

Angela Haddad
Abstract

Syro-Lebanese Translational Narratives around the Caribbean Basin

This paper reads Syro-Lebanese literary production around the Caribbean basin alongside regulatory regimes of citizenship. As governments formulated laws surrounding the bestowing, withholding, and, even, revocation of citizenship in relation to nationalist discourses of identity, members of the Syro-Lebanese community took to the region's intellectual and literary scenes. There, Syro-Lebanese newspaper collaborators, short-story writers, translators of Arabic texts into French and Spanish, and conference presenters like Salim Aun (Haiti and the Dominican Republic), Habib Estefano (Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic), Aquiles Nimer (the Dominican Republic), and Antonio Saab (Colombia) generated narratives that sought to 'translate' their ethnic migrant community as 'naturalizable' with regards to political access to the nation. Their narratives prominently incorporated tropes about past civilizations around the Mediterranean like Pharaonic Egypt, Phoenicia, and al-Andalus alongside contemporary articulations of mass emigration, both of which had gained literary traction during the Nahda (Arab Renaissance) from the 19th century to the early 20th century as nationalist sentiments solidified. My comparison of their works with those of the same theme by intellectuals in places like Mount Lebanon, Beirut, and Egypt as well as with texts by intellectuals around the Caribbean Basin concerned with national identity suggests that Syro-Lebanese migrants both fully engaged with nationalist rhetorics in the Eastern Mediterranean and necessarily reformulated them to make themselves legible to local audiences contending with racialized claims on the nation. The paper interrogates these representations of 'Mediterranean culture' by its 'representatives' through critical theories of Orientalism and translation within the context of migration.