

Women, Religion, and Social Change II

PANEL: THE U.S. RELIGIOUS CONTEXT TODAY

THOMPSON ROOM

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3:30 - 6:00 PM

DIANA L. ECK: Good afternoon. Hi. I'm Diana Eck, for those of you who have just come this afternoon. But one of the things that we're doing in this conference is bringing together two groups of women who have met before, two streams of a great confluence of about 40 women, one group of which met 20 years ago in June of 1983 in a conference on Women, Religion and Social Change, an international group of women from all over the world, and a number of those women are back here again this weekend.

And the other stream is a group of women who have been involved in the Pluralism Project's women's religious networks in the United States. And we have met about three times over the past couple of years, beginning two years ago at just about now. So we have been reflecting a bit this morning and also last night about just what kind of change we've witnessed in the world in the past 20 years, in the past two or three years, in the period since September 11th, really in the last year, in the last six months, and what are some of the issues about which women are most deeply concerned now.

This afternoon's panel is on the American context, and that is in part because the American context itself has changed so markedly in the last 20 years, and with it has changed some of the research work that I myself have been doing. I'm a student of India, now studying, at least for the last ten years, what has happened in the United States. And we developed a project ten years ago called the Pluralism Project that has attempted to explore the changing religious landscape of the United States.

One of the great things that has happened in the world over the last several decades has been the massive movement of peoples as refugees and as political and economic migrants. And that has certainly changed the US, especially since 1965 with the passage of the Immigration and Nationalities Act, that for the first time really since the 1920s removed some of the racist restrictions on American immigration, opened immigration to the rest of the world. And people did come to America from all over the world for lots of different reasons and brought with them not only their economic and political aspirations but their Korans and their Bhagavad Gitas and their images of the Bodhisattva Kuan Yin, their religious traditions. Some of them brought their deep secularism and their anti-religious traditions; they'd had quite enough of religion wherever they had come from.

And so this is part of the complexity of the American scene today, and it has changed so much since the 1983 conference that we thought it would help actually to begin to set some of this in frame. And at least for women from other parts of the world, I was talking to my friend Devaki about this and she was saying, "You know, there's too much of America here really. Can't we gather together the old group and really think about the world issues?"

Well, in a sense the world issues have become America's issues and vice versa. There is certainly a globalization in terms of religion and religious movements and the dynamics of immigration, which are no longer people coming from some other part of the world, as my grandparents and great-grandparents did, to the United States and never going back, but people who come and go back and come and go back all the time with a kind of here and there-ness that is very much typical of the new immigration.

The Pluralism Project, which we launched ten years ago, had three kinds of research questions. The first, a general question about who is here in the US, and that's what you see reflected in a new religious landscape. The second, America's many religions, how are all religious traditions changing as they take root in American soil? What are the dynamics of change in the American context? And the third question, how is America changing in the light of this real multi-religious reality, and one that has both enabled and forced the United States to take very seriously the issues of the free exercise and non-establishment of religion that are part of the constitutional framework of the US? We've had a long tradition of volunteerism in American religion. Nobody is going to pay for or support your religious tradition unless you do. And as a result, we have a very energetic and vibrant set of American religious institutions.

But since the research that we've done has not been so readily visible to many people in other parts of the world, I thought I might just begin with a couple of the excerpts from the CD-ROM that we produced in 1997 and that has now come out with a second edition in 2002. And I might say that Terry Rockefeller, who is sitting here on the front couch and will speak in a few minutes, really rescued us as a producer at a time when we weren't really sure how to produce a CD-ROM-- neither was she-- but we did it and we figured out the answer and we did it very, very well.

So if you will hit the lights, let me just give you a glimpse of what it is we're talking about and some of the voices that we managed to collect in the context of our exploration into this new religious America. And you'll have to forgive the somewhat patriotic tone of the first episode here. But this is the Russian Orthodox Octet that is setting the tone to an orthodox rabbi, a native person....

[CD-ROM]

ECK: I'll stop it there. I just want to give you one other little glimpse of what this looks like, because most people have not gone out looking for it. They haven't seen mosques that have been converted from gymnasiums or watch factories in Queens. They haven't seen the Hindu temples that are created out of churches and built straight in the suburbs of American cities.

But I want to give you a glimpse of what this looks like institutionally, even though many of us are not necessarily institutional people and don't make our homes in mosques and—

[CD-ROM]

ECK: Now finally I simply want to skip this section that has to do with the various religious traditions of the world in the American context, except to note the fact that underneath every one of these buttons is one of those incredible arguments that I mentioned earlier when we come to describing what a religious tradition is: a multi-vocal argument about certain things, stories, books, ideas, symbols, etc. And those are part of every religious tradition in the American context.

And finally, the issue of how America is changing and how that encounter of religious tradition in the United States has become so much more pronounced, so much more divisive, so many more bridges, so many more chasms. We can look at that in historical perspective, but I mainly want to show you this page, that in a sense in these two postage stamps more or less gives a sense of the variety of responses to the kind of diversity we have today and the encounter with that religious and cultural diversity.

On the left you see a rabbi digging into the earth with a shovel at the consecration or at the groundbreaking for the new Islamic center in Sharon, Massachusetts in 1993, with enough rabbis and priests and laypeople from all the religious traditions of Boston there to turn a shovel of earth to build the foundation of a new Islamic Center. And on the right, the minaret and what's left of the dome of a burned Islamic Center in Yuba City, California, just about the same time.

And if we look at the ways in which and the places in which America has litigated and encountered this diversity, it is everywhere, from the zoning boards to the courts to the neighborhood where zoning issues are dealt with, violence and vandalism, to interfaith councils at the grassroots, to the public schools, which are at the front lines of this encounter with religious difference and cultural difference in the United States, to the public square where there have been many more expressed articulations of America's multi-religious nature. The president will commonly speak of churches, synagogues and mosques and have an Iftar at the end of a day of Ramadan fasting at the White House now. So there's a discourse of plurality, you might say, that was never there before. And we don't know what that reveals and what it conceals; it can't be taken at face value, to be sure.

But virtually every part of American society has been challenged with the new religious diversity that we have seen and glimpsed in the last few minutes. And what I'd like to call your attention to simply in closing is one piece that was at least put in the packet of most of you who came as delegates, and that is a piece that is from our website page called "In the News". And you can actually link to this more or less from the CD-ROM now. But "In the News" is one of the ways in which we actually operate a kind of news service, looking through local papers all over the United States where you do not necessarily see the sorts of things that one sees in the New York Times and the Boston Globe, and they are the sorts of stories that we have simply a week of in the printout of "In the News" that we put in your packet. Simple stories, like historical markers placed at the Hindu temple and the mosque in Perrysberg, Ohio, or the story of blood that was poured into the drawer of where they kept the prayer rugs in the UCLA Medical Center where they kept them for the Islamic prayers, the story of the vandalizing of a Sikh Gurdwara in Spokane, Washington. So these stories are sort of collected -- the good, the bad, the markers of a new stage of America's religious life -- and published on the web.

I will close here simply with the sense that the challenge for the United States is really considerable and a much different challenge than we had even 20 years ago. And also that this is an aspect of American life that people in other parts of the world know almost nothing about. And when I lectured in Malaysia last summer at a large conference of the Malaysian Association of American Studies, people were amazed. They didn't realize that there were Islamic political action groups and Sikh social service groups in the United States. So it is a revelation even for most American citizens, but I think it's an important new dynamic in the kind of challenge that all of us have come to encounter in the last 20 years.

So I'm going to stop. If you will turn the lights on again and I'll ask our panelists to come back to their chairs. And part of what we're going to do in the next aspect of the afternoon is really to ask several of the people who have been working on the ground, so to speak, in the United States simply to talk about their work. And I will-- you've met most of them at least if you've been in the conference, but I'll introduce those who are on our panel, for those of you who are joining us this afternoon.

First there will be Sharifa Alkhateeb from the North American Council of Muslim Women. And then Shamita Das Dasgupta, from an organization called Manavi that looks to the well-being and interlocking of networks of South Asian immigrant women. Then Sheila Decter with the Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action. Beverly Harrison, Union Theological Seminary Activist Emerita. And then Terry Rockefeller from September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows.

And I'm going to ask each of them simply to give us a bit of whatever it is-- is it ten minutes or five? Ten. A little ten-minute overview-- thanks-- of what kind of work you do and what you would want an assembly like this to know about the work of your organization and your perspective in the American scene.

So Sharifa, I think we'll start with you.

ECK: If you want to use the podium, that's also okay. It might actually be easier for some people to see you if you're standing. Sharifa?

ALKHATEEB: Our organization deals on several different levels. Part of it is policy development, part of it is consciousness-building, part of it is educating Muslim women about their own rights, part of it is putting our fires of hatred, part of it is helping Muslim women to get a seat at the table of discussion, part of it is getting people in general to respect Muslim women as human beings, regardless of whether they believe or don't believe in God, and regardless of whether they have or have not ever met a Muslim. So we work on many different levels: at the local level, at the county level, the state level and the national level.

But I was going to actually -- since the subject was the US religious context, I was just going to share some of the things that we have been doing and also, you know, where I think the

state of religion is in the US vis-à-vis Muslim women in terms of our work is right now. I'll go really fast because you said ten minutes. That's not a whole bunch of time.

We've done all kinds of things such as news programs, the NCCJ, "The changing Face of Religion," we participated in that, National Council for Community and Justice. Individual churches we do constantly, giving speeches at individual churches as we're requested around the country for really basic Islam 101 sort of things. We participate in religious networks, including the one here at Harvard, and also some specific ones on specific subjects, such as abortion issues with Catholics for a Free Choice.

We participate in county councils such as in Fairfax County we have something called Faith, Communities and Action. And we have several different women participating in that one. There are forums that we have participated in such as the Pew Religious Freedom in the Workplace Forum that was held in May of last year.

There are also-- our organization hosted the White House Iftar, one of the White House Iftars in the year 2000. It was before 2003, by the way, it was back starting I believe in 1998 under Clinton. And Laila Al-Marayati's group was one that hosted one of those Iftars as well.

And then there are some interfaith national message kind of things that we've been involved in, such as at the National Cathedral, the mystical two-day event that was called Sacred Circles, which was for me very invigorating, because it was one of the first times I had a chance-- and they put it on the web afterwards-- to talk to 900 women from all different faiths, mostly Christian but there were a large number of Jewish women there as well and a few Muslims and some Buddhists, some Sikhs, very few others, to talk about my love of Mary, because it's what helps-- she's my role model, one of my role models, and it really helped to invigorate me to be able to say that and share that with so many women from so many different backgrounds.

And then we have international interfaith messages that we are involved in, such as the Women's Global Peace Initiative of religious and spiritual leaders, and we had several meetings-- one of the last ones was in Geneva, Switzerland-- trying to affect the outcomes of the UN as it relates to religious and spiritual women.

We have so many things that we're existing in the middle of, and some of them we've discussed here today, such as the 9/11 and the backlash. But there are other things that create a mindset in general in the society that makes it very hard to exist with an open mind and an open heart. Some of those things are the Watch Your Neighbor policy that was instituted right after 9/11; the interrogations; the detentions without lawyers, without charges; the raids.

In Northern Virginia there were raids inside homes where they went in with machine guns to people's homes while they were asleep, wouldn't let them put their head scarves on. This was the INS, the FBI. Six different groups cooperated in that, including the local police, who never bothered to tell people ahead of time anyone was coming to their door. The Patriot I

law. And then the snipers in the DC area created a lot of suspicion against not only Muslims but Sikhs, Hispanics, anyone who looked brown basically was under suspicion.

And then we had the plans for the Patriot II Act, which are horrendous, where if you-- retroactively it can be decided that you gave money to some organization for humanitarian purposes that you had no idea that there anything else involved in it, and then they retroactively decide it's a terrorist organization, then you can have your born-in-the-US citizenship taken away.

And then the Iraq war and then more interrogations. There were at least 10,000 Iraqis alone in this country who were interrogated. And then the huge "Report Terrorism" signs across the highways in the DC area, the constant xenophobic press coverage, such as we all hear it, but Wolf Blitzer, I'll never forget the look on his face of glee at people being killed. It was just horrific to me. And they sounded more like football cheering sections to me, and they're a vehicle of incitement to hatred in my opinion. The Just War forums that have taken place, at the Pew Forum, at many other places, justifying war from a Christian perspective.

And then in our area, in the Washington DC area, we have 780,000 military people in Virginia alone, just in Virginia. That creates its own dynamic.

So some of the results are unwanted religious identification, just as in Bosnia there were lots of-- I would say the majority of Muslims in Bosnia were not necessarily religious or practicing but they were made to identify with their religion even though they didn't want to, and that has happened certainly in this case. Unwanted racial identification. Lots of people had gone through two or three generations and wanted to just blend into American society, then all of the sudden people are saying, "But you're an Arab-American, what do all Arab-Americans think on this issue?" You know? And then the loss of common values and the perception that certain groups can't possibly share common American values.

Then censorship. They had the Patriot I. We had credit card surveillance – I don't know whether you're aware – some people are having credit cards removed simply because they're from Pakistan, or they have a Muslim name or they're from an Arab country. Some stores that have credit card availability are having that removed from them simply because they are from the wrong part of the world or the wrong ethnicity. And then library surveillance, of course that went on way before 9/11 but it just got worse after 9/11, where they'll watch what you're taking out and then they will never tell you that they did that. And then of course the ability to come into your house, do whatever they want to do in there and go out and never tell you they were there. Self-censorship has gone on, and I'll say something about that later.

The reduction of human rights. If you choose to be religious in the wrong religion, you're then considered not to have the same civil rights as someone else, and definitely not the same human rights. Then there's a climate of fear and distrust, such as the Neighborhood Watch organizations that Ridge said that he's going to deputize in order to watch people.

Then hate crimes. There was a telemarketer-- just to give you a few examples. There was a telemarketer who called up a Muslim lady in our area and said to her, you know, would you like to get this? And she said, "Well no, my husband deals with the money matters." And the telemarketer said to her, "Well that's because you're Muslim. You let your husband tie your shoestrings, right?" This was a telemarketer.

There was another lady who forgot something at a store, turned around in a kind of strange way in the parking lot to go back because she forgot it, and then the second day the FBI was at her door to ask why was she turning around that way in the parking lot. This was in our area in Virginia. And that's what those signs mean by "Report Terrorism."

And then a few days ago I myself when I was leaving the Airlie Center, which was a conference on training about conflict resolution under the US Institute of Peace in Virginia, someone tried to run me off the road. And it was three times they came really close to me, and the third time I just looked up and they were giving me the finger. And luckily I saw a-- and it was rush hour. They had to really try hard to do this because it was rush hour. And there was a policeman at one of the streets. I stopped and told him and the policeman said, "What makes you think that was a hate crime?"

So anyway, then there's total alienation inside one's own country, even if you're born here. I was born here yet I feel a deep sense of alienation now, and I feel it most when I go to places like department stores or airports, when people hug their babies and walk away from me. It's very hurting.

Eagerness to know the other. I think there's a lot of eagerness to know the other but sometimes it's for good, sometimes it's for bad. Sometimes people want to know all the dirt that they can collect about Muslims, and sometimes they just sincerely want to know about the other.

The United We Stand concept has become more widespread, and that's a positive outcome. I think it's very good. A lot of people really started reacting to the negativity by emphasizing the concept of United We Stand.

Another outcome is Daniel Pipes being nominated to the Board of the US Institute of Peace, wonder of all wonders. Franklin Graham has recently-- his Samaritan's Purse organization has been given the green light to go ahead and enter Iraq to do, in quotes, "humanitarian work." He said very vicious things about Muslims.

And then the religious response. There's been ten times more outreach, some of it by seasoned open-minded Muslims who are well-prepared, some by those who put out fires of hatred, some by newcomers with particularist agendas. All of them are learning to be more open-minded, to try to see people of different and opposite views as individuals separated from their other alliances and allegiances so they can hear what the other says without being reactionary.

There's fear and isolation, closing of the wagons, fear inside your own house: you're not sure whether your own house is bugged. There's fear even in the meeting of friends:

sometimes you're not sure whether the room is bugged, whether you're under surveillance or not. For nothing. For no reason. And what's really troubling is that I went to Iraq in 1987 and we had to hide in the house when somebody would knock on the door at 1:00 in the morning and tell you to put up the signs of Saddam. And I have to tell you, I feel exactly like that in here, in the US right now. Exactly the same. That's horrible.

The women and youth in the Muslim community have been newly promoted as spokespersons for the sake of public image, and an outcome of that is that women have begun to feel more confident in helping to shape their own views and those of others. There's self-policing by already-practicing Muslims. When I say practicing, I mean those who pray and fast at least. And an example of that is a recent conference that we had called The Future of Islam in America at the International Institute of Islamic Thought in Herndon, where the lead discussant advised that we should cooperate with the government, self-police ourselves to weed out terrorists, and build bridges by peace rhetoric. And then there is the new policing of us by hired spies and by patriotic wannabes, people who want to prove their patriotism by spying on their fellow Muslims.

And then there are some problems, and I'll end with that. There are a few problems that get in the way of better religious communication. One is imported imams. Most of the Muslim community has imported imams who have been imported in from another country for whom English is not their first language and who don't have a clue as to how to do any kind of inter-faith or inter-communal or inter-religious work whatsoever.

There's one-dimensional thinking of "it's all about me." Muslims sometimes are very closed in and all they want is to get their rights. They're not yet at the point for the most part in trying to move and work for everybody's rights across the board. There's patriarchal baggage of trying to keep women down and trying to repress and suppress women that we constantly have to work around. And there are feelings of embattlement in general. There are a lot of people who were born in this country who are thinking, "I can't live here anymore" because it's just too suppressive and repressive.

And the question of who defines Islam. There are lots of groups who are trying to define Islam for Muslims. Some of them are non-Muslims and some of them are Muslims who say, "I speak for all Muslims," which is not true of anyone. And then there are democracy-mongers who want to force American-style democracy down the throats of everybody in the world. Thank you. [applause]

ECK: Our next speaker is Shamita Das Dasgupta of Manavi, from whom I learned at our very first conference that all those Hindu temples whose rituals I had attended so assiduously as they broke ground and had Maha Kumbhabhisekhas were not necessarily the greatest friends of women or the places that embraced some of the difficulties of South Asian women in the United States. Shamita Das Dasgupta.

SHAMITA DAS DASGUPTA: Thank you. This is-- actually I feel that I'm in one of the most difficult times in my life personally and organizationally. It's a time of sadness. And

although I've been hearing a lot about hope at this morning's session, it's a time of hopelessness that I feel.

This will give you a background. The organization that I am one of the cofounders of and have been working with that organization for about 18 years now is called Manavi, and it focuses on violence against women in the South Asian community in the US.

Now, I wasn't really brought up in a very strict religious background at all. My mother told me that I just have to be good and nice and nice to people and just lead a good life and I'll be fine, so that's what I did. I didn't do much more than that. And my interest in religion, and when I started to look at it and started to learn, came from the women that I worked with in the community when these were mainly battered women who came to us looking for some kind of help, looking for some way out of their situation, and basically said, well I can't do anything about it because my religion said this-- or basically the religion was saying stick it out, or at least that's what they said.

So I started reading both in the Hindu traditions and Islamic traditions, and of course then I would challenge them in a very kind of manipulative way, where do you find that? Show me. And so on and so forth.

So what was interesting is we have a shelter, and there were times when Christian women, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, I remember a time when all four religious groups were living together. We had spaces for their religious practice. And we're talking about a four-bedroom apartment where they shared with their children. They had their events, religious events, and the only thing that was wonderful about it was that I gained weight eating all the wonderful food they cooked, literally, for all the ceremonies. And that's my background and that's the way we worked.

So to go on from there, and literally I feel that we just before the turn of the century, this century, we felt that we were making some kind of progress, that certain types of reliefs were available to battered women, U visas and T visas, and the Violence Against Women Act came about. Gender asylum was getting easier for women who wanted to stay here. So we felt really elated about it, which shows how narrow and short-sighted we were in our work.

Well then of course things changed to a large degree. By this time, by the way, VAWA funding, Violence Against Women funding, has entrenched us to if not our particular group but the larger domestic violence community in a lot of ways within the administration. It has been coopted to a certain degree I would say.

Well, since 2000 onwards worldwide events that started happening affected us and our work. And I just want to kind of quickly go through them and not elaborate on any of these. First of all, the Intifada in Palestine and its brutal suppression affected us. And I'm talking not in terms of intellectual work; I'm talking about what the women brought to us, what they were talking about, how they felt their lives were affected. The destruction of the World Trade Center buildings and to a certain the Pentagon, the event now coded as 9/11,

subsequent passing of the Patriot Act, creation of the Office of the Homeland Security, which many of us call "Homeland Insecurity," suspension of almost all civil and legal rights of certain groups of people, namely Muslims, anyone who looks Middle Eastern, or Muslim, or brown, I would say, to the observer's eyes. Iraq war, subsequent posturing that there may be more wars coming. Gujarat violence definitely took a prominent part. Violence against minorities in Bangladesh. Continuous Kashmir issues. And the rhetoric that took hold of almost everybody: terrorists equated to Muslims, equated to all brown immigrants.

And of course what happened after that is the administration's stance on promoting heterosexual marriage as panacea for all evils, especially violence against women and children. This is now the push towards all of us that we must promote marriage and that will take care of everything. Declaration of faith-based approach for intervention, treatment, and healing of family violence victims and perpetrators. Again, both those last two things, the heterosexual marriage and faith-based approach; these are the two main pushes of this particular administration. These are just to name a few. There are many, many things that are affecting.

So what happens to us within Manavi and working in a community that's affected by all of these issues and many more, that we are literally in a place where all of these forces are pushing us down? We are working at the intersection of all of these forces in some very peculiar ways. The rhetoric and the atmosphere of the country now has given permission to everybody to express prejudice and hostility, not only to the larger community, which seems to have permission to express hostility-- I myself get, by the way, taken out of airplane lines, getting into it, all the time and searched and patted down every time that I've traveled since then, since 2001.

But I will talk about the two different pieces of this reaction. One is the women that we work with, how it has affected-- all of this has affected them, and the workers, workers in my community as well as the larger domestic violence community and how that has affected them.

First, by the way, after the 9/11 tragedies happened, domestic violence workers were very, very strong in saying that let's not talk about this as terrorist acts, we need to think about what's the cause of all of this, we need to talk about terrorism in terms of internal terrorism, 3000 women die every year in this country by domestic violence, intimate violence, victims of intimate violence, so let's not stop there.

But the things that started happening as all of that has gone down. We don't hear this anymore, this kind of protest within the community anymore. Within the women we work with, there is this huge anger towards Muslim women because why did Muslims have to do this, so they are bringing all of this unwanted focus on us. We were going under the radar screen. Now we are being raided, now all of this is happening. Muslim women, on the other hand, are of course quite rightly so feeling extremely put upon and targeted and victimized and also-- I mean, this is something that happened in an open conference-- asking-- and it has become, by the way, with Gujarat and 9/11, it has become in our community a Muslim-Hindu conflict to a large extent. Muslim women asking openly how do Hindu women, you,

all of you, talking to all of us, accept and live with Hindu men who are rapists and murderers. It ended up being a tremendous question that we had to deal with.

Other than that with the larger community workers, of course, the cultures, both-- any culture other than Judeo-Christian have become tainted as poisonous to women. So we can't really do any more-- there is no talk about cultural sensitivity, cultural appropriateness, which was there before. Now it's while you're here, and not only that, your culture is bad to start with, so why don't we change it or do something so it will protect you. So that kind of feeling has come about.

Women of course are on the one hand not calling police because they are-- which means that they are going to invite these invading forces into the community, and these are battered women, but also that the men, if they bring them in, the men are going to be taken away and detained and god knows what is going to happen to them, whereas the other part of it is that many of the women are also saying, if we have to get rid of somebody, neighbors or partners or anybody, let's call them terrorists and get rid of them. That's an easy way of getting them out.

The tremendous risk-- I think the last point that I want to make here is that there is tremendous risk that each of us are taking as we work in the front lines. Physical, I mean, literally risk of injury to our bodies by going in to the community, by working with-- talking about unpleasant issues. People don't want to hear them. I do a lot of police training and every time I do a lot of police training I'm afraid that I come out of it and somebody is going to hit me or punch me. So there is a lot of risk in actual physical body risks, and also risks of the government cutting our resources, which it's already doing, forcing us into positions and rhetoric that we don't want to accept, don't want to promote. Or saying that unless you change in some ways, you don't promote-- you don't work within your culture, you're not accepted anymore. You should be out of this country if you cannot be like, quote unquote, "us" anymore.

So battered women's well-being is being pitted against the whole issue of terrorism or people who are talking about terrorists. And it's splitting our community in some extraordinary ways. Thank you very much. [applause]

ECK: Next we'll turn to Sheila Decter, who when we first knew her was representing the American Jewish Congress and now has got a new organization. Let me get it right. The Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action. Sheila.

SHEILA DECTER: I'm going to ask if-- Dorothy, can you tell me if I need to speak more loudly or less? I'm not hearing myself because of a cold. It's okay?

DOROTHY ECK: Can hear you just fine.

DECTER: Thank you. Let me know if you lose me or if I'm too loud. I work for Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action. It's called JALSA. It's one of about 12 organizations around the country right now that exist in different cities. It's interesting, those of you who

know the history of the Jewish community in the United States, we had these large national organizations that were called defense organizations that were started to try to help various immigrant populations, and they came to the United States and they're still in existence, or some of them are still in existence, but this is a rather new phenomenon where people feel politics is local, to quote our former speaker O'Neill, and that they concentrate on issues in their own community and they don't have an interest in trying to solve country-wide problems but the problems in their own city, which doesn't mean we don't deal with federal or national legislation or issues of nominees to the federal courts, but our work is done in our own area.

So I'll talk for just a couple of minutes about what we do in JALSA and then a couple of minutes on what I think some problems or issues are in the Jewish community as a whole. What we deal with are four areas. One is social and economic justice, where we work on such things as sweatshops. We have anti-sweatshop legislation in the Massachusetts legislature and we deal with immigrant issues, budget issues, anything that we think-- race-- things that we think need to be dealt with in order to make our communities more equitable.

One of our colleagues here has talked about immigration issues, and that's unbelievable. The variety of ways that immigrant communities are being harmed at the current time is almost without limit, and a lot of it just seems to be below the surface. I point out that the goal for refugees in the United States last year was supposed to be 70,000 persons were supposed to be allowed into the country under refugee status, and I think the figure that was actually allowed was 27,000. This year, as of this time, only 8000 have come in. And the methods and the ways of keeping out immigrants vary, but for some of us the feeling is that 9/11 provided almost a technique or a cover or a way of doing some stuff that some people wanted to do all along.

I would then go to the area of civil liberties and echo every one of the areas that were mentioned, and I would just add a couple more. Not only are people from certain designated --in some cases unnamed-- countries absolutely having registrations and checks and what have you, the amount of investigation of the total community is beyond anything we've seen for many years. Those of us that are a few years older know that this has gone up and down in our American history. This is one of the worst times in many, many years, and it may be more subtle than in the McCarthy years, but it's out there. And if somebody is concerned about you, your library books, your credit cards, all kinds of stuff. There have been American citizens, and I say this because we now have this return to this unbelievable designation between aliens and citizens, and the Supreme Court has agreed that aliens get less rights, less protection, which is not a very happy status. And there are American citizens who have not been allowed on planes because they were into anti-war demonstrations the day before.

So we're into a time where speech is an issue, what you're reading is an issue, and the gathering of a great deal of material. This US Patriot Act II was the act that was supposed to come up with all this stuff about the credit cards and stuff. I suggest to you that much of

this stuff is happening by regulation even before the US Patriot Act II has been passed, and it's of great concern.

We work on public education, both in terms of the quality of public education and equity issues in public education. We are dealing in public education with an agenda right now that would like to see more of a variety of schools, less public education, more privatization in education, and it is difficult because only in public education do you have the promise that all children are to be educated.

And I'm not in any way-- one of the remarkable things about the United States is that we have had this ability to have religious education, private education and so forth, but in the sense of what the responsibility of government, it has always been that there should always be a public education system so that everyone should have access to the schools irrespective of ability to pay and so forth. And there are some great many pressures on that system.

We also work in health issues; health access remains a major issue. And some of the issues in this really very much come into the battles among different religious communities, around the whole issue of reproductive rights. I was late today because I was at a hearing dealing with stem cell research, where clearly different religious views were being brought to bear. And it's here where I suggest that our ability for civil discourse just seems to be more and more difficult, harder to kind of work out and find common ground. It's on the one hand there are more and more dialogue groups working and on the other it just seems that we are having a harder time taking with one another and trying to find the common areas. And in the area of politics, it seems to be worse than ever right now. We seem to be both on the federal level and the local levels into very-- not consensus-building. The opposite of whatever consensus-building is, separate directions.

Now in terms of what I think in terms of what's happening in American Jewish religious life right now, it's hard to speak for such a diverse community. I mentioned to you that I was a conservative Jew. We have different streams. We have Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, which is allied to the Conservative movement, and we have Orthodox. And within each of those movements there are many, many divisions and many, many different voices, some more fundamental, some less fundamental.

I think it's true of all of -- or almost all of them that at the current time there has been greater voice for women -- in being listened to, speaking out. Blu is a better person than I am to talk about whether it's always successful or not, but I think that there's some effort at that. I think that that comes from a second issue that I talk about, which has to do with numbers. The American Jewish community is absolutely terrified -- I don't know if that's the right word -- but obsessed with the question of numbers, and that has to do with -- maybe obsessed is too much of a loaded term, and I don't mean it in a loaded way, but what I mean is that there's a great deal of thought, concern about whether or not our children are all continuing in the faith.

One of our colleagues here spoke about whether or not you can be non-Muslim if you want to be or less Muslim or less religious. In essence, in the Jewish community it's been possible to be a secular Jew and not religious if you wanted to be. Maybe that's easier these days in the United States than before, but in a sense, then, those people concerned about numbers spend more time worrying about it and whether or not the next generation is involved. And what you see are two things. You do see groups of people who are comfortable with secular status, and then you also see more intensity of Jewish life among those who care about this. You see much more study among adults than you saw ten years ago. In other words, so that the interest or concern has led to more study and some introspection and so forth.

One of the areas I want very much to talk about maybe a surprise to you, and that is that the American Jewish community feels very vulnerable. And now here I'm not talking about the vulnerability of internal numbers, I'm talking about anti-Semitism. And it may surprise you that there's a great deal of concern about anti-Semitism. After years of saying that anti-Semitism in the United States was on the wane and that we were less worried about it because the Jewish young people could get into schools and you could get jobs, so we were less worried, or that maybe we would talk about cemetery desecration, we're now back to a higher level of concern where we worry about bombs in synagogues. And if you look around, you will rarely find a synagogue service on a major holiday where there are not policemen stationed at the doors. There is new concern about security, not necessarily external terrorism but just security in general. There has been an increase in world anti-Semitism, the worst probably example is France. And so this is back on the community agenda of great concerns.

There is, as I said, more groups dealing with social justice kinds of issues. There is in the area of concern about Israel, I would say that the community at large, very concerned about suicide bombing in Israel, very concerned about the effects of the Intifada. And then the community perhaps divides into three levels of concern. There are those very worried about economic life in Israel, the fact that tourism has all but stopped, that so much of economic life is in chaos, and very worried about the long-term survival of Israel. Some of these people are busy doing various kinds of economic things to help people buy more items that come from Israel or do various things to help economically.

Then you have a group of people who feel that anything the Israel government does is right under all circumstances and that it is being unjustly attacked, and so there are kind of units or groups around that spend a lot of time bringing speakers and speaking out for trying to help the general community or their own children be more supportive and defensive. And then there is another group that feels that the only hope for Israel is in a two-state solution and that has to be through peace, and so that there are groups who are dealing with peace and trying to bring issues like that into Jewish community life.

What is different, it's not that these groups didn't exist before, the two groups, but I would say they have less ability to talk with one another, and that these are also-- and you almost get within a lot of different institutions a kind of let's not deal with that, let's not deal with it together, we can't talk to each other. So if you think that you can't talk outside the

community, I would suggest that there is far less discussion within the community of the groups as they separate.

So I would just end with the whole area of civil discourse. And the last thing, one last vulnerability I would say, that the push for the current administration on various aspects that we call separation of church and state continued to be of concern to a very large part of the community that feel that for American Jewry, we were best able to live comfortably in the United States because of separation of church and state. And there are fears that a whole lot of policies, whether it's the faith-based funding or other changes, will make life more difficult for American Jews. [applause]

ECK: Great to have this level of analysis here. Bev, you want to sit? We can just put you right here, why not? You can definitely be heard. And I'd like to introduce now one of our great ethicists, Beverly Harrison.

BEVERLY HARRISON: This is frustrating because I don't know who I am on this panel. I think I'm the only other person besides Diana and Terry who probably speaks out of the situation of Christian women in the US, and—

TERRY ROCKEFELLER: I'm not even a Christian.

HARRISON: You're not? Oh, she's not Christian. Well you see, so I have a big task. It's sort of like 20 years ago-- I was trying to think about that-- when Veena and I had to do this case study on abortion. And fortunately for me I started by describing the demographics of 100 American women and who they were in relation to reproductive choice. Otherwise I think I would have been stoned, because Carol Gilligan had just done her attack on justice as a male idea amongst us, and we were in quite a hot place at that point.

I would like to start with the demographics of a 100 Christian women were they to appear before you, so that we get some sense that the pluralism is not just the pluralism of other religions but the strange and extraordinary thing that's happening to Christianity in our world, which is rarely mentioned in theological schools and among church historians, if you study church history.

And I'm making a guess here, to be honest. I didn't do the demographics. I didn't have the sources at hand when I thought about this the other night. But I know for sure that of the 100 Christian women now, something approaching 30-40% would be Roman Catholic, and most of them would be women of hue, many from, of course, the countries of the western hemisphere and Asia and other places, and they wouldn't look like the dear feminist Catholic women that some of us know and love from our 30-40 years of working with Catholic feminists in the US.

But I have to confess that until I retired three years ago and left New York City and went back, I didn't-- it's not really going back-- went into a genuinely Christian evangelical culture, I didn't understand what was going on in Protestantism in this culture. And I would say that Protestants that would stand before you, I think we would still be close to 50%,

maybe close to 60%. This would depend upon what you do with Mormons and people like that who some self-identify as Christian and some do not.

But now that I live in the South I can tell you that the larger part of these women-- of course I knew that the larger part would be Baptist, and more than 50% of those Baptists would be women of color from the Afro-American traditions and they would be more than 30-40%, and I would have told you when I knew about Baptists on the basis of my experience-- two experiences, one teaching black Baptists at Union Seminary in New York and the other being working with American Baptists and Northern Baptists and occasionally running into Southern Baptist students at Union, most of whom were survivors and who had come to live and breathe and study theology at Union Seminary.

And I wouldn't have understood white Baptists at all, and I wouldn't have mentioned the Seventh Day Adventists and the other indigenous denominations that are the largest group in the community where I happen to live. And to be perfectly honest, I wouldn't have stressed the sizable number of black Baptists, and I would have described them as a denomination, which is a mistake. I didn't understand that Baptist means folk religion in large parts of the US and that it's only recently been denominationalized by the recent organization of the Southern Baptist Convention, which created itself as a denomination in order to get a hold of the clergy, Baptist clergy, that are a very odd and motley lot-- the white Baptist clergy. I would not, in other words, have described the Protestants as I now see them.

But the other thing I need to tell you is that where I live and work, yesterday's new Christian community is called the Riverbend Christian Community, and the largest new church in town is the Joy Fellowship. But I belong to the other new Protestant church in town, which is a mission. We call ourselves the-- would you believe this-- the Episcopal Mission of Western North Carolina in Brevard. And we are an experimental, inclusive, anti-sexist Christian community that ceases-- that is trying to cease to define ourselves doctrinally in this village. And so this is the world I live in. And all I can tell you is everybody is religious and nobody knows how to dissent.

I'm also happy to announce that to a much larger degree than I dreamed, and this may not make our indigenous sisters happy here, but to a larger degree than I dreamed, many, many of those recovering Baptist women-- I've taught them to describe themselves as recovering-- many, many of them practice indigenous spirituality with the native people. And they go weekend after weekend to practice.

And this is where I live in America, where it is so religious it squeaks. And I also live in Bushland, in the part of the country where 75% of South Carolina and 68% of North Carolina voted for the shrub. And it's terrifying because it's also the part of America, and I just hadn't even seen this up there in New York, not at all, it's where militarism is successfully working day in and day out to recruit all of the kids who have been sent off to Iraq to fight the war into shrub's revolution.

And now how do you describe this religiously? How do we talk about theologically? What work am I doing? Well I'm not going to talk about my work. Some of you were here the other day when I briefly introduced myself. I said I define myself, I am a retired professor, I live on a mountainside, a few of us live together and we call our little place the Redbud Institute. We actually have a not-for-profit. Everybody should get their not-for-profit going because there isn't any profit to be had in subversive work. [laughter]

But what do we do? Well, we bring together writers and justice workers, we offer hospitality. If you're tired, we'll try to give you a few meals and a place to stay while you write your article or whatever you do. We also consult on subversive questions which nobody else around us is discussing. And so if you need a discussion on subversive questions, we occasionally have them, but you have to line up and take the time.

Now, all that needs to be talked about because we are in this strange-- we've talked a little bit about de-institutionalization today. Honey, we haven't begun that conversation. Not only are we de-institutionalizing all of the institutions of liberal political and economic life, but we are de-institutionalizing all the religious institutions and they don't know what hit them. This is very scary.

Now that's my first point. We are in a post-denominational age and yet I listen in this room and am reminded about how important it is for those who come to these shores for reasons of religious freedom or economic opportunity. And I mean, we stole the country from indigenous people, but most people came here either for reasons of economic opportunity or religious freedom, and in fact it turned out that that was both, everybody came for both. And that's part of our deep problem, is how we see ourselves; if we see this as a place of great economic opportunity or if we see this as a place of religious freedom.

And the new populations have to come here, be denominationalized-- and yes, everybody gets denominationalized, whatever your religion-- and then we have to pass through to a point at which we begin to ask ourselves what does it mean to be in this society, especially since in this society we do come to a culture which is profoundly religious, and it was mostly Christian and Protestant and Roman Catholic chiefly. And you come to us in a time where those of us who were the heir apparents of the dominant hegemonic religion have mostly fallen apart and are terrified.

And I reminded myself-- I wish I had the text from-- I never got it out, the lecture, the ten minutes I had 20 years ago, but I know that I did say something about warning you about the backlash against feminism. Now, I have to say that that is still the most important message I have to bring. I don't know why I'm bringing it. My god-daughter, who is 21, just graduating from Bard College, told me she was going to be a professional feminist. I said, "What are you going to do the analysis on?" She said, "Anything that comes up." [laughter] That's the way I feel now.

We are in a situation where I believe that we still have to get much clearer than we have yet gotten about the importance of the movements of women towards full standing in the human community as the reason why the backlash is happening everywhere, not least, not

least in Bush and his boys in Washington. And I believe that more now than I ever have, and I still think we're sitting on the powder keg, any of us who talk with, meet with and engage women anywhere, we are sitting on the powder keg, the unspoken movement of women. We've talked about it and we say how can we get it done.

Well I think first of all we have to be very clear that a lot of the reaction that is afflicting us is the result of the fear, of the changes that are going on in the lives of women and the rising tide of women, globally. And I'm clearer about that today than ever I was. Which is why I can't prioritize very well. Everybody is worried about "What should we do, what should we do?" Well, we have to do everything, and we have to do it all at once. And the only thing is keep your head clear enough about what you want to do today and tomorrow to keep going. Because there is so much work to do and it's a time of great challenge.

I want to say one more thing. I'm out. Well, I wanted to talk about my work on the Christian right. And I won't do that, but I'm going to ask them to circulate a little essay that I wrote for the British Encyclopedia of Social Sciences. Anyway, it's on Protestantism and gender. But it has several things in it that I call to your attention. One is a re-reading, and this surprises me, this 70-year-old lady now really believes that the movements of Protestantism have much more to do with the changes that are going on globally than I ever dreamed, and it has a lot to do with the fact that the Protestant Reformation shifted the religious locus within Christianity from an outdated parish system led by celibate priests to a family-centered system in which women had a religious role. And I now look at Protestantism as much more subversive than I used to. I'm shocked that I think this now.

And I'm discovering that this subversion goes on everywhere where women gather. And where I live and work, I find that the great fear in Rivard, North Carolina among the Southern Baptist preachers, white guys, is that somehow new-age religion is getting loose in their churches through women. This is a terrifying prospect that they're worried about. And why is this? Well, I'm finding that really is a gender gap to be cultivated there, and the gender gap takes the form of mostly anger over militarism, and mostly a fear, a noticing of the difference between the rhetoric and what we have.

But I also want to say I will write my book on the Christian right, maybe before we gather again at my 90th birthday. Because you folks need to know that this didn't just happen. From 1977 onwards, there have been meetings and organizations with the intent to undo the liberal agenda-- that's how they saw us. Now, I'm talking about-- my liberalism is of the radical variety and yours can be whichever you want. But I'm more than a liberal feminist but I'm at least a liberal feminist.

But neo-liberalism consists of the subtle deconstruction of any sort of strong advocacy for democracy. This is what they're getting. And their way of doing it in theological and religious circles is to discredit politics. To discredit politics, that's what they're doing. And it's terribly, terribly important to get this. Do you know the phrase political correctness? Do you know that was developed on the right in order to make fun of any efforts to get a progressive politic going in any institution? Do you know that the vice president of the

United States' wife, her name is Lynn Cheney, she is the one who has intentionally put out all the propaganda about how radical American universities are? I mean, have you looked into this? Do you know what they've been up to for the last 23 years? Why are we surprised that things are difficult?

In fact, did you know that the reason that the Christian right is so powerful in the US is that they own 70% of the radio stations? And do you know why? Because in 1940 when the Federal Council of Churches asked the liberal churches to get into the radio business as a means for getting the governmental franchises for radio stations the liberals said, "Oh, we shouldn't do this, we're religious, it should be non-religious people." And guess what? Somebody woke up on the Christian right and started buying the radio stations. And all you need is a tower. We have 28 of them in the county where I live.

And so we just need to wake up, because these folks are very smart and they're very well-organized politically. And so that's what I'm doing. I'm blowing the whistle. [applause]

ECK: Our final speaker before we open this up to questions and discussion is Terry Rockefeller, who I introduced earlier as the, well, she introduced herself as the producer of the first film that I ever was involved in making called *Becoming the Buddha in LA*, that was actually supposed to be the first of about five films on what's happening in America.

TERRY ROCKEFELLER: Except for Lynn Cheney.

ECK: Except for Lynn Cheney. [laughter] There's something too multicultural about this.

HARRISON: I apologize for recruiting her. [laughter]

ECK: And then Terry helped us with the CD-ROM. And then Terry discovered at the end of the day on September 11th that her sister had been in *Windows on the World* when the tower fell. This has changed Terry's life and—

ROCKEFELLER: Yes it has. I have some leaflets about my organization that maybe can be passed around. It's wonderful that there are so many people here, and I may not have enough leaflets, so perhaps the people who are just here for the afternoon can take them and the people who are going to be at the conference longer, I'll get more made.

ECK: Thank you, Terry.

ROCKEFELLER: If Beverly is pondering her role on the panel, I guess I really ponder mine. I will just speak from the heart. What I have been doing with my life for the last year-plus is giving as much time and energy as I can to an organization called September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows. The group is by definition an interfaith group. We don't-- it's nonsectarian, but we are interfaith by virtue of the fact that among the founding members were a Catholic, a Protestant, a Muslim and a Jew. And we joined the organization because we lost relatives.

I joined after the organization was about two months old. For me it has been a deeply healing process to work for peace in order to honor my sister, and it has been one of the

more spiritual experiences of my life. I grew up a secular humanist. My parents did not want me to have any religious upbringing. And I've found many things to love about life. I would have said that one of my religions prior to September 11th was the work that my husband and I have done for years for Amnesty International. And I have been really provoked by wonderful comments this morning pushing me to question how we think about universal human values and how obviously values that come from a human rights tradition can in and of themselves be tools of oppression. But I think I've tried to be sensitive to those kinds of issues.

After my sister was killed, becoming active in Peaceful Tomorrows allowed me to dedicate myself to a group that I thought worked to understand and practice by its actions-- our travels to other places, the speaking we've done-- an understanding that human suffering due to violence, terrorism and war is universal. And I would be very happy to discuss that, but I think there's validity in that idea. We have sought in our work to extend to other people the compassion that we felt was extended to us, and to try to humanize and make real the sufferings of other people, especially the civilian victims of the war in Afghanistan and Iraq, which we feel has been very wrongly conducted in the names of our relatives. I want to tell you where the name of the organization comes from, because it's a beautiful quote from Dr. King. Dr. King in one of his speeches about the war in Vietnam said, "The past is prophetic in that it asserts loudly that wars are poor chisels for carving out peaceful tomorrows. One day we must come to see that peace is not a distant goal to which we aspire but the means by which we reach that goal. We must seek peaceful ends through peaceful means." And that has become a kind of spiritual practice, and I think that the members of the group-- and we struggle a lot with each other trying to maintain a small organization with not very much funding, surviving mostly on speakers' fees that we're able to collect when we go out and speak, and generous support from the Ford Foundation in our first year. But we struggle, as we struggle to keep our organization going, to practice that notion as we work together among ourselves as well. Peaceful means through peaceful ends. Peaceful ends through peaceful means.

A little bit of the history of the organization. Immediately after September 11th a number of family members began writing letters to the editor and op-ed pieces, worried about the fact that war in Afghanistan was likely, trying to argue that they felt September 11th was a criminal act and that legal proceedings against the criminals who carried it out, and obviously the criminals who were still alive, who aided and abetted them and helped finance them, was appropriate, but war on a country called Afghanistan would be horribly unfair to the people who lived there.

People found each other through the Internet. I mean, another one of the miracles of the Internet. People who didn't know each other began e-mailing each other because they read these op-ed pieces. Then an amazing woman from Voices in the Wilderness-- and I'm totally blanking on her name. I can see her in front of me. Kathy Kelly organized a march from the Pentagon to Ground Zero. People traveled by bus from town to town all along that route between the Pentagon and Ground Zero, and then marched through individual towns carrying signs "no more victims," carrying signs "not in our name".

At the end of that march, about 12 people who were relatives of people killed in the towers, people killed on Flight 93, which went down out of Shanksville, Pennsylvania, people killed in the Pentagon, got together and decided that some of them were very interested in going to Afghanistan once it was safe to travel there in order to actually make connections with civilian victims of the military campaign. Upon their return from Afghanistan the people really began to speak about making it into an organization. And the organization was announced at a press conference on Valentine's Day and we sent a valentine to President Bush asking him to open his heart. And we got no reply.

We made the trip to Afghanistan, then the group spent some time working through people who were in Afghanistan, had been attached to various NGO's, having them collect as much information as we could on specific instances of civilians' needs. And we collected those into a book called Afghan Portraits of Grief. It was very much intended to be a parallel in form to the books, to the portraits that were done in the New York Times of our relatives. But what we chose to do was emphasize people who were living. We would try to tell the story of someone who was now trying to support her family without a husband: her sewing machine had been destroyed, she had lost one child and she had another that she was trying to raise. And that study is available on our website.

I'm getting a three-minute sign so I'll fast-forward a little bit. We found ourselves being very reactive. I mean, no sooner-- we came back from the trips to Afghanistan-- they were taken by other members, not myself-- and did a lot of lobbying in Congress, got some support for a civilian compensation, financial compensation for the civilians in Afghanistan among members of Congress but not enough to get legislation enacted. We're still working on that. We're hoping to combine that with an effort to also lobby for civilian compensation for people in Iraq.

In the middle of the summer we found ourselves reacting to what was clearly Bush's intention to go to war in Iraq. We organized the trip to Iraq, which I went on, and that trip was very much intended to highlight in advance of the war the plight of the civilians, knowing what we knew about how people had suffered after the first Gulf War, knowing the reduced capacity of the civilian support systems due to years and years of sanction. We wanted to draw attention to the dangers of the kinds of civilian casualties that happen after a war. After the bombs stop falling you get still problems of disease and the kinds of diseases that are spread by dirty water. We're hearing it all now, the lack of electricity to supply the water.

And we had an amazing, as I shared with many of you this morning I think, an amazing six weeks between our return from Iraq, just the sense that-- first of all, I want to say that when we were in Iraq we were one of 35 international delegations there at the time. There were two delegations from South Africa that we met. There was a delegation from Italy, from Germany, and from Japan that we met, and we heard of, I mean, we were told by our government minders, "Boy, are we busy this week, because we've got 35 peace delegations from around the world here." That was an extraordinary sense of connection and an extraordinary sense of hope that we were doing things right. And I thank everyone who is

at this conference who has stressed that we have a lot to learn from our successes and we shouldn't think of them as failures.

Let me just close, I guess because I'm a filmmaker, with two images that are in my mind now because this war has happened and because I now struggle with the ambiguity of the issue that you've raised, Sissela, and other people have raised: how do we do good things, or as I've been saying to myself, what do we do when good things happen for bad reasons? The first image I have of the war is one that was on the front page of the New York Times. I imagine a lot of you saw it. It was an army doctor holding a baby girl in his arms. He had just watched her mother die. And I mean, to me that said it all. You send trained people who know how to save lives off to a place where you're using weapons that take lives, and what was he left with? He was left with an orphan in his arms. It's not the only image you can have of war but it's an image that begins to capture the complexities that I think we don't think about in all this patriotic rhetoric that we are being bombarded-- not we in this room but Americans are being bombarded with.

The other is an image that was in the Boston Globe just a few days ago. It was a father kissing the recently exhumed skull of his son. And it told a powerful story about the horrible repression that had gone on in Iraq. Not an image that I think we think of when we think of what liberation is going to look like. I mean, even good liberation.

And I want to just close by saying, it's an answer to sort of the whole set of questions we've put up on that piece of paper. I am convinced that in this room there is the intelligence to spend one-tenth of the money that war cost to have supported people in gaining their human rights as they defined them. And I have to hold out to the notion, although I respected the discussions we've had, that war is not necessary, war is not the means to ensure peaceful tomorrows. Let me stop there. [applause]

ECK: Now it's your turn. We have time for a discussion and for questions that you can address simply to any member of the audience. ... Identify yourself.

BAM: Brigalia Bam from South Africa. I would like to thank the members of the panel but also thank you for giving us all this information. I can assure you this is new information for myself. And when I go back home, women will not believe that I've heard all this. I would like to ask three questions. Since there are several of these women's groups who are doing all these wonderful things that are really supportive to your particular communities, do you also have opportunities to speak to one another and have a common agenda on particular issues where from the various groupings you are, of your religious groupings, you can speak with one voice? Is that possible? That's my first question. Or it's too difficult.

The second one is a very difficult one on the whole question of integration. Your groups mainly work from the various groups mainly to try and be a supportive group within your own group of women of your particular religion. How does this support integration so that at some point ultimately you want to be-- if that will ever happen in the United States-- one-- you say it in English "monolithic society," does that exist? Or do these groupings keep

the divisions that you are never really fully integrated into the American society? Is that question clear?

__: (inaudible)

BAM: Yes. That is a harder one. The third one is a more easy one. After this war in Iraq, which is-- those Americans who supported the war, we don't know how many, and I don't think that's the issue, do they now feel that the people of Iraq have been liberated? Is there a way to sense to those people who supported the war that those people have been liberated? Because the whole argument, beside that some of us are saying, that the Americans went there because they wanted the oil, and that's not true. The real thing they wanted to was to liberate the people from the repression. Is there propaganda in this country that says that has happened? That's a difficult question but I have to ask it.

__: (inaudible)

SHEILA DECTER: I'll try a partial answer to questions one and two. We do a lot of work in coalitions, and it's a technique that is meant to bring different groups together, but recognizing that the groups all have their own agendas. And a coalition works well to the extent that you deal with a common problem without harming any of the individual members on their own vested interests and their needs. And what we find works best if there is a common goal, so we can put together an inter-religious group to deal with sweatshops, or an inter-religious group to deal with the budget or civil liberties. And it works very well.

The group, as long as you recognize that everybody who comes to the table has their own needs they have to solve; at the same time, they work on the common problem. So that works as a technique.

__: (inaudible)

ECK: I'd simply like to say that your question, Brigalia, was my question. In doing sort of research to look at the ways in which people are organized religiously in this time and space and seeing the rise of groups like the North American Council for Muslim Women and Manavi, etc. Our question was, well now we sort of have a sense of who is out there. Do they know each other? That was the question.

I used to keep getting invitations, would I come to the Women of Reform Judaism, to the Presbyterian Women, all of these huge organizations, and talk about interfaith. My feeling was, don't ask me, what you should be doing is inviting women from the North American Council for Muslim Women to help you think about interfaith, rather than inviting someone who could talk about talking about interfaith.

And so that was really the meeting that we started two years ago, was how can women who are organized rather widely, some of them really big organizations, actually discern what they do so they can discern some issues of common agenda.

SHEILA DECTER: Can I just add something for a second? The only thing I would differ with Diana, and it goes back to your question, is to the extent that you are meeting to talk about dialogue, then you run into the question which somebody raised earlier in the day about identity. So then you're caught in your identity and it's like one identity versus another identity. I don't find that works as well. But on the other hand, if we find that there is something we're concerned about and Muslim women are concerned about, then you have an easier time leaving some of that identity at the door. And I don't mean that you have to forget who you are, but you find some ways of working together so that you're not caught only in the ethnocentric issues.

SHARIFA ALKHATEEB: We try to do a lot of work that's both interfaith and building coalitions and working in coalitions. A few years ago I was in the magazine *A Jewish Woman*. I had a small article where they asked me to author. I regularly train with Rabbi Cindi and also some other pastors, Reverend Marie Fortune, on issues of domestic violence. Just a few days ago I e-mailed Manavi and said, "I need the figures because I'm putting together a proposal for a model shelter for Muslim women and I need your figures, even though they include many different kinds of women." They sent me the figures just the other day, as well as about nine other groups around the country.

So we do interface with each other. I think we could interface more. I would like to see Muslim women when they have conferences inviting well-known and thoughtful Jewish women and Christian women. I would like to see them doing the same in their conferences. I think that that could go a long way to opening up areas of communication.

And final assimilation, I don't think the goal is final assimilation. I think the goal is to have people integrate well in this society and still retain their identity as whatever faith they are. I don't want to speak for other faiths, but I think that we always encourage women get involved in the school system, get involved in the political system, get involved in the health system, housing, all the things that people need, and work everybody's needs, not just your own. But at the same time, they're doing it with a Muslim perspective, and I don't think we would ever want them to lose that. But you can be a good American and be a good Muslim at the same time, and that's really what we're working toward.

And the Iraqi women, are they liberated or was there some push? I don't think there was as much push to liberate Iraqi women as there was to liberate Afghani women. People really felt bad about Afghani women. They thought they've got to go there and liberate them from themselves. And they were so shocked when they didn't want to take off the burkhas and they couldn't understand why. And they say, "Oh it must be fear and they must really hate it and they've hated it for a thousand years." They've been wearing it a thousand years; it didn't start with the Taliban. So it's like a cultural concept of who they have in their mind of who they are.

But for Iraqi women, I don't think that was so much of a question, because Iraqi women are one of the most educated groups of Arab women in the entire Middle East, they're very self-assertive, they are intelligent, they have their own women's organizations inside Iraq for that, they're professional women to a large extent-- of course, some of them aren't-- but has

large numbers of professional women. And also when it comes to religiosity, comparing it to Bosnians, I would say they're one of the least religious, outwardly religious groups that I know of in the Middle East. They're not religious as such. So I don't think people felt the need to go and liberate them from themselves as much.

SHAMITA DAS DASGUPTA: I just want to say that, in terms of Iraqi women-- that rhetoric is emerging, that Iraqi women need liberating-- because all Muslim women need liberation and liberating.

ECK: ... Nawal and then Dorothy and Devaki. Just identify yourself ...

NAWAL EL SAADAWI: I'm Nawal El Saadawi from Egypt. In fact, this problem of identity to me-- I am a little bit maybe because of my mother tongue is Arabic, my English is very blunt, not very subtle. So excuse me if I use-- my English is not very subtle, because my mother tongue is Arabic, so sometimes I find difficulty in expressing my views in subtle words. The problem of identity to me is a bit false. This is a very crude word and maybe will be shocking to some people, but how I looked, what this question who I am? You are a Muslim, you are a Christian, you are a Jew. I don't see-- my background is Muslim, but so what? The differences between the three monotheistic religions are very minute, very minute.

So the question that come to me who I am, I am a human being, a person who would like justice, freedom, equality, love. So isn't it a time that we do not stress this identity politics that divide us all the time? And you, I like what you said. What you are doing is marvelous. You are helping your community. But still why you are sticking to the word Jewish and why you are sticking to the word Muslim and Christian, does this divide you? Very much. And I was in Seattle and I was teaching, I met a lot of friends, and they told me yes, but we keep the word Jewish. I have a lot of friends in your association in Seattle. And said, we are not religious any more, we do not believe in Judaism, but we use the word Jewish in a cultural term. In a cultural term.

And some Muslims say the same in Muslim society, in Muslim organizations. They say, we do not believe very much in this but we use it for identity or because there are a lot of antagonism and hostility against Muslims, there is a lot of antagonism against the veil, so we have to stress our identity. We are trapped in that. I think we are very trapped in that. And this time now.

ALKHATEEB: Can I say something?

ECK: Yes. Thank you. And if you would-- yes, go ahead Sharifa. And then we're taking the mic back to the back of the room.

ALKHATEEB: I just wanted to say when I moved in 1978 to Saudi Arabia, I thought-- and I lived there ten years-- and I thought, oh well this is, you know, my father was originally from Yemen and I was born here, but a Czechoslovak mother. So I thought, okay, I'm going back to part of my roots, maybe I'll be able to relate easily to them, same ethnicity, same

religion and whatever. Within about four months I realized that I had very little in common with Saudi women. And the reason being was not religion and not ethnicity.

The reason was that the way I think about how the word works was different, and it was the first time in my life I started to say to myself, trying to dissect the way I think. And I'm a solution finder, that is who I am, and they were not solution finders, and I could not relate to them. They would sit and talk in circles for hours about a problem and all I wanted to do was get to the solution. And I was saying, why should we talk about this for hours?

And so I realized that who you are, your identity, you're not necessarily trapped in an identity, but because you say you're from a particular religion. It's in how you perceive you will have the practice of that faith that identifies you, self-identifies you. It doesn't mean it makes you part of a mass identity. You have your own specialized identity within that. So I don't feel trapped at all. I feel very liberated. When I say that I'm Muslim I don't feel trapped at all. And I don't necessarily identify with all the things that all the Muslim women are doing all over the world. I don't. And especially when it-- I don't identify either with the men, many men who are Muslim, or many women who don't want to solve anything.

ECK: There's a lot of talk, of course, most of us would recognize readily of the multiple complex overlapping diverse identities in the plural that we may have.

HARRISON: In one way I want to say yes to what you say and I also want to say a clear no, and I think yes and no is the proper answer in a revolutionary situation to every question, generalized, over-generalized question. I mean, I have to say that when I had more time, I would have talked a little bit about the shock of discovering how Protestant I am. That's part of my identity. What does that mean? It means that I actually love the notion of perpetual reformation. And the theological task of everybody religiously is to reform our traditions constantly so that they do justice rather than oppression, and that's my theology and that's my stance.

However, today I still am-- it would be dishonest of me to say that I'm a generalized religious person or a new-age person. I'm afraid I'm just kind of stuck being Christian. It's not so much who I have to be as it is who I am. And it's kind of-- I come from that culture. And I see we've got to learn ways of talking about religion as we have also learned ways about talking about politics, so that we don't insist that we choose one or the other.

Because I think if I've learned anything as a secularized liberal Christian, what I have learned is that it's only in the western model of understanding of politics and religion that you are required to be one or the other, and in which secularism makes any sense at all. And I'm a secular person who no longer believes that secularism is possible, because in a generally pluralistic world, religion is about that which you find holy in your culture, and idolatry is the main form of religion for all of us. [laughter] But we have to learn different ways of relating to each other and not ask us not to be what we happen to be culturally. And so I'm worried about identity politics. But I won't lie to you: if you stay around me for a while-- and when somebody said today that we have to pray for George Bush, I said, yes

dammit, I'm a Christian, I have to try to love my enemy. [laughter] It's bad news ... But I still believe I have a certain ... need to move in that direction. And it's part of me, who I am. I really think we've got to re-theorize religion and policies and not ask each other to be what we aren't. And one of the problems I believe for 40 years teaching in a theological institution is that we have inherited a rationalistic western definition of religion, and if we don't re-theorize religion, as those efforts at cultural practice define our bond, our bondedness-- that was what religio was, "What are our bonds?" Or to quote my favorite Jewish feminist theologian Adrienne Rich, "From whence does our strength come and with whom is our lot cast?" You answer those two questions, you define your religion, as far as I'm concerned.

So I just urge us not to be too urgent about this. I do worry more about secular feminism in this country and its appalling-- I mean, where do we get this insensitivity to culture? We get it from our secularism. We get it from the Pope now but I mean, he's ...(inaudible) [laughter]. So let's just be real careful that we are going to be who we are and we're going to have to battle a lot. [applause]

ECK: Okay, we're going to go—yeah! We're going to go to the back of the room and sort of work our way up. You don't have to ask a question; you can just make a comment and we'll gather up a few of them here.

AUSTIN: Can you stand just one or two more questions on this identity issue business?

ECK: Yeah.

AUSTIN: I'm curious, for all of you who are professional interfaith dialoguers. Do you find that--

ECK: How many of us are that? [laughter]

_: (inaudible)

AUSTIN: That's good. Good. Identity. We often hear certainly among undergraduates, for example, that they're not, quote, "religious" but they think of themselves as deeply spiritual. That's one issue. Two, many undergraduates who feel that they have a, quote, "tradition of origin and a tradition of choice," that's the second one. Three, many undergraduates, faculty and others feel that they are convincingly and devotedly of more than one religious tradition, and they practice several of them, and in fact practice several of them in order to even hold on to one of them. If I make myself clear.

So I'm wondering, in the dialogue between people of various faiths and numbers of faiths, do you find that your religious identity continually reconstructs itself in ways that then make the most difficult issues, namely those political and cultural ones, that are associated with the distinctiveness of our religious identity in various parts of the world? Does it make it easier? Does it make it more difficult? That's one question. And in what way does it shape your strategies for working together? And how has all of this identity business helped us,

particularly those of you who are as expert as you are, in dealing with the intra-- and I'd like you to answer this one last-- the intra-traditional squabbles-- not only squabbles, but enmities that we have within our own traditions? And I'll throw it back to Bev first, because she's got lots of thoughts on this.

HARRISON: I don't even remember the questions, yes, that's right. Well first of all, I absolutely believe that identity is constantly being constructed and reconstructed every day, and we all have multiple identities. And if you told me at the age of 21, when I went to-- well, at the age of whenever I went to New York to study theology for the first time from Minnesota, who I was going to be, I would have laughed. I would have thought you were insane. And I would have no idea that I had such a rich and wonderful life and had so many people try to discredit me and call me names and all these wonderful things that have happened.

And I love who I have become, and it's not by holding on to anything. I have always said-- I read Karl Marx when I was 18 and I thought, "Oh my god, he understands my grandfather exactly." My grandfather was a Prussian German and an anti-Semite. And I thought, "Oh my god, he understands him exactly. How could this be?" And it took me a long time to figure out why it was that he could see the petty bourgeois grandpa just the way he did. But you know, ever since that time I decided that I understood his critique of religion. I didn't understand that it was in some ways Jewish self-loathing at the time but I later figured that out. But I knew he was angry at his father for converting to Christianity and becoming a Rice Christian in order to be a successful businessman.

So I always understood the Marxist critique of religion and I accepted it, and I said to myself when I was 18 years old, if I-- I will never stay within Christianity. One day, if I have to say anything, I don't believe it's true. Now, much of the time I was in and out for about 15 years, having taken that, but I believe that spiritually we have just begun to learn what it is to truly learn from each other religiously, and I think it's very hard work. What's that wonderful book about learning manners so you can go pray in somebody else's community?

ECK: How to be a Perfect Stranger.

HARRISON: Yeah, How to be a Perfect Stranger in Someone Else's... I love that title-- we used it at Union a lot-- because we have so much to learn just to be decent people when we pray together or come together.

Now, so my first answer is to say where I live and work, the real terrible thing-- I didn't say this very clearly-- really terrible thing for me was to wake up one day and realize that I live only among-- about 98% of the people around me thought they were Christian and were Christians. And I'd been living in New York City and I'd been living in a global community. Every place I've ever been. And I was terrified, I felt afraid because of all these Evangelical Christians around me, you know. I had to go back and make friends with them. I kept looking for Jews. And in my community, I have to go twenty miles to a synagogue, to find one. And yet at the same time, the Episcopal Bishop of California, Bill Swing, with whom

I've had some differences, to say the least, has started this inter-religious movement in North America. Now, I have to mention this because I think that we have to look for openings everywhere they are, and down in Western North Carolina the Inter-Religious Initiative Network has formed, and in four counties that's how we have a group that bring people together inter-religiously. Now, I don't like it that it was Bill Swing, because he's like most of those Bishops, he wants credit, he wants his ribbons on his sleeves.

So okay, we've got the religion to religion initiative, and it's quite prosperous. There were 700 of us doing peace dances together on New Year's Eve in the First Methodist Church in Hendersonville, North Carolina. Now, I'm sad to report that very few of them-- only about 150, is best I could count, were Christians, because the Wiccans and the Buddhists, most of whom are Anglo people like myself, and the Jews and quite a lot of the other earth religions-- we have several-- were there in large numbers and the Christians were in the smallest numbers. And I understand why. I mean, we are scared. We Christians-- I didn't even get to talk about the old line Christians, the old line Protestants, the new line Protestants and the indigenous Protestants all around the world. The last half a million people to become Christians in the last decade are in Africa, you know, and they're in indigenous African churches. We haven't even begun to talk about what's going on with the social construction of religion and why it's happening.

But anyway, wherever we are we do what we have to do, and I think we're in for a lot of excitement and discovery. And I also think you're absolutely right, we don't yet know who we will be spiritually. The one thing that I believe we have been delivered from, I have been delivered from, from my giving up old ways of defining religious identity, is that I have learned to be a spiritual person who has no idea who I will be tomorrow, but I like who I am. And I don't find that I'm going to be any less concerned about love and justice, the central Christian virtues that I have been teaching about for 45 years, if I follow this path. So I think we need to get over this fear we have of what's going to happen to us. And if old line Protestant church leadership could get over this and if the Pope could get over it, we can move. But unfortunately the women still have only-- we're still the only ones who are actively engaged in teaching this in the old line Christian tradition, so we have to just keep going.

ECK: I want to turn to some of the other hands that were up in the back here. Looking at Leila, then Yifa, then back to Azza-- no, okay, good. We're going to gather up some questions here, rather than make direct response to several of them. So Leila, why don't you start with your question or comment. Doesn't have to be a question actually.

LEILA AHMED: It's not a question, it's a comment. It's a comment on this identity thing. Two different kinds of comments. One is just to address the issue of the history of identity. I mean, just personally speaking, when I first came say 20 or more years ago, I was seen as an Arab, and whether I liked it or not, that's what I was seen as. Now I'm seen as a Muslim, because all I have to do is step onto to-- you know, go to the airport and hand my passport over, they see my name, and I get treated like a Muslim. So I mean, and I think historically that's what has happened in America, that people become what they need to in order to

react against the dominant definitions. So now people organizing are Muslims, are at least able to have a voice. Otherwise they would have no voice at all. So that's part of the issue. On the other hand, like you, I find it-- so I understand the political usefulness of it, and I think it historically has happened. Italians, you know, people who came from Sicily didn't identify as Italians until they were told you're Italian and they got treated as Italians. So this has happened over history and I think as a means of empowerment it's necessary. But like Nawal, I'm also uneasy with the label because at least if you go back far enough to my generation in Egypt, we didn't-- you know, you didn't talk about your religion or you didn't talk about how exactly you believed in Islam, because you don't want-- it's a-- [mic goes out]

I think the subject of Islam is a dangerous subject. [laughter] Anyway, you didn't talk about it because you don't want anybody interfering in your religious belief. We have generations, we are conditioned to keep the government out of our religion, whether it's the government or so-called non-clergy clergy of Islam, you keep them out. So you never discussed your belief outside.

And of course there is a history of persecution if you believe the wrong thing as a Muslim. So in many ways I'm very uncomfortable with this notion that I have to speak my faith. So I'm very happy to take on-- not happy necessarily because it's very negative in some ways-- to take on my Muslim identity, but I nevertheless feel it's nobody's right to ask what my personal belief is.

ECK: Yifa.

YIFA: Also I want to respond to the [question of] identity. I think most people speak in a most beautiful way, but I would like to speak in my own language. What I mean, people like me, I have been a nun for 24 years. And when I go out, people immediately identify me as a Buddhist nun, because I shave my head, I put my robe. So you know, if you want to lose this identity, what are you going to do, disrobe? But I feel like a decent-- the way I dress, the way I have, it's the life. I like to be the life of simplicity. And also, you know, I'm Asian woman. You cannot change your color, not like Michael Jackson.

So you know, this is the identity. I think, you know, we have to learn together not to be the same but to appreciate the variety, the variety. And I also find, because Nawal, I look at your bio, you've written the novels and the literature, because sometimes I feel like we have all the dialogue between the interfaith, like religions, but sometimes when we come to the point it seems, okay, easy to understand among the religious, but when we talk about media, when we talk about politicians, then we feel frustrated because we don't have the dialogue beyond or among the religions.

So I find it's a great-- maybe there was a communication among religions, but reach out to the literature. Because when sometimes write people novels I find-- this is in Chinese, the literature-- there was lots of negative concepts about monks and nuns. And so sometimes people come to you and make that kind of a very stereotyped question about monks and

nuns. So I find this is a great occasion for maybe literature and religion, the dialogue, to get to know more about religion.

And again, also being-- I myself, I also trained to be a scholar, but also at the same time when I stand up, people will treat me more like a practitioner. And frankly for myself, I'm a kind of struggle whether I should be-- you know, especially in the university environment, I used to be looked at more like a scholar or practitioner. And I find, you know, to speak in the academic language, it's not change in the way I practice my spiritual. This is kind of very short answer to maybe thirdly asked the question.

ECK: Yes, Azza? Pass the other one back, and then we're over to Devaki I think.

AZZA KARAM: Thank you. This is better, yes. I just have a question to Beverly, just as a clarification. You had said that the religious right is trying to denigrate politics or to make fun of politics. I'm not clear if that's what you said.

HARRISON: To discredit.

KARAM: To discredit politics, okay. So now, how does that fit in with the fact that a good number of those on the religious right tend to become engaged in politics or to use the political process? And they seem to be doing a jolly good job of it. Could you maybe just clarify or elaborate?

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HARRISON: What I meant by that is a discrediting of politics as such in a-- well, I didn't get to talk about neo-liberalism and how it's constructed as a political, economic and cultural theory. I do a lot of work on that. You notice a contradiction when you point out that isn't it interesting that these people are dismissing politics and at the same time are very politically active. I mean, that's their contradiction, but we should name it for what it is, a contradiction between their ideology and their practice, and that's always where you find the openings for resistance. It's hard to practice, and that's why I should have not said anything, or said more ...(inaudible).

What is happening is that neo-liberalism is teaching us that political ideology introduces divisions among us ... and that the problems in the world can best be solved by the market, and the market is a better, more adequate means of distributing power and resources than is the cumbersome political process.

Now, this is a very sophisticated ideology, and it's not my belief, except among the business community and the corporation types and that sort of thing, but it is the ideology of the present world. And in my view it accounts for the fact that the old guard behind the iron curtain and the fascists in Europe could all come together and want the same thing, for example, in Yugoslavia. Or you go anyplace in the world and the warlords are there and it turns out that they say they have a political ideology but they don't.

See, the Bushites don't really-- they don't really appear too conservative. It's a big mistake to treat this as conservatism, because 19th century conservatism was a specific political doctrine about inherited power and wealth and keeping it in place. These men are liberals. They believe you get to earn it provided that you have it now, and you get to keep it if you have it. And they don't have a vision for a good society. They are not interested in reproducing the liberal traditions of Europe. The liberals are in such retreat that what they do is basically-- I call it virtual liberalism. It's the creation of a virtual Christianity. I mean, fundamentalism, I wanted to give quite a little talk about what fundamentalism is, but I'm a reformed Christian, I'm a Calvinist. We invented it. You didn't. And Islam, I have no reservations about using this term fundamentalism, because it's an invention to reestablish hegemonic theory based upon text that was introduced into US Protestantism in the middle of the 19th century to suppress a movement toward what I would call Evangelicalism or experiential religion. And most-- now, of course, we have evangelicalism, fundamentalism all mixed up and we actually-- and where I come from, people don't read the Bible, they read Timothy LaHaye's novel to show them what's in the Bible so that they learn the doctrine that they're supposed to believe. They won't read text, for God's sake. It has nothing to do with 19th century Protestant fundamentalism. Those were all old text-munching professors that had been through seminary ... certain documents of the atonement. It has nothing to do with that. But it's a virtual reality and it produces-- what it does is frighten people to become traditional in the face of it, which is to say they think their grandfather did it that way, that's the way they're going to do it. But they don't know enough to know what the tradition was.

So we're living in a time where religious illiteracy is the great friend of the Christian right, and you can talk about the right in your religion, but we must get over this notion that this is conservatism. The point is to discredit the love of the creation of democratic community and it's an attack on all the things in our western Christian traditions that taught anybody to value movement in a democratic direction. ... It's really scary out there.

ECK: We have so many people with their hands up. Devaki, you have the mic back here.

DEVAKI JAIN: This is a question to Sharifa. I was most impressed by your clear description of all the dimensions of what this community is facing after September 11th. It was clear, it was factually-based. And so a question in my mind is have any of the major social political movements, for example the American feminist movement, even though it may be diverse and amorphous, come to be a kind of a broad, big support. I mean, it looked like that kind of description of what you said should invite the solidarity of a larger visible movement which says this is happening to these people and we want to call attention to it politically, even as you described it today and describe any such big support that that particular persecution was getting.

So is there a feminist or women's movement that has come to stand by and to support this-- make visible the kind of persecution that this community is facing?

ECK: Thank you. Blu, you want to add to that question?

BLU GREENBERG: Yeah, I did. Because the list altogether was pretty scary and not to be dismissed. And I was thinking as you defined the difference between you and Saudi women, and as I've come to know you, you're a person of solutions. So I was wondering what the broad categories, how you would define the broad categories of solutions, what are some of the specific, and then the question is what about others who want to join the cause to do?

ALKHATEEB: Well, you know, now and again, now and then, Muslim women who are active across the country, and there are many of us, do get invited to different feminist conferences to speak sometimes, to be on panels and so forth. But I've seen a deafening silence really among the majority of major feminist groups when it comes to what Muslim women have been going through.

We've gotten a lot of response from churches, from synagogues, from Christian organizations, Jewish organizations, Sikh organizations, Buddhist organizations, but not the feminist movement. And I think the reason is that they just don't know where to put us. You know, philosophically and otherwise, they're just thinking like they don't fit into our mold of what we think someone who is a feminist should look like or act like or think like, and if they don't think and act like us-- and again, as I said earlier, this is really a kind of neo-colonialism. Then we don't want them near us. We don't want to be part of them. We are not going to support them, because we don't know what that really looks like.

So not even on the basis of humanitarianism have they been willing up till now to broadly support the issues that are facing Muslim women in this country. And I think that that's a barrier that needs to be broken. And certainly we're willing to reach out, and I know women from many other women's groups try all the time and do to some extent reach out to women in women's movement.

But I know twice in the last four years I held long conversations with Ellie Smeal for instance, who finally at the end of both conversations-- one of them was like an hour and a half, just one conversation-- and she said, "I just don't like religion." And she said—

__ : (inaudible)

ALKHATEEB: And that's what she said. And she said, "My mother had such a horrible experience with religion, it turned me off, and I can't get beyond it." I said, "Ellie, I'm trying to have a conversation with you. I want us to have an open bridge of communication." And she said, "I'm sorry. I know that you're trying but I can't get beyond it" and that was it. And so there's-- I know that all of us who are very active across the country, not just in our organization, in all the other Muslim women organizations, try constantly to connect in every way possible, but there's been, as I said, the deafening silence is there. And Blu was asking can people get involved. I think that they can. There's definitely an openness to be involved. There's definitely an openness. And it's just that things haven't gone that way. And broader solutions, we as Muslim women are still collectively-- and we haven't even gotten to the point of really collectively thinking of broad solutions across women's organizations and across divides, things that divide us from different perspectives. But on smaller bases, on solving some specific kinds of problems, we do support each other across

organizations, such as the issue of, you know, at one point five organizations signed on to a letter and had meetings at the State Department to respond to the women in Turkey not being allowed to go to college with a head scarf on. And several of those groups were women who absolutely are against covering but they were also against the human rights abuse of not allowing women to go to college with their heads covered. And we were also-- there were 35 organizations worldwide who signed on to a letter in 1995 to the Taliban against them requiring women to put those covers on. So, you know.

ECK: Thank you, Sharifa. We have a couple more comments. You've had your hand up for a long time. Would you like to ask your question?

AUDIENCE MEMBER (unidentified): Sure. The problems that were being outlined with terrorism-- the Patriot Act, the demonization of Muslims-- actually makes me think of an earlier period in America history, and that's the 1850s, when there was basically a fundamental evil which was eating everything, which was slavery. And with the right, the Bushite right, I see a fundamental subtext which is uniting them, which is basically support for racist colonialism in Palestine.

And the question is can progressives make any progress against the Bushite coalition, which is united on this issue, if they don't bite the bullet and address this fundamental problem of racist colonialism in Palestine?

ECK: Good question. Very good question. We all wrestle with this in some way or another. There are many outlying issues. Sherif, you had your hand up and I'd like to let you have a word as well. Want to pas the mic to Sherif?

SHERIF HETATA: All the issues that have been raised about religion and identity are connected to a reality which we have to face. We can't abolish these things. This diversity of cultures and of religions exists, and we have to deal with it. But I'm not an academician, but from my own experience I found out that these things break down when people do things together, and that's why I have the feeling that instead of engaging in what you call dialogue, what we need to do is to engage in actions on certain things that are common to us, and that is the key. The barriers break down when people work together and do things together and understand one another. That's one point I would like to make.

A second point, very quickly. I think that what the present administration is banking on in order to buttress the policies that it is following is war. If questions of-- if the war policies break down, if this so-called struggle against terrorism doesn't go ahead, the administration is not going to be able to follow the policies that it's following in all areas, including internally here in the United States. And so it seems to me very important to be able to make the link to people between war and between the things that are happening to them here in the different communities. How do we make this link is very difficult, but that is what is going to bring more and more people in against war and against the Bush administration.

ECK: Thank you. I'm very conscious of the time. It's five to six. And I know Clare has the mic back there where she's sort of waving it in various directions. Does someone want to have a final word? Veena Das.

VEENA DAS: I don't want to have final word.

ECK: Not a final word ... a word.

DAS: I just wanted to put two things. One, that I was struck by the fact that Shamita's organization is Manavi, and it's not a faith organization, it's a South Asian women's organization, but that the kind of mitering of the idea that everything is in a certain sense defined in vertical ways in this way puts her into something which becomes a faith organization. So that's one question I would have, that is there not a danger in some ways of this vertical arrangement of some kind? So that we might talk about the fact that it's very-- if you ask me who are you, I'm often likely to say I'm from the country of anthropologists or something like that. [laughter] Because you know, that's the thing I feel comfortable with, and because I also think it's not that you claim identity, something claims you. And I'd like to think of what that difference is.

I think my second point is related to the first one perhaps, which is that it's quite interesting that we don't have something like the worker party or you know, something of that kind, which would have brought a different set of issues probably on the table. And myself, working as I said with young women between the age of 14 and 22 who have HIV infection and most of them are-- they are black. They are either African-American or they are from children born here after the Haitian revolution, the migration and very difficult trajectories of how they came to be over here.

Now, these kids got HIV infection because they were sexually abused, and in the medical literature there has always been this whole thing that teenagers have this very promiscuous sexual life and that's why probably they have HIV infection. And I've been very struck by the fact that in a way there's going to be a cutting out of the programs which are the only sources of hope, because they don't have families from which they could actually get any kind of support. The family is the source from where they got the infection in the first instance.

And I'd like us to think-- somebody I think rose this question of the fact that there are people who are not represented, and how does one represent them and so on. And without at all assuming to represent them, I'd still say that there are really these extremely pressing issues which concern very young girls in this country. And the whole kind of rhetoric of going and saving women elsewhere in a certain sense is a war on women here and on very young women over here, and at some stage I wish we could perhaps think of connecting these.

ECK: Veena, thank you. And I'd like simply to thank all of you. I think obviously there's no end to this discussion, but it is the beginning of a discussion. We will convene again tomorrow, all of you who are here this afternoon invited. At 8:30 we're having a little

coffee, etc., in the Braun Room, and at 9:00 a series of panels that will involve most of these same women, not exactly the ones who are on the panel today but many who are in the room today.

Yes, Leila?

AHMED: Just one little question relevant to the whole issue of activism in a way to Sharifa. What feminist movement? Who are the feminist movement who are failing to come to your aid? Who are you thinking of and where is it? Because I can think-- it's true, I can think of prominent individual white women, feminist women, who have taken rather foolish attitudes regarding-- who have done nothing and who have been very critical of the veil. I also remember that after September 11th lots of individual groups of people across the country took to wearing head scarves in support of Muslims, individual women. So partly I'm-- who are the feminists who have failed to come to-- where is the feminist movement?

ECK: Are you talking about National Organization of Women?

AUSTIN: And let's not give away our power as feminists.

ECK: Pardon?

AUSTIN: And let's not give away our power as feminists. I mean, we're feminists too. So let's not say, "ah, but the feminist movement isn't responding, because among.."

ALKHATEEB: I'm referring to the largest organization. I did not mean all feminists.

AUSTIN: That's my point.

ALKHATEEB: I'm a feminist but I don't want people-- the question was "Did the feminist movement as a movement [assist Muslim women]?" ... and the largest organizations, no, they did not come openly and say, this is--

AUSTIN: We are the movement, is all I'm trying to say.

ECK: Of course. And this is true--

[simultaneous conversation]

HARRISON: ...NOW and is really under fire and they're tired, overextended, and we must not give away our power ... [simultaneous conversation]

ECK: It sounds as if we're breaking into the buzz that will continue. For those of you who are part of the conference getup, can we leave our things in this room? No. So you have to take your papers with you. But you don't have to go very far. We just have to walk out the door and across about 10, 15 steps over to the door of the Faculty Club.

END OF PANEL