

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

**THE ELLIOTT SCHOOL
OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

*The Institute for Middle East Studies,
The Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies,
and
The Future of Democracy Initiative*
present

**The Challenges of Integrating Islam:
Comparative Experiences of Europe and the Middle East**

Thursday, February 14, 2008
Lindner Family Commons, Room 602, 1957 E St. NW
10:00 a.m. - 3:45 p.m.

10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Panel Discussion - Contrasting Approaches to Religious Practice: The Issue of Head Scarves

Chair: Hope M. Harrison, Director of IERES and Associate Professor of History and International Affairs

- **Sign of religious freedom or female repression: An examination of the headscarf issue in Turkey**
Merve Kavakci, Lecturer in International Affairs, GWU
- **Secular Europe and its Veiled Muslims**
Zeyno Baran, Director, Center for Eurasian Policy and Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute
- **Islam, the Egyptian constitution, and Veiling**
Nathan Brown, Professor of Political Science and International Affairs, GWU

12:00 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Lunch Address - Can Islam be French?

Chair: Nathan Brown, Director of IMES and Professor of Political Science and International Affairs

- **John Bowen**, Dunbar-Van Cleve Professor of Sociocultural Anthropology, Washington University in St. Louis

1:45 p.m. - 3:45 p.m.

Panel Discussion - Emerging Transnational Communities

Chair: Hope M. Harrison, Director of IERES and Associate Professor of History and International Affairs

- **Mobilizing the US Lebanese Diaspora: Mapping the Players in the Game**
Liesl Riddle, Assistant Professor of International Business and International Affairs, GWU
Joint work with Aram Nerguizian, GWU
- **Mediatized Islam, Cyberspace and the Public Sphere**
Jon Anderson, Professor of Anthropology, Catholic University
- **The Social and the Political: Islamist Views on Reform**
Marc Lynch, Associate Professor of Political Science and International Affairs, GWU

JON W. ANDERSON is professor and chair of Anthropology at the Catholic University of America. He has conducted field research on tribal culture in Afghanistan, Islamic cosmology in Pakistan, the Internet in the Middle East and Muslim worlds and for the past decade a comparative study of IT implementation in four Arab countries with Michael C. Hudson. He's recently served on an SSRC committee on International Cooperation and Information Technologies and is author of "Vers une théorie techno-pratique de l'Internet dans le monde Arab," (Maghreb-Machrek, 2004) "New Media, New Publics: Reconfiguring the Public Sphere of Islam" Social Research (2003), "Middle East Technology Producers" The Middle East Journal (Summer 2000), Arabizing the Internet (1998), "Globalizing Politics and Religion in the Muslim World" Journal of Electronic Publishing (1996) and co-editor of New Media in the Arab World: The Emerging Public Sphere (1999, Second edition 2003) and Reformatting Politics: Networked Communication and Global Civil Society (2006).

ZEYNO BARAN is a Senior Fellow and Director of Center for Eurasian Policy at Hudson Institute. From 2003 until joining Hudson in 2006, Baran directed the International Security and Energy Programs at The Nixon Center, and previously worked as Director of the Caucasus Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). Her current work focuses on strategies to thwart the spread of radical Islamist ideology in Europe and in Eurasia and to promote democratic and energy reform processes across Eurasia. Baran received her M.A. in international economic development and her B.A. in political science from Stanford University.

JOHN BOWEN is Dunbar-Van Cleve Professor of Sociocultural Anthropology at Washington University in St. Louis. Bowen's research explores broad social transformations now taking place in the world-wide Muslim community, including special emphasis on Muslim life in Indonesia. His research focuses on the role of cultural forms (religious practices, aesthetic genres, legal discourse) in processes of social change. The author of six books, he is a member of a number of national panels and editorial boards.

NATHAN BROWN is Director of the Institute for Middle East Studies and Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at George Washington University. He teaches courses on Middle Eastern politics, as well as more general courses on comparative politics and international relations and is the author of *Peasant Politics in Modern Egypt* (1990); *The Rule of Law in the Arab World: Courts in Egypt and the Gulf* (1997); *Constitutions in a Non-Constitutional World: Arab Basic Laws and the Prospects for Accountable Government* (2001); and *Palestinian Politics After the Oslo Accords: Resuming Arab Palestine* (2003). He recently served two years as Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

HOPE M. HARRISON is Director of the Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies and Associate Professor of History and International Affairs at George Washington University. Dr. Harrison's current work focuses on contemporary debates about how to depict the Berlin Wall and the East German regime. Dr. Harrison is the author of *Driving the Soviets Up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953-1961*, (2003), which was awarded the 2004 Marshall Shulman Prize by the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies.

MERVE KAVAKCI is a lecturer at the Elliott School of International Affairs of George Washington University. She is a former member of the Turkish Parliament. She is also a consultant for the US Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe and a columnist for the daily Turkish Vakit newspaper. Kavakci holds a BS in Computer Science from University of Texas at Dallas, MPA from Harvard University and a PhD in Political Science from Howard University.

MARC LYNCH is Associate Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at George Washington University. He teaches courses on Middle Eastern politics and international relations and is the author of *State Interests and Public Spheres: The International Politics of Jordan's Identity* (1999) and *Voices of the New Arab Public* (2006).

ARAM NERGUIZIAN is a graduate student in the Master of Arts in International Affairs program at the Elliott School, with a regional focus on the Middle East. He is currently working with Dr. Liesl Riddle to research the U.S.-based Lebanese diaspora. His other research interests include civil-military relations and the transformation of military institutions in Lebanon. Mr. Nerguizian is also currently a researcher for Dr. Anthony Cordesman, Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy, at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

LIESL RIDDLE is Assistant Professor of International Business and International Affairs at The George Washington University. Dr. Riddle serves as the Director of the Diaspora Research Program in the GW Elliott School of International Affairs. She is the author of numerous articles on the economic involvement of diasporas in their home countries.

****Notes prepared by Celest Allred. Please do not quote or cite without IMES permission****

Contrasting Approaches to Religious Practice: The Issue of Head Scarves

Merve Kavakci spoke about women wearing headscarves in Turkey, an issue that is as divisive in Turkey as abortion is in the US. This topic is especially relevant because Turkey is currently considering a constitutional amendment that would lift this ban for universities. She explained that while the ban is intended to prevent women who are government employees or in the university (both students and teachers) from wearing a headscarf, its has disseminated to other realms and in some cases was used to justify denying healthcare or a driver's license to veiled women. Kavakci pointed out that the ban is not in the constitution or national laws, but originated from a decree and is implemented through by-laws. Ironically, while the constitutional amendment currently under consideration would allow university students to wear headscarves at school, it would actually legitimize the ban for government employees, which is currently in a legal limbo. Kavakci concluded by noting that the issue of the veil is just the tip of the iceberg. The deeper issues are real political democratization and "democratization of the mind."

Zeyno Baran spoke about veiled Muslims in secular Europe. The issue is indicative of a larger debate about integration and acceptance. She noted that European countries have already negotiated the divisions between the public and private spheres and do not want to renegotiate those divisions for Muslims. Part of the veiling issue is the "slippery slope effect"—people fear that a simple veil (*hijab*) will lead to full body coverings (*burka*) or full-face covering (*niqqab*). Where do you draw the line? Also, veiling is associated with the oppression and isolation of women. However, Baran pointed out that for some guest workers or recent immigrants, wearing a veil allows them out of the house and more freedom of action in society. Veiling is also associated with political Islam and communal self-segregation, serious concerns for Europeans especially since the Madrid bombings and September 11th. It raises questions of loyalty to the Muslim community above loyalty to the state. Increasingly, European countries are faced with conflicts between freedom of religion and the public-private divide.

Nathan Brown began by pointing out that while Turkey and Europe are trying to fit veiling into a secular society, the Middle East makes no attempt to be secular. There are four ways the Islam is usually integrated into the state: 1) Islam is the state religion; 2) requiring a Muslim head of state; 3) personal status law is based on *sharia*; 4) *sharia* is a/the principle source of legislation. Brown focused on this fourth point, and noted that the Egyptian constitution originally stated that *sharia* was a principle source of legislation, but this was later changed to say that *sharia* is *the* principle source. He pointed out how nebulous *sharia* is and how hard it is to define what this actually means in practice. However, he explained that at the same time this change occurred, the Egyptian constitutional court was given more autonomy and began to hear cases regarding laws that were not supported by *sharia*. One test case was about two girls who were kicked out of school for violating a law that prohibited girls from wearing *niqqab* in school. The court decided that it did have the authority to strike down laws that clearly violate *sharia*. Brown concluded, noting that the court's decision also included a deliberately incomprehensible paragraph that the law also violated freedom of religion guaranteed by the constitution. He suggested that the paragraph was so incomprehensible because the court did not want to take on the issue of freedom of belief but not freedom of practice.

Question and Answer Session

Q: If the headscarf ban in Turkey is created by by-laws rather than the constitution, why is the solution now a constitutional amendment?

Merve Kavakci explained that the amendments affect two articles—equality before the law and the right to education. The AK Party is pursuing a constitutional amendment because the ban is predicated on a constitutional decree made by the constitutional court.

Q: Why doesn't the amendment to the article about equality before the law apply beyond the universities?

Merve Kavakci replied that that is her question as well, but the AK Party is dealing with uncompromising Kemalists, and they are trying to make a compromise among very high tensions. Perhaps the changes will come little by little.

Zeyno Baran pointed out that many people voted for AK not because they are Islamists but because of economic and other policies. If the issue becomes too polarized, AK may lose support.

Merve Kavakci expressed surprise by AK's choice of timing with this issue.

Q: There was just a case of acid thrown on girls going to school in skirts that didn't cover their legs. How can you guarantee freedom for women who don't choose to cover up? What about social pressure to wear the veil?

Zeyno Baran noted that of the approximately 70% of Turkish women who wear a veil, 60% of them wear only a basic veil (as opposed to a *burka* or *niqqab*). While there are some stories of oppression, early in Turkey's history women had more rights there than in Europe or America at the time.

Merve Kavakci condemned the acid throwing and said it is not acceptable at all. However, she also warned that it is important to recognize the "deep state" that underlies this situation. In the past, people had similar fears when an Islamist was elected mayor of Ankara, but he said that if any such thing happened he would punish the perpetrators. Kavakci asked who has the right to tell women who want to wear a veil how to, and argued that while some are pressured to do so many really want to wear it.

Q: Is the issue of veiling the main issue or a sub-issue compared to other human rights issues? Also, is the issue being exploited by men?

Merve Kavakci agreed that some people exploit the issue and gave an example of a woman who wears the veil to campaign and gain support but removes it in order to participate in parliament. She again emphasized that veiling is just the tip of the iceberg; there are many other important issues. The root of it all, however, is that the appearance of modernization and westernization became more important than the content. The key is democratization of the mind.

Q: Is Europe a slave to its past, such as its history of colonialism, Islam-Christian tensions, history of conflict with/occupation by the Ottoman Empire? If so, how can this be overcome?

Zeyno Baran disagreed that Europe is a slave to the past, and pointed out that Muslims bring up the past as well with references to regaining Andalusia and restoring the caliphate. She also noted that when Turkey first began EU ascension talks religion was not an issue. It is only more recently that religion and culture have become such an issue.

Q: What was the response in Egypt because the court case was not really resolved?

Nathan Brown said that one response has been more cases brought to the constitutional court to challenge other laws. The Muslim Brotherhood had a mixed reaction. The more liberal wing embraced the court's decision and is comfortable with the court's approach. The other wing is more skeptical of secular judges making these sorts of decisions based on religious laws.

Q: From the perspective of Muslims in Europe, what are the main issues they face?

Zeyno Baran noted that Muslims who look Muslim are concerned about discrimination since the Madrid bombings and 9/11. Also, there has been an economic downturn since then and it is harder to get jobs.

Employers are more willing to hire eastern Europeans than Muslims, in part because if you fire a Pole, for example, then they're gone, but if you fire a Muslim their whole family might show up the next day demanding you hire the person back. Another issue is concern for how to raise orthodox Muslim children while avoiding the risk of radicalization. Muslims are often unsure who to talk to or where to go for help if a child begins to show signs of radicalization.

Q: You said that in France, Muslims tend to identify themselves first as French and second as Muslim, but this is often not the case in other European countries. Why is this the case? What factors contribute to this difference?

Zeyno Baran suggested that the explanation is an expectation in France that Muslims accept French norms and then they will have equal opportunities. While France is very strict about public expressions of belief, Muslims ultimately face less discrimination.

Q: What would you recommend for women who feel pressured to wear the veil in Turkey?

Merve Kavakci first admitted that she did not have a very "realistic" recommendation. The way to escape the pressure is to become empowered, to be educated. She pointed out that the government is actually doing itself a disservice by preventing veiled women from getting a university education. The solution is to stand up to abusive fathers or husbands.

Can Islam be French?

John Bowen began his presentation by acknowledging that Islam is universal and is no more French than Syrian or Egyptian. However, his question is can it be generally accepted as part of the French social landscape and still remain legitimate generally. He noted that Muslims in France generally identify first as French, but explained that the majority of Muslims there are of Algerian descent and are 2nd or 3rd generation French. Despite their French identity, they are angry because they do not feel well integrated and face massive discrimination and racism. He compared the situation to that of African-Americans in the 1960s. He explained that there is a lot of ambivalence in French people's feelings about Muslims in France.

He focused on two dilemmas French Muslims face. First, French Muslim leaders can pay attention to worldwide Islamic authorities and risk irrelevance to local Muslims, or they can adapt to local situations and risk becoming illegitimate. Second, Muslim leaders can advocate private religiosity and risk losing legitimacy, or they can create Islamic institutions according to the French laws and risk accusations of communalism. He gave examples of these dilemmas, including a Muslim leader who tried to adapt *sharia* to modern life by focusing on the "objectives of revelation," but was accused by others of illegitimate innovation and diluting *sharia* in order to fit into European society. He also explained how Muslims cope with these dilemmas, in part, by creating a distance between what is taught about French society and beliefs and personal beliefs. For example, in a Muslim school the teacher taught the French curriculum for evolution but added the caveat that science is always changing its theories and she could not say that the theory of evolution would not be scrapped in a few years as scientists learn more.

Question and Answer Session

Q: What curriculum is taught in the Islamic schools in France? Is it anti-Jewish or anti-Christian?

A: No, the Ministry of Education in France sets the curriculum and demands strict adherence.

Q: You mentioned the role that individual cities play in some other parts of Europe. What is the role of cities in France?

A: The role cities can play in Muslim issues can be illustrated by Rotterdam, which flipped from being anti-Muslim to being a flagship for inter-community dialogue. In some countries, which city you live in can have a huge impact. However, this is not really the case in France, with the exception of Marseilles. In France, everything is so national, changes require national attention to the problem. This pushes Muslims toward cooperation and one recognized type of Islam in France.

Q: What are the subsections in the Muslim community in France? What about recent arrivals?

A: There are different subgroups. There are Turks, and they face significantly different issues and are tied to Turkey. Turkish leaders do not play much of a national role. There are a variety of North Africans, and each group tends to take on different roles: Tunisians set up institutions, Moroccans tend to be the imams, and Algerians are the ones who interact with the government. West Africans usually speak better French than North Africans, but they are more stigmatized because of polygamy. They are more recent immigrants, and they are often Sufi and retain ties to Sufi sites in their home countries.

Q: Will you tell us about the civics class experience you mentioned?

A: When he attended a civics class in an Islamic school, he witnessed another example of the students distancing themselves. They had a matter of fact discussion about the law that facilitates gay marriage and were able to discuss the situation while maintaining a distance between what the French do and what Muslims do.

Q: Do Muslims have better rights in the US or in Europe?

A: He said that when he tells French Muslims about the prosperity of American Muslims they are very surprised. French Muslims feel very constrained. However, on the positive side, if the French consistently apply the rule of the game, Muslims can work the system very well.

Q: Do Muslims from the different European countries hold conferences to compare their experiences?

A: The Interior Ministers of the European countries certainly hold conferences and discuss the Muslim communities in their countries. Muslims also hold conferences, not so much to compare notes, but more to discuss common problems they face, such as only having access to banks that charge interest.

Emerging Transnational Communities

Jon Anderson spoke about the effects of cyberspace on the public sphere. He told how the first Muslims to move on to the internet were techies who put documents like the Quran and the Hadith online and made them searchable. Researchers saw this and expected it to result in agency enhancement. The next phase was the *ullama's* reaction; they "co-opted" cyberspace to be able to give the proper interpretation to Islamic information. While Muslim cyberspace interactions initially looked like democracy and agency enhancement, Anderson argued that all it is really only information seeking. One problem is that there is no real online community; constituency creation does not translate well to the internet. Instead, there is a constant flux of groups that form around various issues, resulting in unstable aggregations. Anderson highlighted four features he has identified in cyberspace interactions: 1) appeals to universal values; 2) appeals to expertise; 3) appeals to stakeholderism; 4) constantly morphing technology.

Marc Lynch compared the different reactions to the Archbishop of Canterbury's statement that *sharia* could be used in British law to the release of the Muslim Brotherhood's party platform. He noted how statements like the Archbishop's or the Danish cartoon of Mohammad initiate what he termed "stupid storms," in which rational debate is overwhelmed. High-minded discussion has almost no affect but stupid storms dominate politics, largely due

to the media. The Archbishop's use of the word *sharia* sparked such as debate in part because it invoked the worse images of extreme punishments. Also, some Muslims argued that *sharia* could not be used as legal code because it is too vague. In the case of the Muslim Brotherhood, they have gone to great lengths to show their commitment to democracy while retaining a very Islamic social and cultural program. (While researchers often draw a sharp divide between these factors, the Muslim Brotherhood does not because they see a total corruption of society, both morally and politically, that needs to be reformed.) However, their platform sparked debate over the idea of an *ullama* council to oversee the government and assist in making sure that *sharia* is the source for laws. Lynch noted that the issues in the UK and Egypt are similar: how do you define *sharia*? how is it applicable? on who? how to enforce this? However, the reactions varied. In Egypt, there was a more high quality debate, which he attributed to the restricted distribution of the platform to intellectuals and select print media. On the other hand, the Archbishop's statement resulted in a "stupid storm" because it went straight to the blogs.

Question and Answer Session

Q: You said community is a very weak force on the internet. What about Second Life and therapy groups?

Jon Anderson said that the hope for community in new media springs eternal. There is always hope for rational communication that lives on its own and does not dissolve into contention. There are groups on line, but they form around particular issues and break up on other issues. Only a weak form of community exists online.

Q: How would recognizing *sharia* in the UK be affected by Pakistani judges who are most concerned with whether or not the courts in Pakistan would recognize their ruling?

Marc Lynch replied that this is certainly an additional complication to the situation. How do you recognize Pakistani *sharia* courts if you are a Turk or an Egyptian?

Q: I want to take issue with your statement that the Muslim Brotherhood has really demonstrated a commitment to democracy. What about their positions on women and minorities? These are very vague. Also, the Muslim Brotherhood gained seats in the last parliamentary election. What percent of their legislative reforms have been to help people and improve their lives versus to put restrictions on things? I think most of their actions are negative.

Marc Lynch replied that yes, the Muslim Brotherhood is ambiguous about minorities, but they have come a long way, with the exception of banning a woman or Christian from becoming head of state in the platform. He thought that the Muslim Brotherhood has been unbelievably restrained by still trying to stay in the system when they know it is rigged against them. If they give up trying that will be a very bad sign. As for the second question, the Muslim Brotherhood is still a small minority and cannot really accomplish anything, creating a moral hazard. We cannot really know what they truly are until they actually take power. Lynch said there is one more step he wishes the Muslim Brotherhood would take to strengthen their position. While they reject *takfir* (declaring someone an apostate), they are not taking a strong stand against those who use it.

Q: What are the critiques in the Egyptian system of the Muslim Brotherhood and their platform?

Marc Lynch explained that the first draft of the platform that was released was pretty liberal and approved of. However, somewhere between then and the recently released draft, ambiguities were added to the text. It was been a PR fiasco because it reintroduced many of the fears that the Muslim Brotherhood had worked so hard to overcome. There is hope, however, that the critiques they are getting for this draft will help resolve this problem in the final platform.

Q: What happens when *sharia* contradicts UK law? Doesn't this raise the question of the slippery slope? Isn't it likely that some people would be forced to go to a *sharia* court who would prefer to have their case heard in a civil court?

Marc Lynch responded that yes, social coercion is one of the things critics fear. As far as contradicting UK laws, *sharia* would only apply to personal laws—marriage and divorce, for example—not criminal law. This is something the Archbishop did not address, and Lynch did not want to put words in his mouth. However, this highlights how hard it is to translate *sharia* into something formal. Many people are afraid of where this could lead, possibly to undermining the primacy of civil law.

Q: Wouldn't this reinforce fragmentation, not assimilation?

Marc Lynch said that it could go both ways. Maybe it would lead to fragmentation, but it could make Muslims feel more comfortable in British society.

Q: What is your opinion of extreme propaganda's ability to mobilize people through the internet?

Jon Anderson replied that the short answer is: 'it depends.' Are you mobilized by it? Propaganda itself does not mobilize. Intuitions are threatened not by propaganda on the internet, but by the internet itself because it represents the chaos on the fringe. Al-Qaeda is a cult, and it reforms identities in the "boonies" of cyberspace. The information on the internet is not the threat—don't worry about it. The internet actually makes the spy's job easier because they can watch terrorists from the comfort of their own office.

Q: Do you think that the internet is or could be used to strengthen democracy promotion in the Middle East?

Jon Anderson responded that ten years ago this was the prevailing idea in Washington and there were many conferences about it. However, when nothing amazing happened people lost interest. He said that he believes it will make a difference in the long run as people form reference groups and learn to make better arguments from the discourse online. Eventually the internet may help redefine the subjects and objects of politics. The internet has opened up the edges. Also, it is mainly young people who are involved and they are the future.