

Contesting Paradigms and Redefining Perceptions of the Middle East

By: Walter Lorenz
Lecturer in Arabic
Pennsylvania State University



Purpose of Presentation



This presentation will discuss the various communities of the Middle East. The goal is to redefine terms that have marked the region as “The Arab World,” and “The Muslim World” that is quite often used in political statements and the media.

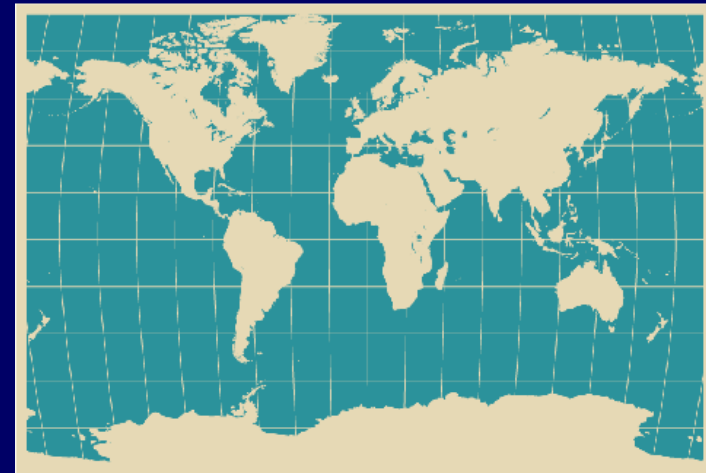
Topics to be Discussed



- What is “Middle Eastern” and “The Middle East”
- Discussing Communities: Religions and Languages
- “The Arab World” and “The Muslim World”
- Summary
- Conclusion

Question: What is “Middle Eastern?”

How do we
define the
Middle East?



Traditional Definition of the Middle East

- Before WWI
 - "Near East" = Balkans and the Ottoman Empire
 - "Middle East" = Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia.
- In 1957, the U.S. officially uses Middle East for the region around the Suez Canal.





Controversial Boundaries



Controversial Boundaries



Controversial Boundaries



Diverse Communities: Languages and Religions

What are the languages and the communities that exist in the region?

العربية
Türkçe
فارسی
ελληνικά
Français
مغذیه
بلوچی
עברית
بلوچی
հայերէն
Azərbaycanca
ਪੰਜਾਬੀ

List of Languages

(Dark Green)

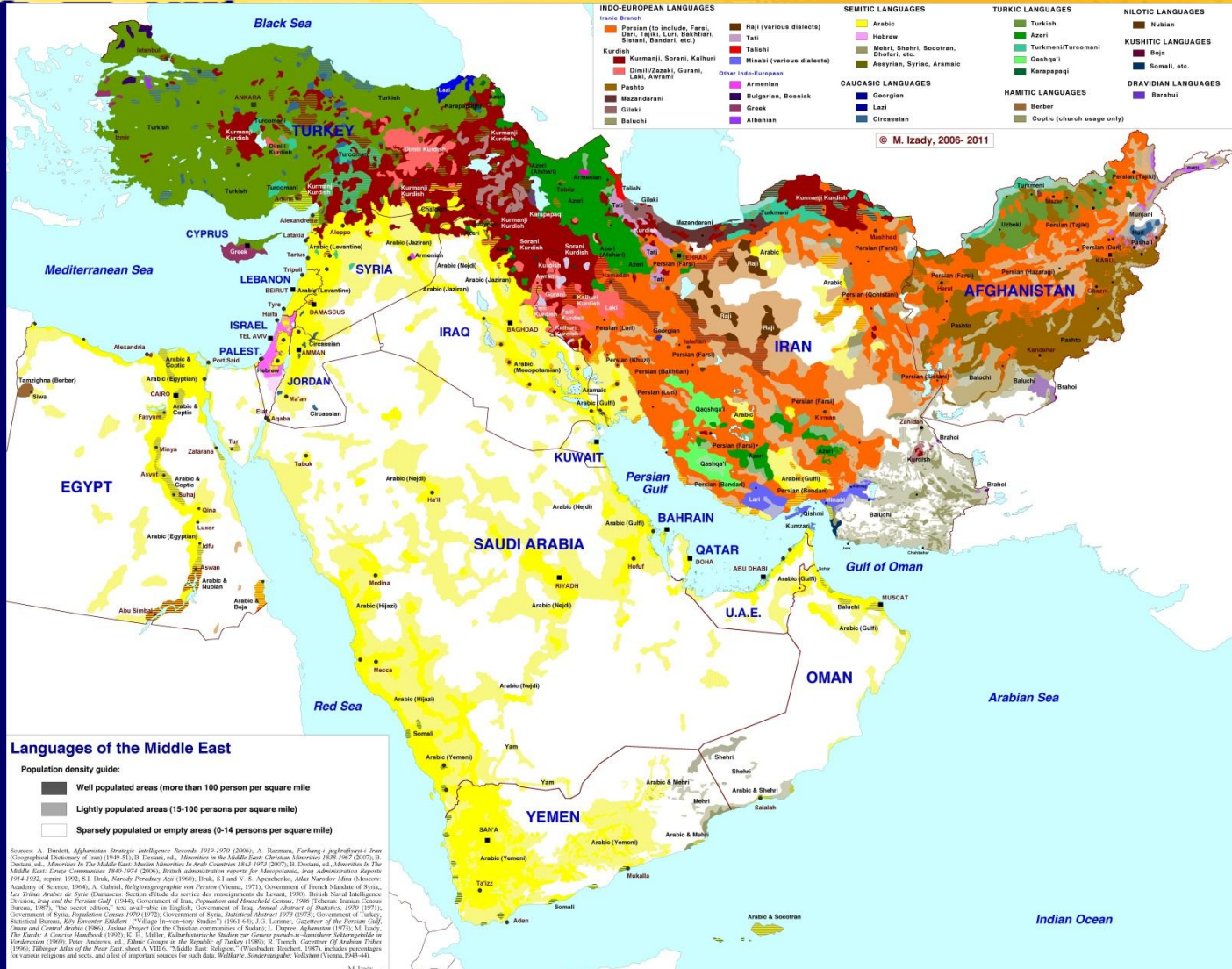
Arabic, Aramaic, Azerbaijani,
French, Greek, Hebrew,
Kurdish, Persian, Turkish.

(Light and Dark Green)

Arabic, Armenian, Azerbaijani,
Balochi, Dari, French, Greek,
Georgian, Hebrew, Kurdish,
Pashto, Persian, Punjabi,
Sindhi, Somali, Tamazigh,
Tigrinya, Turkish.

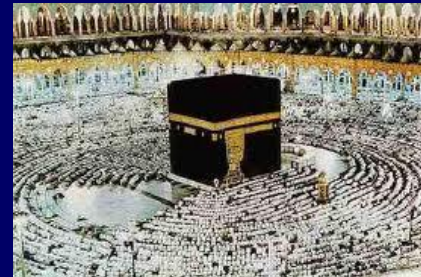


Map of Languages Spoken

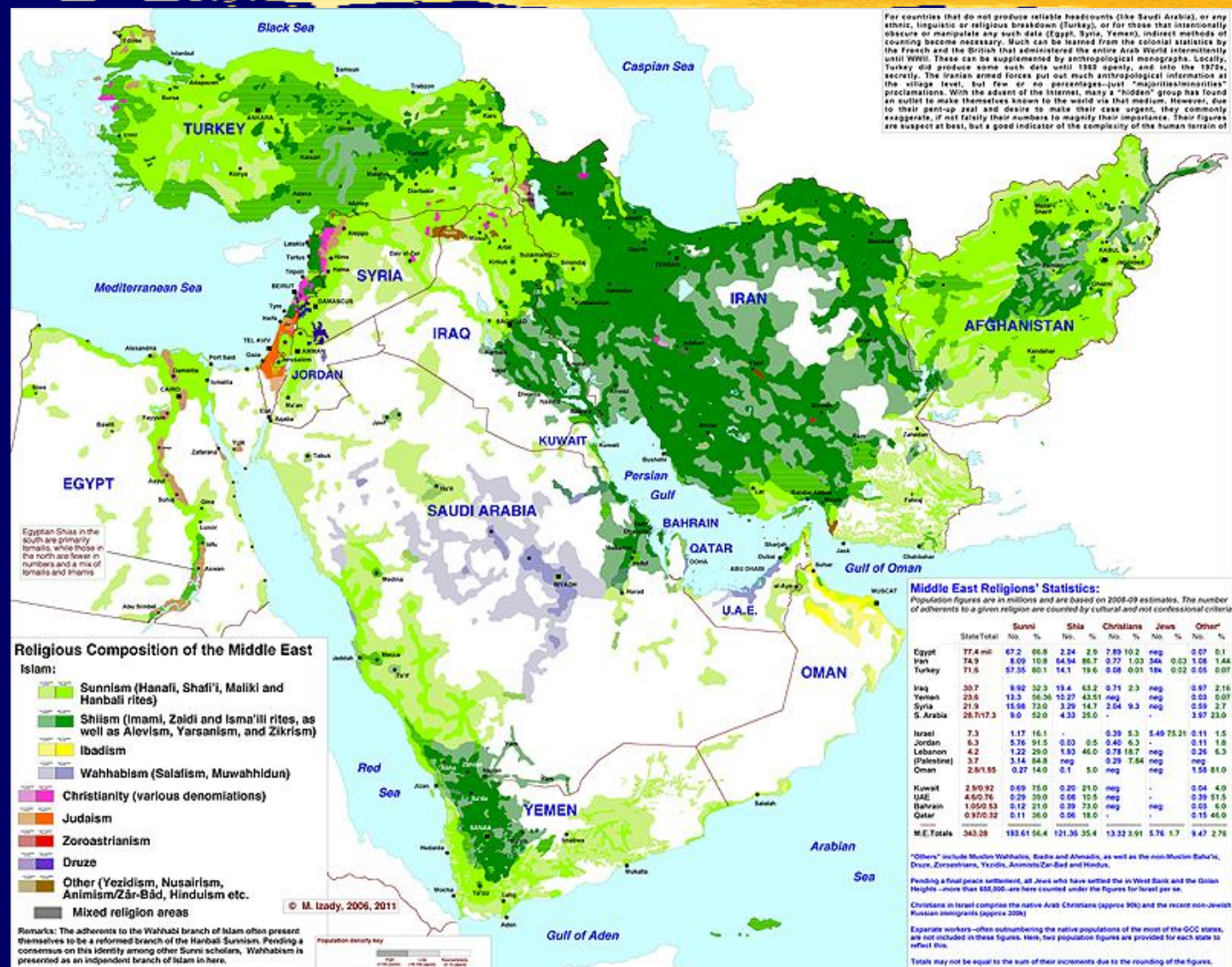


Major Religious Communities

- Islam (Sunni and Shiite sects)
- Christianity (numerous sects such as Nestorian, Greek Orthodox, Maronite, Armenian, Coptic, etc).
- Judaism
- Zoroastrianism
- Druze
- Bahá'í



Religious Communities



Terminology and the Media



Two Commonly Used Terms in the Media.

“The Arab World” and “The Muslim World”

Question:

What are some images that come to mind when you hear these terms?

Arabic Speaking Countries

Arab League: “An Arab is a person whose language is Arabic, who lives in an Arabic-speaking country, and who is in sympathy with the aspirations of the Arabic-speaking peoples.”

Many peoples of non-Arab origins, such as Egyptians and Phoenicians, may or may not identify themselves as Arabs.

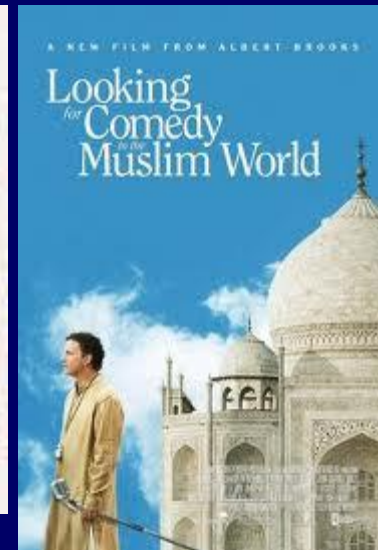
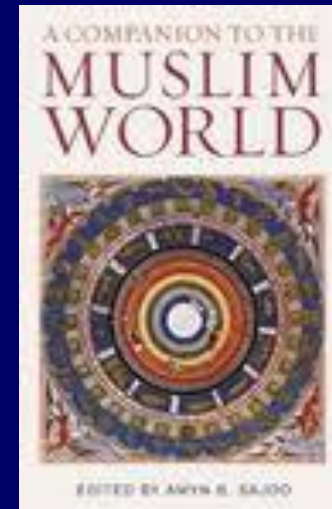
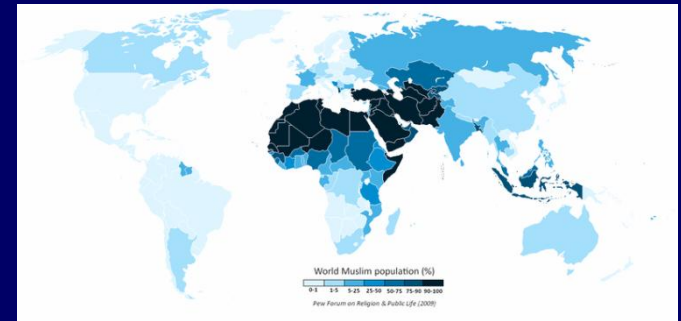
Arabic dialects differ regionally.



What is “The Muslim World?”

Overall, Arabs make up less than one quarter of the world's 1.4 billion Muslims.

How can we define “The Muslim World?” Does this “world” have borders and how many worlds are there?



Summary

- The region defined as the Middle East is a controversial boundary that is difficult to define both culturally and physically.
- Multiple religious and linguistic communities that are usually overshadowed by an “Arab or Muslim Middle East.”
- “The Muslim World” or “The Arab World” are problematic in that they marginalize the diversity of the region.
- The media propagates the popular portrayal of these ideas. Can we redefine them?

Thank you!

