

# LEBANON/ARAB/MIDDLE EAST MICROAGGRESSIONS 101



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Hello everybody, my name is Suesue Eldanaf. Welcome to Middle Eastern 101. We're going to learn a little bit about this identity: some myths about it and some clarification points so that way you all are familiar with this population.

# The Middle East



Middle East is a region that covers parts of Asia and parts of Northeast Africa.

The Middle East consists of 22 countries in the Middle East and North Africa: **Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.**

First point: The middle east—as you can see behind me—is part of Asia and Africa. Just to clarify, this is not a continent of its own. It is not a country, it is a region. It is a region of 22 countries and there are a lot of countries in the middle east. Just to name a few: there is Egypt, there is Jordan. Egypt is in Africa. There is Lebanon, Lebanon is in Asia, technically. Middle East is not an ethnicity it is a region that has a lot of countries within it. There are Arab countries and there are also non-Arab countries. So you can be middle eastern and Arab, but it is not guaranteed that you are both of these because Iran—for example—is in the middle east but they don't speak Arabic. An Arabic-speaking country is considered an Arab country. So Iran would not be considered an Arab country but it is still a middle eastern country.

# India



Behind me, you can see that we have India. As you can see, India is no where near where the middle east was that I just showed you on the previous slide. There's Asia, there's Africa, and then there's India in the south part of Asia. Completely different country, not associated with the middle east, not an Arabic-speaking country whatsoever.

#### Major Indian Languages of India

- **Hindi** – This is the official language. It follows the Devnagiri script. It is mostly spoken in the North.
- **English** – This is spoken among the urbanities. It is a legacy left behind by the British.
- **Kashmiri** – This is spoken by the people living in Kashmir, and by those who have migrated from Kashmir to other parts of India.
- **Rajasthani** – This is spoken in Rajasthan. The folk music of Rajasthan is very famous.
- **Gujarati** – In the state of Gujarat, people speak Gujarati.
- **Marathi** – People from Maharashtra speak Marathi. Marathi plays and songs are very popular.
- **Punjabi** – Those belonging to Punjab speak Punjabi. The songs of this region are very boisterous.
- **Bengali** – Those residing in West Bengal speak Bengali. Many well – known poets and writers have made several contributions in this language.
- **Assamese** – In Assam, the people speak Assamese.
- **Manipur** – This is spoken in the north eastern region of India.
- **Oriya** – This language is spoken in Orissa. Much literature and music has been rendered in this language.
- **Telugu** – This language is spoken in Andhra Pradesh. Many literary works have been written in this language, and well – known poets have rendered songs in this language.
- **Tamil** – In the Far South, this language is spoken by the Tamils. It is also rich in culture and is historically of much significance.
- **Malayalam** – The people residing in Kerala speak this language.
- **Kannada** – This language is spoken in Karnataka.
- **Konkani** – The language is spoken in Goa.
- **Sanskrit** – This ancient language is not spoken now except , it is used when reciting ancient literary texts or verses. Many sacred ceremonies are performed in this language.
- **Urdu** – This is widely spoken by the Muslims. Many songs and poems are rendered in this language. Much literary contributions have been made in Urdu. It is the state language of Jammu and Kashmir.

<https://www.reference.com/geography/language-speak-india-7ce8effac6926e68>

There are actually about 18 languages in the country of India and none of them are Arabic. To name a few, there's Hindi, Kashmiri, Urdu, and I am going to stop there so I don't butcher the names. Just know that none of them are Arabic.

# “Arabia”

- Not a country
- Sometimes known as a region
- Saudi Arabia is a country

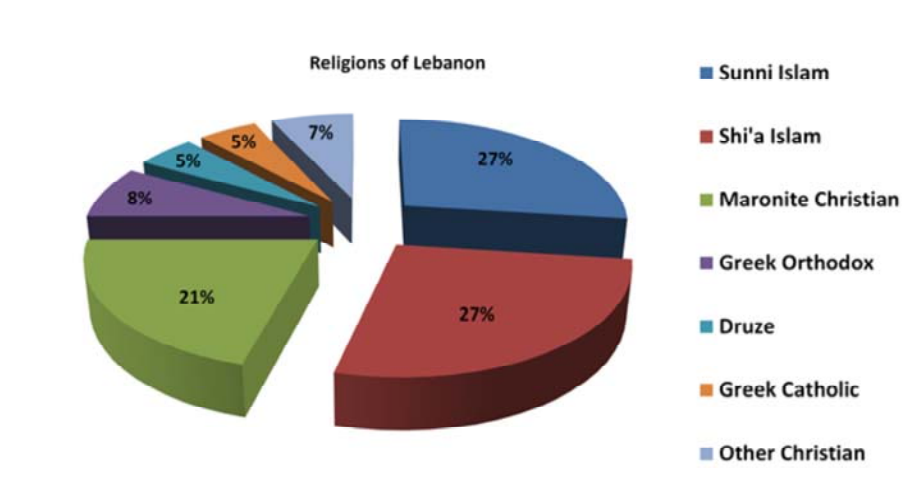
So my point of bringing this up is people tend to think that India is part of the middle east or they're the same thing, same skin color but it's not. My next point is the term "Arabia." Arabia isn't even a word. Arabia is not a place. You can't be Arabian. The only thing that is Arabian are maybe coffee beans and that's as far as it gets. Saudi Arabia is a place but Arabia is not a place. So asking me if I am Arabian or from Arabia is an inaccurate question. A better question to ask if you're unsure is "What's your ethnic identity?" "Where are you from?" but using the term Arabia is inaccurate.

# In Lebanon...

Lebanese = not a language  
Language in Lebanon = Arabic

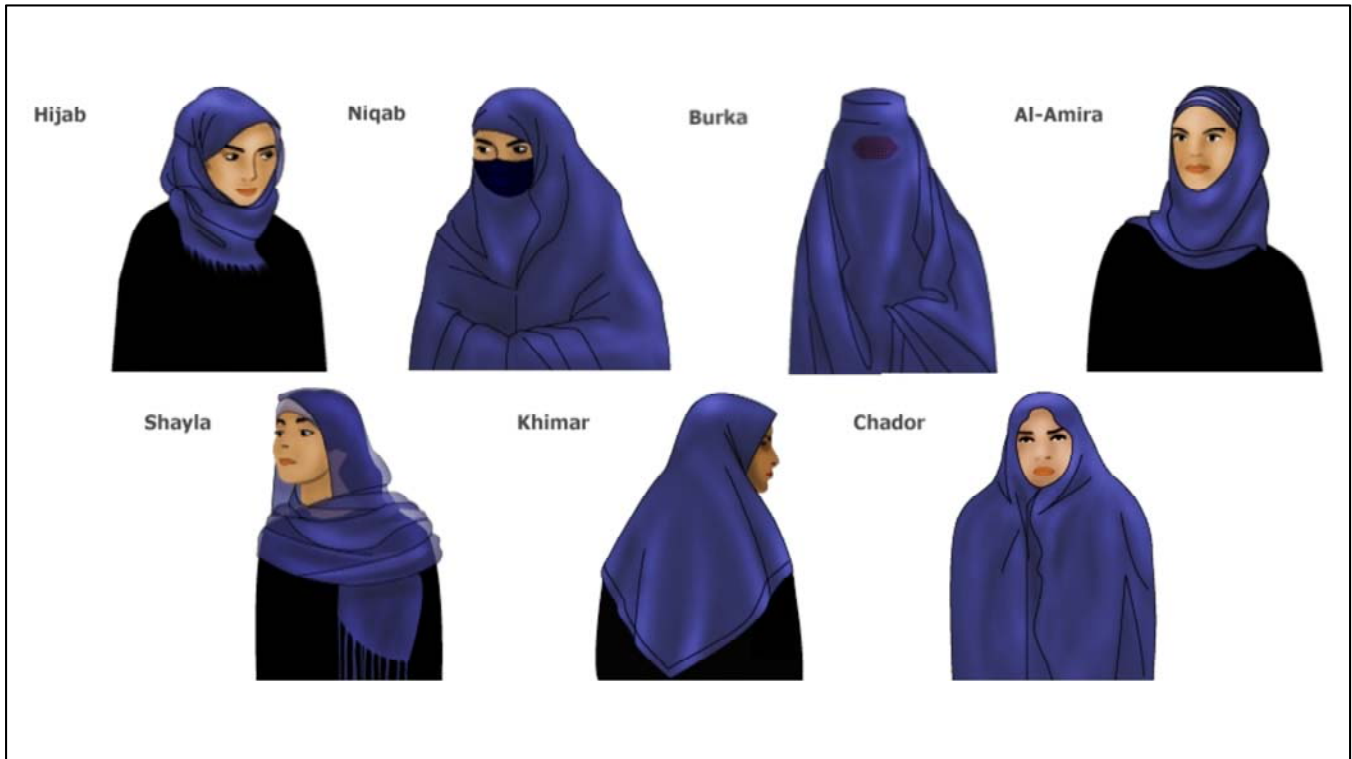
As I mentioned earlier, I am Lebanese. Lebanon is a country in Asia. It falls under the middle eastern umbrella and it falls under the Arab umbrella because those two encompass Lebanon. I speak Arabic, not Lebanese. Lebanese is not a language. It's similar to saying that Mexicans speak Mexican. That's not their language, their language is Spanish. So asking if I speak Lebanese, also inaccurate. If you're every unsure of a language someone speaks, you might want to ask them "What language were you speaking?" instead of asking if they were speaking Lebanese or farsi. Again, not a language related to an Arabic-speaking country.

# Religions in Lebanon



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion\\_in\\_Lebanon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_Lebanon)

Contrary to popular belief, not all Arabs are Muslim. I know, mind-blowing but it's actually very true. There's a huge Catholic population, Christian population, there's a Druze population which no one's ever heard of. That's me. There are Muslims but they aren't all Muslim. So if you look behind me, there's actually a pie chart that gives you a breakdown of all the religions in Lebanon specifically so that way you can see the different religions that encompass Lebanon. Similar to America, there is not just one religion in America it's the same thing in the middle east. Many people just assume that all "brown people" are Muslim. Very, very false.



Speaking of Muslim, many people think that Muslim women, or Arab women since typically they get clumped together, are all supposed to be wearing “hijabs” which are the headscarves. Any time there is a head scarf seen, it is assumed that it is a hijab. There are actually six or seven or eight different types of headscarves you could wear. There are some that cover the mouth, doesn't cover the mouth, some are full body, some are just around the neck. So behind me is a whole diagram of the different type of headscarves. And to name a few, there is the niqab and the burka. So anytime you see someone wearing a headscarf, you do not want to assume automatically that it's a headscarf because there are actually different types. And not all Muslim women, no Muslim women actually, it's not a requirement to wear it. It is completely by choice.



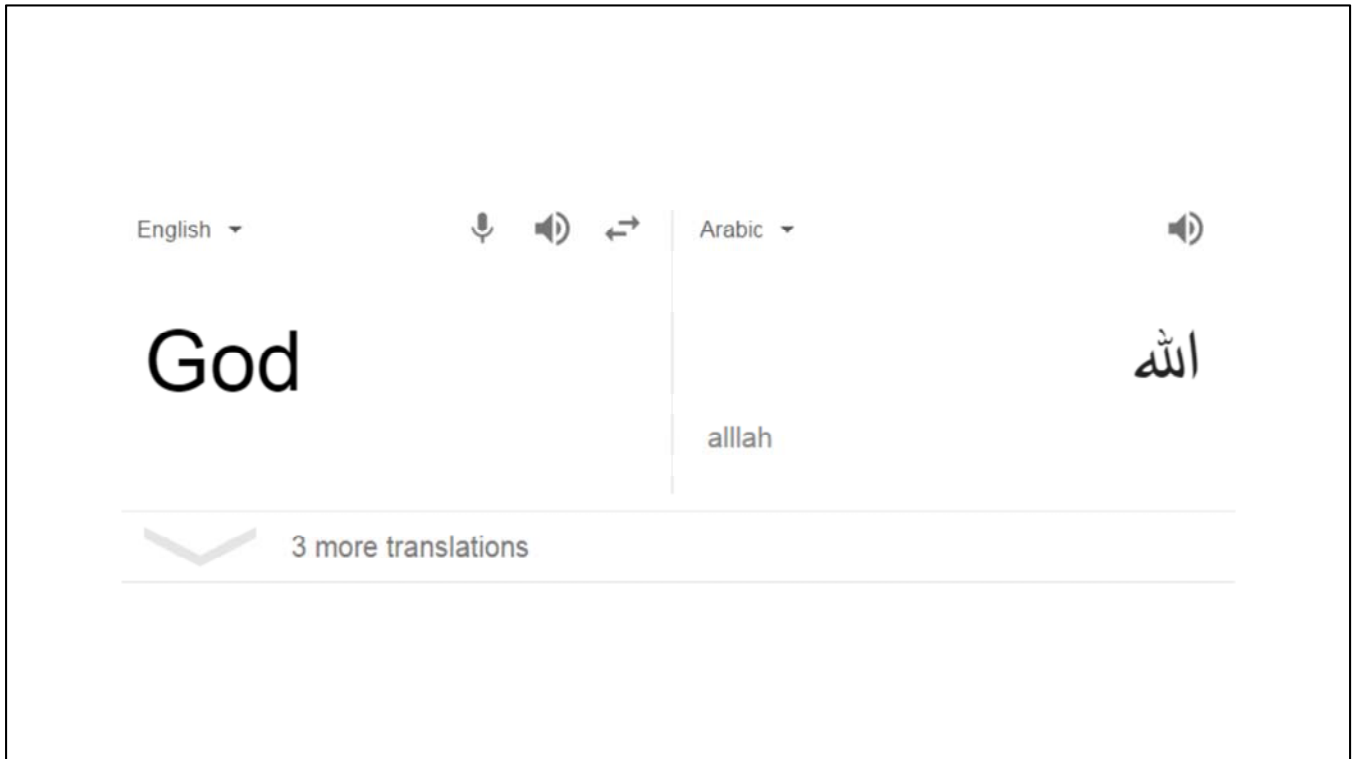
Muslims *can* eat meat.

>Halal

I can eat meat.

Another—this is actually my biggest pet peeve of all, my number one pet peeve. I wish I liked bacon and I wish I liked sausage and ham and all of that because I always order my food without bacon or sausage or ham because I just—I don't like it. But then people always assume it's because I am not allowed to eat it because of this false depiction of Arabs not being allowed to eat meat which is completely false. I am allowed to eat whatever I want I have no dietary restrictions. I think where the confusion stems from is Muslims—sometimes—not all of them, but some of them practice not eating meat unless it's halal meat meaning the meat has been blessed and the animal was sacrificed in a respectful manner. So it's not that they don't eat meat, they only eat halal meat if they do eat meat and that's only for people who decide to practice that part of their religion. Not all Muslims do. But I think that's where the confusion comes from. In my religion, there is no restriction or suggested restriction on meat but I just don't like pork at all. So any time I order my pastas, my burgers, my sandwiches, I always ask for no bacon and people always automatically assume it's because I "can't" so I just wish I did like it so that way I didn't have to not order it and I wouldn't have to have that conversation. It's just so annoying. Just know, there are no meat restrictions. Some religions do advise that you practice meat restrictions or you only eat certain meat or there are some rules behind it. Not everyone follows it. So even if you have a Muslim friend, it doesn't necessarily mean that they don't eat meat or they only eat halal meat. I have some Muslim friends who do eat meat, who don't eat meat, some who fast during Ramadan, some who don't. It's all up to them. Similarly to Christianity, it is a sin to

have pre-marital sex but a lot of people do. So similarly to when people choose what they want to follow, what they don't want to follow, it's the same thing in the religion of Islam.



My next point is to give you all a translation of what the word “Allah” means. It actually translates just to “God.” That’s it. It’s not the “Gods of Arabia.” It’s not “our God,” the “camel God.” It’s just “God.” Just the way that “Hola” translates to “Hello” or “basura” means “trash,” it’s just a different language to say the same word? It’s like that. So “Allah” just means “God.” It doesn’t mean a specific, Arabic, Muslim, brown person God. Just God. So, like, “God is good.” “Allah is good.” Same thing.

# Names

Lastly, names. Arab names—well, actually, any name in a different language or in a different culture is difficult for people to say. That's fair. What's not understandable and not really fair is when you decide on your own to call someone by a different name because you don't want to take the time to learn how to actually pronounce their name. That's when it's not okay. This isn't very Arabic-specific it's encompassing in general. But to use Arab names as an example, so my name is Salwa. I go by Suesue, though. I chose that, I want to go by Suesue. Suesue is an Arab nickname, it's common. People don't usually screw it up...actually they do it isn't as "hard" to say as "Salwa," I just don't like my name so I like to be called Suesue. I made that decision though and you can't make that decision for me on your own unless I gave you the consent to call me something else. My friend Zaher is spelled Z-A-H-E-R and he gets called Zuher, Zahir. Of course you aren't going to know unless you ask but it's when he corrects people and they continue to say it wrong anyway. You got to take the time to really learn someone's name because that's part of their identity. If your name is Bob, I am not going to call you boob because I don't want to take the time to learn how to pronounce it correctly or because it's "too hard." So just take the time to learn people's names. And that is the last slide for today's Middle Eastern 101. I hope you were enlightened and learned a little bit about the middle eastern culture. And remember, if you every have any questions, you always want to ask the question in the most vague way possible. So, "What language was that?" Not "Was the language (blank)?" Never assume and that will minimize the possibility of you saying microaggressions toward

that person. Thank you, bye!