

The last empirical test is qualitative, using Chad (1965–1994), a “most different” case from Lebanon that experienced quagmire, and Yemen (1994), a “most similar” case to Lebanon that did not experience quagmire. Schulhofer-Wohl argues that despite the importance of structural features of the war environment, it is the expectations and interactions of belligerents and foreign powers that end wars or produce quagmires at pivotal moments. The chapter successfully demonstrates that the theory is applicable and valid in a variety of contexts.

There are a couple of main weaknesses in the book but none detract from the important theoretical and empirical contributions. The top-down theoretical approach treats all belligerents and foreign powers as unitary actors. Therefore, the theory cannot account for the effect of power struggles within belligerent organizations or in the domestic politics of foreign backers in shaping each side’s decision-making. These are necessary abstractions but the author could speak more deliberately to how the theory’s conclusions would be challenged by these complexities of the real world.

Empirically, there are moments in the cross-national analysis when the link between theoretical concepts and the variables representing them in the statistical model becomes strained. For instance, the occurrence of a prior war and whether the war is about secession are included as variables that are hypothesized to alter the stakes of the war in an ambiguous direction, depending on the interpretation of the variable. This makes it difficult for the reader to evaluate the model’s efficacy because both a positive and a negative coefficient could be interpreted as being in line with theoretical expectations. Another example is the use of NATO imports, great power proximity, and hydrocarbon exports to proxy for foreign interests. These are useful but blunt measures. Including variables that capture alliance relationships or the history of foreign involvement in a country’s previous civil wars might be more direct measures. Despite these issues, the analysis is still persuasive when taken as a whole.

These weaknesses do not take away from the book’s many strengths. At its most compelling, the book offers a reasonable theory of quagmire that produces counterintuitive and policy relevant conclusions. The model successfully explains why we observe instances of half-hearted involvement by foreign backers under unlikely circumstances—when they have only moderate interest in the civil war’s outcome, and when high costs of escalation and low stakes lead their allies on the ground to pursue a frustrating low-cost fighting strategy that precludes outright victory for their interests. Foreign states keep pouring resources into the conflict because they cannot tolerate giving their international rivals an advantage by withdrawing. The story being told is a cautionary tale for policymakers in states looking to intervene in the wars of others. Minimal and measured involvement, while a seemingly prudent choice, is almost always a devastating trap. States should commit fully to changing the trajectory of a war or stay out completely. Only this would prevent entrapment and prolonged quagmires that waste resources, and more importantly, increase human suffering.

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Argentina in the Global Middle East. Lily Pearl Balloffet (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020). Pp. 248. \$90.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781503611740

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Within the broader literature on migration and diaspora histories on the Middle East, Balloffet’s study, *Argentina in the Global Middle East*, is the first of its kind. In charting the history of Middle Eastern migration to Argentina starting in the late 19th century, and the subsequent formation of a thriving diaspora community with enduring significance to Argentina, Latin America, and the Middle East to this

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day, Balloffet offers an excellent and creative example of the richness of writing transnational historical narratives. She moves away from thematically conventional and chronological accounts that largely follow a similar pattern of exploring the different factors for migration, then move on to trace migratory routes and settlement patterns. These accounts often position migrants vis-à-vis their host countries and their homelands, highlighting tensions and successes, assimilation and segregation, and, almost always, exploring literal or symbolic return to the homeland as a central theme in migrants' experiences in the diaspora. While Balloffet explores aspects of these themes, she ultimately does something altogether different. This book combines disciplines and methodologies, from area studies and history, to contemporary ethnography, socioeconomic and political analysis, and even film studies, to present the first account of the history—and, to an extent, the present—of Argentina's Middle Eastern diaspora community.

Though ambitious in scope, beginning with the arrival of Middle Eastern migrants in Argentina in the late 19th century and ending with the present-day Syrian refugee crisis, Balloffet chooses innovative lenses through which to examine this diaspora. She examines the community's artistic and literary contributions to Argentina, including in visual and performance art, periodicals and journal publications, and comedy and film productions. She investigates charity, healthcare, and social work networks throughout early and mid-20th century Argentina that were largely dominated by Middle Eastern women. She looks closely at the ways in which Middle Eastern migrants utilized the railroad to traverse Argentina, circulating goods as well as Arabness. She explores solidarities between Middle Eastern and Argentinian socialist leaders during the Cold War through examining their correspondences. She charts the contemporary trade in yerba mate between Argentina and the Middle East, and she concludes with a discussion about present-day Syrian refugees seeking asylum in Latin America. To that end, Balloffet secures Middle Eastern migrants' rightful place in modern Argentinian history, leaving no doubt as to their commercial, cultural, and political relevance. One might even argue after reading Balloffet's book that Middle Eastern migrants' peripatetic lifestyles traversing the entirety of Latin America, circulating goods and ideas, and expanding credit networks, were critical to the spread of capitalist socioeconomics throughout the continent.

The book succeeds at moving us past post-Cold War imaginings of borders and fixed nations to embrace more fluid—and what Balloffet calls “in motion”—pasts characterized by mobile and transregional bodies that were ceaselessly innovating, exchanging, creating, and traveling. Balloffet's analysis also demonstrates the importance of decentering the “hub of settlement”—Buenos Aires, in the case of Balloffet's book—in diaspora and migration studies. Much was taking place in so-called peripheral regions that was invariably connected to developments in the hub and back in the homeland. In her analysis, Balloffet clearly shows that there was nothing ultimately peripheral about these areas, and that Middle Eastern migrants were critical in forging material and cultural connections and networks across diverse regions throughout Argentina and Latin America. But this is perhaps simultaneously one of the book's main shortcomings. This really is a book about Argentina, and while Balloffet does not set out to write a history of the Middle East, balancing the analytic lens on both sides of the Atlantic is important in geographically expansive, transregional analyses such as this one. That is, Balloffet does not apply her nuanced examination of Argentina as a geographic, political, economic, and social space to the “Middle East/North Africa region,” as she calls it. In this way, the book's title is misleading in that Balloffet presents a compelling investigation into how Argentina was globalized by migrants, but how the Middle East is “global” remains unclear.

Balloffet uses several terms interchangeably to refer to the Middle East, including the Arab World, Middle East, and the MENA region. While each of the terms is valid, the book would benefit from consistency, or, from explanations for why each term is used and when. To that end, the most accurate term Balloffet uses to refer to the region—indeed, the most helpful geographically in a history of migration and diaspora formation—is the “Arabic-speaking eastern Mediterranean.” Connected to this, Balloffet rightly shows that most migrants from the Arabic-speaking eastern Mediterranean were from the Levant. Consequently, her discussion in Chapter 5 about the close relationship between Argentina's Juan Peron and Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, as an example of South-South solidarities that resulted from historic networks originally forged by these migrants, is harder to fit with the rest of the book. That is, within Middle East studies, the Levant and Egypt are significantly distinct. The matter becomes more sensitive when discussing the diverse demographic and confessional makeup of the Arabic-speaking

eastern Mediterranean and, by extension, the Arabic-speaking *mahjar*, or diaspora. This diversity reflected significantly in political leanings, ethnic and linguistic identification, and assimilation in the *mahjar*. It is therefore particularly important to note that not all Arabic-speaking migrants in the Americas were nationalist anti-imperialists, not all were pan-Arabists, and not all were socialists. It is this very richness in the confessional, ethnic, racial, linguistic, political, and ideological makeup of Middle Eastern migrant communities that is largely missing from the book.

Balloffet frames her geographically and chronologically expansive account as a “South-South” history. This is a central argument in her book. But can the post-Cold War understanding of South-South solidarities be used to understand the early period of Middle Eastern migration and settlement in the Argentinian and Latin American diaspora? As Balloffet discusses in the first chapters of the book, this early period was marked by tense class and race relations between Arabic-speaking migrants and creole Argentinians, an experience shared by Middle Eastern migrants throughout the Americas. Indeed, Sarah Gualtieri and Camila Pastor have shown how Syrians in North America and Mexico fought to be considered White in state registries in the interwar period.¹ The same is true of Middle Eastern migrants in Chile who actively petitioned the Chilean government not to consider them Asians, and who called on one another in their periodicals to behave like Saxons and not Asians throughout the interwar years.² Can we use the Global South framework to understand why so many Middle Eastern migrants took to right-wing politics during the Cold War? That is, Middle Eastern communities in the Americas, and predominantly the Christians among them, have largely supported right-wing regimes throughout the late 20th and early 21st centuries, and it is a reality which continues to disturb and rupture the collective. There is a marked tension in this historical and contemporary trend that merits consideration.

And finally, can we use the South-South framework to understand the post-9/11 world, which is replete with Islamophobia, xenophobia, and populist nationalism to which Balloffet alludes in the epilogue? As many Middle Easterners, myself included, would report, much of the non-Arab and non-Islamic world—including Latin America—has adopted xenophobic attitudes towards Arabs and Muslims. In other words, there are many intercommunal and socioeconomic dynamics at play throughout each period analyzed in this book that would challenge the neat packaging of South-South cooperation and solidarity. In this way, the biggest elephant in the room, so to speak, in Balloffet’s account, and in many histories of Middle Eastern migrant communities in the Americas, is the interplay between race and class. As a corollary, the ways in which Middle Eastern migrants throughout the Americas have identified vis-à-vis indigeneity—a prominent theme in South-South solidarity—is also critical to the discussion, and would add significantly to Balloffet’s book.

Notwithstanding the limits of Balloffet’s study, researching and writing transnational or transregional histories is no small feat, and will surely expose scholars of transnational studies to critique from experts in different area studies. That said, *Argentina in the Global Middle East* is an exciting work that many will enjoy reading, and that will invite much in the way of interdisciplinary and transregional research and inquiry. Balloffet offers an original and innovative analysis of worlds not often brought together; yet they are worlds that are becoming increasingly interconnected and relevant to expanding networks of scholars, students, and activists worldwide. In the field of transnational history, the Middle East and Latin America are certainly connected, and migrants, past and present, have doubtlessly been central to this relationship.

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¹See Sara Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2009), and Camila Pastor, *The Mexican Mahjar: Transnational Maronites, Jews, and Arabs under the French Mandate* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2017).

²See Nadim Bawalsa, “Palestine West of the Andes,” *NACLA Report on the Americas* 50 (2018): 34–39.