In November 2005, when the riots that had burst out in the French ‘banlieues’, ‘quartiers’ or ‘cités’ ended, it was clear that the city of Marseille had largely remained out of the turmoil. How could Marseille, usually considered as an outpost of urban unrest, the undisputed capital of social protest and viewed as the main gate for immigrants, be immune from the contagion of violence that led the young people to set a competition among the banlieues in order to burn the greatest number of cars and fight with the police? The explanation was immediately available: it had to do with ‘l’exception marseillaise en France’ and it reactivated a very old narrative about the special place of the city within the French Nation. In the first part of the talk, the main components of the Marseillais exception will be presented by stressing three major points: the historical ‘de-territorialisation’ of the city; its impossible gentrification and its status as the “undistinguished city” par excellence. In the second part, the consequences of the Arab Spring in Marseilles will be analyzed.

Jean-Louis Fabiani, born in Algiers (Algeria), trained as a philosopher and a sociologist, got his PhD from the Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris. He has three main research interests: the historical sociology of intellectual life (recent book: Qu’est-ce qu’un philosophe français? La vie sociale des concepts, 2010), the use of ethnographic tools to study cultural audiences (L’éducation populaire et le théâtre, 2008) and the changing definition of the Cultural South (Beautés du Sud. La Provence à l’épreuve des jugements de goût, 2005). He is currently working (with Samir Allel) on the effects of the “Arab Spring” in Southern France.

Tuesday, March 13, 5:30 p.m.
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