Media Representations of Islam and Muslims
An international and interdisciplinary conference
Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, France (19-20 juin 2018)

'Islamophobia' and 'race' are contested terms in contemporary political and media discourse around the world (Hajjat & Mohammed, 2013; Massoumi et al., 2017; Sayyid & Vakil, 2009). In the case of heated debates in France, for example, academic and/or antiracist arguments – themselves far from homogenous – struggle to be heard, and these terms are often censored more or less explicitly. The absence of official statistics on ethnic and religious diversity in France (Simon, 2008), which purportedly protects minorities from discrimination, also inadvertently makes invisible the social and cultural inequalities that nevertheless exist. While it may be difficult to recognise racism generally, it is difficult to recognise islamophobia in particular, especially in the context of struggles over the definition of laïcité. In the early 2000s, a "new laïcité", or neo-laïcité, has emerged that distinguishes itself explicitly from the laïcité promised by the 1905 law separating church and state (Bauberot, 2015). This conflict between laïcité and neo-laïcité makes it difficult to recognize difference in an increasingly multicultural society (Modood & Webner, 1997; Lentin & Titley, 2011), and leads to tensions between the protected values of freedom of expression and freedom of religion (Alicino, 2015).

Similarly, in Francophone and Anglophone academic literature alike, there remains no clear consensus on the definition of either Islamophobia or racism, which, more often than not, continue to be studied separately. In contrast to the political and media rhetoric, however, academic research into these issues from a wide range of disciplines has revealed that systemic and structural discrimination is in fact as widespread in France as they are in other western countries, with non-white people suffering disproportionately in terms of unemployment (Wacquant, 2009), imprisonment (D. Fassin, 2011) and education (Keaton, 2006), while international NGOs (Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch) have repeatedly criticised the failure of successive French governments to independently investigate police violence and discrimination against ethnic minorities. Contrary to the clash of civilisations thesis and the emphasis on the need for Muslims to integrate and accommodate their religion or culture with 'republican' or 'western' values, studies on the everyday lives and personal opinions of Muslims in France and other European countries have cast doubt on the extent to which any such contradiction exists (Göle, 2015; Massoumi, 2015; Zerouala, 2015), while others have warned against the increasing sacralisation of laïcité as a civic religion (Roy, 2013) and the false dichotomy of anti-sexism and anti-racism when debating issues such as 'the veil' (Bouyahia et Sana, 2013; Delphy, 2008).

Increasingly, effort has been made to supplement research into the characteristics of Muslim people and religious, cultural or political identity, with more of an emphasis on Islamophobia as the result of political practices that disproportionately affect Muslim people (Massoumi et al., 2017), and to supplement quantitative research into diversity with qualitative research into the perception of discrimination (Dubet et al, 2013). Transcending the dominant focus on immigration and integration, and recognising the 'internal exclusion' of non-migrants (Balibar, 2007), as well as the role of religion as a site of cultural politics rather than an apolitical aspect of the private sphere (Fernando, 2014), some scholars have sought to shift attention away from the

'Muslim problem' and onto the 'republican problem' instead. That is, engaging with the inherent tensions and contradictions of the secular state, republican values and 'secular-republican power' (Fernando, 2014; see also Titley et al, 2017), rather than those of French Muslims and what they eat or wear. Others have located the concept of Islamophobia and the social construction of the 'Muslim problem' in the long-term history of international migration and colonial racism (Bancel et al., 2015; Hajjat & Mohammed, 2013; Poinsot et Weber, 2014). Recognising the complexity of the social construction of 'race' and citing discursive slippages between the figure of the 'Muslim', the 'Arab' and other terms, as well as the ways in which Muslims are perceived in racialised terms, some scholars (D. Fassin & E. Fassin, 2006; Mazouz, 2017) have discussed the phenomenon of 'racism without race', using the term *racialization* to emphasise the process whereby certain identities are socially constructed as 'other' and categorised hierarchically (du Bois, 1994; Fanon, 1967; D. Fassin, 2011; Gilroy, 1987; Miles, 1989; Murji & Solomos, 2005), and drawing on cultural and media studies approaches to reveal the ways in which 'race' intersects with gender and class (Anthias, 2012).

Such approaches have also been important sources for critiquing the role of the media in this process of racialization (Cervulle, 2013; Hall et al., 1978; Petley & R. Richardson, 2011; Poole & J. Richardson, 2006; Rabah, 1998; Said, 1997; Tevanian, 2005; 2006). But, as Hajjat & Mohammed (2013: 116) have argued, analyses of media representations, discourses and content (Berthault et al, 2009; Deltombe, 2005; Macé, 2009; Sian et al, 2013) need to be complemented by more sociological accounts of the conditions of media production and the routine practices of journalists, so as to understand the distance between the habitus of professional journalists and elites, on the one hand, and the 'popular classes' on the other, as well as the discrimination experienced by those from ethnic minority backgrounds working within the media industries themselves, and the economic and structural constraints of news agenda setting.

This conference aims to bring together researchers from a variety of disciplines (sociology, information-communication, history, law, media and cultural studies, etc.), from France and from abroad, as well as professionals from the media industry, to further debate and develop our understanding of the media's role in the construction of the 'Muslim problem' – in France and beyond. Because this is an international and interdisciplinary conference, we are keen to receive papers that foreground the contribution that international and interdisciplinary perspectives can bring, and that highlight the different sources, theoretical traditions, methodological approaches and epistemological questions that are raised by researchers working in different fields, so as to provide a reflexive and critical engagement with the efficacy and appropriateness of terms such as Islamophobia, and of hitherto privileged approaches to understanding such processes and practices. As such, papers that are comparative – that focus on such issues in other countries, or on similitudes with other racisms and processes of mediated exclusion – are welcome, as are those that offer historical perspectives on their evolution, and those that combine media analyses with sociological research, or an engagement with interdisciplinary or international literatures, are particularly encouraged. Generally, contributions are encouraged in, but not limited to, the following areas:

- Definitions of, and debates on, terms such as Islamophobia, racism/racialization, mediation/mediatization and media critique.

- Theoretical, methodological and inter/disciplinary approaches and traditions to critiquing media and racism (cultural studies; media studies; postcolonial studies; critical race theory; gender studies; intersectionality; sociology; history; law; international relations etc.)
- Analyses of media content or discourse; media law, policy and regulation; or media practice and journalism ethics.
- Moral panics, media events and controversies over the veil, burkinis, halal meat, school meals, Christmas crèches in public buildings, *Charlie Hebdo*.
- Ethnic diversity, inequality and discrimination in areas such as housing, employment, education, the criminal justice system.
- Liberalism, republicanism, communitarianism, multiculturalism or cosmopolitanism.
- Secularism/s, laïcité, recognition and difference.
- Colonialism, postcolonialism, nationalism, globalisation, terrorism or collective memory.
- 'Race', religion, religiosity, postsecularism, intersectionality and culture.
- Citizenship, rights, inclusion and exclusion.
- The balancing of freedom of expression with the freedom of religion; academic freedom; press freedom.
- Feminism, gender, class, intersectionality, and anti-sexism and/or anti-racism.

Proposals for papers of up to 500 words (accompanied by an indicative bibliography and a short biographical note) should be sent to Simon Dawes at <u>simon.dawes@uvsq.fr</u> by Friday 16ᵗʰ February 2018. The conference will be bilingual, and the proposals can be sent in either English or French.

Decisions will be confirmed by Friday 16ᵗʰ March 2018.

The conference will take place in 19-20 June 2018.

Keynote Speakers:

Floya Anthias, Marion Dalibert, Eric Fassin, Abdellali Hajjat, Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison, Eric Macé, Narzanin Massoumi and Sarah Mazouz

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