

*Argentina in the Global Middle East*. Lily Pearl Balloffet. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020. 248 pp. \$30. Paperback ISBN-13: 9781503610310.

Lily Pearl Balloffet's detailed and multifaceted historical account of Middle Eastern migration to Argentina is a welcome addition to the literature on global migration. Balloffet details how migrants from Ottoman Syria (primarily Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine) made their way to Argentina before World War I and rapidly dispersed and settled, building communities, institutions, and businesses. In doing so, she masterfully navigates a wide range of literatures and perspectives including case studies of Middle Eastern migration, comparative studies of migration in the Americas, global studies of South-South migration, and studies of nation-building in Argentina. The result is a volume that leverages a transnational lens and archival work to illuminate the peculiar dynamics of Middle Eastern migration to Argentina, shedding new light to multiple literatures.

The study is grounded in the idea of the *mahjar*, the “combined people and territories that constitute the human spatial map of migrant worlds constructed after the massive out-migration from Ottoman Syria since the last third of the nineteenth century” (5). Framing the Argentinean case within the *mahjar* allows Balloffet to maintain a comparative approach, making regular references to the experiences of Middle Eastern migrants in countries such as Brazil and the United States. As such, the study transcends borders, simultaneously situating Argentina within the larger context of the Americas and the Global Middle East.

This is not to say that the work overlooks the peculiarities of the case study. A fascinating aspect of the book is the direct connection between Middle Eastern migration to Argentina and nation-building. Traditional accounts of the Argentinean experience tend to stress the European origins linking migration and national development. In this respect, the account emanating from *Argentina in the Global Middle East* is very original. First, Balloffet mines the writings of founding figures such as Sarmiento and Alberdi and the practical decisions of government officials setting policies to highlight debates around whether Middle Eastern migrants should be considered part of the “modernizing” forces they were trying to attract. By illuminating and elaborating on these tensions, the book broadens the discussion on migration and nation-building in Argentina.

Second, the peculiar characteristics of Middle Eastern migrants also challenged standard expectations about what immigrants are supposed to do. Middle Eastern migrants' predisposition towards commerce and mobility contradicted expectations about settlement and development. As Balloffet describes, “the itinerant [Arab] merchant (instead of the agricultural worker) did not fit within the bounds of the imagined ideal immigrant precisely because of their autonomous mobility” (42). The interaction between immigration and internal mobility brings a spatial dynamic to Middle Eastern migration in Argentina not previously recognized; Balloffet shows that when combined with the expansion of the railroad system in Argentina, the mobility orientation of Middle Eastern migrants explains their dispersion throughout the country. Syrian and Lebanese institutions formed in an orderly manner in Argentina following railroad lines. Map 2 is quite impressive in documenting the connection. By connecting Middle Eastern institutions to the net-

work of communications and transportation in Chapters 1 and 2 Balloffet enhances our understanding of settlement and dispersion of immigrant origin populations. The approach could be easily applied to other groups or contexts.

The research is not restricted to the initial settlement and dispersion of Middle Eastern migrants in Argentina. Once immigration declined by the end of World War I the Argentinean *mahjar* resulted in a continued pattern of interactions and networks that further built the Middle Eastern community in Argentina, transforming the country in the process. Chapter 3 captures the stories of the descendants of Middle Eastern migrants who circulated within the American *mahjar* in pursuit of artistic and cultural projects. It is in this chapter where issues of ethnicity and identity clearly emerge. The accounts document how filmmakers, actors, and musicians became cultural ambassadors and more broadly a link between the broader Middle East and its widely dispersed diaspora. Their activities in some cases merged well with the orientations of government officials and served as a channel to challenge biased and negative representations of Arab communities. Their activities were grounded in the network of associations and institutions formed as part of the *mahjar*. These institutions mobilize money and networks but were importantly dependent on Arab women's work and vision. Chapter 4 delves specifically into the role of Arab women in constructing ethnic institutions, fostering cultural productions, and sponsoring transnational beneficence projects.

The fifth chapter provides a fascinating analysis of the Argentine Arab community's role in shaping the country's geopolitical position during the Cold War. The analysis tracks the close connection between Peronism, as a model that could be extended to other countries and regions of the world, and the Egyptian revolution of 1952 and its emphasis on decolonization and Third World solidarity. Scholars of Peronism in Argentina will find a new insight connecting the movement to broader social forces and common histories in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Arab Argentines themselves drew connections between Peronism, as a popular movement, and the Egyptian revolution of 1952. "From diasporic interlocutors to activists and diplomats, Argentines offered a discursive model, intellectual base, and demonstration of Global South solidarity with Egypt" (158). As such, Argentine people and politics were influential in the Egyptian revolutionary project, fostering South-South solidarities that preceded the non-aligned movement. In this area in particular the study is illuminating. I hope scholars of Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East will accept Balloffet's invitation "to venture a lateral step and illuminate new dimensions of the multifaceted networks that have historically bound these regions together" (160).

The final chapter documents the endurance of Middle Eastern-Argentinean ties with specific analyses of three areas of contacts: commodity exchanges, specifically yerba mate; mass displacements and refugee policies; and South-South cultural spaces. The message that emerges is very clear: the *mahjar* is enduring and continuously evolving, providing the basis for long-standing interaction that enriches both the Americas and the Middle East.

It is important to note that to accomplish her analysis Balloffet had to overcome serious data and methodological limitations from lack of records to the need to track informal sources. The book is highly accessible and engaging, of interest to scholars and also easy to incorporate

into undergraduate courses on migration in the Americas or the global Middle East. Altogether the book is a model for scholars interested in broadening the scope of Global South studies.

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