NEWS

Professor Addresses Misconceptions of Islam

By Kaushik De

Prof. Nimat Barazangi, feminist, gender and sexuality studies, challenged the view that Islam is a religion of submission in her, discussion of the West’s understanding of Islam in a lecture Monday.

Barazangi began by explaining some of the “academic jargon” that she said pervades discussions of Islam.

“Islam comes from the Arabic word ‘aslama.’ It means being at peace with oneself,” she said. “It does not come from the root ‘sallama,’ meaning submission.”
Barazangi also highlighted the differences between Shari’ah and shari’a law.

“Shari’ah, with a capital ‘S,’ is the path that is guided by Qur’anic ethos in its totality to achieve justice,” she said. “It is neither the collection of rules derived by Muslim jurists, nor the interpretations that were solidified by Muslim leaders ... under ‘Islamic law’ or ‘shari’a law’ with a small ‘s.’”

Barazangi stressed this clarification, saying “the massive use and abuse of the terms Islam and Shari’ah as the cause for the motives of violence should be the main drive for us to rethink the meaning of these terms.”

Barazangi added that modern shari’a law, and thereby Western views of Islamic states, stem from misunderstanding of the Qur’an, which she called “the primary and only divine source,” and the Hadith, or “secondary source” of narratives relating to Mohammed.

“When an individual Muslim accepts the reported narratives that ‘women are inferior in faith,’ this individual could not have understood the message of the Qur’an,” Barazangi said. “Unfortunately, a majority of modern Muslims erroneously believe that all shari’a rules are binding morally and legally to the Qur’an.”

She urged attendees to rethink the Hadith saying most of the gender-biased interpretations of the Qur’an rely on the reported narratives in the Hadith. These narratives are often misused without corroborating their narratives with the Qur’an, according to Barazangi.

“I urge Muslim women, and men for that matter, to rethink the Hadith,” Barazangi said. Namit also said that Hadith narratives “directly contradict” the Qur’an numerous times, pointing out that – Qur’an opposing slavery and equal distribution of inheritance amongst children regardless of gender, while sections of the Hadith claim the opposite.
Barazangi explained that the development of shari’a law in the Hadith narratives is what has led to the modern status of women in Islamic-majority countries.

“Despite the fact that the Qur’anic guidance were intended to change the tribal patriarchal norms of the time, women have been mostly absent in shaping and developing Muslim thought,” Barazangi said. “They were hardly involved in developing the rules of jurisprudence ... The biased rules were solidified and elevated to the level of the Qur’an.”

Barazangi argues that Qur’anic instructions concerning women have not been fully practiced “since The Prophet established the first Muslim community in the seventh century.”

The Professor urged Muslim women to reread the Qur’an, calling the act of reinterpretation “scholarship-activism”, and called on an intrafaith reformation to shift the world’s view of Islam.