



Interlopers of Empire: The Lebanese Diaspora in Colonial French West Africa

Andrew Arsan

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This work is the first comprehensive history of the Lebanese migrant communities of colonial French West Africa, a vast expanse that covered present-day Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Guinea, Benin and Mauritania. Where others have concentrated on the commercial activities of these migrants, casting them as archetypal middlemen, this work reconstructs not just their economic strategies, but also their social and political lives. Moreover, it examines the fraught responses of colonial Frenchmen to the unsettling presence of these interlopers of empire--responses which, with their echoes of metropolitan racism, helped to shape the ways in which Lebanese migrants represented themselves and justified their place in West Africa. This is a work which attempts not just to reshape broader understandings of diasporic life--of Janus-like existences lived in transit between distant locales, and dependent on the constant to-and-fro of people, news, and goods--but also to challenge the way we think about empires, and the relations between their constituent territories and diverse inhabitants.

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