



RACE, GENDER AND POSTCOLONIAL IDENTITIES IN FRANCE

APA Program: Paris

Language of instruction: French, prerequisite of at least B1 language level

US semester credits: 4.0

Term: Fall Semester 2021

Instructor: Dr. Aurélie Perrier

Course Description

In a controversial and bestselling novel published in 2015, French author Michel Houellebecq imagines France's government and society taken over from within by Muslim extremists who impose Sharia law. Fears of "internal colonization" by Muslim immigrants have long haunted the French psyche, intersecting with broader concerns over the decline of French identity, traditional family values and republican ideals. But how did, what was once a global empire - extending from the South Pacific to the Caribbean and throughout Africa and Southeast Asia - become so anxious about being "colonized" from within? Who are these "internal others" increasingly talked about in mainstream media and political discourse? How is race, religion, sex or gender mobilized to define these groups as lying outside the purview of the nation? In short, how can we make sense of the contradictions between France's universalist and inclusivist impulse (through concepts such as *égalité*, *liberté*, *laïcité*, etc.) and its exclusionary practices?

To answer these questions, the course will pay particular attention to the imbrication of various forms of discrimination as well as to their historical dimension. First we adopt a longer and wider view of the imperial experiences of France to understand how or to what extent the colonial past manifests itself in contemporary discourses of exclusion towards racial or religious "others". Then, we turn to the question of gender minorities in France, scrutinizing the controversies around both gay marriage and veiled women to show how race and gender stereotypes are entwined. Third, we study the question of *Laïcité*, a distinctly French concept, and examine its changing meaning and the way it has been deployed to manage religious difference. Finally, we turn to the question of immigration, increasingly present in French political discourse.

Surveying works of history, politics, literature, and film -the course seeks to understand how race, gender and religion are invoked to draw symbolic boundaries between those who belong and don't belong inside the French polity in dominant discourses. We will also draw attention to the ways in which minorities have resisted these definitions and seek to create alternative discourses and practices.

The course incorporates several guest lectures and site visits to relevant museums and places to render the subject palpable and dynamic.

Schedule

Week 1

- Introduction to the course
- Colonial history and the myth of colorblind France

Week 2

- Constructing the "Other"
- Theoretical frameworks

Week 3

- The echoes of the colonial past
- Commemorating colonialism in a postcolonial world

Week 4

- Colonial Paris: material traces of the colonial past
- **SITE VISIT**: Class meets in Paris for a tour of colonial Paris. Meeting point will be determined by the instructor.

Week 5

- Women as "Other": the long history of antifeminism in France

Week 6

- Gendering the racial "Other": colonial genealogy of the veil and burkini controversy
- **GUEST SPEAKER** from Muslim feminist organization LALLAB

Week 7

- Controversy over gay marriage (Le Mariage pour tous) law of 2013

Week 8

- Laïcité: A French specificity
- **GUEST SPEAKER**: Dorra Mameri and **SITE VISIT** of the Observatoire de la Laïcité

Week 9

- Place-making and marginality: the banlieues

Week 10

- Multiculturalism, Islam and the specter of communautarisme

Week 11

- Immigration in France: Part I
- **GUEST SPEAKER** (TBD)

Week 12

- Immigration in France: Part II
- **SITE VISIT**: Musée de l'Immigration

Week 13

- Speaking back: postcolonial minority and urban culture
- GUEST SPEAKER and SITE VIST in Paris (TBD)

Assessment

Course Participation: 25%

- Student participation is mandatory--whether in the classroom discussion setting, during visits, or in the context of guest lectures. Students are expected to read critically ahead of course sessions and be prepared to engage in dialogue about the readings.

Storymap of Postcolonial Paris: 20%

- A story map is a tool that allows the pairing of a map with text and image in an interactive narrative and visual presentation. For this exercise, students will be paired in groups of 3 and asked to create a storymap of Postcolonial Paris, identifying 12 places, which signal the presence of the colonial past in contemporary Paris. Detailed instructions will be handed out by the professor.

AQCI Summary and Discussion (Argument, Quote, Connections, Implications): 25%

- During the first class, the instructor will assign two students to a week's reading. Each student must individually complete a one-page AQCI per reading assignment. Students are asked to state the main (A) argument of an assigned reading; quote (Q) its most important single sentence; make (C) connections between this argument/quote and other articles, lectures or site visits; and suggest some of the (I) implications of this argument and one analytical (not factual) question inspired by the reading which the student would like to explore further. Then, in class, the two students will collectively co-lead a discussion on their assigned reading.

Take-home Exam: 30%

- Students have 24 hours to complete a 5-page paper in response to an essay question.