Note
1. Hobbsawm says imagining a nation is mostly a matter of reaction and resentment, and a response to imperial domination.

References

Paul Tabar and Jennifer Skulte-Ouaiss. Editors. Politics, Culture and the Lebanese Diaspora
Hardcover $67.99

Reviewed by Melanie Trexler

Politics, Culture and the Lebanese Diaspora makes an important contribution to Diaspora studies, Middle Eastern studies, and Arab studies by highlighting the shift in political and cultural practices of Lebanese migrants and the identities they construct as a result of migration. A product of a 2007 conference sponsored by the Institute for Migration Studies at the Lebanese American University, the volume contains 24 essays from anthropological, historical, literary, and sociological perspectives. Essays examine the relationships between communal, national, and transnational components of the politics and culture of Lebanese living in Diaspora. Authors challenge the idea that “home” and “identity” are static, fixed concepts and instead indicate that notions of homeland and identity are fluid constructs impacted by transnational politics in Lebanon and in the country of immigration.

The book is divided into three sections: Identity and Multiculturalism, Politics and Activism, and Literature and Media. The first section examines various factors that shape Lebanese identity, emphasizing that immigrants and their descendants constantly negotiate their identities based on past and present situations in both the homeland and country of immigration. Their efforts to assimilate into a new culture are often complicated by racial prejudices and the potential for the erasure of ethnic and cultural particularities. As Hyndman-Rizik argues in her essay, first and second generation Hadchiti immigrants adopted a white identity to assimilate in the US, but 9/11 interrupted the assimilation process. As a result, third and

Melanie Trexler is a PhD candidate in theological and religious studies at Georgetown University in Washington, DC.

www.plutojournals.com/asq/
fourth generation Hadchitis embrace a hybridized identity described as “Honkey-Lebanese”: people who “look white on the outside and feel Lebanese on the inside” (16). In their efforts to construct identities that connect both to the homeland and to the country of immigration, Lebanese living in geographically diverse locations respond to racial or ethnic categorization differently. The responses include heritage projects as discussed in Rowe’s essay about third and fourth generation Lebanese in New England, hip-hop music in Australia as described by Sabsabi and Mitchell, and art displays in Canada that demonstrate the connection between Lebanese and aboriginal peoples as described in the essay by Jamelie Hassan.

The concept of home serves as an intellectual framework around which Lebanese living in Diaspora articulate and build their identity. As Dalia Abdelhady argues in “The Myth of Return Reconsidered,” migrants do not view home monolithically or even in terms of one specific place. Rather, migrants form cosmopolitan attachments and construct multiple notions of home through relationships and practices by which they maintain attachments to the homeland without desiring a physical return. According to Ghassan Hage, migrants’ abilities to transplant their roots outside of the homeland enable them to embrace multiple forms of belonging and identity. However, negotiating multiple conceptions of home and identity is fraught with difficulties, as shown in Al-Aris and Ozbilgin’s essay on Lebanese skilled workers in France; Stasiulis and Amery’s discussion of the emotional impact of dual citizenship on Lebanese-Australians and -Canadians following the 2006 war; and Farred’s explanation of the politizen who lacks full citizenship rights. Problems arise for immigrants when multiple forms of identity clash or when immigrants disagree with the identity the host society projects onto them.

In the second section, “Politics and Activism,” authors explore the ways in which migrants express their connection to the homeland and to the country of immigration through political activism. Jaulin examines the place of migrants in debates surrounding Lebanese voting rights and nationality from 1932 to 1943, arguing that these political contests reveal the struggle for power within the confessional system of Lebanon. The essay demonstrates that migrant involvement in transnational politics dates back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when Lebanese first started migrating abroad. Del Mars’s essay highlights this political engagement in her discussion of Dr. Jurj Sawaya, who lived in Argentina and supported a pan-Arab identity. Other authors explore more current connections between Lebanese in Diaspora and the homeland, including Badine’s essay on Canadian Lebanese contributions to peacebuilding in Lebanon, Yehya and Dutta’s discussion of structures promoting and hindering American Lebanese activism during the 2006 War, and Arsan’s examination of the relationship between non-elite ‘Amili migrants in Senegal to their village in particular and home country at large.
Migrants are not only interested in homeland politics but are also politically active in the country of immigration. Nada Saghie, for example, examines Lebanese-Canadian support for a particular political candidate of Lebanese descent running for Canadian office while Tabar considers various modes of political participation among migrants living in Sydney. Collectively these case studies indicate that homeland and hostland politics impact migrants’ ability to act politically and shape the resultant identities. Moreover, international governments and events also impact how Lebanese in Diaspora express their identity as shown in Malik’s discussion of international governments’ involvement in Lebanese affairs in Ghana and Al-Tawil’s essay on the impact of the Israeli occupation of Palestine on turbah iconography. While some of these essays briefly mention the role of religion, noticeably absent from this section is an article from the perspective of religious studies that examines how religion impacts the political involvement of migrants in politics of the homeland and in countries of immigration and processes of identification.

In the final and shortest section of the book, the “Literature Review” (although it is listed as “Literature and Media” in the table of contents), the authors examine various constructions of identity and home represented in Diasporic literature. In her essay, Hout draws a distinction between exilic and Diasporic literature representations of home by using El Hage’s novel The Last Migration to demonstrate how Diasporic literature depicts home as a portable concept that is created through relationships. Other authors discuss the exclusion migrants experience in Diaspora communities as seen in Kaedbey’s analysis of class, race, and queer politics in the works of author Joanna Kadi and in Nikro’s discussion of the parody of Loubna Haikal’s Seducing Mr Maclean that reveals the power structures of exclusion and inclusion in predominately white societies. The final two essays by Hassan and Bayeh focus on a common theme in Diasporic literature, the Lebanese civil war. Hassan explores the issues of unstated and statelessness through a reading of De Niro’s Games while Bayeh offers a critique of the historical amnesia that seeks to ignore the socioeconomic divisions of Lebanese society through a reading of Tony Hanania’s Unreal City.

To bring together the breadth of topics covered in this book, Tabar and Skulte-Ouais provide a short introductory chapter to map the major topics covered in the essays and highlight broader themes. An expanded introductory chapter defining key concepts, providing an historical overview of these terms, and placing them within current debates would better structure the book and integrate the variety of case studies contained within the volume. Although the editors aimed for broad geographical coverage, half of the essays focus on Canada and Australia; only one essay discusses the experiences of Lebanese living in South America and two essays focus on Lebanese in West Africa. Despite these weaknesses, the benefit of an interdisciplinary book like this is the variety of case studies and diverse perspectives
that provide readers with deeper insight into the Lebanese Diaspora. While some of the essays in Politics, Culture and the Lebanese Diaspora will only be of interest to scholars, the broader themes and issues of identity addressed by the authors will be useful to general audiences and students of Diaspora studies.

Detroit Arab American Study Team. Citizenship and Crisis: Arab Detroit after 9/11

Reviewed by Randa Bassem Serhan

“Arab Detroit” conjures bifurcated images of Americans of Christian Lebanese and Syrian descent in their 4-5th generations, and Muslims from Lebanon and Yemen whose migration is often not farther along than its second generation. For others still, there is a community that is often juxtaposed to Arabs, Chaldean Christians from Iraq, who may or may not identify as Arab. Since 9/11, all these complexities are blurred in the popular imagination to place greater Detroit squarely as the “Arab capital” in the United States.

Undoubtedly, any book that is going to tackle the subject of such a diverse population (immigration wave, religion, education level, different identification, etc.) within one study is ambitious. Citizenship and Crisis undertakes such a feat and successfully hits its mark chapter after chapter. Equipped with a Russell Sage Foundation grant, the team of scholars featured in Citizenship and Crisis, along with numerous advisors, community leaders, and assistants, conducted the single largest study of the Arab-American population in Greater Detroit under the Detroit Arab American and the Detroit Area Surveys. The political scientists, anthropologist, and management scholar in this volume share the data collected in 2003 to address the myriad ways Arab-Americans have been affected by 9/11, its backlash, and how they understand themselves as Americans.

The two most striking attributes of Citizenship and Crisis are the scholars it brings together, and its theoretical positioning of Arab-Americans in the midst of immigration and citizenship questions. Anyone who has been engaged in Arab-American research, especially that coming out of Detroit, will quickly recognize the contributors from Andrew Shryock, Ronald Stockton, Wayne Baker, Mark Tessler, to the more recent emergent scholars Sally Howell, Amaney Jamal, and Anne C. Lin. Just as important, these scholars provide an extensive inventory of

Randa Bassem Serhan is Assistant Professor of Sociology and Director of Arab Studies, American University, Washington DC.