This book is much more than an exploration of what it means to be Arab as its title implies. Rather, Paul Eid herein presents an intimate study of how second generation Arabs in Montreal navigate through life while simultaneously remembering their Middle Eastern roots. Surpassing other works dealing either with religion or ethnicity, this book investigates how the two factors intermingle to create the distinctive culture of these individuals. Combining quantitative analysis with systematic qualitative studies, Eid not only successfully conveys his findings to readers but also provides an accurate glimpse into a particular community and their day-to-day dealings with their families and Canadian society at large.

A fascinating theme of this book is the ubiquitous role family has within these individual’s lives. Parental influence stretches beyond basic care-giving to affect education, dating/marriage practices, and religiously. Although some young Arabs fully mirror the values of their parents, most modernize traditional principles in ways they consider to be more congruous with Canadian society. Parents, in remaining steadfast in their ideals, engender a cultural clash with their children by reinforcing Canadian-Arab dichotomies. Interestingly, though, despite its demonstration of how these youth are unique, the book simultaneously highlights the common ground existing between second generation Arabs and other migrant communities. Cultural cliquishness, tailored religious beliefs, and perceived prejudice from outsiders are by no means behaviours or sentiments exclusive to Arab-Canadians, but rather occur within many global migrant populations. Nevertheless, it is the inclusion of particulars, such as the importance of eating halal, one’s capacity to speak Arabic, or the perception of bias within Canadian media, that interact with such broad migration patterns to generate the circumstances of these youth.

A strongpoint of the book is its firm theoretical backbone. In his provision of countless sources, epistemological camps, and theories of ethnic identity, Eid deconstructs various debates to present his viewpoints on how Arab-Canadian identity is formed. While reading the book, I was pleasantly surprised at both the amount of theory I acquainting myself with and the new ways I was learning to apply them. Eid unites anti-essentialist approaches with postmodern cultural thought to challenge the poststructuralist view that ethnic identity is an open space that actors can manipulate in a social vacuum. In doing so, he identifies ethnicity as a malleable entity that exists on various continuums that contextually vary. The situational aspect of ethnicity, in many ways, coincides with the dynamic natures of the religiously, culture, and identity of Eid’s research participants.

The issue of gender is a manifest sub-theme within this book, as it remains a very problematic issue for most second generation Arabs in Montreal. Surfacing in discussions about religion, education, dating, child-rearing, and clothing, the conflict between traditional and contemporary views pertaining to gender and female-control is obvious. Males within these communities are often treated completely differently than their female counterparts by both parents and wider communities, being permitted greater liberty and relational independence. Females, however, recognizing such sexual and social double-standards, have found unique ways to transcend limitations imposed on them or have placated their own desires to better conform to their families’ traditions. Interestingly, many of Eid’s female participants recognize the value of such customs and consider them integral cultural components; that is, ways to distinguish themselves from the “permissiveness and immorality” of Canadian society.
This book also offers readers an exclusive comparison of young Arabs in Montreal to second generation North Africans, "Beurs," in France, in relation to perceptions of intolerance. Although Canadian Arabs do self-report significant levels discrimination, young Beurs in France report much higher levels of anti-Arab and structural discrimination. Through an introduction to France’s immigration history as it pertains to the Beurs, the integral role national policy has in minority communities’ perceptions of prejudice becomes apparent. Canada’s politics of recognition coalesced with positive images of an inclusive society may deflect minority group’s response to actual prejudice. The key roles politics and place have in the (re-)creation of religious and ethnic identity remains apparent.

Being Arab is a valuable contribution to the emergent collection of Canadian multicultural and ethnic studies. Through qualitative and quantitative analysis, Eid presents a very “human” portrayal of what it is like to be a young Arab-Canadian. Readers, in learning about their day-to-day experiences and dilemmas, cannot help but admire the strength and perseverance of these youths in their journey to not only become meaningful components of Canadian society but also to remain true to, what they consider to be, the essence of their heritage.

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