

PAUL TABAR, GREG NOBLE and SCOTT POYNTING, *On Being Lebanese: Identity, Racism and the Ethnic Field* (Beirut, Lebanon: Lebanese University Press, Institute for Migration Research, 2010). Pp. 189. \$25.00 paper.

REVIEWED BY NELIA HYNDMAN-RIZK, Professor, School of Business, University of New South Wales; email: n.hyndman-rizk@unsw.edu.au

Written at the intersection of theory and practice, this book explores how Lebanese immigrants are at home, or not, in Australia and contributes to the broader scholarly literature on the Lebanese migration experience. Drawing on ten years of research with Lebanese immigrants and their children, the authors explore their structural, phenomenological and dialogic relationship to the host nation. In order to do this, the authors fruitfully apply the theoretical model developed by Pierre Bourdieu to analyze how the accumulation of cultural, social and economic capital is converted, and/or lost, in their search for symbolic capital (i.e. national belonging) in Australia. Additionally, Bourdieu's concepts of the social field and habitus are creatively deployed in order to negotiate the classical dichotomy in the social sciences between social structure and individual agency or the objective and the subjective.

The key focus and innovation of this study is not in depicting the cultural practices of Lebanese immigrants, *per se*, but rather in the study's analysis of their subaltern location in the broader social relations of power in Australia. Hence, the primary lens for social analysis is *relational* rather than ethnographic or historical, as is more common in other studies of Lebanese emigration. In parallel to the work of Ghassan Hage (Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society* [Sydney: Pluto Press, 1998]) the authors situate their analysis not only in relation to the field of Whiteness in Australia, as the dominant field of power, but also in relation to what they term the *field of ethnicity*: "the distinct ensemble of relations that regulate and define so called ethnic communities" (p. 15). While the politics of the ethnic field play out through the role of ethnic community leadership as a form of patronage, as part of multicultural governance in Australia, differences within the ethnic community tend to be muted and represented as a singular whole (in this case Lebanese Christians, Muslims and Arabs). However, ethnicity itself is a curious process, they conclude, whereby immigrants of non-Anglo background in Australia, through the process of settlement, become "ethnics" rather than Australian (p.16). But ethnicity is not simply experienced as a "negative" in relation to Whiteness, they theorize, but has its own valence as a form of symbolic capital within the field of ethnicity (pp. 15-16). Hence, the process of ethnic

identification creates a “double bind” of competing logics of recognition and exclusion between the ethnic field and the broader society.

Drawing on social and cultural theory, the authors seek to transcend reductive analytic approaches to the reproduction of culture, by focusing instead on cultural transformation, in the context of Australia. Here they seek to extend Bourdieu’s theory of the habitus by exploring the potential of the “ethnic habitus” to both reproduce the agent’s location within the social structure, but also to resist and transform it. The key agents in the process of culture change, they argue, are the second generation. Hence, the authors focus on their experiences of racism and resistance to it, the process of identification, the construction of sexualities, their appropriation of rugby and their search for respect. Two chapters focus on Lebanese cultural practices in Australia, the *dabki* dance and the ‘*Ashura* ceremony, and their transformation in Australia into rituals of resistance in the context of everyday racism. While there is some analysis of the particular dilemmas faced by second-generation Lebanese women in Australia, principally in relation to the *hijab* and racist vilification for wearing it or the *burqa* versus the bikini debate, a large part of the analysis focuses on the experiences of male Lebanese youth (*shabab*).

The most insightful analysis, however, is the identification of a vicious cycle between the dynamics of racism, patriarchy and the retreat into religious fundamentalism amongst the Lebanese immigrant community in Australia (both Muslim and Christian). As the authors argue, on the one hand an “ethno sexual frontier” divides Lebanese men, in particular, from white women and constructs them as being both deviant (i.e. as rapists) and characterized by hyper-sexuality (pp. 96-97). As a counter position, the Lebanese immigrant community “reverses the logic” by criminalizing white, western culture as being morally bankrupt (p. 104). By contrast, the Lebanese immigrant community constructs itself as a conservative and morally superior social order to the host nation, in which traditional family values rooted in patriarchal puritanism are maintained.

Unfortunately, the losers in this moral binary are Lebanese women, who are placed in the invidious position of accepting their lack of social freedom and containment within the community (i.e. as protection against racism) as their specific destiny, but also due to their burden of cultural maintenance in Australia. Thus, multicultural crisis in Australia results in particularly regressive community politics for Lebanese women, who suffer from their own “double bind”. The analysis of the relationship between racism and sexism has been explored by a few scholars, including myself (Nelia Hyndman-Rizk, “Balad Niswen-Hukum Niswen: The Perception of Gender

Inversions Between Lebanon and Australia,” *Palma* 11(1):55-85 and *My Mother’s Table: At Home in the Maronite Diaspora, a Study of Emigration from Hadchit, North Lebanon to Australia and America* [Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011]) and is a theoretical dilemma requiring further examination with respect to the dynamics of Lebanese immigrant communities. The work of Saba Mahmood (Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005]) offers some insights into the relationship between piety movements and the feminist subject, in the case of Egypt. Of importance for the present work, is her theorization that the expression of agency and resistance does not necessarily imply teleology of progress, but rather, resistance can also acquire a highly regressive character.

In conclusion, *On Being Lebanese in Australia* is recommended reading for scholars of migration from the Mashriq for its theoretical sophistication and coverage of a wide range of cultural processes, which occur in the context of migration. It also makes a unique and interesting contribution to the broader field of migration studies and sets the stage successfully for other scholars of Lebanese emigration to explore further the broad range of cultural dynamics and contradictions intelligently identified in this study.

