Europe’s Muslim Question?
October 13, 2017

9:00 a.m. Registration and Continental Breakfast

9:30 a.m. Welcoming Remarks

9:45-12:00 Panel 1: Islamophobia and Affective Demands of Belonging
Chair and Discussant: Felix Germain, Africana Studies

National Affect in Crisis: Islamophobia and Islamic Love in Belgium and France
Paul Silverstein, Anthropology Department, Reed College

The paper explores recent moral panics in France and Belgium around Islamic veiling, conversion, and "radicalization" which the state and media have largely interpreted as expressions of the disdain, indeed hate, of Muslims for national values and European culture more broadly. Such interpretations have motivated both restrictive forms of policing and surveillance, as well as demands for Muslims to demonstrate their national loyalty in verbal and embodied forms. This paper charts some of the ways in which French and Belgium Muslims have responded to such imperatives via activism and art, and, in particular, how they have mobilized Islamic idioms of love to call for humanistic, inclusive, and even revolutionary revisions of national identity and belonging.

Historical Anxiety and the Politics of Muslim Inclusion in Spain
Mikaela Rogozen-Soltar, Department of Anthropology, University of Nevada, Reno

This talk explores the way historical entanglements across the Mediterranean shape the politics of religious diversity in southern Europe. I argue that while deeply entrenched iterations of liberalism and secularism shape reception and governance of Muslims in much of Europe, Spain is slightly different. In southern Spain, historical anxieties about the implications of Islamic influence—past and present—for Spain’s belonging in secular Europe produce ambivalence about the growing Muslim population today, spurring both nostalgia for al-Andalus and racist rejection of Muslims. In response, Muslims themselves also view local history as the grounds on which to make claims for social and political inclusion, with mixed results. Through ethnography of Muslim and non-Muslim historical memories of al-Andalus, I trace how both Islamophobic and Islamophilic discourses shape the possibilities and limitations of Muslim inclusion in Andalusia, Spain.

Je suis Charlie’ vs. ‘Je suis Ahmed’: The Relationship between Race and Islamophobia in France in the wake of Charlie Hebdo
Jean Beaman, Department of Sociology, Purdue University

In this paper, I use the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attacks as a way to examine the entwinement of race and religion in France. Based on ethnographic research in Paris and its banlieues with the middle-class segment of the North African second-generation, I discuss these
individual experiences of Islamophobia, which are heightened following the January 2015 attacks. In the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo attacks, much attention rallied around the international slogan, “Je suis Charlie,” in reference to the columnists and cartoonists who were killed. I use the alternate slogan, “Je suis Ahmed,” in reference to Ahmed Merabet, a Muslim and Algerian-origin police officer who was among those killed, as a way to understand boundaries of racial and ethnic exclusion in French society. I argue that Islamophobia against French Muslims is actually a manifestation of racism against non-white individuals. In other words, the religious marginalization that French Muslims experience is code for marginalization based on race and ethnic origin. Part of why Islamophobia is such a problem, I argue, is not the large number of “radical” Muslims in France, but rather that religion stands in for racial and ethnic difference in a society that refuses to grapple with its colonial history and legacy in the Maghreb and other regions. The experiences of my respondents ultimately demonstrate how Islamophobia is a form of racism – one that sees certain individuals as too culturally different to ever be fully accepted as part of the French mainstream. I further discuss the implications of this for understanding not just the intersections of race, ethnicity, and citizenship, but also France’s “racial project,” per Omi and Winant’s (1994) formulation, in which differences among individuals are marked without explicit state-sanctioned racial and ethnic categories.

12:00-1:30 – Break for lunch

1:30-3:00 Panel: Gender and Sexuality in European Islam Debates
Chair and Discussant: Heath Cabot, Department of Anthropology

Ism, Gender, and the Pedagogy of Europeanness in Contemporary Germany
Beverly Weber, Department of Germanic & Slavic Languages & Literatures, University of Colorado Boulder

The gesture of “welcome” as a marker of hospitality has served powerful functions in the public imagination in contemporary Germany. Yet the limits of hospitality are often perceived as connected to many of those characteristics that are related to the racialization of Islam in Germany, including an association of Islam with an unchanging past linked to violence against women and LGBTQI groups and individuals.

My paper examines the “limits” of hospitality in pedagogical materials designed for the curriculum of “integration courses” outlined by the German federal government in the 2015 integration law. In particular, I examine the modules on gender roles, human rights and European secularism in these materials. I argue that pedagogy of integration often replicates existing logics by which Islam is racialized via its perceived relationship to human rights, particularly women’s rights; but also provides openings from which the pedagogy of integration and the attendant pedagogy of race can be challenged and transformed in the service of more just forms of cohabitation and hospitality.

Sexagones: Muslims, France, and the Sexualization of National Culture
Mehammed Mack, Department of French Studies, Smith College
In contemporary France, particularly in the banlieues of Paris, the figure of the young, virile, hypermasculine Muslim looms large. So large, in fact, it often supersedes liberal secular society’s understanding of gender and sexuality altogether. In this presentation, I examine the broad politicization of Franco-Arab identity in the context of French culture and its assumptions about appropriate modes of sexual and gender expression, both gay and straight.

Official French culture has often judged the integration of Muslim immigrants from North and West Africa—as well as their French descendants—according to their presumed attitudes about gender and sexuality. More precisely, the frustrations consistently expressed by the French establishment in the face of the alleged Muslim refusal to assimilate is not only symptomatic of anxieties regarding changes to a “familiar” France but also indicative of an unacknowledged preoccupation with what can be termed the “virility cultures” of Franco-Arabs, rendering Muslim youth as both sexualized objects and unruly subjects.

The perceived volatility of this banlieue virility serves to animate French characterizations of the “difficult” black, Arab, and Muslim boy—and girl—across a variety of sensational newscasts and entertainment media, which are crucially inflamed by the clandestine nature of the banlieues themselves and non-European expressions of virility. Mirroring the secret and underground qualities of “illegal” immigration, Franco-Arab youth increasingly choose to withdraw from official scrutiny of the French Republic and to thwart its desires for universalism and transparency. For their impenetrability, these sealed-off domains of banlieue virility are deemed all the more threatening to the surveillance of mainstream French society and the state apparatus.

3:00-3:15 – Coffee Break

3:15-4:45 p.m. Panel 3: Muslim Youth Cultures and National Belonging
Chair and Discussant: Randall Halle, Department of German

Cool Islam and the Republic: Engaging Afro-Frenchness Through Religion
Mame-Fatou Niang, Department of Modern Languages, Carnegie Mellon University

France’s normative definition of citizenship and the country’s problematic approach to Islam ultimately aim at creating an “Islam without Muslims” (Cinally 2017). Since January 2015, waves of deadly attacks have compounded longstanding anxieties and interrogations about the country’s Muslim population and changing citizenry. In this context, this presentation explores the oft-unremarked subculture of “Black French Islam” and its embodiment by Afro-French youths from the Goutte d’Or. I will particularly focus my study on the display of Afrocentric aesthetics in the everyday practice of these young adults, and the increased affirmation of racial identity within religious claims. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted in 2016, I will demonstrate that their practice of Islam, with embodiment at its core, unveil the contradictions of the French republican model, while stating firmly their belonging to a cultural space stretching from France to Africa and its many diasporas.
‘Culture is the Battlefield’ – British Muslim Culture and the Politics of Belonging
Jeanette S. Jouili, Department of Religious Studies, University of Pittsburgh

Over the last decades, debates over Islam in Europe have increasingly been framed through the lens of cultural difference. In this discursive climate, culture constitutes a crucial terrain of investment for European Muslims in their struggle for inclusion and recognition. Based on ethnographic research undertaken with young British Muslim culture practitioners, this talk examines a particular type of culture discourse that defends the intrinsic and symbiotic link between Islam and culture, especially in order to elevate the place of artistic practices within British Muslim communities and to counter certain revival Muslims’ “anti-culture” stances. While these culture discourses have enabled a quite vibrant and quickly growing British Muslim cultural scene, I argue that the ontological assumptions underpinning the manifold meanings of the culture concept that have historically served to racialize non-Europeans continue to haunt and render precarious efforts to demonstrate Muslim belonging to Europe via culture.

4:45-5:15 – Final Discussion

5:15-6:30 – Reception