ZIADEH LECTURE 2009

NELC

Near Eastern Languages and Civilization

The Farhat J. Ziadeh

Distinguished Lecture

in Arab and Islamic Studies

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

It is my distinct privilege to provide you with a copy of the seventh Farhat J. Ziadeh Distinguished Lecture in Arab and Islamic Studies, "Rethinking the 'Muslim World' Paradigm," delivered by Shibley Telhami on April 22, 2009.

The Ziadeh Fund was formally endowed in 2001. Since that time, with your support, it has allowed us to strengthen our educational reach and showcase the most outstanding scholarship in Arab and Islamic Studies, and to do so always in honor of our dear colleague Farhat Ziadeh, whose contributions to the fields of Islamic law, Arabic language, and Islamic Studies are truly unparalleled.

Farhat Ziadeh was born in Ramallah, Palestine, in 1917. He received his B.A. from the American University of Beirut in 1937 and his LL.B. from the University of London in 1940. He then attended Lincoln's Inn, London, where he became a Barrister-at-Law in 1946. In the final years of the British Mandate, he served as a Magistrate for the Government of Palestine before eventually moving with his family to the United States. He was appointed Professor of Law and Islamic Studies at Princeton University, where he taught until 1966, at which time he moved to the University of Washington.

The annual lectureship in his name is a fitting tribute to his international reputation and his national service to the discipline of Arabic and Islamic Studies. The event and publication would not be possible without the generous support of many contributors including students, colleagues, friends, and above all Farhat and Suad themselves, and their family members. On behalf of our Department, I extend my deepest thanks to them and to all of you who have supported the Ziadeh Fund. You truly have made a difference!

Sincerely yours,

Scott B Noegel
Chair, Near Eastern Languages & Civilization
http://depts.washington.edu/nelc/

NELC

The Department of
Near Eastern Languages and Civilization
at the University of Washington

The Seventh Farhat J. Ziadeh
Distinguished Lecture in
Arab and Islamic Studies

April 22, 2009

RETHINKING THE
"MUSLIM WORLD" PARADIGM

Shibley Telhami

Shibley Telhami is the Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland, College Park, and non-resident senior fellow at the Saban Center at the Brookings Institution. Before coming to the University of Maryland, he taught at several universities, including Cornell University, Ohio State University, the University of Southern California, Princeton University, Columbia University, Swarthmore College, and the University of California at Berkeley, where he also received his doctorate in political science.

Professor Telhami has also been active in the foreign policy arena. He has served as Advisor to the US Mission to the UN (1990-91), as advisor to former Congressman Lee Hamilton, and as a member of the US delegation to the Trilateral US-Israeli-Palestinian Anti-Incitement Committee, which was mandated by the Wye River Agreements. He also served on the Iraq Study Group as a member of the Strategic Environment Working Group. He has contributed to the *Washington Post,* the New York *Times*, and the Los Angeles *Time*s and regularly appears on national and international radio and television. He has served on the US Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World, which was appointed by the Department of State at the request of Congress, and he co-drafted the report of their findings, *Changing Minds, Winning Peace*. He also has co-drafted several Council on Foreign Relations reports on US public diplomacy, the Arab-Israeli peace process, and Persian Gulf security.

He is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and serves on the board of the Education for Employment Foundation, several academic advisory boards, and has served on the board of Human Rights Watch (and as Chair of Advisory Committee of Human Rights Watch/Middle East). He also has served on the board of the United States Institute of Peace. Professor Telhami was given the Distinguished International Service Award by the University of Maryland in 2002 and the Excellence in Public Service Award by the University System of Maryland Board of Regents in 2006.

RETHINKING THE "MUSLIM WORLD" PARADIGM

Shibley Telhami

Reflecting on our relations with what we call the "Muslim World," I'd like to present the notion that our prevailing paradigm, the paradigm that took hold after 9/11 about the so-called "Muslim World," has misinformed far more than it has informed. The question is how and why we got here and what it is that we missed in the process of sticking to this paradigm?

It's not that I want to argue that the focus on religion is unimportant, on the contrary, I think, religion is extremely important. It's important in our lives, important in Middle Eastern lives, important in the states with Muslim majorities. Not enough focus has been put on the role of religion in society. I think it is lived every day and it's very important that we understand how people live their daily lives. Although I am a political scientist, I actually came to political science through the back door, so to speak. I first studied religion and philosophy (after mathematics) before I entered political science. My first instinct was to think that the way to understand conflict in the Middle East was to understand religion in the Middle East. I actually undertook a research project in the Arab World and Israel to try to understand the way religion influenced politics, long before this idea was popular, back in the mid 1970s. I returned from that stint, saying yes, religion is important, but it is not the focal point of understanding the political issues that most concern us.

So I turned to political science as a way to understand what is happening in the region. The starting point is not that religion is not important, but that the model we have used, the so-called "Muslim World" paradigm, is a paradigm in which the Islamic characteristic of a country, the Islamic characteristic of a group, the Islamic characteristic of an indi-

vidual was assumed to be the most important, or at least a very important part of explaining what people and societies did on the issues that troubled us most, whether it was conflict, terrorism, the role of women, the Arab-Israeli issue, 9/11, the Iraq war, or civil war in Iraq and Lebanon. So we jumped from, "Yes, religion is important in the lives of people" to "Religion is the central explanation for issues that we need to understand." In the process we distorted the issues that we wanted to understand and we were distracted from real causes that we need to understand.

I will start with the notion that we all understand that there are Muslim-majority countries, that in some ways the public in those countries particularly has been very angry with the United States, that we have a problem in our relationship with societies in Muslim-majority countries. And that, in fact, has driven to some extent our elections, as the rise of President Obama was in part based on a notion that we are in a troubled relationship with countries that we have called "the Muslim World." It's not a surprise that the President instinctively understands that there is a problem. Our political elites understood that there was a problem, understood that we needed to address it. The President, in one of the first major acts in his first weeks in office started a different discourse with Muslim communities. The first interview he gave was with an Arab television station, soon after, he addressed the Turkish people, he also addressed the Iranian people, and delivered a very important speech in Cairo, which was intended to send a different message to what we call the "Muslim World".

The speech was good in the sense that there was a perception in Muslim-majority countries that the US was now in a relationship of respect towards them. And the President's message based on relations of mutual respect definitely resonated. The speech in Cairo was very well received. We have seen it in public opinion polls, and in other evidence, editorials, discussions, conversations, and visits. It went a long way toward trying to create a different atmosphere and to persuade people to start listening.

But here is the problem: If we stick with the notion that we are dealing with a "Muslim World," then we are on a slippery slope toward

assuming that the Islamic characteristic defines what Muslims do more than any other. Then we are on course toward repeating some of the mistakes and distorting some of the issues with which we need to come to grips. We need to remind ourselves that we don't talk of a "Christian World," we don't talk of a "Jewish World," and we don't talk of a "Buddhist World." We don't think of Latin America and Western Europe and North America as constituting the "Christian World." One never hears such terminology. We don't think such a paradigm is particularly helpful in trying to understand relations between the United States and Venezuela and yet we somehow accept the notion of a "Muslim World" as if it were the most important characteristic that defines Muslim communities.

In fact, when we look at why Muslims were open to the new President of the United States, it wasn't just that he was using the language of respect, or that people thought he understood the "Muslim World" because he had some Islamic roots. It was more issue-specific than people assume. I have been conducting public opinion polling in the Arab World for the past decade and during our election campaign in April 2008, I did a poll in Arab countries to find out whom people preferred, which one of our candidates they thought was going to be more helpful for advancing peace in the Middle East. At the time there were three surviving candidates: Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama and John McCain. John McCain didn't receive many votes, about four percent of people said he would be most helpful. Barack Obama, yes, was slightly ahead of Hillary Clinton; he received 18%, she got 13%. When one takes into account the margin of error, that's roughly equal. So it wasn't as stunning a difference as one might think. What was striking was that the largest number of people responded, "None of the above"; they said it would not make a difference.

In the polling that we have done in the first six months of the new administration to see what issues most created an opening for optimism about Obama, we found three more examples: First, the fact that he said he was going to follow through with his campaign promise to pull out of Iraq, especially given that he had opposed the war from the start. Arabs

(people, but not necessarily governments) want to see America out of Iraq. The fact that the President repeatedly declared that he had a plan to withdraw was important to them. Second, the President's declared plans to end torture and to close the Guantanamo detention facility. Third, the appointment of George Mitchell to mediate the Arab-Israeli issue. Those were the issues that mattered to them in thinking about the President differently. We already see some skepticism because Arab publics are asking questions about whether the United States is in practice moving in the right direction. That is what we need to address—issues. We don't need to address just the tone of relations and language toward the "Muslim World".

Here I want to move to specific issues that we need to address and how these have been distorted by our focus on the "Muslim World" specifically. One reason we have adopted this paradigm of the "Muslim World", certainly, is 9/11, which I call, "the prism of pain," through which many Americans look at Arabs and Muslims. It became the focal point through which Americans interpreted the world around them, through this painful collective experience. But I don't think 9/11 explains why we actually adopted this paradigm, it merely explains the occasion. When the tragedy of 9/11 happened we could have gone in another direction altogether. The initial instinct of the American people was not to blame Muslims. If one examines early polls, in the first few weeks, that wasn't the instinct. President George W. Bush actually didn't think that the cause was Islam, and went out of his way to say so. Arab and Muslim leaders, including, remarkably, Iran and Syria, joined the United States in rejecting 9/11 and even helping with the Afghanistan war. So I don't think one can say "9/11, therefore, the Islamic World paradigm." I think there is something else missing here that needs to be explained and I will return to it later. But we have adopted that paradigm and I do think that in times of conflict one goes for the easiest explanations. It is instructive to look at relations between the United States and other parts of the world, such as China and India, where there are marked religious and cultural differences. If someone landed on earth from outer space and looked at human relig-

ions, he or she would be struck by how close Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are—not by their differences. And if one looks at the differences between Christianity and Buddhism or Christianity and Hinduism—these are huge, theologically and also culturally. This is not a value judgment, as I am making my point about the significant differences, that, if Americans were to focus on some of the cultural aspects in India, or some of the everyday practices in China, they would seem utterly alien to most. And yet we have a very good relationship with India and a warm relationship across cultures. Actually, when one looks at the Indian-American relationship, surprisingly, it is one of the relationships that remained warm during the tough period of the past several years. The difference between Hinduism and Christianity doesn't explain the relationship. And yet I would submit that if we were to get into a strategic conflict with India or China any time in the future (I certainly don't expect one) the first explanation we are going to find in our discourse is going to be to start with using a microscope to examine their culture, their religion, and highlight the differences that we think are really a cause for the conflict. That is an instinct, but it is not a very helpful one. It is an instinct that we cultivated by adopting the paradigm of the "Muslim World" in our discourse. By the way, just as footnote, President Obama did not use the term "the Muslim World" during his speech in Cairo. He avoided using it. And it was deliberate in part to start downplaying that terminology in the relationship.

What evidence do I have that this is more distorting than helpful? Some of this has been done already in the many writings taking issue with the notion of "a clash of civilizations" and also by those who have highlighted the marked diversity of Muslim countries and societies.

But I will take a different track. I will present some evidence about how people feel about specific issues that tell us more about who they are, what prism they see through when they make judgments about world affairs, about which issues are important to the United States' relationship with Muslim communities. I conduct an annual public opinion poll, with Zogby international, in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Morocco,

---

[1]The annual Arab Public Opinion Poll can be accessed at: www.sadat.umd.edu.

＊

Jordan and the UAE, that involves a representative sample of about 4000 respondents.[1] I repeat many of the same questions every year and also ask some new questions. One regular question is: "Whom among world leaders outside of your own country do you admire most?" (I say "outside of your own country" because I don't want to put them in a position of having to evaluate their own leaders.) I use this question not because it is a genuine popularity contest, but because when one looks at whom they admire, one better understands the prism through which they are looking at the world. We are getting at what most matters to them. What are the central issues that rise to the front of their judgment? And so I have been asking this question every year. After 9/11 and the Iraq war, given the intensity of the relationship between the United States and the Muslim countries and the focus on Islam in America, I wanted to see whether in fact some important Islamic leaders would move to the top, particularly Sunni religious leaders, perhaps someone like Yusuf al-Qaradawi who is a very important Islamic religious thinker who frequently appears on Al-Jazeera television and represents much of mainstream Sunni religious thinking. I wanted to see if people would embrace him. Well, the most admired leader in 2004 and 2005—was French President Jacques Chirac! In the middle of the so-called confrontation with the "Muslim World", the "Muslim World" was embracing the leader of a country with a colonial history in the "Muslim World," where immigration issues were at the forefront, where the veil issue in schools was in the forefront. Putting this in historical perspective, right after World War I, Woodrow Wilson sent a commission to the Arab World to find out what people really wanted, and most responded, "We want independence." But if we are not going to have independence, if we are going to have an international mandate, please, make it an American mandate. And if you are not going to make it an American mandate, please don't make it a French mandate. Think about this and flip it over a century later. When one asked Arabs at the outset of the 21st century to name the leader that they admired most in the world—they named Jacques Chirac. When we asked respondents, "Name the leader that you dislike most in the world"—for many years, it was al-

ways the Prime Minister of Israel, especially Ariel Sharon. By 2008, and even after he left office in 2009, it was George W. Bush, the President of the United States who trumped the Israeli Prime Minister as the most disliked leader in the Arab World.

One has this juxtaposition, two Western leaders, one that is most admired despite his nation's bloody colonial history, and one that is most disliked in the Arab World. What this tells us is that something very simple is driving the views on these very political issues. Why do they like Jacques Chirac? He was seen to be more sympathetic on the Palestinian issue and to stand up to George Bush on the unpopular Iraq war. That was enough for them. What happened beginning with 2006? Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah in Lebanon, emerged as a most popular leader. Now when we think about this, we can say: "Hassan Nasrallah is a Muslim cleric." But he is a Shi'a leader and cleric. And the polls are conducted in mostly Sunni Arab countries, at a time when the United States is focusing on the Sunni-Shi'a divide out of Iraq, as if this is a central mobilizing issue in the Middle East. And yet, Egyptian Sunni Arabs and Moroccan Sunni Arabs were saying that Hassan Nasrallah is more admired than any Sunni Arab leader. He is a Shi'a cleric, and they were not embracing him for his religion—but neither were they allowing his Shi'a religion to stand in the way of admiring him. He was popular for one reason: They thought that Hezbollah did well in the war with Israel in 2006, and that he stood up to Israel and the United States. The prism of the Arab-Israeli issue and the prism of the anger with America were still the defining world views through which people were making their evaluation, and these prisms trumped religious identities and they trumped sectarianism. Just as a footnote here, before discussing the Sunni-Shi'a divide further, in 2009, when I asked, "Name the most admired leader," Hassan Nasrallah is still up there, particularly in Jordan where he is still most admired, but he declined in Egypt and Morocco. The governments of these two countries have been attacking him for trying to interfere in their domestic affairs and it seems to have worked. But who took his place in these two countries? Another Islamic leader? Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. Why Hugo

✳

Chavez? Because he was the one world leader in the 2008-2009 war in Gaza who actually had a high profile, opposing the war and cutting off diplomatic relations with Israel, while Arab states at peace with Israel did not. Egypt didn't, Jordan didn't, but Hugo Chavez did. And the Arab public rewarded him for it. That is the prism through which the Arabs are looking at the world, not the Sunni-Shi'a prism, or the Middle East-West prism.

I want to present additional examples about the Sunni-Shi'a divide. We have been obsessed with thinking that this divide is a big reason why there is conflict in the Middle East, that it is a primary motivator of policies in the Middle East. This is a big leap. There has always been a Sunni-Shi'a divide; that is not new historically. There are differences among Sunnis and Shiites, theologically, ideologically, culturally, the way religion is lived, the role of the clergy, institutionally—there are many differences. And there have always been differences. And at some level, if one examines this in historical perspective, we tend to be blinded because we look at history of two, three, four, ten, twenty years… but if one looks at it across the decades and centuries, Islam is far less important today in Middle Eastern lives than it was a century ago and the Sunni-Shi'a divide is less important today than it was at various historical periods. Religious factors have declined in their relative importance, in the way people live their lives over a long period—even though the importance of religion increases and decreases slightly during particular periods. If we look at the Sunni-Shi'a divide itself, it's not the one that informs us significantly on what's happening in the region.

Let me start with some examples. The first example is Lebanon, a country where there is sectarianism, there is a Sunni-Shi'a divide, the Shi'a are the largest single community, there is a significant Sunni Muslim community, and there is also a significant Christian community. It has been a very fascinating country, but also a troubled country because of this sectarianism. And there is no doubt there is sectarianism. I have been polling in Lebanon. And we can see that people have different opinions often based on their sectarian identity. Now if one is a Sunni Arab Muslim in

12

Egypt, or a Saudi Sunni, or a Jordanian Sunni, or a Moroccan Sunni, and looks at the conflict in Lebanon, where there has been a government and a parliamentary majority led by a Sunni Prime Minister, and an opposition led by the Shi'a Hezbollah—one should be expected to support the Sunni-led ruling coalition. It has been portrayed as a Sunni-Shi'a divide but Arab governments largely support the Sunni government and not Hezbollah and Lebanese opposition, not because they are Shi'a, but because they see them as destabilizing for them. And for that reason they emphasize the Sunni-Shi'a divide even more. Now when I have asked in my polls, "With whom do you sympathize more—the opposition led by Hezbollah or the Lebanese government led by Mr. Siniora," a plurality of those polled in the Sunni-majority countries say they sympathize more with the Hezbollah-led coalition, the Shi'a-led coalition. That's because the Shi'a—Sunni prism is not the prism through which they make their evaluation. We see the same thing on Iran. Iran is a Shi'a-majority country. Iran has not been popular in the Arab World and is still not particularly popular in the Arab World. And many Arabs see it as a potential threat. And there is an Arab-Iranian element, separate from the Shi'a-Sunni issue. When Arabs are asked, "Name the two countries that pose the biggest threat to you personally," Iran gets around 10% only, of people overall who identify it as one of the two most important threats, over 80% identify Israel and over 70% identify the United States as the two most threatening states. That, by the way, includes countries whose governments are very terrified by Iran, such as the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. While more people identify Iran as a threat in these countries, far more people identify Israel and the United States as the two biggest threats. While the Arab public is not in love with Iran, they don't see Iran as the biggest issue they face and see it more as an asset in addressing the perceived primary threats. That is important for us to keep in mind. These attitudes also reflect themselves on the nuclear issue. When asked, "Do you think the Middle East would be better off or worse off if Iran acquires nuclear weapons," in 2008, a plurality said the Middle East would actually be better off if Iran were to get nuclear weapons. (These numbers changed in 2009 with a plurality saying

that the Middle East would be worse off.)

While there is obviously sectarianism in parts of the Middle East and religion is important in Middle Eastern societies, these issues do not appear to be the driving forces for the majority and they are not the prisms through which we ought to be making an evaluation of how to address the critical problems in the region. With regard to the Sunni-Shi'a divide in Iraq and Lebanon, there is obviously a Sunni-Shi'a divide in these countries; there is sectarianism, there is mobilization, there is conflict, there is bloodshed. There is political organizing along sectarian lines. There is no denying of these facts. And I think in those countries where there are significant Sunni and Shi'a communities, there is no doubt that the sectarian issue is more relevant in explaining a lot. But even here I believe it would be a problem to leap to the conclusion that sectarianism itself is the primary cause of the problems these societies face. The primary problem in Iraq was the collapse of central authority. In the absence of central authority, people are going to coalesce along communal lines. What we saw in Iraq is more tribalism than sectarianism. And that is primarily a function of the disintegration of central authority. The weakening of the middle class has been in part a function of more than two decades of war and international sanctions. In Iraq, as in Lebanon, there is sectarianism, it's more relevant in these societies than in some other Arab countries, but it isn't in itself the cause of conflict.

I will conclude with two more examples to make my observation about the infusion of Islamic terminology into issues that need to be addressed in a much more social-scientific way. One issue is democracy. We know this has been a central issue in the way we have talked about Arab countries in particular, but also Muslim-majority countries, particularly since 9/11. By important measures there is a pervasive authoritarianism in the Middle East, there isn't much democracy as we know it in the West, and there has been a debate about how to spread democracy, and the barriers to it. It is an important debate, particularly for me, as a social-scientist. But what has been fascinating, is how much the discourse has moved towards: "Is Islam compatible with democracy?" with the infusion

of arguments that are somewhat theological, whether Islam should or could move in a particular direction. The issue of democracy in the Arab World had very little to do with the Islamic characteristic. When we examine the polling data, when we ask people to name two countries where they think there is the most democracy and freedom for their people, the top answers are Western nations. It's not that respondents think there is more democracy in Pakistan than in Germany. It's very clear that Arabs' notions of democracy and freedom are very much in harmony with the Western notions of democracy and freedom. And when we ask, "Where would you like to live if you had to live outside of your own country," or, "Where would you send a member of your family to study if they had to study outside of your own country," the top answers are Western countries. There is no conflict here; Arabs don't have a different notion of what democracy and freedom are, even though many have fears about many aspects of the perceived cultural openness in the West. The problem emerged when we asked, "Do you believe that the United States is genuinely trying to spread democracy in the Middle East," even as the Bush administration was saying that this was the top issue, the vast majority in every county said, "Absolutely not." They didn't believe this was an aim of our foreign policy at all. Even worse, when we ask continuously since the Iraq war started, "Do you believe that there is more democracy or less democracy in the Middle East since the Iraq war," every single year people said that there is less democracy than the year before. So what they are looking at is that they want more freedom but they don't trust that the United States is trying to get it and they look at the results of our policies and think that they are going in another direction.

Another part of the problem of being obsessed with the Islamic characteristic of Arab societies is that it distorted our own conversation at home. I think we have been dishonest about our advocacy of democracy. And in some ways, liberals among us have fallen into the trap in a way that was problematic, because even some people who were opposed to the Iraq war and didn't think that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, or links to Al-Qaeda, said to themselves: "Well, if it's going to bring more

❊

democracy to the region, so be it." So, even aside from the neoconservative view on these issues, there was a liberal instinct, that we imagined that the spread of democracy could be a worthwhile result of the Iraq war. But one of the things that was not seen very clearly is what happens when we are at war as we are in Iraq, in Afghanistan, the war on terrorism, when we have the kind of heavy military footprint that we do have in the Middle East (in Kuwait, in Bahrain, in United Arab Emirates, in Qatar, and in Saudi Arabia—almost everywhere in the region). When a state is at war and has so much at risk, the most important priority is that war and its troops, and everything else is secondary. I have never heard of the head of USAID waking up the President at two o'clock in the morning. But I have heard of many instances of the Secretary of Defense picking up the phone and waking up the President because of a crisis. If we look at our budgets, there is no comparison between what we are doing on political and economic development and what we are doing militarily. What does that mean? That means that the institutions with which we have the closest relations in the region, typically, are the militaries of those countries, and the intelligence forces of those countries, because our military-to-military relations, intelligence-to-intelligence relations are central to the war efforts and to protecting American troops. That's where most expenditures go. But the military and intelligence institutions in these countries are the very institutions of repression, the anchors of the authoritarianism that we say we are seeking to change. So we have a profound problem as long as we are at war, with a military footprint that is this heavy in the Middle East, in trying to make democracy a priority. In that sense, we have not been fully honest in our discourse about the spread of democracy.

I will give one final example that is very popular in linking a specific issue to religion and culture—women's rights. I think this is an important issue. And there is no denying that, if we look at Muslim-majority countries in aggregate terms, (while they vary and should not be mindlessly lumped together), there is a visible problem. If we examine these countries aggregately, there is no question that women have fewer rights than in the West by some important measures such as women in the

16

❋

workplace, women in political offices, leadership positions. There is also no question that when we look at the culture and the religion which is often very conservative, there is no denying that these can be important factors at some levels of society including on issues of women's rights. And I don't want to dismiss religion as a sociological factor, I think it is important, and I would not dismiss it here as a factor in any intermediate period. But by focusing on religion and culture which are almost always constant, we diverted attention from possibly more powerful explanations. One example of such explanations is provided by the work of UCLA political scientist, Professor Michael Ross, who conducted a social-scientific statistical analysis of many countries and their reform trajectory[2]. He didn't only look at Muslim countries, but also Asian countries, Latin American countries, and other countries in order to see, first of all, how some countries increased the role of women over time and how others didn't. And second, to control and see what explains the fact that there are fewer rights for women in Muslim countries by some important measures.

He did an analysis and it was published in the *American Political Science Review*, and I invited him to present in Doha, Qatar with an articulation particularly specific to the Gulf region recently that was published by the Brookings Institution. His conclusion was unconventional: The oil economies in these regions, not religion and culture, have resulted in fewer women involved in politics and the workplace. When he took the oil economies out of the aggregate data that he had, he found that Islamic countries were not different from similar countries across the globe. The reason why oil economies were distorted, he argued, was that when one looks at how women acquired rights across the globe, one finds that typically it was work incentives where economic need would draw them in by creating certain jobs that were suitable for women early on before they

[2]Michael Ross, "Oil, Islam, and Women," *American Political Science Review* 102 (2008), pp. 16-25; "The Impact of Oil Wealth on Women in the Middle East," in Shibley Telhami, ed., *Oil, Globalization, and Political Reform in the Middle East* (The Brookings Institution). The latter is available online at: http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/Files/rc/papers/2009/02_oil_telhami/02_oil_telhami.pdf

started acquiring more political and economic power in the system. This is what happened in most places. And oil economies do not allow this to happen. They don't create the structural incentives to draw women in.

Ross's conclusion also corresponds to some other data we have. First, the issue is less one of education and more about job incentives and opportunities; in places like Saudi Arabia and many of the Gulf countries now, there are more women than men in some universities. Second, I ask in my polls, "Do you believe that women have the right to work outside the house," and the majority say, "Yes, if economically needed"—but only if economically needed. If family need doesn't draw them to the work-force, they won't enter it. So whether or not one buys Ross's conclusion, it is one that should not be ignored. What we have done by virtue of focus-ing our discourse on Islamic characteristic as a source of explanation for the kind of issues that we need to understand, is that we have distorted them and we have moved away from having the kind of analysis that we need to have to normalize relationships between us and what we called the "Muslim World." And I think that when I look back at 9/11, and I see what happened, I see how the way we reacted by emphasizing the Islamic characteristic also led to an increase in Islamic identification in Muslim-majority countries. In cases of complex identities, people rally behind those identities that they need to defend. We need to move away from the discourse that treats Muslims as "the other," as having another world, "our world and their world." We are a part of one world, and that is the language that we need to start with for understanding what our real prob-lems are, the real problems that separate us from the Middle East—problems like the Arab-Israeli issue, which all my polls show, remains what I call the "prism of pain" through which the Arabs see the world. And I hope that as we change our language in relations with the rest of the world, we start normalizing the discourse and moving away from notions of a "Muslim World" to allow for the kind of understanding of critical issues that we need.

Department of Near Eastern Languages & Civilization
University of Washington
Denny Hall 229, Box 353120
Seattle, WA 98195-3120