

Paul Amar, Ed. (2014) The Middle East and Brazil: Perspectives on the New Global South, 366 pp. (ISBN: 978-0-253-01227-2) Paperback.

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The Middle East and Brazil: Perspectives on the New Global South is a transregional, transdisciplinary and multi-authored volume exploring the complex and dynamic relationship between Brazil and the Middle East. Paul Amar, the chief editor, explains the threefold aim of this book: first, to examine the origins and history of Middle Eastern cultural influence and mutual political involvement between these regions, and Middle Eastern historical-cultural influence over Brazil; second, to examine “actors” in this transnational dialogue and relationship and how they have worked to solidify the geopolitical connection between these two regions; and third, to create a new transdisciplinary study and formulate innovative global paradigms. Amar and the many talented contributors of this work explore in depth the emergence of this South-South alliance and transcultural-national exchange between Brazil and the Middle East. This task is completed and segmented into three major parts of the book.

The authors of this book articulate the historical relationship that developed between Brazil and the Middle East, not beginning with President Lula’s South-South solidarity or desire to act as a champion of the Global South. Rather, the various authors successfully demonstrate and prove the centuries-old transnational and cultural exchange between these two regions via migration histories, and societal and cultural debate around race, sexuality, and nationalism. Additionally, the authors examine the “actors” in detail, and artfully prove that the Arab migrant communities have led to the reshaping of contemporary cultural-political relations between these two regions.

Part One (chapters 1-5) of this book entitled “South-South Relations, Security Politics, Diplomatic History,” introduces the reader to both historical and recent developments in the geopolitical relationship between Brazil and many Middle Eastern countries. Over the last few decades Brazil has increasingly made its presence known in most global affairs including international peace negotiations, as well as climate, environmental, disarmament, finance, and trade policies. More recently in Brazil’s history, its foreign policy, through an emerging dialogue, has become increasingly

proactive and outreaching, moving Brazil from a leading regional nation to a powerful player on the global stage.

Brazilian President Lula (2003-2010) in particular has been a contemporary figure who has largely contributed to Brazil's more active foreign strategy. Historically, Brazil has maintained cordial but distant relations with many Arab countries. However, increased dialogue, political and economic cooperation with the Middle East has been a cornerstone of this emerging Brazilian foreign policy. The multiple authors of this first part of the book address Brazil's increasingly active immersion in the geopolitical affairs of many Middle Eastern countries, which is a direct result of intentional transnational involvement on the part of the Brazilian government. However, with over ten million Brazilians of Levantine-Arab ethnicity, including the largest populations of Lebanese and Syrian peoples outside of their countries of origin, Brazil's increasing involvement in Middle Eastern affairs may well be informed by shifting demographics and immigration policies, aside from strictly geopolitical motivations.

In Part Two of this book, entitled: "Race, Nation, and Transregional Imaginations" (chapters 6-12), the authors turn their attention to Orientalism's influence upon Brazilian society, and the cultural and ethnic effects of Middle Eastern migrants on evolving transnational identities in Brazil.

There is much new research that has come out of the work of these authors and similar scholars. One such innovative subject is the concept of "tropical Orientalism." This regional cultural distinctive is a direct product of Iberian Sephardic and Moorish cultural roots that has infiltrated and influenced Brazilian culture. Alexandra Isfahani-Hammond, for example, in Chapter Seven, explores how the late Brazilian sociologist and historian Gilberto Freyre identified Islamic and Oriental influence vis-à-vis the Afro-Brazilian slave trade and plantation economy of colonial Brazil. Freyre (and others) identified ethnic and cultural heritages of these slaves, and contributions of their socio-cultural particularities and ideologies, which identified in Brazilian social hierarchy, imaginaries, and generic embodiments of race and sexuality, drawn originally from Arab and Moorish influences in pre-Reconquista Iberia. Additionally, social echelons developed and further stratification with the Afro-Brazilian component of Brazil's society developed from these cultural influences.

Noticeable outlets for Middle Eastern cultural expression have emerged particularly in certain geographic regions of Brazil, such Rio de Janeiro's bazaar district,

which is referred to as a microcosm of the United Nations. Arab and Muslim communities in Rio de Janeiro and the Tri-Border Region have balanced identifying locally as Brazilian with global identities of “Arabness” and “Muslimness.” However, despite their homogeneous (and sometimes romanticized) portrayal in Brazilian media, Muslims are a much more heterogeneous group with various cultural expressions and identities.

Middle Eastern influence on Brazil, which began historically with literary contributions, has continued and expanded to more modern media expressions and outlets. Islam’s treatment by Brazilian movies and television, for example, provides the reader with national dialogue centered on Islamic religious practices, ethnicity, and Muslim cultural distinctives. Unfortunately, however, Brazilian media interest in Middle Eastern culture and Islam heightened post-September 11, 2001. A combination of romanticism and fear of the “other,” Brazilian media has provided much more attention to transregional dialogue and discussion of Islam.

Finally, part three of this work is dedicated to the study of “Literature and Transregional Media Cultures” (chapters 13-17). Middle Eastern and Arab identity has become a recognized and fully-accepted component of Brazil’s diverse society and cultural character. This cultural recognition by the Brazilian people has come on the heels of an era of mass emigration, with Middle Eastern migrants influencing Brazilian culture and writing through their own literary contributions. In addition to literature, “Orientalist” influences have permeated some of Brazil’s most contemporary literary and media culture.

Brazilian social and literary structures are multicultural at their core, with the authors of Part Three artfully demonstrating the Arab and Middle Eastern influences upon Brazilian media, particularly literature. Since their initial arrival in Brazil at the end of the nineteenth century, Levantine migrants and their descendants have contributed greatly to the varied culture of Brazil, as well as reignited discovery of their own cultural heritage through diverse forms of media, such as Mahjari (Arab-diasporic) literature.

According to these authors in Part Three of the book, echoes of Orientalism exist from Brazil’s Iberian cultural and historical origins. This Orientalism was primarily ingrained in Brazilian culture from pre-Reconquista Iberia, and the Moorish and Sephardic cultural and literary influence, undoubtedly influencing colonial and post-

colonial Brazilian literature and media. For example, Brazilian novelist Alberto Mussa's Portuguese translation of *Mu'allaqat* (pre-Islamic, Arabian poems) played a crucial role in introducing early Islamic literature into Brazilian culture. Mussa's ethnographic translation explores largely Levantine and Moorish migrant cultural roots, which are a component of Brazil's multiracial and diverse cultural milieu. Brazilian-born authors such as Mussa have been instrumental in disseminating Middle Eastern literature and cultural influence throughout Brazil, which has contributed to a transregional literary and paradigmatic shift. The authors of this section demonstrate how this literary shift is now discovering unexplored literary developments of Arab migrants and Middle Eastern paradigms, overturning long-established and culturally-accepted European and American literary principles. As the scholars of Part Three of this book note, there is an emerging network of media and transregional South-South literary conversation taking place among cultures of the Global South, apart from archetypal Euro- and America-centric models, that is sure to leave a lasting legacy in the globalized twenty-first century.

This volume is in some sense a telling story of the rising Global South that is not looking to social, political, or cultural leadership from the United States and Western Europe, but forging its own destiny and writing its own story that will surely forever change the geopolitical future. Amar and the many talented contributing scholars to this volume tell the largely underreported story of the relationship, connection, and mutual cultural exchange between the Middle East and Brazil. The multiple authors, while each being delegated to a specific topic, take to their task, and focus their studies around the central thesis of this book, bringing coherency and unity to this collective study.

A picturesque example of transnational and transdisciplinary academic work, this book is a much needed break from traditional scholarship on geopolitics and international affairs. This interdisciplinary work is an excellent study of Brazil's intricate, complex, and developing relationship with the Middle East. Truly a one-of-a-kind book, this is a must read for students of geopolitics or international affairs, professional or amateur readers of Brazilian studies, and armchair historians alike. *The Middle East and Brazil: Perspectives on the New Global South* is a crucial study, certain to influence and inform future research on international affairs.