Anne Monsour

UNDESIRABLE ALIEN TO GOOD CITIZEN:
SYRIAN/LEBANESE IN A "WHITE" AUSTRALIA

Abstract
Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the arrival in Australia of increasing numbers of immigrants from Syria/Lebanon coincided with a period of economic insecurity and burgeoning white, Christian nationalism. Consequently, although influenced by many factors, the settlement experience of these immigrants, who were identified as non-white, non-European and officially classified as Asian, was fundamentally shaped by racially exclusive government legislation and policies formed within the transnational context of the politics of whiteness. Rejecting their classification as Asian, the immigrants did not contest whiteness as the criterion for acceptability but argued they had erroneously been excluded from the "white race." Using their physical appearance, Christian religion, and the presence of a significant proportion of women to support their case, Syrian/Lebanese and their advocates argued they were white, European, and Christian and hence possessed the necessary qualities to be good citizens.

INTRODUCTION
In 1893, a Sydney newspaper claimed, "that bad as the bulk of the Chinese are as colonists, the bulk of the Syrians . . . are infinitely worse."[1] Not only was their lifestyle "inconceivably disgusting," Syrians were also "a most objectionable class to have in any community."[2] In the same year, the New South Wales Parliament noted that magistrates were refusing to grant hawker's licenses to Syrians because they "were not a desirable class of colonists" and the colony would be better off without them.[3] Similar sentiments were evident in a parliamentary notice of motion claiming:

> . . . that the continued influx of aliens, such as Syrians, Afghans, and other Asiatics, was a menace and danger to the peace and welfare of the European and native-born population, and that

Anne Monsour is a professional historian with a PhD from the University of Queensland. Email: annemonsourqld@gmail.com

immediate steps be taken to prevent further arrivals of these people, and that separate quarters be allocated to those already here.[4]

As these examples show, when Syrian/Lebanese began arriving in the Australian colonies in increasing numbers in the early 1890s, they were immediately described as non-white, identified as non-European, and characterized as undesirable immigrants.[5] Yet, by the 1920s, Syrian/Lebanese had convinced the Australian Government their official categorization as Asian was essentially inappropriate and as a consequence were exempted from some of the restrictions non-Europeans faced. These concessions were gained not through the immigrants contesting whiteness as the criterion for acceptability but through their insistence they had erroneously been excluded from the "white race." Using their physical appearance, Christian religion, and the presence of a significant proportion of women to support their case, Syrian/Lebanese and their advocates argued they were white, European, and Christian and hence possessed the necessary qualities to be good citizens.

Although grounded in the story of one nation and its reception of a particular group of immigrants, the experience of Syrian/Lebanese in Australia is part of "the global ascendancy of the politics of whiteness" and therefore also part of a transnational history.[6] In *Drawing the Global Ccolour Line*, Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds "trace the transnational circulation of emotions and ideas, people and publications, racial knowledge and technologies that animated white men's countries and their strategies of exclusion, deportation and segregation."[7] The settlement experience of Syrian/Lebanese in Australia in the period 1880 to 1947 reveals the interplay of several factors including the continent's geography and style of development, the segregation of Syrian/Lebanese in petty commercial occupations, the class and gender of the early immigrants, and their obvious intention to settle permanently. However, because modern Australia, in common with other colonial settler societies, was conceived as a "white", "civilized" nation, race and religion were the defining factors.[8] This article examines how these ideals, actualized through discriminatory legislation, impacted the early Syrian/Lebanese immigrants and the resulting interaction between the immigrants and the "white" nation-state. It also considers how Syrian/Lebanese immigrants engaged with issues of race and identity. Their need and willingness to validate their "whiteness" resonates with Sarah

Gualtieri's findings in her study of early Syrian immigrants in the United States.[9] Hence this discussion contributes to the comparative and transnational understanding of the ways Syrian/Lebanese immigrants engaged with racial formations.

CONNECTING AUSTRALIA AND THE MASHRIQ

As "the overwhelming majority of its current inhabitants are either immigrants or descendants of immigrants arriving in the past two centuries," contemporary Australia is essentially "the product of immigration."[10] In the Australian context, government intervention significantly determined the nature and timing of immigrant intakes and, consequently, the composition of the Australian population.[11] From 1788 until the end of the White Australia Policy in the 1970s, Australian immigration policy was based on two main objectives: to build a community based on predominately British immigrants and to exclude non-European settlers.[12] The fundamental significance of race is not surprising considering modern Australia's origins as a British colony, established through the dispossession and near destruction of its Indigenous population, intent on repopulating the continent with people of Anglo-Celtic, or at the least, European origin.[13] So, in the period 1880 to 1947, identified as the first phase of Syrian/Lebanese migration to Australia, the immigrants entered a society characterized by a reluctance to accept European immigrants and a "deeply rooted fear of non-European immigration."[14] Australia's restrictive immigration policies were so successful that in 1947, 99 percent of Australians were white, and 90 percent were of Anglo-Celtic origin.[15]

The arrival of increasing numbers of Syrian/Lebanese in Australia in the last two decades of the nineteenth century was part of a mass emigration from the Syria/Lebanon region. According to Samir Khalaf, there is "virtual consensus" that in the 1890s there was a "sharp and sudden" increase in emigration from Syria and Lebanon.[16] Until the beginning of World War I, the number of people departing persistently increased, leaving entire regions underpopulated.[17] In a sample of 472 Syrian/Lebanese located in Queensland in the period 1880 to 1949, three appear in the records in 1884.[18] By 1890, there were thirty-one, including six women. More than six times as many, 194, arrived in the colony between 1890 and 1899. This significant increase mirrors the general pattern of emigration from Syria and Lebanon; the initially small number of emigrants in the 1870s increased significantly in the 1880s, and by the 1890s had become a major exodus. According to Mary Wilke, the height of emigration from Lebanon, Turkey, and

Syria occurred between 1900 and 1914, with roughly 15,000 persons leaving each year.[19] Yet, this increase is not reflected in the number of Syrian/Lebanese arriving in Australia. Between 1900 and 1909, the number of arrivals in Queensland, for example, actually dropped by more than 50 percent to eighty-seven.[20] Then, between 1910 and 1919, even fewer (thirty-five) Syrian/Lebanese came to Queensland.[21]

The increase in Syrian/Lebanese arrivals in the 1890s coincided with a period of burgeoning nationalism and economic insecurity due to an economic decline, extreme drought and high unemployment.[22] Throughout this decade, greatly influenced by transnational histories, knowledge and ideas, Australia's political leaders worked to shape a constitution and to draft legislation intended to guarantee the emerging Commonwealth of Australia would be a "civilized," white nation:

> White men's countries rested on the premise that multiracial democracy was an impossibility: this was the key history lesson learnt from the great tragedy of Radical Reconstruction in the United States, propounded by numerous writers including the British Liberal politician and historian, James Bryce, whose *American Commonwealth* was taken up as a 'Bible' by white nation-builders in Australia and South Africa.[23]

In these circumstances, non-Europeans were increasingly viewed as a threat and anti-Chinese legislation was extended to all Asian and colored persons.[24] In 1901, Australia's founding fathers immediately legislated to expel the Pacific Islanders brought to work in the tropical sugar cane fields and then to exclude non-whites from entry.[25] As the figures in Table 1 indicate, between 1880 and 1947 Syrian/Lebanese immigration to Australia is most accurately divided into two periods: unrestricted and restricted. The dramatic increase in arrivals throughout the 1890s was effectively reversed by the implementation of the *Immigration Restriction Act* of 1901. After this year, the decision to come to Australia was no longer as simple as being able to afford the fare; for Syrian/Lebanese, entry was now dependent on either passing the dictation test, having an exemption permit approved by the minister, or being considered eligible for an exemption permit by being a former resident, or the wife or child of a man not deemed a "prohibited immigrant."[26] Therefore, regardless of the push factors in their homeland, after 1901, it was primarily the implementation of the

Immigration Restriction Act that determined the character of Syrian/Lebanese immigration and the subsequent settlement pattern.

TABLE 1: SYRIAN/LEBANESE ARRIVALS IN QUEENSLAND

Years	Men	Women	Total
1880-1889	25	6	31
1890-1899	138	56	194
1900-1909	59	28	87
1910-1919	23	12	35
1920-1929	59	24	83
1930-1939	15	12	27
1940-1949	7	1	8
Unknown	4	3	7
Total	**330**	**142**	**472**

Source: Government records 1870–1949

Due to the success of the *Immigration Restriction Act*, before the 1950s the number of people born in Syria/Lebanon and living in Australia was always relatively small (see Table 2). However, although the Act put an end to the unrestricted entry of Syrian/Lebanese, for reasons that will be discussed later, at the discretion of consecutive ministers limited numbers with well-established family or friends were allowed to enter the Commonwealth.[27] Because only Syrian/Lebanese who already had family or friends living in Australia were accepted as immigrants, a pattern of clustered settlement based on family and village ties within geographic regions was entrenched.[28] One or two members of a family, usually the original immigrants, settled in a particular place and then brought other siblings or relatives from Lebanon and settled them in the same district. This pattern was reinforced because immigrant settlement was left entirely to relatives or to voluntary agencies.[29] So, not only did the new arrivals owe their entry into Australia to their sponsors, who were typically family members, they also depended on them to find employment and accommodation, to learn English, and to understand the customs of the new society. So, the chain migration pattern often identified as a characteristic of Syrian/Lebanese immigration was actually a direct result of the successful implementation of the 1901 *Immigration Restriction Act*.

TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF SYRIAN/LEBANESE BORN IN
AUSTRALIA 1901–1947

State	1901	1911	1921	1933	1947
New South Wales	734	763	850	1,144	1,118
Victoria	359	327	401	288	217
Queensland	345	152	169	242	260
South Australia	—	187	151	303	253
Western Australia	—	55	190	19	21
Tasmania	60	57	42	21	14
Australian Capital Territory	—	1	0	3	3
Total	1,498	1,542	1,803	2,020	1,886

Source: Commonwealth Censuses 1911–1947[30]

NEGOTIATING A PLACE IN "WHITE AUSTRALIA"

As well as restricting the entry of non-Europeans, the White Australia
Policy sought to make life so uncomfortable for those already living in
Australia they would leave. In the first part of the twentieth century,
legislative discrimination increasingly segregated non-Europeans from
the mainstream of Australian society.[31] The determination of the
Anglo-Celtic majority to deny equal rights to people of non-European
origin is illustrated by the consistent bipartisan support for legislation
excluding non-European settlers from basic rights and privileges.
Institutionalized discrimination imposed on non-Europeans by state
and commonwealth legislation was pervasive and included: exclusion
from certain industries and occupations; denial of the right to vote or
stand for parliament; exclusion from citizenship, restrictions on their
ability to hold leases and own property, and disqualification from
social services such as the invalid and old-age pensions.[32] The existence
of widespread legislative discrimination against non-Europeans in
employment significantly restricted the available choices.[33]
Consequently, hawking and shop keeping were occupations
Syrian/Lebanese were able to develop and sustain because they were
marginal economic activities that did not directly threaten the
employment prospects of white Australians.[34]

Although several factors influenced the distinct settlement
pattern of Syrian/Lebanese in Australia from 1880 to 1947, race based
immigration restriction and legislative discrimination in employment
were evidently the most important. Australia is a vast area. It is also a

country characterized by a high resource potential relative to its small population, and a pattern of economic development dependent on the export of primary products.[35] The wide dispersion of resources resulted in a spread of economic activity and population, a persistent emphasis on rural development, and serious problems of distance and accessibility. Due to the success of the *Immigration Restriction Act*, the number of Syrian/Lebanese was always small. As a result of discrimination in employment most of the early immigrants were self-employed in commercial occupations and this common occupational pathway contributed to a widely dispersed settlement pattern.[36] Although family members may have wanted to live close to each other, their pursuit of the same occupation often meant it was not economically viable to live in the same town. This meant family and friends from the same village often settled in separate towns within the same region.

Until 1947, the majority of Syrian/Lebanese in New South Wales lived in country towns and it was unusual "to find more than one or two Syrian families in each country town."[37] McKay linked this settlement pattern directly with the Syrian/Lebanese immigrants' occupations because according to anecdotal evidence, "there was an unwritten economic law that a Syrian would not open business against another Syrian unless the town could clearly support two businesses."[38] The settlement pattern in Queensland mirrors that in New South Wales.[39] Dispersed settlement inhibited the development of a significant concentration of Syrian/Lebanese except in Sydney and to a lesser extent, Melbourne. Conceivably, this meant Syrian/Lebanese were perceived as less threatening. However, while their isolation from other Syrian/Lebanese may have resulted in their presence being tolerated, it increased the already strong pressure to conform and limited the experience of being Syrian/Lebanese to contact with extended family.

While early Syrian/Lebanese migration is often characterized as predominately male, from its inception, Syrian/Lebanese immigration to Australia included a significant number of women. This is obvious from official records. Daher Aboud migrated in 1884 with his wife Karma and their six children.[40] Mary Malouf arrived with her husband and two young sons in 1889.[41] Having arrived in Queensland in 1894, Jacob Adymee was, in 1901, living in the town of Ilfracombe with his wife and five children.[42] Katoora Dahur, a widow, arrived in Brisbane in 1895 with her four children to join her brother, Calile Malouf, who had arrived with his wife and young family a few

years earlier.[43] When Joseph Gabriel landed in Adelaide in 1896, he was accompanied by his wife and baby.[44] In 1892, the *Illustrated Sydney News* portrayed the "typical Syrian hawker" as a woman with a child on her hip and a basket of goods on her arm, and claimed these women were a familiar sight in most Australian cities.[45] Reports on the granting of hawker's licenses by the Licensing Court at Redfern, Sydney confirm the involvement of Syrian/Lebanese women in hawking: in 1898, thirty-five of the ninety- three Syrian applicants were women; in 1899, of the ninety-one Syrians applying for a hawker's license, forty were women; and in 1902, of the sixteen licenses granted to Syrians, eleven were for women.[46]

The presence of women and children was noted and was an important characteristic that favorably distinguished Syrians from other Asians. In January 1893, it was estimated "the Syrian contingent of hawkers" in Redfern, Sydney numbered "at least 1500 persons, including men, women and children."[47] Despite authorities prohibiting them from landing in Adelaide, twenty-three Syrians (nine men, six women, and eight children) were allowed to spend a day sightseeing in Melbourne en route to Sydney.[48] In 1903, many of Melbourne's Syrians were evidently living in families: "Exhibition street to-day is largely Syrian, and promises to be still more largely so in the near future, as brown, bandy-legged, fat little children scramble out of every other doorway in dozens."[49] The family character of Syrian/Lebanese migration meant they were perceived to be settlers rather than sojourners. Even in 1893, the Syrians who settled in the Redfern district of Sydney were perceived to "have come to stay."[50] Unlike the Indians and Chinese who were predominately male, Syrians had families to support, so it was not feared their earnings would be exported overseas.[51] In an era when interracial marriage was feared, the presence of women from the initial migration meant Syrian/Lebanese men, unlike their Chinese and Indian counterparts, were not seen as a threat to white women or to the goal of racial purity.[52]

Although early Syrian/Lebanese emigrants are often described as poor, unskilled and illiterate peasants, it is quite evident some of the earliest immigrants who came to Australia were neither poor nor uneducated.[53] Joseph George Malouf, described in 1909 as "one of Redfern's leading and highly-esteemed citizens," was educated at the American University in Beirut.[54] As Malouf commenced business as a draper and merchant in Sydney soon after his arrival in 1888, he had obviously already accumulated the necessary capital.[55] This was also the case for Stanton Melick who established the firm of *Stanton Melick*

Warehousemen, Importers and Manufacturers in Sydney in 1888.[56] Encouraged by his initial success, Melick sent for his brother, Aziz, a student at the American Protestant College in Beirut.[57] Two of the earliest Syrian/Lebanese to settle in Queensland, the brothers, Joseph and Richard Arida were obviously well educated and well-traveled. According to the Postmaster in Charters Towers, Richard Arida was ". . . well educated, has travelled extensively and speaks several languages, is on the committee of the School of Arts and other local institutions. In every respect he is regarded as a good citizen."[58] Similar observations were made about his brother, Joseph, who ". . . prior to coming to Australia was all over the world, and holds recommendations from the Governments of various American and European countries. He speaks 7 languages and was an honorary correspondence [sic] for some leading newspapers in America and Australia."[59] In 1886, the Arida brothers opened a store in the north Queensland town of Charters Towers. This was the first in a chain of stores, which they established in towns across north-western Queensland.

Newspaper reports also indicate the early immigrants were from various class backgrounds. In 1891, when Joseph Chehab was charged with the attempted murder of his business partner, Abraham Kahled, the victim and the accused were described as "men of some social standing and of no little education":

> Kahled in particular is a brilliant linguist, and Chebab was said by his countrymen to hold a rank equivalent to the European title of "Count." They appear to have been educated together at the Catholic Mission schools at Beyrout, and after a term of business partnership in Syria, came to Victoria . . . and started the Lonsdale street business, which is now carried on at two separate branches . . . and is estimated to command a stock of over £4,000 in value. Both speak English with more or less fluency, and are altogether of superior class.[60]

The Syrians in Redfern in 1893 were observed to be "divided into two classes—the merchants or employers," the "better class of Syrians," and "the hawkers" who purchased goods from these merchants.[61] A similar class division was identified in the Melbourne Syrian community, which also included watchmakers, carpenters, blacksmiths and even farmers.[62] Despite only a "few" having been

"properly educated in their own country," purportedly, "the majority of the local residents" could "speak and write English with ease."[63] J.M. Faway, the "recognized head of the Syrian community in Melbourne" and a graduate of Beirut University was actively engaged "in the education and improvement of his countrymen," particularly through the Syrian Young Men's Club of Melbourne which he initiated.[64] In 1908, advocates for the Syrian, Alec George James, who faced deportation as "a colored alien," argued James was "not a low-caste 'black,' but as white as many Australians, and a fairly well-educated young man of the middle classes."[65] Furthermore, as he was not illiterate or "a pauper, who had come to be a burden to the State" but the son of "a fairly well-to-do shopkeeper and manufacturer of soft goods in Adelaide" who "sent for his son to assist him in his business . . . the cause for deportation is hard to conceive."[66]

Comments in archival records and anecdotal evidence also confirm the immigrants' varied class background. In 1903, a member of parliament described Mary Michael, a Syrian/Lebanese woman, as well educated and able to read, write, and speak three languages.[67] Joseph Mansour, who arrived in Australia in 1897, was reported to have had a good education and to be "a most cultured and deserving man."[68] Similarly, in 1899, Daher Aboud was described as well-educated and as having brought a lot of money into the colony.[69] In deliberations regarding the status of Syrian/Lebanese in Australia, the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, Atlee Hunt, noted Syrians were "moderately educated but occasionally men are met who are highly trained and who speak several languages."[70] Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Queensland colonial government

TABLE 3: OCCUPATION OF FATHERS AS NOTED IN MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE

Occupation	Number
Tradesperson/artisan	10
Carrier	6
Manufacturer	1
Merchant/storekeeper	10
Public servant	1
Farmer	13
Other	2
Total	**43**

Source: Marriage Certificates in Naturalization Records (1880 to 1947, QSA & NAA), in FamilyHistories or Produced as Part of an Oral History Interview.

required documentary proof of marriage if naturalization was to be approved. As the occupations of the bride and groom's parents are noted on marriage certificates, these provide information about pre-migration, socio-economic status. As Table 3 shows, less than one third of this sample of early immigrants described their parents as farmers. In a few cases, the occupation of the immigrants prior to emigration was recorded. Although statistically insignificant, this information, listed in Table 4, illustrates a variety of occupational backgrounds. Arguably, the available evidence suggests it is too simplistic to characterize early Syrian/Lebanese immigrants as unskilled peasants.

TABLE 4: OCCUPATIONAL BACKGROUND OF SYRIAN/LEBANESE WHO ARRIVED IN AUSTRALIA BEFORE 1900

Occupation	Number
Shoemaker/Bootmaker	2
Blacksmith	1
Pottery Maker	1
Tailor	1
Farmer	4
Wool Spinner	1
Merchant	2
English Teacher	1
Picture Frame Maker	1

Source: Naturalization Records 1880 to 1947, QSA & NAA.

Importantly, the immigrants who were educated, skilled in a trade, or from a wealthy background were able to advocate for the improved status of Syrian/Lebanese in Australia and they did so from the early days of migration. J.M. Faway who founded the Syrian Young Men's Club of Melbourne also tirelessly worked to overcome "the Australian prejudice against the Syrian – founded on the mistaken belief that his people were an inferior and degraded race."[71] In 1893, in the midst of increasing opposition to the perceived "Syrian Invasion," Abraham Khaled, Chancellor of the Turkish Consulate and Joseph Arida both

wrote to the *Sydney Morning Herald* in defense of Syrians. If not confused with Afghans or Hindus, Khaled argued, Syrians would "be found clean, civil, energetic and economical."[72] According to Arida, Syrians were not colored, but Christian and European, and contrary to the complaints made about them, were generally industrious, hospitable, and honest.[73] In 1896, a deputation representing Syrians in New South Wales met the premier to discuss concerns about the provisions of the proposed Coloured Races Restriction Bill.[74] The deputation, which included "B. Shehadi (government interpreter), J.G. Malouf, Jacob Moses, Stanton Mellick, F.E. Zaccour, and A. Mellick," argued Syrians were not colored but Caucasian and differed from other Asians because "[w]e don't send money away to Asia. We live, work, and spend our money in the colony. We don't want to go back to a country where despotism reigns supreme. We prefer a civilised and a Christian country, and I think that we should be welcomed."[75] While this lobbying had little immediate effect, many of the points put forward by these initial advocates were eventually accepted as valid and consequently, Syrian/Lebanese were treated more leniently than other non-Europeans. While the presence of women and children visibly differentiated Syrian/Lebanese from other Asians, and educated and wealthy individuals were able to lobby for equal rights, ultimately race and religion were the most important factors contributing to this change in attitude.

RELIGION AS A MARKER OF WHITENESS
With the exception of a small number of Druze, the Syrian/Lebanese immigrants who came to Australia from the 1880s to 1947 were Maronite, Melkite, and Orthodox Christians.[76] If any were actually Muslim, this is not evident in the archival or anecdotal sources. Early newspaper reports clearly identify Syrian/Lebanese as Christian.[77] Politicians and bureaucrats also recognized the Syrians were mainly Christian. In 1909, Egerton Batchelor, the Minister for External Affairs observed that the religion of a Syrian was "very often the same as ours."[78] Similarly, in 1914, the Chief Clerk of the Department of External Affairs noted Syrians "all belong to the Christian faith."[79] According to Atlee Hunt, the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, Syrians were "practically all Christians being adherents either of the Greek Church or of a Church affiliated with the Roman Catholic."[80] While some Ottoman immigrants to Australia were Muslim, in 1922 a government memorandum noted that: "The number of Turks of Ottoman characteristics in Australia is negligible. There are

no prominent members of the race and the true representatives of the Crescent—Mohammedan in religion and Turkish in national viewpoints—probably number not more than the fingers of one hand."[81] The official statistics support this observation. In Victoria in 1922, the total number of people regarded as Turkish subjects was 160: 119 of these were Syrians, three were Armenians, thirty-five were Palestinian Jews, and only three were Ottoman Turks.[82]

Because Christianity is an important component of whiteness, the predominance of Christians in early Syrian/Lebanese migration added to an evident confusion about their racial identity and was a significant bargaining point in their bid for equal status. In government records, the immigrants and their advocates repeatedly highlight their Christian faith as a positive attribute. Joseph Abdullah who was refused citizenship in 1903 as he was a single, Asiatic male, disputed his categorization as Asian because like "the rest of the people of Australia," he was a Christian.[83] Similarly, when declared ineligible for citizenship on racial grounds, Joseph Morad argued that as a Christian, he was surely "eligible to become a subject of the King."[84] Advocating on behalf of a Syrian/Lebanese client they described as "a sober steady man," solicitors also noted he was, like his father before him, a Roman Catholic.[85] In 1919, a solicitor acting on behalf of Joseph Mansour, argued the Syrian people were not aboriginal natives of Asia: they were "a civilized Christian race" and "descendants of the Crusaders, from Europe."[86] Also making this point, Richard Saleeby noted his family name was literally the Arabic word for crusaders.[87] Whether these claims were legitimate or not, the professed links with European crusaders were obviously intended to imply that Christian Syrian/Lebanese were more European than Asian.

Their historical link to the origins of Christianity was also used in advocacy. In 1896, writing on behalf of "the Syrian colonists," a "Syrian Merchant" pleaded guilty to the "charge" of being Asian "for we belong to the same race as our Saviour, Jesus Christ."[88] In his decade long bid for naturalization, Michael Malouf consistently referred to his Christian faith and emphasized the depth and authenticity of his Christian heritage. His assertion that his parents fled from "Lebanon, Palestine," when he was a "child in arms" was clearly intended to invoke biblical overtones.[89] In the Naturalization Bill debate in 1903, objecting to an amendment that would exclude Syrians, as "aboriginal natives of Asia," from naturalization, Senator Thomas Playford reminded the "honorable senators" Syrians "were of the same race as the great founder of Christianity."[90] However, advocacy seeking to

distance Syrian/Lebanese from the disabilities imposed on Asians through discriminatory legislation did not rely solely on their Christian credentials but also on the assertion they were white and European.

RACIAL "SUCCESS"

In *Asian Migration to Australia*, Alexander Yarwood concluded Syrians were eventually accepted as immigrants and as citizens because they were perceived to be racially similar to the host population.[91] This conferred with Jens Lyng's claim, thirty-two years earlier, that Syrians were not treated by the Australian immigration authorities as "pure Asiatics" because, while the majority belonged to the "Semitic family," there was "a large element of pure whites in Syria of the Mediterranean strain."[92] According to Lyng, it was "owing to this fact" that Syrians were able to "obtain permission to enter and settle in Australia."[93] These observations by Yarwood and Lyng, emphasize the significance of physical appearance, including skin color, in relation to the implementation of the White Australia Policy, and indicate an uncertainty about the racial identity of Syrian/Lebanese. Indeed, there is strong evidence of an ongoing ambivalence regarding the "race" of these immigrants which ultimately worked in their favor.

Although early newspaper reports identify Syrians as non-white, non-European aliens, they also reveal a lingering doubt about their racial classification. In 1892, the *Illustrated Sydney News* claimed Syrians in Sydney were sometimes incorrectly called "Assyrians" and to their detriment were also "frequently credited with the nationality of Afghans, Indians, Greeks, Italians, and other peoples."[94] According to Abraham Khaled many of the complaints about Syrians were due to them being confused with "Hindoos and Afghans."[95] While the often repeated claim "Indians, Afghans, and Arabians" were mistakenly identified as Syrians may have been true, it was also a strategy to distance Syrians from the extremely strong anti-Asian sentiments increasingly expressed through the 1890s.[96] Newspaper reports also indicate doubts about whether Syrians were colored or white. Three Syrian men allowed to enter South Australia in controversial circumstances in 1898 were "hardly. . . recognised as men of colour, as their dress is quite European, and their complexion . . . is less dark than that of some people . . . in our own colony."[97] According to another report, some Syrians "may fairly reckon themselves as white men, but others are more or less tainted with black blood."[98] The Sydney Bulletin described Syrians as one of the three "non-fusible Asiatic races," but noted that in contrast to the Chinese and Indians they were "less

distinctive in personal appearance and unmarked by peculiar dress," and hence less easily identified.[99] They also differed from the Chinese and Indians because they were Christian, white, and had migrated in family groups thus indicating they were permanent settlers.[100] Ironically, this staunchly nationalist newspaper inadvertently identified the distinguishing characteristics that eventually led to Syrians being officially treated more leniently than other Asians.[101]

Bureaucrats and politicians were also uncertain about the categorization and treatment of Syrian/Lebanese. In 1896, when Syrians in New South Wales sought clarification of their status under the proposed Coloured Races Restriction Bill, the premier noted an "ambiguity" as to whether Syrians were white or colored; although he acknowledged some were white, he refused to agree Syrians were a white race.[102] As the *Immigration Restriction Act* (1901) did not exclude any nationalities or races by name, this left room for interpretation and proved to be an important advantage for Syrian/Lebanese. The question of how to deal with Syrians caused the department considerable difficulty because in contrast to the "unanimity respecting the black, brown and yellow races," there was a "considerable divergence in decisions relating to the admission of Syrians."[103] During the Naturalization Bill debate in 1903, Senator Thomas Playford argued against a proposed amendment to disqualify aboriginal natives of Asia from citizenship as the term included "Syrians and others" whom he considered to be "as white as we are."[104] Although Playford agreed with the principle of excluding non-Europeans from naturalization, he disagreed with the inclusion of a disqualification based upon place of origin because of its inherent inflexibility: "It may be that men born in Asia and as white and as good as ourselves, would be desirable citizens; and it would be better to leave the granting of naturalization to the Governor-General, or, in other words to the Ministry."[105] At the time, Playford's view that Syrians were white and deserved differential treatment was not shared; however, his doubts about the application of the geographic definition in the case of Syrian/Lebanese foreshadowed an opinion that would eventually become departmental policy.[106]

Demonstrating a transnational perspective, in 1914 during a review of the treatment of Syrians in relation to the *Immigration Restriction Act*, the chief clerk of the Department of External Affairs referred to the United States of America. He reported that cases taken to court by Syrians regarding their eligibility for naturalization were inconclusive as despite a ruling that Syrians were "Caucasians" and

hence not debarred from naturalization, some Syrians were subsequently found to be ineligible.[107] In a memorandum to the minister, the secretary of the department, Atlee Hunt, referred to advice that the experience regarding Syrians in the United States "where large numbers of them had gone, was on the whole satisfactory."[108] In relation to whether a Syrian was a "free white person" and hence eligible for US citizenship, Hunt referred the minister to the specific court cases, *In re Najour* (174 Fed. Rep.735), *In re Mudarri* (176 Fed. Rep. 465), *In re Halladjian* (174 Fed.Rep. 834), and in particular to the *In ex parte Dow* (211 Fed. Rep. 486) case "as the question of the race of Syrians is extensively discussed and attention is invited to that judgement."[109] Curiously, although three of the four cases decided in favor of eligibility, Hunt concluded that conflicting judgments meant it was not possible to ascertain "any marked preponderance of judicial opinion on one side or the other."[110] It is worth noting that some of the immigrants were also aware of these cases and referred to them when challenging their categorization as Asian:

> It certainly seems strange that we should be looked upon as Asiatics; in fact, I was debarred owing to the reading of the Act stating "aboriginal natives of Asia." I most strongly object to this term being applied in my case. In America, where our people took up the question, it was proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that we should not be classed as Asiatics.[111]

Police reports were integral to the naturalization process and included reference to whether the applicant was white or colored. Records show Syrian/Lebanese were not immediately recognized as colored. Generally police reported applicants were white or not colored, but some were judged to be colored (dark-skinned) or not entirely white. Boulus, for example, was not a colored man but was very dark complexioned and swarthy like most southern Europeans.[112] In contrast, Lutoof was a colored man, probably of Syrian parentage, and George "a coloured man, but not a full-blooded foreigner."[113] The assessment of skin color was obviously quite arbitrary. When George applied for naturalization in 1908, he was described as being of very good character and not colored; however, six years later his brother was judged to be a colored man.[114] Similarly, Slaman was reported to be "a coloured man" although his cousin, Eli, was not.[115] Generally,

bureaucrats also considered Syrians to be white rather than colored. According to the chief clerk of the Department of External affairs, "some" Syrian women "were as fair-skinned as any women to be met in our cities," furthermore:

> So far as Syrian men are concerned, they are dark, but not more so than the Italians, Spaniards and Greeks, and if it were not for the fact that the Syrians disclose their race on going on board ship enroute to Australia, they would easily pass muster with nationals of the countries just mentioned. They hold that they belong to the Caucasian stock and that therefore the fact that they have been 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.[116]

In terms of race and color, the department's head clearly considered Syrians to be more European than Asian:

> They are of swarthy appearance with dark hair, and in most cases sallow complexions, but approximate far more closely to the European types than those of India or parts of Asia further East. So far as general appearance goes they can not be distinguished from the people of Southern Spain, Italy or Greece and in fact are considerably lighter in complexion than the Turks.[117]

Due partly to the presence of immigrants with education and wealth, by the early 1890s, Syrian/Lebanese were advocating for equal rights through letters to the editor, deputations to relevant parliamentarians, petitions, and getting lawyers, politicians and well-respected citizens to advocate on their behalf. In 1893, in response to a move to refuse Syrians hawker's licenses, Joseph Arida maintained Syrians were not a colored race but Christian and European, and unlike the Chinese did not sent their earnings overseas.[118] Similarly, a delegation of Syrians informed the New South Wales premier it would be unjust to include Syrians in the restrictions that would result from the proposed Coloured Races Restriction Bill because they were Caucasians who "by conquest" had "been absorbed into the European race" and who differed significantly from the colored races.[119] A correspondent

signing as "A Syrian Merchant" wrote several letters to the editor making similar points. Syrians were not colored but white, they were "not of the poorest class" but brought money into the colony, they were law-abiding, civilized, and Christian.[120] All these qualities, he argued, made Syrians "desirable colonists."[121]

In 1901, the first Federal parliament quickly passed the *Pacific Island Labourers' Act* and the *Immigration Restriction Act*, both of which were designed to guarantee a "White" Australia.[122] In the Australian nation, non-whites were not welcome and the disadvantages of being non-European increased.[123] As permanent settlers, Syrian/Lebanese continued to agitate for equal status. According to the chief clerk of the Department of External Affairs, Syrians consistently objected to being considered Asian and to their treatment under the *Immigration Restriction Act* arguing they should not be included in the same category "as the Chinese, Japanese, Hindoos and other Eastern people."[124] In 1909, Syrians petitioned the government to allow the restricted admission of Syrians.[125] Arguments put forward in the petition were echoed in letters written by Wadih Abourizk to the prime minister and the minister for external affairs.[126] According to Abourizk, Syrians were Caucasians whose "looks, habits, customs, religions, blood, are those of Europeans" and "they should be treated like other white races."[127] Supporting his argument, Abourizk noted that an "attempt by Mr R Campbell of the immigration board to include them [Syrians] in the alien act in America has absolutely failed."[128] Agreeing with the exclusion of the "undesirable" and "low class of Syrians," Abourizk advocated the use of a strict selection process which would allow young, well-educated Syrians with some capital, to immigrate to Australia.[129] While the unrestricted admission of Syrians was out of the question, the government agreed to consider "on their merits applications for admission of Syrians of special qualifications or closely related to persons already in the Commonwealth."[130] So, Syrians were not absolutely excluded, but their admission was restricted and entirely at the discretion of the minister.

In their individual and collective communications with the government, Syrian/Lebanese strongly objected to being considered Asian, and were eventually successful in achieving a degree of sympathy with this position.[131] By 1909, Egerton Batchelor, the minister for external affairs had decided Syrians should be accepted for naturalization.[132] While Batchelor supported the white Australia policy, he differentiated between the policy of excluding people of Asiatic races from Australia and the question of how people of any race

lawfully residing in the Commonwealth should be treated.[133] It was, in his opinion, "a matter of regret" that the law, which prevented aboriginal natives of Asia from being able to apply for naturalization, meant Syrian residents were not eligible for citizenship. Furthermore, it was undemocratic "that there should be subordinate classes in a State" on whom are imposed "all the responsibilities and penalties of citizenship equally with the rest of the community" but who are denied "the privileges of naturalization, the political franchise and pension rights."[134] Specifically, he believed there was nothing to fear "from the inclusion in the ranks of citizens of the Commonwealth of Syrians — men of a race not far removed from our stock, and whose religion is very often the same as ours."[135]

Batchelor's government lost office and no change occurred; however, his views formed the basis of further deliberations regarding the status of Syrian/Lebanese in Australia.[136] In February 1915 when changes to naturalization laws were being considered, it is quite obvious Syrians were the primary target of the proposed change: "The point has come up most conspicuously in the case of Syrians who are ineligible; though Turks born in Europe are eligible. Many Syrians who we have been obliged to refuse are people of high character and substantial property."[137] The First World War intervened and no changes were made. However, in 1920 when the government proposed dropping the exclusionary clause and granting the minister discretionary power to naturalize any persons considered "fit to become citizens of the Commonwealth," it is obvious the change was intended to benefit Syrian/Lebanese:

> Quite recently I have heard a number of complaints from people who come from Mount Lebanon, and who are placed at a great disadvantage under our Commonwealth laws.

> . . . Under our laws there is no power to naturalize these people, and quite a number of them, with whom I have come in contact, are as good citizens as we have in the Commonwealth. If this measure becomes law, it will give the Minister the power to naturalize them.[138]

That Syrians alone would benefit is confirmed by a Home and Territories Department memorandum in 1922 stating that while, ". . . it is not the policy of the Government to issue certificates of

naturalization to Aboriginal natives of Asia, a special exemption has been made in favour of Syrians."[139] The *Nationality Act* of 1920 changed naturalization laws so no persons of any race were explicitly disqualified; however, as Tom Clarke and Brian Galligan point out, while "aboriginal natives" such as "Turks, Syrians and Assyrians" managed to gain naturalization, the discretionary provisions meant this privilege continued to be denied to the "distinctly coloured races such as the Chinese and Japanese."[140]

CONCLUSION

By the 1920s, in contrast to the earlier view of Syrian/Lebanese as undesirable immigrants, official references to Syrians were more positive and often emphasized their qualities as good citizens; however, although they had gained some concessions, their acceptance was limited and tenuous. Even though it was now easier to become naturalized, successful naturalization did not mean full citizenship. Naturalized Syrian/Lebanese were excluded from the franchise until 1925, and were only granted pension rights in 1941, thirty years after Batchelor, as minister for external affairs, had challenged both the wisdom and fairness of the practice of exclusion.[141] Considered within the context of the evolution of Australian nationalism and the implementation of the white Australia policy, the significance of race in the lives of Syrian/Lebanese in Australia is predictable. Racial discrimination was the basis of Australian immigration policy and the emerging nation was determined to expand and protect its white population. What is unique about their experience is the advantage Syrian/Lebanese gained as a result of an uncertainty about their racial identity. Syrian/Lebanese did not contest whiteness as the criterion for acceptability but objected to the fact their classification as Asian effectively excluded them from the "white race." That the concessions they gained were primarily due to their physical appearance, Christian religion, and the presence of a significant proportion of women, illustrates the exclusive nature of Australian nationalism and the racist and religiously bigoted intent of the white Australia policy.

NOTES

[1] *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH), 17 January 1893, 6.

[2] Ibid.

[3] *Argus*, 18 January 1893, 6.

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5 Until the 1940s, immigrants from the region now known as Lebanon were called Syrians hence the term Syrian/Lebanese. At times it is more appropriate to simply use Syrian as it reflects the contemporary use.

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9 Sarah M.A. Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkley: University of California Press), 2009.

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13 Raja Jayararaman, "Inclusion and Exclusion: An Analysis of the Australian Immigration History and Ethnic Relations," *Journal of Popular Culture* 34, no: 1 (2000), 135–55.

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17 Ibid., 19.

18 Anne Monsour, *Not Quite White: Lebanese and the White Australia Policy 1880 to 1947* (Brisbane: Post Pressed, 2010), 17–18. Queensland is one of the six Australian States all of which were self-governing colonies until federation in 1901.

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21 Ibid.

22 Francis G. Clarke, *Australia: A Concise Political and Social History* (Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), 158–68.

23 Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 6–7 and 137–43.

24 C. Y. Choi, *Chinese Migration and Settlement in Australia* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1975), 27; Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism*, 48–54.

25 Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 137. Lake and Reynolds show how other histories, especially American history, influenced the swift adoption of these two acts as the best way to ensure a "white" Australia (137–43).

26 Barry York, *Studies in Australian Ethnic History, Number 1, 1992: Immigration Restriction, 1901–1957* (Canberra: Centre for Immigration & Multicultural Studies, 1992), 2.

27 Alexander T. Yarwood, *Asian Migration to Australia: the Background to Exclusion 1896–1923* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1967), 149.

28 Monsour, *Not Quite White*, 115–26.

29 Jupp, "Immigration and Settlement Policy," 62.

30 Jim McKay and Trevor Batrouney, "Lebanese Immigration until the 1970's," in James Jupp, ed., *The Australian People: An Encyclopedia of the Nation, Its People and Their Origins* (North Ryde: Angus & Robertson, 1988), 668.

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