

Understanding Identities in the Middle East: The Role of Structure and Agency

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Western perspectives on identities in the Middle East often lack nuance. Much academic research and media frame these identities as victims of authoritarianism, with limited or no agency. This roundtable brings together the voices of five researchers from the region to offer a more sophisticated view. It explores how identities have evolved under colonial and authoritarian structures and how they have been shaped and reshaped by local and regional media, social movements, and neoliberal development paradigms. Using various epistemological approaches, the speakers unpack the evolution and formation of identities while accounting for the structure and/or agency in their assertion. By situating their analyses within historical and social contexts, they demonstrate how identities have evolved and what acts people have taken to reclaim them in Iraq, Syria, and Palestine. Their contributions challenge the reductionist views prevalent in academia and media, offering complex insights about identities in the Middle East.

Track Classification: International Studies of the Mediterranean, Middle East & Asia Working Group