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1. **INTRODUCTION**

The “Canadian diversity model”, a framework for Canada’s multiculturalism policies promoting inclusion and “equality, accommodation, and acceptance”, has profoundly shaped the place of ethnic and religious minorities in Canadian society in the past decades.\(^1\) Community organizations, specifically community-building ethnic and religious organizations have been forever central to minority tradition in Canada and have had a significant role in the shaping of Canadian identity.\(^2\) As such, organizations relied on ethnicity to re-shape identities and formulate a sense of belonging. This essay will argue that cultural NGOs have had a pivotal role in reinforcing internal and external Arab-Canadian identity through community events relating to a shared, common history, and that actively promote the Arabic language as the backbone of Arab culture.

2. **BODY**

2.1. **Theoretical internal and external identity**

i. **Identity and enculturation**

First, ethnicity has a significant role in the shaping of identity, especially in modern society. Its multi-faceted nature allows it to shape not only internal identity but also external identity. Internal identity mainly relates to “states of mind and feelings”, is largely subjective, and can be divided within three spheres: the cognitive, the moral, and the affective.\(^3\)


\(^2\) Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

cognitive sphere of internal identity relates to images the individual has of his group, such as the heritage, the culture, the values, as well as the stereotypes. The moral sphere relates to “feelings of group obligation”, and therefore to adopting certain behaviour that is relevant to the group’s beliefs (ex., religious or cultural endogamy). The last, the affective sphere, relates to patterns of attachment to one’s group; this includes finding comfort within the culture, but also preferring social bonds within the ethnic group itself. On the other hand, external identity relates to the observable sphere of behaviour; it distances itself from inward feelings of attachment, of behaviour and of belonging, to describe instead 5 different phenomena. The first refers to the outward, explicit practice of language and traditions, followed by keeping social relations with people of the same ethnicity, then participating in “ethnic institutional organizations”, in “ethnic voluntary associations”, and finally attending events of ethnic organizations. These distinctions are confirmed by Eid, who states that internal boundaries are related to “ethnic self-definitions”, whereas external boundaries are more-so related to “outside labelling and representations” and the formation of the group’s “cultural otherness”. In Breton’s analysis on ethnic identity, he notes that “the later the generation, the more retention of ethnic identity is explainable by ethnic

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
socialization”. Although this statement is general and may be applied to multiple ethnic groups, this would especially apply to second-generation Arab-Canadians, who in consolidating a pan-Arab identity through the formation of personal ethnic networks, would be in fact forming a stronger external identity.

Furthermore, the notions of acculturation and enculturation intricately shape identity. According to Patterson and Hakim-Larson, Arab-Canadians are within “two worlds”, the private and the public. When their “heritage and host culture interact”, Arab-Canadians encounter *acculturation*, which is the “adoption of the dominant culture because of the unequal bidirectional influences”.

On the other hand, they may experience more *enculturation*, which is the “socialization into the values, beliefs, and behaviors of one’s culture of origin and ethnic group”, which is the driving factor in the creation of an ethnic identity. Patterson and Hakim-Larson’s hypothesis is that Arab-Canadians (specifically youths) will experience more acculturation or enculturation depending on their commitment to the private (heritage) or public (Canadian) spheres, and therefore the strength of their Arab-Canadian identity. Although Patterson and Hakim-Larson’s results show the importance of family in the enculturation process, they highlight the reason behind this being that family offer communal, social support for the consolidation of an Arab-Canadian identity, as a departure from the individualistic public

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13 Ibid.
sphere. Community organizations may offer the same type of communal and social support.\textsuperscript{14} The notion of enculturation is particularly important, as NGOs main objective is to promote this process over that of acculturation.

\textit{ii. Arab ethnic identity in modern Canadian society}

The differentiation between internal and external is particularly important to understanding Arab-Canadian identity, as it is intricately shaped by concepts such as diaspora and history, and the converging components of culture and religion; Arab-Canadian identity is largely intersectional. Religion is important in the formation of Arab identity, especially as demonstrated by Paul Eid in his study on the salience of religious identity among second-generation Arabs in Montreal. He notes that the negotiation of “Arabness” by Muslim Arab Canadians in tight relation to their Muslim identity has resulted in a “one size fits all category” which intertwines both Muslim and Arab symbolism (which may be an issue for Christian Arab Canadians).\textsuperscript{15} However, Eid’s study concludes on the point that religion fashions Arab Canadian identity more so in its \textit{subjective} form, and that Arab-Canadians tend to tie religious attachment and identity to \textit{cultural} factors, “namely its propensity to colour and inform one’s world representations and values”.\textsuperscript{16} These values would be representative specifically of internal identity, more-so its cognitive sphere, and can thus be related to elements other than religion, found within culture, to which the same conclusion could apply. Furthermore, Eid notes that Arab-Canadian identity is focused on culture as it allows for a better “integration into ethnic

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 212.
\textsuperscript{15} Paul Eid, \textit{Being Arab: ethnic and religious identity building among second generation youth in Montreal}, 25.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 110.
structures and networks”, and he especially notes the importance of language in socialization.\textsuperscript{17} This highlights a marked effect of Arab culture, which tends to be more pan-Arab, on the formation of Arab-Canadian identity, specifically among youth. Therefore, it is important to examine the deeper connection within between Arab-Canadians on cultural symbolism that build on Arab-Canadian identity.

Furthermore, according to Bramadat and Seljak, consolidating Arab-Canadian identity must particularly be focused on community building, as it is naturally harder to integrate such a community within a greater Christian community.\textsuperscript{18} Seljak furthers this by stating that Arab Canadians, especially children and young adults, are often left confused about their identity within the Canadian school system; he states that “public schooling is about the socialization of the whole person into a culture and the integration of the individual into a social structure”.\textsuperscript{19} Therefore, education is vital to the creation of identity; however, as the post 9/11 political ideology has the socialization of this identity into one of liberalism, schools often try to create “national citizens” which fit a certain agenda, and actually restricts individual socialization and culture.\textsuperscript{20} According to Seljak, “children who are tired only to their families, religious communities, and locality have to be \textit{remade} into Canadians”; it is considered somewhat unacceptable to only have a “separate” kind of identity, fashioned within the home or the

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 120.
\textsuperscript{18} Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, \textit{Religion and Ethnicity in Canada} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).
\textsuperscript{20} David Seljak, \textit{Education, Multiculturalism, and Religion}, 180.
community, even though Canadian schools support a strong policy of “diversity”. Thereof, the socialization of identity is intricately tied to “nation-state” goals, which results in children and teenagers, specifically first and second-generation Arab immigrants to Canada, lacking not only the importance of forming any individual identity, but when they do, it is encouraged to be within a very neo-liberal, “white” framework that must be in full accordance with the goals of the state. One could argue that if parents do not want their children to be raised as such, to just send them to private schools - however, such schools (such as islamic schools especially, as catholic schools are funded) are expensive. However, Breton proposes an alternate hypothesis, that the very “inter-ethnic competition or discrimination” encountered by certain ethnic groups, furthered by the “social structures or processes outside the community” might be the very driving factor in an individual stimulation for “ethnic-identity retention”. This therefore highlights the importance of relying heavily on third-party associations to foster identity and cultural or religious values, as they are environments which directly foster an environment catered to the formation of an individual intersectional identity.

2.2. The importance of common heritage in inner Arab identity

i. Resistance identity

According to Eid, “internal boundaries emerge through the shared memory and history that provide the ethnic group with the symbolic material it needs for the construction of its

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
\[\text{Ibid.}\]
\[\text{Raymond Breton, Wsevolod W. Isajiw, Warren E. Kalbach and Jeffrey Reitz, } \text{Ethnic identity and equality: Varieties of experience in a Canadian city, 90.}\]
collective self (‘us’”). Eid here notes the importance of symbolism in the construction of the identity, which is drawn from “different periods in order to provide the ethnic group with a historically situated self”. The mobilization of common heritage and historical tradition, whether it be within its symbolic struggles or within its actual traditions, allows to re-construct an “imagined political community” and “create internal group cohesion”. In the case of Arab Canadians, historical struggles particular to individual ethnic groups may be mobilized just as much as traditional pan-Arab struggles, such as the fight for Palestinian independence, in order to fashion a cohesive Arab-Canadian identity. The mobilization of common heritage to fashion identity is a phenomena that occurs especially within environments of either blatant discrimination, or simply when ethnic groups are assigned to derogatory or stereotypical “ethnic and racial categories” by society. This phenomena is called resistance identity, which Ashfield argues may be the “most important type of identity formation in our society”, and occurs when an ethnic group “oppose[s] the dominant group in a globalized society”. Ashfield highlights, once again, the case of Palestinians, who display an “ethnically based nationalism”, which “arises out of a sense of exclusion, alienation and resentment of the unjust treatment”; as they are a community which is already exiled, they “strongly hold on to their national identity”. As a Palestinian, this is something that will already be particularly strong; however, as a Palestinian-

24 Paul Eid, Being Arab: ethnic and religious identity building among second generation youth in Montreal, 23.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.


29 Ibid.
Arab-Canadian, when placed within a society that further marginalizes the “Arab” identity and negates the “Palestinian identity”, it can be argued that it is a double marginalization that would therefore *doubly* encourage the consolidation of an Arab-Canadian identity. Although this is specific to the Palestinian case, it is common for other ethnic Arab groups, whether this be Lebanese, Syrian, or other, to “borrow” from the cause as they find common ground within a general theme of Arab alienation and exclusion, thereby indirectly or directly contributing to a pan-Arab Canadian, collective identity and simultaneously, an internal identity based on struggle and symbolism. Arab Canadians may (revendique) not only individual historical struggles but those of other Arab nationalities in a common struggle against *Orientalism*: that of the past, and of the present, within the Canadian or western context.

ii. **First case study: Association of Palestinian Arab Canadians (APAC)**

The Association of Palestinian Arab Canadians (APAC) is a cultural organization founded in Ottawa, Canada, in 1985, who’s aim is to “organise educational, cultural and community events and programs for the Palestinian community”, as well as play “a role as an advocacy group for Palestinians living in Canada”.

30 The events organized by APAC, as well as the general role that it holds not only for Palestinians, but all Arabs in Ottawa and Canada are a primary example of how common heritage is mobilized to fashion individual and collective Arab-Canadian identity. In organizing certain events that are directly related to the Palestinian cause, such as a rally in solidarity with Al-Aqsa Mosque, or rallies in solidarity with Palestinian political prisoners, APAC gather not only hundreds Palestinians but other Arabs from all over Ottawa to advocate for Palestinian rights. This is therefore not an implicit struggle against

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colonization but a very explicit display of intolerance for orientalism by the state of Israel as well as by Canadian support for Israel. They also hold events which are not directly related to fighting for the Palestinian cause, but cultural events which incorporate elements common to many Arab cultures. The Palestinian festival is the largest Palestinian festival in North America and is held annually every summer in Canada’s capital. According to APAC, this event gathers more than 28,000 attendees, from all backgrounds. The festival offers dozens of food tents of food that is common to all Arabs, such as falafel, shawarma, etc., as well as music, dabke, “multi-cultural performances” and more.

As serving as not only a mediator and advocacy group for Palestinian (an Arab ethnic group) rights but also an organizer of cultural bonding activities for the ethnic group, APAC serves as a primary facilitator of social capital, which is a main factor in the consolidation of inner identity. According to Holland, Reynolds and Weller, social capital can be broadly understood as encompassing the “values that people hold and the resource that they can access”, which can either be used for collective action and social injustice, or simply as encouraging “reciprocity, trust and cooperation” between personal networks, and “co-operation for mutual benefit”. The authors state that social capital theory is generally incomplete as it excludes how social capital is used “as a resource in ethnic identity formation or indeed how ethnic identity is a

32 Ibid.
product of social capital”; there are two types of social capital: bonding and bridging.\textsuperscript{34} Ethnic personal networks are often \textit{bonding} capital, which are related to “networks of trust and reciprocity that reinforce ties within groups”.\textsuperscript{35} They note that often, community-wide networks and social events often allow for the consolidation of individual identity and progression within \textit{multiple}, overlapping communities. Therefore, in embodying a national history for Palestinians but also a common cause for Arab-Canadians, APAC accomplishes both aspects of social capital, which further consolidates internal ethnic identity. It encourages collective action and a pan-Arab-Canadian fight for social injustice, through events which often gather communities and social networks at large, as well as within its cultural events, ripe with symbolism of a shared history (as stated by Eid), which fulfills the simple function of co-operation, as well as representing not only Palestinian values but consolidating common Arab values within a Canadian setting, and providing altogether the ressources for identity building within a diasporic community. Its organization of events but also simply its presence within the Arab-Canadian community creates bonding capital within Arab-Canadians and only reinforces the cognitive and affective spheres of internal identity, as identified by Breton, by promoting positive images and values of the group’s culture but also allowing for security and attachment within group members.

2.3. \textbf{Language: Arabic as a marker of external Arab identity}

i. \textbf{Arabic and external identity}

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\textsuperscript{34} Janet Holland, Tracey Reynolds and Susie Weller, \textit{Transitions, Networks and Communities: The Significance of Social Capital in the Lives of Children and Young People}, 99.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, 101.
\end{flushleft}
According to Breton, language learning or transmission is central to the formation of personal networks, rather than formal language learning. Language in and of itself, whether it be its knowledge or its usage among family or social circles, is “the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed”. It is going to be intricately shaped and will shape external identity, according to certain factors such as whether it is the first or second language, its usage, or even social attitudes towards usage of the particular language. In the case of this paper, it is important to understand that language shapes ethnicity and by extension, ethnic identity. According to Norton, “ethnicity is a product of opposition”; in a “homogenous society”, individuals are naturally constructed by a dichotomy between their mother culture and tongue and that of the “host” country. The society or the state in question will of course determine the fluidity of this dichotomy and to what extent an individual may uphold components of his “original” ethnicity. Ethnic social networks are defined primarily by a “common language”; in the Canadian context, where there is a vast multitude of ethnicities and ethnic social networks, individuals’s ethnic identities will therefore be significantly shaped by usage of said language within their day-to-day interactions within the ethnic group. Heller notes the bidirectional relationship between language and ethnic identity by stating,

Thus the first principle of ethnic identity formation is participation in ethnic social networks, and therefore in activities controlled by ethnic group members. Language is important here as a means by which access to networks is regulated: if you do not speak


38 Ibid.
the right language, you do not have access to forming relationships with certain people, or to participating in certain activities.\(^{39}\)

This highlights the importance of ethnic and cultural NGOs in the formation of ethnic identity, as they are the primary organizers of activities for “ethnic group members” and thus create and reinforce ethnic social networks. Whether the NGO has the objective of being one of socialization, or a more political NGO based on advocacy, ethnic social networks are by nature indirectly or directly created as a by-product of the organization’s very existence. Heller states that language ensures the very formation of relationships; in the case of Arab-Canadians, therefore, a strong command of Arabic could almost be a requirement to making connections within Arab Canadian NGOs, whether they be by default English-language or Arabic-language organization. Therefore, in not knowing Arabic, an individual may lack consolidation of his ethnic identity, by lacking not only a connection to fellow Arab-Canadians but in being unable to participate in the very networks that ensure the formation of such an identity. The Arabic example is further confirmed by Husseinali, who argues that knowing Arabic is especially necessary for not only the understanding of one’s own culture, but equally for the formation of identity, as confirmed by Breton.\(^{40}\) The consolidation of identity by the Arabic language is also further complicated due to it phenomenon of *diglossia*. Diglossia occurs when there are different “levels” in one’s language, and Arabic is the primary example of this. The “High” language, or “fusHa”, is the formal language that is rarely used in conversation. Mostly transmitted within


educational or institutional settings, it is fairly complex and dictated by long-standing rules and patterns. This is contrasted to the “Low” language, which according to Husseinali, is mainly reinforced within social circles rather than the family.\textsuperscript{41} This highlights the importance of Arab community organizations in reinforcing the Arabic language, whether they be religious or cultural, as they are places in which colloquial Arabic is spoken and not only reinforces Arab-Canadian social ties, but intricately binds it to the consolidation of external identity. Not only is colloquial Arabic reinforced within these organizations, and NGOs, but it would in a way be necessary to participate in these very circles; therefore, it is a bidirectional relationship.

ii. Community organizations and the Arabic language

As mentioned, for NGOs, consolidation of the Arabic language within identity is done within cultural social events, rather than formal language learning, as it is here that dialectical (the more socially used form of Arabic) is transmitted. One particular example, in the Arab-Canadian context, is of the Egyptian Canadian Cultural Association of Ottawa (ECCAO). ECCAO describes itself as a “united and inclusive organization for Egyptian Canadians”, to “advance our community cultural, social and political standing”, and enhance “cohesion and integration with other communities within the fabric of the Canadian society”.\textsuperscript{42} Contrary to APAC, ECCAO’s main purpose is not advocacy; in fact it takes a definite stance against anything political, and instead focuses primarily on the consolidation of Egyptian culture within the Canadian society, and facilitating social bonds for social ties between fellow Egyptian-Canadians. As an Arab ethnic group, Egyptians speak Arabic. Although ECCAO is officially an

\textsuperscript{41} Ghassan Husseinali, \textit{Who is Studying Arabic and Why? A Survey of Arabic Students’ Orientations at a Major University}, 396.

English organization, its website and many of its links are offered in Arabic, which shows that it
does not seek to create a solely English-language organization. The events that ECCAO
organizes are a primary example of settings in which dialectic Arabic, that used mainly within
social situations, would be used. Its “Qahwa” events, traditional Arabic coffee socials, are
ECCAO’s most popular and common event. Although ECCAO does not provide information on
the linguistic nature of its socials, whether people typically interact in Arabic or in English, the
presence on these events, posted on their Facebook page, hints at the common usage of Arabic
within attendees. Members often post in full Arabic on the discussion boards of the FaceBook
event for the aforementioned “Qahwa” nights, and interact with each other as such. Furthermore,
some of ECCAO’s “Qahwa” nights cover a main theme or topic which is by nature in Arabic.
For example, ECCAO held a poetry night of Zahraa Waly’s works, who’s prose and poetry is
written fully in Arabic.⁴³ ECCAO also has a sub-group, the Egyptian Canadians Youth and
Young Adults (ECCAO Networking), which is primarily a social group for young Egyptian-
Canadians. It is precisely within such groups, as mentioned, where Arabic would be used. Not
only this, but it could be indirectly a requirement to forming connections with fellow Egyptian-
Canadians. Even if Arabic is not used within peer the entirety of the time, a command of it would
be necessary to attend “Qahwa” nights, specifically those of of the many Egyptian poets who
write entirely in Arabic — knowing only English would restrict the individual to attending them,
but also would miss an opportunity to socialize with fellow member of the ethnic group. This
could leave an individual feeling excluded, or fear of attending future events out of fear of being
labelled “less” of an Arab or an Egyptian for lacking the primary component of socialization and

⁴³ ECCAO, “ECCAO - Egyptian Canadian Cultural Association of Ottawa,” Egyptian Canadian Cultural
Egyptian or Arab identity, that of the Arabic language. However, a strong command of the Arabic language allows the individual to affirm themselves within the ethnic group, and therefore through ethnic socialization, retain a stronger ethnic identity, but also a more general external identity that is constantly negotiated through these ethnic organizations as primary definers of “cultural otherness”. This is especially applicable to young Arab-Canadians, as Breton had stated that ethnic identity, therefore Arab-Canadian identity in this case, is primarily explained by ethnic socialization. As NGO are the main environments of Arabic-language usage after family settings, their role in fashioning Arab-Canadian identity is very important. It is not so much the purpose of the organization, but the fact that it creates environment where observable facets of Arab identity, especially language, can be used comfortably, and with fellow peer, that allow for a confident creation of an external Arab-Canadian identity. Without Arabic, Arab-Canadian identity can be present in an individual, however it would be through lesser, less observable aspects of the culture. Ethnicity is language; without it, ethnic identity may be quite troublesome to have.

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, NGOs have had a very important role in shaping Arab-Canadian identity, especially in the last decade since 9/11. Arab-Canadian identity can be understood by analyzing it through its internal aspect, as well as its external. The primary aspect of internal identity is that of a shared, common history, which can simply be summarized through the concept of a resistance identity. In the Arab-Canadian context, resistance identity is twofold: common heritage is mobilized, or struggles from other Arab ethnic groups, such as the Palestinians, are borrowed to reinforce a pan-Arab-Canadian identity and common Arab solidarity. On the other
hand, common heritage as well as the aforementioned struggles are mobilized to re-appropriate the forced categorization and cultural otherness of Arabs in Canada by contesting issues of colonization and Orientalism. Arab-Canadians find aspects on which to differentiate themselves from society, therefore *reinforcing internal boundaries of ethnic identity* such as feelings and images of the Arab ethnic group. NGOs, such as APAC, reinforce this by creating social or bonding capital; in representing this common heritage, NGOs reaffirm common group values and also allow for collective action against injustices. All in all, it creates personal networks which reinforce internal identity based on a common heritage or a common struggle. On the other hand, the primary aspect of external identity is *language*, specifically the Arabic language. Language is one of the main aspects of identity, specifically ethnic identity; the relationship is bidirectional, as language in and of itself is a requirement to participation in ethnic social networks, and ethnic social networks are the main environment for the transmission of language. In the Arab-Canadian context, this is mainly colloquial Arabic; NGOs, such as ECCAO, are even more necessary due to Arabic’s main form, the dialectic form, being reinforced mainly within community organizations and circles, after the family. Therefore, NGOs are very important for the consolidation of Arab-Canadian *external* identity, as they allow for ethnic networks which are built mainly on the usage of the Arabic language. In fostering the consolidation of Arab-Canadian identity, NGOs contribute to a growing phenomena of *enculturation*, rather than acculturation; perhaps enculturation will successfully take its place within the Canadian context, as a lasting response to categorization and false discourses of post-9/11 diversity.
Bibliography


