

Call for Papers

International Conference

Women, Algeria, Torture, Foucault: The Anticolonial Sociology of Marnia Lazreg

Dates: September 25-26, 2025

Location:

Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College &

The Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York,

New York City

Sponsored by:

Department of Sociology, Hunter College, CUNY

Human Rights Program, Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College

Department of Sociology, CUNY Graduate Center

Abstract Submission Deadline

April 28, 2025

Conference Website: <https://marnialazreg.work>

Marnia Lazreg was a pathbreaking sociologist who made important contributions to a wide variety of fields, including the study of women, torture, colonialism, Islam, Foucault, international development, and her native Algeria. Much of this work was informed by an abiding belief in the emancipatory potential of a universalistic conception of the human---an approach that bucked prevailing academic trends and inspired a highly original oeuvre rich in critical perspectives. We convene in honor of this unique liberatory voice, who was taken from us in 2024. The organizers invite submissions from around the world that build upon ideas that Marnia expounded in any of five major books described below. Papers assessing the books themselves are welcome and encouraged, but so too is any paper that builds on Marnia's ideas in these areas, whether directly or indirectly. Scholars at any career stage, including graduate students, are encouraged to submit to this call for papers and to engage with Marnia's work. The conference is interdisciplinary and abstracts are welcome and encouraged from scholars working in any academic discipline to which the topics are relevant, including but not limited to sociology, anthropology, gender studies, area studies, history, philosophy, and law.

Topic 1: Feminism and Difference

In a celebrated article, "[Feminism and Difference](#)", that she published in *Feminist Studies* in 1988, Marnia challenged some approaches to feminism for engaging in an "antihumanist celebration of unmediated difference" both between men and women and between Western women and women in other parts of the world. Marnia argued that colonial experience taught that an emphasis on shared humanity was more likely to deliver liberation. She wrote that:

the universalistic claim to a supracultural human entity embodied in reason provided colonized societies with the tool necessary to regain their freedom.

Colonized women and men were willing to give up their lives in order to capture their share of humanity celebrated but denied by colonial powers. But what does antihumanism offer “different” peoples? On what grounds (moral or otherwise) can powerless people struggle against their relegation to the prison house of race, color, and nationality into which antihumanism locks them?

In her book [The Eloquence of Silence](#) (1994), which grew out of the article, Marnia sought to break Algerian women out of one part of that prison: the view that, unlike Western feminists, who could point to a history of struggle against patriarchy, Algerian women were passive victims in need of salvation. Drawing on extensive archival research, Marnia detailed the massive resistance that Algerian women had offered to multiple systems of domination trained against them, not least that of colonialism. The book remains a pioneering rejoinder to the savior narrative.

Papers that assess or build on this work, or that address the “essentialization of difference” (Marnia's phrase) in some approaches to feminism, fall within this topic area. Papers that consider the othering narratives, such as the savior narrative, to which a focus on difference can lead, also fall within this topic area. So, too, would papers that address universalistic conceptions of the human or the role of difference in transnational feminism.

Topic 2: Torture and Colonialism

In [Torture and the Twilight of Empire](#) (2008), Marnia showed that torture was not only a pervasive practice of the French military forces during the Algerian War but also that it formed the core of French military intellectuals’ theory of colonial war, which they called “revolutionary war theory”. Marnia leveraged this insight to demonstrate that torture is neither a colonial pathology nor merely a colonial tactic but rather a constitutive element of the colonial project that can be used as a marker of colonial intent. This made it possible for Marnia to identify in America’s embrace of torture in the War on Terror troubling implications regarding the trajectory of American foreign policy.

Papers that assess or build on this work, or that address the relationship between torture and colonialism, fall within this topic area.

Topic 3: The Veil in Question

In [Questioning the Veil](#) (2009), which is structured as a series of open letters from one Muslim woman to another, Marnia offered a reappraisal of the four contemporary grounds for veiling—modesty, sexual harassment, cultural identity, and piety. She challenged the view that the veil is an act of resistance against Western cultural imperialism and suggested that there are more effective ways for Muslim women to assert their cultural identity, express modesty, fight sexual harassment, or express piety than by wearing a piece of cloth that ultimately expresses their anatomy rather than their humanity.

Papers that assess or build on this work, that examine the reveiling trend, or that either examine or assess defenses of veiling, fall within this topic area.

Topic 4: Foucault and Non-Western Thought

In [Foucault’s Orient](#) (2017), Marnia considered "the puzzling gap between Michel Foucault's powerful demystifying thought and his view of the Orient as an enigma beyond the grasp of

Call for Papers: Advancing the Anticolonial Sociology of Marnia Lazreg

Western reason." Digging into a vast Foucauldian oeuvre that contains relatively little discussion of non-Western thought, Marnia identified an assertion by Foucault that the "Orient" is the "limit" of Western rationality. Drawing both on Foucault's published work and original interviews that Marnia conducted with those who knew Foucault during his trips to Tunisia and Japan, Marnia suggested that, despite his critique of power and knowledge, Foucault was prone to othering the non-West. Marnia traced Foucault's disappointing outlook on the non-West to his almost complete rejection of Kant's universalist anthropology in favor of a localist conception of culture.

Papers that assess or build on this work, that consider Foucault's views on the non-West, or that assess Foucault's work in relation to non-Western thought, fall within this topic area.

Topic 5: Assessing Islamic Feminism from an Anticolonial Perspective

In [Islamic Feminism and the Discourse of Post-Liberation](#) (2021), Marnia called into question attempts by some Muslim countries, working in conjunction with Western backers seeking to combat what they see as Islamic extremism, to ground progress on women's roles in Quranic text. Focusing on Algeria, Marnia showed that this approach limits the liberatory potential both of feminism and of Islam.

Papers that assess or build on this work, or that assess Islamic feminism from an anticolonial perspective, either in general or as applied to a particular national context, fall within this topic area.

Submission Format and Deadline

Please email a PDF containing your paper title, a 500-word abstract, and the number of the topic under which you wish your submission to be considered (you may designate multiple topics for a single submission), as well as a second PDF containing your CV, to submissions@marnialazreg.work. Please place the following text in the subject line of your email (excluding the quotation marks): "[Submission]". **The deadline is April 28, 2025.**

Both senior and junior scholars, including graduate students, are invited to participate in the call for papers. Multiple abstracts may be submitted, but no more than one abstract per author will be accepted.

Acceptances will be announced in May 2025. Rough drafts of accepted papers will be due on September 1, 2025.

Publication Opportunity

Authors of accepted papers will have the option to submit their papers for inclusion in an edited conference volume to be published by a reputable academic publisher. Acceptance of the paper into the conference volume is not guaranteed. The publication timeline for the volume, including the acceptance date and deadlines for subsequent drafts, will be circulated after the conference.

Registration, Venue, and Dates

This conference will be held on September 25 and 26, 2025, in New York City at Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College and The Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York.

Call for Papers: Advancing the Anticolonial Sociology of Marnia Lazreg

Registration will open on June 1, 2025 via the conference website: marnialazreg.work . To receive an email announcement and registration link when registration opens, please subscribe to the conference email list at this link: marnialazreg.work/#conference-signup .

The conference has a pay-what-you-wish policy for conference registration. The suggested registration fee for paper presenters is \$120 for established scholars and \$70 for early career scholars. There will be an evening reception for presenters on September 25, 2025 and a dinner on September 26, 2025. At present, the reception and dinner are being planned as self-pay events.

The organizers are applying for funding and hope to be able to offer funding to participants who lack financial support from their institutions. Scholars whose abstracts have been accepted will be notified if funding becomes available.

*

“My work reflects my horror of dogma, be it theoretical, methodological or political.”

—Marnia Lazreg



ROOSEVELT HOUSE
PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE
AT HUNTER COLLEGE

