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ANNE MONSOUR, *Not Quite White: Lebanese and the White Australia Policy, 1880 to 1947* (Brisbane: Post Pressed, 2010). Pp. 216. $45.65 paper. ISBN 9781921214547.

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After receiving Anne Monsour's book *Not Quite White* to review, I put it on my bookshelf at work to read a little further down the track. Taking it home one day a few weeks later, I discovered I mistakenly had picked up the wrong book. I also had on the shelf a copy of a book by Matt Wray with the same main title, but the sub-title "white trash and the boundaries of whiteness."[1] Since I was not going to get to read Monsour's book that evening, I flicked through Wray's monograph instead. Though exploring a different topic—the emergence of the pejorative term "white trash" to describe a segment of the American population—there were sections of this book, that I discovered later, resonated with Monsour's work. In setting out the theoretical framework for his argument Wary returns to the eugenics and scientific material of the late nineteenth century, where the "classifying impulse" was on show.[2] Included in his book are illustrations of two popular racial classification schemes of the time. In both of the schema, from the 1895 *Funk and Wagnall Standard Dictionary of the English Language*, Syrians appear classified—both in a table and through images—as "EurAfrican (Caucasian)." Wray uses these illustrations to establish his argument about boundaries and notes "[the] unstable and inconstant quality of boundaries directs our attention to the social interactions among those on either side of the boundary and to the social interactions across the boundary."[3]

Anne Monsour's book is a detailed study of the shifting and sometime porous boundary that separated Lebanese Australians from other groups within the country. Monsour explores the complex relationship of this small but significant group of migrants with the state, their local community and each other. The book covers the late

colonial period, when as Monsour notes the laws around immigration were less consistent and less rigid, through the period of federation when laws were explicitly racially exclusionary, until the end of the 1940s when there were considerable changes in the number of migrants arriving and the law also changed significantly with the introduction of the *Citizenship Act* (1948).

Monsour has written what is today understood as transnational history. It is an exploration of the local experiences of Lebanese settlers in (mostly) Queensland through their social, economic, and political lives. This local approach is embedded in the national history of Australia and the messy, racially inflected development of immigration policy and narratives of national identity. The third element of the history is the relationship of the Lebanese settlers with their country or region of origin. The reader develops a good sense of this community in relation to global phenomena and political changes across the early twentieth century—including World War I, neo- and decolonization processes. Monsour makes the point early on that Lebanese settlers thought of themselves in relation to their village of birth and their religion. In this sense Monsour's history lays out the process by which the settlers themselves, the local police, colonial and then later federal governments and other Australians negotiated the re-identification of this group of settlers. Over time and space, these Lebanese settlers in Australia imagined themselves in terms of their families, their home villages, their new towns or regions, as British subjects, naturalized Australians and citizens.

As Monsour's sub-title suggests, the white Australia policy was a racialized discourse that shaped individual and community lives alike. At the most basic level, this policy changed the speed of immigration—creating a "gap" in arrivals between the start of the twentieth century until the 1920s. The *Immigration Restriction Act* was refined and amended over the first half of the twentieth century and this had an impact on the ways in which the longer term and new Lebanese settlers interacted with the state. For example, as Monsour explains, the Australian state's classification of Lebanese people as "Aboriginal natives of Asia" was grounds for exclusion from naturalization; yet their "racial" classification as European, or the everyday understandings of them as sometimes fair skinned destabilized this categorizing. As a result, there was room for maneuver. Monsour's thorough and close examination of archival records enables her to show the ways in which the "rules" were manipulated or understandings of who the Lebanese were changed.

Drawing on sources such as letters, police records, and parliamentary correspondence, she maps the various arguments put forward by migrants, their legal counsel and supporters for their acceptance as "white" and so their eligibility for naturalization; as well as the counter arguments that were raised.

The archival evidence that Monsour presents brings to mind dictionary illustrations that Wray uses in his book to show how racial classification worked. In their correspondence with Minister's who were considering reviewing or their cases, the Lebanese settlers draw on the Social Darwinist logic that was so popular at the time. For example, one merchant, who was active in challenging the state—Wadih Abourizk—explained to the Prime Minister: "Syrians are Caucasians, and they are a white race as much as the English. Their looks, habits, customs, religions, blood, are those of Europeans, but they are more intelligent" (43). Similar forensic analyses took place in the Department of External Affairs, with public servants providing responses and legal opinions: "They hold that they belong to Caucasian stock and that therefore the fact that they are born on Asiatic soil should not stamp them as 'Asiatics' in the general acceptance to that term as understood in connection with the administration of the Act" (44). What Monsour makes clear is the liminal space occupied by Lebanese settlers in Australia. They were, as she demonstrates, not clearly excludable, but not obviously includable in the nation. They were "not quite white." The author's analysis brings to mind Ghassan Hage's argument of the restricted or partial way in which non-white immigrants are "invited" into the nation. They may be welcomed as "Australian"—offered naturalization or citizenship status—but they are never considered to be members of the category of "white." This is the racialized-national category kept only for Australian-Britons.[4]

One of the strengths of Monsour's book is her demonstration of the resistance and responses of the Lebanese settlers to this half-hearted acceptance. She demonstrates that the settlers always understood how they were positioned in the Australian national imaginary and illustrates the series of techniques and arguments they drew on in order to try to contest their classification and to fit in. Wadih Abourizk's formal advocacy is one such technique. Community leaders, wealthy members of society, and later members of parliament used their influence and cultural capital to petition on behalf of the community for formal or legal changes to exclusionary legislation. Other individuals drew on their knowledge of the racialized system that was being used to classify them and rewrote their racial identity. Monsour

gives examples of settlers claiming their place of birth as Constantinople knowing it was understood as a part of Europe and so changing the legal perception of who they were.

The struggle of Lebanese settlers in Australia is not one that is undertaken on the docks. The myth, still circulating today through the story of the influx of refugee boats, is that non-white migrants illegally appear in Australian ports. As with so many other migrants, Lebanese settlers arrived in a formal and legal manner. What Monsour does note is that different from many other groups of migrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Lebanese arrived as families. This had an impact on how they were viewed by Anglo-Australians, but it also meant that even though increased post-1901 immigration restriction might have slowed down the entry of non-white migrants, there was a natural growth of the Lebanese community in Australia. Monsour thus spends much of the second half of her book exploring community life in the period of the white Australia policy. Issues of employment, language, education and religion are analyzed through another archive—a series of in-depth interviews with first, second and third generation Lebanese Australians. Here the reader gets an even richer sense of the lives of this group of migrants—the ongoing exclusion and racism, as well as the rich family and community life, that included both this diaspora and the relatives who remained in the villages of Lebanon.

Monsour explores the economic lives of Lebanese settlers through case studies of families who arrived in New South Wales and Queensland in the 1890s and then 1920s. Through these detailed cases, she maps out the logic for the geographic spread of settlement in country towns across the two states, as well as the propensity to take up work in the retail trade and to maintain independent businesses. In these chapters the reader builds a clear picture of the ties that link what seem like isolated families so far from their birth village and from other Lebanese settlers in Australia. The place of hawking in the employment history of these settlers is thoroughly surveyed. This enables Monsour to link the everyday experience of individuals, couples, and families to state policy. What becomes clear is that the role of the local police was key to the surveillance and classification of Lebanese settlers, as white or otherwise, as productive or idle. Across the book, Monsour draws on the myriad (though still incomplete) police records that capture the lives of the settlers. There are reports where the local constabulary kept tabs on a family or a single man, or a couple moving through a town. There are reports where they supported Lebanese settlers they know

well and who they see as important to the town in their quest for naturalization or the renewal of a license; or where they were instrumental in surveillance that lead to the rejection of applications for work or recognition.

One of the most poignant sections of the book is the one that explores language. Here again Monsour links local history to the national and global, explaining the different sets of knowledge different groups of migrants brought with them as a result of the changing colonial landscape in Lebanon. As scholars of immigration well know, language is an important cultural marker for communities and its everyday use or loss shapes the life of a diaspora. The stories of learning English, but also losing Arabic produce a powerful picture of the migrant experience. There are the stories in Monsour's book of being embarrassed when parents spoke Arabic in public, alongside the stories of racist mutterings to "talk Australian" or go home. Monsour ends her book with the question of identity—Lebanese? Lebanese-Australian or Australian? The variety of answers from Monsour's participants demonstrate that for many Lebanese people today some of the same issues that shaped the lives of their great-great grandparents still affect them today.

NOTES

[1] Matt Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

[2] Ibid., 9–13.

[3] Ibid., 14.

[4] Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1998).