



## “SOLEMN EXPRESSION OF FAITH”: MUSLIMS AND BELONGING IN PERONIST ARGENTINA, 1946–1955

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### *Abstract*

*The ascendance of Juan Domingo Perón to Argentina’s presidency in 1946 led to fundamental changes in the way the country was ruled, producing a reformulation of ideas of citizenship and belonging among large portions of the population. While certainly influencing and benefiting from organized labor and the working poor, Perón also inspired immigrants and their descendants to imagine anew their place in national society. The sizable Muslim communities, primarily originating from contemporary Syria and Lebanon, mark an important example of the novel political arrangements creating new sensibilities of association. Segments of the Syrian-Lebanese colonies in Argentina had prospered prior to Perón’s rise, integrating into local communities and playing leading roles in the economy and political and social institutions. The emergence of Peronism permitted many wealthy and politically active immigrants and their children access to corridors of power previously unavailable, achieving important roles in the foreign ministry, the national bank, and the military. Yet Perón’s program “New Argentina,” advocating social justice, political sovereignty, and economic independence, called for nothing less than a total redefinition of the social compact. Peronism permeated and penetrated all aspects of Argentine life, from the Church to the public schools, from the football pitch to the radio waves, becoming the hegemonic discourse through which supporters viewed their world and dissidents shaped their critiques. In this environment, Muslims in Argentina, wealthy and poor alike, attempted to build a mosque and cultural center featuring Islamic architecture, thus inscribing this confessional minority onto the religious landscape of Buenos Aires. At the same time, the new order brought in by Perón inspired Muslims to refashion their understandings of self and community, weaving their religious identities into the larger Argentine social fabric.*

The ascendance of Juan Domingo Perón to Argentina’s presidency in 1946 led to fundamental changes in the way the country was ruled, producing a reformulation of ideas of citizenship and belonging among large portions of the population. While certainly influencing and benefiting from organized labor and the working poor, Perón also inspired immigrants and their descendants to imagine anew their place in national society. The

sizable Muslim communities, primarily originating from contemporary Syria and Lebanon, mark an important example of the novel political arrangements creating new sensibilities of association. Segments of the Syrian-Lebanese colonies in Argentina had prospered prior to Perón's rise, integrating into local communities and playing leading roles in the economy and political and social institutions.<sup>1</sup> The emergence of Peronism permitted many wealthy and politically active immigrants and their children access to corridors of power previously unavailable, achieving important roles in the foreign ministry, the national bank, and the military.<sup>2</sup> Yet Perón's program "New Argentina," advocating social justice, political sovereignty, and economic independence, called for nothing less than a total redefinition of the social compact. Peronism permeated and penetrated all aspects of Argentine life, from the Church to the public schools, from the football pitch to the radio waves, becoming the hegemonic discourse through which supporters viewed their world and dissidents shaped their critiques.<sup>3</sup> In this environment, Muslims in Argentina, wealthy and poor alike, attempted to build a mosque and cultural center featuring Islamic architecture, thus inscribing this confessional minority onto the religious landscape of Buenos Aires. At the same time, the new order brought in by Perón and his wife Eva Duarte de Perón (known as Evita) inspired Muslims to refashion their understandings of self and community, weaving their religious identities into the larger Argentine social fabric.

The Muslim colonies in Latin America are one of the least studied and understood immigrant groups. This is especially true for the emergence and organization of these communities during the first half of the twentieth century. A number of scholars began investigating the history of the large Arabic-speaking immigrant colony in Argentina more than two decades ago; however, much of the scholarship, which corresponded with a general expansion of the study of immigrants and minorities in Latin America, has focused on local prejudice against this group of people and Arabic-speakers' integration into the host country's national life. It has also generally examined the elite immigrants, most of whom were Christians. While mentioning the diversity of the community and focusing on contemporary issues, little scholarship, however, exists on the development of this colony and its attendant institutions. Even fewer studies examine the vibrant and diverse Muslim communities organizing in the 1920s and 1930s. Scholars, in general, recognize the presence of Muslims and then quickly move on.<sup>4</sup> The fact is tens of thousands of Levantine Muslims settled in Argentina by 1920, establishing cultural institutions as early as 1910 to serve the community. Despite this large number of people, little is known about the diversity, development, organization, and integration of this portion of the larger Arabic-speaking collectivity.

The effort to construct Islamic sacred space in Argentina, thus, raises particular questions when contrasted against the efforts of Maronite Catholics, Antiochian Greek Orthodox Christians and Arabic-speaking Sephardic Jews, all of whom built their religious institutions in the first

half of the twentieth century. It is clear the various segments of this group arriving during the first third of the twentieth century shared similar goals and experiences. Argentina's Muslim immigrants, like their Christian and Jewish compatriots, established cultural and benevolent aid societies, created schools, and attempted to fashion institutions aiding to ease the processes of adaptation and integration. Certainly, the imperatives of living in Argentina, such as securing work and housing, dictated an immigrant's ability to participate in these immigrant institutions and necessarily intersected with concerns and connections related to the old country. Religious idiosyncrasies and the realities of life in Argentina, however, prevented any sustained attempt to build a broad-based institution effectively representing all branches of Islam. As a result, a committed effort to construct such a religious institution did not emerge until 1950, decisively influenced by the sociocultural milieu created by the Peronist movement.

The drive to build a mosque in Buenos Aires during the rule of populist president Juan Domingo Perón reveals an environment in which Muslims felt secure enough to pursue such a public project. Elite attempts during the era of mass immigration to encourage or impose a set of values and customs, a so-called *Argentinidad*, on immigrants and others were imperfect and incomplete. And while some Syrians and Lebanese achieved material wealth and won elective office throughout the interior before 1946, social and political elites did not necessarily recognize their ethnic identities as part of the Argentine social tapestry. Yet, the Peronist project, as it insinuated itself into broader society, empowered groups not always considered part of the body politic, challenging the entrenched and provoking various forms of solidarity and resistance.<sup>5</sup> Scholars have thus explored recently what Peronism meant in practice for newly legitimized sectors of society, in particular in the form of consumption and new senses of belonging.<sup>6</sup> The rise of Perón became a critical moment for minority and immigrants communities as he became the first national leader to legitimate the "mosaic of identities of distinct ethnic groups" in the country.<sup>7</sup> Thus this article pursues "unseen connections" between confessional identities and popular understandings of Peronism and how other variables such as transnational support and gender intersected.<sup>8</sup> It is clear that Muslims particularly and Arab-Argentines generally subscribed to the vision of President Juan Domingo Perón and actively supported his initiatives.<sup>9</sup>

The Buenos Aires mosque project marked an energetic period of activity among Arabs in Argentina. The intensity of the effort created new transnational ties, highlighted a heightened, perhaps passing, sense of ecumenical fellowship binding together diverse segments of what had become known as the Syrian-Lebanese community, and fostered a sense of opportunity on the part of Muslims of marking their presence and membership in Perón's New Argentina. In the end, the mosque project would need to wait more than three decades before adding to the urban and religious landscape of Buenos Aires; however, many Muslims used the space created by Peronism to bind themselves to the Argentine nation.

### **Muslim immigration in context**

The Islamic population in Greater Syria (contemporary Syria, Lebanon, Israel and the Palestinian territories) is very diverse, including Sunnis, Shi'is, and numerous people from various offshoots of Shi'ism, namely Isma'ilis, 'Alawites and Druzes. Sunnis, the majority of Muslims in Greater Syria, arrived in Argentina from Cairo, Beirut, and smaller hamlets like Nabk, Damascus district. The 'Alawites (Nuṣayriyya) are a branch of Shi'i Islam concentrated in western Syria in the Coastal Mountain Range, but also formed important minorities in the coastal towns such as Latakia. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the Ottomans largely relied on indirect rule over the 'Alawites; however, military conflict in 1870 and 1877 led to direct control, including levying taxes and conscripting local males. 'Alawites accounted for the second-largest Muslim group in Beirut province, numbering 18 percent of the total population. They also represented the largest religious community in the Latakia district, the northern most of Beirut province, amounting to 57 percent of the local inhabitants.<sup>10</sup>

The Druze community (Durūz) originated in Egypt in the early eleventh century CE, deriving from Isma'ili Shi'i Islam. This community was persecuted for its heterodox beliefs, ultimately settling in the Lebanon and Hawran mountain ranges. By the time the Ottomans secured control over Greater Syria, the Druzes had come to dominate political and economic life in the southern portion of Mount Lebanon and the area south of Damascus known as Mount Druze (Jabal Durūz) in the Hawran. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Druze accounted for nearly 13 percent of the Mount Lebanon's population, and concentrated in the Chouf (Shūf) district in southern Mount Lebanon. The Druzes did not emigrate in the numbers of the Maronite Catholics and Greek Orthodox; however, it seems that at least ten percent of its population left Mount Lebanon. The Isma'ilis (Ismā'iliyya) emerged in the 8th century CE, following a succession dispute regarding the imamate, thus leading to a split from Twelver Shi'ism, the largest branch of Shi'i Islam. In the nineteenth century, the small and often persecuted Isma'ilis resided in the southern portion of the Coastal Mountains Range, suffering from internecine conflicts and occasional battles with 'Alawites. During this time, the first Aga Khan emerged, claiming to be the rightful heir of the Imamate. After his expulsion from Iran and arrival in India, he began organizing the various communities across national borders and in colonial spaces. Most of the Isma'ilis in Syria recognize the Aga Khan as their spiritual leader.<sup>11</sup>

The initial phase of emigration from the eastern Mediterranean to the Americas, beginning in earnest in the final quarter of the nineteenth century, featured a disproportionate number of Maronite Catholics from Mount Lebanon and Antiochian Greek Orthodox Christians from Mount Lebanon and the provinces (*vilayet*) of Beirut and Syria. Muslims too travelled in this initial phase, but in significantly fewer numbers. Yet Christians featured as the overwhelming majority in the early years, and they

seemingly arrived in various destinations throughout the Americas with some capital and goods to pursue economic betterment.<sup>12</sup>

Argentina became the most popular destination in Latin America for migrants, including Arabic-speaking Ottomans, receiving nearly five million foreign-born in the half-century before World War I. Advances in transportation and the manner in which Argentina's export economy of agro-pastoral goods combined with particular conditions in the sending countries to prod this movement of people.<sup>13</sup> In addition, a budding Arabic-language press in the Americas, coupled with personal correspondence, disseminated information about such lands of opportunity as Argentina, Brazil, and the United States. As a result, nearly 100,000 Arabic-speaking immigrants from Greater Syria settled in Argentina by 1917.<sup>14</sup>

Thus emigration became established social practice and acceptable life choice in the Levant, and large numbers of Muslims began leaving too. In the years leading up to World War I, Muslims represented at least a full third of emigrants departing from the principal ports of Beirut province and the governorate of Jerusalem. In Buenos Aires, Muslims totaled 40 percent of the immigrants coming from Greater Syria as early as 1909, which led to the establishment of the Islamic Society the following year. Yet, the actual size of this colony is difficult to ascertain, with numbers ranging from 7,000 to 75,000 in the World War I era. Emir Emin Arslan, the first consul general of the Ottoman Empire in Buenos Aires and a Druze from Mount Lebanon, reported in 1912 that Muslims accounted for only 15 percent of the Syrian colony. Checric Abi Saab, a Maronite Catholic from Mount Lebanon working as a dragoman at the French Embassy in Buenos Aires, estimated Syrian-Lebanese Muslims in Argentina numbered 61,000 people, or 37 percent, in 1928 and 70,000 in 1933.<sup>15</sup> Regardless, Christian and Jewish compatriots accepted as fact that the Islamic community formed a large portion of the Syrian-Lebanese colonies in Argentina. Dr. Said Abu Jamra, publisher since 1903 of the Sao Paulo-based, Arabic-language biweekly *al-Afkar*, explained that Muslims preferred Argentina to Brazil because of "a characteristic of his people, gregariousness." More seriously, Dr. Abu Jamra said that the larger number of pioneers Muslim immigrants in Argentina "determined a stronger current of immigrants of that faith."<sup>16</sup>

In the early years of this immigration stream, "Muslims in Argentina had certain difficulties" in maintaining religious rites because they lacked mosques, religious guides or leaders, and space for preparing bodies for proper burial. According to community history, Sunni Muslims residing in the tenement (*conventillo*) located at Charcas 400, along the northern border of the Barrio Turco in the Socorro district of downtown Buenos Aires, would grab their prayer rugs at prayer time and walk to Plaza San Martín, referred to as "la gran mezquita del cielo abierto" (the great mosque of the open sky), in order to not disturb the other dwellers in the tenement. The stares of passers-by seemingly did not bother these men, who earned the nickname "Sun worshippers" ("adoradores del sol") from

a suspicious public.<sup>17</sup> While mosques would not have been necessary for 'Alawites, Druze, and Isma'ilis, communal space was an important consideration and in the interim these immigrants improvised. At the same time, the religious makeup of these migrants was one element of a matrix that informed how these people understood themselves and the immigrant community of which they formed a part. Shared cultural heritage, common language, regional provenance, and similar experiences of mobility and integration into local labor markets and social milieus helped shape this group of immigrants into the Syrian-Lebanese colonies as much as the reception and perceptions held by Argentines. Religion, in many instances, did not feature first among an individual's or a group's identity in the diaspora. Yet, it certainly remained an important cultural reservoir that could be tapped in particular moments.<sup>18</sup>

The Muslim community residing in Buenos Aires settled in particular neighborhoods. For instance, Shi'a from Lebanon moved to the Flores neighborhood, while many Syrian Sunnis lived in San Cristobal. The small Druze colony set up in Palermo as did the 'Alawites, who also were in Villa Crespo. There were enough Muslims in these neighborhoods to support butcher shops selling *halal* meat (meat slaughtered according to Islamic guidelines).<sup>19</sup> Outside of the Argentine capital, large numbers of Muslims moved to such industrial towns as Berisso and Banfield in Buenos Aires province and Rosario, Santa Fe province. A large concentration of 'Alawites established themselves in Tucumán province and elsewhere in the Argentine Northwest.

The Muslim communities throughout Argentina experienced a surge in institution building in the 1920s and 1930s, many of which emerged during the Great Syrian Revolt (1925-1927). Most of these institutions served as mutual aid societies providing services to the humbler and more vulnerable sectors of the collectivity, such as widows, orphans, and the indigent in need of medical care. Some of the more notable organizations in Buenos Aires include the Druze Association of Beneficence (est. 1926) and the Islamic pan-'Alawite Association of Beneficence (est. 1927). Outside of the federal capital, important institutions emerged in the provinces of Buenos Aires, Tucumán, Rosario, Mendoza, Córdoba, and Jujuy in the early 1930s to coordinate the community and arrange for activities to support local initiatives and needs.<sup>20</sup>

### **Perón, Muslims, and the Arab-Argentine Colonies**

Juan Domingo Perón's vision of a New Argentina celebrated the ethnic heritages of Argentines, and immigrants from the eastern Mediterranean and their descendants were no different in this regard. This validation of a multicultural Argentina led Arab-Argentines of all creeds to support overwhelmingly Perón. The Islamic community, in many ways, came of age during the ascendance of Perón to prominence and ultimately the presidency, actively and publicly participating in important national initiatives. The first opportunity came in the wake of the earthquake in the

poor Andean San Juan province on January 15, 1944. That same day, Juan Domingo Perón went on national radio and called for national solidarity and initiated a relief drive to collect aid for the victims. As the Secretary of Labor and Pensions, Perón used his office to organize the humanitarian relief campaign that asked all sectors of Argentine society, “from the president to the humblest worker,” to contribute. It was a smashing success, collecting nearly 30 million pesos (cash and goods) in the first week alone. This campaign and Perón’s desire for broad participation launched his political career and began the bond between him and the working classes, the poor, and the margins of society.<sup>21</sup>

The Islamic community used this humanitarian aid drive to bind itself to the social fabric in a moment of national commitment. Citing the call by Colonel Perón, the Muslim intellectual and child of Lebanese immigrants Ibrahim Hallar appealed in an open letter to “all Arabs in the country” published in the Arabic-Spanish bilingual periodical *Natur-Islam* (al-Fiṭra Islamiyya) on January 27. He declared that Arabs and Arab-Argentines would not be “absent” from this moment of need and would join with all “noble inhabitants” in Argentina in supporting the aid campaign. Hallar noted that donations should be sent directly to the military garrison on Piedras street in Buenos Aires. Then, Hallar and Ali Mahmud Saleh, writing on behalf of the Islamic Social Aid Association and the Young Muslims Association, dispatched a telegram to the president General Pedro Pablo Ramírez offering its condolences for the national tragedy, its unconditional support, and a contribution of nearly 1,300 pesos from individual Muslims and an Islamic organization.<sup>22</sup>

Broad support continued for Perón and his movement once he attained the presidency, with the French diplomatic corps noting that the “grand majority” of the Arab-Argentine community supported the Peronist Party.<sup>23</sup> To better coordinate with the Peronist state, the various Syrian-Lebanese institutions created an umbrella organization called the Arab High Committee of Argentina whose positions and engagement with the Peronist state were “based on a number of parallel considerations.”<sup>24</sup> Perón, for his part, advocated and found solidarity with Arab nations, several of which had recently secured its independence, and these countries formed important allies in his Cold War non-aligned movement known as the Third Position. In fact, Perón’s engagement with the Arab world bemused the French, noting his policy was “strange” considering Argentina was geographically distant from the “Muslim world,” conducted minimal trade, and was home to a Catholicism that would have “repudiated an accommodation with Islam.”<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, the deepening connection between Perón and the Arab-Argentine community continued and led to the creation of associations to support his 1951 reelection campaign, including the Lebanese-Syrian Committee for the Re-election of General Perón and the Lebanese Committee for the Re-election of General Perón.<sup>26</sup> Certainly, the size and wealth of the community had transformed these

potential voters into a “non-negligible element in the concern of the Argentine government.”<sup>27</sup>

There was broad support for Peronist initiatives. The most recognized Syrian-Lebanese advocate for Peronism was Luis Atala, a national deputy from Córdoba province. Through his newspaper *Mundo Árabe* and other community periodicals, including those edited by Muslims, Atala pushed Perón’s five year plan. Atala’s efforts earned him much acclaim, including the Commander of the National Order of the Cedar from the Republic of Lebanon. In Argentina, he was feted by such community associations as the Druze Association of Beneficence, which was unreservedly pro-Perón. The Banco Siriolibanés, a most celebrated community institution, called for support of the second five year plan, utilizing the slogans “Avoid unnecessary expenses,” “Manage prudently,” and “Meet the duty of the hour.” Furthermore, Ibrahim Hallar, the Muslim public intellectual, led the Arab Committee for the Diffusion of the Second Five Year Plan, which included as members more than 100 community entities from all over Argentina.<sup>28</sup>

The candidacy of the retired Admiral and then Senator Alberto Teisaire to become Perón’s vice president presented another opportunity for Muslims. In February 1954, a group representing the “Arab-Argentine collectivity” visited the Executive Committee of the Peronist Party to express its unconditional support for Teisaire, who was running against the Radical Party’s Crisólogo Larralde. The company of men visiting the party headquarters included Christians and Muslims, businessmen and intellectuals. The Muslim contingent included Ibrahim Hallar, the head of the Buenos Aires Mosque Committee’s Administrative Council Asem Tarbuch, president of the Druze Association of Beneficence Asad Riman, Yusif Hadid, Abdulcarim Hadid, Mahmud Diab, Amin Corbegg, Sami El Kadri, and Amed Isa Murad. *La Bandera* editor Abdul Latif al-Hechin and *al-Istiqlal* correspondent Saleh K. Abosalem represented the papers connected to the Muslim community. These activists announced their support and that of the institutions they represented for Teisaire before many labor syndicates did so publicly.<sup>29</sup> The rhetoric of President Juan Domingo Perón and the actions of the Peronist state created a space in which Muslims clearly identified with the New Argentina and actively supported both.

Despite these various forms of backing Juan Domingo Perón and his movement, it is important to note that this community was not monolithic in its support. Many Syrian-Lebanese in particular had risen through the ranks of the Radical Civic Union party and remained loyal to it, such as Santiago Llaver and Alfredo Asmar. José Benito Fajre, for instance, was a member of the opposition block of 44 Radical and Socialist deputies in the national Congress during the first peronismo.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, important members of the broader Syrian-Lebanese colony became prominent and public supporters of Peronism, including Américo Yunes (an ‘Alawite Muslim), Elías Adre, Jorge Antonio, and Lorenzo Miguel. In addition, a prejudicial discourse against Arabic-speaking immigrants had circulated in Argentina since the late nineteenth century and likely found some

resonance among the conservative sectors of the Peronist movement.<sup>31</sup> Yet, Muslims specifically and Syrian-Lebanese and other Arab-descent folk generally believed that they belonged in Argentina. Perón provided public affirmation.

### The Push for a Mosque

The rise of Perón created an environment in which Muslims reimagined their place in Argentina and determined their religious identity was perfectly compatible with their commitment to and lives in Argentina. This is evermore interesting given that Perón still advocated for and enjoyed the support of the Roman Catholic Church in 1950. Nevertheless, the environment of cosmopolitan Buenos Aires in this Peronist moment was opportune. The drive to build a prominent space for worship and cultural activity for the Muslim communities and the broader Arab population (both first generation immigrants and their descendants), however, was not the initial one. The former Ottoman consul general and Druze Muslim Emir Emin Arslan envisioned such a center toward the end of his life. Arslan, who arrived in Buenos Aires in 1910, was an esteemed figure within the Syrian-Lebanese colonies as well as a celebrated intellectual within elite Argentine cultural circles.<sup>32</sup> In his dream, the goal was to build a mosque (*jāmi'*) in the heart of the Arab neighborhood in Palermo. Yet, this envisioned complex would be more than sacred space, and would include a restaurant, a hotel, and a school to teach Arabic and the history of the Arabs and their civilization. According to a relating of the movement, the purpose was "to bring together all Arabs in one place."<sup>33</sup>

It is unclear how far along Arslan pushed this plan; however, any attempt stalled following his death in January 1943. Dr. Nadīm al-Ma'rī led a second attempt later in the 1940s, but was unable to establish more than a private school in which Arabic was taught and served members of the Muslim community. The efforts beginning in January 1950 featured a key figure that seemingly unified and energized wide swathes of the active Syrian-Lebanese communities. Muhammad al-Saīd served as Minister Plenipotentiary in Argentina for Egypt's monarch King Farouk. A seasoned diplomat with a law degree from the University of Cairo, diplomas in political science from the University of California and New York University, and previous postings in New York, Jerusalem, Athens, Istanbul, Naples, Baghdad, Teheran, and Hamburg, al-Saīd arrived in Buenos Aires in the winter of 1947 and would become very friendly with President Perón.<sup>34</sup> Working in conjunction with leading members of the Muslim communities, al-Saīd promised Egyptian state support for the construction of the mosque and cultural center. Al-Saīd also helped secure donations from important Egyptian institutions and citizens. For instance, al-Azhar University donated 2,000 Egyptian pounds, the Ministry of Religious Trusts (Awqāf) and the Syrian-Lebanese Bank in Egypt gave 1,000 each, and Prince Muhammad Ali gave 500 Egyptian pounds.<sup>35</sup> The contribution from al-Azhar, the leading Islamic institution of higher education, is



an important indication of its interest in the Muslim diaspora in the Americas; a seemingly novel occurrence. In contrast, connections with religious institutions in the old country were a longstanding feature among Arabic-speaking Christians abroad. For instance, the Lebanese Missionaries, an order of Maronite Catholic priests, had arrived in Buenos Aires in the beginning of the twentieth century to tend to the burgeoning community of adherents, establishing a church in 1902 on Paraguay street near the prominent Plaza San Martín.

The Muslim communities also possessed and maintained these sorts of ties; however, networks with institutions were not as deep or as well developed as those of their Christian compatriots. For example, Muslims in Argentina raised a small sum, some 2,000 Argentine pesos, for the creation of an Islamic university in Jerusalem. This donation drive came out of the General Islamic Conference held in Jerusalem in December 1931, hosted and arranged by the mufti al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni. Checri Abi Saab, dragoman at the French Embassy in Buenos Aires, noted the muted response from the Muslim communities to the efforts of the Pan-Islamic Association of Buenos Aires. For Abi Saab, this was simply a consequence of the fragmented nature of the various branches of Islam represented in Argentina despite a discourse of viewing themselves as brothers.<sup>36</sup> While Abi Saab noted an important characteristic of intra-Muslim relations, it is as likely the consequences of the global depression on labor markets in Argentina undermined the fundraising efforts.<sup>37</sup>

The emergence of Muhammad al-Saïd as patron and energy behind the Buenos Aires mosque initiative highlighted new transnational ties distinct from previous examples. Certainly, migrants from the Levant maintained a variety of relationships with family, friends, and homeland institutions. Yet, the prominent role assumed by Egyptian diplomats, and by extension Farouk's monarchy, marked a level of state interest in succoring the Muslim communities unprecedented among those migrants in Argentina. In addition to spearheading the mosque initiative, al-Saïd helped arrange the celebrations for Islamic feast days and made an interesting choice to spread the events to different community institutions. For instance, the Arab Youth Club in the middle class Flores neighborhood would host the 'Id al-Fiṭr celebration. The Arab Alliance Society Club agreed to organize events for 'Id al-Adha. New year festivities were scheduled for the Yabrud Society's social hall in the San Cristobal neighborhood. Al-Saïd agreed to host the event celebrating the birthday of the prophet Muhammad at the Egyptian legation.<sup>38</sup>

The activities of al-Saïd were important for several reasons. Firstly, it fit into a certain logic relating to the foreign policy initiatives of King Farouk. Despite his renowned and reviled behavior as a decadent playboy, there was a brief moment when Farouk pursued an active agenda of becoming the leader of the world's Muslims in the position of Caliph. General, firm resistance to recreating a Caliphate warmed Farouk to the idea that an Egypt-led Arab world would suffice. The policy goal then

was to place Egypt as the first nation among fellow Arab and Islamic countries; a goal achieved. The Egyptians established the Arab Union in 1942 to make manifest the elusive goal of pan-Arab unity, and apparently decided to curry favor among the Arab Muslim diaspora in the Americas. For instance, the movement to build an Islamic Center in Washington, DC, which began in early 1950 and was finally dedicated in June 1957, emerged under the aegis of Egyptian guidance and encouraged coreligionists in Argentina and elsewhere to donate to the trust fund (*waqf*) guaranteeing the institution's future development and survival.<sup>39</sup>

This state interest contrasted with the actions of the Ottoman state, which had a basic consular agreement with Argentina and its Consul Emir Emin Arslan's privileges were limited to the capital. While some immigrants contributed to the Ottoman war effort, there is little evidence to suggest a concerted effort to organize the Sultan's subjects in meaningful ways.<sup>40</sup> The French, on the other hand, were legally obliged through the League of Nations mandate to represent Syrians and Lebanese in the diaspora until 1946. At the same time, the French state was very interested in the anti-colonial activities of Arab, Lebanese, and Syrian nationalists.<sup>41</sup> In several instances, the French partnered with the Argentine state to tamp down public demonstrations and influence Argentine public opinion regarding the mandates in the Levant. The French also were leery of Egypt's rising prominence in the Arab and Islamic worlds. During World War II, Free French representatives noted the policies pursued by Farouk's government and the increasing importance of the print and radio media forced all belligerent nations to produce daily propaganda in Arabic to influence local public opinion as well as the opinions among the various émigré communities. Arabic, the French feared, would be the glue unifying Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Syria and Lebanon. In a confidential report, the French noted the Syrian and Lebanese communities in the Americas spoke local languages, prospered, profited from local naturalization laws, conserved an intellectual life of Arab culture, and possessed a strong sense of ethnic and Muslim and Christian religious solidarity. Further, as a result of their internal organization, Syrians and Lebanese in Cuba, New York (which featured the Syrian Lebanese Union speaking on behalf of 65 affiliated clubs), Buenos Aires, and the large Syrian and Lebanese communities in the principal Egyptian cities petitioned via telegram Egyptian Prime Minister Mustafa al-Nahhas Pasha to intervene in the Franco-Lebanese dispute regarding independence.<sup>42</sup> The prestige of Egypt in the Arab world offered an international ally for those Syrians and Lebanese in the Americas bristling at the Mandates in the Levant; a development the French correctly viewed as a threat to their colonial policies.

Secondly, al-Saïd actively participated in diplomatic routines, such as a public visit to the tomb of Latin American independence hero José de San Martín on the centenary of his death. These visits ordinarily included members of the Syrian-Lebanese colony. In addition, al-Saïd, along with his peers from the Lebanese and Syrian missions, attended a dinner



honoring Argentina's President Juan Domingo Perón, who was joined by his wife Evita and Buenos Aires province governor Domingo Mercante and his spouse. These occasions reinforced efforts by the Peronist state to solidify relations with Middle Eastern countries in order to pursue goals in the new international system following the conclusion of World War II. Argentina's wartime neutrality and the perception of Nazi sympathies raised obstacles challenging its entrance into the new United Nations, and the Chancery viewed alliances with Arab nations as a path back to international legitimacy.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, such events permitted Muslims residing in Buenos Aires, and certainly the Arab-Argentine community more broadly, an opportunity to publicly demonstrate their place within the larger Argentine social fabric as part of the entourage or in separate visits. It was a level of legitimacy previously unavailable to Muslims, with the exception of Emir Emin Arslan. For their parts, many Maronite Catholics and Greek Orthodox Christians from Syria and Lebanon had success in forging ties with local elites and social institutions in various places throughout Argentina.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, the efforts of al-Saïd raise additional questions regarding the goals of Farouk's foreign policy. The Egyptian monarch was thoroughly despised by the rising Muslim Brotherhood. Perhaps these steps were designed to act as a counterweight to this Islamic movement's growing popularity in Egypt and beyond. At the same time, Egypt wanted to stave off any challenge to al-Azhar for pre-eminence among the Muslim faithful, and it may be that connecting with the Arab Muslim diaspora played a part in the larger policy initiative.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, given that Syrians and Lebanese migrants spread throughout the world, it would be interesting to see if Egyptian diplomats were active elsewhere, such as western Africa, home to sizable Syrian and Lebanese Muslim populations.<sup>46</sup> In addition, perhaps the actions of Egyptian diplomats fit into a larger project to resurrect the image of King Farouk and maintain Egypt's primacy among other Arab nations in the wake of military defeat in the Israeli war for independence.<sup>47</sup>

### **A Brief Ecumenical Moment**

Perón's Argentina and the patronage and stature of Muhammad al-Saïd encouraged activists to attempt to unify the various Muslim groups in Buenos Aires under Egyptian aegis. This happened despite the majority of Arabic-speaking immigrants and their descendants originating from the newly independent states of Lebanon and Syria, which possessed diplomatic missions in Argentina. State sponsorship must have heartened many of the most committed members of the community. Yet, as this news was announced, Saleh Abu Saleh, editor of the bi-monthly periodical *al-Istiqlāl* founded by the late and fellow Druze Muslim Arslan, pondered whether or not it was fitting or advisable that outside initiative would get the complex built. Abu Saleh concluded building the "Arab Center" with local financial support and leadership would be ideal, demonstrating to

Argentines Arab and Islamic industry, culture, greatness and serving as a testament to the unity of the broader collectivity.

The efforts to build a mosque and cultural center sparked a moment of interfaith dialogue and action, rallying broad swathes of the Arab-Argentine communities. Previously, various issues, ranging from politics of the homeland, in particular the French Mandate in Syria and Lebanon, to mundane differences in organizing and religious practices, had complicated any sense of common cause among Muslims or between Syrians and Lebanese. Certainly, French control in the Levant grated against most of these immigrants; however, the ultimate goal of independence caused great discord within the community. For instance, opinions diverged sharply on how independence should take shape, including a nascent form of Arab nationalism contrasting with the dreams of advocates of a Lebanon separate and free from Syria.<sup>48</sup> In addition, controversies among leading members of the Muslim communities hindered sustained institution development. The supposed umbrella Pan-Islamic Association limped along as a result of a schism within the leadership and the rank-and-file due to disagreement regarding the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 and the question of national identity. The treaty asked for Levantine émigrés to select a Lebanese or Syrian citizenship, which grated against the vision of a united Syria and Lebanon.<sup>49</sup>

Reality of life in Argentina also likely combined with idiosyncrasies of certain Muslim communities to stymie broad based efforts to create such institutions. For instance, many of the Muslim immigrants seemingly worked as day laborers and factory workers, and according to Cherri Abi Saab the majority was illiterate.<sup>50</sup> Immigrant institutions tended to establish and maintain hierarchies within an immigrant community and did not necessarily represent the interests of all segments of would-be members. Put another way, these organizations were bourgeois associations that offered certain protections but also particular requirements for membership. Furthermore, the majority of working class Muslims likely neither had the time nor luxury to join a group organized and led by prosperous, upwardly mobile merchant coreligionists.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, many Muslims in Argentina carried no formal sense of sacred space and thus the mosque was not a primary feature of religious practice. For instance, scholars of Ismaʿili communities in Syria are uncertain about religious practice prior to the arrival in the 1920s of an emissary from India dispatched by the third Aga Khan, Sultan Muhammad Shah. Adherents of Nizari Ismaʿilism perhaps had been praying in mosques in villages like Masyaf, but it is at best speculation. Following the efforts of the Aga Khan's envoy, Syrian Ismaʿilis began to form and congress in *Jamatkhanas*, which began as a community center but has evolved to include sacred space. Furthermore, neither Druzes nor ʿAlawites, in their respective understandings of sacred space, utilized mosques.<sup>52</sup> These reasons and others, thus, help explain why neither Arslan nor al-Maʿrī could muster enough support to fund

the operations, which would have necessitated purchasing property and financing the design and construction of the center.

Despite these challenges, Abu Saleh's call to action worked in conjunction with the formation of a committee and received immediate support from the Syrian-Lebanese communities in Mendoza province, including Christian donors, pledging more than 200,000 pesos by March 1950. In addition to the Druze elite buying into the project, leading members of Sunni, 'Alawite, and Antiochian Orthodox Christian communities also published articles in support of the effort.<sup>53</sup> For instance, Qasim Abdallah lauded the "great victory" to be achieved by the community and the leadership of Muhammad al-Said. The plans revealed by Abdallah, who also served as the Arabic-language Secretary for the Buenos Aires mosque committee, were ambitious, suggesting the complex in Buenos Aires would be perhaps five times larger than the mosques in London and Paris. Furthermore, "the mosque was for Arabs generally rather than Muslims specifically." There would be an Arabic school and there would be no division based upon religious identity or within the various expressions of Islam. Architects in Cairo designed the complex, basing their vision on Egyptian examples that also possessed public baths, traveller quarters, and infirmaries.<sup>54</sup>

Muslims and Christians were set to work together, including a strong endorsement from Nifón Saba, the Antiochian Orthodox Metropolitan (Archbishop) of Zahle, Lebanon. Abdallah asserted Muslims could learn from the generosity of their Christian compatriots. Metropolitan Saba, who happened to be in Argentina as part of his tour of the Orthodox communities in the Americas, donated 1,000 pesos. The intellectual George Saydah also gave 1,000 pesos, while Professor Jawad Nader contributed 200 pesos and Monsignor Ignacio Aburrus added 100 pesos. For Abdallah, these examples of leading Christians aiding Muslim initiatives should lead Muslims to support "this momentous work," mentioning the Mendoza community had promised more contributions, as had the Egyptian monarchy. And if successful, this complex would be a place to showcase Arab and Islamic civilization, culture, and art.<sup>55</sup>

In addition to giving money, Metropolitan Saba also published an article extolling the importance of interfaith dialogue and the mutual celebration of key religious holidays. In his relating of his experience in Zahle during World War II, Saba noted Muslims and Christians of all classes celebrated Easter together, declaiming poetry marking "harmony, affection, and unity." Saba then commented on the opportunity in front of the Arab-Argentine collectivity, remarking religion was much more accommodating in creating unity, whereas politics could never unify. While these comments were perhaps suggestive if not utopian, it did speak to important streams of interfaith excitement and goodwill wending through the Muslim and the broader Arabic-speaking communities in Buenos Aires in the Peronist moment.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, there is no evidence to suggest that the Maronite Catholic Church in Argentina

or the Arabic-speaking Sephardic Jewish communities were invited to participate in these events. Individual members certainly donated money, but institutional involvement was seemingly non-existent.

### **A Solemn Expression of Faith**

The prospect of erecting a grandiose structure as envisioned by local Muslim leaders caused great excitement. In a Spanish language editorial, Abu Saleh remarked that all Islamic branches existing in the then seven Arab nations and Pakistan possessed adherents in Argentina, principally Buenos Aires. The notable cordiality among the adherents of Islam, he continued, would be rewarded with a “common mosque for all Muslims regardless of country of origin and the sect one pertained to.” Furthermore, this sacred space would be open to Arabs of different creeds wishing to pray to a divine being. While recognizing this was important, Abu Saleh concluded, “above all, there will be a mosque in Buenos Aires as an expression of recognition of the Arabs to Argentines, to whom [Muslims] will offer it as a contribution of its architectural art to the beauty of the grand city of the South.”<sup>57</sup> Building on this theme, another writer described, “in the capital of the Republic, next to the Catholic Cathedral, bordering the Orthodox Church, in front of the Hebrew temple, on the side of the Evangelist religion, like in Paris, London and New York, the Muslim mosque will be erected.”<sup>58</sup> As much as this project potentially unified the broader Arabic-speaking and Muslim communities, the building of the mosque promised to inscribe Islam onto the urban and religious landscapes of Buenos Aires and Argentina. This physical structure was tantamount to not only announcing Muslim presence in the city but a affirmation that these believers were important threads of the Argentine social fabric. This expression of difference was a declaration of belonging.

The mosque project kept the Muslim communities and more broadly the Syrian-Lebanese colonies energized during the fall of 1950. As donations continued to flow in, the project leaders moved ahead, hosting a massive celebration during which the cornerstone of the mosque was laid in early May 1950. The “solemn ceremony,” located in the Caballito neighborhood at the corner of Rivadavia Avenue and Cucha Cucha (presently Felix Lora street), began with the Argentine national hymn, followed by the call to prayer and a reading from the Quran, both performed by a young Muslim named Hamdi Marhaba. Next, several speakers, including Minister al-Saïd, addressed the crowd, which included “national and municipal officials, diplomats and consular representatives from Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon, Muslims, [and] delegations from social and cultural entities of those collectivities,” remarking on the cultural, economic, and political connections between Argentina and the Arab world. Marhaba then read a verse from the Quran printed on a piece of paper, which organizers placed in the ornamental stone. As the mosque committee members lay the cornerstone, a band played the march of San Martín.<sup>59</sup>

For Buenos Aires' Muslims, this ceremony marked a crowning moment confirming their membership in the Argentine nation and as a part of Peron's project. Ibrahim Hallar, secretary of the mosque commission, expressed in Spanish to the assembled onlookers and dignitaries a sentiment that was broadly felt by the community at large. He declared,

"Liberty is not requested, it is conquered - said the American Liberator. The same sentence was pronounced by his namesake, the Arab Faysal. Both fought with the unbreakable faith of their peoples, in the security that they fought for a just and sovereign cause. The one breathed the air of liberty in the minarets of the Andes, the other did it in the peaks of the Arab hills. San Martín drank the waters from the springs of the Cuyo, and Faysal did it from the Damascene brooks; San Martín and Faysal did not see their works finished, one by renouncing and the other by destiny's vicissitudes, they left the earthly life to eternalize themselves forever in the history of their peoples."<sup>60</sup>

Hallar further extolled the maker of Argentina's premier symbol - its flag, proclaiming it the "genius of Belgrano" made from "the spirit of a sublime patriot." The linking of these national heroes with the Arab nationalist hero drew clear associations between this immigrant population, its host country, their purported shared histories, and this group's place in the future of Argentina. Given the excitement surrounding the national commemoration of Jose de San Martín's life and contributions to independence, it is not coincidental that Hallar and other advocates attempted to tie themselves to these figures. Yet, Hallar in his speech and throughout several of the Arabic press and community organs also decidedly aligned themselves with the Peronist project.<sup>61</sup> Hallar concluded his speech that the Islamic community "offers to this republic, to this just and sovereign New Argentina, the sentiment of gratitude that all Arabs and their descendants have for it; a sentiment that translates in dedicating this symbolic act in celebration of the year of San Martín, that overcomes not only Argentines in their intimate patriotic feelings, but also every immigrant that inhabits this generous land."<sup>62</sup>

For many Syrians and Lebanese, whether Christian, Jewish or Muslim, the populism of the first Peronismo created a space in which many sectors of the Argentine population emerged and engaged in public forms of sociability and visibility for the first time. Certainly, the efforts of Muhammad al-Saïd and the patronage of the Egyptian legation provided important support for this burgeoning Islamic community. But, Peronism mattered, empowering this community and giving it a sense of national belonging.

The local Buenos Aires press covered this ceremony with interest, observing its "celebration and symbolic adherence" to the "year of San Martín" (año sanmartiniano). Indeed, the leading dailies had much to say about this community and the city. *Clarín* noted "Buenos Aires, passionate

and prosperous, gives . . . a piece of its soil to the faithful of God" while *La Epoca* declared this would be the first mosque in the capital. The resolutely pro-Peronist newspaper *El Laborista* proclaimed the mosque would be a "monument of faith . . . the first that would elevate its majestic cupola beneath the sky of Latin America" as did the daily *La Razon*.<sup>63</sup> *El Laborista* also discussed the important role Egypt - as the "spiritual center of Islam" - and its minister Muhammad al-Said performed in "fulfilling an old aspiration that, once materialized, serves to secure, still further, the proverbial freedom of religion that prevails in our country."<sup>64</sup>

The popular daily *La Razon* produced the longest and most colorful report, insisting

"In the porteño neighborhood of Caballito, according to plans designed by architects in Cairo, a temple of pure, ancient Arab style, with its typical minarets and cupolas, and the day is not far off that those early morning risers head from Primera Junta to Liniers or Mataderos will hear the muezzin of strange garments, singing in Arabic from the top of a tower . . . And it will amaze quickly the residents of the populous neighborhood, at the fall of night, the voice of the muezzin calling to prayer for the fourth time while the bells of Saint Julia's Church, the closest to the mosque, toll the Angelus. Like in London, Paris and Detroit, outside of the Islamic world, Buenos Aires will see in the peace of its bustling life the comprehensive and fraternal proximity of the great monotheistic faiths."<sup>65</sup>

While this sampling of local publications may not have represented all corners of the porteño press, it is clear that many of the leading papers reported on the event and cited its significance. Indeed, there were neither attacks on the idea of the mosque nor opinions suggesting the such an addition of Islamic sacred space was a threat to Catholicism. Rather, *La Razon* and *El Laborista* connected it to the cosmopolitanism of the great global cities. Further, all of the news accounts linked it to the festivities commemorating the centenary of the liberator José de San Martín's death, other Argentine heroes, and the idea that Argentina provided an opportunity to achieve upward social mobility. And whether explicitly or implicitly, this act registered with participants, observers, and reporters as confirmation of the integrative force of Peronist populism that helped create the multicultural and pluralistic Argentina of the present.

While many Muslims and more broadly Arab-Argentines in Buenos Aires and elsewhere identified with Perón's New Argentina, the president and his wife Evita also declared that this colony was an important part of national society. For instance, in early September 1950, the "Lebanese, Syrians and other Arabic-speaking collectivities in Argentina" organized a tribute to President Perón and his wife. The event was held in the finest tango salon Les Ambassadeurs, a space popular with cinema stars and politicians located in the Palermo neighborhood. It also featured most of Perón's cabinet, including the ministers of Foreign Relations, Treasury,



Economy, Finance, Agriculture, Military, Public Works, and Industry and Commerce. The President of the federal Supreme Court joined national legislators, the heads of Egyptian, Lebanese and Syrian diplomatic missions, national, provincial, and municipal functionaries, and members of Arab institutions from the capital and the interior. Organizers decorated the hall with Argentine, Egyptian, Lebanese, and Syrian flags and prominently placed portraits of José de San Martín, President Perón, and Evita.<sup>66</sup>

A brass band from the General San Martín Regiment of Mounted Grenadiers opened the event, performing the march of San Lorenzo that marked the arrival of President Perón, Evita, Buenos Aires province governor Domingo Mercante, and his wife. A reception committee met the first couple, and a ladies commission gave an affectionate tribute to Evita during the long ovation. As the dignitaries moved to their assigned places, organizers hoisted the Argentine flag and the attendees then sang the national anthem. President Perón next proceeded to walk around the salon greeting people to great applause. Once seated, Perón and Evita received gifts from one of the various committees, desserts were served, and Simón Muse addressed the crowd on behalf of the organizing committee, eulogizing San Martín, thanking the generosity of Argentina, and celebrating the social work programs developed by Evita. Ivón Siriani de Abboud followed Muse and declared Evita represented the head of a movement in favor of civil rights for women. Elias Richa, President of the Lebanese Patriotic Association (the principal sponsor of the event), spoke in the name of the Lebanese colony, affirming that Juan Domingo Perón was a “paladin of Justicialism” who had fulfilled a plan of national recuperation. Upon the conclusion of Richa’s remarks, a delegation representing Mendoza province’s Lebanese community gifted the president with a reproduction of the monument of San Martín’s Army of the Andes, erected on Cerro de la Gloria in the city of Mendoza. Finally, a young girls’ commission gave a painting to Evita.<sup>67</sup>

Evita then spoke briefly to the crowd, referring to the Syrian-Lebanese as a “race of laborious men that have come to blend in the eagerness of work with the sons of this land.” She then directed her comments to the women of the Syrian-Lebanese colonies, remarking that “Argentine women like Arab women have fought alongside their fathers, brothers, and husbands to forge happy and prosperous countries, in these moments in which the world is experiencing difficulties, because it is the only way to develop the welfare of nations.” Evita, while not the originator of the women’s or suffrage movement in Argentina<sup>68</sup>, came to embody both in the eyes of many women, including Syrian and Lebanese Christian, Jewish, and Muslim women. Her public comments about the female contributions to the home and to the nation resonated with women throughout the country, validating women as political actors and vital to its development.<sup>69</sup>

Her husband spoke next. Perón began by noting his happiness to be among friends and on behalf of the nation he expressed his gratitude to the “noble Arabic-speaking collectivity that lives and works in our country.”

He then asked rhetorically what bound a young nation like Argentina to those that are the oldest of humanity. He asserted that they shared the same sentiments and ideals, both were heroic peoples in adversity, hard-working, just and lovers of peace. "We possess the same virtues and suffer the same deficiencies. We Argentines love Arab countries [as] Arabs that reside here love sincerely and feverously our own land." Perón thus declared Arabic-speakers in Argentina were "magnificent Peronists," concluding that "the Arab is not, never has been, and never will be a foreigner in the country."<sup>70</sup>

Juan Domingo Perón's declarations clearly reveal his intent to fold this ethnic community into the Argentine social tapestry. While perhaps some of the comments were theatre, it is clear that this rhetoric resonated with many in the broader Arab-Argentine colonies and among its Muslim adherents. Put another way, the actions and words of Perón and his wife validated minorities in their vision of a new Argentina, confirming their space in national society in important and unprecedented ways. Furthermore, the number of dignitaries in attendance also reveal the importance of this event. Certainly, the organizers represented the upper echelon of the Syrian-Lebanese colonies, but the sentiments were broadly and deeply felt among these immigrants and their descendants.

The space created by Peronism also filtered into events featuring the prominent members of the Muslim community in Buenos Aires. At the 'Id al-Adha event in the Spring of 1950, which featured al-Saïd, the Syrian minister plenipotentiary, the Lebanese commercial attache, and the Antiochian Greek Orthodox Bishop, Galia Hamur de Murad, as the head of the Women's Committee of the mosque commission, gave a speech lauding the grandeur of the holiday and the importance of the future sacred space and cultural center.<sup>71</sup> She declared:

The marvellous dream we live will be shortly a sweet reality, striving today more than ever, that everything is possible in this blessed land, thanks to the support that all good works have from the Justicialist government of General Perón and the generosity of his meritorious wife, Doña María Eva Duarte de Perón. We will honor [Argentina with] a blue and white pavilion, that receives everyone equally under its sacrosanct folds.

We imagine the happiness of this, when in the luminous mornings of the great city, we hear the muezzin call to prayer, to perpetuate in our hearts the religion, the respect, and the veneration and to fill our spirits with a sweet and infinite peace . . .<sup>72</sup>

Galia Hamur de Murad closed by asking the audience to "profess pride in the noble modesty of your origin and guard very jealously in your heart the care of your true homeland (patria), Argentina, united with the distant, beautiful country where your parents saw light for the first time."<sup>73</sup> Hamur de Murad directly connected the activities of Buenos

Aires' Muslim community to the Argentine nation. Indeed, a strong discourse circulating for decades in the Arabic-language press highlighted the beneficence of Argentina in providing opportunity for Syrians and Lebanese to pursue their dreams, to raise families, and to participate as a member of local society. And the wealth of the Muslim merchant class provided funds to purchase land and seriously consider constructing a mosque. Furthermore, she drew a direct link to Juan and Eva Perón. The New Argentina they were constructing generated a tremendous amount of public commitment to the government's policies and projects. In addition, the possibility of the muezzin's morning call breaking the silence of the Argentine dawn tantalized the speaker and likely her listeners. As she beckoned her listeners to identify with Argentina, the country that has succored this colony, Hamur de Murad made it clear that there was nothing irreconcilable between their Islamic faith and their place in Buenos Aires. Indeed, the mosque would be confirmation of their contribution to the country and the blue and white entryway would be their small token to Argentina.

Peronism continued to produce a space for less-influential groups and minorities of religious minorities to feel like they belonged, as was clearly expressed in community newspapers, such as *al-Istiqlāl*, and other institutions. For instance, in June 1952, a new organization named the Argentine Druze Youth (*Juventud Drusa Argentina*) held its first annual party celebrating its fruition and the works it intended to pursue. The event featured Western and Eastern music and brought together the leading families of the Druze community and their friends. Samia Corbag addressed the audience, noting the several obstacles overcome in order to establish the group under the aegis of the Druze Beneficence Association. She also pointed out that despite the Druze community in Buenos Aires being "conservative in its customs, conservative in its ideas, and conservative in its traditions," the younger generation wanted to "live with the times" without separating themselves from the "beautiful and magnificent" cultural elements of their parents. Yet, this speech was framed in the context of being raised in the "generous" Argentine nation and in the current political climate, as Samia concluded her speech with a rousing "¡Viva la República Argentina! ¡Viva Perón y Evita!" She was followed by Warda Mar'ī who read a Spanish-language poem by Héctor Fuad Miri, the son of Lebanese immigrants resident in Tandil, Buenos Aires province. The poem described an exalted fraternity between the Muslims of Andalus and the Christians of Spain.<sup>74</sup>

The cultural symbols invoked by Corbag and Mar'ī are important. Firstly, these are the images and beliefs that informed this generation of Muslim Argentines' understanding of self and community. For Corbag, her destiny lay in Argentina and she identified with the state and its populist leaders Juan and Evita Perón. Moreover, she was determined, at least rhetorically, to blend the worlds of her youth, namely the Islamic tradition of her parents and the opportunities awaiting her in Peronist Argentina.

Secondly, Mar'ī's decision to use a poem by Miri suggests she identified with the author and the subjects and images discussed. Drawing historical allusions to an idyllic connection between Iberian Muslims and Christians was a deliberate attempt to situate these Druze youth in broader Argentine society, a predominantly Catholic nation. The symbols blended the contemporary with the historical. By making these connections, it reveals for some Muslim youth, there was nothing contradictory between their confessional identity and membership in the Argentine polity. In other words, it was in spaces such as this party for the Argentine Druze Youth where immigrants and children of immigrants fleshed out what it meant to be a Muslim residing in Argentina; what it meant to be an Argentine who was Muslim; what it meant to be a woman who was Argentine and Muslim. Acts such as these complemented the mosque project, and in many ways allowed for a Muslim Argentine to evolve and endure as the effort to erect the sacred space foundered. To be sure, the activities of the Argentine Druze Youth were not unique to immigrant groups or other sectors of the Syrian-Lebanese colonies. Yet, the example of the Druze illustrates the multiplicity of options minority groups faced, some more desirable than others. Recognizing the various possible outcomes is important given that each immigrant group was necessarily segmented along many fault lines, be they class, gender or generation.

### Conclusion

Despite initial interest and success in raising money, trouble soon emerged prompting the mosque project board to announce that rumors of theft and run-ins with the Argentine special police concerned only one person; one who was not privy to the project's accounts. More disconcerting for the project leaders and *al-Istiqlāl* editor Abu Saleh, interest in the project had waned by December 1950, inducing the project leadership to publish a terse announcement asking how Muslims in Argentina planned on participating in the mosque endeavor. Perhaps the final blow was the recalling of Muhammad al-Saīd's by his superiors in Cairo in April 1951 and his replacement by someone with less interest or energy. The diplomat's departure, which was protested by the Argentine foreign ministry at the behest of Perón, and apparent apathy from the community caused project board member Qasim Abdallah to remember wistfully the efforts of al-Saīd and project board President Mustafa Ali to raising money, locating property, and attempting to erect a monument for Muslims in Argentina. Perhaps any chance to revive this effort with Egyptian state support evaporated in July 1952 with the military coup deposing King Farouk and ultimately bringing Gamal Abdul Nasser to power.<sup>75</sup>

The possibility of the mosque remained a very powerful desire for many Argentine Muslims. The Muslim community ultimately purchased another property on Rivadavia Avenue in 1957 after a "long lethargy" and much turmoil. A structure already sat on the property and thus the building came to feature a reception center and a private room for prayer.

While this was a more modest outcome than the project envisioned earlier in the decade, an important connection with al-Azhar came to fruition. The most important institution of Islamic education in the Sunni world sent an *'alim* to serve "the spiritual interests of Muslims" in Argentina; a relationship that endures to the present.<sup>76</sup>

The failed attempt to construct a mosque and cultural center that would have nurtured the spiritual needs of Argentina's Muslims and mapped these people onto religious and social landscapes of Buenos Aires suffered from a series of interconnected events. The historic fragmentation of the various Muslim communities residing in the capital had evolved over twenty years of institutional life and without a galvanizing force proved too strong for the efforts in the Peronist era. This moment also marked the twilight of Farouk's rule and the arrival of secular Arab nationalism led by populist authoritarian rulers, first Muhammad Naguib and then Nasser. The recalling of Muhammad al-Said to Egypt was a severe blow to the efforts of the Buenos Aires mosque project, but the demise of Farouk destroyed seemingly any possibility to push the project forward as the foreign policy imperatives of Egypt changed. This disappointment also apparently indicated the beginning of the slow decline of these Islamic institutions until the return to democracy in the 1980s.

The sentiment of belonging expressed by many Muslims residing in Argentina, however, reflects the context of the first Peronist government (1946-1955). As a member of the group of military officers who overthrew the government of President Ramón S. Castillo in June 1943, Juan Domingo Perón rode the crest of support from the working classes to assume the presidency three years later. This archetype populist politician proved attractive very early on for certain segments of the Syrian-Lebanese colonies, and important figures within the collective actively campaigned in Perón's behalf in Spring 1945. Furthermore, politicians of Lebanese and Syrian descent became important points of contact and reference to the Peronist state for the broader community, especially in encouraging support for Perón's second five-year plan.<sup>77</sup>

The sentiment that non-elites were active agents in the destiny of their country, often channeled through loyalty to Perón, his wife Evita, and various state institutions, marked a novel and fundamental change in the understanding of politics for non-elite sectors of Argentine society. The rise of Perón certainly created political opportunities on which well-positioned and opportunistic children of Syrian and Lebanese immigrants sought to capitalize. This was most clearly seen in the interior provinces, such as Catamarca, La Rioja, and Santiago del Estero, where certain families, such as the Saadi and the Menem families, came to dominate local politics since the 1950s. In addition, increasing numbers of children of Arabic-speaking immigrants rose through the ranks of the military and the diplomatic corps, especially during the first Peronist government.<sup>78</sup> Specific community newspapers, such as *Mundo Árabe*, announced the activities of the government and its agents, highlighting the successes achieved by

Syrian-Lebanese working in party politics.<sup>79</sup> Yet, the broader impact of Peronism on Muslims was that they belonged. They could celebrate their religious heritage and understood that these acts fit perfectly into an emerging multicultural and democratizing Argentina.

Thus, the Peronist period marked a period of great interest and support on the part of many from the second and third generations of Syrians and Lebanese, which were coming of age at Perón's ascent to power. The populist appeal and the transformation of the political sphere to include non-conventional actors, such as women and laborers, proved attractive to Muslims in Argentina. The environment, certainly viewed as authoritarian by critics of the government, created a space where Muslims, young or not, debated, fashioned, and celebrated an identity confirming themselves as members of a religious minority while being a part of the Argentine nation.

### Acknowledgements

I thank Malachi Hacohen for encouraging my pursuit of this research project. In addition, the comments from Raanan Rein, Jeff Lesser, and Adriana Brodsky were helpful in investigating the role of Peronism in the lives of Muslims in Buenos Aires. Akram Khater, John T. Karam, and the participants at the Bodies in Motion: Middle East Migrations workshop at North Carolina State University helped sharpen my arguments and observations. I thank the three anonymous reviewers for suggestions to further refine this article. Finally, I extend many thanks to Wingate University and its International Programs for financial support to conduct research in Buenos Aires.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Alberto Tasso, *Aventura, trabajo y poder: Sirios y libaneses en Santiago del Estero 1880-1980* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Indice, 1989) and Steven Hyland Jr., *More Argentine Than You: Arabic-Speaking Immigrants in Argentina* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Abdeluahed Akmir, "La Inmigración Árabe en Argentina (1880-1980)." (PhD diss., Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1990), 409-513; Gladys Jozami, "The Path From Trade to Power: The Sons of Syrians and Lebanese in the Military and in Foreign Affairs in Argentina (1920-1962)," *The Muslim World* 92, nos. 1 & 2 (2002), 157-167.

<sup>3</sup> Mariano Ben Plotkin, *Mañana es San Perón: A Cultural History of Peron's Argentina* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Books, 2003); Lila Caimari, *Perón y la iglesia católica* (Buenos Aires: Ariel Historia, 1995); Raanan Rein, *Fútbol, Jews, and the Making of Argentina* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 91-111; Ezequiel Adamovsky, *Historia de la clase media argentina, apogeo y decadencia de una ilusión 1919-2003* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 2009); Jorge A. Nállim, *Transformations and Crisis of Liberalism in Argentina, 1930-1955* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 105-196.

<sup>4</sup> A notable exception is María del Mar Logroño Narbona, et. al., eds., *Crescent Over Another Horizon: Islam in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latino USA* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015). See also Pedro Brieger and Enrique Herszkowich, "The Muslim Community of Argentina," *The Muslim World* 92, nos. 1 & 2 (2002), 157-167; Jozami, "The Path From Trade to Power," 157-167; Ignacio Klich, "Criollos and Arabic Speakers in Argentina: an Uneasy *Pas de Deux*, 1888-1914," in *The Lebanese and the World: A Century of Emigration*, eds. Albert Hourani and Nadim Shehadi (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993), 246-84; Christina Civantos, *Between Argentines and Arabs: Argentine Orientalism, Arab Immigrants, and the Writing of Identity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006); Gladys Jozami, "The Manifestation of Islam in Argentina," *The Americas* 53, no. 1 (1996), 67-85; S.A.H. Ahsani, "Muslims in Latin America: A Survey, Part I," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 5, no. 2 (1984): 454-463; and A. Noyjovich, "Viva Berón! Political Integration of Argentine-Arabs through the Peronist Movement, 1945-1955" (PhD diss, Tel Aviv University, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Raanan Rein, "Más allá del crisol de razas: los judíos argentinos, el peronismo y la lucha por un hogar multicultural," *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales* 59, no. 222 (2014), 141-160; Rein, *Los muchachos peronistas judíos*, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> See, among others, Eduardo Elena, *Dignifying Argentina: Peronism, Citizenship, and Mass Consumption* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011); Natalia Milanesio, *Workers go shopping in Argentina: The Rise of Popular Consumer Culture* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013); Nállim, *Transformations and Crisis of Liberalism*.

<sup>7</sup> Raanan Rein, *Los muchachos peronistas judíos*, 12. See also Oscar Chamosa, *The Argentine Folklore Movement: Sugar Elites, Criollo Workers, and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism, 1900-1955* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2010), 157-182.

<sup>8</sup> Eduardo Elena, "New Directions in the History of Peronism," *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe* 25, no. 1 (2014), 31. Little is written on minorities and immigrant groups in the Peronist era. Notable exceptions include Sandra McGee Deutsch, *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation: A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880-1955* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 172-204; Donna J. Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State: Performing Charity and Creating Rights in Argentina, 1880-1955* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 151-185; and Rein, *Los muchachos peronistas judíos*.

<sup>9</sup> Arab-Argentine emerged as an umbrella term including people of Syrian and Lebanese descent, but also included all immigrants and their children from the Arab world. In post-World War II Argentina, Arab-Argentine also was used interchangeably to mean Muslim by many activists. See Noyjovich, "Viva Berón!" and Ariel Noyjovich and Raanan Rein, "'For an Arab There Can Be Nothing Better Than Another Arab': Nation, Ethnicity, and Citizenship in Peronist Argentina," in *The New Ethnic Studies in Latin America*, ed. Raanan Rein et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 78-98.

<sup>10</sup> Vital Cuinet, *Syrie, Liban et Palestine: Géographie Administrative, Statistique, Descriptive et Raisonnée* (Paris, Ernest Leroux, 1896), 14, 149; Dick Douwes, "Reorganizing Violence: Traditional Recruitment Patterns and Resistance against Conscription in Ottoman Syria," in *Arming the State: Military Conscription in the Middle East and Central Asia, 1775-1925*, ed. Erik J. Zürcher (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), 111-128.

<sup>11</sup> See Engin Akarli, *The Long Peace: Ottoman Lebanon, 1861-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Philip K. Hitti, *The Origins of the Druze People and Religion with Extracts from Their Sacred Writings* (London: Saqi, 2007[1928]), 25-36, 58-66; Cuinet, *Syrie, Liban et Palestine*, 211; Rania Maktabi, "The Lebanese Census of 1932 Revisited. Who are the Lebanese?," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 26, no. 2 (1999): 234; Farhad Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998); Norman N. Lewis, "The Ismā'īlīs of Syria today," *Journal of The Royal Central Asian Society* 39, no. 1 (1952): 69-77.

<sup>12</sup> Akram Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 56, 209n28.

<sup>13</sup> José C. Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 45-59.

<sup>14</sup> Alejandro Schamún, *La Siria Nueva. Obra histórica, estadística y comercial de la colectividad sirio-otomana en las repúblicas Argentina y Uruguay* (Buenos Aires: La empresa Assalam, 1917), 19.

<sup>15</sup> Arthur Ruppín, *Syrien als Wirtschaftsgebiet* (Berlin: Verlag Benjamin Harz, 1920), 22-26; Kemal Karpát, "Ottoman Emigration to America, 1860-1914," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 17, no. 2 (1985), 199; Raymond Delval, *Les Musulmanes en Amérique Latine et aux Caraïbes* (Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan, 1992), 262; Centre des archives diplomatiques de la Courneuve, (henceforth ADLC), Direction des Affaires Politiques et Commerciales, Série E-Levant, Carton 621, Syriennes à l'Étranger, Ambassador to the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (henceforth MAE), November 28, 1930; ADLC, Direction des Affaires Politiques et Commerciales, Série E-Levant, Carton 618, Colonies Syriennes d'Amérique, Ambassador to MAE, October 15, 1935; Schamún, *La Siria Nueva*, 20; Gildas Brégain, *Syriens et Libanais d'Amérique Du Sud (1918-1945)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008), 62-66.

<sup>16</sup> Samuel M. Zwemer, "Islam in South America," *The Muslim World* 6, vol. 2 (1916) 150-151.

<sup>17</sup> Yusef Abboud, "Los Árabes Musulmanes," in *Sirios, Libaneses y Argentinos: Fragmentos Para Una Historia de la Diversidad Cultural Argentina*, ed. Hamurabi Noufour et al. (Buenos Aires: Fundación Los Cedros, 2004), 239.

<sup>18</sup> Akram Khater, "Becoming 'Syrian' in America: A Global Geography of Ethnicity and Nation." *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 14, no. 2-3 (2005): 299-331; John O. Voll, "Muslims in the Caribbean: Ethnic Sojourners and Citizens," in *Muslim Minorities in the West: Visible and Invisible*, eds. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Smith (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2002), 265-77.

<sup>19</sup> Abboud, "Los Árabes Musulmanes," 238; Brahim Husein, "Los Alauitas," in *Sirios, Libaneses y Argentinos: Fragmentos Para Una Historia De La Diversidad Cultural Argentina*, ed. Hamurabi Noufourri et al. (Buenos Aires: Fundación Los Cedros, 2004), 245–247.

<sup>20</sup> See Rita Veneroni et al, "Cronología institucional," in *Sirios, Libaneses y Argentinos: Fragmentos Para Una Historia de la Diversidad Cultural Argentina*, ed. Hamurabi Noufourri et al. (Buenos Aires: Fundación Los Cedros, 2004), 298–303.

<sup>21</sup> Mark Healey, *The Ruins of the New Argentina: Peronism and the Remaking of San Juan after the 1944 Earthquake* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 66–79; "A todos los árabes del país," *al-Fiṭra Islāmiyya*, January 27, 1944. For the relationship between Peronism and the Arab-Argentine colonies, see A. Noyjovich, "Viva Berón!" and Noyjovich and Rein, "For an Arab There Can Be Nothing Better Than Another Arab."

<sup>22</sup> "A todos los árabes del país," *al-Fiṭra Islāmiyya*, January 27, 1944.

<sup>23</sup> Centre des archives diplomatique de Nantes (henceforth CADN), Buenos Aires, 1946–1956, Box 29, "Homage de la collectivité Arabe de Buenos Aires au Général Perón," April 23, 1954.

<sup>24</sup> CADN, BA, 1946–1956, Box 29, "L'Anti-Colonisme Argentine," September 1, 1950.

<sup>25</sup> CADN, BA, 1946–1956, Box 29, "Relations de l'Argentine avec les Pays Arabes," December 13, 1952. For more on the third position, see Raanan Rein, *In the Shadow of Perón: Juan Atilio Bramuglia and the Second Line of Argentina's Populist Movement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 103–155.

<sup>26</sup> Cited in Noyjovich and Rein, "For an Arab There Can Be Nothing Better Than Another Arab."

<sup>27</sup> CADN, BA, 1946–1956, Box 29, "L'Anti-Colonisme Argentine," September 1, 1950.

<sup>28</sup> "Apoye el 2o Plan Quinquenal," *al-Istiqlāl*, April 10, 1954; "Instituciones Sirias y Libanesas Apoyan con Entusiasmo la Candidatura del C. Teisaire," *Mundo Arabe*, February 27, 1954.

<sup>29</sup> "Instituciones Sirias y Libanesas Apoyan con Entusiasmo la Candidatura del C. Teisaire," *Mundo Arabe*, February 27, 1954; "Mas Adhesiones Recibe El Contralmirante Teisaire," *Mundo Arabe*, March 6, 1954." For more on Teisaire, see Fabián Bosoer, *Detrás de Perón: la historia y leyenda del almirante Teisaire* (Buenos Aires: Capital Intellectual, 2013) and Fabián Bosoer, "Alberto Teisaire. Lealtad y traición en el canon peronista," in *La segunda línea: liderazgo peronista 1945–1955*, eds. Raanan Rein and Claudio Panella (Buenos Aires: Pueblo Heredero, 2013), 313–338.

<sup>30</sup> Marcela García Sebastiani, "The Other Side of Peronist Argentina: Radicals and Socialists in the Political Opposition to Perón (1946–1955)," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 35 (2003), 311–339.

<sup>31</sup> For discussion on the prejudicial discourse, see Civantos, *Between Argentines and Arabs*. For a more nuanced assessment of the interaction between

the Arabic-speaking collectivity and Argentine society, see Noyjovich, "Viva Berón."

<sup>32</sup> For further biographical information, consult Ignacio Klich, "Argentine-Ottoman Relations and Their Impact on Immigrants from the Middle East: A History of Unfulfilled Expectations, 1910-1915," *Americas* 50, no. 2 (1993): 177-205 and Pablo Torielli, "Hombre de tres mundos. Para una biografía política e intelectual del emir Emín Arslán," *Dirāsāt Hispānicas. Revista Tunecina de Estudios Hispánicos* 2 (2015): 157-81.

<sup>33</sup> "Jāmi' Buenos Aires," *al-Istiqāl*, April 15, 1950.

<sup>34</sup> Archivo General del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto (henceforth AMREC), Egypt, 1947, Box 21, File 7, De Labougle to Foreign Minister Bramuglia, June 13, 1947; AMREC, Egypt, 1950, Box 2, File 7, Foreign Minister Paz to Speroni, September 19, 1950; AMREC, Egypt, 1950, Box 2, File 7, Speroni to Paz, September 22, 1950.

<sup>35</sup> "Jāmi' Buenos Aires," *al-Istiqāl*, April 15, 1950; "Tabaru'āt jaliyya Mindusa," *al-Istiqāl*, February 11, 1950; "Qawā'im al-Tabaru'āt," *al-Istiqāl* (Buenos Aires), April 15, 1950.

<sup>36</sup> CADN, Buenos-Aires, Carton 172, Military Attaché to Minister of War, December 26, 1933.

<sup>37</sup> Philip Mattar notes similar issues of discord among Muslims and depression-induced immiseration affected university fundraising efforts in the Muslim world. Apparently, the funds for building the university were spent during the Arab Revolt from 1936 to 1939, and the university was never built. See Philip Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem: Al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni and the Palestinian National Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 50-64; and Taysir Jabara, "Jāmi'a al-Masjid al-Aqsa al-Islāmiyya fi al-Quds fi 1931," *Majala Jāmi'a al-Najah li al-Abhāth (al-'Ulum al-Insāniyya)* 14 (2000): 125-152.

<sup>38</sup> "Id al-Fiṭr al-Mubārak wa al-Iḥtifāl bihi," *al-Istiqāl*, July 10, 1950.

<sup>39</sup> For the evolving diplomatic and regional initiatives of Egypt, consult Sylvia Kedourie, ed., *Arab Nationalism: An Anthology* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976), 45-53; Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 121; and a contemporary account of King Farouk, Harry Zinder, "Farouk: The Playboy King," *Saturday Evening Post*, April 29, 1950, 36-89. For an account of state interest in its national communities abroad, see Mark I. Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); "Jāmi' Wāshantūn," *al-Istiqāl*, April 15, 1950; "Mashrū' Masjid Wāshantūn," *al-Sālam*, February 28, 1950; "Moslem Prayer Call Will Ring in Washington," *The New York Times*, April 1, 1957. See also "History," The Islamic Center, accessed May 19, 2017, <http://theislamiccenter.com/about-us/history/>.

<sup>40</sup> See Klich, "Argentine-Ottoman Relations," 177-205.

<sup>41</sup> For a fuller treatment on this theme, see Brégain, *Syriens et Libanais d'Amérique*.

<sup>42</sup> CADN, Beirut, Cabinet Politique, Carton 786, Ministère Plénipotentiaire, Délégué en Turquie du Comité Français de la Libération Nationale to Ambassador, Commissaire aux Affaires Étrangères, Algiers, January 10, 1944.

<sup>43</sup> See Klich, "Towards an Arab-Latin American Bloc?," 550-572.

<sup>44</sup> See the photograph taken on July 19, 1950 featuring Muhammad al-Saïd, members of the Buenos Aires Mosque Project and other Muslims; Archivo General de la Nación, Departamento Documentos Fotográficos, Box 3425, Photograph 188286. See also "al-Jam'iyya al-Khayriyya al-Duruziyya tahiyya dhikrai muḥarrir al-Arjuntin," *al-Istiqlāl* (Buenos Aires), November 1, 1950.

<sup>45</sup> Mattar notes the concern among the leaders of al-Azhar regarding the efforts to establish the Islamic university in Jerusalem and the competition it could have generated. Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem*, 60.

<sup>46</sup> The potential of transnational, pan-Islamic organizing concerned French officials administrating colonies in French West Africa, who decided to interdict the distribution of the periodical *al-Fiṭra*, a newspaper published by an 'Alawite Muslim residing in Buenos Aires. See ADLC, Afrique 1918-1940, Affaires Musulmanes, Carton 19, Minister of the Colonies to MAE, July 5, 1923.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Doran observes a consistent pattern in Egyptian actions when partnering with other Arab nations, namely "ambivalence-leadership-abdication." Doran argues that Egypt fought against Israel in 1948 and 1949 to secure its place as first among Arab nations, thus explaining its sudden desertion of the war effort. See Michael Doran, *Pan-Arabism Before Nasser: Egyptian Power Politics and the Palestine Question* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>48</sup> See Bregain, *Syriens et Libanais d'Amérique*, 135-244.

<sup>49</sup> CADN, Buenos-Aires, Carton 172, Military Attache to Minister of War, December 26, 1933; ADLC, Direction des Affaires Politiques et Commerciales, Série E-Levant, Carton 618, Colonies Syriennes d'Amérique, Ambassador to MAE, October 15, 1935.

<sup>50</sup> CADN, Buenos-Aires, Carton 172, Military Attaché to Minister of War, December 26, 1933.

<sup>51</sup> This discussion builds upon an observation by Raanan Rein and Jeff Lesser regarding the fact most immigrants do not associate with these sorts of institutions. Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein, "Challenging Particularity: Jews as a Lens on Latin American Ethnicity," *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2006): 249-263.

<sup>52</sup> Rizwan Mawani in discussion with the author, September 2013.

<sup>53</sup> Among others, see Saïd Badran, "Binā' Jāmi' fi al-'āṣima," *al-Istiqlāl* (Buenos Aires), April 15, 1950; Yusef ṣārmī, "Hawla Binā' Jāmi' fi Buenos Aires," *al-Istiqlāl* (Buenos Aires), April 15, 1950.

<sup>54</sup> "Bajo el Cielo de un Barrio Porteño, Caballito, la Primera Mezquita El-evará su Grave Cúpula," *El Laborista*, May 5, 1950; "Tendrán en Pleno Caballito una Gran Mezquita los Fieles de Alá," *La Razon*, May 6, 1950.

<sup>55</sup> Qasim Abdallah, "Jāmi' Buwaynis Aires," *al-Istiqlāl* (Buenos Aires), April 15, 1950.

<sup>56</sup> al-Matrān Nifun Sābā, "al-Itihād Qūwa," *al-Istiqlāl* (Buenos Aires), April 15, 1950.

<sup>57</sup> "Porqué se hará una mezquita en Buenos Aires," *al-Istiqlāl* (Buenos Aires), April 15, 1950.

<sup>58</sup> Julio Naput, "Una Mezquita en la Capital Federal," *al-Istiqlāl* (Buenos Aires), April 15, 1950.

<sup>59</sup> "Inician las Obras de la Mezquita de Buenos Aires," *Clarín*, May 6, 1950; "Fué Colocada Ayer la Piedra Básica de la Mezquita de Buenos Aires," *La Prensa*, May 7, 1950; "Fué colocada la primera piedra de una mezquita," *al-Salām*, May 11, 1950.

<sup>60</sup> "Fué colocada la primera piedra de una mezquita," *al-Salām*, May 11, 1950.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> "Fué colocada la primera piedra de una mezquita," *La Nación*, May 7, 1950. The prominent Arabic and Spanish newspaper *al-Salām* reprinted this article. See "Fué colocada la primera piedra de una mezquita," *al-Salām*, May 11, 1950. See also "Fué Colocada Ayer la Piedra Básica de la Mezquita de Buenos Aires," *La Prensa*, May 7, 1950.

<sup>63</sup> "Inician las Obras de la Mezquita de Bs. Aires," *Clarín*, May 6, 1950; "En Caballito colocarán hoy la piedra fundamental dela Mezquita de Buenos Aires," *La Nación*, May 6, 1950; "Hoy se Colocará la Piedra Fundamental De una Mezquita," *La Prensa*, May 6, 1950; "Fué Colocada Ayer la Piedra Básica de la Mezquita de Buenos Aires," *La Prensa*, May 7, 1950; "Buenos Aires, hirviente y prospera, presta un pedazo de su suelo a los fieles de Ala," *Clarín*, May 7, 1950; "Colocan la Piedra Básica de la Mezquita a Levantarse en Esta," *La Epoca*, May 6, 1950; "Bajo el Cielo de un Barrio Porteño, Caballito, la Primera Mezquita Elevará su Grave Cúpula," *El Laborista*, May 5, 1950.

<sup>64</sup> "Bajo el Cielo de un Barrio Porteño, Caballito, la Primera Mezquita Elevará su Grave Cúpula," *El Laborista*, May 5, 1950; "Tendrán en Pleno Caballito una Gran Mezquita los Fieles de Alá," *La Razon*, May 6, 1950.

<sup>65</sup> "Tendrán en Pleno Caballito una Gran Mezquita los Fieles de Alá," *La Razon*, 6 May 1950.

<sup>66</sup> "Fué Extraordinario El Agasajo Tributado al Gral. Perón y su esposa," *al-Salām*, September 2, 1950.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> For a discussion on feminist and suffrage movements prior to Evita, see among others Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State*; and Greg Hammond, *The Women's Suffrage Movement and Feminism in Argentina from Roca to Perón* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2011).

<sup>69</sup> "Fué Extraordinario El Agasajo Tributado al Gral. Perón y su esposa," *al-Salām*, September 2, 1950.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> "Hafla 'Id al-Adha al-Mubāarak," *al-Istiqlāl*, September 30, 1950.

<sup>72</sup> "Hid [sic] Al Adha," *al-Istiqlāl*, November 1, 1950.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> "Texto del discurso que habia pronunciado la sta. Samia Sobagg [sic], *al-Istiqlāl* (Buenos Aires), June 30, 1952.

<sup>75</sup> For the controversy over al-Saīd's dismissal, see the collection of dispatches in AMREC, Egypt, 1950, Box 2, File 7. See also "Jāmi' Buenos Aires Bayān li-l-Rāi al-'Ām," *al-Istiqlāl*, July 31, 1950; "Jāmi' Buenos Aires," *al-Istiqlāl*, December 9, 1950; "al-Jāliyyāt al-'Ārabiyya Tawada'a Sa'āda Muhammad al-Saīd Bey," *al-Istiqlāl*, April 15, 1951; "Takrīm al-Sayyid Mustafa Ali," *al-Istiqlāl*, July 20, 1951; "Hawla Mashrū' al-Masjid al-Islāmī," *al-Istiqlāl*, September 5, 1954; "Jāmi' Buenos Aires," *al-Istiqlāl*, December 1, 1954.

<sup>76</sup> ADLC, Amérique, Argentine, 1952-1963, Box 127, "Création d'une Mosquée à Buenos Aires," September 27, 1957.

<sup>77</sup> See Klich, "Towards an Arab-Latin American Bloc?," 552; "Los Arabes en el 2° Plan Quinquenal," *al-Istiqlāl*, July 10, 1953; and "Fue agasajado el diputado nacional Don Luis Atala por la colectividad árabe, patrocinada por la Asociación de Beneficencia Drusa," *al-Istiqlāl*, January 5, 1954.

<sup>78</sup> Jozami, "The Path from Trade to Power," 169-184.

<sup>79</sup> *Mundo Arabe* was published by Luis Atala, a son of Lebanese immigrants and Peronist representative in the national lower house of Congress from Cordoba province. The newspaper covered Atala's activities and provided space for other Peronist politicians to present their activities. The masthead declares "Edited in Cordoba for the [Syrian-Lebanese] collectivity everywhere in the country." See, for instance, *Mundo Arabe*, January 30, 1954.