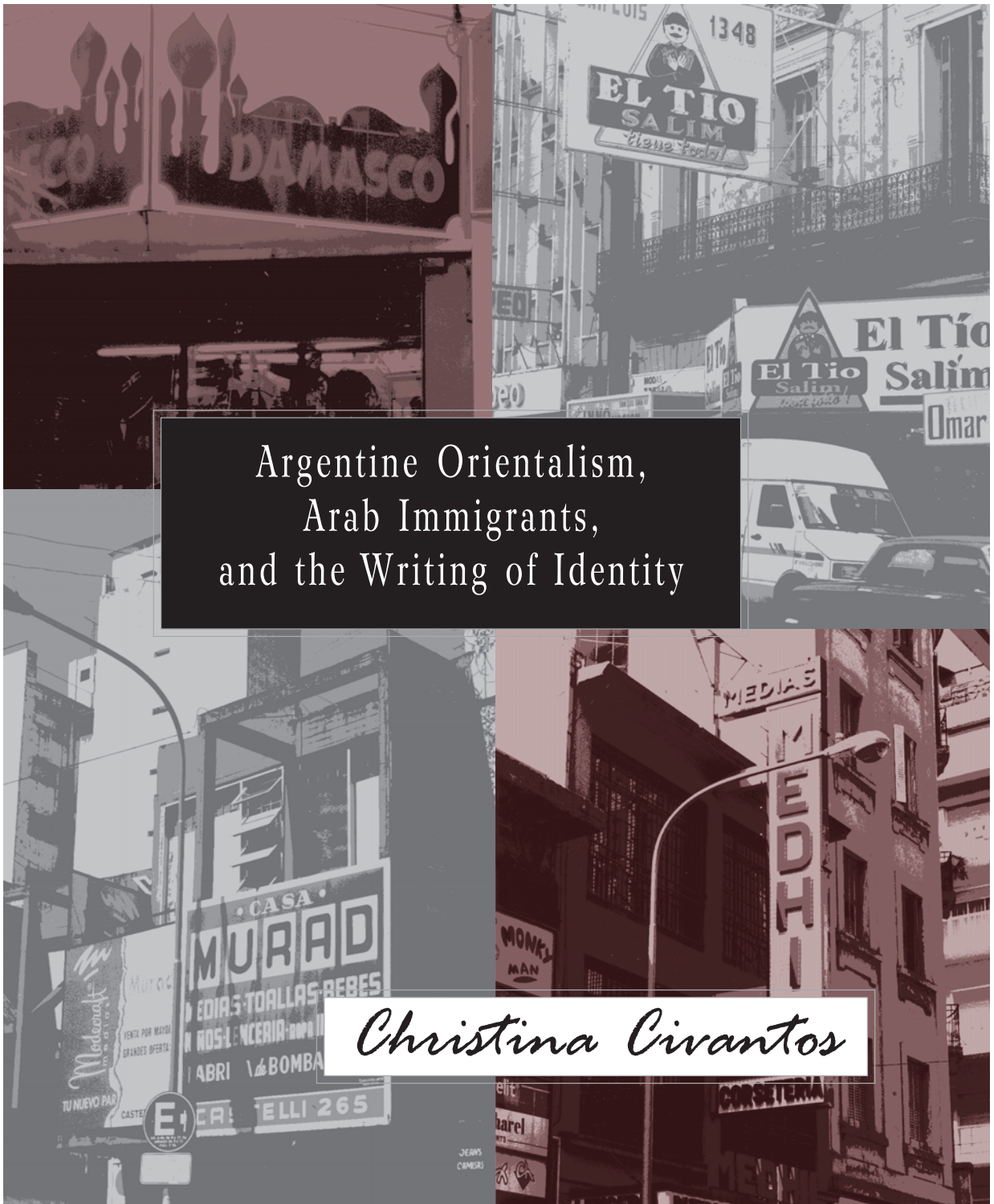
Between Argentines and Arabs



Argentine Orientalism, Arab Immigrants, and the Writing of Identity

Christina Civantos

BETWEEN ARGENTINES AND ARABS

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PREFACE

A few notes on terminology and the presentation of non-English words and text are in order. With only a few exceptions, all translations are my own. The exceptions are the translations I provide for stories by Jorge Luis Borges. For the most part I use Norman Thomas di Giovanni's translations of "Abenjacán el Bojarí, muerto en su laberinto"("Ibn Hakkan al-Bokhari, Dead in His Labyrinth") and "Las doce figuras del mundo" ("The Twelve Figures of the World"). However, in certain passages, in order to bring out more of the original text, I use my own translation. When quoting from these stories, in addition to the parenthetical page references to di Giovanni's translation, I provide the page numbers in the Spanish original in brackets. For all primary texts, the publication dates I provide refer to publication in the original language. Occasionally the difficulty of rendering an exact translation led me to include a word or phrase from the original inside brackets (and in italics) within the quotation.

In transliterating Arabic words into the Roman alphabet, I follow a modified version of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES) system. As with the IJMES system, for titles and proper names I do not provide diacritical marks to indicate dark consonants, or macrons to indicate long vowels. However, I do use full transliteration of personal names in the bibliography. I use full transliteration of technical terms, but only upon the first appearance of the word. For names or terms that are familiar to non-Arabic speakers, I use simplified transliteration to facilitate recognition (e.g., "Quran" rather than "Qur'ān"). I also provide full transliteration of non-Arabic words appearing in Arabic script (even in titles) and of all original quotations from Arabic texts.

In earlier drafts of this study I used the term *orientalism* (without capitalization) in order to allow for the possibility of more than one form of this discursive, academic, and/or institutional phenomenon,

rather than a single hegemonic form. In short, I wanted to use the noncapitalized term in order to highlight the fact that "the Orient" as a proper name only exists as a construct, not as an organic or coherent cultural or even geographic entity. However, upon further reflection I remembered that various other commonly used terms—such as "Middle East" for West Asia—are also not, strictly speaking, place names, or at least not unproblematic ones. Thus, rather than take up the (necessary, though daunting and possibly endless) task of transforming common terminology, I have chosen to accept the capital "O" with the understanding that it signals that "the Orient" refers to a construct but one that as such professes to be a concrete place. Ultimately "the Orient" is a geographic location, but one of unclear, and Eurocentric definition. In an effort to still highlight the heterogeneity of discourses on the Orient, I do, however, attempt as much as possible (within the bounds of readability) to emphasize plurality with phraseology such as "forms of Orientalism" and "Orientalisms." Given this understanding of Orientalism, throughout this study please consider my use of the terms *Orient* and *Oriental* to be within quotation marks, that is, bracketed in order to denote their status as constructs.

I use, more or less interchangeably, the terms *Levantine*, *Arab*, and *Syro-Lebanese*, to refer to immigrants from the Ottoman province of Greater Syria. Argentines began to commonly use the term *Syro-Lebanese* in the 1920s, however it does not do a good job of including Palestinian Argentines (or the small number of North African immigrants, Jews and Muslims from Morocco and Algeria, that also settled in Argentina [see Klich, "*Criollos* and Arabic Speakers," 246, n.1.]). When wishing to highlight the Euro-Argentine perspective on the Arab Argentines, I also use the term *turco*—which Argentines generally use pejoratively.

I use the terms *criollo* and *creole* when referring to descendents of Spanish colonizers and the broader term *Euro-Argentine* in order to include turn-of-the-century immigrants of European descent. The standard English equivalent for *criollo* is "Creole." However, because "Creole" often not only denotes a person of Spanish or French descent born in the Americas, but also connotes a person of mixed African and European background, I have chosen to use the Spanish "criollo," or the uncapitalized "creole." Although the term *criollo* carries in it the potential for racial mixture, by virtue of birth in the Americas, by no means does it necessarily denote this. Also, the term has a particular valence in Latin American cultural history where the *criollo* is first at odds with the colonial Spanish administration and then with immigrants. Rather than the indigenous elite of many postcolonial contexts, in Argentina (and to this day in many Latin American countries) one finds an upper class that is *criollo* or of European descent. It is to

criollo, as well as to some extent to Euro-Argentine culture, that I refer when I use the terms *mainstream* or *dominant* culture, recognizing nonetheless that these are not stable, undifferentiated cultural units, but rather networks cross-cut by issues of class and gender, as well as immigration versus creolism. The main difficulty with using this terminology is that it leaves Jewish Argentines in an ambiguous position—since even Eastern European Jews cannot be neatly categorized as European, and arguably Arab Jews cannot be said to be non-Arab. But such is the nature of identity and our attempts to name it. I hope that this book draws attention to the complexities that underlie cultural histories as well as the formation and interaction of identities, and that in some way it can help in the shaping of better modes of coexistence.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The idea of this study first came to me as a beginning graduate student; since then the project has gone through a seemingly infinite number of versions. Throughout the process, the project and myself have benefited tremendously from the help of various people and institutions. I am deeply grateful to all of them.

The works of Margot Scheffold and David Zaruj were crucial in embarking on the research process. Funding from a Fulbright grant, a University of California at Berkeley (UC Berkeley) Center for Middle Eastern Studies Mellon grant, a UC Berkeley Humanities and Social Sciences Research Grant, the UC Berkeley Department of Comparative Literature Mellon dissertation writing grant, and the University of Miami Orovitz and General Research Awards supported my research and writing.

An earlier version of chapter 3 first appeared as "Custom-Building the Fictions of the Nation: Arab Argentine Re-Writings of the Gaucho," *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 4:1 (2001), 69–87. My thanks to Sage Publications Ltd. for permission to reprint. I use as epigraphs material from "East of Said" by Richard G. Fox (In *Edward Said, A Critical Reader*, Michael Sprinker, ed. Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1992) *Huellas del Islam in la literatura española* by Luce López-Baralt (Madrid: Hiperión, 1985), *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* by Lisa Lowe (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), and *A Thousand Plateaus* by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

At UC Berkeley, during my first semester of graduate school Julio Ramos suggested that I write my seminar paper on Orientalism in Sarmiento and Mansilla. I then started to wonder how Arab immigrants in Argentina figured into this equation and, when my research abroad had yielded piles of material, Francine Masiello helped me

structure my approach to this veritable tangle of texts. Her expertise, enthusiasm, and support as dissertation director were vital to this project. Karl Britto, Margaret Larkin, and James Monroe also provided rigorous commentary and valuable encouragement at the dissertation stage. Likewise, the members of the Comp Lit Mellon dissertation writing seminar provided important critiques and suggestions. Many other friends and colleagues there also offered valuable support. Among them Elliott Colla provided comments on the initial grant proposal that got the project started and Laura Schattschneider gave me a detailed translation of certain pages of Scheffold's study.

In Argentina, the Pelegrina family, Eduardo Freytes, and Marta Iturriz provided *locro*, *criollitos*, and the warmth of homes away from home. Katie Fleet, Kent Eaton, and the rest of the Fulbright group helped me face the trials and travails of research with a sense of humor. Theresa Alfaro Velcamp provided important camaraderie and research leads. I am indebted to the staffs at the Biblioteca Nacional, the Club Sirio de Buenos Aires, the library of the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras—Universidad de Buenos Aires, the Centro Islámico de Buenos Aires, Argentores, and the priests of Colegio San Marón (Buenos Aires); the personnel at La Asociación Libanesa de Tucumán, La Sociedad Sirio-Libanesa de Tucumán, La Sociedad Sirio Libanesa de Córdoba, the Unión Sirio-Libanesa de Salta, the Sociedad Sirio Libanesa de Santiago del Estero, the Biblioteca 9 de Julio (Santiago del Estero), the Sociedad Libanesa (Rosario), and Father Michel Saba of the Iglesia Ortodoxa San Jorge (Rosario); the staff at Club Social Sirio Libanés (Santa Fe), and the personnel at several other libraries, archives, Arab associations, mosques, and churches. I am grateful to various individuals for their help in locating and contextualizing Arab/Argentine works, as well as for their generosity and hospitality, among them are: Dalal Kabbas, Pedro Catella, Martín Rodríguez, Cristina Iglesia, Omar Borré, Javier Fernández, Hanna Jaser, Delia Dagum, Juana Dib, Alberto Tasso, Gladys Jozami, Jorge Bestene, Jorge Asís, and Nimr Barud.

In Damascus and Beirut, I am indebted to the staffs at *Maktabat al-Asad* and the Bibliothèque Orientale of Université Saint-Joseph. I am especially grateful to Mazin Rabia for many discussions about Arabic literature and culture, for consultation on Levantine dialect, and for generously sharing wonderful meals, good company, and his extended family of friends, students, and relatives. Among these, Patxi brought to my attention certain texts by Borges.

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Luxner's "The South American Leaf" and Karen Rignall sent me Brieger's "Latin Islam since 11 September"; Rebecca Biron, Michelle Warren, Jane Connolly, Lillian Manzor, David Ellison, and Anne Cruz gave crucial advice on the publication process. Hosam Aboul-Ela and Gema Pérez-Sánchez read sections of the manuscript, Rebecca read several, and all offered much appreciated suggestions and encouragement. The two anonymous readers of SUNY Press provided me with extremely detailed, insightful, and helpful comments. Lisa Chesnel and Laurie Searl of SUNY Press were very attentive to detail, and very patient.

Childcare became a crucial element in the final months of revision, as these coincided with the arrival of my first child. Abuela Elsa deserves a gold medal for many a Saturday baby-sitting session. During the work week Pilar, Fátima, and L'Atelier offered warmth and caring. Sameet took time from his own book project to give me more time to work. Aunt Marlene generously offered her time during the home stretch. Grandparents Adarsh, Mahendra, and Paco also provided much appreciated babycare while I tended to this book.

Throughout the last years of this process Sameet offered patience, serenity, companionship, and an endless supply of delicious food—when all I wanted was to think about this book, and when all I wanted was to think about anything other than this book. Throughout the last months Javier Amrit has provided amazing work breaks, of a sort I could never have imagined.

INTRODUCTION

Interwoven Histories, Interwoven Identities

> Traveling theories, like any baggage, get knocked about in transit. I do not mean to mishandle Edward Said's Orientalism, but I do think our ultimate destination lies further along than it has traveled—or perhaps can travel. I suspect Said would rather see it tossed about and then reinforced for further travel than have it artificially brought along with kid-glove treatment. Certainly Orientalism has proved very sturdy in recognizing Western cultural domination and prodding [us] to see our complicity in it. But now we have to travel further on, to see the intimacies between European Orientalism's domination and the Third World's cultural resistance. We have only reached this point, however, because Said's theory has traveled so well and because he has been so remarkable a cicerone.
>
> —Richard G. Fox, "East of Said"

IN THE SOUTHERN TIP OF LATIN AMERICA, especially in Argentina and Uruguay, one drink reigns supreme across all social sectors—*mate*, a tea-like brew made from the locally grown plant of the same name and ritualistically consumed in vast quantities. It is a curious testament to little-studied historical links that, as Luxner indicates, while Argentina is the largest producer and consumer of *mate*, the largest importer of Argentine *mate* is Syria (28–29). The consumption of *mate* in Syria is a material trace of the migration of some 250,000 Levantines to Argentina, and the eventual return of some of these émigrés to their homeland, whether to visit or to stay for good, with

a taste for *mate*. The study that I carry out here is concerned with Arab-Argentine connections of a different sort—discursive intersections and dialogues—but ones that arise out of the same historical events. The connections that concern me are those that lead to the emergence of the Arab/the Orient as a cultural sign in Argentina and to the presence of Arab Argentines as cultural agents within Argentina.

The main questions I address are: How do Euro-Argentines employ the figure of the Arab—images of the "Orient" and the "Oriental" immigrant—in constructing an Argentine national culture, and how do Arab immigrants in Argentina make sense of the linguistic and cultural dislocations that they experience while responding to Euro-Argentine discourses? I answer these questions by reading contrapuntally the writings of Euro-Argentines and Arab immigrants in Argentina. I examine the textual conversations between Argentines of European descent and Arab immigrants to Argentina in order both to shed light on the reciprocal nature of processes of representation and identity formation between national and immigrant groups, and to open up the study of Latin American immigrant and ethnic literatures.[1] This study is then both a literary history—of Argentine Orientalist literature and Arab Argentine immigrant literature—and a critical analysis of how the formation of identities in these two bodies of work is rhetorically enmeshed.

The first Argentine representations of Arabs, and the portrayals' enduring essentialisms, appear a few decades before the arrival of Syro-Lebanese immigrants in Argentina. As early as 1845, some twenty years before the entry of the first Arab immigrants, the Orient—an Orient assembled through readings in Orientalist academic studies and literature produced in Europe and through travels in the Middle East—was already a presence in Argentina. Images of the Orient appear in the founding texts of Argentine literature and Argentine cultural nationalism written by authors such as Domingo F. Sarmiento and Leopoldo Lugones. Yet, it was not until long after actual "Orientals" began settling in Argentina that the presence of Arabs *in* Argentina was recorded in literary texts. Aside from reference to the departure of Arab immigrants en route to Argentina in a 1909 travelogue, the reality of Arabs in Argentina is not represented textually until the 1920s when the figure of the *turco* begins to appear in literary works. Meanwhile a far away and fantastic Orient continued to function in Argentine letters into the early 1950s.

By focusing on the formation of Argentine national identity in the Orientalist texts of non-Arab Argentines, I hope to expose both how the Orient—as imagined and experienced by various figures in Argentine cultural history—has played an important but heretofore unacknowledged role in Argentine national identity, and how conceptions of Orientalism can be reconfigured in light of this. I consider the Euro-Argentine texts within the frameworks of the legacy of the Spanish *Reconquista* and European Orientalisms. Together these elucidate how the presence of the Arab, both abroad and at home, has played a role in Euro-Argentine literature's construction of an Argentine national identity. Additionally, by reflecting on the workings and implications of Orientalism in the Latin American context, I point to the ways in which the notion of Orientalism, as established by Edward Said, can be reformulated in order to take into account a variety of interconnected historical circumstances and discourses.

Although there is no dearth of critical commentary surrounding discourses of Orientalism in general, or Edward Said's theorization of Orientalism, I find that there is at least one more stone to be overturned—another "complex unfolding of the social world"[2] to be acknowledged. I am referring to the intersection between the construction of Argentine identities—both subject positions and a national "character"—and the practice of forms of Orientalism. Said's groundbreaking *Orientalism* contributed immensely to a broad range of fields by pointing to knowledge about the Orient as a means to attaining power over it and to positioning the self against an exotic Other. Drawing from Michel Foucault's analysis of the deep interconnections between power and knowledge, Said argues that political and cultural imperial relations have relied upon a particular mode of understanding and representing the Orient that includes the academic discipline of Oriental Studies and Orientalist art and literature. Although in *Culture and Imperialism* Said moves toward a more nuanced understanding of Orientalism and recognizes resistance to it, his work does not account for more heterogeneous forms of Orientalism, such as those that arise from the relationship between creole colonials of Spanish descent and the Arab world.

In certain ways, and to varying extents, writings by Euro-Argentines and even Arab Argentines fall within the type of Orientalism that Said formulates; however, on a variety of levels they do not fit within, and thus cannot be understood through, Said's conceptual-ization. These texts call for a more fluid, context-based notion of essentialization of the Orient than that which Said offers. As various critics have noted, Said characterizes Orientalism as a monolithic discourse that replicates itself throughout history. Said's totalizing

notion of Orientalism and Orientalists tends to fall into an essentialization of both as emphatically schematic. James Clifford delves into these issues in a section of his *The Predicament of Culture*. Clifford observes that despite the often "essentializing modes" and "totalizing habits of Western humanism" in Said's work, "it succeeds in questioning a number of important anthropological categories, most important, perhaps, the concept of culture" (271). Nevertheless, when examining the essentialization found in *Orientalism*, Clifford describes the problem as "the absence in his book of any developed theory of culture as a differentiating and expressive ensemble rather than as simply hegemonic and disciplinary" (263).[3]

This is not to say, of course, that the images of the Orient produced by Argentine writers are simply stylistic devices with no broader implications. On the contrary, the Orientalisms of Argentine writers of European descent—as well as those of Arab Argentine writers (e.g., Hallar and Arslan)—are linked to significant questions of identity formation. Julia Kushigian, in *Orientalism in the Hispanic Literary Tradition*, takes an important first step toward considering the particularities of Orientalism in Latin America by examining what she terms "Hispanic Orientalism." However, the lack of development of certain key ideas—the nature of the relationship between the Hispanic world and the Orient, the conceptualization of the Orient and Orientalism, and the notion of dialogue—leaves her analysis incomplete. A noteworthy critical study of Orientalism in Spanish literature is Luce López-Baralt's *Huellas del Islam in la literatura española*, which brings out the interconnectedness of Spanish and Arab letters from medieval times to the present. In particular, in her analysis of the ideological contradictions and unwitting consolidation of exoticizing, essentializing notions of the Arab Other in Juan Goytisolo's *Makbara*, López-Baralt points the way to a more nuanced understanding of "Hispanic Orientalism" and Orientalism in general. For this reason, her work serves as background as well as a conceptual guide for my analysis of how the historical relationship between Spain and the Arab world lingers as Argentine *criollos* define their identities against both the indigenous peoples of Argentina and immigrants to Argentina.

Outside of the realm of Spanish and Spanish American letters, the most noteworthy reconceptualization of the notion of Orientalism is Lisa Lowe's *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms*. Lowe calls for a conceptualization of Orientalism that takes into account the various other discourses that intersect and interact with Orientalism. Her purpose is to point to the ways in which Orientalism is linked to multiple systems of representation and informed by particular social and literary conditions and thus allow for attempts at countering Orientalisms. Her work provides a building block for my investiga-

tion of Latin American processes of mutual self-definition and their relationship to Orientalism. As part of this inquiry I consider how Arab Argentines have used forms of Orientalism as a cultural resistance in the face of Argentine nationalism. In this way my work also bears commonalities with Richard Fox's work on South Asia. Fox wonders,

> [H]ow far did Orientalism, not Said's theory of Orientalism . . . , but the Orientalist domination he has documented, travel to the Orient that was its object and destination? Said allows in passing that Orientalism reached the Orientals (*Orientalism*), but he does not go on with this idea. . . . Said's theory of Orientalism does not travel as far as Orientalism itself did. [It] does not allow the possibility that Orientals, once Orientalized by Western domination, could use Orientalism itself against that domination (145–46).

In order to allow for the broad spectrum of Arab/Argentine Orientalisms—including the Orientalist practices of both Argentines of Arab descent and Argentines of Euro-American descent, I draw from existing formulations of Orientalism and bring them together with theorizations of the heterogeneity of Latin American identity. In this way, I elaborate a conceptualization of Orientalism that fosters greater awareness and understanding of Orientalisms in postcolonial and immigratory contexts.

The history of anti-Arab prejudice in Argentina reveals the importance of reading certain texts that have been ignored and provides impetus for seeking new points of entry into more well-known texts. By considering in greater detail the history of anti-Arab sentiment in Argentina, specifically from the late 1800s through 1955, we can understand what conditions certain Arab Argentine writers were contending with and responding to, as well as what sort of milieu fostered the works of many twentieth-century Euro-Argentine writers. In the sections that follow, I sketch out the interwoven histories of Arabs and Argentines from the initial reaction against the massive influx of immigrants in the last two decades of the nineteenth century through the start of the twenty-first century.

Most mid-nineteenth-century Argentine statesman believed that Argentine progress depended upon populating the country with Europeans.

The province of Buenos Aires led the way with its establishment of an immigration commission in 1824, long before Argentine political unity. A program of promotion and active recruitment of European immigration followed. During the next decades, with variations due to political circumstances, government policies in the River Plate region sought to attract European, and particularly Northern European, immigrants. The impetus behind this project was the desire to create the conditions deemed necessary for progress. The ruling class wanted a workforce to make Argentina's vast territory agriculturally productive. They also believed that through immigration the remaining indigenous peoples would be absorbed into the ("whiter") national body and the *mestizos* and *criollos* would be counterbalanced with "superior" Northern European stock. The Argentine immigration project, however, did not come to fruition as its promoters had believed it would.[4] Rather than Northern European immigrants, it was mostly Mediterraneans and Eastern Europeans who arrived; rather than populate the interior and work in agriculture, most immigrants stayed in the city of Buenos Aires.[5]

In the 1860s a flow of Arab immigrants began to arrive in the Americas, where they mainly settled in the United States, Brazil, Argentina, and Chile. Most of those who arrived in Argentina came from what was then the province of Greater Syria under Ottoman rule (what are today Syria, Lebanon, Palestine/Israel, and parts of Jordan). Because they came from the Ottoman Empire they were given the name *turco*—"Turk" in Spanish—a usually derogatory term still used to this day. A variety of reasons have been cited for this Arab immigration movement, most of them linked to the crisis that arose in the Ottoman Empire in the mid-1800s and culminated in the empire's dissolution after its defeat in World War I. Many historians point to Ottoman persecution of the Christian minorities: Internal conflicts began in the 1850s and led to the massacre of a large number of Christians in Damascus in 1860. Others also point to the Ottoman policy of forced military service. Later, as the process of Ottoman decolonization began in the Arab world, conflicts arose between Arab nationalists and the colonial projects of England and France. This shift in colonial domination also caused changes in the economic structures of the region: Land tenancy was affected and there was a crisis in local industries because of the competition created by imports. Added to this was the rise in population in Lebanon and an incipient industrialization that affected the livelihood of craftsmen and small merchants. Thus, Syro-Lebanese immigration arose out of a combination of political, economic, religious, and cultural factors.

Precise statistics on how many Syro-Lebanese emigrated are difficult to establish because of illegal departures, nonstandardized or inaccurate terms used to record origins at arrival points, and return migration. Nonetheless, estimates indicate that between 1875 and 1914 among the forty-five million immigrants that arrived in the Americas, there were more than a million émigrés from the Ottoman Empire. Up until 1870 the majority went to the United States, then the flow moved toward the Caribbean and South America.

As for Argentina specifically, between 1887 and 1913, amid the flood of European immigrants, approximately 131,000 Arabs arrived in Argentina. The numbers of Arab immigrants peaked between 1904 and 1913, and then went down because of World War I, which created both difficulties in travel and the hope of Arab political independence. Another wave, of lesser numbers, started in 1931 and lasted until the 1950s; during this period more Palestinians arrived. A later influx of Lebanese in the 1980s resulted from the Lebanese civil war. Today Arabs, and the majority of them Christians, make up roughly the fourth-largest immigrant group in Argentina, where they settled mostly in Buenos Aires and the Northwestern region of the country. Those who arrived at the turn of the century usually started out, as elsewhere in the Americas, as itinerant salesmen and then set up shops for the sale of cloth, notions, and housewares. Though many Arab Argentines are still small business owners, a number have also became major industrialists or key figures in regional politics.[6] This can be seen in the case of Carlos Menem, the son of Syrian immigrants, who rose from local Peronist politics in the agricultural region of La Rioja to become president of Argentina from 1989 to 1999.

By the late 1800s the Argentine elite's disappointment in the outcome of the immigration project had turned into anti-immigrant sentiment. The city of Buenos Aires teeming with poor and labor-organizing immigrants, together with modernization and the rise of a *nouveau riche* class, created within the elite a climate of fear about foreignness and materialism, as well as a nostalgia for the countryside, lost values, and pre-immigrant Argentina. In turn-of-the-century Argentina cultural nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiment reigned among the upper classes. In the early 1900s the immigrant backlash was seen on a political and institutional level in the work of the *Liga Patriótica Argentina* (Argentine Patriotic League) and in legislation such as the *Ley de Residencia*. The military coup of 1930 ushered in *La Década Infame*: "the Infamous Decade" of economic depression, conservative oppression styled after the European authoritarianism of the period, and

recurring electoral fraud. In this sociopolitical context, by the mid-1930s nationalism had become a full-blown major political movement characterized by authoritarianism and xenophobia. From the teens through the thirties Semitic immigrants—whether Christian Arabs, Eastern European Jews, Muslim Arabs, or Arab Jews—were targeted as the most undesirable of immigrants. This attitude held sway into the 1950s with Peronist immigration policies.

Not coincidentally, from the 1880s through the 1930s Argentine intellectuals, immersed in the ideas of European positivist thinkers, wrote positivist works about Argentine society. Influenced by the ideas of Darwin, Comte, and Spencer, and the nascent field of criminology, Argentines such as José Ramos Mejía, Víctor Mercante, Carlos Bunge, and José Ingenieros made the "scientific" racism of positivism a central force in Argentine politics and culture. Positivism's objective of explaining and modifying social phenomena through the methods of the natural sciences led to an insistence on conceptions of ethnic, racial, and biological difference. Positivist thinking ran throughout late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Argentine formulations of identity and shaped and fueled attitudes toward immigrants. Positivist Argentine discourses typically understood the immigrant, or at least the non-Northern European immigrant, as an inferior, diseased, and contaminating presence. Salessi and Molloy further elucidate fin-de-siècle conceptions of immigrant difference by pointing out that sexual "deviance" was also one of the ills that the positivist thinker diagnosed in the immigrant body. Molloy explains the linkage between xenophobia and homophobia in the following way:

> Doomed to the closet of non-nationality, the alien was then constructed as a diseased, perverse, and ultimately threatening other. As the discourse of the Spanish conquest had feminized the native American other, as the discourse of metropolitan Spain had feminized its Creole subjects, so the hegemonic discourse of nineteenth-century nationalism perverts, and in particular evirates, the male immigrant. He is assigned a sort of performative effeminacy that, according to the danger he is felt to pose, can go from the simply grotesque to the socially and morally threatening, ("Too Wilde for Comfort" 45)

Positivist discourses of disease and immorality had a particularly strong impact on the reception of Semitic immigrants.

Ignacio Klich cites both "ethnic" and "economic" reasons as the main factors behind Euro-Argentine elites' consideration of the Syro-Lebanese as undesirable immigrants ("Arab-Jewish Coexistence," 13). The tradition of Argentine positivism explains the weight of questions of ethnicity. Carl Solberg explains that in the early 1900s, although Argentine intellectuals still regarded Western European immigrants highly,

> they generally viewed Syrian, Jewish, or Oriental immigrants with a dislike approaching disgust. These groups, it was claimed, had deteriorated biologically to such low levels that they could contribute nothing to the improvement of the mestizo. Journalists . . . led this defamation. Bitter newspaper articles frequently appeared condemning Syrians, Jews, and Orientals as inherently disease-ridden, immoral, and lazy.

Solberg refers to articles, published in *La Prensa* and *La Nación* in 1910, that claimed that the Syro-Lebanese were racially inferior (20). Klich also cites an 1898 article from *The Buenos Aires Herald*, an English-language daily, that displays fear of an ethnic shift in Argentina: "The *Herald* wondered: 'Are we becoming a Semitic republic? The immigration of Russian Jews is now the third largest on the list, whilst Syrian Arabs (*Turcos*) and Arabians [*sic*] are also flocking to these shores'" ("*Criollos* and Arabic Speakers," 266). In addition to considering Semitic peoples inferior, Euro-Argentines equated all Syro-Lebanese with Muslims (Klich, "Arab-Jewish Coexistence," 13–14). Thus, like Jews, Arab Argentines were looked upon as different and detrimental because of intertwined conceptions of racial stock and religion.

In terms of the economic factor, Solberg explains that along with the Russian Jews, "Levantine immigrants in Argentina experienced spectacular economic success after 1900. By 1910 the so-called Turcos owned at least 6,900 businesses scattered throughout the republic." This led to fears among the Argentine elite about the challenge that the Syro-Lebanese posed to other small-scale businessmen and complaints that their itinerant sales not only filled no need in the Argentine economy, but drove established shops out of business. These opinions were exhibited in the press (from as early as 1902), as well as in government reports. Government immigration reports of 1899 and 1900 referred to the dangers posed by Syro-Lebanese ambulatory commerce and referred to these salesmen with derision as "dirty and ragged." A 1910 article in *La Nación* went so far as to say that the deplorable peddling of trinkets by the Syro-Lebanese was a dishonor to the nation, and to call for the restriction of the immigration of Levantines (Solberg, 88–89). In addition, as Bertoni has indicated, Euro-Argentines

took issue with the fact that, aside from the male Syro-Lebanese hawkers, Syro-Lebanese women were engaging in peddling ("De Turquía a Buenos Aires," 69). In a society in which women were only beginning to enter the work force, and in which this change was inciting much concern over morals and traditional values in the face of modernity, these foreign women selling wares in public spaces were not considered a welcome addition. (An ironic situation indeed considering that one of the common stereotypes about the Arab world is that all Arab women are confined to the home.)

Though the Syro-Lebanese immigrants were usually merchants, and with time economically comfortable and even wealthy ones, the Argentine social imaginary connected them to two threats in the Argentina newly transformed by modernity: the laboring masses and the rising middle class. On the one hand, the smaller-scale Arab merchants, especially the ones who were just starting out, targeted the lower income market, offering them cheaper goods and a system of credit. They maintained a very low overhead by selling on the street or from door to door—that is, in public spaces. Thus, they were connected to public urban spaces, as well as the immigrant masses whose labor organizing in such spaces was challenging the oligarchy. On the other hand, whether they had been working in the city or the countryside, many Arab merchants were accumulating wealth and moving into not only wholesaling but also manufacturing and large-scale agricultural concerns. As Solberg points out, by around 1914 some immigrants were already in the process of attaining increasing control over commerce and industry. In this way, they embodied the other threat to the elite: the social and economic changes introduced by middle-class entrepreneurial immigrants.

In the case of the Arab (as well as Jewish) immigrants, race, and not economic concerns, could be raised as the reason for undesirability. Although prosperous Italians and Spaniards could be put down through the portrayal of them as dishonest by nature (Solberg, 89–90), the category of "Semitic" allowed Euro-Argentines to racialize Arab and Jewish immigrants. This notion of racial difference provided a means by which to easily denigrate Arab and Jewish immigrants, regardless of whether it was their affluence and rising influence, or their itinerant street commerce, that was really at issue. What was most probably a preexisting racial prejudice fed into socioeconomic issues that could then be veiled as racial concerns, such that the factors of ethnic and economic threat became mutually reinforcing.

Anti-Arab sentiment manifested itself in specific instances of discrimination in the early part of the twentieth century. As Klich phrases it, "The bias against Arabs and Jews resulted in their exclusion from the benefits accorded to the desirable" ("Arab-Jewish Coex-

istence," 14). Among the benefits denied Arab immigrants, was that of a place to stay and food to eat at no cost upon arrival in Argentina. Humphrey reports that "[t]hey were denied access to the services, meagre as they were, of the 'Immigrants' Hotel' that provided European immigrants accommodation and board on arrival."[7] The "benefit" of equal protection under the law was also routinely denied to the Syro-Lebanese. Klich, in analyzing Emin Arslan's tenure as Ottoman Consul in Buenos Aires, details the high number of murders of Arabic speakers during the 1910s in which the perpetrator of the crime met with impunity. Klich contextualizes these incidents and also draws out their importance by saying:

> Undoubtedly, some Syro-Lebanese committed crimes too; however, this does not condone the barely veiled lack of interest reportedly displayed by the Argentine authorities when faced with grievances from this quarter. Incident followed incident, and always the apprehension prevailed that the *turcos* were second-class residents whose lives and deaths were really matters of indifference to the police and judiciary. ("Argentine-Ottoman Relations," 186–87)

Arab immigrants reported fourteen such cases to Arslan during a four-year span. Even in an exceedingly grisly case in which two Syro-Lebanese were hacked to death and left half-buried in a forest, the confessed murderers were held for only four weeks and then set free. Klich notes that those who petitioned Arslan for help in attaining justice "usually felt at a serious disadvantage when their accusations implicated Argentine nationals. In such situations, their occasionally articulated fear was that their *turco* identity would result—if it had not already done so—in discrimination against them, whether by the police or the judiciary" ("Argentine-Ottoman Relations," 190). Considering these cases as well as other factors and sources, Klich concludes that "supplementary evidence points in the direction of these fourteen [cases] only being the tip of the iceberg, indicative of a larger sample that went unreported." And thus, "the anti-*turco* atmosphere" led to the violation of Arab rights and the impunity of those who committed crimes against them ("Argentine-Ottoman Relations," 190, 192–93).

Although Argentina never went as far as many other Latin American countries in establishing legislation banning Arab entry,[8] anti-Arab discrimination was seen on a variety of institutional and legislative levels in Argentina into the 1950s. Juan Alsina, the Director of Immigration for nearly twenty years at the turn of the century, expressed, in both official and unofficial publications, preference for Western European immigrants and the belief that Syro-Lebanese were

not suitable and not assimilable.[9] Klich points out that Alsina's influence was wide enough, and his sentiments shared enough, that the Argentine Senate passed a resolution in 1910 to tighten up immigration legislation, "among other things to deny entry to the Syro-Lebanese" (Klich, "Argentine-Ottoman Relations," 183).

Klich explains that in 1928 the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Relations sought to block Arab entry while at the same time avoiding explicit legislation. Argentine health inspectors started to deny entry to many Syro-Lebanese claiming that they were infected with trachoma, although Uruguay accepted the entry of these very same émigrés. Mainly, though, Argentina pursued the restriction of Arab arrivals by sending specific, though not explicit, new instructions to Argentine consulates abroad. Using "coded directives," in January 1928 foreign ministry officials communicated to the Argentine consulate in Beirut and other cities what seems to be only the reiteration of article 3 of law 817 that restricts "dissolute or useless immigration." However, the *Patronato Sirio-Libanés* (a Buenos Aires Syro-Lebanese immigrants' protection group) maintained that the Directorate of Immigration's request to have Syro-Lebanese entry restricted, pushed that consulate to become "systematically resistant" to issuing visas. The *Patronato* had the right to intercede on behalf of visa applicants, but even this was later revoked by the Directorate (Klich, "*Criollos* and Arabic Speakers," 268–69, n. 57).[10] Syro-Lebanese continued to arrive in small numbers by entering illegally, but the bad press that this sometimes occasioned only made the community look worse (Humphrey, 170). Apparently the Directorate of Immigration's steps were not enough for some: A response to a survey carried out by the *Museo Social Argentino* (a private center for positivist anthropological research) recommended that Argentina "[r]estrict the immigration of exotic races, allowing only minimal quotas. . . . The immigration of Orientals should be very restricted." This indicates that calls for the limitation of West and East Asian immigration continued into the late 1930's (Schneider 180–81).[11]

After the peak of nationalist xenophobia in the *Década Infame*, there was a change in the attitude toward immigration, but not toward Semitic immigration. As Schneider (178) and Quijada (867–68) explain, following World War II the first Peronist government actively promoted immigration. Perón's first quinquennial plan sought to bring in four million Europeans from 1946 to 1951, with the expectation that this would bolster the nation's economic progress. At this time the Immigration Bureau (*Dirección General de Migraciones*) and Immigrant Hotel, which had been closed during the 1930s, were reopened and the National Ethnic Institute (*Instituto Étnico Nacional*) was founded.

The National Ethnic Institute's role was to carry out biological and social behaviorist research on immigrants, in the tradition of

Argentine positivist—and sometimes outright racist—social and natural sciences that had commenced in the late nineteenth century. The institute's research was part of the Peronist plan to mold a homogeneous, unified national body. This research as well as government pamphlets and other official propaganda expressed a rhetoric of egalitarian assimilation and biological fusion, regardless of race or ethnicity, using the melting pot metaphor. However, other official documents point to a preference for the groups who already formed the Argentine majority—Spaniards and Italians, as well as for Northern Europeans, and a concomitant bias against Middle Eastern, Eastern European, and Asian immigrants.[12]

As Schneider puts it: "[T]he very notion of the melting pot, though apparently conveying the meanings of equality and homogeneity among immigrants and their descendants, also contained elements of an ideology of the superiority of certain immigrants over others, and was based on a supposition that racial differences would account for social differences" (173). Quijada stresses that the Peronist government was particularly interested in "Latin," that is, Spanish and Italian, immigrants because there was a belief that the incoming immigrants should share Argentina's official Roman Catholicism and Spanish language (or the linguistically related Italian) (870, 880–82, 885). Thus, the Peronist immigration project, like that of the nineteenth-century liberal Argentines who started the last wave of immigration, welcomed only certain kinds of immigrants.

Although a good number of Arab Argentines have enjoyed political and economic success, or precisely because of this success, anti-Arab sentiment lingers to this day in Argentina, albeit in more subtle forms. Renewed anti-Arab bigotry surfaced in 1988 when Menem won the presidential nomination of the Peronist *Justicialista* party. Since that time the press and the populace have often linked Menem's shortcomings as president to his ethnic origins. In 1989 a popular humor magazine created a figure named "Bolud el-Kotur," an Arabized Argentine slang version of "el Turco Boludo," equivalent to "the *turco* ass."[13] Subsequently, books about the Menem presidency have carried titles such as *Alí Babá y los 40 ladrones* (Ali Baba and the 40 thieves), *La traición de Ali-Baba* (Ali Baba's betrayal), and so forth. The Argentine public regularly refers to Menem as "el Turco" and a popular theater show that satirized Menem was entitled "Lo que el turco se llevó"—a play on the Spanish version of the title *Gone with the Wind* (*Lo que el viento se llevó*, literally: what the wind [or the *turco*] took with it).[14] Although there is certainly plenty to criticize in Menem's political record, these critiques invoke Menem's Arab background as though it were the source of his flaws.[15] More recent displays of Anti-Arab sentiment have targeted not only Menem but also the broader Argentine

Muslim community. Two different mosques in Argentina have been attacked with explosives, in June 1986 and in January 2001. In an act that has been seen as part of the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States, in July 2002 tombs were desecrated in a Muslim cemetery in Buenos Aires. The Muslim community of Argentina mostly saw it as an act of discrimination. However, the Buenos Aires police did not classify the incident as a hate crime nor investigate it as such.[16]

A 1990 magazine article, "La pampa árabe" (The Arab pampas) illustrates the typical Argentine attitude toward Arab immigrants in a subtle yet powerful way. The title of the article and its inset sidebars display and incite uneasiness, if not fear, of the Arab immigrant. The term *la pampa* or *las pampas* refers specifically to the grassy plains that surround the estuary of the Río de la Plata (the River Plate). However the term is sometimes used in a broader sense to refer to the rural plains of Argentina in general, and in a figurative sense to the Argentine heartland. The pairing of "pampa" with the adjective "árabe" is certainly striking if not threatening for the Argentine reader. While the body of the article begins by telling the story of Arab immigrants' particular ability to assimilate to Argentine life, the series of insets—three sidebar boxes, one per page for the last three (out of four) pages of the article—tell a very different story. The first inset, entitled "Arabs in politics," lists major political figures of Syro-Lebanese descent. The second inset starts off by stating that Arabs love politics and then presents a paragraph or more on each of five politically active Arab Argentine families. Each of these descriptions begins with the subheading "The power of the [family name]." The last inset, entitled "Arab Economic Power" lists the major manufacturing corporations owned by Arab Argentines and notes that thirty years ago many fewer Arab names were found among the prominent businessmen of Argentina. In this fashion, the article presents the notion that Arab Argentine clans are politically and economically powerful and that their numbers in positions of power are on the rise.

The body of "La pampa árabe" closes by referring to Arab fatalism and stating, "Maybe the main difference between a gaucho and a Syro-Lebanese immigrant is that while the gaucho had the certainty that the desert/deserted pampa [*la pampa desértica*][17] belonged to him, the Arab knew that he would have to conquer it" (Noble). This invocation of the gaucho, or Argentine cattle herder, clearly participates in the linking of gauchos and *criollos* in contradistinction to immigrants.[18] As discussed further on (in reference to Lugones in chapter 2) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the gaucho became aligned with the *criollo* as a result of the tensions between the *criollos* and the newly arrived immigrants. Related to this, the article also brings into