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Beth Baron
Professor of History and Interim Director, MA in Middle East Studies, Graduate Center of the City University of New York
Marion Holmes Katz
Professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, New York University
Farzaneh Milani
Professor of Women and Gender, Asian and Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures, University of Virginia

Women and Islam

Patricia Ellis: We really appreciate the opportunity to meet at IIE, and especially in this gorgeous room, and especially with such a great crowd of friends from IIE, from Carnegie, from so many different organizations, and the diplomatic community. We have a great turnout today, which is just fantastic because it's a few days later, but it still is the time that we're celebrating International Women's Day, so we couldn't have a more appropriate discussion to celebrate that day. We really appreciate our collaboration with IIE. We have an ongoing partnership, and we're just so pleased that they could be a co-sponsor of this event.

So good afternoon and welcome to everybody. I'm Patricia Ellis, President of the Women's Foreign Policy Group. We have lots of new faces, and we're always happy to see that, so just very briefly, what we're all about is promoting women's leadership and women's voices on pressing international issues of the day, and we're very well known for our in-depth international issues programs, such as our program today. We're doing more and more of them in New York, so we hope that you will participate. We have cards at the tables, so if you want to get on our mailing list or join us, you'll get notices about our upcoming events. One in particular that I want to highlight is every year, we do an annual UN Study Visit. It's very exciting, we get briefings from top UN officials on humanitarian issues, on climate change, and all kinds of important issues. This year, our keynote speaker at the luncheon will be the Deputy Secretary General, Asha-Rose Migiro, and so we're very excited about that.

We are particularly excited about this program today, and I want to extend a warm welcome to Pat Rosenfield, and Hillary Weisner from Carnegie. Carnegie is the sponsor of our Scholars Series, and it's been an absolutely wonderful series, where we've been able to really explore the diversity and complexity of Islam with scholars who give us the nuance, bring the historical, cultural, and political perspectives on things, and allow us to have a dialogue on issues that are so important to us today. So we're just really, really pleased and very excited to have our three scholars, our three professors, Professor Katz, Professor Milani, and Professor Baron, who I will introduce shortly. I also want to welcome colleagues from the diplomatic and UN community. We have the Austrian Consul General; we have the Executive Director of the UN Population Fund, who has the rank of UN Under-Secretary General, and representatives from many embassies, including Jordan, and the US Mission to the UN, and the Finnish Mission to the UN.

This is the second part of our 2008 Islam Scholars Series. The first one was with a professor, also from the University of Virginia, Professor Sachedina. We had a very lively discussion on research and writing on human rights in Iran. We're also planning on having a conference in Washington sometime this year called "The Faces of Contemporary Islam: Fresh Perspectives on Theory and Practice," and we want to connect it to foreign policy as well. What this is going to allow us to do, which is what we tried to do today, is bring together different scholars who are working on related issues, but from a very different perspective. They have so much to say themselves, but this way they can interact and enrich the discussion.

Before I introduce our speakers, I just want to say a special thanks to my staff, Kimberly Kahnhauser and Sara Barker, and Loreny Socas of IIE, for making this possible. It's now my privilege to introduce the panel and each speaker briefly. You have a handout which has their short bios, so we want to get to them and have plenty of time for Q and A, which we love to do and which I'm sure will be very rich today. Since the topic of Women and Islam is so broad, we could go on for many hours, maybe days, we've asked the scholars to address certain issues, and they won't all address all of them, but as they relate to their research; things like myths and realities about women and Islam, because there are so many of them. Varying interpretations of Islam and human rights, generational, regional, and country-wide perspectives on Islam, and issues that are always in the news these days relating to headscarves, veils, and law in practice. There are many, many issues, but these are just a few.

So I'm going to introduce the three speakers in the order that they will speak. We were planning to have a fourth speaker, Lila Abu-Lughod, but unfortunately she is ill and couldn't join us today, and we hope to hear from her on another occasion, and hope that she's feeling better. Our first speaker is Marion Katz. She's a 2006 Carnegie Scholar, and she's a professor at NYU's Department of Middle East and Islamic Studies. Her focus has been on Islamic law, ritual, and gender. She's also taught at Mt. Holyoke, received her PhD from the University of Chicago, and authored two books, *Body of Text: The Emergence of the Sunni Law of Ritual Purity* and *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad: Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam.* Our second speaker is Dr. Farzaneh Milani, also a 2006 Carnegie Scholar. She was born and raised in Tehran, and she is a professor of Women and Gender, Asian and Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures at the University of Virginia. Previously she was Director of Studies of Women and Gender, and she was a past president of the Association of Middle Eastern Women's Studies in America. She has written widely; her articles have appeared in *The New York*

Times, *Washington Post*, *Ms.* magazine, and she's written many articles in Persian and English. She's the author of *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voice of Iranian Women Writers.* Our third speaker is Beth Baron, a 2007 Carnegie Scholar, and she's a professor of history at City College in the Graduate Center of City University of New York. She's the interim director of a new MA in Mideast Studies at the CUNY Graduate Center, where she co-founded and co-directs the Middle East and Middle Eastern American Center. She also has authored a number of publications, I'll just mention one or two: *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* and *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Cultures, Society, and the Press.* And after the panelists have spoken, we're going to open it up to Q and A. Before I turn it over to our first speaker, I just wanted to recognize Susan King of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, who really is the person behind this whole series, and thought that we were a great organization to bring everyone together to help develop a better understanding of Islam through programs with the Carnegie Scholars, so I just wanted to thank Susan for all her support. And now I will turn things over to Professor Marion Katz.

Marion Katz: My topic is Gender and Islamic Law, and obviously it's ridiculously vast. I just want to give some very general remarks suggesting that Islamic law is very important in understanding both the challenges and limitations and also some of the opportunities facing women in many Muslim majority countries. It's less relevant than we think, in a lot of ways, and less useful as a framework for understanding what's going on, but also in some other ways, it's very important and really worthy of our consideration.

To start out with, on a concrete level, Islam dictates very little about the status or rights of women. If you just know at the outset that we have a hypothetical woman who's a devout Muslim in a Muslim majority country – even one that proclaims itself to, in some sense, enshrine Islamic law as a or even the source of legislation – that fact does not tell us, for instance, whether she can vote, whether she can stand for public office or serve as a judge. It doesn't predict whether she'll work outside of the home; it doesn't tell us whether she has access to contraception or abortion; it doesn't tell us whether she'll be able to divorce her husband if she so desires. All of these things- many of them are dictated by structural factors that have little to do with religion. All of these countries have political and legislative histories that are highly complex, and just knowing something about Islam tells us very little about what the situation is going to be in a given country.

That being said, people often do debate and justify issues of policy and social practice in overtly religious terms, and this is certainly the case in many issues that are vitally connected to gender. There are many frameworks that people use in the Middle East and South Asia and many other parts of the Islamic world to discuss what's morally right; what's good public policy; what's morally correct; what's culturally authentic. Islam is only one of these. Islam frequently looms rather large in debates that have to do with things like sexuality and the family, and I think you need only to think about, say, in this country, the rise of the Christian right, or the slogan of family values, to realize how frequently, across different religions, it is the case that religion is unusually frequently evoked in sensitive and sort of culturally iconic areas like sexuality and the family.

The second thing that I think you have to realize about Islamic law, which is my specific area of interest, is that it's not a law whose content or legitimacy is rooted in legislation by states. It is historically a scholar's law, very much like the Jewish Halacha, and the fact that something is considered by a given group of people, or movement, or individual, to be what Islamic law says has basically nothing to do with whether it was ever the enforced law of any given state. The media make us very aware of the extent of this kind of critique, in other words, you can say that something is Shariahh, you can assert that something is what Islamic law says, even if it's not what the state is doing, even if it's not what the state is doing in the name of Islamic law.

The media makes us very aware that this critique can be exercised by extremist groups, which is certainly true, but the extent to which it's also a powerful tool for progressive groups and for women's activism is something that I think people are less aware of. Just as one example of this, that has been quite influential, I point to the Malaysian group Sisters in Islam. Go to their website. It will ask, "Do you know your Islamic rights?" This is a group that's been very successful in leveraging the fact that you can make potent religious arguments about what is ethically right, what is religiously justified, that sometimes are very much in opposition to what a male-biased political reality has been.

Although Islam is frequently invoked in contexts like sexuality and the family, it's once again very difficult to predict what rules, attitudes, and ideals will be promoted in its name. As an example of this I point to a really interesting intensive study of Palestinian public opinion in the 1990s done by Rema Hamami, where she discovered two really interesting things. First, in the population that they surveyed, they found a significant majority of people supporting the idea that family law should be based in the Shariah. They also found a really significant majority of people saying, yes, family law should be reformed to give greater rights and protections to women. Now, you could say, well, these people are confused, but I think in fact what it shows is that in their minds, the idea of basing something in the Shariah is not some kind of rigid, monolithic, anti-woman thing. They thought both things could be true.

To illustrate the flexibility and complexity of Islamic law, I'd like to look at one example, which is the question of women serving as government officials, in terms of the way that this is debated in a lot of religious contexts. I'm most familiar, personally, with Arabic debates going on in the Middle East. It tends to be seen as one larger category, whether you're talking about the woman being a judge or you're talking about her being head of state. While the same answer doesn't necessarily emerge for both things, the larger category is state authority. It's "wilaya" in Arabic.

As a number of Muslim majority states, one of the most recent and notable being Egypt, have appointed female judges, there's been a lot of debate among religious authorities of various kinds about the status of such appointments under Islamic law. And certainly figures like Benazir Bhutto raise the question of, what about the legitimacy of women as heads of state? What you immediately see when you look at the religious texts and precedents that people invoke, is that you can argue almost anything. I don't say this to suggest that people are manipulative and insincere. I think it's very much like asking, what does the Bible say about single-payer health care? It's just not something that's directly addressed by very old texts that were looking at a different situation, so sincere people of faith come up with different answers.

In this case, one end of the spectrum is that the Qur'an, in its discussion of the Queen of Sheba, has one very striking positive example of a female ruler being deferred to by male nobles. On the other end of the scale, where you get much more restrictive, and I would have to say misogynistic, arguments being made, you have the allegation that the prophet Muhammad reacted to the news that an Iranian princess had ascended to the throne by saying, No people that commended its affairs to a woman flourish. Whether or not the prophet actually said this, or whether it's compatible with his other views, is certainly open to debate and has been debated. My point is not to endorse either of these things as what Islam says about women in positions of political power, but the point is that there's a wide range of variation that gets cited.

At a more proximate historical level, people are frequently interested in, what does the classical legal tradition say? And there, again, it's very hard to say. One major school of law basically says, yes, women can be judges, but they can't be judges in criminal cases. You have other schools of law that say women shouldn't be judges. You have one major medieval scholar who says women can be judges for absolutely anything. These precedents get variously invoked by scholars and public figures and activists of various political stripes. So what happens when you're looking at this background in the modern period? If you're looking at the fact that while there seems to be a very mixed background in terms of sacred texts, and then you have this mix but, I would have to say, generally negative, attitude on the part of medieval Islamic scholars, whose work still has a lot of power of precedent and prestige among a lot of modern Muslims.

If you look at what happens in the modern and contemporary periods, I think that based on the little that most Americans know about Islamic law, they'd expect one of two things. They would expect A, that it remains rigid. If I had a dollar for every article I've read that says, Islamic law is seeking to reconstruct seventh century Arabia, or that they're medieval laws, I would be a richer woman today. So people would expect either that it would remain rigid and static, or, that essentially, in the modern period, due among other things, to the influence of and dialogue with, essentially, Western liberalism, that there would be reform. In other words, that things would move in a more positive direction for women.

The thing that I'd like to close with is the observation that neither of these things is true. On the one hand, I think I've already given you a taste of the fact that it's not static, and that there's a lively and diverse discussion over issues like this. But the second point, the idea that when people revisit more restrictive and culturally embedded and, in some cases, not-so-positive for women norms from the pre-modern period, in some cases this whole inescapable awareness of the West that you see in the contemporary discussions, in some cases it's negative. In other words, it cashes out to more restrictive attitudes towards women, which is actually a sort of paradoxical thing, in the eyes of most Americans, at least.

To close, I'd like to give you an example of a very influential opinion that's been written by Yusuf al-Quaradawi, who's the media mufti of the Al-Jazeera satellite channel. He's on Islamic law councils around the world, and he's rooted in the prestigious Al-Azhar University of Cairo, and in the obviously very important Muslim Brotherhood movement. When he writes, recently, about the question of can women serve as judges; is this a legitimate thing, basically he's fine re-reading the pre-modern tradition and he's quite open to this he's quite positive about it. But the thing that really emerges as new, and this is not unique to Quaradawi, is that there's this new emphasis on the idea of motherhood and domesticity as being central to the essence of what women are. The idea that, well yeah, the rules don't necessarily preclude a woman doing these public things, but it will take her outside of the home where she is really supposed to be taking care of the kids.

This is not, in fact, something that the medieval scholars made a big deal of, whether it's because they were men and they were out of touch, or rather the nature of child care was very different, this was not a major preoccupation. He thinks of women in a way that's defined by nurturing and domesticity in a way that goes far beyond anything you find in the pre-modern texts. The second thing is, he actually quotes a French biologist for the idea that women are emotionally different. You can trace this back to Sayyid Qutb, who is sort of, at least in the Western press, the poster child for Islamic extremism. When you read in the Qur'an commentaries, one of the things he says is that women are different on the cellular level. And he is getting this from bad Western science; there's nothing Islamic about it.

So I think that's just the final thought that I'd like to leave you with. Not only is it complex, not only is it changing, but there's a genuine sense in which a lot of the newer stuff is in dialogue with perceived Western ideas and trends and knowledge, in ways that we might perhaps not anticipate or truly have understood to this point. Thanks.

Farzaneh Milani: Good afternoon. It's really an honor to be here this afternoon in the presence of such a distinguished audience and in the company of such wonderful scholars. I want to specifically thank the Women's Foreign Policy Group, especially Patricia, for arranging this. And I want to thank the Carnegie Foundation for doing what they're doing, which is bring scholars of Islam, with people in the policy field, asking us to write in a way that is more accessible for the general audience, not today's audience. I want to especially thank Dr. Rosenfield, who has had very special impact on my personal life for the past year or so.

We were asked to address a couple of issues, although I would like to say, the project I'm currently working on is in direct relation to what my colleague said about issues of freedom of movement, and I hope I will have time during our question and answer session to address how my project dovetails perfectly with what she said about the fact that women in early Islamic years were by far more powerful, more in charge of their lives, and a lot more mobile. They had more of what we call freedom of movement, which is one of the rights of modern citizens, in the early years of Islam than I do today, now, as a Muslim woman, as an Iranian Muslim woman. But that's something else. One of the issues we were asked to address today was the issue of myth and reality of women and Islam and, with your permission, that's what I would like to do.

What I thought I would share with you is the unprecedented popularity of life narratives by Muslim women in the last three decades. I say three decades and I trace the genealogy of this group of writing, which I call hostage narratives, to the hostage crisis in Iran. It was after that unfortunate event that a whole new genre of very popular books, articles, movies were born in the US. And they have a number of specific characteristic features, and again, I hope I'll have time to share with you some of what they are. But I want to talk about how hostage narratives and these very popular bestsellers distort the image of the Muslim women in the West. My argument is going to be that in the overwhelming majority of these books – and I want to make it clear that I'm not talking about all books written about women in Islam – I'm talking about those that focus on the Muslim woman as a prisoner. There is a whole genre of books that do that. I will give you a number of examples, and I'm some of you at least are familiar with several of these titles, because they're very popular books.

What are some of the characteristic features of these popular books? Usually they have an image of a veiled woman on their cover. I want to make it clear that I think it is the absolute right of a woman to decide how she wants to present herself to the world, and the veil is a very complicated, multi-layered, nuanced institution. Just let me remind you that, one, Muslim women were never represented as veiled in medieval literature, and that the issue of the veil became central to Western discourses of women in the Muslim world with modernity. In fact the Madonna, the Virgin Mary, in most pictorial representations of her, is covered. In medieval literature, the issue of the veil is not the monopoly of the Islamic world. Again, to take up the veil means to become a nun, in the medieval period. What was particular to the Islamic world, what was the signature of the Islamic world, was the turban. To take up the turban, or to put on a turban, meant converting to Islam.

So this notion of the veil as the monopoly of the Islamic world is a modern phenomenon, as is the issue of segregation of Muslim women. I'm not saying that segregation is not a reality; in a minute, I will talk about that. Segregation has become a reality in the majority of Islamic countries in the world, and I believe it has been one of the most destructive and detrimental issues, not the veil. We have *fetishized* the veil. We have made it the only issue to talk about. There are much more important issues regarding women in the Islamic world. And that's why, when you talk to people in the Islamic world, they will tell you, why are you so focused on the veil? Are there no other issues to discuss other than that?

The segregation was also not an issue until the beginning of modernity. The word "harem," which means the confined spaces, in which some rich Muslim families kept their women, did not enter the English language until 1635. Prior to that, in French and in English, the word for those segregated spaces for the women's section of the house was “seraglio,” which meant a palace. So it is a valid question to ask, what happened that we, Muslim women, went from palaces to prisons? Because “harem” now has really become in a way synonymous with imprisonment. And many people, in the popular books that I want to talk about, in fact talk about those women’s quarters as a form of prisons. So what happened? In a nutshell, I believe that with modernity, emphasis was put on the freedom of movement. I think to be free, to travel, to leave the house, to work outside the house, or not to, is one of the most important rights granted to a modern citizen.

That’s exactly why a philosopher such as Michel Foucault can write a book lik *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* and argue that prisons as a common form of punishment came into being with modernity. It’s not that we didn’t have imprisonment before, but prisons as a common form of legal penal punishment is synonymous with modernity. So when you have the birth of the prison in the West, or throughout the world, in modern cultures, you also have the emergence of the Muslim woman as the ultimate captive, as the virtual prisoner.

What is new about what I call hostage narratives is that whereas beginning with modernity – and let me just add parenthetically that it is perhaps no coincidence the first veiled Muslim woman appears in the first book that is considered by many as the defining moment of literary modernity, Cervantes’ *Don Quixote.* Prior to *Don Quixote,* we had no veiled Muslim women in any Western literature that I know of. So the first book that is the defining moment in modernity is also the book in which you have the emergence of the veil as the monopoly of Islam.

Things have been going since then. For the last three decades, we have this new phenomenon where it’s no longer Westerners representing Muslim women as prisoners, but now we have Muslim women themselves calling themselves the prisoners. These are the new books; let me just give you a few examples. One of the most famous ones is, of course, Ayaan Hirsi Ali. *The Caged Virgin* is the title of her book, and basically, in her books and in many of her articles and in many of her talks, she argues that Islam is the cage, and Muslim women are trapped in that cage, in a nutshell. She has basically said exactly things of that sort.

And I can give you a whole number of books that have “captivity” in their titles, talking about Muslim women. Between 2001 and 2003, more books were written about Afghan women in the US than have been written in the whole history of American letters, and the overwhelming majority of them have “captivity” or “escape” in their titles. Another example, a very popular book, canonized by many as a masterpiece, is of course *Reading Lolita in Tehran.* In that book, the central issue is that Iranian women are captives of Ayatollah Khomeini. The book was published in the year 2003, the same year than an Iranian woman inside Iran won the Nobel Peace Prize.

To close, I want to give you some statistics about Iranian women, to show you how things really sharply contrast with the image given in a very popular, beautifully written book, I have to admit, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. It’s one of the two most popular books ever written about Iran in the US, about Iranian women. The first one is, of course, *Not Without My Daughter*, by Betty Mahmoody. It sold more than 12 million copies, was translated into over 20 languages, and was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. Believe me, as an Iranian woman, I don't see myself, my mother, or any of my friends or relatives represented in that book. I have studied women in Iran for 30 years, and I don't see much resemblance there. And the other most popular book, again, is *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, which was published in 2003.

Now to just give you some statistics, 62 percent of all people admitted into institutions of higher education in Iran are women. *Reading Lolita* is based on the notion that just as Lolita was this young, innocent girl imprisoned by Humbert Humbert, her jailor and rapist, and the argument in the book is that Islamic Republic lowered the age of marriage to 9, which is true, they did that. But the year 2003, according to United Nations statistics, the average age for marriage for an Iranian woman was 24.3. So that's the dilemma. Talking about women in the Islamic world, especially in places like Iran, is very complicated. Why? Because there are competing narratives of womanhood in that part of the world. Most of the Islamic countries, for sure Iran, is a society in transition. It's a culture that is changing quickly.

So yes, while the age for marriage was lowered to 9, in practice, the age for marriage is 24.3. And women are forced into covering themselves, it's true: every time I go back to my country, I have to cover myself. I respect the right of those who want to cover themselves, but I don't think anywhere in the Qur'an, as far as I can read it, and I've read it many times, it says that there is any penalty for a woman who doesn't veil herself. There is absolutely not a single line, anywhere, in the Qur'an or in the Hadith, to the best of my knowledge, that penalizes a woman for not covering herself. I would be penalized in my country, and not only me, even a non-Muslim doing that would be. So that tells you best that the issue of the veil has been so politicized. So if it is an Islamic law, why would a Jewish woman or a Christian woman or an atheist cover herself?

Thank you very much.

Beth Baron: I too want to thank Carnegie, the Women's Foreign Policy Group, and the Institute of International Education, for inviting us here to speak. I think we see certain themes that are emerging from the different talks. In spite of the directions to speak about women and Islam, we all seem to be bringing the West into our comments, whether it's, at the end, the influence that the West has had in shaping modern Islamic law, or images of Muslim women in the West. What I'd like to talk about is to sort of reverse what my colleague has talked about and look at foreign women in the Middle East, and the impact that they have had in the Middle East on Muslim women.

So this sort of changes the table. We have this sense, particularly as Americans, that we've discovered the Middle East really in the last 15 years. Those of us who have a little longer memory, maybe sort of post-World War II, we look at things. But American involvement in the Middle East goes back two centuries, and the involvement of American and European women in the Middle East goes back. So what I'd like to in my brief comments is talk about the transition or trajectory of involvement of foreigners, Americans and Europeans, in the Middle East, and the impact that this involvement has had. Starting with missionaries, moving to modernizers, and then more recently, groups that have pushed for democratizing. And then starting from here, to sort of take ownership of what impact we've had, and whether we acknowledge it or not.

Protestant missionaries started their involvement in the Middle East in the early 19th century; Catholic missionaries had preceded them. Missionaries moved into different lands: Anatolia, Iran, Lebanon; throughout the region. They built schools, hospitals, orphanages. What they quickly saw as the key to transition in that society was getting at girls. The missionaries were there to frankly do one thing. They aimed to convert the populations. They had different strategies for this, but they were there to evangelize, and they evangelized through their preaching, but also through building social welfare institutions.

I should say that, actually, women missionaries outnumbered the male missionaries, although they didn't run the organizations, but the foreign boards in the US and in Europe realized that single woman missionaries were cheaper to send abroad than married male missionaries who would go with their families and had higher salaries. So we had, starting from the early 19th century, women missionaries in the Middle East teaching in schools, opening orphanages, working in hospitals, providing social welfare that was very much needed. So how did local Muslim populations respond to this? In the absence of these sorts of institutions, they flocked to the schools. These were some of the first schools for girls in places like Tehran, Cairo, Istanbul, and so on, producing some of the earliest women activists.

Turkey, after World War II, barred foreign missionaries, but after British and French colonial occupation of the Arab lands in the inter-war period, missionaries still continued their activities, and they still continued their main mission, which was proselytizing. Although they evangelized amongst Muslims quietly – because converting from Islam is apostasy, it's against the law, and they weren't supposed to be converting Muslims – they nonetheless did this. In the 1920s in particular, they became quite emboldened in some of their projects. In large part, the missionaries weren't very successful at all in converting numbers of Muslims. They were more successful in converting minorities in the region.

But in time, and particularly in the 1920s, in the spirit of rising nationalism, and the spirit of rising Islamism to which this was connected, there was a backlash. In the late 1920s and 1930s, there was an anti-missionary movement. But, and this is one thing I'm looking at much more closely in my research, it's no accident that the missionary movement reaches its height at the same time that the Muslim Brotherhood and other organizations are founded. The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in 1928, and one of the earliest things it organized around was anti-missionary activity. One of the first things it did was send a letter to the king to bar missionaries, and it organized conferences, and there were other organizations that did these sorts of things.

The missionaries had this tremendous role in providing social welfare organizations, but on the other hand, there was this anti-missionary reaction which, in a certain sense, gave birth to and helped incubate Islamist organizations, which in turn have had a huge impact on the lives of women. Islamist groups don't all have the same positions on women, but they tend to have a fairly constricted view on women's rights. In a certain sense what I'm saying is that this foreign involvement created unintended consequences, part of which was the rise of these Islamist groups.

As the missionary groups were winding down, groups of modernizers entered the field, and instead of working on evangelizing, they shifted to replacing religion with science, and these modernizers worked to improve sanitation, combat contagious disease, and control population size. Success in public health led to more children surviving to adulthood, but foreign, and also local experts came to see population size as a barrier to economic development. This is kind of accepted in the development world. But again, what we see is that there has been a reaction to the population or family planning programs. These early programs were not imposed on Middle Eastern women, who had built up their own networks of clinics and spoke about needs and desires for family planning, contraceptives, and so on, coming from the demand.

But what foreign donors did in the early stages was work through male doctors and work through the state, and they actually bypassed a lot of the early women activists. So in a sense what they were doing was helping shore up authoritarian states and also bypassing women who had earlier on had roles. So again, that's another unintended impact that they had in minimizing the role of the local activist women like Aziza Hussein, in Egypt, who was very active in population policy. Her groups got bypassed for other groups.

But again, there was an Islamist reaction that views family planning programs as part of a USAID, European Union conspiracy to limit Muslim births. So there's been a reaction to that. But again, following on what my colleague has said, if you look at total fertility rates across the region, you see that Muslims have interpreted injunctions on birth control and so on very differently, and you have a huge range. Again, I think what we're all trying to do is break down these myths about, say, large family size, and the homogeneity that really doesn't exist in the Middle East region.

I would love for every time someone discusses the veils, to throw out fertility rates and have them look at them. If you look at Egypt, the total fertility rate in 2000 was 3.1. That's similar to Iran; I don't know if people imagine that Iran actually has a rate at that level. This is not as low as Turkey, which is 2.5, but it's significantly different, and here you see the range, Oman has a total fertility rate of 5.7; Saudi Arabia is 5.8; Yemen is 7.6. So you can see that women's lives across the region, based on the number of children they have, are very different. To me, still in the midst of raising twins, one of the things that changes one's life is children, and the numbers one has. Having two at once was enough (no I love kids, it's just I have two teenagers right now).

Shifting from the modernizers, more recently, from the 1980s, the international community has shifted from public health to the body politic, and again there are these unintended consequences. Building up civil society became the new order of the day, in opposition to authoritarian regimes and the rising tide of Islamism. Democratizing projects have included efforts to empower women through literacy classes and leadership training in women's centers. But these have often used Western models, rather than building on indigenous sources of women's power, and there's been some critique that this has sometimes led to cutting off of leaders from their grassroots. Islamists were initially perceived as anathema to civil society and democratization, but with the growing popularity of Islamism, the strategy shifted to promoting Islam in democracy, and including Islamic groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, I think, as part of civil society.

So women have played a more and more symbolic role in this strategy to democratize the region. Afghani liberation became equated with women's liberation, but then again, there was this focus on the burka rather than on some of the underlying issues. In Iran, also holding elections in which women could participate was offered as an indicator of success. Sunni and Shi'ite women have had their own priorities: security, food, clean water, electricity, medicine, education. In a certain sense, one thing I would like to leave us with is that the women are really, in very many ways, not very different from us. They have the same concerns and the same desires for themselves and for their children.

Iraqi girls and women faced the reinstatement of Islamic family law, which is meant to protect them, at the same time that the economic privation has forced families into sending their young girls into prostitution. There are untold numbers of illiterate Iraqi girls now who are caught up in sex trafficking that takes them to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, where they're prized for their youth and virginity. A discussion of women and Islam does not get at some of these underlying issues and stories. Again, that's one of the unintended consequences of a foreign involvement in the region, ostensibly to help people.

The general shifts over the course of the past two centuries: Americans and Europeans shifted from promoting Christianity and the Kingdom of God to marketing science and contraceptives, to strengthening civil society and building democracy in the Middle East, in a race to transform the other. Muslim women were seen as a soft target, having educational, health, and socio-political needs that were not being met by the local societies and states. But in attempting to meet these needs, foreign actors often sparked anti-Western reactions. In short, their projects had unintended consequences. Muslim women have had their own agendas, and while they've taken advantage of opportunities, they sometimes found that those who had come with the best of intentions had strengthened Islamist movements or authoritarian states and made their day-to-day struggles more difficult.

Actually, before leaving the footing, I just thought I'd do a promotion of colleague's work, since we're in New York, and we're on the subject of women and Islam. The Islamic wing of the Met has been closed for quite some time, but there is an exhibit that students and faculty at Hunter College have put together which is called, "Re-Orientations: Islamic Art and the West in the 18th and 19th Centuries." What's very nice about this exhibit is, they took out a lot of pieces that the Met never shows anyway, because they're not the most expensive pieces, but many of these pieces actually show the interrelationship between the West and the Islamic art. And I think this gets at what we've been discussing today, that this is an interrelationship that goes back a long time, and it's rather important. So that is at Hunter, running for the next couple of months.

Patricia Ellis: Thank you to all our speakers, and we now go to the Q and A period. I would just like to very briefly offer the opportunity to our speakers to comment on anything any other speaker has said. I think a number of your comments dovetailed, as you saw. That's why we had some overarching themes, but we heard variations on the themes of the issues that we were talking about, and I'm sure that you have many questions. As I said, I want to try to get to as many of them as possible. I think I'm going to open it up and, with my journalistic experiences, go with what was on the wires the last few days and the newspaper, and that was the Saudi woman protestor driving a car, and I'd just like to raise this as an example. Did it help the cause, did it hurt the cause, what kind of an impact did something like that have? We've been talking a lot about symbols, whether they're veils or other kinds of symbols, and I'd like to hear from our panelists on that.

Farzaneh Milani: Well, since you've put the microphone in front of my face, I'll start. It's interesting to know that even in Saudi Arabia, which we often take as the only example of an Islamic society, and it's not. Unfortunately, or fortunately for those of us who are Muslim, there is no such thing as a typical Muslim woman. Such a thing doesn't exist. But still, Saudi Arabia has one of the most restrictive laws regarding women. But even there, the women who cannot drive cars can own cars. So we should first keep that in mind, that Islam granted women the right to own property more than 13 centuries ago.

So why are women not allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia? For the same reason that when women started driving cars in the US, there were a lot of objections. I have studied the beginning of women driving in the US, and it is truly an eye-opening experience, to see the number of articles written about the danger of motorized mobility for women. At the Seneca Falls convention, Elizabeth Cady Stanton said something that is one of the most profound statements. She said one of the most important discoveries for women was the bicycle, at the time. And she's absolutely right. If we study the importance of bicycles for the suffragette movement, you'd be surprised that the movement would not have been a possibility had it not been for the issue of women's mobility. Think of the movie *Thelma and Louise.* I always think it should have been titled, *Thelma, Louise, and Their Car.* Without the car, there would have been no Thelma and Louise.

So why can't women drive in Saudi Arabia? Because it's the best way to control them. The issue at the heart of it is the issue of women's freedom of movement. They control women by not allowing this. Their fate granted them the right to own property, but the laws of the land, and I don't think it's the laws of Islam, because nowhere in the Qur'an does it say a woman is not allowed to drive a car.

Patricia Ellis: This is Thoraya Ahmed Obaid who is from Saudi Arabia and is the

Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund

Thoraya Ahmed Obaid: As these three women were speaking, I saw myself in all of them. I'm the product of a missionary school in Egypt. It was a Presbyterian school, and they didn't try to convert us, but they gave us a very good education. I'm a product of Saudi Arabia, very conservative, where we cannot drive, and we are hostages to our drivers. The day he gives us the key we are stuck. And we are also in a country where, as Marion has said, the interpretation of Shariah can go either way. So really, all of what the speakers have said is the reality that we Muslim women face in Muslim societies. But I'd like to raise two issues. I think the issue of why the focus on women has become so much is because the issue of women has become politicized. It was the modernity issue, this was the target, enter society through women. That was the first one. The second one was through national movements that came at that time.

But the third one, in the contemporary period, is that wars are justified in the name of liberating women. And I think this is what has made it very hard for us, as women, to get more reactions. Islamic movements do not want change, or they want different change, and so the soft spot that has entered against them is women, and therefore the reaction against us has become much harder. And so politicizing the issue of women, from the simple social political rights, into the whole issue of being the weak spot to enter into these countries, has made our situation worse.

The second one is the issue that was raised – I think Beth was the one who talked about it – in terms of different movements. Islamic movements in the 1920s were beginning to open up into more progressive interpretations of Islam. They were aborted. And they were aborted by nationalist parties, and if you look at all the leadership of these political parties, they're Christians. Supported by France or England or whatever. And so there was an abortion of the possibility of having an Islamic interpretation, an Islamic movement, that was open. One of the leaders said he went to Europe, he saw Europe as the model. And yet, this was aborted. So again, the politics of the region, and the mandates, and the occupation by England and France and so on added to the whole issue, and women became hostage again. So we go back to, the West has politicized women, and made them the center of the struggle, and as a result, we also got banged up very badly by the Islamist movements.

Question: Thank you so much for such stimulating presentations, and it's really an honor for us to be able to be engaged with such first-rate scholarship and with women who communicate so clearly to a broad public. I wanted to follow up a little bit on the politicization of women, but from a positive point of view. I remember the tremendous excitement about the women's conferences that took place, and the sense of international solidarity among women's groups, particularly after the 1995 Beijing Conference. And I'm seeing how, especially with what Beth was saying, but also how since 9/11, so much has been politicized in the negative way instead of the positive way. The networks of women that really cut across geographic and religious lines that emerged from '95 were so exciting, so positive, and yet we really haven't moved as far ahead as we would like, and 9/11 set us back in terms of women's solidarity.

So I'd appreciate it if the three of you could comment on what ways you see to bring back that sense of solidarity across women's groups, recognizing some of the unintended consequences that do come when women from the West who really want to make change, who want to be progressive, think that this is their entry point, the misunderstandings that have taken place, and how you might reach out to really well-intentioned women's groups to bring back that sense of global solidarity.

Beth Baron: To preface, I'm a historian, so I try to avoid the present… but it's unavoidable. But the one thing I would say is listening. That's the most important thing; listening to what the concerns are that are coming from the other side. One of the things that I've seen is that there's constantly been an effort to impose an agenda, whether it was the missionaries, or whatever the agenda is. You know, we have the answers, we have the solutions. And clearly, in a certain sense, we continue to struggle with many issues here, so we don't have all the answers. Maybe we could find some answers over there to some of our problems and questions. So I think listening and learning, as a starting point, is the most important thing, rather than going with either preconceived ideas or preconceived packaged programs, and in that way being able to respond to what's really going on.

Farzaneh Milani: I think that's such an important question. We are all hostages to our fields, and so I'm going to try to answer it from my field, which is literature. I am an emigrant; I came to this country because I love this country, and it's my country. So I want to suggest a few things that I think will help, at least on a small scale, on the written words. I think we need to diversify our pool of information. The kind of information available to the average American reader – and I'm really proud to be a part of this country with its kind of readers. When Sally Armstrong – at the time she was the Editor-in-Chief of one of the women's magazines – wrote the first article about women in Afghanistan during the Taliban period, in one week, she got 9,000 letters from American people who asked one question: How can we help? So it's not only that the issue is politicized, it's also that there are genuine interests in helping people.

So how do we then invest on that interest? We need to diversify our pool of information, as I said. We really have a very restricted kind of information available. Think of all these bestsellers. They reach millions of people. And what about scholars in the field of Islam? We reach a very limited, ghettoized group of people. So we need to change that. And us scholars are as responsible in making what we have to say more accessible to the general readership. We need to integrate scholarship in public debate. That's why conversations like today are so important. We need to listen to each other. We need to encourage more translation. When I started studying translation in my adoptive land, in the US, I was shocked by the country that is the accepting home of all immigrants in the world, most welcoming. In the year 2000 – that's the most recent one where I could find correct statistics – only 2.3% of all books published in this country were books of translation. In 1999, when we were deeply involved with the Islamic world, especially the Middle East, only 18 books were translated from the whole of the Middle East into English.

So who do we rely on then for our information? And the general public is genuinely interested. If you study the bestsellers about Islam, in the US, you'll see the most important characteristic feature they have is that they give, presumably, information on everyday life in that part of the world. People are hungry and thirsty for that kind of information. So we need to encourage more translation, which goes back to what Beth had to say. We need to establish a dialogue. In a way, it has become a monologue. Hirsi Ali or people like her who write – we should listen to her too, I have nothing against diversifying the pool – but we should also listen to other people. When Massoumeh Ebtekar – some of you might remember her, she was the spokesperson for the hostage dealers – when she wanted to publish her book, her experience with the hostage-taking, she approached more than 20 publishers in the US. She could not find a single publisher who was willing to publish her book in English. She had to go to Canada to publish it. Shirin Ebadi, the Nobel Peace Laureate, had to begin proceeding to sue the American government to be allowed to publish her book, which is one of the best books written about the Islamic Republic in this country.

So I think we can listen better, we can encourage translation, and diversify the pool of our experts. There is a recent book that I just started reading by John Esposito, who speaks for the Islamic world or for Muslims, and you'd be surprised with what they've come up with, which is based on Gallup polls. It's different from the perception we have of people in the Islamic world. We don't hate Americans. That's a misperception.

Patricia Ellis: I think the importance of getting good information is always a problem, because, for example, we had the recent issue in Turkey, the uproar over the decision about headscarves. And, you know, it is hard to understand, is it political, is it religious? You need to have a framework, because the issue may be different in France, they may have a similar decision, but it was taken for different reasons. So I think, just going back to what you're saying, we clearly need more knowledge to be able to interpret what these issues need, rather than just generalizing.

Marion Katz: With respect to that, I think there's sort of a perfect storm around Muslim women, which is that I think we tend to both make women the issue and make religion the issue, when neither of these is necessarily true. I think when Beth said that we can be talking about headscarves when what people care about is clean water, is very much frequently the case. And so, I have to say, I study religion, and I study gender, and I don't think that these things are unimportant, and I don't think it's always an artifact of misdirected Western attention when these things become prominent issues, because you can go and read in Arabic in the press in various places that I go to, and a lot of these issues really are large.

But you have to understand, it's a little like trying to understand, and not to step on anybody's toes, but say, is abortion the biggest issue in most women's lives in America? No. Maybe some people would say it is, but there are things that are flashpoints. There are flashpoints politically, culturally, religiously, and they get inflated beyond, perhaps, its relevance to the everyday life of the average person. And I think we have to simultaneously say, this is not the fabric of people's lives. They don't eat, sleep, and breathe some of these issues that loom so large in our press, and in fact, in the press of some of these countries. It's not as of Turks don't argue about headscarves, they do, if you go and read newspapers there.

But you have to understand, it's less important to say, this is what really matters; maybe it's not, but to understand what it is that makes these things so symbolically potent for people. That's when you start getting into, what are the dynamics? Who are the parties to this debate? What's at stake for them, that makes this something that has so much resonance for people? And I think then, when you sort of get inside what's inflating some of these apparently trivial issues, to these dimensions, you get to another level.

Pam Pelletreau: I would just like to raise a slightly different perspective addressing the question of regaining the sense of solidarity. I left the Islamic world three years ago. I left Tunisia in '87, I left Cairo in '93. But there were at that point in time women's organizations around professional skills. I think particularly in Tunis, the North African Women's Business Leaders. They had an Algerian, a Tunisian, a Moroccan, a Mauritanian. If the US community can find ways of getting themselves invited, saying, yes, I'd like to attend something like this – which they may be doing, I don't know the US business community at all – you get a sense of a sector's evolution, or their current concerns, in the professional dimension. They're women, and they're professionals. As you all are women, and you're university teachers.

Some of this must go on, and I am uninformed, but I would think if you build from common interests and peer groups up, you are taking a grassroots approach to rebuilding the solidarity. I wear a pin from Beijing, brought to me by a friend who was there, so I was a great admirer of that period. I just think the world has developed since then, and it behooves us to move along with it.

Susan King: I'd like to do a challenge, if I could. I haven't seen this many young women in a room in awhile. I found it exciting when I walked in, because there's a group of us who have been breaking down doors, and getting movements like this. Can we hear some of the questions on your mind?

Patricia Ellis: I was just going to raise a question about generational difference. Any questions from over there?

Question: This question is going back to a comment that you made, Professor Katz, regarding the socio-biological construction of women as solely the child-bearer is having this reemergence in the Muslim world. I was wondering, why is it happening? What can be done to kind of "bash" that construction? And, do you think it's a viable strategy to approach it by revealing its Western roots?

Question: I'm sorry to bring up headscarves again, but I have talked to women from those areas, and one concern I hear is that in Turkey, it's legal to wear them to school. There's this fear of social pressure to do so. And this is coming from one of our interns, who's from Bangladesh. She said that because a certain terrorist in the country said women should wear headscarves, all of a sudden a lot more women were wearing headscarves. So I just wanted to see if you could talk about that.

Marion Katz: In response to the first thing, I do think that people argue against it. I think that despite the fact you can take individual texts and say, he's misquoting a Frenchman here, or something like that, that frankly the prestige and assumed legitimacy of medical discourses, and the naturalization in biological terms of certain ideas about gender, they're too widespread to just go through and deconstruct it by saying this thinker is getting it from here and it's a Western source. That being said, I do think that in a weird way, women have somehow leveraged that. Not necessarily primarily the biological part, but just sort of the prestige of the new focus on women as nurturers of the young, and the family-centered, domesticity-centered ideal of the woman.

And you can see parallels in the 19th century US, for instance, of women really leveraging that to say, yeah, we're really important. And some of the things that can play out in negative ways in terms of controlling women can also play out in positive ways by saying, yeah, we are the source of what our society is going to be like. In some ways, I think that plays out better than trying to historically deconstruct some of these very widespread ideas.

Farzaneh Milani: I would like to answer the headscarf question, and maybe to be able to discuss it a little more in detail. I'll just stick to one example; my own country, Iran. I can talk about Turkey; I was in Turkey last summer, and it was fascinating to see the various discourses on the issue of the headscarf or the veil. In 1848, the year of Seneca Falls, there was also a convention in Iran, in which an Iranian woman of a different faith, the Babi faith, unveiled herself publicly and inserted herself in the public discourse, not only unveiling her face, but also giving body to her voice and voice to her body. She started lecturing, and she started talking about how she thinks it's the beginning of a new era and things need to change.

So since 1848, in Iran, the issue of the veil has been at least of concern to some women and some men. That's quite different than politicizing the issue as the sole important issue affecting women. In 1936, when Reza Shah Pahlavi, who did a great deal for Iran, wanted a shortcut to modernity. And for a while, some men had claimed ownership of women's bodies. They decided, overnight, that they were going to unveil women. So women, regardless of their age, regardless of their personal preference, were ordered out of their veils in 1936. If a woman was caught on the streets of Iran with a veil, the police were ordered to take her veil off, tear it into pieces, and teach her how to go unveiled.

My own grandmother refused to leave her house between 1936 and 1941, when the law was finally rescinded. For five years, she became literally a prisoner, because she was a devout Muslim and she didn't want to unveil herself. What happened? A few decades later, another regime came into power, and this time it was decided that no unveiled woman could be seen on any Iranian streets. So this time, unveiled women were forbidden from entering the public space.

To me, again, and forgive me if I keep repeating the same issue, I think the issue at hand here is controlling women's access to the public arena. If we put that at the center of our concern, then education, working in the public sector, being able to own property, these issues become much more important than forcefully veiling or unveiling women. I see both of them as disrespectful of a woman's right to choose how she wants to present herself to the outside world. And, for sure, not a religious matter, but a deeply political one, and a politicized issue.

Question: I'd like to respond to the solidarity issue. We heard from all of you today that there are competing images, competing conversations, about women's role in the Muslim world, as there are in this country. We've got this Bible Belt, where women are really quite oppressed. I think a major, major problem and obstacle is that when we – I'm an Arab Muslim who grew up in a feminist household – but when I as an Arab hear Americans talking about feminist problems, I don't hear Americans talking about feminist problems in this country. I hear them talking about problems in my country, as missionaries. As opposed to being feminist together; working to resolve not exactly the same problems, but common problems.

Question: Just kind of adding to the point that you were saying, I appreciate very much, the effort, for example, of this event, about understanding Muslim women. But I think that we really have to be careful, in trying to understand Muslim women, because I'm sort of hearing this us-and-them conversation, and I think it's not going to help women like myself, in giving voice to myself and how I feel, or what I want to add to the conversation. And when it comes to, for example, the family discussion, even here within the United States there is a discussion about whether women want to choose to stay home and raise their children, or whether they choose to work. And then also Muslim women who choose to veil, I think yes, it is important to say that women have a choice, and that they are getting the choice as to whether they want to veil or not. But I think sometimes in our discussion, we lose sight of the women who do choose to veil, and how they feel about their choice, and how it empowers them or gives them more room to do whatever they may choose to do. Like I said, I do appreciate efforts like this, but we have to be really careful in not creating that us-and-them, we as Americans. Oh, they really care about their families and their health. Yes, we are women, yes, we care about all these things. And so if we can all be careful in these endeavors, to recreate this network, as you said, after the Beijing conference. I'm doing social work because I want to focus on that on-the-ground reality of what's happening with women everywhere, and what's happening with social issues everywhere.

Patricia Ellis: Thank you so much for your contribution, and do you have any suggestions about how to get beyond this divide that you are talking about.

Question: I think it's just a consciousness within ourselves that we have to create, and say that every time we say, you know, how are Muslim women?, that we just have to re-frame in our mind that we're all women. We all care about similar things. It's just that we frame it in our minds of who we are and really seeing ourselves as similar, and seeing ourselves as one people. And so it's a re-framing of that mind, I think.

Question: My name is Saja Majali and I am a counselor at the Mission of Jordan and I am speaking in my national capacity right now. First of all, I would like to thank all the panelists for trying to bring into perspective the very important issue of women and Islam. All of the three basically presented and reflected the complexity of the issue, and Dr. Katz brought forward an interesting perspective on the issue of interpretation of the law, whether Islam is the same in the different countries or not, and whether Shariah and other forms of laws that handle women's issues is possible or not, and if I understood well, there is a possibility. They don't negate each other, if we look into creative ways of handling the issue. The complexity of the issue was also brought forward by Professor Milani when she spoke about the competing narratives, and bringing into it the image of women in Islam as being victims, and this also touches in the issue of what Professor Baron spoke about, about this sort of civilizing aspect into missionary movements. One way or the other, probably the reaction was not against trying to teach young girls rather than trying to convert them into another religion. I want to go into this.

The importance of the issue is basically thinking, how different is Islam from other religions? A woman in Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, as well as Islam, is seen sometimes as rebellious, and there have been at one time or another in the history of one nation or another, specific laws that were put forward that would curtail women's rights. The important thing is, I think, at the end of the day, whether a woman wears a veil or not is a question of whether the woman herself wants to wear the veil or not. In a country where the woman would want to wear the veil and there's a law stating that she should not, this veil is basically seen as a religious choice for her, and I believe that she should have the right to wear the veil. In a country, whether Islamic or not, where she is forced to wear the veil, I believe that we have reached a time in history where we should basically, as women, and men, speak for our rights in this regard.

The question then, I think, is more a question of choice. But how we change these laws, how we change these women, would depend on what these women really want to do. So then where have we gone wrong? I would be interested in hearing how we can find a way out of this, whether it's on issues of family planning, which are just as much a priority in the Muslim world as it is here in the United States, and the questions on abortion and so on and so forth, are at the end of the day basically a political issue. They are directly influencing the election between Democrats and Republicans. Conservatism, whether it is Christian, Jewish, or Muslim, in one way or another, does curtail women's rights.

The only way for us to move forward is first of all to listen to the women themselves in their respective countries. Those who want change should be supported, either by their governments or by the people, but then again, change should come from within and cannot really be changed by any other state or any other religion. The thing is, we can learn from each other, we can find a way of learning within our different denominations, and outside these different denominations.

Marion Katz: I just wanted to make a comment in response to the previous comment. I think you make a really good point, and that's why I brought up the issue of family values, and the Christian right in the United States. Not to claim that they're identical issues, or that they get argued about in the same way, but when I teach in this area, I really think that's it's not very fruitful to sort of say, we're going to understand Muslim women. I mean, empathy is really important, and being in dialogue with people is really important, and it's a lifelong enterprise and so forth, but I think what we can do intellectually more is sort of understand the processes by which a lot of these questions get discussed. And in our society, as in many Islamic societies, they're questions that get politicized in different contexts. They get politicized in the contexts of very different power constellations, but there are real overlaps and similarities. I think one of the problems that we have, and I have this experience frankly as an American, sometimes, being in the Middle East, is that people assume things. There's this dichotomy. They assume you're secular. When they find out you're religious, they're sort of like, wait, I didn't expect this. But some of the same issues of class, of geography, of family background, come up in people's assumptions of what is religion supposed to do in our lives; what's it supposed to have to do, if anything, with our political agendas, and so forth? Acknowledging that we have those dialogues in our own societies is integral to bring that society outside.

Beth Baron: Basically, I wanted to also thank people for their comments and questions. I think there are a couple themes that emerged. One is, again, we talked about choice. We talked about listening to women themselves, and allowing change to come from within. One thing that I've thought about quite a bit, as someone who's worked for a long time on the history of the Middle East, and gender history in particular, is this notion of what position we come from. In part, and my scholarship takes us in the direction, I think that Americans need to own up to their responsibilities and not sort of objectify Muslim women as a group we need to know about so we can change. Rather, we can change ourselves. We need to take responsibility for ourselves, and for our own actions. Having said that, I appreciate these other comments. Ultimately, we're all human. We're all in this together.

Question: I'm a Muslim convert, American, originally from Chile. I think one of the things that strikes me is that all of these interests about Muslims, about Islam, and women, comes from fear of 9/11. And that makes it a little demonized, Islam. It equates everything to terrorism, and that creates a skewed view. And I think that we need to communicate, among women, just as women. Not thinking, I'm American; I'm Arab; I'm Christian; I'm Muslim – just women.

Patricia Ellis: Thank you. What an absolutely wonderful program. I just want to thank our speakers; this could have gone on for hours, but they were all just wonderful. And thank you all for your good questions. I think we all learned a lot. We really hope that you will continue to come to our events and be involved, and we look forward to seeing you soon. Thanks a lot.