

Chapter 2

Navigating Identities: From Diaspora to Global Perceptions

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Abstract

In the exploration of identity formation within the MENA region's diaspora, personal belongingness emerges as a crucial aspect. As we navigate the complexities of religious, cultural, and personal identities influenced by geopolitical dynamics and historical events, the individual's sense of belonging takes center stage. This chapter delves into the intricate interplay between broader societal trends and personal experiences, shedding light on the complexities of belonging, displacement, and the clash of identities between "Islam" and "the West." Against the backdrop of rising nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiments, particularly evident in Europe, the chapter underscores the challenges faced by migrants and refugees in their quest for acceptance and safety. Through this lens, we embark on a journey of personal exploration, unraveling the intricacies of belongingness and its significance in the context of the broader diaspora narrative. As we conclude, the imperative for sustainable practices, empowerment of marginalised communities, and international cooperation to address global challenges becomes even more pronounced. The call for sustainable practices, empowerment of marginalised communities, and international cooperation to address global challenges becomes even more emphasized in conclusion.

As a descendant of the labour diaspora, I embarked on an expedition to define my unique sense of 'belonging' from an early age. While immersed in the prevailing discourse of

‘immigrant’, I failed to truly grasp the profound nature of my parents’ journey—an extraordinary display of courage and bravery. Nostalgic memories of my homeland have significantly moulded my life as a member of the diaspora hailing from the MENA region. The notion of ‘returning to the motherland’ only intensified my feelings of rootlessness, trapping me in a liminal existence, which was both agonising and isolating. The ache for home and a reconnection with my origins became overpowering.

As I grappled with the paradox of harmonising my cultural heritage with my newfound surroundings, a complex array of challenges emerged. The displacement of my first identity became palpable upon my migration to the United Kingdom, manifesting as a form of fragmentation—a tangible upheaval of movement intertwined with the psychological sensation of inhabiting an in-between realm. My ancestral ties to Morocco, deeply ingrained within me, have resulted in a multitude of identities—British, Moroccan, European, North African, Arab, and Muslim Female. Balancing these dual nationalities proved to be a complex task, inducing a sense of marginality within my country of residence. In the context of personal exploration, delving into Morocco’s rich cultural diversity and historical context provides further insight into the complexities of national identity and belonging.

Morocco’s Cultural Diversity and Historical Context

Morocco’s historic crossroads, a junction where people are inherently mobile and open to diverse cultures owing to its strategic position bordering the Arab world, Africa and Europe, while nestled between the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, has facilitated robust international connections spanning culture and diversity awareness. Having been raised in Morocco, I have perpetually sensed a rich tapestry of multi-religious and ethnic unity, marked by tolerance and cultural reverence within the Moroccan community. For example, the common exchange of greetings

like ‘Shalom’ and ‘Asalamualaikum’ among Abrahamic kin reiterates this coexistence.

Morocco’s history is intertwined with a Jewish presence spanning over two millennia. Jews, Muslims and Christians have shared harmonious lives for centuries, with Morocco once hosting the most substantial Arab Jewish community globally, home to a quarter-million Jews at its zenith. In the illuminating work ‘Jews Under Moroccan Skies: Two Thousand Years of Jewish Life’, Elmaleh (2012) challenges conventional portrayals of Muslim–Jewish relations, shedding light on the complex interplay and subtleties that defined their interactions. Portraying the narrative of Jewish existence in Morocco, the text intricately depicts the harmonious coexistence between Jews and Muslims over the span of many centuries. The writer delves into the profound chronicles of Berber Jews, providing an insight into their vibrant history. This narrative reinvigorates our understanding of power dynamics and politics.

The Jewish community’s demographics changed over time, as highlighted by Laskier (1997), who explored the history of Jewish communities in North Africa prior to the widespread emigration in the early 1960s. He affirms that countries like Morocco once housed some of the world’s largest Jewish populations, many of whom migrated to Israel, profoundly shaping the nascent Israeli state’s growth trajectory. In a documentary by broadcaster Al Jazeera, Fanny Mergui, a Jewish political activist and returnee, on a pilgrimage to Ouazzane, Morocco, recalls a sense of acute vulnerability within the community. She recounts the pervasive impact of ‘intense propaganda’ which spurred a significant exodus. In 2004 she returned to Morocco and stated that “There was harmony between Muslim and Jewish culture, most Jews had the same standard of living as other Moroccans, we were all under colonial rule which monopolised the country’s wealth”. In the ancient town of Agouim, Pinhas Suissa, a Jewish returnee, revisits his childhood: “I remember life as a child, Berber Jews were no different from Muslims, we lived in the same houses, a Muslim family lived next door to a

Jewish one”. I can affirm this view, based on my upbringing in Morocco. Al Jazeera’s reporting underscores this remarkable narrative, highlighting the profound and lasting connections that persist between Moroccan Jews and their ancestral homeland, and further affirming the harmony between these two monotheistic religions.

The decision to migrate from Morocco to Israel marked a significant turning point for a substantial portion of the Jewish population. While some resisted the allure of Israel and chose to remain in Morocco, the majority departed, leaving behind a mere 2,000 Arab Jews in the region, according to Rabat and Kasraoui (2021). However, the transition to Israel did not always fulfill the expectations of those who embarked on this journey. Many found themselves marginalised in their adopted homeland, prompting some to return to Morocco. Despite these challenges, their profound ties to Morocco endure, serving as a testament to the enduring power of heritage, culture and Abrahamic kinship. The examination of the motivations, challenges and lasting connections experienced by those who embark on this transformative journey is vital.

Migration

Today, Europe and the USA have emerged as significant destinations for migrants and refugees. According to Pew Research, most of the migration surge which began in 2011 was a consequence of foreign invasion and armed conflict that forced the displacement of millions of people. Forced displacement and migration have boosted the number of migrants from 25 million to 54 million (Pew Research, 2016). Escaping ceaseless conflicts, oppression, and the economic instability fuelled by post-colonial unrest, they embark on perilous journeys aboard overcrowded and unseaworthy vessels, facing the unknown as they seek safety and opportunities. According to UNHRC (2020), conflicts in regions like the Middle East, Africa and parts of Asia have emerged as primary drivers of displacement.

In instances of fatalities in the Mediterranean Sea, it becomes glaringly evident that Europe and the US, who possess the capacity to deploy a wide array of resources and manpower for interventions, invasions and war, do not extend the same level of commitment to the tragic fate of thousands of men, women and children hailing from the same countries, who succumb to the Mediterranean's depths. This discrepancy is all the more perplexing when considering the active involvement of these nations in actions such as bombings and interventions in regions like Libya, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Mali, Sudan, Palestine and Somalia, to mention just a few.

Pew Research recorded that 2.26 million persons immigrated to the EU in 2021. The idea that there are two sides to every story carries notable significance within this context, uncovering the reasons for migration, and we can reveal the intricacies that drive migrants or those often stereotyped under the brand of 'immigrants' to embark on their journeys, encompassing elements out of their control or desires.

In the framework of significant immigration numbers, such as the 2.26 million persons recorded immigrating to the EU in 2021 by Pew Research, the notion that there are multiple perspectives to consider becomes particularly salient. In considering the reasons behind such migration, we unravel the root causes that propel migrants—often unfairly stereotyped as “immigrants”—to embark on their journeys. These motivations often encompass elements beyond their control or desires. The rise of nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiments, and the exploration of how these sentiments shape policies, attitudes, and the lived experiences of migrants within the EU and beyond, becomes imperative.

Rise of Nationalism and Anti-Immigrant Sentiments

Unfortunately, the rise of nationalism and anti-immigration sentiment in various countries has further complicated the

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plight of migrants, obstructing their pursuit of acceptance and safety. Anti-immigrant and refugee sentiment sweeping across Europe has caused a shift in immigration and refugee policies throughout the continent, resulting in the construction of both physical and symbolic barriers to deter populations coming from the global south.

Open racism may be less prevalent in mainstream politics, but there are indications of racism resurfacing as a component of right-wing political policies. Factors such as increasing ethnic minority populations in European cities, international travel, migration pressures from developing countries, and the rise in refugees may be contributing to the apparent rise in racism being seen in the twenty-first century. Discriminatory issues like racism, xenophobia, exclusion, racist attacks and police brutality, particularly against foreigners, remain prevalent in Europe. These problems have increased significantly in recent years: in 2021/22 there were 109,843 racist hate crime incidents recorded by the police service in England and Wales, compared with 92,052 in the previous reporting year (Statistica, 2023).

Morocco has a significant diaspora population, with around five million Moroccans living abroad in Europe (Mahieu, 2022). Migration initially involved men who migrated after World War II to work in Europe during the reconstruction period (Hicham, 2021). The European Union is frequently regarded as a zone of comfort (Cafruny and Ryner, 2003; Schmidt, 2006; Geddes, 2008), which played a central role in motivating my family's decision to migrate and establish roots in the UK. Nonetheless, upon conducting a thorough analysis of post-colonialism from the perspective of the political, cultural, economic, historical and social ramifications of European colonial dominance, one might initiate a re-evaluation of Europe as a 'comfort zone'.

Europe has been a mixture of increasing popular and political hostility in host sites to migrants and asylum seekers, along with the opening of new opportunities for diaspora organisation and mobilisation. The persistence of racism in

modern societies, particularly in Europe, was researched in the work 'Recognising and Confronting Racism in Europe' (Henderson, 2021) wherein the author claims that systemic racism continues to be a problematic menace.

The conversation surrounding anti-racism takes on a unique dimension when considering the European experience. There are three distinct challenges highlighted in recognising and addressing racism in Europe, as suggested by the author: limited knowledge of Europe's historical role in colonisation and enslavement; misunderstanding of present-day inequalities within Europe; and adherence to European models of social cohesion and national identity. These challenges form the bases for the exploration of Islam versus the West. Delving into the complexities of this dynamic relationship, we will examine how historical legacies, contemporary narratives and societal structures shape perceptions and interactions between Islam and the West.

Islam vs the West

In considering Europe and MENA migration today, the EU affirms that it has a robust system for human rights protection, employing effective mechanisms with binding decisions and a sophisticated legal arsenal (European Council, Council of the European Union). However, contrary to the assertions by the EU, certain member states have enacted legislation that formalises exclusion and upholds discriminatory behaviours. To illustrate this further, in 2004, France implemented a ban on the Muslim head covering for women within education spaces. In more recent times, the UK has introduced a barge for migrants that has been denoted as a 'floating prison', which is an 'utterly shameful' way to treat people seeking asylum (Amnesty International, 2023), and both Sweden and Denmark have permitted the burning of the Holy Quran under the guise of democracy and freedom of speech. Further afield, in the United States, fears about the perceived threat of 'Islam' played a significant role in the administration implementing

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policies like the travel ban from several Muslim-majority countries, further reinforcing the narrative of confrontation.

Though the EU has advanced in safeguarding human rights, ample proof suggests that there remains a task of tackling the entrenched problems of bias and marginalisation within its boundaries. These challenges underscore the necessity for continuous endeavours to counter racism, foster inclusiveness, and establish parity both in Europe's global and local spheres, including its institutional frameworks.

On a global level, in considering EU relations, the ongoing human rights violations against the Palestinians which started in 1948 with the establishment of the state of Israel (Human Rights Watch, 2022) has been a major driver of displacement, leading to the exodus of millions of people from their homes. "They made the desert bloom" said Ursula von der Leyen, 13th president of the European Commission, in her 2023 speech commemorating the state of Israel.

Disregarding the Nakba (catastrophe) puts European values and human rights ethics under scrutiny. From 1947 to 1949, more than 400 Palestinian villages and approximately one million individuals, including men, women and children, were forcefully evicted from their residences under threat of arms. Suppressed for nearly a century, if this occurred in contemporary times, it would unquestionably be labelled "ethnic cleansing", attests Pappé in his book "The ethnic cleansing of Palestinians", 2007.

The illegal incursion into Iraq stands as another compelling illustration of scrutiny under the EU assertions of Human Rights, as evidenced by the House of Commons and the Chilcot Inquiry in 2016. One may well deduce, that on one side, the motivation behind military interventions, unlawful invasions, and settler colonial practices is fuelled by the desire for resource exploitation, strategic dominance, and a form of capitalism driven by warfare.

In his book, "The United States of War: A Global History of America's Endless Conflicts, from Columbus to the Islamic State" (2018), David Vine asserts that since its

invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the United States has been continually engaged in warfare. He claims that this ceaseless cycle of conflict is not as unique as it may appear initially, with the United States having been either involved in war or initiating invasions of other nations nearly every year since its inception. He meticulously traces this enduring pattern of violent confrontation from Christopher Columbus's arrival in Guantanamo Bay in 1494 to the gradual expansion of a global empire over the course of 250 years.

Relying on historical research and first-hand anthropological studies spanning fourteen countries and territories, "The United States of War" exposes how leaders across various generations have ensnared the nation in an unending cycle of war. They achieved this by establishing an unprecedented network of foreign military bases, forming a worldwide framework that has increased the likelihood of aggressive interventionist conflicts.

The book culminates by addressing the devastating consequences of American wars—resulting in millions of casualties, injuries, and displacements, especially in the Middle East. In particular, Israel and the United States entered into a 10-year military support agreement, marking the most substantial commitment of its kind in the history of the United States. Outlined within a Memorandum of Understanding, this arrangement is valued at \$38 billion over the span of a decade, reflecting an approximate 27 percent increase from the funds allocated in the previous accord established in 2007. The enduring diplomatic and military partnership between these countries has deep roots, with Israel having been, even before this deal, the primary recipient of U.S. foreign aid since World War II, as documented by the Congressional Research Service (2020).

Beyond unveiling the profit-driven motives, political agendas, racism and toxic masculinity that underlie the West's relationship with war and empire, it reveals how the extensive history of dominance and military expansion influences everyday lives. This influence extends from the multi-

trillion-dollar wars of today to the pervasiveness of violence and militarism.

Understanding the complex shifts in magnitude, evolving patterns, and changing population distributions associated with global socio-political and economic transformations, such as migration, is pivotal for comprehending the evolving landscape of our existence. This comprehension not only helps us make sense of a changing world but also enables us to strategically plan for the future. Vital components in this endeavour include sustainable practices, empowerment of marginalised communities, and fostering international cooperation to address shared global issues. By recognising the interconnectedness of historical legacies and present-day realities, we can pave the way for more effective and inclusive solutions aimed at ensuring a sustainable future in the region. Against this milieu, “Reshaping the Narrative and Identity” delves into the dynamic interplay between historical forces, contemporary challenges, and the quest for collective identity, offering insights into the complexities of navigating shifting narratives and redefining identities in an ever-changing world.

Reshaping the Narrative and Identity

My journey of assimilation also unveiled a profound identity conflict rooted in my religion, Islam. Despite Islam being the second-largest global religion, misconceptions abound, exacerbated by mounting anti-Muslim rhetoric and the unjust association of ‘terrorism’ with Muslims. These biases and stereotypes have given rise to Islamophobia.

To put the faith into statistical context, the number of Muslims is expected to increase by 70 per cent from 1.8 billion in 2015 to nearly 3 billion in 2060. Muslims are expected to make up more than three-in-ten of the world’s people (31.1%), according to Pew Research Centre’s demographic projections (2017).

Islamophobia denotes an irrational fear, prejudice, or discrimination directed at Islam and its adherents. This

societal ill has infiltrated Western perspectives, fostering negative attitudes and unfounded generalisations about Muslims. Mitigating Islamophobia stands as a critical imperative for nurturing tolerance, inclusivity and respect for diversity in multicultural societies. The notion of a clash between “Islam” and “the West” looms significantly in the MENA region, and has engendered a skewed perception of homogeneous identities, fostering a misleading dichotomy.

The modern juxtaposition between “Islam” and “the West” hearkens back to the colonial era of the 19th century when an “Orientalist” discourse emerged, framing Europe’s perception of the Middle East (Said, 1978; Neumann, 1999). The ideological confrontations of the Cold War era, spanning left and right and the competing nationalisms of individual MENA states, as well as the concept of an imagined Arab nation versus distinct Arab countries, gradually evolved into an emphasis on cultures and religions as the core constituents of collective identities. Historians and empirical analysis have termed this strategy “divide and conquer,” aiming to make revolution more challenging, through division. In 1964 in Pal Gardens, New York, Malcolm X, American Muslim minister and human rights activist who was a prominent figure during the civil rights movement stated, “The greatest weapon that the colonial powers have used in the past against our people has always been divide-and-conquer”.

Geopolitical matters in the MENA region have been further reframed with the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks also being intertwined with the “Islam” vs. “the West” narrative. While some depicted these events as emblematic of the clash, viewing “Islam” as a symbol of “justice” and “the West” as a champion of “freedom,” this perspective oversimplifies the complex realities and dynamics at play.

This phenomenon was part of a global trend in which “identity” assumed increasing political significance (Lapid and Kratochwil, 1996). Within the MENA region, this shift led to a re-interpretation of history, including the influence of US interventions in the region and the positioning of Israel.

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The origins of the “identity” concept can be traced back to the 19th-century colonial period, characterised by the emergence of an “Orientalist” discourse that shaped how Europe viewed the Middle East and vice versa (Said, 1979). This clash of identities has profound implications for regional politics and international relations, often misperceived as a qualification that “Islam” and “the West” are homogeneous identities, creating a misleading binary divide. Moreover, this concept theorises that global or universalist identity perceptions, such as support for human rights and democratic values, exert influence on the MENA region.

The 20th century witnessed the global political ascendancy of “identity”, with ramifications extending to the MENA region. This newfound political salience of identity prompted a re-examination of history, including the role of US interventions and Israel. Consequently, this reorientation has impacted how conflicts and geopolitical issues are framed and comprehended within the region.

Grasping the global identity factors is imperative for comprehending the social and political evolutions in the MENA region. The interplay between “Islam” and “the West,” alongside the influence of worldwide identity perceptions, has fundamentally shaped the region’s dynamics and conflicts. Acknowledging these factors has enabled me to attain a more nuanced grasp of the intricacies of the MENA region and its relations within the broader global context.

The proliferation of the discourse depicting a global confrontation between “Islam” and “the West” is unmistakably observable in the propagation of this narrative on a global scale. Some factions intentionally propagate this narrative, as exemplified by Islamist radicals of various shades, perpetrating acts of terrorism who employ and reinforce the narrative of an insurgent “Islam” pitted against “the West.” The diffusion of these narratives has had discernible implications for social and political outcomes. The rise of far-right movements in Europe, fuelled by Islamophobia (characterised by collective fear and denigration

of all Muslims, rather than just the criminals who represent them), has concurrently shifted the European political centre towards the right.

Simultaneously, elements within the far right in the Western world promote and propagate this narrative. Events like the Mediterranean migration crisis have been exploited to intensify apprehensions about “Islam” and amplify a perception of siege in Europe.

The widespread acceptance of these narratives has also facilitated the ascent of far right movements in Europe, thereby shifting the political equilibrium of the continent towards the right. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as Islamophobia, encompassing a collective aversion to and disparagement of all Muslims, extending beyond those solely responsible for acts of violence.

These distorted narratives find traction among elements of the far right in the Western world and mainstream media, exerting considerable influence over attitudes, policies and interactions between diverse communities and regions. Effectively comprehending and addressing these narratives is imperative for fostering tolerance, inclusivity and harmonious coexistence in an increasingly interconnected global landscape.

Notably, the Western media consistently harms and degrades certain social groups by reinforcing the status quo or by amplifying stereotypes, namely practising representational harm. A study found that terrorist attacks committed by Muslim extremists receive 357% more US press coverage than those committed by non-Muslims, according to research from the University of Alabama, utilising the Global Terrorism Database. Terrorist attacks committed by non-Muslims (or where the religion was unknown) received an average of 15 headlines, while those committed by Muslim extremists received 105 headlines. These findings were based on all terrorist attacks in the US between 2006 and 2015 according to the Global Terrorism Database (2018). The disparity in media coverage is particularly at odds with reality, given that

white and right-wing terrorists carried out nearly twice as many terrorist attacks as Muslim extremists between 2008 and 2016.

In the realm of Western media, a disconcerting pattern emerges—one of being the unrelenting cheerleaders of war. In his book, “War Made Invisible, How America Hides the Human Toll of Its Military Machine”, acclaimed veteran and political analyst Solomon delivers a searing exposé of how the American military, with the help of the media, conceals its perpetual war. Profound revelations act as symbolic stepping stones on this intellectual journey, shedding light on the Western media’s active role as promoters of conflict and warfare. They validate the assertion that “Western media act as advocates for war”, encompassing propaganda and the suppression of information, aligned with Western interests.

Despite the relentless propagation of the discourse surrounding a global clash since 2011’s global war on terror, with discernible and deleterious effects on the MENA region, the identities within this region are not monolithically shaped by this singular factor. Countervailing forces, operating both on a global and regional scale, stand as formidable barriers against the supposed clash of civilisations that looms large. The gravitational pull of universalist ideals, which serve as the bedrock for concepts like democracy and human rights, exerts a substantial influence within the MENA region. I consider that the interplay between Islam, democracy and modernity at the grassroots level defies facile dichotomies, and demand a nuanced understanding.

The relationship between Islam, democracy and modernity cannot be reduced to simplistic clashes. The notions of “democracy” and “human rights” are not exclusively owned by the West but have a broader global nature.

Amidst the prevailing discourse that often pits Islam against the West in a supposed clash of civilisations, I, as a descendant of the diaspora, challenge this unjust narrative. Fundamentally, understanding the complexities inherent in the MENA region requires us to actively avoid the perilous

trap of oversimplification. It is imperative to grasp the multifaceted array of factors that shape identities and political aspirations in this region, including the pervasive influence of universalist principles such as democracy and human rights. As we delve into “Reframing Islam vs the West,” we embark on a journey to deconstruct prevailing narratives, explore nuanced perspectives, and shed light on the intricacies of this dynamic relationship. Through a lens of critical inquiry and empathy, we aim to reshape the discourse surrounding Islam and the West, fostering a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between cultures, ideologies and historical legacies.

Reframing “Islam vs the West”

Whilst the narratives of “Islam versus the West” have sown seeds of destruction, stoking conflicts and sowing division, glimmers of hope emerge through the presence of countervailing forces, including diverse diaspora communities and transnational social movements. These offer the promise of a more sophisticated and all-encompassing political landscape across the MENA region. By wholeheartedly acknowledging and embracing these global identities and connections, the region embarks on a trajectory of cooperation, comprehension and reciprocal esteem.

Another example of such understanding can be seen in the book “Islamophobia: Making Muslims the Enemy” by Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg (Rowman & Littlefield, 2008). This book deftly navigates the landscape of Islamophobia in the United States, shedding light on the negative stereotypes and apprehensions that have woven themselves into the American consciousness. In the post-9/11 era, the perception of a “clash of civilisations” has taken root, painting Islam as a looming menace in the theatre of the “War on Terror”. These perceptions, rooted in unexamined anxieties, have burgeoned over time, particularly in moments of crisis or significant events involving Muslims.

The term “Islamophobia” serves as an apt descriptor for this unsettling phenomenon. It encapsulates the fears,

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suspensions and resentments that unfoundedly cling to Islam and Muslim cultures, often in the absence of genuine comprehension of the religion or the diverse tapestry of Muslim-majority nations. These anxieties find their sustenance in rare incidents that validate existing prejudices, fanning the flames of an unending cycle of fear and bias.

The referenced book unveils the potent impact of political cartoons as a formidable print medium, laying bare the West's tendency to vilify and belittle Muslims and Islam. This demonisation, as the book compellingly asserts, transcends political ideologies, extending its reach across the spectrum, where both liberals and conservatives contribute to the corrosive portrayal of Islam. Additionally, the book highlights the general misunderstanding of the Muslim world. It addresses the misconception that Islam is primarily a Middle Eastern religion, even though the majority of Muslims reside in South and Southeast Asia. The text further challenges the assumption that an extensive portion of Muslims are militant fundamentalists when, in reality, they represent only a small proportion of the Muslim population. His observations subsequently provoke the notion that it might not be unreasonable to re-characterise this "war on terror" as a "war on Islam".

Overall, his work sheds light on the issue of Islamophobia in the West and emphasises the crucial importance of understanding and countering these negative stereotypes and anxieties through more accurate and informed perspectives on Islam and Muslim cultures.

In the grand tapestry of thought, from scrutinising settler colonialism to unmasking the tendrils of Islamophobia, the unifying thread is clear—an unwavering commitment to challenge prevailing narratives, advocate for justice, and foster an atmosphere of respect and understanding for all cultures and races.

The colonial dogma has, time and again, resulted in the dispossession of ancestral lands, the obliteration of age-old indigenous traditions and histories, and the imposition

of Eurocentric norms and values, all bearing witness to the profound disruption caused by Western colonisation. These sentiments resonate strongly in the scholarly works of figures like Michael M. Laskier (1997). This history has spurred a critical examination of settler colonialism, grounded in the poignant experiences of indigenous peoples who have borne the brunt of European colonisation. The troubling narratives find their roots in the history of colonialism, which has deeply scarred not only my homeland but also the entire continent of Africa. As we delve into “Indigenous Critiques of Settler Colonialism”, we embark on a journey to unpack the enduring legacies of colonial violence, explore indigenous perspectives, and confront the ongoing struggles for land, sovereignty and cultural survival. Through this lens of critical inquiry and empathy, we seek to amplify indigenous voices, challenge dominant narratives and contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding decolonisation and indigenous rights.

Indigenous Critiques of Settler Colonialism

I find myself focusing my critique on a fundamental concept: the sacred significance of land within indigenous cultures. Unlike the mere materialistic perspective, land is an intrinsic part of my historical, religious, cultural and social identity. The European onslaught, with its unquenchable thirst for land acquisition and resource exploitation, severed these sacred connections, plunging indigenous communities into a vortex of suffering and loss.

Breaking free from the grip of Eurocentric thought is essential, as it imposes an artificial lens that deems progress and development as universal ideals. Even in the realm of post-colonial theories, remnants of this perspective persist, erroneously assuming that the trajectory of European modernity should guide all societies. However, as an indigenous descendant, I vehemently challenge this monolithic view, as it erases the rich tapestry of cultures and worldviews, inadvertently upholding colonial paradigms of dominance.

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The transference of populations and the imposition of external power structures have left indelible and far-reaching imprints on the cultures, lands and rights of indigenous communities across the globe. Acknowledging the historical roots of these phenomena is essential for comprehending the intricate complexities of the current challenges and underscores the imperative for a thoughtful and respectful approach to addressing them.

Additionally, the Eurocentric worldview frequently dismisses indigenous knowledge systems and epistemologies, labelling them as primitive or inferior (Held, 2019). Yet, indigenous critiques endeavour to showcase the intricate depth and sophistication of their own knowledge systems, intricately interwoven with their profound connection to the land and ancestral heritage.

Across the globe, indigenous communities continue their valiant struggles for self-determination and the reclamation of ancestral territories. These battles are a resolute response to the lingering shadows of settler-colonialism, demanding recognition of indigenous sovereignty and rights. It is a struggle that resonates deeply with my own convictions, transcending geographical boundaries to echo the cries of solidarity from Palestine.

Agnès Callamard, Amnesty International's Secretary General, declared in their report published in 2022, "Our report reveals the true extent of Israel's apartheid regime. Whether they live in Gaza, East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank, or Israel itself, Palestinians are treated as an inferior racial group and systematically deprived of their rights. We found that Israel's cruel policies of segregation, dispossession, and exclusion across all territories under its control clearly amount to apartheid. The international community has an obligation to act".

Principally, I attest that indigenous critiques of settler colonialism can offer a profound and philosophical counterpoint to the legacy of colonisation. In my role today as an activist and human rights defender for the Palestinian

cause, I confront prevailing narratives, scrutinise notions of universalism, and underscore the paramount importance of indigenous peoples and their rights under international law. By engaging deeply with these critiques, we can effectively confront the lingering ramifications of colonial practices and work steadfastly towards an equitable future that honours the rights and dignity of indigenous communities. Today, I strive to reclaim the [unjust] narrative.

The aim of establishing a “fair and equitable” society, where every individual holds value, their rights are acknowledged and safeguarded, and decisions are conducted with fairness and integrity, stands as a fundamental objective. The rule of law functions as a safeguard, ensuring that everyone can be held responsible for their actions and that no entity remains exempt from legal principles. This holds immense significance in upholding a fully operational democratic structure.

Human rights embody the cherished values of fairness, equality, and dignity that unite us all. Human rights law serves as a conduit, giving life to these principles. It is designed to safeguard our right to voice dissent and offer prayers, to think freely and express our thoughts openly, and to shield our private lives from intrusion.

The current plight of the Palestinian people represents a pivotal global justice concern of our era. It transcends a mere “conflict” between two equal factions; rather, it manifests as an “occupation” enforced by a formidable military state, bolstered by Western support, against an impoverished, displaced populace bereft of statehood.

For a span of over 75 years, Israel has systematically subjected Palestinians to egregious human rights violations, marked by profound discrimination and lethal military force. Over a million Palestinians continue to endure discrimination, being denied equal access to public services, land and employment. Esteemed organisations like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have raised their voices on this matter.

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Amnesty International asserts that Israel's blockade of Gaza has plunged its 1.9 million inhabitants into a blizzard of poverty and psychological torment. The construction of an apartheid wall, the military lockdown of the Jordan Valley, and the annexation of East Jerusalem coalesce to establish an irrevocable reality of enduring occupation.

Israeli influential historian, Pappe, presents a groundbreaking account of the Occupied Territories, building upon the success of his previous work on the 1948 "War of Independence". This insightful examination picks up the narrative where "The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine" concluded.

Within this extensive exploration of one of the world's lengthiest and most tragic occupations, Pappe leverages recently declassified archival materials to scrutinise the motives and tactics of both military leaders and politicians. He delves into the decision-making process itself, which served as the bedrock for the ongoing occupation. Pappe's narrative encompasses a study of the legal and bureaucratic systems established to manage the populace of over one million Palestinians, along with the robust security mechanisms that rigorously enforced such control. In his 2016 book, "The Biggest Prison on Earth: A History of the Occupied Territories", Pappe vividly portrays an immense "open prison", encapsulating the essence of the world's largest of its kind. Irish Times book review stated, "What is new in 'The Biggest Prison on Earth' is Pappe's detailed accounting of exactly what the Israeli planners were contemplating in 1963; namely, the largest ever mega-prison for a million and a half people".

It is hardly surprising that the MENA diaspora community extends unwavering support to the Palestinian people's quest for justice. These overarching, global ideational frameworks have effectively nurtured a collective sense of identity among fellow like-minded activists throughout the region and beyond. This shared identity, in turn, has been instrumental in catalysing the mobilisation for both social and

political transformation. These movements have consistently championed the causes of human rights, democracy and social justice, transcended the confines of national borders, and left an indelible mark on regional politics.

A crucial catalyst in these processes of group identity formation and political mobilisation has been the prevalent narrow portrayal of reality by journalism in the Western media. The deep-rooted mistrust of mainstream Western media among MENA diaspora communities stems from historically problematic Western foreign policies and the need for transparency and sensitivity. Specifically, in the context of MENA, mistrust of international mainstream media has often promoted human rights justifications for countless political agendas and what I have come to conclude as “war capitalism”, as asserted by Beckhert (2016).

As an activist and employment law advisor, working under the “Reclaim The Narrative” brand, I play a pivotal role in challenging mainstream media and workplace narratives, representing and advocating for human rights and employee rights simultaneously. I am driven by Martin Luther King’s notable declaration, “All labour that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence”. In addition, I also reclaim the narrative with religious philosophy, namely Islam and my ancestral MENA region.

From my indigenous perspective, I challenge the Eurocentric view that universal progress and development represent overarching ideals. Post-colonial theories, at times, inadvertently perpetuate this paradigm by assuming that European modernity’s trajectory is a universal yardstick. I actively contend that such universalism obscures the tapestry of cultures and worldviews, perpetuating colonial ideologies that rationalise divisions and conflicts.

In “Israel’s colonial project in Palestine: Brutal Pursuit”, the author claims that colonialism is grounded in three core aspects: violence, territorial control, and manipulation of populations, all of which are built upon racist ideologies

and practices. Examining the endeavour in Israel/Palestine through the lens of settler colonialism uncovers the underlying strategies and objectives driving the region's governance, marked by tactics such as violence, repressive state regulations and racially oriented surveillance methods. Drawing from sociological, historical and postcolonial studies, author Elia Zureik provides an examination of the colonial project in Palestine, spanning from Israel's foundation in 1948 to the actions and decisions of the present-day government.

The Eurocentric worldview often dismisses indigenous knowledge as rudimentary or inferior, while indigenous critiques illuminate the intricate depth and refinement of their own knowledge, intricately interwoven with their connection to the land and ancestral heritage (Held, 2019).

The struggle for self-determination and the reclamation of ancestral lands persists among indigenous peoples across the globe. These efforts strive to confront the enduring echoes of settler colonialism, demanding recognition of indigenous sovereignty and rights.

In summation, I affirm that indigenous critiques of settler colonialism can offer a robust philosophical response to the legacy of European colonisation, by challenging the prevailing narratives, probing the notion of universalism, and underscoring the centrality of land and indigenous international human rights. Engaging with and comprehending these critiques paves the way for addressing the persistent repercussions of colonial practices, working towards a future marked by justice and equity, where the rights and dignity of indigenous communities are fully honoured.

The enduring ramifications of colonialism have profoundly shaped various corners of the world, including the MENA region. Postcolonialism theory provides a critical examination of the multifaceted impacts of colonial rule, typically attributed to European powers (Elam, 2019). This comprehensive framework delves into the realms of politics, culture, aesthetics, economics, linguistics, history and society.

At its core are the enduring effects of colonialism, with the aim of deconstructing its foundations.

Eminent figures like Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Frantz Fanon have propelled the postcolonial perspective, unsettling prevailing assumptions and power structures. It effectively counters the predominant White perspectives that have shaped historical narratives about other cultures (Said, 2001).

The essence of postcolonialism lies in its mission to amplify marginalised voices and intervene in shaping perceptions. It strives to recalibrate thought processes and behaviours, fostering improved intercultural relations. Under the “Reclaim the Narrative” umbrella, I am able to shed light on mainstream media bias, and align with the perspective of Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Israeli NGO BT’Selem, that the theft, oppression and exploitation of Palestine and Palestinians is being sold to us at the cost of truth and justice.

To tackle the contemporary environmental challenges in the MENA region, it is imperative to acknowledge and comprehend the historical context of colonialism, as these historical legacies continue to influence present-day issues. A profound understanding of these epi-historical factors is indispensable for addressing the intricate challenges confronting MENA countries today.

The impact of colonial powers reverberates through resource exploitation, arbitrary border delineations and subsequent displacement of ethnic and tribal communities in MENA countries. This discord over land and resources has ignited conflicts, ultimately leading to a surge in population displacement and refugee crises. Furthermore, the legacy of colonialism renders MENA nations susceptible to geopolitical clashes, centred around resource control and territorial dominance. These conflicts exact an ecological toll, disrupt communities, and ravage infrastructure, thereby exacerbating the region’s environmental predicaments.

In observing conflict dynamics from diverse external perspectives and gauging the influence of multifaceted political opportunity structures, the concept of “war capitalism” is not to be dismissed. This is a term used to describe the violent exploitation of the non-West through piracy, enslavement, theft of natural resources, and the physical seizure of markets, as outlined by historian Sven Beckert in his widely acclaimed book, “Empire of Cotton: A New History of Global Capitalism”.

Understanding the historical context of colonisation and imperialism becomes paramount when dissecting the ongoing struggles faced by indigenous communities today. The forced displacement of populations and the imposition of external power structures have cast enduring shadows over the cultures, lands and rights of indigenous societies worldwide.

Postcolonialism serves as a lens through which we strive to unravel the intricate legacy of Western colonial and imperial dominance, which has left an indelible mark on our world’s social, political and economic frameworks since its inception in the 1400s. Delving into the aftermath of colonialism on the knowledge and identities of both the colonisers and the colonised, postcolonialism emerges as a global critical theory with profound insights into the foundational structures of power, knowledge and identity in our contemporary world. As we explore the diverse factors shaping identity, we draw upon the insights of postcolonial theory to navigate the complexities of identity formation amidst the enduring legacies of colonialism and imperialism. Through this exploration, we aim to deepen our understanding of the multifaceted dynamics that influence how individuals and communities construct and negotiate their identities in a postcolonial world.

Diverse Factors Shaping Identity

The convergence of Critical Theory and postcolonial perspectives coalesces around the theme of development and its intricate entwinement with Eurocentrism and White supremacy. McCarthy’s critical theory of global development

is viewed as a move towards confronting Eurocentrism and affording voice to critical viewpoints originating beyond Western boundaries (Tinsley, 2021). However, certain post-colonialists posit that vestiges of modern imperialism persist within it.

Further extending the discourse, Allen, a distinguished feminist scholar, delves deeply into her work, “The End of Progress: Decolonising the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory.” In this study, she provocatively questions the lessons critical theory can glean from its postcolonial critics, asserting that reliance on a normative framework grounded in Western modernity is inadequate as a standard for social and epistemic evolution. These perspectives underscore that the validity of critical viewpoints hinges upon a normative foundation anchored in Western modernity, potentially reinforcing the presumption of Western intellectual superiority.

Allen’s critique sheds a glaring light on the imperative for critical theory to engage in introspection and embrace postcolonial perspectives that challenge the hegemonic paradigms centred around the West. In my contention, deconstructing normative foundations and engaging in robust dialogue with postcolonial criticisms positions critical theory to chart a course toward a more inclusive and decolonised approach. This evolution involves the recognition and appreciation of diverse knowledge systems and experiences beyond the Western framework. By delving into these critiques, we embark on a transformative journey, one that confronts the indelible echoes of colonial practices.

Through this journey, we pave the way for a future imbued with justice and equity, one that reveres the rights and dignity of indigenous peoples while embracing and celebrating the rich mosaic of cultures and races.

The ongoing propagation of unjust narratives against Islam poses a threat to global peace. These misrepresented narratives can be swiftly challenged through the interpretation of various scriptures underscoring the inherent principle of faith, equality, and respect for all races. Hadiths and

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Quranic passages explicitly endorse equality among all races, underscoring this as an inherent principle of the faith.

Notably, in his last sermon, our prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “All mankind is from Adam and Eve. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab have any superiority over an Arab; a white has no superiority over a black, nor does a black have any superiority over a white; [none have superiority over another] except by piety and good action”. (Human Appeal, 2020).

A prominent advocate for human rights, having embraced Islam in 1963, El Hajj Malik El Shabazz, Malcolm X, famously pronounced from Makkah; “Islam is the one religion that erases from its society the race problem”.

Malcolm X flew to Makkah to perform Hajj, or the Pilgrimage, and what he saw there affected him deeply. As Black men and White men prayed side-by-side in complete harmony, his eyes were opened to the true beauty and meaning of Islam (Haley, 2007). In his now famous letter to his assistants, entitled Letter from Makkah, Hajj Malik writes: “Never have I witnessed such overwhelming spirit of true brotherhood as is practiced by people of all colors and races here in this ancient Holy Land, the home of Abraham, Muhammad and all the other Prophets of the Holy Scriptures. America needs to understand Islam, because this is the one religion that erases from its society the race problem. Throughout my travels in the Muslim world, I have met, talked to, and even eaten with people who in America would have been considered white – but the white attitude was removed from their minds by the religion of Islam. I have never before seen sincere and true brotherhood practised by all colors together, irrespective of their color’.

Islam acknowledges and holds in high regard the diversity of all races. This is shown in the verse: O humanity! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may “get to” know one another. Surely the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is

the most righteous among you. Allah is truly All-Knowing, All-Aware. Quran - Al Hujurat 49:13

My personal interactions with the host country were influenced by various identity dilemmas, where my cultural and religious practices, norms and political views were ridiculed and diminished, further eroding my identity. I came to realise that I needed to study and reshape my hybrid identity, leading to a shift away from the notion of merely “fitting in”.

This journey prompted me to educate myself to facilitate and encourage cross-cultural interaction and fusion, opening new avenues of thought and perspective. It challenged the binary notion of seeing oneself in contrast to an imaginary “other”. This process of assimilation and educational growth within the dominant culture of the host country propelled me beyond the confines of stereotypical experiences of uprootedness and marginalisation. I soon found myself coaching senior management in UK corporations on cultural awareness, diversity and inclusion. Driven by a desire for change, I pursued a career in human resources management; this decision became a cornerstone of my journey. Conflict management and equal opportunities were integral aspects of my role, serving as a launching pad for my objective to coach recognition and respect of diverse cultures and faiths.

In an era of globalisation, as I work to reshape the narrative, I have undergone significant adaptation and transformation, nurturing a vision that empowers me to uncover prosperity in my host country. The complexities inherent in diaspora experiences, the profound significance of cultural identity, and the imperative for inclusive and respectful engagement with diaspora communities took centre stage as I embarked on a journey to forge a cohesive sense of self within my new cultural milieu, the British-Moroccan fusion.

Achieving a sense of pride and elevation in my British existence demanded the pursuit of higher education, in my new-found role in human resources, to facilitate and create

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educative spaces for coaching and development of corporate employees. The postcolonial perspective holds significance within the British education system, which has predominantly presented White viewpoints, particularly in historical narratives of pivotal events. The lack of “viewpoint” diversity in historical texts left me deeply confounded.

In her book, “Decolonising Educational Leadership: Exploring Alternative Approaches to Leading Schools”, Ann E. Lopez masterfully presents the case for critical and liberating strategies in educational leadership. Lopez suggests that by delving into the cultural dynamics within diasporic educational spaces, the imperative to decolonise education and curriculum in public secondary schools becomes evident. She advocates for mainstream education to be more inclusive and responsive to the diverse experiences and viewpoints of marginalised communities.

This perspective underscores the transformative potential of diasporic educational spaces and their role in combatting xenophobia and racialisation within educational environments. It highlights the significance of acknowledging and valuing the contributions of these communities, urging a more equitable and decolonised approach to education in Western societies.

Recognising the transformative potential of diasporic educational spaces and their ability to counteract xenophobia and racialisation in educational settings is paramount. This perspective underscores the importance of acknowledging and valuing the contributions of these communities, calling for a more equitable and decolonised approach to education in the Western context. Furthermore, by incorporating an unbiased approach into the curriculum, educators can help to promote a more informed and compassionate generation that values diversity and understands the importance of challenging stereotypes and discrimination, conceivably eroding the notion of “them” and “us”.

I conclude that indigenous critiques of settler-colonialism are deeply enmeshed in the lived experiences of

indigenous peoples, who have borne the brunt of European colonisation's consequences. Settler colonialism encompasses the establishment of new societies by European settlers on lands pre-inhabited by indigenous communities, often leading to land dispossession, erasure of indigenous traditions and imposition of Eurocentric norms.

Central to indigenous critiques is the reverence for land within indigenous cultures, wherein land is not a mere commodity but an integral facet of spiritual, cultural and social identity. The onslaught of European colonisation, focused on land acquisition and resource exploitation, disrupted these deep connections, inflicting profound suffering and loss upon indigenous societies.

Promoting sustainable practices, empowering marginalised communities and fostering international cooperation to address shared global challenges are of utmost importance. Recognising the intricate interplay of historical and contemporary factors enables us to develop more effective and comprehensive solutions for a sustainable future in the region. It is essential to foster an inclusive environment where individuals are accepted for their identities, regardless of their ethnicity or religion. This sentiment promotes diversity, tolerance and understanding among different communities, a distant recollection that I cherished during my upbringing in Morocco.

In my journey, I have come to realise that the experiences of diaspora communities are complex and challenging. We find ourselves in foreign lands, which can lead to a deep sense of displacement and a yearning for our homelands. This state of "living in-between" has its pains, often leaving us marginalised and struggling with matters of cultural identity, discrimination and resistance to the dominant culture.

As I have gone through the process of assimilation into the dominant culture of my adopted country, I have witnessed the transformation of my diaspora identity and the emergence of a unique hybrid identity. While this blending of cultures

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can sometimes lead to conflict, it has also opened up new perspectives and ways of thinking for me.

The forces of globalisation have significantly altered my diaspora experiences, compelling me to broaden my vision and relinquish some aspects of our national identities. While this shift has brought both success and prosperity in my new home, it can also result in feelings of estrangement from my place of origin.

The diaspora is not defined in homogenous or nationalistic terms within this context. Instead, it seeks to celebrate and understand its varied and rich manifestations as it traverses borders, shifting from margin to centre, and finding itself in the intersections of multiple sites and influences.

The aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks cast an unprecedented spotlight on Muslims, generating heightened scrutiny and public attention. Undeniably, this intensified focus often gave rise to misunderstandings and a notable lack of comprehension concerning Islam and its practitioners.

A troubling trend that emerged during this period revolves around the polarisation of viewpoints toward Muslims, a division notably driven by political affiliations. This polarisation has led to increasingly divergent attitudes and perceptions regarding Muslims, fostering an atmosphere characterised by mounting contention and division.

Cultural or religious differences should not be a tool for Western politicians and media to drive a wedge between their communities and adoptive societies. To foster a more comprehensive and empathetic society, I firmly believe in the importance of integrating the experiences, viewpoints and voices of Muslim individuals into various institutional and social contexts.

As an activist, I am committed to achieving this goal through the following personal strategies. Forums, transnational networks, and social media platforms have

emerged as spaces in which new political identities and modes of political activism are forming among MENA diaspora communities. I actively engage in online activism in reflective dialogues that delve deep into stereotypes, bias, discrimination and religious prejudice.

By analysing real-world instances and discussing the consequences of such attitudes, I try to encourage critical thinking, anticipating cultivation of empathy for injustices that violate international law and basic human rights. I firmly advocate that this principle is particularly relevant in cases where migration is compelled due to unjust invasions, interventions that continue in modern- and historical-day colonial practices, including apartheid.

The global movement for human rights gained strength with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948. Crafted as a “shared benchmark for all peoples and nations”, this Declaration marked a historic milestone by articulating fundamental civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that every individual should be entitled to.

Over time, it has garnered widespread acceptance as the foundational principle of human rights that demand universal respect and safeguarding. The UDHR, along with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its two Optional Protocols, as well as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, collectively constitute the commonly referred to International Bill of Human Rights. In the very year the bill was ratified, the native inhabitants of Palestine endured a catastrophic event, known as the Nakba, and even now, their ongoing fight persists despite the established International Bill of Human Rights.

By confronting bias and discrimination, we create a platform to engage in discussions that can manifest in personal interactions, educational environments, communities, and society at large. By encouraging alternative experiences and perspectives, we can foster nurturing and compassionate

global peace by championing allyship aligned with basic human rights as enshrined in International Law.

Conclusion: Call for Inclusivity and Cooperation

Weaving together my approaches, I actively contribute to the development of an enlightened and empathetic narrative that values diversity and comprehends the significance of challenging stereotypes, discrimination and injustices. This approach serves as the foundation for shaping a more inclusive society where every individual, regardless of their background or beliefs, is treated with respect and esteem. Embracing the term “diaspora” and acknowledging its multifaceted nature allows societies to cultivate enhanced integration, understanding and collaboration among diverse communities. This acknowledgement has the potential to foster mutually advantageous relationships and fortify the bonds linking migrants with their countries of origin.

To facilitate constructive interaction, it is imperative for countries of origin to implement supportive policies towards their diaspora populations. These policies may encompass efforts to engage with diaspora communities, create channels for their participation, and address their concerns and needs. Addressing these challenges necessitates concerted efforts from various stakeholders, including educators, media outlets, community leaders and policymakers.

Educating the public about Islam, its beliefs, practices, and contributions, can help dispel myths and promote a more accurate understanding of the faith and its followers. Engaging in open and respectful dialogue fosters empathy and breaks down stereotypes, with understanding the foundations and teachings of Islam being vital in tackling Islamophobia—a fundamental step toward promoting tolerance, inclusivity and respect for the diverse fabric of our multicultural societies. Promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding plays a pivotal role in building bridges between communities and fostering a sense of unity and mutual respect.

While apartheid in South Africa may belong to the past, in 1997, Nelson Mandela notably drew parallels between the struggles of South Africa and Palestine, emphasising, “We are acutely aware that our liberation remains unfinished without the liberation of the Palestinians”. The prevalence of continued systematic global institutionalised supremacy further emphasises the need for continued vigilance and efforts to promote equality and inclusivity in society, drawing lessons from history.

The MENA diaspora’s presence in various parts of the world can be viewed as either a resource to be harnessed or a threat to be contained, largely influenced by political and geopolitical realities. By actively seeking to learn about different religions, cultures and perspectives, and by embracing diversity, we move towards a more informed and compassionate society that celebrates the richness of human experiences. Recognising and reclaiming genuine identities, histories and ancestries, and being proud of them through education, workplace coaching and online activism, helps reclaim the narrative and escape stereotypes perpetuated by the media and enacted in local societies. By drawing lessons from history, we can acknowledge the value of our differences and strengthen our individual, yet collective, identity. Acquiring knowledge about the history and reality of our diaspora narrative empowers our identity, enabling us to take control of our own stories as descendants of the MENA diaspora.

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