



# CHRONICLEONLINE

Search Chronicle  
Online

Sept. 22, 2010

## Speaker: Muslim women can use Quran to counter the 'hijacked' authority by Muslim men

By Caitlin Parker

For the past 14 centuries, Muslim women have been repeatedly marginalized to the point that they have lost their moral courage to step up and voice their own understanding of the Quran and thereby develop a stronger identity in the male-dominated Muslim society, said Nimat Hafez Barazangi in a lecture Sept. 16 in Boyce Thompson Institute Auditorium.

"God will not change the condition of people until they change what is in themselves," quoted Barazangi, a research fellow of feminist, gender and sexuality studies at Cornell, from the Quran (13:11). This quote, she said, calls on women to change their inclination from passively praying to "challenging the unwarranted, hijacked Islamic authority by Muslim men, and moving toward accomplishing the comprehensive human rights for themselves."

Muslim women's loss of "moral courage" has handicapped their ability to retake their primary role as equals to men, she said. Women's deeper knowledge of the Quran could counter this problem by helping women to develop moral autonomy, give them more opportunities in religious, social and political leadership and allow them to express their perspective on Quranic guidelines.

"Given that most reform movements in Muslim societies have failed, and since one of the core problems in the globalization of democracy is the absence of Muslim women in shaping and developing Islamic thought, the time has come for a revolutionary move by Muslim women to rebuild a new structure for Muslim societies and communities through an egalitarian interpretation of the Quran as the primary and the only divine source of Islam," Barazangi said.

Lack of moral autonomy has made it difficult for women to obtain leadership positions, she said, which would prompt them to take pride in their gender and to stand up for their given rights in the Quran. Some Muslim women's study groups have helped develop women's articulation skills needed to voice and even publish their reinterpretation of the Quran and become involved in the decision-making process.

There is a crisis in understanding Islam by both Muslims and non-Muslims, Barazangi added. Given the recent debates on Muslim women's attire and the building of Islamic centers, particularly in lower Manhattan, the marginalization of Muslim women intensifies along with more misinformation. "Therefore, the time has come for us, academicians, to question what has been taught about Islam in our own institutions because scholarly literature often echoes stereotypical images of Islam and Muslims," she said.

Barazangi pointed out that Muslims are not the only ones who are experiencing religious revivalism and identity crisis. "Non-Muslims themselves are also experiencing their own identity crisis in response to what Oliveira Roy called 'the post cultural society,'" Barazangi said. "Moreover, this religious revivalism among fundamental Christians, Jews and others is one of the factors that incited Western Muslims' fundamentalist views, which traveled east."



Barazangi

### Media Contact:

Joe Schwartz  
(607) 254-6235  
[bjs54@cornell.edu](mailto:bjs54@cornell.edu)

### Cornell Chronicle:

Susan Lang  
(607) 255-3613  
[SSL4@cornell.edu](mailto:SSL4@cornell.edu)

### Related Information:

[Nimat Hafez Barazangi](#)

[CAPE](#)

### Share:

- Twitter
- Digg
- Reddit
- del.ici.ous
- Google
- Yahoo! MyWeb
- Facebook
- MySpace

Ultimately, the bridge of communication must span across religious communities, and a better understanding of Islam must prevail before the women's revolutionary movement will progress with much speed, she said.

The lecture was sponsored by the Cornell Association of Professors Emeriti.

*Caitlin Parker '13 is a writer intern for the Cornell Chronicle.*

##

| [September story index](#) | [Cornell Chronicle Online Home Page](#) |