

Call for Papers

Veiled Constellations:

The Veil, Critical Theory, Politics, and Contemporary Society

[“http://www.veiledconstellations.com/callforpapers.html”](http://www.veiledconstellations.com/callforpapers.html)

Seymour Schulich Building
York University
Toronto, Canada
June 3-5, 2010

co-sponsored by:

Department of Political Science (graduate program)
Centre for Human Rights
Graduate Students' Association
Department of Sociology (graduate program)
Department of Communication and Culture (graduate program)
York University

Overview

This conference offers a forum to problematize the prevailing discourses surrounding the veil while exploring the veil's subversive potential. The extent to which the veil can erode, or even invert power and oppression is, with the exception of various Islam-inspired positions, an overlooked and under-explored area of academic theorizing. We ask what new insights may be unearthed in moving beyond the impetus to repudiate, fear, or adore the veil. This conference is a unique opportunity to discuss those contested voices situated within the interstices of the liberal, conservative and Islamic constellations, and, in the

process, to re-evaluate the veil in an entirely new light by intersecting multiple disciplinary perspectives. Perhaps as importantly, we see the appraisal of critical theory in moving theory beyond the mainstream discursive impasse as central to epistemological responsibility and accountability. This event will highlight highly innovative and thought-provoking approaches to not only the Islamic veil, but the veil as such. We envision the rich insights of critical inquiry as an under-utilized terrain that may help unpack the current intellectual discourse on the veil. Essentially, we seek a different kind of conversation and a different set of lexical and philosophical devices to navigate the many paradoxes that the veil represents.

From our perspective, part of this conversation should address the relationship between theory and policy as it pertains to the veil and Muslims in contemporary society. We imagine that some innovation in addressing the real and perceived contradictions of the veil could meaningfully contribute to policy discussions. Specifically, we would like to consider the effects of re-interpretations of the veil on the personal, social, and political life of veiled people. The act of pursuing novel political spaces (re-conceptualizing the veil and advancing new forms of understanding) may have the concomitant effect of advertently or inadvertently bridging disparate communities, and potentially easing domestic policy efforts to control, contain, and assimilate veiled people. Such theorizing may encourage the re-examination of foreign policy approaches towards Muslim societies by providing the necessary intellectual atmosphere to transcend fear and enter constructive dialogue. Participants of this conference will therefore be encouraged to relate radical reinterpretations of the veil to the religion of Islam, and the relationship(s) between Muslims and contemporary society.

Elaboration

Although there is a rich supply of documentation and research on the veil, the qualitative nature of the veil is under-theorized. The entrenched debate among competing mainstream understandings of the veil, the increasing politicization of the veil, made most prominent by conservative and radical secular movements within the EU and by a growing literature that paints the veil as a threat to human rights and/or security, have had an immeasurable effect on inter-cultural exchanges, especially in metropolitan centers. These secular forms of theorizing and debating have been countered by a concurrent movement, spearheaded by

Islamic-minded thinkers: the shrouding of the female form as a variation of patriarchal resistance. Given the amplified visibility of the veil and the growing desire of people to veil and unveil, what kinds of research options can move us beyond this analytical impasse? Have the responses to the liberal, conservative, and Islamic positions on the veil been cogent? What theoretical questions have not yet been asked? What impact has this hitherto insoluble debate had on those who choose everyday to wear the veil? These questions are tremendously relevant, possibly overdue, in large part because of the increasing salience and persuasiveness of the contested perspectives on the veil. Such views are reinforced by the uncertainties of a post 9/11 world, including the prevailing social and political mistrust of multifarious actors. The protracted debate in Canada and abroad, to the exclusion and possible silencing of all other views, leads invariably to the stultification of thought and action. This conference seeks then, in the face of these trends, to bring previously unheard views on the veil to the fore.

Within Canadian society, the relationship between those who veil and the veil itself is complex. People navigate any number of positions in this regard. At times, we discover those who "deify" the textile, exhibiting forms of extreme attachment to it. With others, a relative indifference towards the injunction to veil is evident, which sometimes turns into an unrelenting evasion of the veil's obligatory weight. The veil could be viewed as fabric, symbol, symptom, means, ends, expression, submission, a reclaiming, empowerment, a voiding process, protection, separation, sacrifice, or facilitating a sigh of relief. Has the mainstream debate adequately addressed these and other understandings of the veil? What new questions can be asked? For example, can one "deify" the veil and yet continuously evade it? Can people engage in indifference towards the veil as a form of evasion? In what ways is orthodox observance of the veil a subversive and revolutionary act? How powerful is the veil in undermining the forces of assimilation in Canada? How do people who veil navigate the difficulty of the veil as protection and separation? How well do veiled people understand themselves? These, and other counter-intuitive—sometimes paradoxical—questions need to be confronted and assessed.

A central purpose of this event is to engage these questions in new ways in order to render more flexible, more porous—possibly to completely undo—the boundaries that seek to encapsulate, control, and own the veil. Not only will the prevailing

discourses be interrogated and problematized, the very spaces opened up by this event will likewise undergo the same rigorous investigation.

We welcome submissions of all sorts that deal with the issue, including those that take cross-cultural, historical, and/or comparative approaches. Submission formats may include academic papers from any relevant discipline and/or creative submissions such as poetry, video performances, storytelling, visual arts and other alternative formats. We promote traditional modes of presentation such as panels and roundtables, but are also open to other interesting and innovative approaches.

We encourage submissions from all disciplines that push the boundaries of creativity and intellectual discussion, and that take a critical and previously unexplored position on the veil. For example, we are very interested in exploring the interpretative possibilities that arise from psychoanalytic approaches to the veil (especially that of Lacanian theory). This being said, the veil can be investigated in relation to a whole assortment of topics, which we welcome and encourage. We will privilege those submissions that raise the level of debate to new heights of originality.

Suggested Themes:

The veil can be related to: militarism, revolution, warrior/guerrilla movements, the postcolonial experience, un-doing borders, citizenship, nationalism, the commodity form, the market, labor, jouissance, feminine sexuation, patriarchy, matriarchy, empowerment, identity, the beautiful, the sublime, beingness, popular culture, prisons, enclosures, concealing males, epistemology, philosophy, art, calligraphy, history, poverty, civil disobedience, political participation, social justice, motherhood, anarchism, geography, urban environment, and literature.

How to Submit Proposals for Participation:

Proposals for papers, films, or other formats should include:

- 1) Paper/project title
- 2) Name and contact information (mail, email, phone, affiliations)

- 3) Bio (approx. 50 words)
- 4) Abstract (maximum 150 words)
- 5) Technology needs for presentation (please be specific)
- 6) Translation needs, if applicable
- 7) Desire to present via teleconferencing/video-conferencing

Proposals for panels and roundtables should include:

- 1) Panel/roundtable title
- 2) Name and contact information (and paper title, if applicable) for each presenter (mail, email, phone, affiliations)
- 3) Bio of each speaker (approx. 50 words for each speaker)
- 4) Abstract explaining the panel/roundtable's focus (maximum 150 words)
- 5) Names and contact information (mail, email, phone, affiliations) for any discussant(s) or respondent(s)
- 6) Technology needs of presentations (please be specific)
- 7) Translation needs, if applicable
- 8) Desire to present via teleconferencing/videoconferencing

Please send *complete* proposal submissions to: submissions@veiledconstellations.com by Thursday, October 1st, 2009.