

**UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL BULLETIN  
ANNOUNCEMENT**

**Florida International University**  
*University Graduate School*

Doctoral Dissertation Defense

**Abstract**

Our Representative on This Island: Local Belonging and Transnational Citizenship among  
Syrian and Lebanese Cubans, 1880-1980

by

**John Ermer**

This dissertation reveals how vernacular understandings of citizenship in Cuba and the Levante, based on locally derived conceptions of belonging, contended with liberalizing legal reforms meant to redefine citizenship as a state-focused and legible status. As a mobile population caught between empires, states, and these rival citizenship regimes, Lebanese and Syrian migrants and their descendants in Cuba cultivated transnational networks and conceptions of citizenship defined by fluid and diasporic understandings of belonging. This study reveals how Cuba played a pivotal role in an Atlantic world shaped by movement and shifting sovereignties. In a world of shifting imperial systems and nationalist movements, *mahjaris* in Cuba leveraged their transnational networks to advocate on their behalf in Cuba and to exercise political influence in the Levant. When state-focused regimes of belonging finally prevailed on the island, many descendants of the original *muhajarin* who came to Cuba from the Levant, but certainly not all, again turned to their networks of travel and communication to find new homes.

**Date:** June 16, 2021  
**Time:** 12:00 P.M.  
**Place:** Zoom

**Department:** History  
**Major Professor:** Dr. Bianca Premo