June 11, 2018

Berna Turam (North-Eastern University)

“Muslim diaspora and sanctuary cities: safe places and politics of fear

This lecture explores the ways in which cities might become more resilient as they currently respond to various forms of oppression, human rights violations, and other unjust exercises of power directed at Muslim non-citizens. Specifically, Berna Turam asks in which ways cities provide inclusion and safety to vulnerable Muslim populations. While her interdisciplinary research team explores different aspects of the sanctuary cities in Boston and Seattle, Berna’s field research takes the concept of sanctuary to the international context. Athens, Berlin and Istanbul stand out in their large-scale reception of Muslim refugees – including but not limited to Syrian refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants. Against the backdrop of anti-immigrant states that prioritize border control and security issues, she is interested in cities, urbanites and municipalities that search for and generate ways to accommodate and provide protection to vulnerable Muslim populations. Her paper juxtaposes cultural patterns – particularly urban ways of life – against the images and practices of new security states by spatializing the continuum of safety, (in)security and fear.

Berna Turam, Director of International Affairs Program and Professor of Sociology at Northeastern University, is the author of Between Islam and the State: The Politics of Engagement (Stanford University Press, 2007), and Gaining Freedoms: Claiming Space in Istanbul and Berlin (Stanford University Press, 2015), and the editor of Secular State and Religious Society: Two Forces at Play in Turkey (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). She also published articles in journals including British Journal of Sociology, International Journal of Urban and Regional Studies, Nations and Nationalism, International Feminist Journal of Politics, Contemporary Islam and Journal of Democracy. She co-edited a special issue, entitled “Secular Muslims?” in Comparative Studies of South America, Africa and the Middle East. Her article, entitled “Primacy of Space in Politics: Bargaining Space, Power and Freedom in an Istanbul neighborhood,” won the best article award from the International Journal of Urban and Regional Research in 2014. As a political sociologist, Turam has an abiding interest in conducting research on state-society interaction, particularly on the interaction between ordinary Muslim people and secular states. Her last book on Istanbul and Berlin—the city with the largest and densest Turkish neighborhood outside Turkey— reveals and analyzes the ways in which contested urban space generates democratic practices that facilitate inclusion and accommodation. By gendering political and spatial processes of inclusion and exclusion, she does intersectional analysis of religion, space and gender. Currently, she is the lead Co-PI of a comparative project on cities of refuge that explores how cities shape perception and experience of fear and safety of Muslim non-citizens. The locus of Turam’s ethnographies has extended from homeland Turkey to host lands of the Muslim, Turkish and Syrian Diaspora –specifically Almaty-Kazakhstan, Berlin-Germany Athens-Greece and North America. During her sabbatical in 2016, she was awarded two fellowships, Dahrendorf fellowship at London School of Economics and Erasmus Fellowship at Cosmopolis Department of Geography at Vrije University in Brussels.