partido Comunista do Brasil (Communist Party of Brazil)
- PLO:** Palestine Liberation Organization
- PMDB:** Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement)
- PF:** Polícia Federal (Federal Police)
- PN:** Polícia Nacional (National Police)
- PR:** Paraná
- PSDB:** Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (Brazilian Social Democracy Party)
- PT:** Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party)
- RF:** Receita Federal (Federal Revenue Secretariat)
- SEPIT:** Secretaria de Prevención e Investigación del Terrorismo (Secretariat of the Prevention and Investigation of Terrorism)
- SIDE:** Secretaría de Inteligencia del Estado (State Intelligence Secretariat)
- SNI:** Serviço Nacional de Informações (National Intelligence Service)
- TBA:** Tri-Border Area
- UIF:** Unidad de Inteligencia Financiera (Financial Intelligence Unit)

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