RELIGIONS, CULTURES, IDENTITIES

By Greta Scharnweber

Is the Middle East a Holy Land?

Religion, and particularly Islam, is never far from our minds when we approach studies of the Middle East. But there is all too often an overemphasis on religion as central to today's conflicts in the region. Many analyses, for example, insinuate that Jews and Muslims have been fighting for centuries, the most recent version of which manifests itself in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This analysis does little to advance accurate understandings of the specific and complex reasons for the current reality.

The Middle East as a Holy Land is a popular concept precisely because it contains some important, if distracting, accuracies. Indisputably, the Middle East is the historic home to the three major **Abrahamic monotheistic** faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and as such bore witness to a number of imperial powers inspired by those faiths. The Dome of the Rock, the Temple Mount, the Wailing Wall, and the Stations of the Cross in Jerusalem's old City are overlapping and interactive sites that serve as historical testimony to the region's religious pluralism. The Zionist aim to establish the state of Israel is deeply rooted in a desire to create/return to a

Chapter Glossary

Abrahamic Faiths: refers to the monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) that trace their origins through the biblical and/or Qur'anic story of Abraham.

Allah: The Arabic word for God—synonymous with the Jewish and Christian (Abrahamic) God.

Five Pillars: A set of core practices and rituals deemed essential for adherence to Islam, although they are followed to varying degrees in everyday life.

Islam: Literally meaning "submission," Islam is the term for the Abrahamic faith that recognizes Muhammad as God's most important and final prophet.

Monotheism: Belief in one god alone.

Muslim: A person who follows the religion of Islam.

Shia: Roughly 10% of Muslims worldwide adhere to the Shia sect of Islam. The Shia especially revere the special knowledge of the Prophet Muhammad's family, particularly his son-in-law Ali and his descendants.

Sunni: Almost 90% of Muslims worldwide belong to this sect of Islam, although there are several schools of thought among them. Sunnis are commonly contrasted with Shias based on a divide over leadership in early Islam.

Sufi/Sufism: Sufi Muslims can be of either Sunni or Shia sects, and strive for personal and/or mystical connection with God through rituals such as Zikr/Thikr (see below).

Umma: Refers to the worldwide community of Muslims.

Wali: A Sufi "saint" or "friend of God" who may be revered or commemorated in some way (e.g. a tomb where pilgrims visit).

Zikr/Thikr: Refers to a range of Sufi rituals that use repetitive action (repeating names of God, or twirling in meditation) to achieve a connection with God. The most iconic of Zikr/Thikr practitioners are the so-called "Whirling Dervishes."

Jewish homeland. A trip to Istanbul is hardly complete without a visit to the Hagia Sophia, an impressive construction that was created as an Eastern Orthodox Church, transformed into a mosque under the Ottoman Empire, and now serves as a Museum visited by almost 3.5 million people annually. Aramaic, the language of Jesus, is still a living language (albeit endangered) in small pockets of the Middle East. Arabic, the language of the Muslim holy book, the Qur'an, is the lingua franca of much of the region (although it is not the only language, as Khaled Islaih's chapter in this volume richly explores). The sites of the Qur'an's revelation to the Muslim prophet Muhammad in modern-day Saudi Arabia are designated as holy sites for pilgrims undertaking the Hajj to Mecca and Medina. This list could go on; the centrality of this region to the multitude of sects that belong to three of the world's major religious traditions is indisputable.

The stunning Hagia Sophia, in Istanbul, Turkey, is now a museum. Examples of Islamic calligraphy and gilded Christian icons reveal the building's complex past as a cathedral (537-1453) and then a mosque (1453-1931). Monuments and legacies of all three Abrahamic faiths, often in interaction with one another, can be found throughout the Middle East. Photo by Ian Scott.

On the one hand, understanding this religious heritage in the region and its diversity is critical and tells us much about the historical interactions of Jews, Christians, Muslims and other religious sects. And yet, thinking about the region ONLY as a holy land can distort one's understanding of changes in the region over time. Pilgrims on "Holy Land" tours take a dip in the Jordan River at a manufactured tourist site, unaware that the "real" site a few kilometers downstream is polluted and quite unsafe, and surrounded by the harsh barbed-wire border between the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Jordan. Israelis check the daily level of Kinneret (the Sea of Galilee, where Christians believe Jesus walked on water) out of a concern for the amount of fresh water in the region for daily use, agriculture, and drinking. The Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, supposedly an unchanged ritual since the time of early Islam, is a major economic and touristic event that now features air-conditioned routes among several of its stations to assist with crowd control and increase pilgrim comfort. Pilgrims to all of these sites must contend with modern visa regulations in order to visit, in some cases preventing mobility. These modern juxtapositions can help to illuminate the critical fact that things have not remained the same in the region, Holy Land or not, since the inception of these

The Hajj pilgrimage has changed with the times, as this air-conditioned tent "city" in Mecca shows. Photo by Omar Chatriwalaott.

three major religions (each of which of course has its own multi-century history to contend with).

We are all too often tempted to simplify conflict and identity along the lines of faith or sect, when common sense would tell us that individual people and even larger actors (communities, states) are always crossing lines to accommodate their own best interests. In our instinct to categorize people and classify events, we miss much of the dynamism (and constructive contradictions) that I would argue characterize humans the world over, including those that live in the Middle East.

Religious Pluralism

One of the most powerful associations many students (and teachers) will have is a conflation of the religion of Islam and the geographical Middle East. We have already spent some time discussing the difficulty of defining the Middle East as a region, a challenge that increases tenfold when considering the world's Muslim population, much of which actually lives OUTSIDE the Middle East. 90% of the Middle East, however you define it, is in fact Muslim. According to the Pew Research Center, the top ten countries with the largest Muslim populations, Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nigeria make the list before we get to the first Middle Eastern country, Egypt, at number 6. Thus, all Middle Easterners are not Muslim, and all Muslims are not Middle Eastern. Perhaps this is a good time to remind the reader also that not all Muslims are Arabs, and not all Arabs are Muslims, nor are all Middle Easterners Arabs. Yet, myriad forms of Islam are the core of the worldviews of many individuals in the Middle East.

But what do we miss when we focus too much on Islam as the defining factor in all things Middle Eastern? We diminish the crucial place other religions have taken in the landscape of belief and culture in the region. The Middle East is indeed a central location in global history for the development of the three Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It is also a location from which numerous ethnolinguistic groups (some of which map onto distinct religious sects but others do not) trace their lineages. It should not be a surprise that when we zoom in, we find complexity, rather than simplicity, in people's identities, religious beliefs, and community allegiances.

The Abrahamic Faiths

Judaism, the oldest Abrahamic tradition, which may predate Christianity by as much as 2000 years, has been a continuous presence in the Middle East region. It should not be a surprise to discover that large Jewish communities have prospered in what is now Iraq, Iran, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Turkey, Yemen, and many other places throughout the region over time. In contrast with European Ashkenazi Jews (the pioneers of Zionism), these Mizrahi and Sephardic groups frequently spoke languages related to Arabic (Judeo-Arabic and Ladino) as well as Arabic or Persian. In the years leading up to and following the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, much of the Jewish population living in the Middle East and North Africa fled or emigrated to the new Jewish state. These groups, while their paths to Israel are varied and contested, add to the diverse social and ethnic fabric of modern Israel. And yet, despite their Jewishness, many continue to feel alienated within the Ashkenazi-dominated political and social milieu. More recent waves of emigration (1980s and 1990s) have included a large number of Ethiopian Jews, further diversifying the fabric of Israel's Jewish citizenry. Of course, about 25% of Israel's citizenry is non-Jewish (Arab Muslims, Arab Christians, Arab Druze, Armenians, Assyrians, and other minority groups). Indeed, in any modern nation-state in the Middle East, one will find a fascinating historical tapestry of diverse religions and languages, even if the size of these communities is scattered or small.
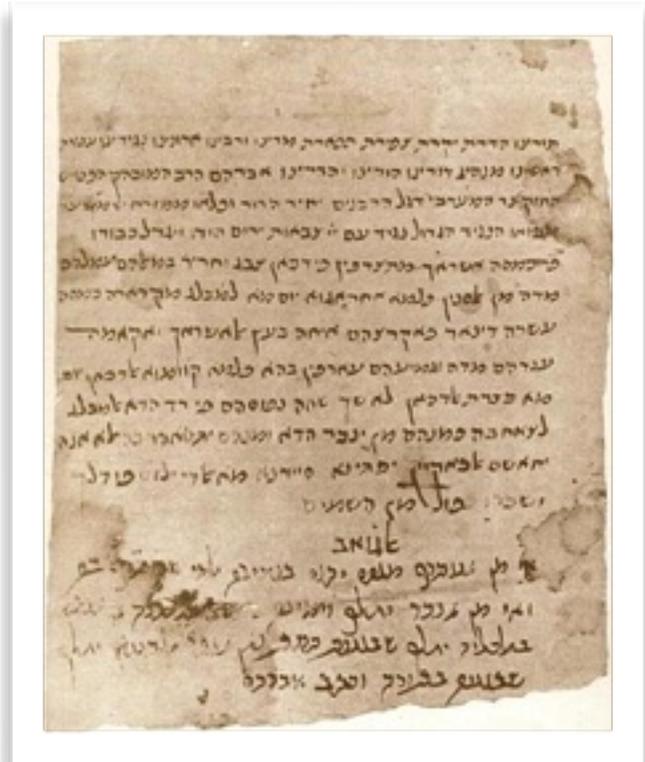
The Cairo Geniza is a collection of Jewish manuscript fragments found in Egypt's Ben Ezra Synagogue, some of which were written in Judeo Arabic as pictured. The Geniza are valued by historians due to the insights they give into everyday life in the medieval Middle East.

Christianity in the region, historically and today, encompasses an extremely wide range of sects and ethno-linguistic groups. The largest number tend to fall within Eastern Orthodoxy (Copts, Armenian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Assyrians) or eastern branches of the Latin Catholic Church (Maronites, Chaldeans, Coptic Catholics). Differentiation and shifts among Christians in the region have been radical over time, and the Middle East was often at the crux of these transformations. Perhaps the most significant historical example of this occurred when Constantinople (now modern Istanbul) was at the center of debates among Western (Latin) and Eastern (Greek) Christian leadership, culminating in the 11th century "Great Schism" between the two schools of Christian theology. Since then, other debates over belief and practice have given rise to the diversity of

churches we see in the Middle East and elsewhere. As time and various empires (Arab, Ottoman, European) have made their mark on the societies and modern nation-states of the Middle East, Christan communities have faced varying challenges in maintaining their identities.

In Lebanon, where around 40% of the population is Christian (the largest percentage in a Middle Eastern country) a confessional political system inherited from European colonialism was cemented with the Taif Agreement of 1989. Partly in response to a growing Muslim majority and as an effort to end a long civil war, the Taif Agreement shifted a government that favored majority Christian participation to a 50/50 representation of Christians and Muslims. This is perhaps an oversimplification of Lebanon's pluralistic society that in practice has given rise to a highly specialized quota system to accommodate a wide range of both large and small ethnic and religious groups. Egypt is home to the largest Christian sect in the Middle East, the Copts, a non-Arab ethno-religious group. The Copts comprise an estimated 10% of the Egyptian population (and 1% in Libya and Sudan). As the echoes of Gamal Abdel-Nasser's Arab nationalism continue to reverberate, the Copts have experienced dwindling influence in today's Egypt, and have been the targets of discrimination and hate crime. Yet in the recent revolts, we saw many examples of Christians and Muslims protecting each other as they prayed, indicating that many Egyptians embrace religious

Unity in Protest: These two women in Egypt's Tahrir Square revolution in 2011 are holding a sign that says "Egypt belongs to all Muslims and Christians." Photo by Mohamed El Dahshan.

rights within in their society. Syrian and Palestinian Christians also form significant minorities in their respective nations, although a variety of economic and political factors throughout the 20th and 21st centuries have caused these communities to dwindle in the Middle East and appear in larger numbers in the Western diaspora. For example, the vast majority of early 20th century Arab immigrants (Syria, Palestine) to the Americas were predominantly Christian. No discussion of Christianity in the Middle East would be complete without mention of the Armenians. While they are an important minority group in Lebanon today, their numbers would be much larger in the Middle East, particularly in what is now Turkey, were it not for their 1915 mass expulsion (argued by many to reach the levels of genocide). These violent events created the conditions for a fractured Armenian consciousness and population, today divided among the former Soviet state of Armenia, the ancestral homeland in Anatolia, and a widespread but cohesive diaspora. The history of the Armenian genocide, long denied, is rapidly taking its place in most narratives of world history.

Islam, by far today's dominant religion in the Middle East (more than 90%), remains misunderstood by many Americans and others. Many textbooks focus on defining Islam through its well-known requirements or **"Five Pillars":** 1) *Shahada*, a statement of faith (like a creed) that affirms one God, (the same Abrahamic God as Christians and Jews worship) and acknowledges Muhammad as God's prophet; 2) *Salat*, the daily prayer rituals; 3) *Sawm* or fasting during the month of Ramadan; 4) *Zakat*, the giving of annual charity; and 5) *Hajj*, a once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, the cities in modern day Saudi Arabia where the Qur'an (the Muslim holy book) was revealed to Islam's prophet Muhammad. These "pillars" of faith and the Qur'an are indeed important to Muslims. However, focusing exclusively on rituals, holidays and texts falls short of revealing

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everyday life and practice of most Muslims. It seems common for most Americans to understand the range of piety among adherents of other faiths (e.g. Judaism and Christianity). We know that a reform Jew has a very different approach to his/her religion than an orthodox Jew. One can even observe the common use of the category, "secular Jew," which acknowledges a sense of belonging and exposure to a particular tradition that isn't necessarily accompanied by serious belief or adherence to practice. Similarly, with Christianity, we spend time to understand the differences between Baptists and Amish, Quakers and Catholics, as well as the various ethno-linguistic contexts from which these interpretations of Christianity originated. We also readily understand that many who would define themselves as Christian may not practice or know much about the tradition they are born into at all. Yet, due to powerful stereotypes that permeate much of our media, allowing for this complexity seems harder when it comes to Islam. As teachers and learners we must balance our understanding of the orthodoxy of Islamic practices (which of course vary in particular ways among Islam's many sects and schools of thought) with the reality of individual interpretations, the degree of personal observance of any number of religious "requirements," and the existence of any number of activities that don't seem to "fit" within any interpretation of Islam. The next section will explore how some of these less scripted activities illuminate variations among the sects, but others show surprising and interesting overlap.

Sunni, Shia, Sufi and approaching a "Living" Islam

Many discussions of diversity within Islam begin with an explanation of sectarian identity or denomination. In other words, are the Muslims we are talking about Sunni or Shia? As with many simplifications, this divide is rather inadequate for understanding the complex divisions among Muslims. It is generally accepted by historians of religion and theologians that the divide began in early Islam immediately following the death of the prophet Muhammad. When those closest to Muhammad were expected to choose a successor to lead the Muslim *umma* (or community of believers), they disagreed about whether Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law and close confidant, or Abu

Bakr, Muhammad's father-in-law, should step into the Caliphate. Ultimately, Abu Bakr became the first Caliph and Ali eventually became the fourth Caliph, his reign ending abruptly when he was murdered by a member of the Kharijites, one of the earliest Muslim groups to differ from mainstream tenets (predating even the formal Sunni-Shia divide). Rather than characterizing this split solely as a battle of succession, the preferred choice of Caliphs also reflects a difference in interpretation of the ideal Muslim's approach to knowledge, practice, and understanding of God's and Muhammad's nature.   Indeed, each of the first four caliphs (and beyond) had varying interpretations of one's relationship with the divine and one's knowledge of and relationship with those that were deemed closest to God. For those who became Sunni, knowledge could be learned through study of the texts and practice. For those who became Shia, knowledge also came through the study of texts and practice, but there was an added sense that keeping close to those that were closest to God (such as Muhammad's family, including Ali) was critical. This more esoteric Shia theology, in some cases, characterizes its difference from Sunni thought much as any ancient battle over succession.

Of course, today the divide among Sunni and Shia is dominant in popular understandings of political conflict throughout the region. Iraq is a great context in which to examine why these ideas


are misleading. Iraq is often described as having
three major groups: Sunnis, Shia, and Kurds (never mind that the Kurds are in fact Sunni Muslims). Despite this problematic Iraqi triad, it is useful for understanding that an ethnolinguistic identity (Kurdish Iraqis speak Kurdish while Arab Iraqis speak Arabic regardless of their Sunni or Shia sect)

Sayyidah Zaynab Mosque,Damascus, Syria (left) and a few pilgrims visiting the site (right). The shrine contains the grave of Zaynab, granddaughter of the prophet Muhammad, and is dominated by pilgrims of various backgrounds, although predominantly Shi'a and/or Sufi. Ali Shariati, the Iranian ideologue of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, is also buried within the compound of the Sayyidah Zaynab Mosque and is regularly visited by Iranian pilgrims. This complex pilgrimage site, exemplary of a pious practice that falls outside of the five pillars, also shows the frequent intermingling of sects and religious and political ideologies. Sadly, the beautiful site has suffered at least two attacks in the ongoing violence in Syria. Photos by James Gordon.

or national identity (the Kurds view themselves as a nation) can unite and/or divide communal identity at least as much as religion can. Imagine if we understood Egyptians, Turks, Iranians, and Israelis solely based on variations in religious belief? Or, to narrow the point, imagine if we understood Egyptians, Jordanians, and Saudis to all have the same views because most of them are Sunni Muslims? Using this example we can immediately see that context and identity matter on a variety of levels.

Sufism, if it is mentioned or known of at all, is usually understood to be a mystical branch of Islam with particular rituals and communities. This idea has some merit, as many Sufi traditions do practice rituals that lead to ecstatic experiences. However, again, in our urgent categorization we forget that both Sunni and Shia Muslims are involved with Sufism. Sufi practice can include a mundane visit to a local **wali**'s (saint's) shrine to ask for a good result on an exam or recovery from a disease. Sufism can also include an involved ritual practice of *zikr/thikr* (a repetition and remembrance of God's names or attributes), or it can involve a complete rejection of all prescribed ritual or outward practice. Despite Sufism's relatively low profile in our understanding of Islam, when one travels throughout the Middle East and Muslim world, evidence of both casual and highly pious Sufi practices (and everything in between) are abundant. It is difficult to make sense of this complexity, but it should be as important to develop contextual nuance in our understandings of other societies as it to maintain our own specificities and plural experiences.
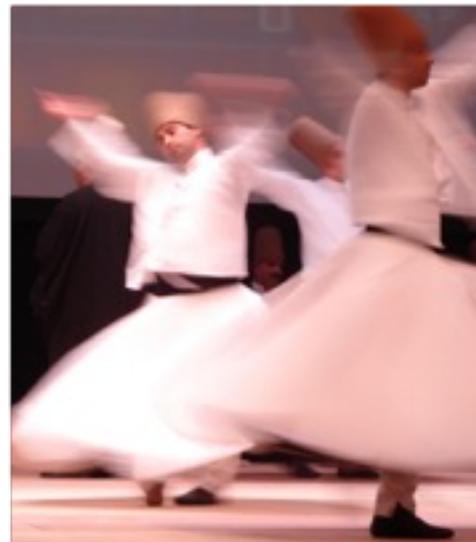
The famous "Whirling Dervishes" of Turkey practice *zikr/thikr* and are members of the Mevlana sect. Other Sufi groups employ similar repetitive motion or speech in their rituals.

A Complex Web of Culture and Identity

Despite what "we" in the U.S. may be taught to believe, Middle Easterners are basically not all that different from "us." Most people in the world value family, community, good health, and individual and collective prosperity. Most people in the world are also part of a modern nation-state, or members of a language group, or followers of a particular religious sect, all of which add further layers to their identities. How these individuals perform or describe their identities varies as much as their DNA. We can certainly learn the particulars of each facet of identity (and this is a useful way to develop specific knowledge); we can also approach identity as a fluid and changing set of influences in an individual's life. This approach reflects multifaceted, incoherent, messy (but realistic) identities that are harder to generalize about but prove to be much more fascinating to explore.

Teaching Tool
Beyond Sectarianism
Critiquing the Sunni-Shia Divide and Developing Media Literacy

1. Study the CIA Sunni and Shia Muslim Distribution Map from 1995 that appears on the next page.

2. Read Arang Keshavarzian's "The Muslim World is Not Flat," from *Middle East Report* (Vol. 37, Spring 2007) http://www.merip.org/mer/mer242/muslim-world-not-flat?ip_login_no_cache=3e372294950ead20ab415a6789ca74dc

3. As homework, have each student select and bring to class a current article from a news source in which the sectarian division between Shia and Sunni is employed to describe a situation.

4. In small groups, use the discussion questions below in combination with the points made in "The Muslim World is Not Flat" to analyze the journalistic pieces. Have each group decide whether the journalists are using the terms in a helpful and nuanced manner versus an overly simplistic one. Report the results back to the class and see where the majority of the articles fall. Rather than focusing on whether or not an article is "good" or "bad," instead try to see what attributes of research and writing add credibility and authenticity, and what elements detract.

Discussion/Essay Questions

1. What nation-state is the setting for the article you are analyzing? How does the location appear on the CIA map on page 10?
2. Is the story about conflict or cooperation and coexistence?
3. What adjectives are used to describe Sunni vs Shia groups or individuals?
4. Is the story rooted in a particular time period? Do references to Islam link early Islam to reasons for modern conflict?
5. What conclusions do you think the author of the piece wants you to draw about Sunni or Shia Muslims and do you agree with their assessment? Why or why not?
6. Compose a short essay that addresses the above questions in informing your reader about the article/articles you have selected to study. Be sure to include specific references to the text(s) that are correctly cited, use proper grammar, and include introductory and concluding statements as well as transitions where appropriate.

Sunni and Shia Muslim Distribution Map (1995)

Source: CIA, 1995.

Teaching Tool
Palestinian and Israeli Identity through the Arts
https://sites.google.com/site/artsandidentity/
By Betsey Coleman

Introduction: When students hear the words "Israeli" or "Palestinian," they often think "conflict," "peace process," and sometimes "Jewish Israel" and "Muslim Palestine." The latter are of course misnomers. In an effort to broaden American teachers' and students' views, the website *Teaching about Palestinian and Israeli Identity through the Arts* collects profiles of individual Israelis and Palestinians who express their identities through creative means. Self-expression via the graphic novel, graffiti, a sculpture made from recycled material, or the rhythms of a rap artist tend to be remembered much longer than statistics, dates, and political speeches. It may be surprising to many that Palestinian boys skateboard and do parkour to escape the confines, literally and figuratively, of their geography; or that a Mizrahi Jew in Jerusalem sings about her Moroccan heritage and the injustices of being a Jewish minority in Israel. It is unexpected to learn that women in the Jenin Refugee Camp, a place notorious for terrorists, create original toys for a worldwide market; or that the Israeli Druze, a group synonymous with conservative secret societies, has produced a filmmaker creating a coming of age movie. These artists and their creations form a memorable tapestry of diverse identities and points of view that startle people embedded in

Jewish Israeli comic book writer and illustrator Dorit Maya Gur is the creator of Falafel Man, a rare Israeli hero not crafted in the image of a soldier.

X Games: Muslim Palestinian Boys in Qalqilya skateboard and do parkour and grafiti to escape the confines, literally and figuratively, of their geography.

stereotypes. Learning about the diversity of identities within Palestine and Israel awakens their humanity and makes them accessible as individuals.

Teaching about Palestine and Israel in American classrooms is often hindered by politics and the media, and there is much more to the understanding of Israelis and Palestinians than the acquisition of stark facts associated with conflict. Hearing the voices of the individuals profiled on the site does not require students to adopt their politics, but it will teach them to listen and to feel empathy. By making a connection with the artistic expressions of diverse individuals and groups, we can come to view real people in all their complexity rather than through simplistic stereotypes. The following activities can help you explore, with your students, the valuable set of primary resources and testimonials found on the site.

What is Identity?

How do your students identify themselves? What do they prioritize about their identities? Create a definition of identity with your class or brainstorm a list of identity factors and/or have them consider and add to this list:

class/socioeconomic background	genetics	peer relationships	interests
psychology	education	age	appearance
language	religion	sexuality	race
nationality	gender	upbringing/family life	ethnicity

Discussion Questions:

1. What items on this list are most important to your identity? Select a few and explain why these aspects are so important to how you define yourself.

2. Now read the following profiles, look at all the pictures and watch the videos.

> X-Games—Skateboarding, Parkour, and Beatbox—Palestinian Muslim boys in Qalquilya
>
> https://sites.google.com/site/artsandidentity/arts-organizations/x-games-team
>
> Dorit Maya Gur—Israeli, Zionist, Comic Book Creator
>
> https://sites.google.com/site/artsandidentity/graphic-arts/dorit-maya-gur
>
> Suleiman Khattib—The next Arab Idol—Palestinian, Muslim, Ramallah
>
> https://sites.google.com/site/artsandidentity/performing-arts/suleiman-khattib-ramallah---arab-idol
>
> Neta Elkayam—Singer—Mizrahi Jewish Israeli, Moroccan
>
> https://sites.google.com/site/artsandidentity/performing-arts/neta-elkayam---singer

3. With a partner list several factors you think are important about each artist's identity. Be prepared to explain your choices to the rest of the class.

4. As we learned in this chapter, the Middle East is quite religiously diverse, and of course so are Israel and Palestine. After reading the following profiles, can you say what religions are important to each individual? Use this is an opportunity for further research. What do you notice about diversity within Jewish identities? Muslims? Christians? Druze?

> Hajj Art on Houses - East Jerusalem
>
> https://sites.google.com/site/artsandidentity/street-art/hajj-pilgrim-art
>
> Ron Ofer - Documentarian
>
> https://sites.google.com/site/artsandidentity/video-arts/ron-ifer---documentarian
>
> Neta Elkayam - Singer
>
> https://sites.google.com/site/artsandidentity/performing-arts/neta-elkayam---singer
>
> Georges Khoury and Art College
>
> https://sites.google.com/site/artsandidentity/arts-organizations/georges-khoury-and-art-college-in-bethlehem
>
> Tesfaye Tennessee
>
> https://sites.google.com/site/artsandidentity/material-arts/tesfaye-tegegne-and-tal-dekel---sculptor-and-professor
>
> Adi Adwan - Filmmaker
>
> https://sites.google.com/site/artsandidentity/video-arts/adi-adwan---filmmaker

5. A number of women are profiled on this site. First look at the images on the page. What do you see that is important to them as women? As people?

> Aisha and A Child's Cup Full
>
> https://sites.google.com/site/artsandidentity/arts-organizations/aisha-and-child-s-cup
>
> Andi Arnovitz
>
> https://sites.google.com/site/artsandidentity/material-arts/andi-arnovitz-barak
>
> Fatma Abu Rumi
>
> https://sites.google.com/site/artsandidentity/material-arts/fatma-abu-rumi---portrait-painter
>
> Dorit Maya Gur
>
> https://sites.google.com/site/artsandidentity/graphic-arts/dorit-maya-gur
>
> Raja Abu Salah
>
> https://sites.google.com/site/artsandidentity/performing-arts/poet-raja
>
> Sheva Chaiya Shaiman
>
> https://sites.google.com/site/artsandidentity/material-arts/sheva-chaya-shaiman-tsfat-israel
>
> Neta Elkayam
>
> https://sites.google.com/site/artsandidentity/performing-arts/neta-elkayam---singer

Essay

Compose a well-thought-out short essay that addresses one or more of the above questions in informing your reader about an aspect of the topic of identity and diversity. Be sure to include specific references to the text(s) that are correctly cited and use proper grammar, include introductory and concluding statements and transitions where appropriate.

Extension Activities

Mapping Identity (and Israel and Palestine)

Although the area of Israel and Palestine is small, it is a complex one with overlapping identities. After exploring the website thoroughly, have students search online for detailed maps of Israel and Palestine. This in and of itself will yield complicated results. Have students try to determine what is Israel and what are the various Occupied Territories. Make sure they can identify major cities such as Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.   Have students select a handful of profiles from Betsey Coleman's website in order and to see if they can figure out who lives where. Who lives in West Jerusalem? East Jerusalem? Where is the separation barrier? What are the settlements? Where are they located? What other observations can students make about the maps they find? How can physical location affect identity? The following profiles might be useful:

Ahmad Kawas - Jeweler - East Jerusalem

https://sites.google.com/site/artsandidentity/material-arts/ahmad-kawas---jeweler

Eid Hathelin Eid Hathelin - Sculptor - South Hebron hills

https://sites.google.com/site/artsandidentity/material-arts/eid-hathelin---sculptor

Natsheh Family - Glass Blowers - Hebron

https://sites.google.com/site/artsandidentity/material-arts/natsheh-family-hebron-west-bank

Palestinian Boy Scouts - Nablus

https://sites.google.com/site/artsandidentity/arts-organizations/palestinian-boy-scouts

Freedom Theatre - Jenin

https://sites.google.com/site/artsandidentity/performing-arts/freedom-theatre

Teaching Tool
Islamophobia

Throughout the second half of the 20th century, the fear of Islam and its haphazard equation with violence and terrorism has been ubiquitous in the United States and Europe. The tendency of the media and of political actors, whether in news programming, children's cartoons, hollywood movies, political speeches or other fora, has been to reinforce these fears rather than work to move past them. The attacks of September 11, 2001, provided ample fuel for these fears; ten years later the plans for a so-called "ground zero mosque" reignited tensions; and most recently the attacks led by Islamic State or ISIS around the world (but specifically in Paris) have again renewed discussions of Islam and Muslims as possibly being at odds with "Western" ways of life. Following the 2015 Paris attack, several reports of passengers being removed from their flights because they simply spoke Arabic on the plane circulated on social media. Muslim women and girls have been taunted or had their headscarves yanked off. There are too many examples. For Muslims, particularly those living in the U.S. and Europe, the tension and constant assault of bias is a defining aspect of daily life. When teaching about Islam and these tragic events, it is important to remember that violence exists everywhere and within any community. It is altogether too common to draw essentialist conclusions about Islam and violence rather than emphasizing the fact that only a tiny fraction of the world's Muslims embrace the views of radical groups such as ISIS or al-Qaeda.

The below resources describe the struggle that many Muslims living in "the West" face every day. They also show a range of responses and activities to change public perception of themselves and their families.   Have your students explore these short videos/readings in class or as homework in preparation for discussion and/or essay assignments.

> First Writing Since by Suheir Hammad
> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDyLNgLHprI
> http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/ac/shammad.html
>
> How Does it Feel to be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America by Moustafa Bayoumi "American Girl"
> http://moustafabayoumi.com/excerpt/
>
> Dalia Mogahed on the Impact of Paris Attacks on Muslim Americans
> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6o3nbBS_aLs
>
> Not in My Name
> http://www.isisnotinmyname.com
>
> Land Called Paradise
> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sbcmPe0z3Sc
>
> Think Muslims haven't Condemned Isis? Think again!
> http://www.beliefnet.com/columnists/commonwordcommonlord/2014/08/think-muslims-havent-condemned-isis-think-again.html

Discussion/Essay Questions:
Citizenship and Identity after 9/11

1. Suheir Hammad's poem "First Writing Since" went viral after 9/11 and many Arab- and Muslim-Americans identified with the sentiments she expressed. What can you imagine are the important facets of her identity from reading this poem? Why do you think she mentions her brothers? What message does she hope her readers will take away from this poem? What do you think she means with the statement: "I have never felt less American and more New Yorker"? Support your argument with passages from the poem.

2. "American Girl" tells Rasha's story about her detainment in the investigations after 9/11. How do you think her experience of residing in the United States changed due to her and her family's stint in jail? Why do you think her family was arrested? Do you think it was just? Why or why not? Support your argument with examples.

3. Why do you think Muslim voices have been largely silenced when they speak out against violence? After watching Dalia Mogahed speak and exploring the two anti-violence Muslim sites listed above, what sorts of impressions do we have about the difficulties faced by Muslim citizens of the US and the UK, whether they are native-born or immigrant to those countries? What kinds of efforts should we make to ensure moderate and progressive Muslim voices are not silenced?

Extension Activity: Media Literacy
Entertainment, Stereotypes and Humor

Scholar Jack G. Shaheen has gathered ample evidence that Hollywood and other media portray Arabs and Muslims in negative light in disproportionate numbers. Watch *Reel Bad Arabs* together as a class and discuss your reactions together.

Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aKD3CnPJNOE

Arab- and Muslim-Americans struggle with their portrayal in the media. Activists, scholars, journalists, and ordinary people frequently stand up against Islamophobia. Actors and performers in particular have a front-row seat to being type-cast or in being asked to portray stereotypical roles (for example, as terrorists). Recently, a handful of comedians have been successful in launching projects that aim to have a different, and more accurate, human view of who Muslims and Arabs are. Watch these two videos as a class or as homework in order to get a sense of their comedic approach.

Axis of Evil Comedy Tour
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pCBQzCD5QMU

The Muslims are Coming! (Trailer available below, copies are readily available for rental or purchase through amazon.com)

http://themuslimsarecoming.com

Discussion/Essay Questions:

1. What are some of the themes that permeate the different standup comedians' humor?

2. Can you find any overlap with the themes presented in Jack G. Shaheen's documentary *Reel Bad Arabs*?

3. Do you think humor is an effective way to combat media stereotypes? Why or why not?

Extension Activity
Hold a Social Media Campaign Competition

Using the "not in my name" campaign and the "A Land Called Paradise" video for inspiration, in small groups or individually, students plan and propose a social media campaign that combats Islamophobia. Campaigns must include a hashtag slogan and detail what types of images or ideas would be shared through the campaign.   Other possible themes related to this unit could be refugees, or religious pluralism, or immigrant rights, or global citizenship, or identity, or countless other possibilities. Have the class vote on the winning campaign, and determine as a class/school whether or not the campaign should be launched in the real world!

Sources and for Further Reading

Abu-Lughod, Lila. *Do Muslim Women Need Saving? Harvard University Press, 2013.*

Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993.

Bowen, Donna Lee, Evelyn Early, and Becky Schulthies, editors. Everyday Life in the Muslim Middle East, Third Edition. Indiana University Press, 2014.

Safi, Omid, editor. *Progressive Muslims.* Oneworld Publications: 2003.

Shaheen, Jack. *Reel Bad Arabs: How* Hollywood *Vilifies a People.* 3rd Edition, updated and expanded, Interlink Books, 2014.

Samir, director. *Forget Baghdad: Jews and Arabs—The Iraqi Connection.* Arab Film Distribution: (www.arabfilm.com) 2002.

Sacred Journeys: World's Largest Pilgrimage-Hajj
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cCEBwSk0ePM

MEPC (Middle East Policy Council) Resources

"Shiism and Ethnic Politics in Iraq" by Mehdi Noorbaksh
http://mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/shiism-and-ethnic-politics-iraq

"Turkish Democracy and the Kurdish Question" by M. Hakan Yavuz and Nihat Ali Ozcan
http://mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/turkish-democracy-and-kurdish-question

"Roots of Alawite-Sunni Rivalry in Syria" by Ayse Tekdal Fildis
http://mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/roots-alawite-sunni-rivalry-syria

Common Core/Standards

Common Core/Standards/College, Career, and Civic Life (C3)

Anchor Standards Reading

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1
Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4
Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.10
Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Anchor Standards Writing

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2
Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.5
Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.7
Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.8
Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Anchor Standards Speaking and Listening

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4

Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.6

Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

Social Studies ELA Standards by Subject/Grade (9-10)

Reading: Literature » Grade 9-10

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone

Reading: Informational Text » Grade 9-10

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative,

connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.7
Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.10
By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literacy nonfiction in the grades 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range. By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literary nonfiction at the high end of the grades 9-10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

History/Social Studies » Grade 9-10

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1
Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4
Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.10
By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 9-10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.2
Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/experiments, or technical processes.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.4
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.5
Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.7
Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.8

Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.9

Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

NCSS Themes

1.   **Culture**

Through the study of culture and cultural diversity, learners understand how human beings create, learn, share, and adapt to culture, and appreciate the role of culture in shaping their lives and society, as well the lives and societies of others. In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with geography, history, sociology, and anthropology, as well as multicultural topics across the curriculum.

2. Time, Continuity, and Change

Through the study of the past and its legacy, learners examine the institutions, values, and beliefs of people in the past, acquire skills in historical inquiry and interpretation, and gain an understanding of how important historical events and developments have shaped the modern world. This theme appears in courses in history, as well as in other social studies courses for which knowledge of the past is important.

4. Individual Development and Identity

Personal identity is shaped by family, peers, culture, and institutional influences. Through this theme, students examine the factors that influence an individual's personal identity, development, and actions. This theme typically appears in courses and units dealing with psychology, anthropology, and sociology.

5. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Institutions such as families and civic, educational, governmental, and religious organizations, exert a major influence on people's lives. This theme allows students to understand how institutions are formed, maintained, and changed, and to examine their influence. In schools, this theme typically

appears in units and courses dealing with sociology, anthropology, psychology, political science, and history.

9. Global Connections

The realities of global interdependence require an understanding of the increasingly important and diverse global connections among world societies. This theme prepares students to study issues arising from globalization. It typically appears in units or courses dealing with geography, culture, economics, history, political science, government, and technology.

NCSS C3 Framework

D2.Geo.2.9-12.

Use maps, satellite images, photographs, and other representations to explain relationships between the locations of places and regions and their political, cultural, and economic dynamics

D2.Geo.4.9-12.

Analyze relationships and interactions within and between human and physical systems to explain reciprocal influences that occur among them.

D2.Geo.5.9-12.

Evaluate how political and economic decisions throughout time have influenced cultural and environmental characteristics of various places and regions.

D2.Geo.6.9-12.

Evaluate the impact of human settlement activities on the environmental and cultural characteristics of specific places and regions

D2.Geo.7.9-12.

Analyze the reciprocal nature of how historical events and the spatial diffusion of ideas, technologies, and cultural practices have influenced migration patterns and the distribution of human population.

D2.His.1.9-12.

Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.

D2.His.5.9-12.

Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people's perspectives.