



**Women's Foreign Policy Group
Author Series Event
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Dr. John Bowen
Professor, Washington University in St. Louis

Can Islam be French? Pluralism and Pragmatism in a Secularist State

Miriam Mozgan: Good evening, I'm Miriam Mozgan, the Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of Slovenia and we are very, very happy to welcome you once more to the Embassy. We held a similar event last year for the Women's Foreign Policy Group, and each time we have an event with Patricia and her colleagues it's always beautiful weather. Maybe we will do this on more regular occasions because you always bring great weather. We are not presenting "Can Islam be Slovenian?", but a book called *Can Islam be French?* Since we're all in the EU I think we can relate to this because it's a very important topic for all EU countries, so thank you Dr. Bowen.

Patricia Ellis: Miriam, thank you so much, and thank you all so much for coming tonight. We're so happy to be back here again, and as Miriam said there is something about being at this Embassy and the beautiful weather; so we want to come back again too because it's just wonderful. We really appreciate your warm hospitality. It's so nice and very special to be back here, and we look forward to many more partnerships. For those of you who don't know me I'm Patricia Ellis. I'm President of the WFPG and on behalf of myself and my Board Member Donna Constantinople, I want to welcome you all. We're so pleased that you're all able to come tonight.

What we're all about is promoting women's voices so whenever we have a male speaker, we always have a woman as part of the program. Our topics are always on pressing international issues of the day we seek to promote women's leadership. We have a number of diplomats here tonight and a number of friends and I would like to welcome you all. Also I think we have a number of Francophiles who've come out for the occasion.

This is one of the many programs in our very popular Author Series. The next one will be a book about women's leadership with Linda Tarr-Whelan and the following one will be a book written by Haleh Esfandiari who was imprisoned in Iran for 105 days. Recently we launched our season with one of our Embassy Series events, so this is the second time this fall we've been at an embassy, and we're so grateful to be here. The last event was at the Embassy of Egypt for an *Iftar* buffet and a discussion relating on "US Relations with the Muslim World," and with a view from Egypt. It was extremely interesting. So we have lots going on and for those of you who are not members, we hope you will join us and we look forward to seeing you at our upcoming events.

Now we're very lucky to have John Bowen as our speaker tonight. He has spoken to us before—this is the third time—and we got to know him over the course of our grant from the Carnegie

Corporation of New York and he was one of the Carnegie scholars working on the issues of France and Islam. We also held a large conference on Islam last November and Mr. Bowen was one of our feature speakers.

John Bowen: The only man.

Ms. Ellis: The only man! And, clearly our favorite.

Dr. Bowen: I was in heaven.

Ms. Ellis: John's newest book is called *Can Islam be French?*, and we hope that you will all be able to get one of these books, because particularly after hearing from him you will want to read it. He has written a few other books, one was about Indonesia, which earned him plenty of acclaim. He also wrote a book discussing the discussion of headscarves in France and the larger cultural implications of this discussion, which he also presented to WFPG about.

In his day job, when he's not writing books or speaking, he is a professor at Washington University in St. Louis and his work is in areas such as pluralism, law, and religion, efforts to rethink Islamic norms in Asia, Europe, and North America; and in his research, he looks at the interplay of civil law and religious law and how this affects families. He compares Islamic judicial practices around the globe and also examines the variation in operational models of religious and ethnic difference around Europe. Please join me in welcoming John Bowen. [Applause.]

Dr. Bowen: Thank you, thank you very much – Maybe I should quit my day job, you could just put me on salary and I could stay here and speak every week to you. This is the second book in a project, a match with the first one, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves*—they're both sort of odd titles, which lead people to challenge me I suppose. They're both really aimed at critiquing something a good friend of mine, the philosopher Charles Taylor, calls "block thinking."

Block thinking, which is a new name for an old problem, is when we assume that there's one set of characteristics that applies to all people in a particular group. It could be Catholics, it could be Muslims, it could be people who live in Burundi, any sort of group like that. The problem is once we start to think of a group as having essential characteristics then we start to explain everything they do in terms of those characteristics. One of the problems in our own public discussions in Europe and North America is that there is a tendency to talk about "Muslims." There's a whole bunch of them, it's a group, and they march around together and they take their orders from somewhere, we're still working on finding out where that is. Because we're identifying them by their religion we're assuming that the major force behind their every day actions is Islam. So why did someone do something, why were there riots in France in late 2005—look it up in the Koran, look for something there.

You see this represented, this way of thinking, in currently released books in the US, all the way from a very intelligent book written by Chris Caldwell—with whom I'll be speaking on Thursday—down to books that are written in the style of bottom of the dial, AM-radio commentators. I won't mention names because one can get into legal problems, but there's the same sort of tendency to

assume that one way of thinking. What does that mean? That means that you can take a few people talking about Islam and assume that they're characteristic of the whole.

Well, how do we attack that way of thinking? It's pernicious, because it leads us to condemn a whole group. One of the things we can do is just point out that people vary. For example, in France very recent poll data shows that about a third of French Muslims, people who self-identify as Muslims, don't ever worship: they don't ever pray, they never get near a mosque. About 15% go to mosque at least once a week to worship and there's everything in the middle. There are people who fast, never fast, do all sorts of things. In their daily lives, these people are thinking about how they can get their kids into good schools, how they can get a job, keep a job, how they can eat properly, how they can be healthy; just like the rest of us, right? So if we step back and start looking at variation, that's a pretty good start.

The second step is something I try to do in this book, which is say "Alright, there are some folks who believe in their religion." We assume that's alright; we've got Catholics and Mormons and Jews and Baha'is and Zoroastrians, and all sorts of people who believe in their religion. So if they take it seriously and they try to work out a way of life in a new place, because France is a relatively new place for most of these Muslims, what do they do? How do they figure out these new ways? I've spent years sitting in classrooms, sitting in mosques, talking to Muslims, public intellectuals, and a lot of the people who are hearing them and reacting to them, trying to figure out new ways of interpreting Islam and making it work in France. So, it's not all Muslims, it's those who are trying to sort of work out this new way of being a Muslim in France. The question "*Can Islam be French?*" for me means that. It doesn't mean "Well, all French people accept Islam; it's just as natural as Catholicism." Although, if you look at polling data French people are much more likely than British people and Germans and Spaniards to say that Islam can be reconciled with modern society. That's an interesting fact which I don't dwell on here.

But the question is how do they teach, what do they think about marrying, divorcing, eating, praying, and building mosques in this new country. All across Europe Muslims are facing these kinds of questions. All across Europe they're negotiating the transnational state of Islamic debate, or what we could call "Islamic normativity." Because Muslims in France aren't just listening to other Muslims in France, no; they're on the internet, they're watching television, they're writing letters or placing phone calls to someone in Saudi Arabia or Yemen to say, "Is this joker in my mosque in Paris correct?" They get different answers so there's this transatlantic/national state and that constrains what these Muslim public intellectuals do.

That's the "on the one hand" part; the "on the other hand" parts are the structures of opportunity in France. What's permitted, what's not permitted, what's permitted but looked down on, or what's really rewarded. But Muslims are pretty quick, like most immigrant groups, at figuring out what those structures of opportunity are, and I'll talk a bit about those. Muslims in Britain are doing the same dance but there are different structures of opportunity. In Britain early on it was very easy to organize locally. To get things done in France it was basically illegal before 1981, if you weren't a citizen, to form a legal association and there's a tendency in any case in France to try to solve things on a national level. In England things have always been delegated down to a local level, so there are these sorts of differences right away that pop up.

So what is specific about France? Well, three things really pop out. One is that their engagement with Muslims and Islam is deeper and older and stronger than any other Western European country. So not the South East, not Russia, and if we think of Europe in terms of the council of Europe, which is the group over which the court of European human rights has jurisdiction, not just the European union; that includes Turkey and that includes Russia. I'm talking in Western Europe. France's engagement with Muslims and Islam was older and deeper with recruitment of laborers, going back to the nineteenth century as part of the state and industry project, with massive use of soldiers in World War One, World War Two. It's also closer because Algeria was part of France, it wasn't a colony. And so, many people in France are born in Algeria but they're actually fourth generation citizens of France. Britain would be the next candidate for this deep close engagement because of its colonial presence in South Asia. However, South Asia is a lot further away and had the same sort of bitter experience that French and Algerian people had between 1954 and 1962 during the Algerian war. It is something that doesn't have an equivalent elsewhere in Europe. It had a wrenching effect that people are gradually coming to terms with. It's hard to go into any ministry today in France and *not* find someone who didn't spend some time serving in a French government mission of some sort somewhere in North Africa. And often these colonial experiences are brought back into thinking about Islam in France. So that's one difference, that's one specificity of France.

The second one is that the vast majority of Muslims in France, and certainly the group that takes the public role, first and foremost come from Northern Africa. North Africa is a place of relatively few theological battles and relatively few disputes over Islam. There is the general acceptance of one legal tradition, the *Maliki* (tradition), unlike in Northern India and Pakistan where you've got all sorts of different religious schools fighting with each other; which is reproduced in England. Or the battle between Secularist and Islamist, as they say, Turks fought out again in Germany; or the differences between Moroccans and Turks in the Netherlands, etc., etc. There's a general sort of ease about working together around one set of Islamic understandings in France. That makes it easier actually to construct a kind of national way of thinking about Islam. That's a very good sign.

Third, there's a very specific sort of state model in France for dealing with religion and it goes back to the fourteenth century, and what came to be called the Gallican Church. The notion that the state controls the temporal affairs of the church and the Pope and the Vatican controls the doctrine and bishops can be proposed by the head of state and then they're actually officially named by the Vatican. That's still true in the far eastern part of France, all-saints, **Meurthe-et-Moselle**, the state model I've glossed before as "support and control" France had, of course this model is effectively more of a *laïcité*. Of course we often gloss more of the separation but in fact it's not at all. It's a model where there's a lot of support given by the state in France and a lot of encouragement given to organized religion. There are subsidies for private religious schools, as long as they teach the national curriculum and admit anybody without respect to their religious confession and a lot of help with building mosques, official recognition in many ways including presence on national television, etc. A lot of money is given to religious organizations. But at the same time there's a lot of control. There's a bureau of organized religions in the ministry of the interior, so there are both aspects at the same time. That leads to what I'd like to call *encompassment*. An idea that religious institutions could work out, very successfully in fact, with state encouragement in France, with their religious logics but with a structure that's determined by the state, and by the state we mean the national state.

Think about Britain just for one second. I'm not here to talk about Britain tonight, but it is a place where the model is one of private initiative. One high court judge working in England told me recently that "If Muslims want to go and marry and divorce and do everything on their own with religious law, that's fine, we really don't care – as long as disputes don't come up that have to do with children or financial assets." But there is a general sense that that is just fine. That's not the French logic. How do Muslims work within this? I'll give you two examples: the outcome of the decades long battle between the Catholic Church and the republic, starting I suppose in the 1880s, one could say, and ending really only in the late 1950s, was an arrangement whereby you can set up a private school, if you teach the national curriculum, then you can get your teachers' salaries paid for by the state after a certain provisional period. You have to teach the national curriculum so it means that there's an opening for state financed, religious, private schools but with those conditions. So this then shapes the way which teachers in the few private Islamic schools think about curricula, in a way that's very different from curricula in the United States or Great Britain, for example. I spent some time, there's one school that I've followed since the beginning of 2001 and I've wondered about how people teaching things like the ability of people to enter into civil unions, we would say; homosexuality, all sorts of things.

But one of the things that baffled me was the teaching of evolution. Let me just give you a little bit of the way this teacher is teaching it. She's teaching the national curriculum and her students will be following the national tests, but this is also an Islamic private school so she wears what we would call Islamic dress, and she's trying to give them something of keeping their religion's integrity within the educational structure. So I was there one day when she was teaching about evolution, she explained about different species and how the tail disappeared in humans in the course of evolution, she said. Then she started discussing the unity of all living things and I'm quoting her, talking to the kids. "Now let me open a small parenthesis. The curriculum is designed to convince you of the theory of evolution, but it's just a theory, it's not absolute truth, I cannot say that in 20 years a scientist will not say 'No! That's no longer true!' That is how science progresses. For example with the cell, we used to say that it was like a room, and then we became able to see the parts, and then there were biochemical studies. Science is knowledge that is constructed bit by bit, it does not fall from the sky so right now we teach about the unity of all living things, but perhaps in twenty years we will teach in a different way." Right, so it gave her a way to compartmentalize knowledge, now the kids could say "Okay, I'm learning this because this is the current state of play, I'll have to pass the test" – by the way they *all* passed, they succeeded in the *Baccalauréate* in science. But they were also given a way to say "Okay, maybe the science isn't right, maybe the Koran will eventually end up being right about these things." I talked with her after class, she talked a lot about her own career and then she said—I'm quoting her now, talking to me—"I'm sure that some of the parents don't believe it at all." (Evolution) "At the beginning of the year I tell the parents, 'here is what I am going to teach them because it is in the national program and if you want to brainwash them afterward or deform the teaching it's up to you.'" Alright, see the logic—and it works out in a lot of these classes.

The second example comes from the domain of marriage and divorce. Unlike other countries, where the religious marriage is considered to fulfill the state's requirements, France has a very clear and very strict set of laws that you have to be married in City Hall *first* and then you can do whatever you want to. You can have religious celebration but it has no legal effect. In fact two

imams were indicted last year for performing marriages for couples who were not already married in the City Hall. Well, again a great contrast to Britain where this sort of precedence rule doesn't apply, and it has given rise to a bunch of separate institutions in Britain which deal with divorces and can deal with marriage. In fact, what's happened is that people are confused, young people are confused about what constitutes religious marriage. What do we do? Should we go along with the law or should we stay out of the domain of the law and just obey God's rule?

It leads to constant and often quite confusing discussions among themselves that often take place on the internet. One conversation I happened onto a couple of years ago started, "How can I divorce? I married in "*halal*" fashion"—meaning in Islamic fashion—but with no civil ceremony. So, everyone started jumping in the way they do on the internet, trying to be helpful, after they got the details of what happened—and troubling facts began to emerge. Now I'm just reading from the book, "At her marriage, held in France, she saw no Imam, she had no male guardian, and there were no witnesses, no marriage gift was exchanged. All these things are requirements for a marriage to be valid in Islamic terms you have to have a guardian, you have to have witnesses, and you have to have a marriage gift called the "*mahr*." The respondents were nervous; they were pretty sure that the absence of a guardian and witnesses meant that she had *never* been properly married, even in Islamic terms, and as she had consummated the marriage—they had to ask. It went on, they tried to find a solution for her, it went back and forth and then at some point, someone introduced a new note which moved the topic off of her problem and back to the broader issue of *halal* marriage versus City Hall. So one guy booms in: "Let me remind participants who are unaware, that for the marriage to be valid in Islam you must have both the *halal* and City Hall. If one or the other is missing, then the marriage is invalid. Islam requires this to avoid the sort of unfortunate event our sister has undergone. So, Islam means that "'You have to go City Hall or you'll get into these sorts of messes,'" that's what he said. A lively debate continues all through the night and into the next day. One participant exclaimed, I quote, "City Hall does not validate a marriage. If for you, marrying in front of a guy in a bowtie with a red white and blue flag is more important than marrying before God, good for you! The official doesn't believe in God and, says Mohammed—peace be upon him—is an imposter! And it's *his* signature that will make my marriage *halal*? God says in the Koran '*Kfa ballh shhidaan*' which means 'God is sufficient as a witness.'" Alright, so they went on and on and back and forth, and at some point the woman tries to get back into the conversation, and no one responded; the debate had moved on to other things.

And this confusion is in part because there's no sort of public place for Islamic marriage, there's no sort of public recognition of it at all. In fact, it is considered to be something that should not happen. Now, what's interesting to me is that this problem has led quite consistently, across a number of schools, across a number of cities in France, Islamic public intellectuals to say, "You know, to deal with these problems, we've got to say that American City Hall is already Islamic marriage. And how do you get divorced in Islam? You get divorced in City Hall." Let me read you the reasoning of one of these people, Ishem El-Arafa, in whose sort of "higher school" for Islamic Study I spent many, many months. I'm quoting Ishem, "Some people think that having to go to City Hall and fill out forms is too much work and moreover, they consider marriage to be a religious matter and they do so all the more because some Islamic authorities say that marriage is religious." These Islamic authorities, *they* say that "The Prophet, in his time, did not have laws about registering marriage, so it is not necessary for Muslims to do so." But then you can say—and this may make you laugh but there's something to it—"that back then, in the Prophet's time in other

words, the society was composed of tribes, and if someone married he would never just leave his spouse because his life would be in danger. Everyone knew each other then so there was no need for these regulations.” But now it is different, that is the reasoning according to the objectives of Sharia.

So, this reasoning which is pretty widely shared across a number of these North African teachers, is that you need to think in terms of what the scripture was set out to do, and the institution of marriage that’s specified in the scripture is there to protect the marriage, to protect the family, and specifically to protect the women. Nowadays, we don’t have a tribe, so what do you have to protect women? You have a law! You have the court, you have the judges so you see you’ve got to get married – *in Islamic terms* – you need to be married, in City Hall. It’s an example for me of how he’s adapting to the structure of opportunity that France presents, but from within the Islamic tradition; reasoning within the Islamic tradition. Now, set out at some length in my book is the sort attacks these guys are visited with for this sort of reasoning - because when you get into mosque debates, for example, you’ll also have people coming in from more prestigious centers of learning, in Damascus, or Cairo or somewhere else and saying “Hogwash!” Saying, “There are rules in Islam, and here they are and it says this and this and the other thing and this attempt to adapt everything to France is just copperwork, it’s heretical.” There’s a delicate dance being carried out here. For Ishem he’s trying on the one hand to fight off the people he thinks are extremists, who say you should just ignore the state, you should just draw back into your own little shell. On the other hand he’s trying to deal with this real problem in France of how do you come up with an Islamic set of interpretations for a new generation of Muslims. This is his job, he teaches Islam to this new generation every week.

Alright, what I see happening in France, this is my conclusion—and then, obviously, there’s lots of time for discussion—is, the hopeful signs are what I call a pragmatics of convergence, that come from— just speaking very roughly— two sides, the Islamic side and the state, secular side. There are attempts here and there to work towards the other. From the Islamic side it’s the sort of reasoning I just talked about, or the way in which that teacher teaches in school, where from an Islamic perspective one can say to younger people, “Here’s how we can think in a way that makes it possible for us to be good Muslims and also be fully active members of this society.” Not resentful but fully participant in the society. Much the way with Catholics, some enlightened progressive Catholics did a generation earlier in France and elsewhere. From the other side there are efforts within the government and I have to say Nicolas Sarkozy was at some point a leader in these efforts to say, “If we’re to be consistent with the Gallican model that we control religion, we spy on them”—there are spies in every mosque, right—but we also support them. Put in a fairly condescending way he said, “We need to bring Muslims out of the basement, bring them out so that they’re visible, and that means that we have to give them lots of money so that they can have proper mosques.” So working from that logic, traditional French logic, works towards the needs and demands of Muslims to have proper facilities for slaughterhouses, for mosques, for schools, etc. This is no different from the logic of reconciliation between Catholics and the republic that France has gone through over the last century. It’s just with a new—quite different, quite shockingly different often, but a new group. This is hopeful because it allows each of these parties to work within their own logic towards something more than just toleration one for the other, but really creating new institutions that allow Muslims to be full participants in the republic.

Ms. Ellis: Thank you. So, we'll open it up and I'm going to start things off because the latest manifestation of what's going on in France is a furor over banning *burqas*. There was an article in the New York Times a couple weeks ago, John was quoted in this, about this debate, what it really means, the parliamentary commission, and I'm very interested and I think it might bring all the things you're talking about in focus by understanding why this debate started, why now, and who's on what side?

When you finish with that I'm just wondering how the debate in France over these issues has an impact on other countries throughout Europe?

Dr. Bowen: Well I could spend a long time on this because the earlier book actually was about the debate about the headscarf in schools, and indeed a number of people, Fadela Amara for example, the State Secretary for Urban Affairs, said "the *burqa* is just like the headscarf, and if we're going to get rid of the *burqa* let's go back and get rid of the headscarf." What I was trying to do in that earlier book is try to explain why something like the headscarf would create such furor in France, such anxiety, so many worries and part of that explanation had to do with the importance of the school in French ways of thinking about integration, it's not true with the *burqa* debate, but it was for that. Part of it has to do with a particular concern about public space. There's another controversy in this book. I write about the *burqa* debate a bit in this book, we're really talking technically about something called the *niqab*—by the way which has the visible eyes—I don't think I've ever seen a *burqa* in France. In fact, the secret police calculated there are, I don't know, 367 of them. I don't know exactly how they did that but it's not millions, by any means. There's a particular concern in France about appearance in public space. So much so that since 2003, the government can object to grant someone citizenship when they request citizenship, say after a marriage, if the government thinks they haven't "assimilated." One of the many operant definitions of assimilating has to do with "being no different than those with which you live," so acting the same way, speaking the same way—speech is actually set apart as a separate criterion.

It can be taken to mean that if you dress differently that also could be taken as a justification to deny you citizenship. So this concern with appearance and some confusion about what public space is and a considerable degree of sensitivity to public dress – Jean-Luc may correct me here—one finds quite often. Now, on top of that there's a great sensitivity especially on the part of women's groups to the fight that they have recently had with the Catholic Church about contraception and about abortion. These fights were later and longer and bloodier in France than in the United states. Indeed many women's groups when objecting to headscarves several years ago said "we just got one large religious organization off our backs" —meaning we, women—"now are we going to have another one?" Here's the critique that the headscarf, the *burqa*, or something is a symbol of the oppression of women, it's something you hear all the time in France, from public figures, and all over the place.

It's the sort of argument that is hard to work in to a law. In fact the commission that recommended successfully that headscarves be banned from public schools took great pains never to make that argument. Because, how do you establish that something's a symbol of oppression of women? Do you ask them? Well, most Muslim women wearing headscarves say, "No! What are you talking about?" So that commission restricted itself to a very narrow argument about the law against headscarves in schools as freeing girls from "pressure" to put on headscarves. That was the

argument, which is an argument that plays well in the States because it's about individual liberty. I don't think it's well grounded, but it's a coherent argument. I think they made it up. I think what was really pushing the anti-headscarf ban were these concerns about public space and anti-Islamic sentiments, not concerns on the part of women's groups, the relatively recent history of political Islamic dialogues in France. So the *burqa* is, in some sense, a ratcheting-up of the Islamic dialogue that's come back again.

Why now? I don't know. I was interviewed on this in France recently, and I think that to find out why now you have to look at Lyon-area electoral politics. I don't know anything about the French politician that introduced this resolution. It's not something I've looked into, the politics of this, but my guess is that politicians like to stir up trouble and he wanted to stir up something and get his name in the paper. But that's not a scientific analysis, that's saying "I think that's where you'd have to look" to answer the question, "Why now?"

Ms. Ellis: Just today the Immigration Minister reiterated that, "these are unacceptable" in France.

Dr. Bowen: He also said the DNA testing of would-be residents would be off the table for the moment because it would create too many problems. That's right, this *burqa* controversy is arising various places here and there in Europe: in Italy, the Netherlands, in Belgium, and elsewhere—I don't know if there's much influence one place or the other. There is this parliamentary commission which initially looked to propose a law, and I went back to testify, I may testify in early December. I don't think there'll be a law, I can't imagine given France's strong and praiseworthy stance against religious clothing police in Iran—I can't imagine clothing police in France: "Is that a *niqab* or a *burqa*, let me look (it up in) my book – one's against the law, one isn't." I rode around recently with a prefect, in one of the more difficult regions, and he's the prefect in charge there. Everything doesn't always go very well, we went around to the places and he showed me "here's where they do the heroine, but that's not till 6, so we're ok," and we're talking about the *burqa* thing and he says "Terrible, terrible problem, well there's one!" You know, with a *foulard*, it was a headscarf—nobody knows what they're talking about, frankly; they're sort of reacting in a fairly reactive and scared way to something that looks like people are closing themselves off, being different from other people. I can't imagine clothing police, I think this is going to be an airing of grievances, and I think it's going to go away.

Ms. Ellis: Ok, so any other questions here? Yes, Donna –

Donna Constantinople: There is an irony too about the scarf, because if there's one thing French women are known for, it's the scarf and it's done in a thousand ways and we're all so envious and it takes time to figure out how it is that they're able to do their scarves in all these ways and there have even been books published on how to wrap scarves!

Dr. Bowen: Like origami, but for real.

Ms. Constantinople: Yeah and still I can't seem to get it right. You know, I mean the irony of all of this centering on scarves.

Dr. Bowen: You know, I went into Hermès once, the main Hermès store, and I said with full naïveté, do you sell foulard? And they shrieked, “No!”—“We sell *carré*”—squares. You know, *no*, you do not want to be associated with the word “*foulard*.”

Ms. Constantinople: The strife that occurred in 2005 has not reoccurred to that extent, and it was basically economic, not social or religious, or was it? And what are the statistics on the growth of the population of the Muslim community in France? Is it increasing by dramatic proportion, and is there an attitude in France that they will accept the immigration of the Muslims without any restrictions?

It strikes me that if we look ahead to some of the outgrowth of other world problems that there will be other places that the Muslim community will go and if France is somewhere they can seek and receive money and support for the building of mosques and tolerance of their community it's going to be an increasing phenomenon.

Dr. Bowen: No, since the 2005 riots, there have been echoes in subsequent years and there's actually been an *increase* in brutal attacks by police. They're really upping the ante in terms of violence, in a few places, including the place that I was with my prefect friend. I mean there is economic and social anger, anger at police harassment — you can get stopped three or four times in the course of an evening if you look wrong. The family that I've lived with for many, many years now, you know, a French family of long date, they have three sons: one looks more or less like me, one looks more or less like Jean-Luc, and one looks a little darker. Same house, same neighborhood. The first two have never been stopped by the police for anything, the third one—full blood son, right? —When he left home was stopped once a week and asked for his papers. The race-based harassment—which certainly happens in this country too, we know all about that—is a fact of life and it can be conscious harassment in some areas and that's a sort of trigger for some of these activities. I was quite pleased to see that when the riots began in 2005, the secret police said, “This is not about Islam, this is about other things, so don't play that card.” And a few politicians who started spouting off about Muslims and this and that—they stopped it. That was the first question.

French attitude towards immigration: well, everybody is concerned about immigration. There is some very recent data out about general attitudes towards immigration and actually attitudes were more positive in France than most other countries. Certainly more than in the UK and there're some very interesting contrasts here. So I think we would be mistaken in thinking about the reasons for migrating as based on “Oh, if I go to France, I can have a mosque.” It's usually eating. I mean, people may be Muslims, but they're usually trying to eat. And if they're illegal migrants they're trying to get a better job so they'll have better food or their kids will have a better chance. I don't think it's that different whether it's a very poor man coming from Mali risking his life on a boat, or the famous Polish plumber or somebody else, it's just levels of deprivation but they both really have economic betterment in mind.

There's also migration for reasons of religious liberty which on the whole, by the way, almost of all the religious teachers I write about in this book come from Tunisia; because most of them were forced to leave by the Tunisian government at one point. But no, I think the issues of immigration

are huge, huge issues and they're hugely complicated. And nobody has a good answer, but I think they're very little to do with religion.

Ms. Ellis: Just one point about that, if you ask a French official they say that they do not have statistics on Muslims because they do not count them because "Everybody is French." And, you know, this tells you something.

Question from audience member: Allow me to express a small opinion about that. I'm French myself and first of all I would like to thank you, John, for this very subtle way you've described a complicated phenomenon. I'm very much with you on this one. And actually I think we have made a lot of progress, if I think about the way we were talking about Islam in Europe just after September 11th, for instance there were some that talked about "Eurabia," a concept assuming that Europe is collapsing under a radical Muslim population growth, and so on.

About statistics, we don't have statistics because we don't have the right to have "technical data," but that doesn't mean that sometimes we aren't doing some more speculative stuff. I was working for the French unemployment office to fund my PhD when I was a student, and I was working on young Muslims, the young generation, and so we had specific data about that. I think very well of everyone from that department who worked on that. Number one that's a very touchy issue because of this doctrine we have in France, and number two we have a lot of stuff to do about that but there's no political will to address it. Because the next step would be, to say, okay how many? We have a picture of the Muslims in France and then we would have, those on the far right would say that's too much and the far-leftists would say the same thing, in a different way.

So all we know is it's a very touchy issue I would say. And when you talk about France in France, we don't talk about community. Officially we don't have a Muslim community, and we don't have a Catholic community either. There's supposed to be, in the public, all equal treatment and officially, at school for instance, the headscarves at school, this is not anti-Muslim. I remember as a child I had this cross around my neck and my teacher told me no, you must hide it, that's forbidden in public school. And so you're right to make this connection between Catholicism and Islam, but there is an issue with radicalism. Don't you think that in France—especially those from Europe—we are importing and producing of course, radical Islam, that's true. But we are also producing a sort of made in Europe, "slash" made in France Islam. A mix of secularism and Islam. And that new form of Islam has consequences in French space or in Arab space.

Dr. Bowen: Well we don't know about the consequences. I think there is, indeed, a consistent set of ideas being generated in France about how to construct an Islam that fits in France. And that's what I explore in the book, I agree. There's a major problem, though, in terms of exporting it, which is that the reasoning that results in that French version of Islam is not accepted by many of the most prestigious jurists; Islamic legal scholars, in a lot of these places. I didn't respond to your point about "Muslim community," I also avoid the term but for different reasons: I think analytically there's a problem. There isn't a community of people who get together, all of us and contract a community, and say "we all share X" or something, it just doesn't exist. I think we use the word "community" to mean something like people who know each other and have some sort of multi-stranded relationship - or what we need is categories, people representing something.

Question from audience member: ...It's very difficult to realize, is it geographically, are they living in the same area?

Dr. Bowen: No.

Question from audience member: Are they dispersed and immersed in every community throughout Europe?

Dr. Bowen: Two things, first on that and then back to the population thing, that's actually quite important. There's a lot of writing now, really good studies coming out in France, in the Netherlands, in Sweden, in Germany, in the UK about segregation. It's something we know a lot more about in the US, we have a really good tradition of really good statistical studies of segregation. Think of William Gillis Wilson, in Chicago. There hasn't been that tradition in Europe. It looks like ethnic segregation is much less marked anywhere in Europe than in the US.

Secondly, the tendency is away from segregation, which is quite surprising. This is stuff that's just coming out this year, but that it's really, really different depending where you look. If you look at certain parts of England, you find quite a large degree of ethnic segregation but in France it's very low. And one of the reasons it's very low in France is the way people were settled. People were brought in from various places in North Africa, and they were put into residences that were near factories. And some of those were in the suburbs of Paris, or in Lyon, or in Marseilles, some of those were out in other parts of France where there happened to be factories. They were mixed ethnically as a result, and in any case the mixing was Algerians and Tunisians and Moroccans, who are not that different.

The problem about residential segregation or residential enclaves has really been an economic one. With the pulling out of the industry, people were left in these projects with no work. So you started off with a fairly diverse group. Now, demography—I'm not going to spend too much time on this. Demography issues are really interesting, two points. One is, one of the French reasons for not wanting to collect statistics. But there's a good argument for doing it which is that in order to fight structural discrimination in industry you've got to have data, you've got to have broad based data about ethnic and racial identity. But some of the reasons against it are memories of racial and ethnic classification under Vichy. Which given the republican idea which Jean-Luc so elegantly stated, Vichy was just a total contradiction and so it comes up a lot.

Alright, finally on the population expansion, there's been a lot of real hogwash about demographic trends. "Europe will be half Muslim by 2050." Has anyone ever heard that?

I've spent a lot of time over the last few weeks asking colleagues in various parts of Europe at demographic institutes, what are the best projections you have? The consensus seems to be, given current trends of birth, Muslims are than the broader population, there's going to be some more immigration, but you know, sort of the middle range of projections is you might have 10% of western Europe Being Muslim in 2050, not 50%. And given that it's about 10% now—we don't really know but something like that in France, it's a little less in England—it's just not huge. Then again the real problem is we say 10% Muslim—what's that group? A third of them don't ever worship! Again it's this problem of bloc thinking, we're thinking about a group of people who get together at night in caves and plot to take over the world—right?

Ms. Ellis: So we had a question over here did anyone else have a question? We'll take a few questions together, if that's ok with you.

Dr. Bowen: That's fine, I can remember.

Ms. Ellis: If you could just identify yourself, I saw your hand before.

Question: Yes, my name is Aislinn Hetty from the Hudson Institute. My question is twofold; I'll ask the second part if your answer allows for it. The extent to which the controversy in France is just wearing headscarves in schools and whatnot; is that worse than if you wear a cross, the Christian religion? I mean, is it considered something worse, is it considered the same, what is the sort of general feeling about that?

Dr. Bowen: And what was the second part?

Question: The second part to me, it's something I've never been able to understand, part of having grown up in an Irish Catholic family myself; to me any symbol of religion is oppressive. Oppressive of free will, there's this idea that you can't really do what you want or you'll go to hell, so I was just wondering: is it really the way the headscarf is a humanitarian concern of the oppression of women, the way any religious symbol depicts oppression in one way or another? Or is it more fear of the other, those who look different.

Dr. Bowen: Thank you.

Ms. Ellis: OK, yes, Stanley.

Question: Stanley Kober of the CATO Institute. Very different sort of question: I've been wondering about foreign influences on Islam and was reminded of Rousseau's Social Contract, and I was wondering if Rousseau had any influence on Islam in France?

Question: I'm from Canada, originally, where there seems to be more tolerance between the different ethnic groups. Also, I hope this is an appropriate forum for this question, but I run into female circumcision in my profession as a physician and am just curious if this is an issue in France and what is France's political stance on that?

Ms. Ellis: OK, there was one hand up here, if you don't mind—

Dr. Bowen: No, no, no! Keep going!

Ms. Ellis: Go ahead, so we can get to everyone...

Dr. Bowen: There's still wine, right?

Ms. Ellis: Yes there is! There's food!

Question: I would like to ask you about the French suburbs. As far as I know there are some areas where neither the police nor firemen go, and is it true that there are more Muslims in these sorts of area or not?

Dr. Bowen: Ok, right. That's it?

Ms. Ellis: Ok well one last question. Can you talk about the adoption of institutions, and the move to establish Islamic banking, which until now has existed informally. I'm wondering if this trend is actually taking off?

Dr. Bowen: You know I often try to group questions together when I have a bunch and I just see no way in this, they're just so different! (Laughter from audience) So I'll just take them one by one. France is coming fairly late to allowing Islamic financial instruments, they were developed much earlier in the UK, in the US, Malaysia, and they're actually more recent than people often think in places like Saudi Arabia and Egypt, they date from the sixties—1960s. And I think it's a very good thing to allow people to invest their money in different ways. Is there a particular question or you just wanted me to comment?

Ms. Ellis: No, as a trend, because the article that I read said that France is looking at this as a way of attracting money into (the country).

Dr. Bowen: Probably so, it makes sense. I think it's a very good thing; actually they did better than the stock market. The poor outer cities, I don't like to use the word "suburbs" because in America that conjures up, you know, East Falls Church. The poor outer cities, I don't think anyone's in charge. To the extent that anyone's in charge it's not that different from some of the gang-run projects in some US cities where you do have people who are running drugs and that sort of thing. That said, having spent some time in one of the worst ones, again with the prefect, they're a lot less scary than certain places in the US. There's a real difference here. There's not the kind of ethnic segregation, and the crime rates and violence rates are nowhere near what they are in some parts of the US. There's been a lot of resistance, I think well founded, to using the word "ghetto" to talk about the French situation. They're certainly not being run by religious leaders. If anything the two of the mosques in Clichy-sous-bois which is where the 2005 riots started, immediately sent people out into the streets to try to calm the situation and actually they had a great deal of success.

Question: I was in the middle of the riots and I think these guys were much more influenced by US rap culture than by their own. So maybe that was mostly social.

Dr. Bowen: I would agree. Female genital mutilation was a major public policy issue in France awhile back, and there were trials—there were girls being brought back under false pretenses to West Africa, primarily West Africa, and being given radical cutting and then there were suits filed against them, and it was a terrible problem. I don't hear about them very much anymore, but it must happen. France's position is that it's very strictly illegal. I don't know if there's a lot going on but if so people are more careful about hiding it. I just know there was a very strong legal action taken about 20 years ago. And it may still go on, but I don't know. Was there something about Canada you wanted me to comment on, or you were just introducing yourself?

Question: I'm from Canada and there's more tolerance for the ethnic groups and religions there. However when I've gone back to Toronto recently there are a lot of people in *burqas*, you were saying 367 in France, there are way more than that in Toronto in an afternoon in the park.

Dr. Bowen: I like to adopt different positions depending on whom I'm speaking with just to keep the debate going, so of course the counter-argument about tolerance is that there is something oppressive about religiously giving sort of quasi-legal sanction to religious leaders and that was really the argument, the key legal argument against headscarves in the US. So while we're talking about tolerance we're treating groups again as blocs. We're saying "Muslims want this, Sikhs want this, Hindus want this, let's let them do that" and then later we ask—Will Kymlicka has this line, a prominent Canadian political theorist—about "how far do we go in tolerating the intolerant?" You know, when the norms within the community itself are intolerant minorities, do we then say "we can't tolerate the community anymore." So it's not like we can give each country an index of tolerance, it's more complicated and more multidimensional than that. This isn't about what you said, it's just a general point.

To the next question- I don't know anything about Rousseau's influence in Iran. It's a fascinating question, certainly. Rousseau-ian political theory has been widely read around the world and of course as you know very well, Turkish political theory was inspired by French legal instruments, not Rousseau. But I don't have much to say on that. And your comment about a religious symbol being a sign of repression: well, you know, there comes a point I think when our basically liberal or even libertarian instincts run up against the reproduction of religious communities. Because any community works on, at least, parents telling kids what to do. So do Catholic parents ask their five year old, six year old "Do you want to go to church today? It's up to you, it's a free country." (Laughter from audience) There is discipline at the heart of—bringing up kids in general and at the heart of religion. And that could be called oppression. And then the question becomes "In what form do we tolerate it?" "How far do we allow it to go?" The French theory and response on this was that the school is a place where none of that should have any place at all. We have to stop anything that could give rise to any sort of thinking about it in terms of status, like men over women (were tolerated), that was the French argument and the American argument was very different.

I'm very allergic to people saying that "the headscarf stands for "X." Because for different people it stands for different things. I'm not sure who's really in a position to say "The headscarf stands for this, oppression." Or, the freedom of women to choose. Or piety, or my relationship to God. You hear different people saying different things. I remember hearing two—the Levy Sisters, you'll remember this Jean—two young women who in 2003 started wearing headscarves to school and there was a big fight about it and it was very interesting because the father was a non-practicing Jew, and the mother I think was a non-practicing—technically a Muslim. And, they were on talk shows—they were treated terribly on talk shows but they stood up very well, at one point someone asked them "Why do you wear this? In Afghanistan women are forced to wear this." And one of them said "If we were forced to wear it in Afghanistan we wouldn't wear it, we would refuse." So the idea was "It's our right, we don't want to be told what to do." It's a complicated matter, there's a back and forth on it—but the notion that we can sort of decode for all women wearing "X" whatever it is—a nicely arranged scarf, a not very nicely arranged scarf, whatever it is—that we know the meaning of that, is foolish.

Ms. Ellis: OK, last question.

Question: Isn't the *burqa* a security issue?

Dr. Bowen: Well, the current pretense – and I will call it that, frankly, for the *burqa* furor, is – and by the way I remember the punitively left wing newspaper *Libération*, the same day they were reporting on the *burqa* commission they also had a full page article on a high-class fashion show of Saudi dress; *abayas*, that a whole bunch of really rich Saudi people were flying in to see, right. So, one hand - isn't that great to bring up the *abaya* - in France, which is very covering. And the other hand, all these terrible, terrible *burqas* and these women are so oppressed that they wear cloth on their heads. I mean, really, it's absurd.

The security issue thing – yeah, this has come up in the US, actually. There have been a number of states, Florida – remember there was the case about this, right, could you have a headscarf on for a driver's license? I mean, there are practical ways around it. If this were the issue we'd come up with solutions; female police officers. And there are only 367 women in France wearing something that covers the face, how many security crises have there been that involved those women? Maybe not one yet. So, you know. Which is the security issue, the not being able to identify the face?

Question: Well in Iraq and Afghanistan, there was concern they might have explosives hidden under their *burqas*.

Dr. Bowen: Well yeah you could have your face uncovered and a nice long robe and a trench coat – how about a trench coat? No, the explosives issue has not come up. I mean, I don't think even the fantasies of, what's his name again, the Lyonet deputy, I don't think this has ever come up. No, the security issues come up with *contrôle d'identité*, checking somebody's card. Because you can do that in France; anybody can be stopped anytime and be asked to prove who they are.

Ms. Ellis: OK, last question.

Question: My name is Stephanie Wade and I spent some time in the Middle East and I can see this tension working as the Muslim population moves more and becomes a larger presence of these western European countries. And we see that tension evolving. I also saw tension on the opposite side in the Arabic countries, in the Middle Eastern countries of trying to become more tolerant of non-Muslims moving into their country and having to re-arrange their society around that. I was wondering if you could speak or have you talked to people about the situation on the reverse end in the Middle East, of how the underlying tensions and the impetus behind it and how those two might be related?

Dr. Bowen: Right, right. That's a really important point. This is the big point that a lot of people like Chris Caldwell and others say. A lot of Europeans are shocked by this massive presence of Islam. And the people in Saudi Arabia or in other countries are being shocked by the dramatic influx—not massive, you know, much smaller but still a presence of new kinds of people—so both are fact. So what do you do about it? How do you rethink how you run your society? And everyone's got to figure this out.

One of the things that I ask myself is, so much of the rhetorical force of these Western scare books on Islam is that many of them depend on the shock factor—And I ask myself, is that a bad thing? Aren't we Americans a better society for all the confrontations we've gone through; about the presence of people of color, about immigrants? I mean we've had a lot of shocks; we've had a lot of angry debates. Aren't we better for having gone through these angry debates now than we were 50 years ago? I think we are. And I think the newness, it's hard to imagine a group that would be *as new* for us given the sort of variety of people there are in the US who now are actually playing an important public role.

For countries, especially the Scandinavian countries in Europe who have only recently faced the notion of people who look really different being citizens. That's really new and you know in many ways, it's not my place to argue what's good for Sweden; it's up to Swedish people just to take one country for example, but maybe it's a good thing that they have to rethink what it is to be Swedish with this new heterogeneity in mind. This physical difference in mind. And maybe it's a good thing for Saudis, or Yemenis, or Egyptians to rethink somebody who's Islamic.

Ms. Ellis: Ok, well we've come to the end of a very interesting evening, I want to thank you John – thank you all so much. And John's book is for sale over there so we hope you all will buy it.

Dr. Bowen: Signed copies!

Ms. Ellis: So, let's give John a big hand. [applause]