

The Enchanted Mooress

Thousands of little ramshackle brick houses with flat metal roofs cling to the hillsides of northeast Rio de Janeiro, in an area known as Complexo do Alemão, one of the largest favelas in Brazil. Just a twenty-minute cab ride from the beaches of Copacabana and Ipanema, this cluster of shantytowns of four hundred thousand people faces south toward the massive statue of Christ the Redeemer watching over Rio. Residents joke darkly that God has turned his back on the northern outskirts, his outstretched arms embracing only the city's affluent "South Zone." The Alemão favela was until 2010 ruled by rival gangs, the Red Command and Friends of Friends. These criminal organizations engage in drug trafficking, but also provide protection, adjudicate conflicts, and fund neighborhood associations. The gangs openly challenge the authority of the state. And every so often the Brazilian military will launch a "pacification" operation, sending hundreds of troops in armored vehicles to drive out the traffickers and regain control of the area. Yet on this balmy Friday afternoon in late October 2012, it wasn't armored vehicles that were making their way into the hills of Alemão, but refrigerator trucks. Residents and shoppers looked on curiously as the trucks came to a halt, and volunteers sporting T-shirts that read "Brasil-Turquia" began unloading boxes and handing out plastic bags to passersby. The occasion was Eid al-Adha, the Muslim festival of sacrifice, when a sheep or goat is

slaughtered, and volunteers from the Brazilian-Turkish Cultural Center were distributing halal meat to residents of Alemão.

"It's not much. The meat may last a few meals, but it's the gesture of solidarity that's important," says Mustafa Goktepe as he helps hand out the bags. Mustafa directs the Brazilian-Turkish Cultural Center in Rio, set up by Gülen, a Sufi movement that runs schools and charities around the world. "We're not preaching, we're not doing propaganda. We're just serving. Our center provides classes, scholarships, and aid to the needy." Mustafa's center distributed twenty thousand kilos of halal meat to ten thousand people in Alemão, while volunteers fed another forty thousand in other favelas in Rio and São Paulo.

One reason Alemão residents were awed by the sight of people in T-shirts with Turkish flags passing out food was because it seemed as though life were imitating art, that characters from a telenovela had walked off screen and into their neighborhood. Just days earlier, TV Globo, Brazil's main television channel, had begun broadcasting, to much fanfare, *Salve Jorge* (Save George), a soap opera set in Brazil and Turkey. The plot of *Salve Jorge* revolves around a love story between Théo, a captain in the Brazilian military sent to pacify a favela, and Morena, an eighteen-year-old favela-dweller and single mother, who ends up migrating to Europe and then Turkey in search of work. Théo heads to Turkey to find Morena, and their tale overlaps with another love story, that of Bianca, who visits Turkey as a tourist, and falls in love with her tour guide. *Salve Jorge* is by no means the first soap to be set in the "Orient," but it is the first to be filmed in a favela, in Alemão. The opening episode shows Théo, the army captain, riding in on horseback, removing the drug gangs' flags, and planting the Brazilian national flag, just as the military actually did after its operation in November 2010.

The story line moves from Brazil's urban periphery to the Middle East and back. The noise and confinement of daily favela life are contrasted with the vastness and quiet of the Anatolian mountains; shots of Rio's breathtaking coastline are intercut with the warrens and alleyways of the Grand Bazaar of Istanbul; the throb of favela funk gives way to images of whirling dervishes and Anatolian dance. The Orient is presented in sensuous detail, from the courtship dances to the women

kneading bread to the smoke-filled hookah lounges; and the favela is depicted as communal, culturally lush, and ascendant. The aim seems to convey that Brazil and Turkey are two rising nations that have much in common. St. George, after whom the soap is named—and who is Théo's patron saint—was after all born in Cappadocia, in eastern Turkey.

The ongoing telenovela—a story of love, betrayal, and organized crime—set off a mania for Turkish music, fashion, even "Ottoman" plates and cutlery; viewers have begun incorporating expressions used by actors into their speech—"merhaba" and "mashallah, mashallah"; travel agencies are offering special package tours of Turkey. Soap operas in Brazil, as in other developing states, do more than entertain: they hold up a mirror to society and try to alter public attitudes. *Salve Jorge* touches on the improving conditions in a "pacified" favela; the problem of sex trafficking; tensions between Brazilian evangelicals and devotees of Afro-Brazilian religion; the country's deepening ties with Turkey and the Middle East; and of course Muslims, and how they are part of the Brazilian nation. In the Brazilian telenovelas that deal with Islam, there is a complete absence of the issue of terrorism, or Muslims as a threat, unlike popular American television series like *Homeland*, *24*, and *Sleeper Cell*. They seem mainly intended to educate the public about Brazil's growing Muslim population, and to highlight the cultural elements in the world of Islam that can be borrowed and made Brazilian.

This cultural representation is not accidental. Brazil has long sought to show that it's different from Europe and America in its relationship to the developing world. President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva made it clear that Brazil in the twenty-first century would be pursuing an "independent foreign policy," and emphasized his country's historic ties to Africa and Islam, through the transatlantic slave trade and the legacy of Muslim Iberia. This type of pan-Islamic rhetoric from Latin American leaders and nationalists is not new. At various political moments in Latin American history, when South American states have chafed under Spanish or American domination, leaders have declared solidarity with the Arab world and Africa. The argument that Brazil is culturally indebted to Africa and Islam was first made in the 1930s by Gilberto Freyre, a leading Brazilian thinker,

and adopted as official policy by the populist regime of Getúlio Vargas (1930–1945). Today this discourse has been revived, as the Brazilian government, under Lula and Dilma Rousseff, has sought closer relations with Africa and the Middle East. This diplomatic maneuvering has made cultural ripples at home. Rio's Carnival, a metaphor for the nation, is increasingly strewn with Oriental and Islamic elements—from Middle Eastern-themed floats to veiled, burkaed, and fake-bearded street dancers. Samba queens, long symbols of national identity, adorn their bodies with Middle Eastern ornaments, as if to signal Brazil's growing immersion in the Muslim world and ability to seduce anyone. And “the enchanted Mooress” (*a moura encantada*), a centuries-old trope in Portuguese and Spanish folklore, is making new appearances in Brazilian public life.

The experience of Brazil's Muslims shows the degree to which the fate of Muslim communities in the West is determined by policy and geopolitics; and Brazilian policy—foreign and domestic—has created a situation where the country's Muslims face little hostility and no state repression. Yet ironically, for all its efforts to distance itself from the War on Terror and build alliances to counter U.S. power, the growth of Islam in Brazil today—through migration and conversion—mirrors the rise of Islam in the United States in the early twentieth century, and is in fact deeply influenced by American cultural politics. As Brazil's democracy enters its third decade, newly empowered Afro-Brazilian movements are reclaiming the Islam brought by African slaves in the 1500s, just as African-Americans did a century ago. Carnival in Bahia, in northeast Brazil, is exhibiting a Black Muslim consciousness reminiscent of North America. The Brazilian state, like the American government, is discovering that its early Muslim history is a useful diplomatic asset. And Muslim youth in Europe and elsewhere are increasingly charmed by this cheerful nation.

Sensual Mysticism

In October 2009, President Lula launched the campaign to bring the Olympics to Rio. In a televised speech, the head of state addressed the

Olympic committee and millions of viewers and counted off Brazil's advantages. “We are a people in love with sports, in love with life. Our men and women come from every continent—we're all proud of our origins,” he said. “We are not only a mixed people, but a people who likes very much to be mixed. That is our identity.” In underlining Brazil's mixedness, Lula was invoking an idea essential to Brazilian national identity: that Brazil can absorb any culture and “indigenize” it, that Brazil is a country where immigrants are always welcome, seen as saviors who, in the words of one 1940s state official, would make the nation “bigger, stronger, and more respected.”

But this wasn't always the case. In the late nineteenth century, Brazilian elites saw the racial mixing between Native American, European, and African that had produced Brazil as a drawback, the cause of myriad afflictions, from corruption to poverty to national disunity. Prominent intellectuals like the historian Cezar Magalhaens would argue that Brazil's “backwardness” was rooted in a “Muslim passivity” inherited from the Portuguese. And Brazilian immigration policy would reflect these views. The government, from the 1880s through the 1920s, encouraged mass immigration from Europe, hoping that would help “whiten” the country.

But in 1933, Gilberto Freyre, a young Brazilian scholar who had studied at Columbia University with the anthropologist Franz Boas, published his book *Casa-grande e senzala* (later translated as *The Masters and the Slaves*). Freyre turned the conventional wisdom on its head. He argued that Brazil was a rich mix of Amerindian, African, and Portuguese; that the country was saturated with African culture, and that every Brazilian had within his “soul” the mark of the African and the native. Freyre coined the term “Luso-tropicalism,” arguing that the Portuguese, unlike other Europeans, had an affinity for dark-skinned peoples and an ability to adapt to the tropics. But to fully understand the Portuguese talent for mixture, Freyre argued, one must look to the influence of the Moors in Iberia, because it was the overflowing Muslim presence that saved the Iberian peninsula from “Nordic obliteration,” and brought about a “Portugal influenced by Africa, conditioned by the African climate, and undermined by the sensual mysticism of Islam.” It was the “interpenetration” between

Iberians and Moors that made the Portuguese a syncretic people, who are fatalistic but energetic, modern yet Oriental in their voluptuousness and sense of longing.

The sexual dynamics of Muslim Iberia, according to Freyre, continued in the New World. It was Portuguese men's love for the "Moorish brown girl," and the fantasy of the "enchanted Moor-ess," that propelled them across the Atlantic. "Long contact with the Saracens had left with the Portuguese the idealized figure of the 'enchanted Moorish woman,' a charming type, brown-skinned, black-eyed, enveloped in sexual mysticism, roseate in hue, and always engaged in combing out her hair or bathing in rivers or in the waters of haunted fountains," writes Freyre in the opening pages of *The Masters and the Slaves*, "and the Brazilian colonizers were to encounter practically a counterpart of this type in the naked Indian women with their loose-flowing hair . . . Only, they were a little less coy and for some trinket or other or a bit of broken mirror would give themselves, with legs spread far apart, to the 'caraibas,' who were so gluttonous for a woman." The Moorish era was critical to understanding Brazil: Islam had softened Portuguese slavery, giving life on the sugar plantation its sensual character; slaveholder identified with the enslaved, since both had "Negro" and "Moorish" blood.

This idealized, eroticized view of the colonial encounter is not unusual. Across Latin America there are such "foundational fictions," which locate the birth of the nation in a romantic union between European man and Native American woman. Yet Freyre's account was distinctive, for the encounter that produces Brazil begins, not in the Americas, but in the Moorish empire; and the Moorish past is not only the "seed" for Luso-Brazilian civilization but an antecedent for Brazilian national unity and *convivencia*. Freyre's book caused alarm at first, but the author was also seen as daring and revolutionary; the young scholar had used cutting-edge social theory (distinguishing between race and culture) to counter the discourse of eugenics and give Brazilian national esteem a much-needed boost. Brazil's history was now a story of cultural affinities and sugar production; her hybrid character, a national virtue and a comparative advantage linking the country to Africa and the Orient. Soon Getúlio Vargas, the strong-

man who ruled Brazil for fifteen years beginning in 1930, would pick up Freyre's ideas and make them central to the New State that he was building. The concepts of "racial democracy" and "Luso-tropicalism" became state ideology, disseminated in the media, in classrooms, and in official proclamations.

Freyre's book drew attention in the U.S. as well, from activists who thought Brazil's mixing was "more humane" than Jim Crow segregation and from scholars who were doing fieldwork in Bahia in the 1930s and saw Freyre's ideas as an antidote to Nazi ideology. American diplomats, in turn, viewed the South American nation as an ally that could contain German influence in Latin America. In 1942, the House of Representatives discussed the importance of the Brazilian example and "Brazil's fascinating three-way blending." Speakers praised Freyre's "monumental works," saying that English translations were urgently needed to demonstrate the importance of the "Negro to the life, culture, and defense" of both Brazil and the United States; and in 1946, an English version of *Casa-grande e senzala*, retitled *The Masters and the Slaves*, finally was published in the States. American lawmakers were intrigued by the "Brazilian solution," in part because Vargas, who was implementing Freyre's ideas, was a staunch anticommunist.

The Vargas regime fully embraced Freyre's nationalist vision of Brazil as mixed, exotic, and better than the Great Powers. From the mid-1930s onward, Afro-Brazilian cultural forms—samba, carnival, capoeira—became national culture. The *mulata*, the embodiment of miscegenation, would become a national icon. The *mulata*, it's worth noting, was at the heart of Freyre's analysis of Brazil; she was the reincarnation of the "Moorish brown girl," a culture-bearer and, like rum or molasses, the precious product of the sugar economy. It was because of her that all Brazilians had a mark of Africa. "Practically all of us bear the mark of black influence," writes Freyre, "from the slave or the nanny who raised us. Who nursed us. Who fed us . . . the mulata . . . who initiated us into physical love and gave us, on a coarse cot, the first sensation of being a man." The Vargas dictatorship would make the *mulata* a symbol of Brazil's hybridity and virility. The regime would also mobilize samba, a music born in the shanty-

towns of Rio, broadcasting songs laced with patriotic lyrics across the country. Carnival, with its drummers and samba dancers—usually *mulatas*—flitting atop floats, would come to signify Brazilian conviviality. In 1935, the Vargas regime opened up cultural centers in New York and European capitals to improve the country's standing; and slowly—starting with the samba singer Carmen Miranda and her tutti-frutti hat—Brazil would come to be seen as a tropical paradise.

The images of Brazilian “racial democracy” in films like *Black Orpheus* and the soft sounds of bossa nova that circulated globally in the 1950s cut a sharp contrast with the pictures of degradation emanating from the American South. Brazilian diplomats and intellectuals began to envision their country as the first racially mixed Great Power, one that could compete with the U.S. Brazil was, after all, on the right side of the “racial curtain,” opposed to European colonialism and American racial segregation. In the early 1960s Brazilian leaders attempted an “independent foreign policy,” making diplomatic forays into Africa; but the country, relatively weak and dependent, could not resist pressure from its former colonial master, and ended up siding with Portuguese colonialism in Africa, alienating dozens of newly independent African states. António Salazar, the Portuguese dictator, would actually adopt Freyre's theory of Luso-tropicalism, using the scholar's ideas to justify colonial rule over Angola and Mozambique.

By the mid-1970s, Freyre was a cause célèbre in the Portuguese-speaking world, serving as an advisor to Brazilian and Portuguese leaders. *Casa-grande e senzala* would appear in nine languages and forty editions, inspiring a comic book, a television series; even floats at Carnival celebrated the book's message. But the scholar's defense of Portuguese colonialism brought heavy criticism. And in the 1930s, Freyre's ideas were used to counter white supremacists; by the 1970s, the ruling junta would invoke his name to silence Afro-Brazilian activists, depicting them as militants who opposed mixing. Meanwhile, Brazilian scholars had begun producing research showing that racial inequality was entrenched in Brazil, and feminists were contesting his idealized, eroticized picture of colonial violence, so that by the mid-1970s, few Western policymakers were talking about the “Brazilian solution.”

And yet Freyre keeps returning, oscillating, as one scholar put it,

between canonization and excommunication. Still recognized as the “inventor of Brazil,” and one of the greatest Latin American intellectuals of the previous century, in the last decade or so, he has been enjoying a revival. In 2000, President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who as a young sociologist had slammed the idea of “racial democracy,” declared the year, the centenary of Freyre's birth, the “National Year of Gilberto Freyre,” stating that with the transition to democracy, Brazil was coming closer to the ideal. The rise of genomics and genealogy testing has also brought renewed interest to Freyre's ideas, as Brazilians who identify as white discover that they have African blood. But most important, many Brazilians (and non-Brazilians) think Freyre's ideas of mixing and Moorish antecedents can counter the clash-of-civilizations talk, and that in the post-9/11 world Brazil can offer a solution.

The Story That Broke All the Rules

There are roughly one million Muslims in Brazil, scattered in the cities of São Paulo, Rio, Curitiba (in the southern state of Paraná), and Foz do Iguaçu, a city in the tri-border area near Paraguay and Argentina in the east. Most Brazilian Muslims are the descendants of immigrants from the Middle East, though that's changing due to conversion and recent migration from Africa and South Asia. “There was no anti-Muslim backlash here after 9/11,” says Rasheed Abou-Alsamh, a Brasília-based correspondent for the newspaper *O Globo*. “Muslims in Brazil are generally viewed positively. I think that's partly because they're lumped with the Syrian-Lebanese community. The Lebanese have been here for over a century, they're integrated, they're represented in the arts, in politics. They paved the way for the Muslims.”

Brazil's Syrian-Lebanese community, estimated to be seven million strong, is affluent, influential, and largely Christian. Arab Brazilians own multimillion-dollar businesses such as the luxury-goods conglomerate Grupo Monalisa and SBT, Brazil's second-largest television network, and make up an estimated 10 percent of the city council in

São Paulo and the federal congress in Brasília. In public perceptions, Arabs and Muslims in Brazil have historically been more associated with business savvy and affluence than with political violence. Yet in the weeks after 9/11, Brazil's Muslims felt vulnerable. The Arab Brazilian Chamber of Commerce received a bomb threat; a cultural event in the city of Guarulhos, just outside São Paulo, was postponed. Brazilian Muslims were interviewed on the evening news. In October 2001, CNN and the *New York Times* began reporting that the Muslim community in Foz do Iguaçu was being monitored for terrorist activity, a claim repeated by Brazilian media outlets. At the root of these allegations was a photograph: American troops in Afghanistan had found a photo of the Iguazu waterfalls—a major tourist attraction in eastern Brazil—at an Al Qaeda training camp. Muslim Brazilians nervously wondered how the spectacle unfolding on their television screens would affect them. “I was anxious day and night,” says Leila Chamaa, a Lebanese-Brazilian community leader in São Paulo. “I got caller ID, I kept my daughter home from school for two days, worried she would be harassed.” She recalls the post-9/11 weeks vividly. “I was really worried—but then the soap opera started,” she smiles.

Leila is referring to *O Clone* (The Clone), a popular telenovela that began airing on October 2, 2001. The soap told the story of Jade, a young Brazilian Muslim who returns to her mother's homeland of Morocco after her mother's death in Brazil, and tries to adapt to life in an extended-family setting in the old city of Fez. There she falls in love with Lucas, a Christian Brazilian who is born after his brother (Diogo) dies. Diogo's heartbroken godfather clones the dead boy's tissue cells and plants them in an unsuspecting Moroccan woman, who then gives birth to Lucas, who looks just like the deceased brother. Filmed in Rio, Fez, and Miami, the telenovela offered a profusion of Orientalist imagery—from veiled belly dancers swaying behind ornate latticework to dazzling shots of Marrakesh and Fez spliced with footage of scantily clad women on Rio's beaches—and of course, incessant supplications of “*Ay, por favor, Allah!*” from Jade's neighbors in the medina.

O Clone was scheduled to air on Brazil's TV Globo in September 2001. The first episode was postponed after 9/11, as producers

debated how to portray the Muslim characters. They decided the series, originally intended to address the issue of cloning and genetic engineering (a topic of interest in Brazil), would be recast to educate the public about Muslims in Brazil and Islam in general. “We need to say no to prejudice, to stop feeding this ignorance,” explained the screenwriter, Glória Perez, at the premiere. “We're showing common people that there is terrorism in all countries and between all peoples, and the Muslims are people like us.”

O Clone captivated viewers. It ran for two years (250 episodes), leading up to and through the invasion of Iraq. Eighty-five million Brazilians, and tens of millions across Latin America, tuned in weekly to watch this Moroccan-Brazilian love story that played out alongside the War on Terror spectacle, which sometimes would seep into the story line. The earliest episodes aired just as American media outlets were raising alarms about the Muslim community in Foz do Iguaçu. In October 2002, an article appeared in *The New Yorker* by Jeffrey Goldberg, a prominent American journalist, claiming that “Middle Eastern terrorist groups” had bases in the eastern Brazilian city. The allegations snowballed, and soon the *Washington Post* was claiming that Osama bin Laden had spent time in Brazil in the mid-1990s. The telenovela would change the subject to a Brazilian concern: intermarriage. In the first season, Jade has an affair with Lucas, a Christian Brazilian, but her uncle has promised her in marriage to a young Muslim named Said. She is forcibly married to the latter, but there's no love there. On the night of their wedding, Said, decked in a white djellaba, removes Jade's silver slippers, bathes her feet, dries them with rose petals and a woven cloth; but he cannot win her heart. Year after year she tries to escape from him. Only after twenty years—and in a finale reminiscent of García Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*—is Jade reunited with Lucas in Brazil. For four seasons, the producers seemed most interested in probing Muslim family life and showing that Muslim immigrants to Brazil were intermarrying just like earlier Christian immigrants from the Middle East.

In a show of Brazil's cultural reach, *O Clone* was translated and broadcast in fifty-three countries. In Portugal, the soap was screened by social workers in workshops on immigration and intermarriage;

in Kyrgyzstan, where Islam was suppressed for seventy years of Soviet rule, viewers saw *O Clone* as an introductory course on Islam. In Turkey and the Arab world, women loved Jade, the protagonist. On blogs and in chat rooms, fans groaned at the cliché story of a captive Muslim girl trying to escape to be with a Christian prince, but they enjoyed watching bejeweled Brazilian actors in face veils and belly-dancing outfits appeal to Allah, and traditional family gatherings turn into dance-offs. In Brazil, the producers defended the story lines as humanizing, a challenge to the idea of Muslim women as passive. Glória Perez said her soap aimed to show that “Muslim women love, too. Muslims do not have anything against sexuality . . . If you take the women of Islam, they transgress rules the entire time.” The series was responding to American discourses about Islam, showing that Brazilian Muslims were part of Brazil and more secure than their American counterparts (one episode specifically addressed reprisals against Muslims in the U.S.). The Brazilian Muslim community by and large welcomed the soap; at least it didn’t link Muslims to terrorism.

O Clone’s cultural impact was astonishing, triggering what *Latin Trade* magazine called “Mideast fever.” In Brazil, belly dancing and Middle Eastern-style jewelry became “the rage in Rio and São Paulo”; Brazilians began throwing “A Thousand and One Nights” parties; “Talk to a Sheikh” chat rooms cropped up online; and tourism to Morocco increased by 300 percent. A journalist visiting Quito, Ecuador, found viewers of the series “wide-eyed and drop-jawed for all things Arab.” In the States, *O Clone* (dubbed into Spanish and titled *El Clon*) was picked up by Telemundo, an American Spanish-language channel, but almost canceled due to potential controversy. When it was finally broadcast, “the story that broke all the rules”—as Telemundo billed the series—would reach an estimated 2.8 million Hispanic households in the U.S. and exert a palpable influence on Latino youth culture. In one memorable episode, Jade does an elaborate dance for Lucas: she tiptoes from behind a smoking candelabra, draped in veils, twisting, writhing, a silver sword balanced on her head; she balances the sword on her right hip, on her bustier, and then shimmies toward him; she lies down, gazing up at her Christian lover, the blade bobbing dangerously on her bare stomach—“*Por que,*

habibi?” That dance would rivet viewers. “Made in Brazil but with airs of a Morisco past,” crowed the Miami-based *Nuevo Herald*. In New York, the Spanish daily *El Diario-La Prensa* would report an *El Clon*-triggered fashion for Arab jewelry and hip scarves, overflowing belly-dancing classes teaching the dance of “Jade y Lucas,” and a recently opened beauty parlor in Queens called *El Clon*.

The soap, a celebration of the Orient’s appeal for Brazil, was part of a larger pushback against Western representations of Islam—but also of Brazil. In the 1980s and 1990s, Brazil’s image had suffered. With the rise of favela violence and films like *City of God*, media stories were depicting Brazil as an urban dystopia, a cautionary tale to other countries. With 9/11, international media fueled the idea of a lawless Brazil, speaking of terrorism on the country’s borders. Brazilian activist groups began to counter the American and European media flows. When CNN aired a report in November 2001 alleging terrorist activity in the tri-border area, Foz do Iguaçu’s public prosecutor sued the Atlanta-based network for defamation. Groups like Peace Without Borders and MV Brasil mobilized to protect Muslim Brazilians from “cultural aggression.” An advertising agency in Foz decided to respond with parody to reports that bin Laden had visited a local mosque. It printed posters with bin Laden’s face on them: “When he’s not blowing up the world, he spends some pleasant time in Foz. You come too.” Across Brazil, the Al Qaeda leader’s face began appearing in unexpected places. A tavern opened up in Niterói called Bin Laden’s Cavern (“Where the Taliban Gather!”) with a promotional poster of a grinning Osama floating on a pool mattress in swim trunks. In February 2002, in Rio’s Carnival, a troupe of street dancers called Bin Laden’s Harem would dance around, then raise their burkas to show off their thongs. Irony, Orientalist kitsch, and cultural fusion became a way to disrupt War on Terror talk.

The Brazilian state promoted the idea of solidarity with Muslims. Upon assuming office in January 2003, President Lula would distance the country from the United States’ War on Terror policies. Brazil did not pass the antiterrorism bill that the U.S. requested. According to American diplomats, the Brazilians feared the bill would be used to target Arab Brazilians and “members of what they [Brazilian officials]

consider to be legitimate social movements fighting for a more just society." Brazil would also refuse "multiple requests" to take in a group of released Guantanamo prisoners—Uighur Muslims—that the U.S. did not want sent back to China. Brazilian officials also "vigorously" rejected American claims of terrorist activity in their country. A 2009 dispatch from the American embassy in Brasília states, "The USG [United States Government] is regularly accused of making unsupported assertions that malign TBA [Tri-Border Area] residents and have a negative impact on tourism in the [tri-border] region." Lula also reached out to Arab and Muslim Brazilians, appearing at events, assuring them that they were the pride of Brazil's "racial democracy." At Arab community functions, the head of state would don traditional headdress and perform a Lebanese *dabka* dance, twirling a cane over his head.

Lula also launched a number of South-South initiatives to, as *Foreign Affairs* put it, "rebalance the global order in favor of the developing world." He began building ties with African and Asian states to lobby for a reform of World Bank and IMF rules. In December 2003, he took a nine-day tour of the Middle East, the first time a Brazilian head of state had traveled to the Arab world since Dom Pedro II, the emperor, visited in 1876. Lula visited Syria, Lebanon, the UAE, Egypt, and Libya, with an entourage of Lebanese-Brazilian businessmen. "If, alone, none of us can compete with the rich countries, together we will have a lot of strength," he told his hosts. His foreign minister, Celso Amorim, was more explicit, saying the objective of the trip was to create "a new world economic geography," so that "to go from Brazil to Cairo, you won't need to pass through Washington and Paris." In 2005, Lula hosted the first South American–Arab nations summit in Brasília. Brazil also became a sponsor of the "Alliance of Civilizations"—a United Nations initiative launched by Spain and Turkey; two states that see themselves as a bridge between Islam and the West. In May 2010, Brazil and Turkey brokered an agreement with Iran to delay UN sanctions.

Yet Turkey was wary of Brazilian soft-power initiatives in its backyard and began to push back. In the early 2000s, Brazilian and Mexican soaps were watched across North Africa and the Middle East.

By 2008, the Turkish soap *Gümüş* (known outside Turkey as *Noor*) had edged out the Latin America telenovela. Risqué and glamorous, the soap focused on the relationship between Noor and her dotting husband, Mohannad, who challenged every stereotype of the "traditional" Muslim husband; Noor's independence and rags-to-riches tale signified Turkish society's growing affluence and changing gender roles. A subsequent series, *Magnificent Century*, focusing on sexual and political intrigue in the harem of Suleiman the Magnificent, would bring the glory of the Ottoman Empire to viewers from West Africa to Pakistan, eclipsing all U.S., Latin American, and Arab competition. "U.S. cultural imperialism is finished. Years ago we took reruns of *Dallas* and *The Young and the Restless*. Now Turkish screenwriters have learned to adapt these shows to local themes with Muslim story lines." says Sina Koloğlu, a Turkish television critic. "Asians and Eastern Europeans are buying Turkish series, not American or Brazilian or Mexican ones. They get the same cheating and the children out of wedlock and the incestuous affairs but with a Turkish sauce on top."

Samba Citizenship

It's February 2011, and Ana Paula Minerato is standing in front of a gaggle of journalists and cameras at the edge of the Sambadrome parade ground in São Paulo. She's wearing a pearl-studded crown, stiletto-heeled gladiator boots, braided gold chains around her neck, and nothing else. "I represent the Arab wedding tradition," she says, and smiles, as a body artist dabs touches of black paint on her stomach. "*O casamento do Dubai*." Her breasts are painted black and red, speckled with pearls and sapphires; a band of black paint loops diagonally around her thighs and buttocks. Arabesque calligraphy adorns her stomach and forearms. "I'll now show you the Dubai samba, *samba do Dubai*," she says, hopping off and doing a quick foot-step. She disappears into the throngs of dancers and drummers.

The nineteen-year-old Ana Paula is a member of the Gaviões da Fiel (Hawks of Faith), a top-level samba school, and an aspiring

samba queen. (Her title now is *musa* (muse), hence the massive feathered wings attached to her shoulders.) In Carnival, samba schools perform different themes or plots (*enredos*), telling stories about Brazil. In 2011, the Hawks made their theme a celebration of Dubai, “the El Dorado of the Orient,” and staged a raucous, visually stunning show mixing tropicalism and Orientalism. The extravaganza featured four thousand drummers and dancers, twenty-six dance companies, and five floats that paraded down the Sambadrome, hailing “the City of the Future” and “the Dream of King Maktoum.” Samba singers—in satin robes, Arabian headdresses, and dark glasses—strummed their mandolins, chanting “*Riqueza, beleza, e cultura árabe*—riches, beauty, and Arab culture!” Dancing nomads on stuffed camels, harem boys in embroidered vests, and drag queens with palm trees sticking out of their turbans pranced in between floats.

The floats, depicting Dubai’s ascent from ancient kingdom to economic power, are deliberately satirical and outrageous: a newborn baby blinking at the world, a massive golden hawk with headphones, a sphinx glaring down at a spinning Ferris wheel, a cluster of gleaming skyscrapers representing Dubai’s financial power. The last float is an Oriental palace with golden minarets and arches. Looming above the towers is the turbaned effigy of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, the current ruler of Dubai. The sight of near-naked samba queens—in thongs, plumage, and loose head scarves—frolicking beneath Sheikh Maktoum’s bearded visage, as his robotic arms wave to people, is striking. But no one else seems surprised. The thirty thousand spectators—many dressed as sheikhs or veiled women themselves—are dancing, banging tambourines, and cheering the “Arab Spring” float, as it was dubbed. Thousands of miles away, Mubarak of Egypt and Ben Ali of Tunisia had just been toppled. The Orient, like Brazil, was rising; or so it seemed.

Since the 1930s, Carnival has been a metaphor for Brazil. The floats and samba schools are supposed to narrate where the country is at the moment. “The naked, seductive women mark the transformation of public space into one big house,” writes a Brazilian scholar. For the four nights before Lent, the pageantry of the Catholic Church, the drumming and dancing of Afro-Brazilians, and the

soundo like
“The Second Coming”
with Yeats

* samba

elaborate Native American costumes blend into one symbolic family. Brazilian officials—and cultural elites—see samba as the sound of the nation, soaking up new cultures and maintaining social peace. It’s not surprising that the post-9/11 craze for things Middle Eastern would find its way into Carnival. Now one sees more Orientalist *enredos*, more references to things Arab and Islamic, whether it’s head scarves and turbans or dancers called *habibas*, who mix samba and belly dancing. Also, part of the local response to War on Terror discourse has been to highlight Arab and Muslim contributions to Carnival. In June 2010, a group of Rio-based dance activists published a study on “Arab-Muslim” influences in the city’s “corporal culture,” noting the Moorish origin of various musical instruments used in samba, and parsing the *marchinhas* sung at Carnival that refer to the East (such as the Lebanese singer Antônio Gabriel Nássara’s 1941 jingle “Allah-lá-ô/We crossed the desert/We had to pray/My good Allah”), all to show that Muslims were present at the birth of samba in Rio’s favelas.

This pop Islamophilia was spurred by Brazil’s new diplomacy. In his first foreign-policy speech in 2003, President Lula declared, “The rich heritage of the Arab-Islamic civilization was present at Brazil’s birth, given its powerful influence on the Iberian Peninsula, where the Portuguese heralded.” Freyre became part of the national dialogue again. Celebrations of Freyre and his works were held at Brazilian embassies in Africa and the Middle East. At the launch for the Arabic translation of Freyre’s *New World in the Tropics*, the Brazilian ambassador to Morocco praised the intellectual who had “fashioned the Brazilian way of being.” At home, Brazilians began—as seems to happen every few decades—searching for traces of “Moorish presence” in their Lusified selves. Freyre was now vindicated as a visionary. “Freyre saw the Oriental pattern in Brazil, he foresaw the resurgence of Islam in the world,” declared scholar Antônio Campos at the opening of a literary festival in November 2011 in honor of the late anthropologist. “He foresaw a new, rising Brazil, a mestizo Brazil, with greater tolerance, racial and cultural convivencia.” And the enchanted Mooress, a figure of Portuguese folklore that has, over the centuries, drifted in and out of the Brazilian imagination, has in the last decade been making more appearances: in the guise of the iconic *mulata* (now dabbed with Ara-

bic tattoos); as the veiled temptress in a telenovela; as the flash-mob *habibas* doing the *dança mourisca* in São Paulo's city square; as a spirit summoned at poetry readings.

The legend of a *moura encantada* appears in Portuguese and Spanish folklore from the 1500s through the early twentieth century. It's not clear how or when the enchantress emerged: some historians say she appeared in southern Iberia during the Moorish era; others claim she was born during the Reconquista, after a Moorish princess fell impossibly in love with a Christian knight. The Mooress was seen frequently in Portugal's and Spain's southern- and westernmost regions, usually on the eve of the feast of San Juan (St. John the Baptist). The dark-haired damsel would be spotted, near a river or a cave, grooming her hair with a golden comb. She would appeal for help, speaking Portuguese (or Spanish) with a Morisco accent. The *moura* would be carried by Spanish and Portuguese colonists to the Americas and soon be sighted across the New World, making her way into Cuban poetry and Brazilian fiction.

But the enchanted Mooress was not simply a figment of the Portuguese male imagination. The Inquisition, as recent scholarship has shown, reached the New World and targeted the Moor and Mooress. In 1501, less than a decade after Columbus landed on the island of Hispaniola, Queen Isabella of Spain issued a decree instructing the governor of Hispaniola to ban Jews, Moors, "New Christians," and heretics from entering the Americas. The queen had just quelled the Morisco rebellion of Alpujarras (1499–1501), and as Muslims and Jews fled eastward toward the Ottoman Empire, the Spanish monarchs feared that these religious outcasts would board ships in Seville and escape to the Americas. The last thing Ferdinand and Isabella wanted was for their centuries-old battle with Islam to continue in the New World. And they took great measures to ban the importation of Muslims. Several church decrees, *cedulas*, were passed (in 1501, 1532, 1543, 1550, and 1577) to stop the flow of "white slaves" (*esclavos blancos*), as Moors were called, and to deport those who had trickled into the New World. The Spanish and Portuguese conquistadors

white
slaves

saw the Moors as "agents of Islam," "intractable and rebellious," and feared their radicalizing influence over West African slaves.

But Moorish women did not face the same persecution. In 1512, King Ferdinand issued an order to send *moriscas* to the Americas * in order to avoid "carnal relations" between the colonists and native women. Spanish and Portuguese officials issued licenses to have these *mujeres publicas* ("fallen women") transported from Iberia to the Americas to serve in brothels. No sooner had they arrived than the colonists established these *casas publicas* throughout the Americas. In 1526, Charles I authorized the establishment of a brothel of *moriscas* ("*casa de prostitutas blancas*") in San Juan, Puerto Rico, again to avoid mixing between Spaniards and indigenous women. The demand for Moorish women actually made the Church decrees difficult to implement. In 1543, when an order calling for the deportation of enslaved Moors was issued, settlers in Hispaniola requested its annulment, "because slaves and free persons from this background were few and very useful in a variety of occupations." The order was rescinded in 1550.

This Orientalist fantasy would come to play a critical role in forging a Brazilian national identity. It's certainly possible, as Freyre claims, that the indigenous woman reminded the Portuguese colonists of the *moura*, the Moorish girl. The conquistadors, after all, believed that they were near the "Orient," and often interpreted what they saw in the New World in terms of the Muslim enemy. Native American women were often mistaken for *moriscas*. In New Mexico, the Spanish conquistador Hernando de Alvarado would describe the Zuni Indians' huts (*kivas*) as "mosques" and their wives as "Moorish women." But the conquistadors encountered the indigenous woman at a time when *moriscas* were around and playing a specific social role. The *moriscas* brought to the New World would gradually—through marriage—be absorbed into the Spanish and Portuguese category, and not endure the violence that African women suffered; by the seventeenth century, the term *morisca* would simply mean the daughter of a *mulata* and a Spanish man. Yet the Moorish seductress would remain part of Catholic lore—and national mythology—in Latin America.

Brazilian Muslims have long loved Freyre and his notion of Moorish continuities across the Atlantic. Muslim migrants were, in fact, making such arguments before he began writing. In 1929, when the Muslim Beneficent Society was raising funds to build a mosque in Rio, community leaders described Brazil as “our second Andalusia.” During the Vargas years, when the government first latched onto Freyre’s ideas, Arab Brazilians would tout the official line, that they’re familiar yet exotic, because “ancient Arab culture infiltrated itself in Brazil through the Portuguese and Spanish.” Today there are Arab and Muslim community leaders who see Carnival as vital for greater recognition, and speak giddily of their community’s presence in the samba tradition.

mix of different instruments & cultural sounds

“You can hear Moorish influence in Carnival,” says Oswaldo Truzzi, a sociologist at the University of São Carlos. “The Brazilian mandolin (*bandolim*) used in samba is a descendant of the *oud*, the lute—we call it *alaúde* in Portuguese. That instrument has children across the Americas—the Cuban *tres*, the Andean *charanga*.” Truzzi speaks proudly of the Arab elements that Carnival has ingested. “The *adufe* as well: the square tambourine used in samba comes from the Arabic *daff*. The instrument traveled from North Africa to Iberia, then across the Atlantic and mixed with everything else.”

But this discourse of miscegenation and samba cordiality is troubling to others. And it’s not so much the public erotica that’s causing contention. Brazil’s main Muslim organizations are conservative—either Salafi- or Tablighi-oriented—yet there has been no Muslim protest around depictions of Islam in Carnival, even after the Brazilian government, in 2010, overturned a law banning religious symbols from being displayed on floats, prompting more religious references. Conservative Brazilian Muslims—like their evangelical and Orthodox Jewish compatriots—cringe at the idea of Brazil being an “erotic democracy,” and will leave town during Carnival week, taking their children to “halal retreats” and “Islamic camping.”

“It’s really curious. The very things that will cause Muslims to protest in Europe—public sexuality, cartoons, etc.—cause no outrage in Brazil,” says Samy Adghirni, a correspondent for *Folha de S. Paulo*, who relocated from France to Brazil in the mid-2000s. “And that’s because Muslims are very comfortable here. I really think Brazil is

the best place to be Muslim in the West. The Muslim population has grown, and there is very little hostility. The problem is that this narrative of celebration, of a rising Brazil and a rising Orient, ignores the rise of Islam among low-income communities here.”

And this is what’s unsettling to younger Muslims. Brazilian officials and cultural elites will deploy samba, Carnival, and Afro-Brazilian culture to create a spirit of tropical cordiality, but in so doing they are glossing over a great deal of history. The trope of the Moorish brown girl—whom Freyre made a linchpin of Brazilian national mythology, capturing the nation’s Iberian, Oriental, African, and Native American components—is, after all, rooted in the *morisca*, a figure of sexual indulgence, who transmutes into another erotic character, the *mulata*, who would be similarly exploited by the colonists. Why exactly, feminist critics are asking, did Brazil’s intellectual founding father transform the “enchanted Mooress,” usually seen sitting by a river with her legs crossed in a sign of Islamic modesty, into a woman “with legs spread far apart”?

In his fiction, Alberto Mussa, a Lebanese-Brazilian scholar, and one of the country’s leading novelists, probes the ironies of Brazil’s national mythology, examining the violence, the brothels and “erotic crimes,” that made the nation. A respected historian of Carnival, Mussa has long argued that the samba plot (*enredo*) is the only true epic form created in Brazil, and was crucial in diffusing Afro-Brazilian history. But today he is openly critical of the “functional samba” of Rio and São Paulo’s mega-Carnivals, lamenting the “lost poetry” of Carnival that helped uplift marginalized communities.

And this seems to be the growing view among Brazil’s Muslims: Carnavalesque depictions of Muslims are important for cultural inclusion, but portrayals focusing on Syrian-Lebanese affluence, Muslim intermarriage, the rise of Turkey or Dubai, tend to sweeten the past.