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# What does “Middle East Studies” mean in Latin America? A Special Issue

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The historical relationship between Latin America and the Middle East has deep roots, extending back to the era of European colonization in the New World (see Ferabolli and Araújo in this dossier). However, it was during the late 19th and early 20th centuries that these connections intensified, primarily due to significant waves of Arab migration to Latin America. These migrants, predominantly from the Levant region, settled in various Latin American countries, notably Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico, profoundly influencing the socio-cultural fabric of these societies. They established thriving communities, contributing to commerce, culture, and the political landscape, thereby embedding Middle Eastern cultural elements into the Latin American milieu (Balloffet, 2019; Amar, 2014).

In the mid-20th century, as nations in the Mashreq and Maghreb regions achieved independence from colonial rule, the relationship between Latin America and the Middle East evolved into more structured diplomatic and economic engagements. Despite challenges posed by geographical distance, the legacy of

European colonialism, and differing political priorities, collaborative efforts emerged through international forums. The 1955 Bandung Conference marked a significant milestone, fostering South-South cooperation among developing nations. Subsequently, the Non-Aligned Movement and initiatives promoting South-South Cooperation in the 1970s further deepened ties between Latin American and Middle Eastern countries, aiming to establish a new international economic order. An illustrative example of initiatives promoting South-South Cooperation in the 1970s is the adoption of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA) in 1978. This plan was a significant milestone in formalizing technical cooperation among developing countries, aiming to enhance collective self-reliance and establish a new international economic order. BAPA provided a framework for Latin American and Middle Eastern nations to collaborate on shared development challenges, thereby deepening their bilateral and multilateral ties. However, these engagements were often constrained by internal political dynamics within Latin American

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countries, including cycles of civil-military governance and varied strategies of international integration, as well as shifting stances toward U.S. hegemony during the Cold War (Velasco; Dahi, 2017).

Opportunities for strengthening ties emerged in the 1990s, primarily driven by commercial interests. In the early 21st century, however, these efforts became more structured, as evidenced by the launch of the South America–Arab Countries Summit (ASPA), an initiative designed to reshape economic and commercial relations on an interregional scale (see Ferabolli, 2017). This diplomatic endeavor not only reconfigured South America's engagement with the Middle East but also fostered deeper political and economic cooperation between the two regions, facilitating trade agreements, diplomatic dialogues, and multilateral initiatives. One significant diplomatic outcome of these developments was the formal recognition of the State of Palestine by several South American nations from 2010 onward.

The Arab Spring, while slowing the momentum of interregional engagement, did not bring it to a halt. The migration of Syrian citizens to Latin America introduced a new dimension to these relations, fostering deeper social and cultural exchanges<sup>3</sup>. In recent years, the political landscape of South America, sha-

ped by the rise of neoliberal and right-wing governments, has shifted its geopolitical focus northward, prioritizing a pragmatic, commercial-oriented approach to engagement with the Arab and broader Middle Eastern world.

The COVID-19 pandemic further underscored shared vulnerabilities among Latin America, the Middle East, and North Africa, particularly in managing global health challenges. Notably, collaborative efforts such as the Cuba-Iran vaccine production partnership exemplified the potential for South-South cooperation in biotechnology and public health. The outbreak of the Ukraine war in 2022 further reshaped global economic dynamics, exacerbating food supply disruptions and energy crises. Given their roles as major producers and exporters of food and energy, Latin America, the Middle East, and North Africa have gained renewed economic relevance in global markets (IFPRI, 2023; The Guardian, 2024; Reuters, 2024; Stimson, 2024; World Bank, 2023).

Beyond economic considerations, these regions are also subject to growing international expectations regarding the environmental agenda. As key stakeholders in biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation, and the pursuit of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), they face increasing pressure to implement ambitious policies addressing ecological sustainability and environmental governance.

In recent times, the evolving relationships between Latin America and the Middle East have garnered significant scholarly attention, particularly in 2023, a year that has underscored the growing assertiveness of the Global South within the international order. This shift is exemplified by the expansion of BRICS, as the bloc seeks to broaden its institutional scope by integrating additional nations. The inclusion of Saudi Arabia

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<sup>3</sup> Two doctoral theses have been produced on this subject by doctoral students supervised by contributors to this special issue. **Danny Zahreddine** supervised the thesis *A Coesão Social na Síria: Um estudo da percepção dos refugiados sírios no Brasil sobre a relação entre os grupos confessionais na Síria entre 1990 a 2010*, written by **Guilherme di Lorenzo Pires**, within the Graduate Program in International Relations at PUC Minas Gerais. Similarly, **Silvia Ferabolli** supervised the thesis *A Síria a partir do Brasil: uma análise de percepção dos sírios sobre a situação no seu país de origem*, written by **Gabriela Silva**, within the Graduate Program in International Strategic Studies at UFRGS.

(currently under discussion) and Ethiopia, along with Iran, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt, reflects this evolving dynamic (Carnegie, 2024). Amidst the Gaza conflict, Latin American countries have pursued distinct diplomatic and political initiatives, reinforcing the significance of the Palestinian question. Brazil, assuming a central role, advocated for a neutral and pacifying approach, calling for an immediate ceasefire and the establishment of humanitarian corridors in Gaza. In contrast, Bolivia and Chile took more assertive stances by severing diplomatic ties with Israel while the conflict persisted (Real Institute Elcano, 2023). Additionally, Latin America's role in global energy governance has expanded, as demonstrated by Brazil's potential entry into OPEC+, Venezuela's established membership in OPEC, and Mexico's participation in OPEC+. These developments highlight how Latin American nations are emerging as influential actors in international energy politics, actively reshaping their traditional energy policies within a shifting global landscape.

Building on the extensive social, political, and economic relationships between Latin America and the Middle East, a fundamental question arises: "What does 'Middle East Studies' mean in Latin America?" While this may initially appear to be a bold inquiry, it should be understood metaphorically—as an invitation to explore how Latin American scholars conceptualize, interpret, and engage with the Middle East through distinct regional lenses. This question serves as the intellectual foundation of this Special Issue, which seeks to offer insight into the diverse methodological, theoretical, and empirical approaches that define Latin American research on the Middle East.

This initiative, however, does not represent an inaugural effort but rather an outcome

of the ongoing process of systematizing Latin American research on the Middle East within established epistemic spaces. In our case, this endeavor materialized through the formation of a research network that brings together Latin American scholars dedicated to the study of the Middle East, with particular emphasis on its interconnections with our region. Since 2016, the Working Group: Middle East and North Africa of CLACSO (*Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales*), an international non-governmental institution with associative status at UNESCO since its founding in 1967, has sought to coordinate and consolidate the efforts of Latin American scholars engaged in the political, economic, and socio-cultural study of the MENA region. More broadly, the Working Group aims to enhance Latin American societies' understanding of the Middle East while fostering the development of research initiatives that explore the historical, political, and cultural interrelations between both regions.

Drawing on the collective experience of this research network, we proposed a Special Section at the BRISMES Conference 2023, entitled "*Seeing the Middle East from Faces Beyond the Metropole<sup>4</sup>: What Does Middle East Studies Mean in Latin America?*" An internal selection process was conducted among the approximately 80 current members of CLACSO's MENA Working Group, aligning with its thematic divisions: Middle Eastern Diasporas in Latin America; Religion, Culture, and the Study of Islam in Latin America; and Latin America–MENA International Relations. This initiative was led by Silvia Ferabolli (Federal

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<sup>4</sup> We gratefully acknowledge that this **evocative and insightful** phrase was originally conceived by **Sharri-Plonsky** during our inaugural discussion on the creation of this **Special Section**.

University of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil) and Rodrigo Amaral (Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo, Brazil), with the valuable support of Sharri Plonsky (Queen Mary University of London) and Neve Gordon (BRISMES). It aimed to foster academic engagement by introducing the BRISMES community to the research contributions of Latin American scholars in Middle Eastern studies and offering a representative sample of the diverse and evolving scholarship emerging from the region. This endeavor was intended to constitute an initial step toward the development of a collaborative academic network linking universities across Latin America, Europe, and the Middle East, with the objective of fostering enduring scholarly dialogue and sustained intellectual and institutional cooperation.

Building on the outcomes of these presentations, we proposed a Special Issue in *Conjuntura Internacional*, the International Relations journal of PUC Minas, featuring articles developed from the research presented by scholars who participated in the Special Section “*What Does Middle East Studies Mean in Latin America?*” at the 2023 BRISMES Conference. This Special Issue consists of eight articles, structured into two sections.

The first section comprises articles that examine the politics, history, and culture of Arab-Latin American relations, adopting a broad analytical framework to explore Latin American perceptions of key Middle Eastern themes. In “Arabs in Brazil: An Overview of Half a Millennium of Relations,” Silvia Ferafolli and Luiz Antônio Araújo provide a historical analysis of Arab-Brazilian relations, offering a foundational entry point for scholars new to the field. The study delineates six distinct phases of Arab and Muslim migration

to Brazil, spanning from the 16th century to the present, and underscores key historical moments and sociopolitical transformations that have shaped this enduring transregional relationship. In “Global South by the Global South? Latin American IR Reads the Middle East,” Mariela Cuadro critically interrogates how Latin American IR scholarship constructs knowledge about the Middle East, emphasizing the colonial power-knowledge dynamics that shape both regions and their positioning within global hierarchies. Finally, in “Mahjar Studies in Latin America: Evolution, Theoretical Advances, and Emerging International Relations Perspectives”, Jorge Araneda offers a comprehensive review of Mahjar studies in Latin America, tracing the field’s evolution from its historical foundations to its contemporary engagement with MENA–Latin American relations within IR scholarship.

The second set of articles consists of case studies that engage with the three previously outlined axes of CLACSO’s MENA Working Group, i.e., Middle Eastern Diasporas in Latin America; Religion, Culture, and the Study of Islam in Latin America; and Latin America–MENA International Relations. Each study examines a specific social, political, or economic phenomenon geographically situated in Latin America that incorporates a Middle Eastern dimension. In “Urban Trajectories and political experiences of Migrants in São Paulo: The Case of “Al Janiah” Workers, a Cultural and Gastronomic Space in the City”, Reginaldo Nasser, Rodrigo Amaral, Tiago Cortes, and Marina Mattar investigate the urban trajectories of migrants and refugees from diverse national backgrounds within Al Janiah, a Palestinian cultural and gastronomic space in São Paulo. The study finds that Al Janiah serves

as a critical site of city-making, fostering social integration beyond conventional migrant networks and providing valuable insights into the lived experiences and adaptation processes of displaced populations in São Paulo. In “The State of Israel in the Construction of Argentine Politics through a Prophetic Lens,” Damián Setton examines how the right-wing Argentine government frames the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with a particular focus on the use of religious symbols in constructing Javier Milei’s public image and the Libertarian identity project. The analysis explores the integration of Jewish symbols into Milei’s political rhetoric, shedding light on their role in shaping Argentina’s contemporary political landscape. In “The Rise and Fall of Brazil and Israel’s Sub-Imperialism,” Bruno Huberman critically engages with Ruy Mauro Marini’s concept of sub-imperialism, using Brazil and Israel as case studies during and after the Cold War. The article examines whether these nations continue to exhibit sub-imperialist tendencies in the post-Cold War era, considering shifts in U.S. imperialism and the evolving geopolitical roles of Brazil in South America and Israel in the MENA region. In “Islam in Mexico: Love and Mobility,” Arely Medina, Alejandra Sotomayor, and Samantha Levy undertake an anthropological analysis of Muslim communities in Mexico, with a specific focus on the role of marriage within these communities. The study explores how Islamic matrimonial practices navigate religious mandates while intersecting with broader global dynamics, including migration, political conditions, and economic shifts in Muslim-majority countries. In “Social Trust and Intercommunal Relations in Pre-Crisis Syria: Reflections from Syrian Refugees in Brazil,” Danny Zahreddine and Guilherme Lorenzo investigate the role

of social trust among religious communities in Syria since the 1990s, drawing on findings from a 2019 study involving Syrian refugees in Brazil. The article explores refugees’ perceptions and experiences, offering insights into interfaith relations, trust dynamics, and their implications for the broader Syrian conflict.

Finally, we acknowledge that it would be impossible to provide a singular, definitive answer to the question of “*What Does Middle East Studies Mean in Latin America?*” Instead, this Special Issue offers a curated sample of the rich and diverse body of research produced by scholars engaging with this subject. While it does not claim to comprehensively map the entire field, it highlights key trajectories, debates, and empirical inquiries that underscore the growing importance of interregional studies between Latin America and the Middle East. More than merely presenting a snapshot of ongoing research, this collection serves as both an invitation and an encouragement to continue deepening the exploration of the multifaceted interactions between these two spaces of the Global South.

At the same time, we urge our readers to approach this Special Issue with an understanding of the linguistic diversity that characterizes the production of knowledge in a truly global discipline. Many of the contributing authors are English as a Second Language (ESL) scholars, and while their prose may not always conform to the stylistic standards of native English speakers, their intellectual contributions remain rigorous, insightful, and essential. In a field such as International Relations (IR), which aspires to be global, it is both unreasonable and counterproductive to expect all academic work to be articulated in “Shakespearean” English. To impose such a standard would be to privilege

form over substance and, worse, to perpetuate epistemic hierarchies that systematically disadvantage scholars from the Global South.

As Gilberto Freyre (2011, p. 146) reminds us, the affinities that bind Latin America, with its tropical, Latin, and Amerindian heritage, to regions such as Egypt, Arabia, and India run deep—they are not superficial. The same can be said of the intellectual exchanges between these regions: they transcend language barriers and stylistic conventions, offering perspectives that challenge, enrich, and ultimately decolonize the field of IR. We invite our readers, therefore, to engage with the substance of these contributions, recognizing that the true value of scholarship lies not in linguistic perfection, but in its ability to provoke thought, foster dialogue, and expand the horizons of global knowledge production.

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# The rise and fall of Brazil and Israel's sub-imperialism

*A ascensão e queda do subimperialismo do Brasil e de Israel*

*El ascenso y caída del subimperialismo de Brasil e Israel*

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## ABSTRACT

*This article examines Ruy Mauro Marini's concept of sub-imperialism, analyzing Brazil and Israel as key examples during and after the Cold War. It explores whether these nations continue to function as sub-imperialist powers in the post-Cold War era, considering shifts in U.S. imperialism and its regional impacts. The study also assesses how Brazil and Israel's roles have evolved within South America and the MENA region, highlighting their strategic alignments and influence. By revisiting Marini's framework, the article offers insights into contemporary geopolitical dynamics and the enduring relevance of sub-imperialism in a changing global order.*

**Keywords:** *Sub-imperialism; Brazil; Israel.*

## RESUMO

*Este artigo examina o conceito de subimperialismo de Ruy Mauro Marini, analisando Brasil e Israel como exemplos centrais durante e após a Guerra Fria. Explora se essas nações continuam a atuar como potências subimperialistas no período pós-Guerra Fria, considerando as mudanças no imperialismo dos EUA e seus impactos regionais. O estudo também avalia como os papéis do Brasil e de Israel evoluíram na América do Sul e na região MENA, destacando seus alinhamentos estratégicos e influência. Ao revisar o arcabouço teórico de Marini, o artigo oferece insights sobre a dinâmica geopolítica contemporânea e a relevância duradoura do subimperialismo em uma ordem global em transformação.*

**Palavras chave:** *Sub-imperialismo; Brasil; Israel*

## RESUMEN

*Este artículo examina el concepto de subimperialismo de Ruy Mauro Marini, analizando a Brasil e Israel como ejemplos clave durante y después de la Guerra Fría. Explora si estas naciones continuán actuando como potencias subimperialistas en el período posterior a la Guerra Fría, considerando los cambios en el imperialismo estadounidense y sus impactos*

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*regionales. El estudio también evalúa cómo han evolucionado los roles de Brasil e Israel en América del Sur y en la región de MENA, destacando sus alineamientos estratégicos e influencia. Al revisar el marco teórico de Marini, el artículo ofrece perspectivas sobre la dinámica geopolítica contemporánea y la persistente relevancia del subimperialismo en un orden global en transformación.*

**Palabras clave:** *Subimperialismo; Brasil; Israel.*

## INTRODUCTION

Ruy Mauro Marini (2012), the Brazilian theorist who introduced the term sub-imperialism, identified Brazil as the primary example of a sub-imperialist nation during the civil-military dictatorship (1964–85). His aim was to elucidate Brazil's role in South America under the conditions of dependence and industrialization. He saw Israel as an additional paradigmatic example of sub-imperialism during the Cold War.<sup>2</sup>

Using the concept of sub-imperialism, this article examines the relationship of the US with Brazil and Israel during and after the Cold War. The primary goal is to analyze if Brazil and Israel remain as sub-imperialist nations after the Cold War. I argue that both nations have transitioned away from sub-imperialist status post-Cold War for divergent reasons. The democratization of Brazil and its foreign policy entailed the dismissal of the US policy of coups and dictatorships in South America; whereas the continuation of the US's aggressive agenda towards the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) necessitated the preservation of Israel's apartheid state.

Nevertheless, I claim that both nations remain as subordinate partners in the US-led "collective imperialism". Samir Amin (2004) referred to the triad of the US, Europe, and

Japan as "collective imperialism". This alliance has been pivotal for US strategy during and after the Cold War. As Israel aligned more closely with the US, it forfeited its relative autonomy and became a co-empire; whereas Brazil distanced itself from the US without breaking its state of dependence.

Since the late 1970s, Brazil and the US have experienced tensions in their bilateral relations, resulting in increased estrangement after the Cold War. Following the conclusion of the dictatorship, Brazil's military operations no longer aligned with capitalist interests; the nation has fostered increased respect for the sovereignty of its neighbors; and it has ceded its autonomy to the US in certain moments. South America has decreased in significance within US strategy, which has primarily engaged in the region through the War on Drugs. This has diminished US pressure on Brazil to take assertive action in the region.

The rapprochement between the US and Israel following the 1979 Iranian Revolution has resulted in a level of proximity between the two nations that transformed Israel into a co-empire. In the 1980s, the military-industrial complexes of both countries became significantly intertwined. Even with the crisis in the US-Israel relationship during the Gulf War (1991) and the reorganization of MENA after the Cold War, Israel maintained its strategic importance with the rise of the War on Terror. In addition, Israel acts as a proxy against

<sup>2</sup> Other cases appointed by Marini were South Africa, which was under the apartheid regime, and Iran, which was under the dictatorship of Shah Reza Pahlavi.

Islamic nations and groups, including Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas, which oppose the US's unchallenged dominance in the region.

The initial section will examine the transformations of the concept of sub-imperialism since its elaboration by Marini in the 1970s. Next, we will examine the relationship of the US with Brazil and Israel through the concept of sub-imperialism.

## **1 IMPERIALISM AND SUB-IMPERIALISM**

Lênin (2021) defined imperialism as the colonial and warlike expansion of states that is based on the formation of monopolies from the combination of financial and industrial capital, which enter into a crisis of overaccumulation. Imperialism enables capital to exploit native labor, expropriate natural resources, and conquer new captive markets to dislodge systemic crises through state force.

Marini (2012) formulated the concept of sub-imperialism to address the diversity of dependent nations. This is because Brazil and Bolivia, for instance, were both dependent states, albeit in distinct positions within the global hierarchy. Marini regards sub-imperialism as a method for dependent national capital to circumvent the constraints of realizing the surplus value resulting from the domestic market's atrophy as a consequence of the super-exploitation of labor. Sub-imperialist nations strived to export these goods and capital to weaker nations in their regions to realize the value contained in the commodities. The outcome was a hierarchy among states, such as between the US, Brazil, and Bolivia. In this hierarchy, Brazil continued to be exploited by the US while simultaneously exploiting Bolivia.

Nevertheless, the interpretation of sub-imperialism should not be limited to economic considerations. This is the factor that distinguished Brazil from Argentina and Mexico. These countries did not have the geopolitical characteristics of a sub-imperialist nation. Mexico lacked the relative autonomy indicative of sub-imperialism due to their proximity to the US. The Mexican capital had no national project that could deviate from US imperialism. Argentina had greater autonomy, as shown in the Malvinas War (1982). However, the Argentinian bourgeoisie lacked regional leadership in comparison to Brazil.

## **2 SUB-IMPERIALISM IN THE COLD WAR**

### **2.1 Brazil**

Following the 1964 military coup with US political and military support, Brazil was designated as the representative of American interests in the Nixon-Kissinger strategy (1969–74) of “spheres of influence” to impede the spread of communism and popular nationalism in South America. Brazilian assistance was provided to coups in Uruguay, Argentina, Paraguay, Chile, and Bolivia as part of Operation Condor (1975–83). For instance, in Bolivia, this was combined with Petrobras' involvement in the exploitation of natural gas and the export of Brazilian capital. Brazil also established the second-largest arms industry in the Third World during this period, trailing only Israel (Luce, 2015). Thus, Brazil's sub-imperialism was defined by the combination of its coercive role and the extension of Brazilian capital within US objectives for South America.

Nevertheless, the Brazilian elites had their own national project, which occasionally deviated from that of the US. This was apparent during the Ernesto Geisel administration (1974–79). Brazil voted in favor of UN resolution 3379 in 1975, which classified Zionism as a form of racism, because of its rapprochement with MENA nations to promote oil imports. This illustrates the divergences inside US-led “collective imperialism”.

In 1975, the Brazilian nuclear project was developed to compete with Argentina for technological dominance and military hegemony on the continent. The agreement with West Germany to advance the project reinforced the country's relative autonomy. However, the US agenda was centered on the containment of atomic expansion. Consequently, the Americans were at odds with Brazil's decision to enhance its nuclear capabilities, even for energy purposes (Sotelo Valencia, 2017). Brazil and the US experienced a gradual separation as a result of this crisis and the human rights foreign policy of the Jimmy Carter administration (1977–1981). The economic and social crisis that ensued in Brazil as a consequence of the abrupt increase in interest rates by the Federal Reserve in 1979 ultimately resulted in the end of the dictatorship in 1985.

## 2.2 Israel

During the Cold War, the US' foreign policy toward the MENA was designed to facilitate access to the region's oil (Hanieh, 2024). The sub-imperialist alliance with Saudi Arabia and Iran, which control the two largest oil reserves in the region, serves as evidence (Hanieh, 2021). Despite the absence of energy reserves, Israel was perceived as a solid ally in the fight against Arab nationalism.

The 1967 war marked Israel's rapprochement with the US, as the Israelis emerged victorious over Egyptian, Syrian, and Jordanian forces. This was considered a humiliation for Arab nationalism, which began to perish (Hanieh, 2024). The Yom Kippur War of 1973, which was a surprise attack by Egypt and Syria, was the final gasp of pan-Arabism. It was also a crucial moment for the US-Israeli alliance. American air support was instrumental in Israel's response, which successfully contained the enemy troops (Hanieh, 2021).

The US strategy was altered in 1979. The US mediated a peace agreement between Israel and Egypt instead of engaging in military conflict with Arab nationalism. The outcome was the subjugation of Egypt to the US and the collapse of pan-Arabism. However, 1979 also witnessed the Iranian Revolution. This confluence of factors made Israel the US's main ally and established political Islam as the primary adversary in the region. This led to an increase in the alliance. Neoliberal reforms in both countries and a bilateral free trade agreement in 1985 facilitated the advancement of American capital over Israel, particularly in the military sector (Hanieh, 2003).

During an inflation crisis in the 1980s, Israel was rewarded with huge investments from American capital and the opening of new markets for Israel, especially in the Third World. Israel exported arms and trained counter-revolutionary forces in regions where the US could not be directly involved (Halper, 2015). A significant market was Latin America, particularly the dictatorships of Chile, Argentina, and Brazil. Therefore, Brazil's sub-imperialist actions facilitated Israel's arms exports to the region, despite the vote against Israel in the UN, and strengthened US-led collective imperialism.

### 3 SUB-IMPERIALISM AFTER THE COLD WAR

#### 3.1 Brazil

Some authors have characterized Brazil's rise following its re-democratization in 1989 as sub-imperialist (Bond; Garcia, 2015; Luce, 2015; Sotelo Valencia, 2017) or imperialist (Fontes, 2010). Brazil's (sub-)imperialism would be characterized by the transnational expansion of finance. The establishment of Mercosur in the early 1990s was a significant manifestation of Brazil's power project in South America and relative autonomy to US imperialism. It promoted free trade and reproduced the exploitation of Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay. Mercosur was also an alternative to the US-sponsored Free Trade Area of the Americas, which was rejected by the Brazilian elites.

Brazil's regional project was to be continued with the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), established in 2008 as an alternative to the US-led Organization of American States (OAS). Unasur's objective was to fortify South America's defense and economic autonomy. It aimed to advance regional integration through the Initiative for the Integration of South American Regional Infrastructure (IIR-SA) with the investment of the National Development Bank (BNDES) and the support of the Brazilian monopoly capital. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also played a role in opening new business opportunities (Bond; Garcia, 2015; Luce, 2015; Sotelo Valencia, 2017). Despite the country's deindustrialization and the increasing influence of agrarian and mining capital, Brazil continued to export manufactured goods and capital to the region (Luce,

2015). On a geopolitical level, Brazil assumed the leadership of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) at the request of the US. Bond (2015) contends that Brazil has served imperial interests in the same manner as other BRICS nations.

Nevertheless, I agree with Katz (2020) and Berringer (2013) that Brazil's military extension and its project for South America are not articulated to classify Brazil as a sub-imperialist. Both authors perceive an economicism in the classification of post-democratization Brazil as a sub-empire. To begin with, the interests of Brazil's bourgeoisie are not a factor in its military intervention in Haiti. Additionally, Brazil is not accountable for the regional intensification of the War on Drugs, the primary coercive instrument of US imperialism in South America. Colombia, a nation with US military bases but lacking the economic profile of sub-imperialism, fills this role. Furthermore, the Brazilian capital has not established a specific projection space in South America; rather, it has pursued opportunities throughout the Global South, building relationships with countries in Africa, the MENA, and China (Berringer, 2013; Katz, 2020). The Brazilian bourgeoisie, according to Berringer, lacks the political and economic capacity to initiate an autonomous project.

Consequently, Brazil did not implement coercive measures in conjunction with the expansion of national capital. On the contrary, Brazil acknowledged Bolivia's sovereign decision to nationalize the natural gas, in 2006, that Petrobras had been exploiting since the dictatorship. Berringer observes that Brazil confronted coup attempts in Venezuela in 2002, Bolivia in 2003 and 2008, Ecuador and Honduras in 2008, and Paraguay in

2012. Moreover, the 2016 parliamentary coup against Dilma Rousseff (2011-16), which the US supported, as well as the dismantling of a portion of Brazilian capital as a result of the Lava Jato operation, have had a significant impact on the global expansion of the Brazilian state and capital.

On the other hand, the geopolitical role that the Jair Bolsonaro government (2019–2022) played was consistent with sub-imperialism. Its support for the 2019 coup in Bolivia, the 2019 coup attempt in Venezuela, and the efforts to strengthen the far right on the continent are examples of this. Nevertheless, Bolsonaro has diminished the extent of Brazilian autonomy concerning US imperialism by submitting the country to the Donald Trump administration (2017–20), as evidenced by the transfer of the Alcântara space base to the US. In addition, he has reversed initiatives to fortify Brazilian autonomy, including the weakening of the BNDES, IIRSA, and Unasur. Therefore, Brazil is neither sub-imperialist nor anti-imperialist. It remains a dependent nation under US-led collective imperialism.

### 3.2 Israel

The geopolitics of the MENA were altered as a result of the unipolar order that the US established after the Cold War. Following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the Gulf War garnered the backing of nearly all Arab nations. Syria and Libya, which remained neutral, and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which supported Iraq, were the exceptions. The US resumed its role as a peace broker to further its undisputed hegemony. The objective was to transform the resolution of the Palestine Question, which was gathering global atten-

tion since the first Intifada (1987–93), into a means of normalizing Israel's diplomatic relations with Arab nations and facilitating the establishment of a free trade zone in the MENA (Hanieh, 2024). Nevertheless, Israel initially declined to engage in peace negotiations. President George H.W. Bush's (1989–1992) threats to cut military aid. Assurances of new business opportunities for the Israeli bourgeoisie sparked Israel's participation in the Madrid Conference in 1991 (Shlaim, 2015). This led to the Oslo Accords (1993–95).

Nevertheless, certain segments of the Israeli elite, particularly those associated with Likud and the far-right settler movement undermined the agreements. I do not, however, interpret this opposition as a Israeli relative autonomy. The neoconservatives, an ideology that emerged in the 1980s and opposed peace agreements in the MENA, were a crucial part of the American establishment and supported the Israeli position. Neoconservatives advocated for war to defeat the enemies of the US and Israel (Huberman; Santos; Nasser, 2024). Even the Democratic presidents Bill Clinton (1993–2000) and Barack Obama (2009–16) were not mediators who were dedicated to justice and peace (Khalidi, 2013).

Moreover, Benjamin Netanyahu (2009–21) attempted to undermine the nuclear agreement between US and Iran and confronted Obama's decision to halt the construction of settlements in the West Bank to facilitate the negotiations with the Palestinians. However, during a speech in 2015 that challenged Obama's foreign policy toward the MENA, Netanyahu was met with a standing ovation from members of both parties in the US Congress. Israel ceased to be an external partner and has become an actor in the internal disputes of the

US. This is the reason Katz (2020) and Martinelli (2022) designate Israel as a co-imperial state. Katz compares Israel to two other settler colonies: Canada and Australia. These three settler nations are unconditional allies of the US, also a settler state. The outcome has been the preservation of Israeli settler colonialism, apartheid, and occupation.

Furthermore, a notable rapprochement occurred between the American and Israeli bourgeoisies, particularly following the onset of the War on Terror in early 2000s. US capital investments have stimulated the civilian and military technology sectors in Israel. Consequently, Palestine was transformed into a testing ground for arms and security technologies utilized and exported by the Israeli and US military-industrial complexes (Graham, 2011).

The US has prioritized war as the primary method of imperialist intervention in the MENA. The region has been engulfed in several imperialist wars: Afghanistan (2001–21), Iraq (2003–11), Lebanon (2006), Gaza (2008–), Libya (2011), Syria (2011–), and Yemen (2004–). In 2024, the US Air Force intervened to safeguard Israel from Iranian drone attacks. This reaffirmed Israel's alliance with the US during a time of widespread protests against Israeli genocide in Gaza (2023–).

Capasso and Kadri's (2023) comprehension of contemporary imperialism helps understand the centrality of war in the MENA. The authors contend that the wars fought by US-led collective imperialism are a form of production, accumulation, and profit. War is a mode of accumulation by waste that results in the destruction of human life and nature by Western bombs. The commodities produced are the bodies of the surplus populations who resist the undisputed hegemony of the US.

The Israeli military-industrial complex is pivotal in reinforcing US dominance in the MENA, ensuring unobstructed access to oil, and thwarting Chinese influence in the area. The agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, mediated by China in early 2023 to promote the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and enhance Chinese access to regional oil, has increasingly impeded American and Israeli strategies in the area due to Saudi Arabia's growing autonomy (Nasser; Oliveira, 2024). The Saudis frequently conflicts with the US, as evidenced by the negotiation of oil prices with Russia in OPEC and the joining of BRICS+.

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia consented to the 2020 Abraham Accords, which normalized Israel's relations with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco, and engaged in their own normalization negotiations with Israel (Hanieh, 2024). Nevertheless, the Palestinian attack on October 7 halted this regional reorganization in disregard of the Palestine Question. This has challenged the US initiative to establish an alternative to the BRI in the region via the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). Also, it illustrates the current contradictions in US-led collective imperialism, considering the strategic significance of MENA in countering China's ascendance.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, we argued that Brazil and Israel ceased to be sub-imperialist nations in opposing ways. This resulted from internal transformations within these nations and their foreign policies, along with the evolving significance of MENA and South America for US strategy. The democratization of Brazil and the persistence of apartheid in Israel are internal

factors that elucidate the alteration in foreign policy towards the US and its regions.

Although the US has moved away from Brazil and closer to Israel, indicating that both nations are no longer sub-imperialist, I contend that they continue to be integral to the US-led collective imperialism. Nonetheless, their significance markedly differs from the greater resemblance they embodied during the Cold War, when Marini saw both as sub-imperialist nations. The cessation of Brazil's acquisition of Israeli military vehicles amid Israel's genocide against Palestinians in Gaza in 2024 exemplifies the divergent trajectories of the two nations since the conclusion of the Cold War. It also exemplifies the persist divergences within the US-led collective imperialism.

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# The State of Israel in the Construction of Argentine Politics through a Prophetic Lens

*O Estado de Israel na Construção da Política Argentina sob uma Perspectiva Profética*

*El Estado de Israel en la Construcción de la Política Argentina desde una Perspectiva Profética*

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper analyzes Argentina's right-wing government's framing of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, focusing on religious symbols in Javier Milei's public image and the broader Libertarian identity project. It examines how Milei integrates Jewish symbols into his political narrative, shaping domestic and foreign policy discourse. Given the role of meaning-making in foreign policy, the study explores how Milei frames Argentina's developments within a "civilizational war," linking them to the Middle East. This prophetic politics presents domestic sacrifice as part of a broader ideological struggle, aligning Argentina's trajectory with the ideological and symbolic narratives surrounding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.*

**Key words:** Javier Milei; Libertarianism; Right-wing politics; Jewish orthodoxy; Palestine.

## RESUMO

*Este artigo analisa a construção do discurso do governo de direita da Argentina sobre o conflito palestino-israelense, com foco nos símbolos religiosos na imagem pública de Javier Milei e no mais amplo projeto identitário libertário. Examina como Milei incorpora símbolos judaicos em sua narrativa política, moldando o discurso da política interna e externa. Dado o papel da construção de significados na política externa, o estudo explora como Milei enquadra os acontecimentos argentinos dentro de uma "guerra civilizacional", vinculando-os ao Oriente Médio. Essa política profética apresenta o sacrifício doméstico como parte de uma luta ideológica maior, alinhando a trajetória da Argentina às narrativas ideológicas e simbólicas em torno do conflito palestino-israelense.*

**Palavras-chave:** Javier Milei; Libertarianismo; Política de direita; Ortodoxia judaica; Palestina.

## RESUMEN

*Este artículo analiza la construcción del discurso del gobierno de derecha en Argentina sobre el conflicto palestino-israelí, centrándose en los símbolos religiosos en la imagen pública*

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*de Javier Milei y en el más amplio proyecto identitario libertario. Examina cómo Milei incorpora símbolos judíos en su narrativa política, moldeando el discurso de la política interna y exterior. Dado el papel de la construcción de significados en la política exterior, el estudio explora cómo Milei enmarca los acontecimientos en Argentina dentro de una “guerra civilizacional”, vinculándolos con Medio Oriente. Esta política profética presenta el sacrificio doméstico como parte de una lucha ideológica mayor, alineando la trayectoria de Argentina con las narrativas ideológicas y simbólicas en torno al conflicto palestino-israelí.*

**Palabras clave:** Javier Milei; Libertarianismo; Política de derecha; Ortodoxia judía; Palestina.

## Introduction

The paper aims at analysing the symbolic substratum at work in how the Argentinean government relates to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Recently, President Javier Milei announced that Argentina would relinquished its historical non-intervention policy by aligning itself to Israel and supporting its “legitimate right to self-defence”<sup>2</sup>. By doing so, he subscribes to a civilizational war frame<sup>3</sup> which allows him to link what is going on in Argentina (the local sphere) with what is at stake in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (the global sphere). In order to understand how such a right-wing political phenomenon has arisen in Argentina, it is worth looking at the uses of religious symbols in the making of prophetic politics narratives (Hanska, 2009)<sup>4</sup> and Argentinean

right-wing in-making identity (Saferstein; Gondentul, 2021; Vázquez, 2023). Our objective is to analyse how the Middle East conflict is portrayed in a prophetic style and how this narrative feeds the building of a right-wing libertarian identity. In order to aboard the issue, we analyse the salience of Jewish symbols in the libertarian narrative. Finally, we analyse how these symbols are placed into the frame of an emotionalized religion able to provide meaning in the very realm of politics.

## Contextualizing the issue: Judaism and politics in Argentina.

From before its very foundation as a State in 1948, Israel and the Zionist project have impacted in Argentinean politics. As a product of XIXth century mass migration to Argentina, a well-developed and institutionalized Jewish (Kahan, et. al; 2011), Arab and Muslim communities (Montenegro, 2023) dwell into the country. Certainly, Jewish population is estimated in less than 1% of the total population of the country, which is mainly Catholic (63%), Pentecostal (13%) and with no religion (19%) (CEIL, 2019). Nevertheless, because of right-wing nationalist anti-Semitism (Lvovich, 2003; Grinchpun, 2020), integral Catholicism (Mallimaci, 1988) and right-wing PeronistJudeophobia (Besoky, 2018), both Israel and the

<sup>2</sup> These statement has been pronounced in the context of the ongoing war between Israel and the Hamas Islamist movement. For Israel, it is all about a military incursion aimed at destroying Hamas after the 7<sup>th</sup> October 2023 attack in which 1200 persons were killed and others were kidnapped. For those who oppose Israel, it is all about an Israeli genocidal practice that started several decades ago. A more nuanced position such as European Union’s condemns Hamas but warns Israel about the humanitarian consequences of its military actions.

<sup>3</sup> The literature on framing is abundant. It is worth making reference to Benford and Snow (2000) and Entman (1993), between others.

<sup>4</sup> Several features of Milei resonates with those of prophetic politics as analysed by Hanska: a leader who provides the people he is leading with a unified view of themselves and their existence and an idea of a joint purpose; a dichotomise vision of the future (Gomorra VS Golden future frame) that warn the people of the alternative future which will become inevitable if the narrated politics are not followed; portrayal of the leader as an outsider to politics.

so called “Jewish question” have historically been a central topic in the political agenda.

The 1994 AMIA (Argentine Israelite Mutual Association) bombing was a watershed in the relationships between Jewishness and politics (Tank-Storper, 2016). Several victims’ organizations were founded. From years, ceremonies were held aimed at the searching for Justice (Tolcachier, 2012). Faced with the attack and lack of justice, the State appears as a debtor. At the same time, Jewishness appears as a potential presence in the political scene. As a consequence of the attack, ethnicity takes a political and public dimension as Jews are able to be portrayed as a *collective* victim. It is true that in the rallies that commemorate of the tragedy, the attack is framed not just in ethnicity, but as a tragedy that involves the all Argentinean society. Nevertheless, the balance between the ethnic and the national framing is not an easy thing to be established (Feldstein; Acosta-Alzuru, 2003; Tolcachier, 2012).

The potential politicization of Jewishness manifested itself during the last years of Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner’s Presidency (2007-2015). The signing of the memorandum between Argentina and Iran, the death of prosecutor Nisman who were in charge of investigating the AMIA bombing, and the discourses looking at denouncing Chancellor Timerman taking into account his Jewish identity, were all elements in the staging of Kirchnerism’s decline (Setton, 2021). While the DAIA (*Delegation of Argentine Israelite Associations*) accused the government, an organization called *Llamamiento Argentino Judío* (Jewish Argentine Call) was born and supported Timerman. A split took place inside the Jewish field. This rift not only expressed the plurality of Judaism itself, but the salience of political identities in the making of the Jewish field.

Milei, from celebre enfant terrible to President.

Javier Milei became famous thanks to his provocative interventions in the mass media. The anger, the fury and the raising of tone voice were his very hallmark. By categorizing his opponents as “fucking lefties”, he reinstated in the overall common sense the Communist-Capitalist (Liberty) dichotomy. Milei himself was part of a field inside of which several intellectuals criticized the central-right government of *Cambiamos* (2015-2019). By criticizing *Cambiamos* from an extreme right-wing position, a fusion between the right-wing reactionary nationalism and the conservative liberal strand was finally established (Morresi; Saferstein; Vicente, 2021).

Until the rise of Milei, the so called new right had been hegemonized by the PRO party, whose activists refused to be identified either as lefties or righties (Bohoslavsky; Morresi, 2016; Vommaro, 2017). Theirs was a strategy aimed at de-categorized the political field by rejecting the historical categories that used to frame the perceptions of the social actors. Milei did otherwise. He himself is a great categorizer. He identified himself as anarcho-capitalist, a category that used to be strange to Argentinean politics. Milei identifies a wide range of economic and cultural practices as “Communism”. For the libertarians and several right-wing intellectuals, Communism is a live force that has to be confronted in the realm of several battlefields, foreign policies being one of them.

## Israel in the Libertarian and the right-wing imagery<sup>5</sup>.

Taking into account the rising of right-wing parties in Europe, the United States and Latin America, and the relationship between their leaders and both the Israeli government and Judaism, several papers have been writing aiming at tackle the issue. A brief review of this literature allows us to locate our object study into a wider context. We will focus on such literature that pay attention to the salience of Jewish and national Israeli symbols in the making of political identities. Some foreign policy practices are able to be analysed as symbols, such as the relocation of embassies from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Supporting Israel is not a practice that can only be analysed as pertaining to the domain of foreign policy, but a symbol of a right-wing project of national community building *sometimes* based on religious principles. For instance, former USA Vice President Mike Pence framed his support to Israel as a kind of religious duty. Notwithstanding the salience of religion in such a discourse, political actors tend to balance between different sources of legitimation. Trump policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been characterized by ambiguity rather than religiously-oriented full support to Israel. These can be confirmed when looking at the statements surrounding the relocation of the USA Embassy to Jerusalem (Eriksson, 2018, pp. 54-55). Milei's proposal on the Embassy issue follows a discursive pattern similar to Trump's. When asked (in Spanish) in X "Will you move the Embassy to Jerusalem?", he simply asked "West Jerusalem"

5 Libertarianism is but a sub-ideology which can be located in the Right ideological field. This section deals not only with Libertarianism but with the overall Right in order to contextualize Milei's viewpoint into a wider field.

(July, 9, 2024). By clarifying that it is the western part of the city which is concerned in the proposal, he avoids to intervene in the debate concerning the unification of Jerusalem and its religious connotations.

Supporting Israel has been a task assumed by USA neoconservatism since the 1960s. This cultural, economic and political movement framed the Cold War in a "good VS evil" schema (Durham, 2011, p. 610), linking the support for Israel to the war against Communism, which was labelled as Satanic<sup>6</sup> (Aiello, 2005). In the late 1970s, the Christian Right emerged as a political actor whose stance regarding Israel echoes those of the neoconservatist, especially in linking anti-communism with pro-israelism. A Christian Zionist brand, which interpreted Middle East affairs in a prophetic way, emerged from these Christian Right. While being associated with opposition to abortion and gay rights, the Christian Zionist encouraged American evangelist to support the settlement policy in occupied West Bank and Gaza (Durham, 2011, p. 612). For them, Israel and Judaism are perceived as western moral barriers against both Islamism and Communism. The supposedly Jewish symbols worked as political artefacts which expressed the values of the Right.

Christian Zionism has spread around Latin America. In 2018, President Jimmy Morales translated the Guatemalan embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. This was a policy aimed at building the very identity of Guatemala as an Israel friendly and God-oriented country (Fuentes, 2023). In a pro-Bolsonaro rally, *Tea*

6 For Milei, Communism can be labelled as a kind of satanic phenomenon. He accused Pope Francis of being "*el maligno*" (the evil one) because his economic perspective based on social justice. Besides, Milei subscribes to a viewpoint that sees in the Bible (Book of Samuel) the fundamentals of a capitalist oriented economy and a rejection of statehood.

*Party* co-founder Michele Bachmann stated that for more than 3500 years, God appointed Jerusalem as the city capital of Israel (Machado, et.al. 2021). Until now, there is no such a religious orientation in Milei's promise to move the Embassy.

Cases such as Guatemala, Brazil and Chile (AranguizKahn, 2022) have been analysed taken into account several issues regarding the relationships between politics and neopen-tecostalism, the transnational links between conservative Evangelicals, the influx of USA religiosity in Latin America and the portrayal of Jewish and Israeli national symbols in the making of religious-political agendas aimed at supporting "traditional values". Nevertheless, the matter not only relates to evangelism but to the making of Jewish identities. Gherman y Klein (2021) analyses the issue in the context of the recent transformations of racial economy in Brazil and the ongoing identification of Jewishness with whiteness. It was formed an interreligious field that blend conservatives –Christians and Jews- together and split Judaism around political identities. Politics prevail above ethnicity.

The representation of Israel in Milei's discourse do not replicate world-wide libertarian's approach to the issue of Middle East conflict. Murray Rothbard was anti-Zionist (1967). Libertarians do not agree each other on the Middle East conflict (see Futerman; Block, 2024; Durham, 2011). The bone of contention relates to the legitimacy of communitarian property rights. For the individual to be the centre of society, no communitarian property right should be stated. Jewish land property right contradicts this principle because Jewishness is a collective identity. No individual Jew could have proven, in 1948 and

previously, that he owned a piece of land in Palestine (Hoppe, 02/01/2024).

The relationships between conservative libertarianism and Jewishness in Argentina travelled along two different tracks. One of them was the use of Jewish symbols in the political campaign (the sound of the *Shofar*; the Maccabean heroism). Those symbols are part of Judaism but are able to echo in other religions. The "forces of heaven", a symbol taken from 1 Maccabees -a book which, in fact, is not part of the Jewish cannon-, is just a vague reference to God not used at all in Jewish social spaces as synagogues but able to be reappropriated by religions other than Judaism.

Our case study has the particularity of being Milei himself an applicant to become Jew. This second aspect of the Judaization of libertarianism generated the possibility for Jewish social actors to be part of the front stage (Goffman, 1981) of libertarianism. Milei related himself to Jewish orthodoxy, a branch of Judaism that vehemently express support to right-wing Israeli politics.

The public image of Milei is constructed upon the exposure of his ties with Judaism. Even the practices that could be framed as spirituals intertwined with politics. The travel of Milei to the grave of Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, is not just a visit to an inspiring religious leader, but to one who shared the same hatred to Communism as Milei. From its very inception, Jewish orthodoxy had a troubled relation with Communism, even before the rise of Stalinist anti-Semitism. The sixth Rebbe of Chabad, IoseftzjakSchneerson (who held office before Menachem Mendel), was persecuted by the Communist regime in the Soviet Union. Nowadays lubavitchers celebrate his deliverance

from soviet prison. Fighting Communism is a core component of Chabad memory. It is said that Menachem Mendel prophesized the fall of the soviet regime (Heilman; Friedmann, 2011). The arrival of the Messiah, he stated, would be preceded by marvellous events such as the fall of Communism. For Milei, the alignment to Orthodox Judaism allows him to be part of a lineage which has developed itself in a hatred tension against Communism, either as a rival for the conquer of the Jewish souls at the beginning of the XXth century, either as a victim, either as an early messianic herald of Communist bankruptcy.

Nowadays Lubavitchers portrayed his leader, Menachem Mendel, as the herald of a hard hand politics in the context of Arab-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Schneerson use to criticise the Israeli government for not showing full Israeli power to his enemies. The Rebbe discourse on the matter rested in a rationale other than politic. Prophecy run against political compromise. Similarly, Milei detaches himself of the behaviour that a politician is expected to reproduce. He do not hide his ideology when dealing with political subjects, no matter if he may appear as a man lacking of political rationality. He depicts himself as a giant lion carrying with him a book called "*ley bases*" (Basic Laws) and followed by little lions, the book representing the core components of his foundational project. It is then possible to verify that a prophetic stand is at the centre of nowadays Argentinian politics. Moreover, the attachment to Israel is a component of a polity framed in a prophetic language that rejects the compromises that a professional politician -a member of a denigrated "casta" (caste), as Milei use to say- is expected to look for.

The alignment with Israel frames itself in an imaginary geography structured upon the liberty-Communism duality. When Milei expresses his support to Israel by stating that Israel has the right of defending itself using whatever means it deems necessary, he adds that "we are on the side of liberty, on the side of the USA, Israel and western Europe" (El tiempo, 6 May, 2024). Is the very concept of *Free world* that Milei resumes when explaining the foreign policy of the libertarian government. His refusal of being part of the BRICS is a strategy of staging his positioning in one of the poles of a world that he imagines as bipolar.

As Gherman and Kim (2021) state, the Israel that the rightist fight for is an imagined Israel. The real Israel is more complex. Certainly, it would be difficult for the Right to sustain the Israel that use to organize LGBT parades. Which is the Israel that Milei admires? An analysis of the address of Rabi Axel Whanish in front of the Senate when explaining his future task if designated ambassador in Israel, could get us closer to the answer.

Whanish spoke largely about the Israeli "economic miracle". This image, spread through Senor and Singer's book *Start up Nation*, provides an account about the transformation of Israel from a socialist oriented economy to a free market one. By taking this capitalist path, Israel would have become a prosperous country. Most of Whanish's speech was dedicated to identify the benefits for Argentina to associate with such an advanced technological country as Israel.

The benefits of the link with Israel have to do with the use of its technology and the acquisition of the culture that is behind that development. Our challenge is to invest in future technology. In that, Israel can be one of the most

beneficial partners for Argentina. (YOUTUBE Senado Argentina, March, 21, 2024).

Unlike Christian Zionism and its religious justifications for being close to Israel such as “those who bless Israel will be blessed”, the Rabi spoke about advanced technology and avoided to speak on religious terms.

Behind the idea of economic miracle underlies a teleology of capitalism. Like the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Israel would also have defeated socialism. It was not an external socialist force but its inner tendencies to this ideology. But it is not just about economics. Milei presidency defines itself in such a term as “cultural revolution”. Those who support the government think that Argentina is now experiencing deep changes. The logic behind supporting Israel do not lay down in a restricted political rationale, but in a moral one based on the clear distinction between good and evil. By taking sides with Israel, Argentina would align itself with an order which is not just social or geopolitical, but a cosmic one. When confronted with the idea that translating the embassy to Jerusalem would jeopardize Argentina, the supporters of Milei state that the real moral fault would be showing feelings of fears in face of terrorism.

In this sense, Whanish shows himself as a spokesman of this moral revolution that incorporates a clear advocacy of Israel face the October 7<sup>th</sup> Hamas’s attack.

Milei brings moral clarity. It was a question of terrorism versus civilization, and barbarism versus democracy, and a decision had to be made. Milei made a commitment by including Hamas as a terrorist organization in Argentina. When right and wrong are so clear, you cannot remain neutral. (Infobae, March, 6, 2024). Again, it is not religion that provides the rationale for this policy, but morality.

Jewishness provides a source of symbols by which the libertarian project portray the moral revolution supposedly at place in Argentina. By giving a Chanukah candelabrum as a present to Ukrainian President Zelensky, Milei stages his positioning in the geopolitical arena. By lighting a candle in the Chabad Lubavitch public celebration of Chanukah, Milei stages the Libertarian account of History. So, the Chanukah light represents the liberation from decades of populist (ie. Socialist, Peronist<sup>7</sup>) obscurantism.

Unlike other cases where Christian Zionism works as a core component of pro-Israeli policy, such an evangelical component is absent in ours. It is not in evangelical meetings that this policy is celebrated, but in Jewish ones. Pro-Israelism has no relation with the Christianisation of the society, as in the other cases. Neither has any relation whit Judaization. In fact, Jewish leaders use to state that Judaism is but a supplier of moral values for the politic. The condition for a minority ethnic religion to sustain a national political project lies down in its reduction to morality and spirituality.

Judaism provides the symbols for a prophetic politic to be staged. By weeping in the Western Wall, Milei constructs leadership as he shows himself as an “authentic” man. Even though emotion is not a core component of Orthodox Judaism which, in fact, emphasizes more in the attachment to divine commandments (*Mitzvot*) than in feelings and emotional commotion, the weeping Milei feeds the prophetic component of the libertarian project. The prophet is touched by God, so he

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<sup>7</sup> Peronism is a political identity that was born in the 1940s, aiming at representing the working class and looking for an alliance between this class and the national bourgeoisie. For some liberals politicians and intellectuals, the decline of Argentina is mostly due to Peronism.

weeps. He shows how close to God he is. The feat of the prophet is full of emotions, battles and acts of heroism all supported by a clear distinction between good and evil. In this case, prophetic politics and emotionalized religion goes together.

## Conclusion

For decades, Catholicism has been a core component of Argentinean politics. The salience of Jewish symbols and the very presence of Jewish religious leaders in the spiritualization of a political project is something that has not been seen before. This shows how Judaism and Israel are imagined by the Right. It is clear that Jewish orthodoxy is a branch of Judaism that has been experiencing a revival. The revival of right-wing Judaism intermingled with the rise of libertarianism. Between them, elective affinities are established. As far as Jewish symbols can be integrated in a shared language by which, for instance, the lighting of a candle is able to be understood not as a Jewish ritual but as a metaphor of what is going on in the nation and the all world, Judaism will be able to provide spiritual support to a political project that sees itself as a moment of nationhood re-foundation full of sacrifices. Supporting Israel, as long as this support is framing in a good V.S. evil dichotomy, becomes a moment of libertarian and right-wing spiritualization.

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# Islam in México: Love and Mobility

*Islã no México: Amor e Mobilidade*

*Islam en México: Amor y Movilidad*

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## ABSTRACT

*This article explores, from a transnational perspective, how Islam is mobilized through emotional and intimate relationships. Specifically, it examines the trajectories, experiences, and migratory practices of Muslims in Mexico, focusing on love, dating, and marriage. By analyzing these dynamics, the study sheds light on the intersection of religion, affective ties, and mobility. It also considers how religious identity is shaped through transnational connections and intimate relationships, contributing to broader discussions on transnational Islam, migration, and identity formation. By examining these personal and social dimensions, the article provides insights into the lived experiences of Muslims navigating faith and relationships across borders.*

**Keywords:** *Islam, love, transnational*

## RESUMO

*Este artigo explora, a partir de uma perspectiva transnacional, como o Islã é mobilizado por meio de relações emocionais e íntimas. Especificamente, examina as trajetórias, experiências e práticas migratórias de muçulmanos no México, com foco no amor, namoro e casamento. Ao analisar essas dinâmicas, o estudo ilumina a interseção entre religião, laços afetivos e mobilidade. Também considera como a identidade religiosa é moldada por conexões transnacionais e relações íntimas, contribuindo para debates mais amplos sobre Islã transnacional, migração e formação identitária. Ao abordar essas dimensões pessoais e sociais, o artigo oferece insights sobre as experiências vividas por muçulmanos que navegam entre fé e relações além das fronteiras.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Islã, amor, transnacionalismo*

## RESUMEN

*Este artículo explora, desde una perspectiva transnacional, cómo el Islam se moviliza a través de relaciones emocionales e íntimas. Específicamente, examina las trayectorias, experiencias y prácticas migratorias de musulmanes en México, centrándose en el amor, el noviazgo y el matrimonio. Al analizar estas dinámicas, el estudio ilumina la intersección entre religión, vínculos afectivos y movilidad. También considera cómo la identidad religiosa se configura a través de conexiones transnacionales y relaciones íntimas,*

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*contribuyendo a debates más amplios sobre el Islam transnacional, la migración y la formación identitaria. Al abordar estas dimensiones personales y sociales, el artículo ofrece perspectivas sobre las experiencias vividas por musulmanes que navegan entre la fe y las relaciones más allá de las fronteras.*

**Palabras clave:** *Islam, amor, transnacionalismo*

## Introduction

The study of Islamic communities in Mexico has enabled us to see dynamics of the Islam's transnationalization process (Medina, 2019) at its global scale as well as at a local one with its particularities. Islam's transnationality is the result of the religious system's high mobility, which is encouraged by different actors who can be Islamic or not, who can be part of institutional Islam or not. In this process, Islam is delocalized, transterritorialized and relocated in various ways (Capone; André, 2012). We chose the transnationalism focus, which enables us to get out from the methodological nationalism and understand the dynamics that run through geographical, political and hegemonic borders. Cultures, ideologies, systems, among them the religious, which can be revitalized through channels, flows and agents that mobilize them. With this perspective, we want to present, in this work, one of the mobility forms of Islam in Mexico through affective relationships, which generally result in marriage.

These dynamics are enrolled in the process of geographies of love or desire (Roca, 2011), migration for love (Roca, 2007), the transnationalization of intimacy (King, 2002), or transnational courtship (Bodoque; Soronellas, 2010). Roca Girona (2007, 2011) observes that these dynamics started in 1980 with the mobilization of Filipina girlfriends or women from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union to the United States of America, and later, with

marital agencies that facilitate the search for a partner on the internet, which originated the transnational courtship and marriage phenomenon. This dynamic has increased and has taken on different forms that are in accordance with the social networks' update and the move from computers to mobile phones, thus, the love apps appear to create an affective market: "they create mobile apps that are directly from the phone, and they work as 'sexual-loving delivery'" (Bonavitta, 2015). Among the Muslims, this has taken as well to the creation of social media groups (Pasqualin; Campos Barbosa, 2016), platforms, websites, and dating apps with Islamic tone, such as Muslima, Muzz –the Tinder for Muslims–, Musmeet, Muslim Dates, Muslim Dating, BuzzArab, Arablounde, or Zawajara: Islamic Marriage, Single Muslim, Muzwaj, Muslim Mingle: Dating and Chat, Sunna Match, Islam et Mariage, Mariage Halal et Recontres, among others, which has opened a marital or intimacy market for a specific consumer society.

With this context is that we seek to initiate a reflection that focuses on the forms or types of forming marriages through the use of digital technologies and migration. Hence we anticipate that the affective experiences of Muslim migrants in Mexico are not foreign to the presence of virtuality or the use of these apps as a medium for marriage seeking, and that this involves other variables such as migration and conversion. The affective relationships that involve transnational dating or transnationali-

zation of intimacy where we can locate love, which entail love between Muslims, either converts or migrant origin in Mexico, opens a line of research to comprehend some ways in how Islam mobilizes, which is the purpose of the article, but also how these relationships allow the generation or make visible cultural expressions on the rules of love and Gender-related marital relationships, and around Islam in a highly Christian context with a Catholic majority.

The data presented here are the result of monitoring two Muslim groups. On one hand, the Muslims from Guadalajara<sup>3</sup>, and on the other, the Ahmadi Muslim Community<sup>4</sup>. The tracking consisted of field work and interviews, but we also backed up these experiences with a literature review about Islam in Mexico, and retrieved data that show love, courtship, and marriage experiences. Derived from it, we propose methodologically a typology, according to the idea of Weberian ideal types (Weber, 1984) to describe the different ways of how the affective relationships are connected to Islam and its mobility, in which the migration is an important variable. With a comparative analysis, we seek to explain and inform about the particularities that the affective relationships have in Guadalajara and with the Ahmadi Movement.

We rely on the idea that this type of emotional and loving relationships, especially marriage, should not be comprehended only as a religious commandment, decision-making linked to needs, desires, aspirations always plays important roles in the agency of each involved,

so religion is not always an imperative. The proposal is that these relationships also respond to the global dynamics related to cultural industries that create social imaginaries for the case of women converted to Islam or Mexican Muslims; as happened in the exploration of Medina (2014) with the construction of religious identities and the case of Islamic marriages in Brazil (Pasqualin; Campos Barbosa, 2016), and with the so called migration for love, which, at the same time, is connected, for the case of migrant men, to political and economical situations of their countries. We want to highlight that the processes, even though they involve Islam and mobility, are not homogenous. Every emotional and loving relationship is a trajectory that plays differently with the religion, love, and migration variables, to mention those that are reiterative. With the comparative analysis, we explain how an institutionalized religious practice creates specific types of marriage, whereas an Islam exposed to deinstitutionalization allow the generation and combination of various types of affective relationships.

### **Islam in Mexico: the community from Guadalajara and the Ahmadi Muslim Community**

The contemporary existence of Islam in Mexico, which spans from 1990 to this day (Medina, 2019), has shown an increase of Muslims bot migrant origin and converts, e.g., in 2010 the Census of Population and Housing identified 3,760 Muslims in the country, of which 2,368 are men and 1,392 are women (INEGI, 2010). In 2020, an increment was reported with a total of 7,982 Muslims, of which 4,713 are men and 3,269 are women (INEGI,

<sup>3</sup> The Muslims in Guadalajara are represented by two Sunni mosques, hence, for the purpose of this work, they will be taken as only one group.

<sup>4</sup> The Ahmadi Muslim Community is present in Mérida, Mexico City, Querétaro and Chiapas. In this work, they are considered as Muslims because they identify as that. It is not our goal to debate whether or not they are Muslims.

2020). Based on our field work, we know that from that population, the majority are Mexican converts, while the minority consists of Arab, Turkish, and Pakistani migrants.

Islam's presence is very diverse when it comes to create community, enroll to some orthodoxy or doctrine, connect to the international da'wah, and practice. Among the doctrine's diversity, there are Sunni, Shiite, Sufi, Ahmadi, and Salafi communities, and many of them are related to international proselytism of diverse types. Among the international proselytism of a more vertical character are a couple of Islamic organizations that establish as community in some region of the country, introducing a type of practice, such as the Murabitun World Movement in Chiapas in 1998, and the Ahmadi Muslim Community, installed in Merida in 2014, that later spread to Mexico City and Querétaro in 2017, and to Chiapas in 2018.

As in the case of Ahmadi, we observe that its installation in Mexico obeys to the international proselytism dynamic that establishes a hierarchical organization as well as endogamous through the preservation of marriages among high-class Pakistani people. The men in this marriage become missionaries with the goal of maintaining the communication, integration and economic support between the caliph in England and the sees in different countries where converts live. An important part of their system, conservation of the practice and institutional prevalence to an international level, is the marriage: endogamous for Pakistanis, and for the women converts with a Pakistani or between converts. These mechanisms highlight the hierarchy and power relations within the community that are accompanied by ethnic

identity for Pakistanis, and the perception of the convert as another, which permeates the ways of institutionalizing marriage.

Marriage has its own institutional process through the matrimonial service, *Rishta Nata*. This is attended by a volunteer parishioner, who is in charge of searching potential prospects, so the marriage can be achieved, this way an Ahmadi family and the movement's growth is guaranteed. However, this does not weaken the converts' diligence to do their own searching, for example, in dating apps or any other social networks that not only involve the Ahmadi, but Muslims of other currents as well.

Contrary to this type of organization, the Islamic community from Guadalajara, which started in 1993 with a migrant majority and a Sunni orientation, has developed under global dynamics, although they involve international da'wah, they have not been sustaining from it and, instead, the community has been self-managed. The converts' trajectories also show a diversity of religious and hybrid symbolic practices that are a reflection of Islam's deinstitutionalization dynamics. There is not a vertical organization established from just one orthodoxy, rather, the converts go through different Islamic spaces with a diverse offer. The internet has been a tool, a channel and an interaction and learning space that enables the building of emotional transnational relationships. It was through interactive platforms such as ICQ, Hi5, Facebook, and Instagram where Muslim women have established these relationships and even progress into marriage with migrant Muslims (Medina, 2014; Medina, 2020), but the same growth of the national community has allowed marriage between Mexican Muslims.

## Types of Affective relationships and marriage in Islam

The emotional relationships that were detected in the literature review about Islam in Mexico has enabled us to show the wide range of affective relationships that involve Muslims, migrants or converts. This can be from a courtship, engagement or even marriage. Within this diversity, we propose ideal types that seek to show the complexity of affective relationships existing in every trajectory, where every exposed case succeeds in connecting with any other type.

- A. Marriage or the loving-affective relationship is a migration cause, meaning:
  1. There is a transnational courtship and an engagement between a Mexican Muslim, or not, and a Muslim with a foreign residency.
  2. The marriage is effected by a Mexican (whether Muslim or not) and a migrant, later, they migrate to live as a couple.
- B. Marriage is an effect of migration. Migration happens for non-affective causes, and, at the place of destination, Mexico, relationships are formed and marriage is achieved.
- C. Marriage as a conversion cause generally happens when non-Muslim women get married to a Muslim man, and as time goes by, they choose to convert to Islam and build an Islamic family.
  1. The conversion is given by the existence of an affective-loving relationship, which entails the idea of a future marriage with a Muslim man.
- D. Marriage as a conversion effect, converts throughout their Islamic practice will

integrate marriage as a pillar, this will lead them to consider it and then contract it to a migrant or a compatriot.

- E. Conversion and marriage as part of a ritual process to fulfill conversion. Islam's diffusion through proselytism has had an effect not only in a person's spiritual search, but it has achieved conversions of complete families, integrating, at the same time, the dynamics of an Islamic marriage.
- F. Muslim families' migration. This is common between the Turkish, Pakistani, and, especially, belonging members of the Ahmadi movement.
- G. Temporary marriage or *muta'ah*, is a marriage that presets its duration and, most of the time, its only goal is the sexual pleasure.

From these ideal types, we can see how religious mobility is connected to the consolidation of affective relationships, where, mainly, marriage appears as a focal point. But we also want to show how Weber (1984) explains that within ideal types does not exist an ideal figure, but actions focused on goals and explanations within it, that open possibilities in connection ways and find crossings between them. The gathered experiences, mostly among Mexican converted women, imply several types of marriage, linked to their relation with the community and their personal trajectories, or ways of relating to otherness, gender and power relations as well.

For the case of the community from Guadalajara, we observe the existence of various types and crossings, what gives different forms of transnational love mobility:

Type A. Marriage or the affective relationship is the cause of migration. Ali, a Turkish; Fouad a Moroccan; Kadher and Assad, Egyptians, maintained transnational court-

ships from their countries. Fouad and Khader's fiancées traveled to their fiancés' countries to get married; the wives returned to Mexico to obtain a visa for them. Ali and Assad traveled to Mexico to get married. In all four cases, their wives have not converted to Islam, there was not an Islamic ritual, but only the civil one.

Type B. Marriage is an effect of migration. Sedar, a Turkish, and Haidar, a Syrian, arrived to Mexico because of work situations. Later, they married Catholic women who have chosen not to convert into Islam.

Type D. This is the most common case, since marriage is established as a religious pillar, in which the converts get to know each other previously, or meet at the communities and later get married. Rafael, the *imam*, and his wife met at the community, and they fulfilled the marriage ritual under the community customs.

Type E. Aisha explains marriage and conversion as part of a ritual process that completes the transition. She converted to Islam before her partner, with whom she had a daughter, in her second pregnancy, her partner decided to convert to Islam, and, at that moment, the community encouraged them to realize the Islamic marriage.

Type F. Muslim families' migration. Metin and Sandal are both Turkish men who migrated to Mexico because of labor motives. Already settled in the country, they went back to Turkey to get married, and brought their wives with them. Sandal's children were born in Mexico, and now they have the Mexican residence. This type of dynamic creates culturally endogenous families.

Those marriages in which crossings of one or more several types of Islamic marriages have also been registered, for example: D, A and B Crossing. The case of a Mexican woman who

converted to Islam through the internet. Social media enabled her to have a long distance relationship, one that didn't succeed. Later, she joined the community where she met an Indian migrant, this man belongs to type B, because his staying in Mexico was because of his job. After they met, they decided to get married in Mexico where they lived for a few years, and then, had children. During lockdown, they went back as a family to India, and after a long period of time as a couple, the husband divorced her islamically, and she returned to Mexico without her children

Case D, A, E. Prior to her conversion, Habibah was married to a Catholic man, with whom she had two daughters. Her partner represents Type E, where his conversion led to the whole family's conversion. However, Habibah did not feel that the conversion was authentic, so she got divorced. She began the transnational affective search (Medina, 2020) and managed to travel to Egypt with hopes of getting married, but not fully convinced, she returned to Mexico. In the local community, she met a convert with whom she got married, and now they live as a couple with their children following Islamic dynamics.

In the Ahmadi case, few marriage experiences are presented, in which we identified two types:

Type A. Marriage or affective-loving relationship as cause of migration. María and Guadalupe, before their conversion and as a part of their Islamic faith's integration, got married to foreign believers who they met through internet platforms. Maria, through *Rishta Nata Canada*, was helped by her *walli* and the platform's mediator; her marriage was celebrated with an Ahmadi of Pakistani descent and Canadian citizenship, where she emigrated to.

And Guadalupe, through a dating app, managed to marry a Sunni Muslim from Tunisia, the city where she currently resides.

Type D. Marriage as a conversion's consequence. It is about a couple of adults from Yucatán that converted on the first weeks of the establishment of the Ahmadi community in Mérida, Yucatán in 2014, and three years later, in 2017, they strengthened their relationship by getting civilly married to consolidate their integration in the community.

A couple of experiences where the marriage process was long and complicated were also registered, thus, some complex typologies crossings were identified:

Case C, D, A and B. Airam, is a Mexican woman who converted to Islam during a virtual courtship that ended, after which she continued with her Islamic practice, aware of her desire for an Islamic marriage. Subsequently, she reactivated her profiles on Muzz and Rishta Nata Global, met a suitor and migrated with the intention of getting married, however, the marriage did not materialize. She decided to stay in the UK working and later met her current Muslim husband of Pakistani descent on the Muzmatch app, with whom they immediately got married through the Rishta Nata UK platform.

Cases D and A. A convert, aware of the need for marriage as a key part of her Islamic practice, consolidated a transnational marriage through the Rishta Nata Canada platform, migrating to the suitor's country to celebrate the marriage and lead her life as a couple.

## Final considerations

Marriage because of migration is not a recent dynamic, it has been present in classic migrations. What we currently witness is the

reformulation of a market of marriage or courtship that broadens the possibilities of transnational affective interactions. The variable religion and migration in this context mediated by social networks that streamline communication has made the phenomenon of migration for love extended to sectors that were previously more traditional, such as Islam. Each ideal type considered, and the cases presented allow us to illustrate the mobility route, objective of this work, but we do not want to simplify the history of each couple, nor simplify the processes of socio-cultural integration in Mexico, including gender and power relations in them. The analysis of Islamic marriage we made with two community cases reflects how the religion and migration variables link together, and how these dynamics are connected to the transnationalization process and the continuation of Islam in Mexico.

We see how a community with a hierarchical and endogamous organization foster, mainly, a pair of types that are also well-approved, while if it goes out of the institutionalized practice, some other types are generated. These other types are very similar to the ones observed in the case of Guadalajara, where individual experiences not managed from the Islamic community bring within more diversity.

We observe that in both cases, even if some types coincide, there are variations. For example, in Type A, in the case of Guadalajara, migration is mainly masculine, where the man leaves his country of origin to go to Mexico. While in the Ahmadi case, the Mexican woman migrates to her husband's country because Ahmadi-Pakistani migration concentrates in Germany, England, Canada, and the United States of America, hence why the presence of Ahmadi migrants belongs to missionary fami-

lies and the missions in Latin America are done by converts only.

Finally, the classification of these affective relationships that is offered here has allowed us to appreciate that there is not just one cause that favors courtships or marriages, but several patterns that even are a sum of various types, also exist.

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# The Global South by the Global South? Latin American IR writes the Middle East

*O Sul Global pelo Sul Global? As RI latino-americanas escrevem sobre o Oriente Médio*

*¿El Sur Global por el Sur Global? Las RI latinoamericanas escriben sobre Oriente Medio*

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## ABSTRACT

*This study assumes that the Social Sciences fulfill a normative function with subjective effects. It examines the knowledge (re)produced in regions of the Global South about other regions within the same category, focusing on how Latin American International Relations scholarship constructs knowledge about the Middle East. To this end, it analyzes articles on the Middle East by Latin American authors published in SciELO-indexed journals (2011–2019). The findings suggest that these analyses often replicate Western IR's ontological, epistemological, and theoretical assumptions while incorporating elements of peripheral Orientalism. In doing so, the study highlights the conditions and effects of subjectification in the (re)production of this knowledge.*

**Keywords:** South-South relations; Latin American IR; Middle East; Peripheral Orientalism

## RESUMO

*Este estudo parte do pressuposto de que as Ciências Sociais desempenham uma função normativa com efeitos subjetivos. Ele examina o conhecimento (re)produzido em regiões do Sul Global sobre outras regiões dentro da mesma categoria, com foco em como a produção acadêmica latino-americana em Relações Internacionais constrói conhecimento sobre o Oriente Médio. Para isso, analisa artigos sobre o Oriente Médio escritos por autores latino-americanos e publicados em periódicos indexados na SciELO (2011–2019). Os resultados sugerem que essas análises frequentemente replicam os pressupostos ontológicos, epistemológicos e teóricos das Relações Internacionais ocidentais, ao mesmo tempo em que incorporam elementos do Orientalismo periférico. Ao fazê-lo, o estudo destaca as condições e os efeitos da subjetivação na (re)produção desse conhecimento.*

**Palavras-chave:** relações Sul-Sul; RI latino-americanas; Oriente Médio; Orientalismo periférico

## RESUMEN

*Este estudio parte del supuesto de que las Ciencias Sociales desempeñan una función normativa con efectos subjetivos. Examina el conocimiento (re)producido en regiones del Sur Global sobre otras regiones dentro de la misma categoría, centrándose en cómo*

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*la producción académica latinoamericana en Relaciones Internacionales construye conocimiento sobre Oriente Medio. Para ello, analiza artículos sobre Oriente Medio escritos por autores latinoamericanos y publicados en revistas indexadas en SciELO (2011–2019). Los resultados sugieren que estos análisis suelen replicar los supuestos ontológicos, epistemológicos y teóricos de las Relaciones Internacionales occidentales, al tiempo que incorporan elementos del Orientalismo periférico. Al hacerlo, el estudio destaca las condiciones y efectos de la subjetivación en la (re)producción de este conocimiento.*

**Palabras clave:** relaciones Sur-Sur; RI latinoamericanas; Oriente Medio; Orientalismo periférico

## INTRODUCTION

Latin America and the Middle East are European inventions. The shaping of territorialities and the essentialization and homogenization of cultures within them, have historically worked as ways of constituting identity and otherness. Social sciences have played a crucial role in it. This article is particularly interested in International Relations (IR) whose normative character (Walker, 1991) establishes binary differentiations among regions, othering those not matching with the Western ideal.

This text focuses on knowledge (re)produced by Global South regions to reflect on how they also participate in relations of power and ways of subject constitution. Specifically, it inquires into Latin American IR knowledge about the Middle East. With that objective, it presents a content analysis (Bernete, 2013) of papers published in indexed Latin American IR journals between 2011 (peak year of the Arab uprisings) and 2019 (pre-COVID pandemic).

The text is divided into four sections. The first focuses on Latin American IR's ontological, epistemological, and theoretical assumptions and main research agendas. The second tackles how it has historically dealt with the Middle East. The third section concentrates on methodological issues, and the fourth, presents a content analysis of the articles referring to the

Middle East region published in indexed Latin American IR journals. Finally, the paper provides some conclusions.

## 1 LATIN AMERICAN IR AND ITS ASSUMPTIONS

Latin American IR has mainly contributed to the sub-fields of International Political Economy and Foreign Policy having a particular imprint (Miguez; Deciancio, 2016). However, in sharing the epistemological and ontological assumptions of mainstream perspectives such as Realism, Liberalism, and “Via Media Constructivism”, or diverse combinations of them (Medeiros; Barnabé, 2016; TRIP, 2017; Tickner, 2003), in general, it has confirmed “the continued status of IR as an ‘American Social Science’” (Tickner; Waever, 2009, p. 3).

Concerning topics and research agendas, according to the 2017 TRIP survey<sup>2</sup>, Latin American IR is mainly devoted to International Security, International Political Economy, Foreign Policy, International Relations of a parti-

<sup>2</sup> Teaching, Research & International Policy (TRIP) is a research lab at William & Mary's Global Research Institute in Virginia, United States. Every three years, the lab surveys researchers and professors in different regions, including Latin America, on teaching and research in International Relations. This is an input that provides valuable information as it is methodologically rigorous and is carried out periodically. The results are available at <https://trip.wm.edu/>

cular region or country, and IR Theory. For its part, the results of our analysis of leading IR journals of the region published between 2011 and 2019 shows that 62.5% of the issues with which the published papers deal correspond to: Foreign Policy (29.5%), International Security (16.6%), International Political Economy (8.3%), and Regional Integration/Regionalism (8.1%). Within these sub-fields, when it does not deal with Latin America, the research is focused on Europe and the United States. This way, Latin American IR tends to reproduce the discipline's Western-centrism.

In this context, how does Latin American IR read/write the Middle East? To answer this question, it is first necessary to look into how has knowledge about the Middle East been historically built in our region.

## **2 LATIN AMERICAN IR AND THE MIDDLE EAST: PERIPHERAL ORIENTALISM AT WORK**

Relations between what would later become Latin America and the Middle East have been mediated by the West from the start: European orientalist thinking was present in Latin America during the colonial period and also was an important source of reference for the building of the nascent nations (Bergel, 2015). Because of the dependence on European sources, the lack of originality, and the marginal position in the overall cultural production, Hernán Taboada labelled this orientalism as peripheral (Taboada, 1998).

Despite a noticeable general increase in interest in the Middle East from Latin America, its study from IR continues to be non-significant. Issues related to Asia and Africa stay outside the

core of Latin American IR's interest and occupy a limited space. According to the 2017 TRIP survey, the Middle East is the main subject of study for 4.5% of researchers of the countries consulted (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico). Of them, in the case of Argentina, Colombia and Mexico, the large majority considered themselves working from a Realist perspective. In the case of Brazil and Chile, the majority considered themselves doing so from Via Media Constructivism's postulates.

Among the universities that the 2017 TRIP survey interviewees considered better for the study of IR in their countries<sup>3</sup>, only El Colegio de México has a space specifically dedicated to the study of the Middle East<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, the study of the Middle East is mandatory only for IR undergraduate programs in Mexico. By analyzing undergraduate and postgraduate theses, Marta Tawil Kuri has made a useful review of Mexican IR studies about the Middle East (Tawil Kuri, 2016). The author identified the main topics in IR theses on the Middle East and the most used theories. From her review it is possible to conclude that the study of the Middle East from Mexican IR is imbued with a peripheral orientalist perspective that feeds from theoretical lenses constructed in the West/North. My hypothesis is that this feature can be generalizable to all Latin American IR. In other words, this paper asserts that Latin American IR writing of the Middle East is mainly the product of the intertwining between mainstream IR assumptions and peripheral orientalism.

<sup>3</sup> Universidad Torcuato de Tella (Argentina), Pontificia Universidade Católica, Rio de Janeiro (Brasil), Universidad de Chile (Chile), Universidad de Los Andes (Colombia), El Colegio de México and Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (México).

<sup>4</sup> El Centro de Estudios de Asia y África.

### 3 ON METHODOLOGY

To define the Middle East according to Latin American scholars' conceptions, in 2019 I conducted a survey with members of the Latin American Council of Social Sciences<sup>5</sup> Working Group called "Latin America and the Middle East". As a result, the Middle East appeared as constituted by the following countries: Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

The text presents an analysis of papers working on the Middle East as defined above published between 2011 (when the Arab uprisings started) and 2019 (before the breakup of the Covid pandemics) in the following Scielo indexed IR journals: *Colombia Internacional* and *Revista Relaciones Internacionales, Estrategia y Seguridad* (Colombia), *Contexto Internacional* and *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* (Brazil), *Estudios de Asia y África* and *Foro Internacional* (Mexico), *Estudios Internacionales* (Chile), and *Revista de Relaciones Internacionales* (Argentina). Out of a total of 1009 articles published in these journals during these years, 28 of them focused on the Middle East and were written by researchers based in Latin America, representing 2.9% of the published articles. International Security and Foreign Policy were the main subfields from which authors read the region, 89.6% of the selected texts being inserted in these subfields.

The analysis sought to answer the following questions: a) What topics do the articles address? b) What are the cases selected to illustrate the object of study? c) On what

sources are the studies based? d) What are the theoretical frameworks used in these papers? e) What are the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning the texts?

### 4 ANALYSIS

To organise the presentation of the analysis, this section is divided into two parts. The first is devoted to texts working on issues related to International Security (IS) and the second to those dealing with topics related to Foreign Policy (FP). While the majority of the texts were easy to classify in one of these two categories, some of them eluded an immediate categorization because they dealt with both state policies and international security issues. In each of these cases, the distinction criterion has been the text itself: if it placed itself within FP analysis or made explicit its object of study was FP, then it was classified as an FP text, if not, as an IS text. Each of the subsections is introduced by a table organising the texts to facilitate their identification.

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<sup>5</sup> CLACSO

## 4.1 International Security (IS)

Table 1 – Articles on IS and the Middle East: references

Journal	Title	Year	Ref.
Colombia Internacional	International Security and Multilateralism: International Organizations and Intervention in Libya. (QuerajazuEscobari, 2012)	2012	Col. 1
	From The Thirty Years War to 21st Century Jihad. A Prelude to Secularization? (Der Ghoughassian, 2013)	2013	Col. 2
Contexto Internacional	Iran Talks: From Words to Acts. The Tehran Declaration and the Geneva Joint Action Plan in Perspective. (Rocha; Pereira, 2014)	2014	Ctx. 1
	The Core of Resistance: Recognising Intersectional Struggle in the Kurdish Women's Movement. (Ferreira; Vinicius, 2018)	2018	Ctx. 2
Estudios de Asia y África	Water, Power, and Hegemony between State and Non-State Actors in Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. (Conde, 2017)	2017	EAA 1
	Political Islam's Contentious Action during the Hegemonic Crisis of the Secular State in the Middle East: Egypt and Iran's Cases. (Garduño García, 2019)	2019	EAA 2
EstudiosInternacionales	The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict through the Light of Hydropolitics and the Transgression of the Right to Water. (Vázquez Méndez; Martínez Montañez, 2018)	2018	EI 1
	The Sunni Jihad of the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda: Islamism, Anti-Imperialism, and Political-Messianic Nihilism? (Ortiz; Caro, 2018)	2018	EI 2
Foro Internacional	Humanity in Limbo. Turkey's International Protection System in the Face of the Humanitarian Crisis of the Syrian Conflict. (Souto Olmedo, 2018)	2018	FI 1
Revista de Relaciones Internacionales, Estrategia y Seguridad	Europe in Face of the Threat of Islamic State's Religious Radicalism. (Melamed Visbal, 2016)	2016	RIES 1
	Relations in the Gulf After the 'Arab Spring' and their Impact in the Region. (Cuadro, 2016)	2016	RIES 2
Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional	Exploring the Interplay between Framing and Securitization Theory: the Case of the Arab Spring Protests in Bahrain. (Carvalho Pinto, 2014)	2014	RBPI 1

41% of the analyzed texts deal with issues related to IS. Generally speaking, they do not constitute a homogeneous field but, on the contrary, one characterized by dispersion. Thus, of the 12 analyzed texts, four deal with political Islam (Col. 2, EAA 2, RIES 1, and EI 2), two deal with the issue of natural resources -specifically water- (EAA 1 and EI 1), one works on the functioning of multilateralism in relation to the region (Col. 1), one on Iran's nuclear program (Ctx. 1), one on the relationship between women and conflict (Ctx. 2), and one

is of a theoretical nature (RBPI 1). This characteristic dispersion is repeated in relation to the cases addressed by the texts: two work on the conflict in Syria (Ctx. 2, FI 1), three others work on the Gulf (RIES 2, RBPI 1), one on the intervention in Libya (Col. 1), one on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (EI 1), and one on the nuclear agreement with Iran (Ctx. 1). Other countries in the region covered are Turkey (FI 1) and Egypt (EAA 2).

Although some issues of common interest can be identified, one outstanding characteris-

tic is that the texts do not dialogue with each other, but rather with the literature and issues raised by the academy in the North. This becomes apparent when analyzing the bibliographical sources used by the texts: while 71.8% of the total bibliographical references belong to authors working in North America (31.6%) or Europe (40.2%), 19% belong to authors from the Middle East and only 5.8% to Latin American authors. The remaining 3.4% is accounted for by literature written by authors working in Australia, Asia, or Africa. Besides, none of the analyzed texts resorted to theoretical frameworks developed in Latin America or the Middle East. Thus, names such as Robert Keohane, John Ikenberry, Samuel Huntington, Barry Buzan, Stephen Walt, and Kenneth Waltz are repeated as theoretical underpinnings of the analyses produced by Latin American authors.

The majority of the analyzed texts are based on a substantialist ontology and on philosophical rationalism assuming rational pre-given actors. Three types of actors appear in these texts: state, non-state (Islamic movements), and international organisations (UN). Rationalism is ascribed to both state and non-state actors: 'Islamism (jihadism) certainly makes use of fundamentalism, but it operates with religion in a selective way, not hesitating to violate "God's commands" if any of them oppose its power objectives' (Ortiz; Caro, 2018, p.42). This instrumentalist conception of Islam is, paradoxically, accompanied by a certain essentialist reading asserting that "The geopolitical conflict between Islam and the West (Christian world) goes back to the very origins of Islam, because these are two global religious and political systems seeking hegemony" (Ortiz; Caro, 2018, p.46).

Rationalism is strongly linked to epistemological positivism which, however, in most

of the texts under analysis lacks explanatory ambitions, restricted to descriptive objectives. Despite the importance of the cultural dimension in the analysis of the Middle East from Latin American IR -mostly evidenced by the frequent use of religion as an explanatory variable (Tawil Kuri, 2016; Cuadro, 2019), materialism is another characteristic of these texts. This way, in general, conflict in the Middle East is explained by a combination of both cultural characteristics (Islam) and the struggle over scarce material resources (oil, gas, water). By way of example, EI1 can be mentioned, where water conceived as a scarce resource is presented as the axis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Rationalism, culturalism, and materialism are identifiable assumptions even when the texts are based on very heterogeneous theoretical frameworks. In the case of the analyzed texts, they are mostly underpinned by Institutional Neoliberalism (Col. 1), Securitisation Theory (Col. 2 and RBPI 1), Neo-Gramscian perspective (EAA 2), and Geopolitics (EI 1). Notwithstanding this diversity, they all share these epistemo-ontological assumptions.

Texts based on a relational ontology are a sounding minority. Among texts dealing with IS issues, it is possible to place within this category Ctx. 2. This text is a clear example of a relational and reflectivist perspective. The text shows how spaces, subjectivities, and political forms that substantialist ontology takes as pre-given are produced through relational practices. Although the text uses a greater heterogeneity of sources, their distribution follows the logic of the North as theory producer and the South as data collector. Thus, the theoretical underpinning is provided by European or North American authors such as Patricia Hill Collins, Nira Yuval-Davis, Carole Pateman,

Wendy Brown, and Cynthia Enloe. In contrast, many of the references to the empirical case study are by Middle Eastern authors -especially, Turkish. This way, it reproduces the logic underlying the division of intellectual labour

articulated by postcolonial thinkers: while the North provides the theoretical frameworks, the South is relegated to the position of either a mere provider of data or a laboratory for the application of the former.

## 4.2 Foreign Policy (FP)

Table 2 -Articles on FP and the Middle East: references

Journal	Title	Year	Ref.
Colombia Internacional	Colombia and Israel under the Uribe Administration: Partners in the Global War on Terror. (Bernal, 2015)	2015	Col. 3
Contexto Internacional	The Delegitimation of the Iranian Nuclear Program in Benjamin Netanyahu's Speech. (Souza, 2015)	2015	Ctx. 3
	Signalling for Status: UAE and Women's Rights. (Carvalho Pinto, 2019)	2019	Ctx. 4
EstudiosInternacionales	Ricardo Lagos' «NO» to Irak Invasion in 2003: The Foreign Policy Decision-Making Process in Chile. (Bywaters, 2014)	2014	EI 3
Foro Internacional	Patterns of Mexico's Voting at the UN General Assembly between 1994 and 2015: Middle East and Palestine Issues. (Paredes Frías; Contreras Piñas, 2017)	2017	FI 2
	The Arab Public Sphere and Qatari Foreign Relations since 1995. (Viramontes, 2019)	2019	FI 3
	Continuity and Adjustments in Mexican Foreign Policy towards the Arab World and the Middle East: The Economic and Political Agendas. (Tawil Kuri, 2019)	2019	FI 4
Revista de Relaciones Internacionales, Estrategia y Seguridad	Turkey's Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy: Analysis of Historical and Regional Factors. (Guerrero Turbay; Jaramillo Jassir, 2013)	2013	RIES 3
	International Relations of the Syrian Civil War: the United States and Russia in the Struggle for International Power. (Ghotme; Ripoll, 2014)	2014	RIES 4
	Active Neutrality. Comparative Perspective between Colombian and Turkish Foreign Policies. (Guerrero Turbay; Jaramillo Jassir, 2015)	2015	RIES 5
	The Emergence and Increase of Anti-Semitism in the Governments of Hugo Chávez and its Relationship with the Deepening of the Relations between Venezuela and Iran (2005-2013). (Figuerola Sepúlveda, 2018)	2018	RIES 6
Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional	The Essential Role of Democracy in the Bush Doctrine: the Invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. (Santos; Teixeira, 2013)	2013	RBPI 2
	From Tegucigalpa to Teheran: Brazil's Diplomacy as an Emerging Western Country. (Steiner; Medeiros; Lima, 2014)	2014	RBPI 3
	Debating US Military Strategy in the Persian Gulf: What is the Way Forward? (Lilli, 2018)	2018	RBPI 4
	Brazil, the United States, and the Tehran Declaration. (Oliveira; Santos, 2018)	2018	RBPI 5
	Brazil's Policy toward Israel and Palestine in Dilma Rousseff and Michel Temer's Administrations: Have there Been any Shifts? (Vigevani; Calandrin, 2019)	2019	RBPI 6

Sixteen articles can be included within the subfield of FP, representing 55.2% of the analyzed texts. Out of these, eight (50%) are concerned with a Latin American country's FP towards the Middle East (mostly, Brazil's and Mexico's), four of them (25%) work on a Middle Eastern country's FP, three (18.75%) deal with global powers' FP towards the Middle East [This sentence is confusing. Please consider reviewing it] and one article (6.25%) establishes a comparison between a Latin American country (Colombia) and a Middle Eastern one (Turkey).

Despite the fact that 50% of the texts are devoted to the study of Latin American countries' FPs, references to Western (North American and European) publications and authors also predominate in this sub-field. Thus, while the latter account for 62% of the references used by Latin American authors, literature from our region accounts for only 28.7% of the citations. On the other hand, even though 25% of the texts deal with FPs of Middle Eastern countries, publications and authors from this region only account for 7.4% of the total references within this sub-field.

Regarding theoretical literature and frameworks used, theory put in motion is mostly that developed in the North, even despite the importance of the "Latin American hybrid" (Tickner, 2002), for the region's IR field [This sentence is confusing. Please consider reviewing it]. Indeed, the concept of autonomy, key to this perspective [This sentence is confusing. Please consider reviewing it], is used as a lens of analysis only in RBPI3 and it is not central to the text. Other theoretical frameworks used include diverse variants of Realism (RIES4 and RBPI4), Constructivism (RBPI2 and Ctx.4), and FP Analysis (EI3, Col.3, and RPBI3),

Liberalism (RIES3), and "Postmodernism" (Ctx.3). Five texts lack any explicit theoretical discussion.

The predominance of these theoretical frameworks is accompanied by a substantialist ontology [This seems to be incredibly important for the authors' argument and therefore should be explained to the reader] this is, an idea that the international is constituted by pre-existent states that later enter into relations- and an epistemological positivism<sup>6</sup>. Indeed, 11 out of the 16 articles have explanatory objectives and are structured around independent and dependent variables.

Philosophical rationalism predominates in these articles and interests appear in all these cases as independent variables. As a way of example, in the case of EI3, Ricardo Lagos' interest in strengthening multilateral institutions in order to balance powerful states appears as the explanation of his negative vote to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. In RBPI6, the inexistence of changes in Brazilian FP towards the Middle East during both Dilma Rousseff's and Michel Temer's governments is explained by structural objectives as "international participation and global interests; diversified economic interests; internal political, social, cultural balances; foreign policy memory and tradition" (Vigevani; Calandrin, 2019, p.21) and complementary interests among Brazil and the Middle Eastern region.

A minority of the analyzed texts (RBPI2 and FI3) are based on a relational ontology and on a post-positivist epistemology. RBPI 2 is framed within radical constructivism to argue how the export of democracy was part of

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<sup>6</sup> For literature on the epistemo-ontological debate, see Jackson and Nexon, 1999; Hamilton, 2017; Cuadro, 2024.



George W. Bush's strategy in his interventions in the Middle East as part of the Global War on Terror. For its part, FI4 gives centrality to the concept of Arab public sphere. The notion is an adaptation of the Habermasian idea of public sphere and appears as an intervening variable that helps understanding Qatar's FP actions. The text is based on an ontology that eludes the dichotomy agency/structure and, instead, makes an accurate application of structuration theory asserting that the Arab public sphere "informs and affects" (Viramontes, 2019, p.13) the Gulf country's foreign relations. In both cases a certain rationalism proper to the idea of agent is maintained, but it is a conditioned rationalism closer to the constructivist idea of language as a social instrument.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis showed that the main traits of the overall discipline of IR in Latin America (epistemological positivism, ontological substantialism, rationalism, and materialism) are reproduced in the study of the Middle East. Indeed, with a few exceptions, there is a general reproduction of the ontological, epistemological, and theoretical assumptions of Western/Northern IR to which peripheral orientalism (Taboada, 1998) is added.

The majority of the analyzed texts are based on a substantialist ontology and on philosophical rationalism assuming rational pre-given actors. Rationalism is strongly linked to epistemological positivism. In texts dealing with IS issues, this epistemological assumption does not lead to explanatory ambitions. This is not the case with texts tackling FP affairs, most of them looking for independent variables of rational actors' behaviors. When explanations

are given, they oscillate between materialist and culturalist causes.

Only one of the 28 analyzed texts uses a theoretical framework developed in Latin America, the rest reproduces the logic underlying the division of intellectual labour articulated by postcolonial thinkers: while the North provides the theoretical frameworks, the South is relegated to the position of either a mere provider of data or a laboratory for the application of the former. This feature is more striking when 8 of these texts deal with some Latin American country FP. On the other hand, it can explain that the analyzed texts do not dialogue with each other, but rather with literature and issues raised by the academy in the North.

Why is it important to study and reflect on how we know other regions of the 'Global South'? Primarily, because knowledge works in tandem with power and subject. This means that truth is a social construction that is inseparable from the power relations that sustain and effect it, and that the knowledge we practice constitutes us subjectively. To forge other social and political relations, it is essential to critically analyse those we already practice. As said in the Introduction, Social Sciences in general and International Relations in particular have played a significant role in the essentialization and homogenization of cultures. This text has enquired into how we in the Global South participate in it reinforcing the Western ideal.

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