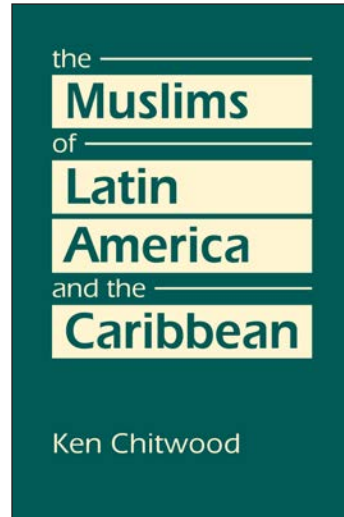


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The Muslims of
Latin America and
the Caribbean

Ken Chitwood

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1

Putting Muslims on the Map in Latin America and the Caribbean

THE RHYTHMIC BLAST OF THE LATEST REGGAETON HIT REVERBERATES in my chest cavity as the music pumps from a Jeep Wrangler, tricked out with trunk-mounted speakers and cruising down the main drag of Loíza Aldea. On the northeastern coast of Puerto Rico, Loíza Aldea is known as a hub for Afro–Puerto Rican culture, music, and dance. Suddenly, a cacophonous intermingling of the deep beats of the reggaeton mixes with the music making of a truck full of *bomba y plena* instrumentalists that suddenly appears from around the corner. In response to this combination of sounds, a woman who seems to be at least in her sixties shoots up from her wicker chair to dance like a teenager at the local *discoteca*. The oppressive humid heat of the tropical Caribbean summer day seems not to deter the throngs of people lining the streets for a procession of SUVs, cars, golf carts, pedestrians, bikes, and parade floats that stretches for miles through the coastal communities that make up the Loíza municipality. The festival is loud, it is hot, it is popular. It is also joyous and full of smiles, warm embraces, and enthusiastic dance.

At the head of this lively procession is a group of garishly dressed *vejigantes*—bogyman-looking characters arrayed in bright colors and carnivalesque costumes with batwing-like features. They wear masks adorned with horns, handmade from coconuts, and painted in bright and bold orange, yellow, pink, black, and the colors of the Puerto Rican flag—blue, white, and red. This particular group leading the procession in Loíza are known as *los diablitos*—“the little devils.” They take pride of place at this widely honored multiday festival, *La Fiesta de Santiago Apóstol* (The Festival of St.

James the Apostle) in Loíza Aldea, one of the largest public festivals in Puerto Rico.¹ For locals and, according to Puerto Rico's cultural politics,² the fiesta is a celebration of Afro–Puerto Rican identity and religion. The *vejigantes* are symbols of the strength of African traditions in a place where they have often been marginalized or neglected in normative understandings of Puerto Rican identity. They are also a celebration of *mestizaje*, the mix of American cultural antecedents from Spanish, African, and Indigenous roots. Puerto Rican national symbolism is expressed in the faces of the *vejigantes*, some of which are emblazoned with the Puerto Rican flag, held up as material embodiments of the diversity of Puerto Rican national culture.

Afro-Caribbean culture is a point of pride in Puerto Rico, a vital element of the *tres raíces* (three roots) that make up the sanctioned and celebrated national Puerto Rican culture (the other two being Spanish colonial and Indigenous Taíno culture). The *vejigantes* can represent the embodiment of evil, the forces of darkness, the dead, or simply a robust mixture of multiple cultures—most notably those of African descent. At their point of origin, the *vejigantes* represented a particular, and poignant, people group for the Spaniards who brought the festival to Latin America and the Caribbean. When the festival first arrived, *los vejigantes* represented the enemies of Catholic Spain. They represented Andalusian Muslims, *los Moros*—“the Moors.”³ Thus, beyond representing Afro–Puerto Rican culture and invoking images of good versus evil, the history of the Festival of St. James the Apostle in Loíza Aldea reveals a deeper resonant meaning behind the *vejigantes*, their masks, and the processions that serve as an easy excuse to dance, sing, gather with friends, and drink sangria from sunrise to sunset.

This festival also hints at the role that Muslims—in memory and in body—played in the colonization, establishment, and cultural development of the Americas. Nonetheless, Loíza-based artist Samuel Lind, known for producing posters for the annual event and a local legend in Afro–Puerto Rican art, told me that, “if you asked any man in the street, or even someone dressed as a *vejigante*, they would think they are heroes—not enemies, not Moors.”⁴ He said, “The Muslim presence in the festival has been forgotten. Now they represent African pride.”⁵ While acknowledged and noted by scholars and researchers, the Muslim influence on the festival, as Lind said, has long “been forgotten” among the masses. In this, the festival is perhaps prototypical of a general amnesia when it comes to the ways in which Muslims came to, and came to shape, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the American hemisphere—comprised of North and South America, but encompassing connections to other parts of the globe. It is a testament to their “absent presence” in the Americas. Often influential—and frequently present in flesh and blood—Muslims have too often been erased, forgotten, or neglected in recollections of the hemisphere's story. Far from being a foreign entity or some distant civilization, Muslims

helped make the modern-day Americas and define its political, social, and religious development from the fifteenth century forward. They continue to do so today.

The people of Loíza can little be blamed for not recognizing much about the Muslim presence in, and influence on, their festival. For them, the story and ritual of the *vejigantes* and the *caballeros* took on other resonant meanings and their recasting of the *vejigantes* as the point of pride in the festival became a critical part of their resistance to White, hegemonic rule. And yet, the too often forgotten influence of Islam and Muslims on the festival speaks to a larger ignorance concerning how both have long been part of the American hemisphere's story. This is only one example of how Muslims have been, and continue to be, left out of the narrative of the region and its negotiations of race, ethnicity, and religion. This ignorance, both willful and passive, raises questions about why Islam and Muslims have been sidelined in the narrative of the Americas. Despite having been a continuous part of the narrative of the Americas for the past 500 years, their story is rarely represented in discussions of the American hemisphere's history or contemporary dynamics. In light of this, it is one of this book's central claims that Islam and Muslims should be rethought of as part of, rather than foreign to Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Americas as a whole.⁶ This book offers a corrective to this oversight and provides a synthetic account of Islam and Muslims across Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Americas over time and in the contemporary scene. The aim is not to make an excessively academic argument, but to evince a sensibility and provoke a conversation around the question of "how" and not "if" Muslims are a significant part of the American hemisphere's story.

Related to this claim is my suggestion that the Americas should feature more prominently in our discussions of global Islam. My hope is that, after reading this book, readers will walk away with a deeper appreciation for, and a vaster understanding of, global Islam—one that includes the stunning diversity of people and circumstances across Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Latinx United States. While we may already know some of these histories or situations (Muslim enslaved persons in Brazil, Mexican Muslim converts, Indigenous Shi'i in Peru, etc.), the issue of how these numerous episodes fit into a collective narrative remains unclear. The goal of this book is to offer an expansive—if not comprehensive—view of how the various, dynamic, and globally interconnected stories of Islam and Muslims in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Latinx United States fit into the story of the Americas on the one hand and that of global Islam on the other. This helps us gain a deeper appreciation of both the Americas *and* global Islam as two interwoven threads of a much more entangled story than previously told. Expanding the geography of global Islam and the religious narrative of the American hemisphere through the stories and data in this

book permits us to appreciate an expanded conceptual framework of what constitutes global Islam and the American hemisphere that is more inclusive and complex.

With that said, it is an introduction to a broad field of research that continues to develop. Thus far, this field has coalesced around a few central themes, which this book uses as its general lines of argumentation. They are: (1) Islam and Muslims are not foreign to this region, but an integral part of the history and contemporary narrative of Latin America and the Caribbean; (2) Latin America and the Caribbean can be considered part of global Islam despite relatively lower numbers of Muslims; and (3) recognizing these two facts helps us see both Latin America and the Caribbean *and* global Islam in new light, thus opening new avenues for historical understanding, contemporary research, and public discussions and debates over identity and religion, culture, and history.

As a general outline, and overall, three-pronged argument, these points form the backbone of the book. Thus, they deserve a bit more unpacking. The next two sections examine these primary themes in more detail with a focus on how the first two points might lead us to the third—that of seeing our world in a new light with a renewed emphasis on how the story of Islam and that of Latin America and the Caribbean are more intertwined than we might currently imagine.

An Americas Approach to Global Islam

In 1883, Walt Whitman ruminated on how certain stories about the United States were forgotten or sidelined by dominant, European frames of “American” history. He wrote, “We Americans are yet to really learn our own antecedents. . . . Thus far, impress’d by New England writers and schoolmasters, we tacitly abandon ourselves to the notion that our United States have been fashion’d from the British Islands only . . . which is a very great mistake.”⁷ While Whitman had only New England and the United States in mind, and wanted to enlarge our view to include only “Spanish” influence, his sentiment might well apply to the whole of the American hemisphere. If one were to substitute “Western” for “New England” and “the Americas” for the “United States” or insert references to “Christianity,” the point would still hold. The Americas were not made of purely European stuff. First, European colonizers found the Americas inhabited by numerous complex and sophisticated Indigenous societies, upon which they relied for knowledge, labor, and resources. Despite being dominated by European colonial powers, and their populations and societies irreparably decimated, Indigenous peoples left an indelible imprint on the Americas, and the populations that survived continue to

play a significant role across the hemisphere. Since that first contact in the fifteenth-century, the hemisphere's various identities at multiple scales (regional, local, hyperlocal, etc.) also include an amalgam of influences from across the "Atlantic world" in interaction with the Americas and those already present there.⁸ The "Atlantic world" is a constructed category meant to encompass the interactions between peoples and empires bordering the Atlantic Ocean rim—Africa, Europe, and the Americas—from the Age of European Discovery to the present. It also includes nations, cultures, and peoples farther from the Atlantic Ocean's rim but who came to play a certain role in the development of this vast area, such as the Middle East and the Sahel.

The people and empires who interacted, and continue to interact, in this Atlantic world have done so for various reasons and with many motives. Some were forced to move from, or defend, their homelands. Some came to escape an old society or to launch a new one. Some sought to maintain the society they already had built or conquered. Others came to acquire riches. Others set up shop when the economy shifted. Yet as John Elliott alludes, they faced similar challenges of movement and new settlements, the confrontation of unknown people, places, and technologies, and coming to terms with alien dynamics that demanded diverse adaptations and a range of responses.⁹ In his work, Elliott focuses on the influence of European empires—the British and the Spanish in particular—in shaping the responses of various emigrants to the American hemisphere. His point is well made. While the American local context—with its diverse ecological, material, political, sociocultural, and religious environments—shaped the contours of American colonization and conquest, the colonial world was simultaneously defined and influenced by its transatlantic nature and its European antecedents. Significantly, the historical and legal dimensions of imperial statecraft conditioned the experience of various constituencies in even the most far-flung reaches of American empires.

At the same time, the accepted Euro-American liturgical history that posits the New World as a place of overwhelmingly European and Christian influence, whether of the Protestant or Catholic varieties, is little more than myth. The truth is that there were many more influences, individuals, and imaginations at play in the development of the Americas that emerged from the age of European encounter. European civilization¹⁰ was far from the only cultural, political, social, architectural, or religious influence on the hemisphere. Various cultures—both Indigenous and imported from across the Atlantic world—came to shape what we now know as Latin American and Caribbean culture. Material artifacts, ritual practices, linguistic elements, culinary dishes, and many more cultural expressions that make up the region's particular flavors, textures, and impressions today came from places such as the West African coast, the mountains of Europe,

the Amazonian jungle, and elsewhere. This book sheds light on the ways in which the culture of Latin America and the Caribbean was shaped and molded by Muslims and elements of Islamic faith and practice. In this way, this book pushes back against popular perceptions that “Islam” and “the West”—however they are essentially imagined and constructed as coherent wholes—are locked in a “clash of civilizations”¹¹ and sees them, in this instance, as co-constitutive in the creation of multiple aspects of historic and contemporary American culture.

On that note, this book takes a decidedly more hemispheric approach to understanding “American” religion, politics, economics, and culture. Furthermore, it seeks to not delimit the boundaries of global Islam, but expand them to include people, practices, and places hitherto marginalized or altogether ignored. To view the Americas more hemispherically and transregionally means that I do not limit the Americas to the group of nation-states and territories traditionally included in North America, Latin America (those areas where Spanish, French, or Portuguese are predominate), and the Caribbean. Instead, I take a broader view of these states, cultures, people, and geographic areas to include the Americas as a hemispheric whole and as entangled with numerous other stories beyond the hemisphere. This means keeping in mind how this region is part of the Atlantic world (including Africa and Europe) and other regions of the globe via historical and modern communications, trade, and travel.

More specifically, taking an “Americas” approach also means paying attention to certain themes in the story of Islam and Muslims in Latin America and the Caribbean. At its most foundational, an Americas approach appreciates the hemispheric continuities and connections, contested borders, and tense boundaries that exist across the Americas as they are conceived and constructed, lived in and between, by a multitude of people. For example, the life of a Puerto Rican Muslim whose family resides in Ponce, Puerto Rico, was born in Miami, lives in Newark, New Jersey, studied in Saudi Arabia, and regularly travels to Sweden and Spain for conferences and work as part of a transnational network of teachers headquartered in Stockholm and with members in places such as Australia, Kenya, and Indonesia cannot be limited with the monikers “Latin America” or “Caribbean” alone. This individual lives within, across, and between the American hemisphere and the transregional networks of global Islam. They are American in a fuller sense than can be encapsulated in just the North/South/Latin/Anglophone/Hispanophone varieties. Furthermore, their life includes economic, political, social, and religious dimensions and decisions that transcend the Americas and connects them across the Atlantic and with other parts of the globe. What is more, this person’s life is not necessarily abnormal in this day and age. Instead, their cosmopolitan existence is more the norm than anything else. Hence, there

is a need for us to think outside the traditional “Latin America” and “Caribbean” box as we consider the story of Islam and Muslims in these regions.

With that said, there is a *there*, there. And so, this book focuses on Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Latinx United States in particular,¹² all the while maintaining in our peripheral vision their connections and contacts with other areas, regions, and hemispheres. Following the disestablishment of religion in Latin America and the Caribbean came the concomitant “growth” of non-Catholic (and in some cases non-Protestant) religions in the region, including Islam. These non-Catholic traditions were already present in some shape or form, but following disestablishment, the enforcement of orthodoxy was no longer tied directly to the state and “non-Catholic religions were able to emerge and expand” in ways hitherto hindered by the Catholicism hegemony.¹³ While the Catholic Church still maintains a place of privilege and processes of disestablishment vary across the region, over the past several decades they have only been exacerbated by the global movement of people, ideas, technologies, finances, and media.¹⁴ Along with, and as an integral part of, these “flows” of globalization have also been religious currents that “have left traces, transforming peoples and places, the social arena and the natural terrain” across Latin America and the Caribbean.¹⁵

Concomitant with the rise in pneumatic or spirit-centered Christianity and the “Protestantization” of the Americas, there has also been an increase in affiliation with, and practice of, alternative Christian traditions, New Age religions, Afro-Latin American and Caribbean religions such as Santería or Candomblé, and religions conventionally seen as “foreign” such as Buddhist and Hindu Traditions, Judaism, and Islam. This has led to transformations within Christianity and other religions as they found new acceptance and ascendancy in the region. While Latin America and the Caribbean have always been religiously diverse, the scope and intensity of the region’s religious diversity have been irrevocably exacerbated at local, national, and hemispheric scales. Although cross-fertilization and creolization have long been features of religion in the region, along with a related desire to impose orthodoxy on such miscellany, today these juxtaposed processes occur against a backdrop of global exchange and transnational immigration and movement, which allows for a widespread and intense tension when it comes to beliefs, systems, symbols, practices, and even more creative recombinations of various religious fragments in everyday experience.¹⁶

Furthermore, and thanks to increased communication and the importance of transregional academic networks, more scholars have endeavored to approach Latin American and Caribbean religion in a broader, interdisciplinary, and comparative fashion. This has expanded the scope of studies of religion in Latin America and the Caribbean, with recent overviews and encyclopedias including an ever broader array of religious phenomena and

communities beyond Christianity and Indigenous traditions. This has meant more research and appreciation of such topics as “popular religion,” Afro-Latin religious traditions such as Umbanda or Obeah, the New Age Movement, Judaism, and Islam.¹⁷ With that said, and with the exception of single chapters or sections in specific anthologies and encyclopedias, surveys and investigations of Latin American and Caribbean religion still lack a thorough appreciation and analysis of Islam and Muslim socialities. This book aims to address this deficiency and further integrate the study of Islam and Muslims into considerations of Latin American and Caribbean history, culture, society, and religious change.

With this in mind, themes that are important to the study of religion in Latin America and the Caribbean appear throughout the book. Issues such as globalization, transnationalism, borderlands, and migration flows emerge in multiple chapters, whether discussing South Asian immigrants in the Anglophone Caribbean or Arab immigrants, their descendants, and converts in places such as Brazil. Questions of hybridity and postcolonial identification come to the fore when discussing Muslims in Trinidad and Suriname. Cross-fertilization, creolization, and hybridity have long been features of religion in the Americas, along with a concomitant desire to impose orthodoxy, but today that occurs against a backdrop of expanded global exchange and transnational immigration and movement. This allows for a widespread and intense set of divergent affective tendencies and tensions when it comes to beliefs, systems, symbols, material cultures, practices, and creative recombinations of religious fragments in everyday experience. Muslims are as much a part of this process as others and I hope the examples offered in this book reflect that reality. Indigenous identities and communities receive attention in Chapter 8 on Muslims in Mexico, specifically when addressing Tzotzil Muslims in and around San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas. I also pay attention to popular representations of religion and its more institutional manifestations. That means that I consider Muslim actors and traditional institutions (mosques, *madrasahs*, *ulama*, caliphs, rulers, scholars, etc.) and outside of them as Islam is lived in the material contexts of everyday existence. I do not try to play the game of “orthodoxy” versus “syncretism” and, instead, recognize the agency of multiple actors as they contest what these categories mean across the Americas. The same goes for my approach to global Islam.

Furthermore, the themes of race and ethnicity—perennially complicated subjects in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the United States—percolate throughout the book, whether that be in the analysis of Muslims’ place in the racial categories of the Spanish Americas or of Arab migrants in countries such as Brazil and Argentina. Muslims have never sat comfortably in any of the racial schemas that have been produced and reproduced in the Americas. While Islam is not a race, Islam and Muslims have long been racialized in

multiple contexts across the globe. The same can be said in the Americas, where Muslims have been made both enemy of the elite, racialized state apparatuses *and* welcomed as part of a process of elite, postcolonial *blanqueamiento* (whitening). They have both added new elements to processes of *mestizaje* and *mestiçagem* and been prevented, or held themselves apart from, the racial mixing that has long defined the region. Moreover, being Muslim in the region, especially since September 11, not only has been a complex negotiation of a pluralistic national religious field, but also the globally circulating images of, and narratives about, Islam and Muslims. The ways in which they navigate these tensions depends on careful attention to leadership, resources, interrelational dynamics, networks, membership, reception in the larger society, and specific histories and stories, including those about race.

By connecting the story of Islam and Muslims to some of the overarching themes that encompass the study of religion, culture, politics, and society in Latin America and the Caribbean, I hope to show how they are an integral part of the hemisphere's overall dynamics. I believe Muslims deserve more focused attention by scholars interested in some of the continuities and contrasts in the study of the Americas. I also try to balance between the continuities and ruptures that have occurred across time and space in the region. This means that I situate Islam and Muslims within the historical narrative of the region as well as focus on contemporary communities and their variances across the hemisphere. The book is split half-and-half in this sense. In Part 1, I concentrate on historical narratives that are important to properly situate Islam and Muslims in the hemisphere and to contextualize contemporary dynamics. Focusing on contemporary communities, Part 2 is not an attempt to capture all of the dynamics at play among Muslims in the region. Instead, I simply hope to point readers to some important themes, fruitful lines of inquiry, and critical axes and junctures of interest in the study of the Americas and global Islam. These themes deserve more attention than I give them. Hence, Part 2 is more of an introduction—or perhaps an invitation—to further study.

This book also seeks to further “decenter” the United States in the study of Islam in the Americas. Over the preceding decades, there has been a flood of publications on Muslims in the United States. While not wanting to discount the importance of the millions of Muslims in the United States, this book is a humble effort at seeking to balance our understanding of “American” Muslims by relating the narrative of the millions of American Muslims *outside* the United States. At the same time, I do not treat these socialities as wholly separate entities. Instead, I view Muslims in the United States, the Caribbean, and Latin America as mutually entangled in global dynamics and intertwined in some sense across the hemisphere, via economic, political, religious, or societal issues of common concern. In

the current era of globalization, marked as it is by time and space compression, interactions between nations and communities have multiplied. Latin America and the Caribbean, as the first “Americas”—defined as the place of encounter between Indigenous and European people and cultures—provide fertile ground for exploring and unpacking the potentials and pitfalls of the late modern era and its superabundance of global interaction. This is as true of the study of Islam and Muslims in the region as it is of other topics of importance to Latin American, Caribbean, or broader “American” studies. Thus, this book seeks to draw our attention to the hemispheric, transnational, and transregional dynamics at work beyond the United States, all the while paying attention to specific, local, regional, and national processes and settings. Its aim is to provide a richer, integrative, and more complicated picture of “American Muslims.”

In this regard, it is important to note that Islam and Muslims have been both included and excluded across the Americas since the 1500s. As this book makes clear, there is a paradoxical phenomenon of inclusion and exclusion that has taken place with regard to Islam and Muslims in, and of, the Americas. Discussing Islam in the United States in particular, Mucahit Bilici remarks that Muslims in the twenty-first-century United States “are susceptible to exclusion only because, for the first time, they are being included. Awareness of Muslims, even as it remains discriminatory, makes them part of American society.”¹⁸ What is true of Islam and Muslims in the twenty-first-century United States is also true of Islam and Muslims across the hemisphere. It is also true across the past 500 plus years of history. The historical overview in Part 1 makes clear this simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of Islam and Muslims. Although the form and shape of this “absent presence” has changed over time—from the representation of Moors as *vejigantes* in the Festival of St. James the Moorslayer to the modern image of Muslims as terrorists in our midst—the inclusion/exclusion paradox has generally remained consistent. While Muslims are often imagined as becoming “domestic” to the Americas in only the twentieth century, Muslims have long been part of the American story. However, as Bilici’s comment points out, the story of their inclusion in this narrative must also incorporate their corresponding exclusion from it in policy, practice, and prejudiced perspective. Even as Islam and Muslims shaped the history of this place, they were frequently imagined, constructed, and forced into being “foreign,” “Other,” and from “over there.”

With that said this book tells the story of how Muslims have actively sought to navigate, and push back against, this exclusion either by counteracting the fear and anxiety through assimilation and adaptation to American cultures or by rejecting and resisting them, or as often is the case in human history, by engaging in a combination of both. For Islam and Muslims in Latin America and the Caribbean, the story has frequently been one of “negative incorporation,” wherein “being targeted mean[t] being recognized.”¹⁹

For the Muslims who were simultaneously targeted *and* recognized, this opened up the path for incorporation, as rocky as it may have been and continues to be. It is incorporation through exclusion, fear, and crisis, but it is incorporation, nonetheless. As Bilici comments, the “fear and vigilance of the broader public bring the minority group to center stage. Recognition, whether positive or negative, is the crucial raw material for cultivation of citizenship.”²⁰ In this way, this book is a humble effort at decolonizing the study of Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Latinx United States by turning the focus away from European and Christian impact and focusing, instead, on that of Islam and Muslims. By doing so, it is my hope to disrupt the binaries and reifications that tend to define the region according to solely Catholic/Christian and European identities or influence.

Specifically, this book situates the story of Islam and Muslims—past and present—as part and parcel to the narrative of the Americas. Rather than telling these stories in isolation from one another, this book is an overview of the historical and contemporary story of Muslims in Latin America and the Caribbean that does not lose sight of hemispheric connections spanning the American hemisphere and across the Atlantic. In so doing, it is an attempt to situate the story of global Islam in Latin America and the Caribbean while, at the same time, situating Latin America and the Caribbean in the narrative of global Islam. By doing so, it is my aim that when telling the story of Latin America and the Caribbean, Islam and Muslims are no longer excluded or relegated to the margins as mere sideshows to a grander *mestizo* (mixed) Euro-Indigenous culture in the Americas. Instead, by relating how Islam and Muslims “are part of, rather than foreign to,”²¹ Latin America and the Caribbean, this book can help challenge the prevailing notions and opinions that continue to frame Muslims as strangers and foreigners in a region they have long been part of, helped to shape and build, and continue to actively participate in. As Edward E. Curtis IV writes in the introduction to *The Bloomsbury Reader on Islam in the West*, this book “rejects the idea that *homo islamicus* (‘Islamic man’) is a fundamentally different species than Western man” and turning to “contemporary scholarship it reveals a far more nuanced and ultimately humanistic view of Muslims in the West”²² and more specifically in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Latinx United States. This point may seem subtle, but it is vitally important in a climate—both popular and academic—that imagines Muslims as outsiders and unassimilated foreigners in discussions of public policy, religion, and culture.

Further Globalizing Global Islam

I also seek to expand and diversify our notion of “global Islam.” Talal Asad famously wrote that Islam is “a discursive tradition”—a set of religious

symbols that take on meaning, value, and expression in various social and political situations where multiple processes, discussions, and negotiations are involved.²³ What this process produces can, at times, seem somewhat contradictory. As Shahab Ahmed intimates, the main challenge in interpreting global Islam is coming to terms with its considerable diversity of beliefs, practices, and postures while simultaneously appreciating that there are shared principles that act as a *cri de coeur* for Muslims across the world.²⁴ While it is convenient to use terms such as *Muslim world* or *Islamic civilization* to denote the ideas, practices, and traditions that Muslims share across the globe, pragmatic contextual differences disrupt the idea that there is any kind of bounded or monolithic “Islamic” or “Muslim” identity. This is true in local contexts and at global scales. The diversity of Muslim voices shows that globalization has not produced a single form of Islam or sociality of Muslims. Likewise, local dynamics do not allow for the top-down reproduction of global forms of Islam in regional, national, or local contexts. Instead, Islam has been interpreted and reinterpreted, applied and reapplied, transformed, translated, and transplanted across, in, and between various localities, languages, and landscapes over its centuries’ long history.

Thus, it is important to avoid the idea that all Muslims think and act as one or that “Islam” is a given, *sui generis* category for investigation. Islam has been, and still very much is, made up of a stunningly diverse array of people, practices, and perspectives. It could be said that the “term *Muslim* tells us next to nothing about a person’s beliefs and orientation.”²⁵ Moreover, terms such as *Muslim world* and *Muslim ideology* mean almost nothing. At worst, the term *Muslim world* seems to suggest that Muslims live on a separate planet detached from the world as it is (or for some, as they hope it would be). The use of the terminology says more about the individual using it and what their assumptions are than any “real” entity, place, principles, or persons. Scholars have questioned the objectivity of such a thing as “the Muslim world” arguing that it is instead a cultural, and colonial, constructed category that allows for “the West” (whatever that may refer to) to homogenize, subvert, and dominate those areas and regions deemed to be part of “the Muslim world.”²⁶ Cemil Aydin demonstrates how European intellectuals, politicians, and thought-leaders racialized “Muslims” as a homogenous whole and constructed a geography of the discursive category labeled as “the Muslim world.” The very fact that the Muslim world has never existed as a distinct object has simultaneously made its production as a colonial subject possible in the first place. In this colonial reading and guise, the Muslim world was limited to the Middle East, North Africa, and parts of Asia.

At the same time, readers might wonder, “Isn’t there something to the idea of ‘the Muslim world’?” To be sure, there is *something* to be said for

paying attention to population percentages, historical influence, and cultural, social, political, and economic impact and dominance. On all of these measures, Latin America and the Caribbean may pale in comparison to places such as Iran, Indonesia, or India. Nonetheless, there are serious intellectual, social, and political dangers to delimiting the area of the so-called Muslim world to restricted geographies and particular mappings. Not only do these constructions belie colonial designs and potential platforms for political denigration, but they also ignore vast swathes of Muslim history and Islamic influence across the globe. For scholars researching Muslim cultures and societies, such center-periphery models are increasingly called into question for their lack of explanatory power. In particular, scholars researching on the so-called periphery or edges of global Islam have found that such models fail to address the complex and networked ways in which Muslims themselves understand and make manifest global Islam. This range of scholarship challenges the politics of area-ization²⁷ and the “politically-informed-defining and ‘scaling’ of localities, ethnicities, languages, religions, and cultures”²⁸ that have long dominated Islamic studies. Pushing back against the “gridded landscapes” such as “the Muslim world” and “the West,” a new emphasis on transregional networks,²⁹ rhizomes,³⁰ assemblages,³¹ and processes of cosmopolitanization³² that include Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Latinx United States (as well as other geographies) are helping decenter the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in the study of global Islam.

These discourses help us make better sense of the co-constitutive connections and continuities that exist between seemingly disparate Muslim socialities, whether those distances be geographic, ethnic, or ideological. It also helps us test these connections’ progeny, their endurance, and their makeup.³³ The result is that “global Islam” is no longer viewed as a contained, monolithic whole, but as an ongoing process and ever expanding network of bodies, socialities, and traditions that is messy, unstable, and full of “divergent affective tendencies”³⁴ as much as it is commonalities and connections. It is a perspective that posits global Islam is defined more by flows and relations, “frictive intertwining” and “dialogic interdependence,”³⁵ than any particular landscape, people, or place. Although this process is complex, it focuses attention on intellectual production, networks of text and media, institutional systems, transregional personal histories, and other lattices of relation that are often artificially sequestered from each other by nationalized or area-ized discourses. By moving away from center-periphery models of global Islam, we can perhaps see and study the lateral networks, ill-fitting incidents, and unexceptional encounters better than our previous frameworks and rubrics of study. Hence, while I use the term *Muslim world* from time to time, I do so reluctantly, with an eye toward critiquing, interrogating, and expanding our conceptualization of it. Instead, I

try to view the *world as a method* in the study of Islam and, therefore, opt to use the term global Islam. I define global Islam as the complex and dynamic nexus of people, material, institutions, ideas, texts, and contexts encountered at, across, and between a lattice of landscapes, socialities, and traditions variously identified as “Islamic.”

More essentialized conceptualizations of global Islam fail to appreciate and incorporate the tensions, slippages, alterations, and negotiations that characterize lived Islam in interaction with myriad contexts *and* non-Muslim actors. Any understanding of global Islam has to appreciate the text and traditions of Islam along with the diverse contexts and conduct of Muslims throughout the world and come to terms with the resulting—seemingly contradictory—apperceptions, appropriations, and applications of what Islam is and is not. This includes non-Muslim imaginings and interactions as well. Whether Muslim or not, all of our conceptions of Islam help make it what it is and, sometimes, are implicated in the making of “global Islam.” As Ali Mian writes, Islam “on its own terms” is never on its own. It necessarily involves Islam and Muslims in relationship to the Other. There is, after all, no “identity without difference.”³⁶ Thus, in trying to understand Muslim identity, it is perhaps critical to look at “Islam on the edges”—those places that are often seen as peripheral to a core “Muslim world” and where Muslims are, more often than not, in the minority. There, scholars can investigate the “structural tensions” and “divergent affective tendencies” of global Islam within historically situated and context-specific case studies and analytical frameworks. This helps us avoid “reifying orthodoxy” and, thus, the power to define what is orthodox or heterodox, whether by Muslims or non-Muslims, in the study of Islam.

Therefore, I suggest that the study of Islam and Muslims in Latin America and the Caribbean should no longer be viewed as peripheral to a perceived MENA core. While on the rise, studies of Islam and Muslims in Latin America and the Caribbean remain secondary to scholarship on Islam in the Middle East, North Africa, Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, the anthropological, cultural, and sociological study of Latin America and the Caribbean continues to regard Islam and Muslims as outside of American culture rather than appreciating, and integrating, the study of Islam and Muslims as intrinsic to Latin American and Caribbean heritage. At best, scholars and various publics laud Muslims who make the Americas their home and tell their stories in one-off articles, journalistic pieces, and blogs. However, this trivial and limited treatment assumes, and undergirds, the pervasive idea that Muslims are foreign to the region and not thoroughly American. This could not be further from the truth—their history and presence here is long, robust, and significant. Yet because of continued marginalization and underappreciation in the academy, there are relatively few studies that have fully investigated the linkages between Latin Amer-

ica, the Caribbean, and global Islam more broadly. This book aims to build on the scholarship that does exist to point out how the story of global Islam—past and present—is woven into the very fabric of Latin America and the Caribbean. And vice versa.

It is perhaps self-evident to many readers that the Americas are marginal in relation to a MENA core. And yet this does grave injustice to the historical and contemporary realities of many Muslims across the landscapes of global Islam. In fact, I suggest that a paradox still seems to lie at the heart of the contemporary study of global Islam. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent war on terror, which has recapitulated the Huntingtonian clash of civilizations thesis and its emphasis on the false binary between “Islam” and “the West,” essentially conceived, there has concomitantly been an increase in the academic attention afforded to the study of Islam in places such as the United States, Canada, and throughout the American hemisphere. Although the number of Islamic studies degrees conferred has more than doubled in the past decade, Islamic studies has also been reified as the domain of Middle East, or Near East, studies, leaving Islam and Muslims in Africa, Asia, Oceania, Europe, and the Americas to the wayside. As Scott S. Reese notes, “The Western academy has emphasized the dominance of the so-called Arabo-Persian ‘Islamicate’ center” to the neglect of other communities beyond the scope of this narrow geocultural focus.³⁷ This is also why, as Michael Amoruso writes, “Islam in Latin America has eluded sustained scholarly attention.”³⁸ In a word, even with the rise of the study of global Islam, its scope has failed to fully incorporate other geographies and the study of Islam beyond the Middle East remains underrepresented. Too often, visions and explanations of global Islam still imagine the direction of influence as radiating out from a MENA core and largely being nonreciprocal. The truth is, there is still a pertinent need to *globalize* the study of global Islam. This problem comes into focus when considering the general neglect that regions such as Latin America and the Caribbean have received thus far in the study of global Islam.

Indeed, the Americas are often, quite literally, left off the map of global Islam. When one peruses a selection of books introducing the topic of Islam to the general reader, there is usually a map to be found in the opening pages or in the appendix. For example, the widely utilized *Islam: The Straight Path* by John L. Esposito features a map of “The Muslim World” immediately following its Introduction.³⁹ The map is a screen shot portion of an oft-published equirectangular world map focusing in on the landmasses of Eurasia, Africa, and the Asian Pacific. Not all countries are named, only those deemed to have a significant enough Muslim population to note. A key is included with five categories of “Muslim percentage of the population,” ranging from 86 to 100 percent down to 5 to 15 percent. The Americas, nor half of Australia, all of New Zealand, and many other

nations and geographies are not included in this map of “The Muslim World.” The inference seems to be that these other regions and nations are not part of the Muslim world and that this area lies within a specific geography stretching as far west as Senegal and Bosnia and Herzegovina, north to Kazakhstan and Mongolia, east to Indonesia and the Philippines, and south to Mozambique and Mauritius. Moreover, this cartography of the Muslim world is centered around places between Morocco and Mauritania to the west, Somalia and Yemen to the south, Afghanistan and Pakistan to the east, and Turkey to the north. The locus of the Muslim world is limited by the percentages of the population contained within the geographic bounds of modern nation-states. As such, more often than not, Latin America and the Caribbean are excluded.

Furthermore, in surveys of global Islam, Latin America and the Caribbean are almost always ignored or not acknowledged.⁴⁰ Even in the most generous works looking at Islamic and Muslim phenomena from a global perspective, Latin America and the Caribbean are rarely referenced, researched, or written about. For example, in the otherwise commendable introductory book *Islam in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives*, edited by R. Michael Feener,⁴¹ Latin America and the Caribbean do not make an appearance or even appreciate a mention. The aim of the book is to “provide a deeper grounding for discussions of contemporary Muslim societies”⁴² and to do so from a decidedly global perspective with chapters focusing on various cultures including Turkey and the Arab Middle East, Iran, South Asia, Central Asia, China, Indonesia, Ethiopia, South Africa, and the United States. While Feener and colleagues admit that the “short volume can provide only a critical selection of studies rather than comprehensive coverage of all Muslim societies,”⁴³ it is lamentable that Latin America and the Caribbean could not be included as means of expanding readers’ concepts of what “Islam in world cultures” might consist of.

I raise these examples not to lambast these particular scholars, but to comment on the broader sidelining of an important set of stories that make up the narrative of global Islam—past and present. This evaluation is a form of “critical intimacy,”⁴⁴ not just deconstructing the ways in which we have constructed our view of global Islam, but also seeking to reconstruct, expand, and improve on our vision so that we might better understand our field of study. This limited geographical view of global Islam helps contribute to what Gyatri Spivak calls the “monolithized view of Islam that rules the globe today.”⁴⁵ In view of that fact, Talal Asad wrote, “[It] is too often forgotten that ‘the world of Islam’ is a concept for organizing historical narratives, not the name for a self-contained collective agent . . . the integrity of the world of Islam is essentially ideological, a discursive representation.”⁴⁶ The production, and reproduction, of knowledges and the educational resources that undergird them train us to see certain places as

“Muslim” and to not see other areas as such. That, in turn, permits the pernicious and pervasive idea that Muslims are foreign to certain places and native to others.

In this book, I try to make clear that we need new maps of global Islam. Our maps of global Islam remain largely medieval, pinned to a narrow geographic radius that encompasses only the Middle East and North Africa and perhaps the Balkans and South Asia. But the Islamic world and Muslim communities have long been more diffuse than our conceptual or physical maps can encompass. While not dominant, Islam and Muslims have played a role in geographies across the globe for hundreds of years, from China to Northern Europe and sub-Saharan Africa to the Americas. Geographies and maps, both real and imagined, popular and academic, are vital to understanding Islam and Muslims in the past and the present. Therefore, I argue, both the academy and the general public need to include Latin America and the Caribbean in our conceptual mapping of global Islam’s terrain.

What I suggest in the following pages is that the emerging subfield of studies focusing on Islam and Muslims in the Americas offers such opportunities to further complicate and interrogate our conceptualization of global Islam’s landscapes—both literal and imagined. This view from the perceived margins of global Islam helps Islamic studies scholars (and others) reimagine the Middle East (or Indonesia, or Eurasia, or Asia, or North Africa, or Latin America) as only one contributing region, or representative site, of global Islam, rather than as its singular, inevitable, and irrevocable center. Moreover, this body of scholarship sheds light on the plurality, changeability, and global connectedness of Muslim cultures beyond the MENA region, and specifically in the American hemisphere. There, what we see is a landscape that has been in process for over 500 years through the movement of people, ideas, and things variously defined as “Islamic” or “Muslim.” Viewing Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Latinx United States as one of the “process geographies”⁴⁷ or representative sites of global Islam provides a more robust vision of global Islam.

With that said, I do not want to reify the idea of “global Islam,” anachronize it, or negate its capability for multiplicity, dynamism, evolution, and entanglement. The frame “global Islam”—or “the Americas,” for that matter—encapsulates an enormous range of elements. These frames reflect less *how* populations and phenomena are bound together, but *which* characteristics we believe they have in common. As the ensuing chapters show, there is not a single, definitive pattern of Islamic practice or Muslim sociality in Latin America and the Caribbean. If anything, diversity and divergence are the prime characteristics to be found across the American hemisphere. Thus, I do not play the “orthodoxy” game in my treatment of Islam and Muslims in the region. Instead, I incorporate practices and groups

that are sometimes deemed un-Islamic, such as the use of amulets, the Ahmadiyya, the Nation of Islam, or certain Sufi socialities and rituals. It is also a story of networks forged, lost, and reformed over multiple centuries and between various nodes in Europe, North Africa, West Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, North America, and elsewhere. Thus, I try to describe a mutable and protean picture that highlights the cultural, economic, and political *mestizaje* of global Islam. Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Latinx United States can be seen from demographic perspectives as locales on the frontiers, or edges, of Islam—but to speak of many frontiers is not necessarily to speak of a singular center. These frontiers also offer the opportunity for us to trace and map the limits of global Islam and to seek to understand its dynamism, contingency, and contested expression in the interstitial space of various types of boundaries—religious, cultural, economic, material, affectual, or geographic. Here, I suggest, we find an augmented vision of global Islam that encompasses places, people, and processes that we have hitherto sidelined or ignored for political, social, and cultural reasons. Adding them to the mix in our understanding of global Islam gives us a richer, more complex, and expanded vision of what being Muslim in the late modern world is and can be.

When raising these points, I am often asked “How many Muslims *are there* in Latin America and the Caribbean?” It is true that the number of Muslims in Latin America and the Caribbean is perhaps negligible compared to other nations, regions, and areas of the globe. Moreover, while there are numerous works that estimate regional and national populations of Muslims across the Americas, the numbers are largely unreliable due to a lack of consistent data, under or overreported population statistics, and a constant flux of migration and conversion in multiple directions. At the very best, demographic research can serve as an invitation to whet the researcher’s appetite concerning understudied Muslim populations throughout the Americas and provide nuanced representation of them.⁴⁸ While we cannot say for certain exactly how large many of these populations are, scholars have noted both long-standing Muslim communities *and* noteworthy and growing communities of converts across the Americas.⁴⁹ For example, there are significant populations in Suriname, Trinidad, and Guyana, as well as large concentrations in the urban centers of countries such as Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina, which have invited a range of studies and deservedly so. There are also historic, dynamic, and substantial constituencies in places such as Jamaica, Colombia, or among Latinx Muslims in the United States.

At the same time, outside of places like Suriname and Trinidad, percentages do not rise above 5 percent of the total population and Muslims in the Americas must be viewed according to their status as minorities. And yet beyond population percentages often being a poor marker of social and cultural significance, this book’s challenge is for scholars to think beyond

numbers and appreciate impact, influence, and other markers of significance and relevance. For example, there are numerous communities—such as those in Barbados, Puerto Rico, Chile, or Belize—that deserve more attention, despite what their overall population numbers are. There, scholars cannot reflect only on the uniqueness of some of these socialities, but also on their connectedness to Islam's representative sites across the world. It also provides opportunity to analyze some of the similarities and disparities between Muslim minorities in the Americas with those of other geographies and localities.

Therefore, setting numbers aside, at least for now, I argue that treating Latin America and the Caribbean as a veritable sideshow in the grander narrative of global Islam not only does a vast disservice to the millions of Muslims in the hemisphere as a whole, but also misses out on critical junctures in the story of global Islam over time and in the contemporary scene. This book remedies this oversight and seeks to widen our view of global Islam to include Latin America and the Caribbean. I suggest that if scholars of the Americas are not considering Islam and Muslims and those in Islamic studies are ignoring the Americas, we are missing critical stories and vital insights on some of the most pressing themes in both fields. Moreover, incorporating one into the other not only allows for certain stories to be shared and themes to be better explored, but also challenges colonial conceptions of global Islam that landlock it to certain continents and nation-states or certain forms of Islamic tradition and practice. This challenges scholars and the wider public to consider the globe as the locus of Islam and Muslim activity, to make the world our framework and method, rather than any one locality, region, or network. By doing so, it pushes back against notions that Islam, and Muslims, are foreign to certain parts of the world and should be relegated to other parts of the globe. The relevance of this point in regard to debates surrounding refugees, immigration, global politics, nativism, and nationalistic populism cannot be overstated.

Why This Book?

The idea for this book emerged out of the vexations of a cohort of students I had the honor of teaching at the University of Florida in spring 2017. The course was Islam in the Americas. It was a joint offering from the Department of Religion and the Center for Latin American Studies at the university. The course aimed to familiarize students with the multiple historical and contemporary narratives, representations, and manifestations of Islam across the American hemisphere. Furthermore, it sought to provide students with resources and opportunities to explore the historical and contemporary Muslim socialities between Cape Columbia, Canada, and Tierra del Fuego,

Argentina. Finally, I hoped that it might foster the students' ability to think deeply about, and be critical of, the production and reception of scholarship and popular representations of Muslims in the Americas. In doing so, it was part of a larger project to help students learn how to reflect critically on how they, as students of religion, arrive at their beliefs, values, and practices and bring to consciousness the degree that these might shape how they report on the various cultures and subcultures that they encounter in their lives, their studies, and in popular media. The same purposes lie at the foundation of this work.

Students in that class sought to answer the questions such as: Why does Islam matter in the Americas? When did it arrive here? What values, practices, traditions, and tensions exist within its histories and social dynamics in the West? How can we study Muslims in this hemisphere? Similar to how that course sought to place Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Latinx United States within a broader Islamic framework and locate Muslims of various backgrounds and experiences within the hemisphere from the 1500s to today, so too does this book. The difference, however, is that while the resources that helped the students learn in this course were cobbled together from various articles, edited volumes, dissertations, blogs, and specialized monographs, this book aims to put the story together as one narrative whole. This was one of the central complaints of my students—that although they thoroughly enjoyed the course and learned much from it, they desired “one book that would rule them all,” as it were. They wanted a general introduction that could help them frame the overall narrative and that could be used as a base to delve further into specialized topics and specific areas of research and discussion. This book is meant to be an answer to that yearning. Thus, it is my hope that this book helps (re)place Latin America, the Caribbean, and North America within a broader Islamic framework and locate Muslims of various genealogies within the hemisphere over the *longue durée*. Furthermore, it aims to incorporate local values, practices, traditions, and tensions placing these within larger questions about what kinds of histories, social dynamics, and meaning production make Islam significant, or how its significance is denied, in a part of the world that has not recognized its history here or its contemporary configurations or impact.

In particular, this book is inspired by Judith Laikin Elkin, whose work on Jews in Latin America and the Caribbean showcases, in part, some of the best of what this book hopes to do. Originally published in 1980, Elkin's *The Jews of Latin America*⁵⁰ presents an overview and a history of Jewish presence in Latin America. She found in her teaching and writing that there was no continent-wide historical or contemporary account. This drove her to produce an overall scholarly work that documented the Jewish experience in Latin America. At the same time, she was finding that “Latinamericanists”—those who study Latin America as an academic dis-

cipline—“seemed to dismiss Jews as too small in number to have significantly impacted the region” and that “those who studied Jews typically considered Latin America outside the scope of their history.”⁵¹ And yet her work demonstrated the opposite. In carefully detailing the ways in which Jews came to, and impacted, the historical trajectory of Latin America and how Latin America impacted the broader Jewish world, she was able to challenge the prevailing paradigms and open up a new field of research that thrives today in associations and organizations such as the Latin American Jewish Studies Association (LAJSA).⁵²

The parallels to the aims of this book are clear. The English-language literature on the topic is largely made up of focused histories, edited collections, or anthropological studies. They are, for the most part, highly specialized. The literature also lacks a broader hemispheric or (trans)regional perspective, instead favoring local, national, or minimally comparative foci. There has also been little attempt to weave an overall narrative or story together. Drawing on my fieldwork, journalistic activity, media analysis, collaborations and discussions with colleagues based on their expertise, and a growing body of interdisciplinary literature on Islam in the Americas, this book aims to communicate to a broad audience and offer an overall narrative of Muslims in Latin America and the Caribbean. In doing so, it corrects visions of global Islam that exclude the Americas *and* understandings of religion and culture in the American hemisphere that marginalize Islam and Muslims.

I am humbly aware that I am far from the first to write on these topics and issues, in English, Spanish, Portuguese, or otherwise. In addition to the aforementioned authors, research on Muslims in the Americas is on the rise. There are now entire books, numerous journal articles, encyclopedia entries, and conference presentations on the topic. More and more are emerging every day, which is in turn inspiring present and future scholars to turn to the topic as a way to understand culture, politics, religion, and economics in the region. In part, this book is a celebration of the field and the scholars who have been, and currently are, part of making it what it is. In fact, I view this book as a chance to highlight the breadth and depth of the topic and scholarship on it. That is why I am proud to reference so many scholars I respect⁵³ and whose research has helped shape how I see Latin America, the Caribbean, and global Islam. In my teaching on the topic, I have often turned to two significant, and pathfinding, edited collections. The first, edited by Aisha Khan and entitled *Islam and the Americas* helped show the ways in which we are not dealing simply with “Islam in the Americas” but an “Islam of the Americas.” The second, *Crescent over Another Horizon: Islam in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latino USA*, edited by María del Mar Logroño Narbona, Paulo G. Pinto, and John Tofik Karam, likewise helps place “Latin America, the Caribbean, and

Latino USA within a broader Islamic world and [locate] Muslims of varied genealogies within [the American] hemisphere over the *longue durée*.”⁵⁴ Drawing on highly specialized, interdisciplinary research from a variety of scholars, both works are of inestimable value.

However, as a generalist approach to this field of study, this book is an attempt to weave over 500 years of history and various microstories into a coherent, readable, and informative account to provide a foundation for further exploration for the introductory student and general reader. Thus, I present a reasonably coherent overall story and offer frequent references to a wide array of works to provide possible pathways to understand the existent literature in the field and furnish inroads for future research. I do not claim to be an expert in all of these fields. I have drawn on those more knowledgeable than myself to paint a “big picture” of the topic as an introduction for students and the general reader.⁵⁵ For more in-depth explorations of these topics, I highly recommend the inestimable work of specialists in the many subfields in this area to supplement this more general account. Hence, I reference their work frequently throughout this book and encourage readers to peruse and explore the endnotes and references to learn more from these scholars’ expertise. I ask these same scholars to please forgive my generalist approach, my reliance on their ideas and research, and any of my “trespasses into their various territories”⁵⁶ that I commit along the way. In addition, I ask forgiveness of the scholars whose works I did not include. In a synthetic account of this sort, it is almost impossible to cite everything relevant or related to the conversation.

Relying on this previous scholarship, this book gathers together many strands, and adds new fibers from some firsthand research throughout the region (in places such as Cuba, Puerto Rico, Brazil, Mexico, and the United States), to weave a synthetic account of Islam and Muslims in the region. Existing, and emerging, scholarship on the subject has generally moved along two axes: one historical, the other contextual. First, a burgeoning body of scholarship has opened the doors to investigating Muslims’ presence and history in Latin America and the Caribbean for at least the past 500 years. This scholarship has been successful in looking at the ways that were present and active in the shaping of the American hemisphere, but have often been left to the wayside in the telling of that story. The latter type of scholarship features interdisciplinary approaches to exploring how Muslim populations in places such as Trinidad and Mexico, Cuba, and Brazil, have sought to be, and become, Muslim in contexts where they are a minority.

What becomes clear is that while there are general themes and historical periods to pay attention to, there are also disparate stories and wayward narratives to take note of across the ages and the hemisphere. In this way, this book also contributes to the field by highlighting new, or understudied,

aspects of Muslim presence and impact in the Americas. The truth is that we still lack a basic understanding about the history and culture of Islam and Muslims in the region. This work, while purposefully wide-ranging, is tentative and incomplete. The overall picture I present in this book is meant to be expanded on and problematized by subsequent contextualized research, both historical and contemporary.

Overview of the Book

Building on this theoretical foundation, this book places Latin America, the Caribbean, and the American hemisphere within a broader Islamic framework and locates Muslims of various backgrounds and experiences within the hemisphere from the 1500s to the twenty-first century, from north to south across the hemisphere and in many periods and places in between. It covers a lot of ground, both historically and geographically, ranging across over 500 years of history and numerous nation-states across the globe.⁵⁷ Therefore, it is divided into Part 1, “Historical Lineages,” Part 2, “Contemporary Communities and Global Entanglements,” and a concluding Part 3.

Part 1 addresses the history of the presence, and influence, of Islam and Muslims in Latin America and the Caribbean. The principal point of Part 1 is to look back on how Muslims traveled to the Americas, took part in, shaped, and were molded by its American context even as they adapted to and resisted broader Euro-American power, culture, and its attendant lifeways. It is meant to ponder the role of the imagination—that of Muslims and non-Muslims—in shaping and telling this story. It also begins to show the networked, interconnected, and complex narrative of contemporary Muslims in Latin America and the Caribbean. It illustrates how significant Islam and Muslims were to the development of Latin America and the Caribbean, especially as it grew out of the contact between Europe and Indigenous Americans. Furthermore, it begins to prod us to think of the many ways that Latin America and the Caribbean, and the multifarious forces at work in shaping this region, have also come to influence global Islam. These are themes that pick up even greater pace when we transition to the contemporary scene in Part 2.

Part 1 begins with Chapter 2, “The Question of Pre-Columbian Contact,” which looks back to the idea of precolonial contact between Muslims and the American hemisphere to navigate the imagined deeper roots of Islam in the Americas. This chapter reviews the proposed evidence for precolonial Muslim contact and presence in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Americas as a whole. While the evidence is far from convincing, it offers readers an opportunity to consider the degree to which Muslims want to validate their presence here and why the crown of “first contact” with the

Americas is so coveted by various communities in the present age. This chapter invites readers to see how claims of Muslim first contact are part of American Muslims' postcolonial arts of memory, seeking a place and space in a cosmopolitanized hemisphere. Chapter 3, "*Los Moros*, Spain, and the Making of the New World," explores the influence of Andalusian Spain on Latin American and Caribbean cultures and histories. Readers not only encounter and explore how individual Muslims came over as conquistadors, servants, interpreters, and colonizers, but also the extent to which the specter of the Muslim "monster" was brought over from Europe and influenced language, ideas of citizenship, material culture, religious practice, and the representations and constructions of Indigenous peoples. Readers see how, once here in the hemisphere, Muslims took part in, shaped, and were molded by their American contexts even as they adapted to, resisted, and surrendered to the broader Euro-American worldview and its attendant lifeways. In the words of John Tofik Karam, looking at this "*longue durée* of Muslims" in the region helps us "globalize our view of what constitutes the 'Islamic world' itself."⁵⁸ Chapter 4, "Enslaved Muslims and Their Enduring Legacy," segues from Spain to examine the forced importation of Muslim slaves to Latin America and the Caribbean. Focusing on Muslim slaves from West Africa, this chapter notes the tribe-based singularities, individual stories, and significant influence of Muslim slaves in the New World. It not only illustrates the importance of Islam and Muslims in our considerations of the transatlantic trade in enslaved persons, but to the broader "Atlantic World" as a whole. Chapter 5, "Indentured Servants and Immigrants," picks up on the story of indentured servants as a bridge to begin talking about more modern Muslim immigrations to the region. As such, it moves forward in time to provide an overview of later Muslim migration to Latin America and the Caribbean, largely focusing on South Asian, Indonesian, and Arab immigration. This chapter helps transition the narrative to "contemporary communities and global connections."

Picking up where Part 1 left off, Part 2 illustrates how the varied and multivalent historical streams in Part 1 have produced a high degree of diversity among Muslim socialities in the Americas today. It shows how contemporary "American Muslims" do not conform to any single tradition, but instead select, abandon, practice, and identify with a range of Muslim identities—Sunni, Shi'i, Sufi, Salafi, etc.—through translocal networks of encounter and exchange. These stories continue to underscore the plurality, changeability, and entanglements within and across global Islam. Thus, Part 2 includes discussions of some of the most pressing themes in global Islamic studies alongside important aspects critical to understanding the Americas today: religious change and diversification, the cold war for Sunni hegemony, South-South solidarities, the halal economy, terrorism and the global war on terror, Shi'i diaspora commu-

nities, a variety of popular political movements, Ahmadiyya missionary efforts, Sufi orders, Islamic finance, global imaginaries of the *ummah*, and more. Furthermore, in keeping with the book's overall dual focus on global Islam *and* the Americas, it helps readers think more deeply about how Islam and Muslims in the region are situated in broader American social orders. Specifically, it addresses ways in which Muslims in the Americas are implicated in current discussions about frontiers and borderlands, alter-globalization, postcolonial politics, indigeneity, contemporary religious pluralism in the region, diaspora religion, race and ethnicity, transnationalism, and cultural hybridity.

To do so, the second part of the book takes a closer look at specific countries and regions ranging from North America to Latin America and the Caribbean. Each of the chapters raise particular questions to address communities in particular places (Trinidad, Suriname, Brazil, Mexico, Cuba, Argentina, and the Latinx United States) and to explore salient themes in the study of both global Islam *and* the Americas. The aim of Part 2 is to create a diverse portrait of Muslim experiences in the contemporary Americas and explore how Muslims' presence and practice is influenced by their American context and their rhizomic connections to other Muslim networks, discourses, and dynamics across the world.

Part 2 begins with Chapter 6, "Halal in Brazil and the Global Muslim Economy," which focuses on the economic networks that have made Brazil into one of the largest exporting nations of halal products. This presents an opportunity to discuss how global Islam not only includes ideological or religious networks and "scapes," but also an economic lattice that is both Islamic and neoliberal, capitalist, and evidence of the fragmentation of identity and belonging throughout the Americas and the global *ummah*. Next, Chapter 7, "Islamophobia and the War on Terror," presents some case studies on contemporary discussions about Islam, violence, jihad, and Salafism in Latin America and the Caribbean. This chapter also provides an overview of Argentina's Muslims to further examine how they occupy a tenuous space in the American public sphere as a whole. There are both internal and external events and pressures that come to define the presence of Muslims in Argentina, including the election of public leaders, terror attacks, and a generally low public opinion of Muslims in the country. Together, these disparate narratives show the global nature of the war on terror and its inflections across the Americas. Chapter 8, "Seeking a Better World in Mexico," starts in a rural community outside San Cristóbal de las Casas in Chiapas, Mexico, and connects its story to the global diversity of Islam and Muslims present in Mexico. This chapter also explores the fortunes, fissures, and frictions between global Muslim missionaries, alter-globalization movements, the neoliberal economic world order, and religious diversity in Mexico. Chapter 9, "The Contest for Sunni Hegemony

in the Caribbean,” is based on firsthand research in Havana, Cuba, and an analysis of Turkey’s reemergence on the global scene in contestation with other actors. It introduces readers not only to the thriving Muslim community on the island, but also to the ways in which global Islam is concerned and involved with it, specifically when it comes to a contest for “Sunni hegemony” between Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Chapter 10, “The Dream of a Latinx Muslim Homeland,” relies on extensive research on Latinx Muslims in the United States to review how, and why, Latinx people convert to Islam against a backdrop of increasing religious diversity across the hemisphere. Furthermore, this chapter discusses how these conversion narratives serve as a means of community cohesion amidst significant societal pressure and multiple marginalities. Finally, it seeks to bring the conversation full circle by showing how these “dreams of al-Andalus” parallel the dreams of Muslim first contact with the Americas.

Tying in the aforementioned chapters and strands of argumentation, Chapter 11, “The Americas as Part of a Broader ‘Muslim World,’” weaves together the overall narrative and reemphasizes the book’s critical attempt to establish the story of Muslims in Latin America, the Caribbean, and across the American hemisphere, while at the same time situating the region in the narrative of global Islam.

Notes

1. For visuals of these celebrations in the past, see Alegría, *Las Fiestas de Loíza Santiago Apóstol*.

2. See Dávila, *Sponsored Identities*.

3. The term *los Moros*, used frequently in this book, is a historically ambiguous term that could refer to those from what is now modern-day Morocco or could be used as a broad signifier for “Black” or “dark-skinned” people. This means that over time, the term *Moor* (or *el Moro*) was used to refer to Africans of many kinds, Muslim and non-Muslim, from North Africa or sub-Saharan Africa. As shown in this book, it was also used at times to refer to the Indigenous peoples of the Americas and—I have been told—is still used by some to refer to Muslims in the Philippines.

4. Samuel Lind, artist, interviewed by the author, Loíza Aldea, Puerto Rico, July 24, 2017.

5. *Ibid.*

6. See Curtis, *The Bloomsbury Reader on Islam in the West*.

7. Walt Whitman, “The Spanish Element in Our Nationality,” Letter, 1883.

8. This is not to mention the “Pacific world” and its own stories and influences. This book focuses primarily on the Atlantic world.

9. See Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World*.

10. European civilization, it should be said, was also far from a unified whole in the sixteenth century.

11. See Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*.

12. Although there is more work to be done in researching Islam and Muslims in North America, there is far more research in this area when compared to the his-

tory and communities to the south. Latinx, Caribbean, and other Muslim stories from across the American hemisphere are more hidden from our historical view and our contemporary conversations.

13. Peterson and Vásquez, *Latin American Religions*, 2.
14. See Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*.
15. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 62.
16. Peterson and Vásquez, *Latin American Religions*, 254.
17. Usarski, "Editorial: The International Journal of Latin American Religions," 1–4.
18. Bilici, *Finding Mecca in America*, 9.
19. *Ibid.*, 143–144.
20. *Ibid.*, 144.
21. Curtis, *The Bloomsbury Reader on Islam in the West*, 1.
22. *Ibid.*
23. See Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam."
24. See S. Ahmed, *What Is Islam?*
25. R. Ahmed, *Sharia Compliant*, 27.
26. See Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World*; Afsaruddin, "The Myth of the Muslim World"; Amer-Meziane, "Strategic Muslim Worlds?"
27. See Shipley, Comaroff, and Mbembe, "Africa in Theory."
28. Derichs, "Shifting Epistemologies in Area Studies: From Space to Scale," 29.
29. See Cooke and Lawrence, *Muslim Networks*.
30. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.
31. See Verne, *Living Translocality Space, Culture and Economy in Contemporary Swahili Trade*; Knight, *Muhammad's Body*.
32. See Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision*; Leichtman, *Shii Cosmopolitanisms in Africa*.
33. Verne, *Living Translocality Space, Culture and Economy in Contemporary Swahili Trade*, 23–25.
34. Mian, "Shahab Ahmed's Contradictions," 240.
35. See Manjapara, *Age of Entanglement*, 6 and 291.
36. Mian, "Shahab Ahmed's Contradictions," 239–240.
37. Reese, "Islam in Africa/Africans and Islam," 18.
38. Amoruso, "Review: *Crescent over Another Horizon*," 1165.
39. This is referencing the seventh edition of Esposito's *Islam*. It must be said that I often use this text when I teach Introduction to Islam.
40. A notable exception is Westerlund and Svanberg, *Islam Outside the Arab World*, which includes a chapter on Islam in the Caribbean and Latin America by Muhammed Abdullah al-Ahari. Another is Aminah Beverly McCloud, Scott W. Hibbard, and Laith Al-Saud (eds.), *An Introduction to Islam in the 21st Century*.
41. See Feener, *Islam in World Cultures*, 1.
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*
44. See Paulson, "Critical Intimacy."
45. Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, 87.
46. See Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," 15.
47. See Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact*.
48. See Foroutan, "Misunderstood Population?" 163–176.
49. See Chitwood, "The Study of Islam and Muslim Communities in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Americas," 57–76. See also Galvan, *Latino Muslims*.
50. Elkin, *The Jews of Latin America*.
51. Mayer, "Review: *The Jews of Latin America*," 243–245.

52. Lockhart, "The Latin American Jewish Studies Association (LAJSA)," in H. Gooren, ed., *Encyclopedia of Latin American Religions*.

53. And those scholars I disagree with as well!

54. Narbona, del Mar, Pinto, and Karam, *Crescent over Another Horizon*, 6.

55. See Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road*.

56. *Ibid.*, xi.

57. The book focuses on national and regional contexts in the Americas, but also shows those communities' linkages to countries more often associated with global Islam or the Muslim world, including Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Senegal, Gambia, Morocco, Spain, Syria, Iran, Lebanon, Palestine, Libya, the United Arab Emirates, South Africa, Egypt, Jordan, and others. This is one more way I make the case that the Americas are part of the broader networks that make up global Islam, both today and over the *longue durée*.

58. Karam, "Muslim Histories in Latin America and the Caribbean," 258.