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RAANAN REIN (coord.): Más allá del Medio Oriente. Las diásporas judía y árabe en América Latina.

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RAANAN REIN (coord.): *Más allá del Medio Oriente. Las diásporas judía y árabe en América Latina*. Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada, 2012.

Más allá del Medio Oriente. Las diásporas judía y árabe en América Latina broadens our understanding of Latin American societies in which mainstream study continues to be marred by the scant attention paid to ethnicity as a significant analytical category by a substantial number of scholars of the region. The volume equally expands the work of intellectuals such as Rodrigo Cánovas, Christina Civantos, Ottmar Ette and Friederike Pannewick, Erin Graff Zivin, Ignacio Klich, Ignacio López-Calvo, Jeffrey Lesser, Daniel Masterson and Sayaka Funada-Classen, Brinda J. Mehta and Ranaan Rein. Their research, to varying degrees, examines the experiences of non-Catholic (or of those perceived as such) Latin American ethnic communities of Middle Eastern, Asian and Eastern European descent that are integral to a more sophisticated awareness and appreciation of the histories and cultures of Latin American nations. The volume, written in Spanish, includes a foreword by the editors María José Cano Pérez and Beatriz Molina Rueda and an introduction by the coordinator of the project, Raanan Rein, who insightfully depicts not only the growing importance of Latin America in the political affairs of the Middle East and vice versa but also the active role that Latin American diasporas play in the formation of local political and cultural landscapes.

The compilation further comprises 13 essays, largely based on primary sources, by leading scholars whose work complicates the ideology of *mestizaje*

as they reveal longstanding Latin American cultural traditions that, due to its bias toward western European “whiteness”, the discourse of quintessential and autochthonous Latinamericanism has historically tended to disavow. Unfortunately, due to the limitations of space, I can only engage in greater detail with the contributions related to my fields of research. However, the impressive scope of the contributors’ research includes: the historical influence of Gibran Kahlil Gibran and the *Al-Mahjar* literature on the construction of Arab Lebanese identities in 20th-century Mexico; the shifting representation of Palestine between 1937-1956 in the *mahjar* Mexican press as a consequence of the Arab Revolt in Palestine between 1936-1939 in the Mashreq region; comparative work analyzing the socialization and integration strategies of first generation Jewish Syrians and Christian Lebanese during the first decades of the 20th century in Mexico; research on the poetry of resistance by the second generation Palestinian-Chilean poet Mahfud Massís (1916-1990); the examination of the interplay of sport and ethnic identity in Latin America through the fascinating cases of the Chilean soccer team *Club Deportivo Palestino* and the Jewish *Club Atlético Atlanta* from the neighborhood Villa Crespo in Buenos Aires; analyses of representations of Israel and Palestine in contemporary Argentine and Chilean *telenovelas*; investigation on auto-construction of Jewish and Arab identities during the years of Argentine dictatorship, 1976-1983, and the Menemist period in the cases of Jacobo Timerman and José Siderman, respectively; research that traces the history of radicalized young Jewish Argentines of Syrian descent during the politicized 60s and 70s that problematizes Orientalist ideas about the generalized orthodox religious approach of the community both by Eurocentric academic discourses about Jews from the Arab world as well as auto-representations of affiliated members of the community linked to centralized institutions in their desire to reaffirm their religious identity; the analysis of documents recently opened to the public disclosing the Brazilian support of the UN Resolution 3379 adopted in 1975 as an effect of pragmatic *realpolitik*, and not necessarily anti-Semitism, by a nation seeking to define its role as a racial democracy and global economic power independent from the USA; an excursion into three books of the celebrated Italian writer Edmondo de Amicis published in the last decades of the 19th century to scrutinize his Eurocentric images of “things Arab” in Spain, “the Arabs” in Morocco as well as “things American” in the US and Argentina; and a report on the little known history of the Sephardic Moroccan communities from Tangier and Tetouan that arrived in the Brazilian and Peruvian Amazon region in the 1850s and their progressive assimilation in a context devoid of manifest anti-Semitism.

The excellence of *Más allá del Medio Oriente* is underscored by the inclusion of essays such as “Medio Oriente en América Latina Contemporánea”

by Mario Sznajder and “La diplomacia cultural en la proyección exterior de Marruecos hacia Latinoamérica” by Juan José Vagni. Both contributions not only document the unquestionable historical presence of Christian and Muslim Arabs in Latin American nations but simultaneously reveal their relevance to the contemporary political, economic, and cultural life of the region in unexpected ways. Stretching the thematic boundaries of the book, while asserting that the Arab-Jewish conflict has long moved beyond the Middle East and reached Latin America, Sznajder’s thought-provoking essay also engages with the expansion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to Muslim countries such as Iran and attempts to explore points of convergence that may link current radical elements in the Middle East and Latin America. After sketching the shifting perception of Israel and the Arab world in Latin America, Sznajder elaborates on the tenuous historical connections between Iran and the region to propose that in the context of a globalized world under the dominance of neoliberal market values, current alliances between Iran and some Latin American countries can be understood in part on the basis of shared and strong anti-imperialist, anti-globalization and anti-American sentiments. Finally, while Sznajder’s essay outlines complex diasporic bonds and potentially challenging future interactions between the Middle East and Latin America, Juan José Vagni’s essay on contemporary Moroccan and Saharawi cultural diplomacy toward Latin America closes the volume on a more hopeful, if not more provocative note.

Vagni explores how, as a result of the Algerian intervention in defense of the Saharawi cause in the 1980s, the Moroccan isolation from the African Union in 1984, the nation’s continued unstable political relations within the Maghreb region and the conditioned links to Europe, the Kingdom of Morocco seeks to improve its image and prestige overseas and to integrate itself internationally by making productive and pragmatic use of “El discurso de la herencia hispano-andalusí y la migración judeomarroquí.” By appropriating the heritage of *convivencia* in Al-Andalus, the Arab cultural contributions to Latin American nations via Spain and Portugal and the Jewish Moroccan diasporas in Latin America, as Vagni reports, Morocco attempts to establish commonalities and has successfully generated transatlantic cooperation through numerous projects such as the “Iniciativa del Atlántico Sur” or bilateral agreements with diverse Latin American countries. Saharawi diplomats, Vagni shows, have also applied the strategy of a shared cultural heritage arguing that they too belong to the Iberoamerican family because, like Latin America, the territory of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic was also a Spanish colony from 1884 to 1976 and that Spanish is one of their languages. Though to different degrees, Vagni elucidates, both Morocco and the SADR have become important interlocutors in Iberoamerican international forums. The Kingdom has begun participating

in multiple cultural and educational initiatives promoting cultural pluralism, intercultural and interreligious understanding between the Arab world and Latin America. However, this responsibility should not be exclusively delegated to Morocco, as Vagni correctly acknowledges. Latin American nations and their constitutive ethnic communities are also responsible for the preservation and transmission of these legacies that testify to their cultural heterogeneity. Fittingly closing the volume, the move beyond mere rhetoric that Juan José Vagni reveals in the relations between Morocco and Latin America opens an ethical space that challenges us to work toward shared futures based on mutual recognition and respect. *Más allá del Medio Oriente. Las diásporas judía y árabe en América Latina* is an invaluable contribution that deserves to be required reading for scholars in the fields of Latin American, Inter-American, Arab, Jewish, Trans-Atlantic, Mediterranean, and Middle Eastern Studies.

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