

VEILED CONSTELLATIONS: THE VEIL, CRITICAL THEORY, POLITICS, AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY
YORK UNIVERSITY AND THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
JUNE 3-5 2010

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ABSTRACTS

Keynote Speaker

Ellie Ragland

Professor

University of Missouri-Columbia

Title of Presentation:

The Islamic Veil, the Phallus, and the Semblant

While Russell Grigg argues that the phallus is not a semblant, Jacques-Alain Miller teaches that it is. One way to approach this question is around the veil of the Islamic culture. The answer will claim that the veil is a semblant and, as such, one of the examples of the imaginary phallus in Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic teaching. I shall argue that, not only is the veil a semblant of the phallus, but the veil is also a symptom of the question: What is Woman? As a symptom of male phallic castration (\$), the veil itself works as a kind of "non-delivered meaning," one definition Jacques-Alain Miller gives of the symptom. As a signifier of jouissance, as is the phallus, the veil hides that which is impossible to say and, thus, leads to the object a which refers to a jouissance beyond words, a jouissance whose first roots in the attachment of the infant to the mother's body as a collection of partial objects cause-of-desire. The Father's Name signifier reappears in the veil as a third thing, a phallic prohibition against a supposed

Oneness between the infant and the mother. Thus, the veil proscribes the jouissance of woman as a phallic mask that covers over her sexuality, her gaze, her lips, sometimes even her voice. Insofar as the veil is meant to calm the effect of the drives (the real) within the symbolic, it is a semblant, an emblem of Woman's being placed outside the symbolic, on the side of the real. What is woman's object, the veil asks, she herself being man's object? I shall argue that the veil is the phallic semblant that organizes the paternal metaphor (Oedipal structure) in Islamic culture around the Father's Name signifier and the imaginary phallus while making the woman the coordinate of those signifiers. Indeed, the veil is the semblant of the truth in jouissance and of reality in the phallic function.

Plenary Speakers

Reina Lewis

Professor

London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London

Title of Presentation:

Between Conscience and Commodity: Young Women, Hijab, and the Fashion Industry

This paper analyses the relationship between modest dress and the fashion industry, using interviews with veiled UK shopworkers to evaluate how young women combine conscience and commodity as they negotiate store uniform/dress codes in a context where their hijab makes visible their faith. Examining the potential challenges this poses for company merchandising and HR strategies, the paper also draws on interviews with HR managers concerning their implementation of new UK/EU legislation protecting the expression of faith and belief at work.

Whilst mainstream brands generally ignore the potential of niche markets for modest clothing, the increasing visibility of fashionable Muslim women offers an opportunity to consider the impact of fashion as a mode for intercultural/interfaith dialogue and exchange. With many young people seeing little conflict between faith and fashion, to what extent are new taste communities a force for progressive cultural politics or evidence of incorporation by commodity capitalism?

Jennifer Heath

Title of Presentation:

Visible and Invisible Spaces: History, Lore, and Politics of the Veil

Veiling – of women, men, and sacred places and objects – has existed among people of countless cultures and religions from time immemorial. Yet the veil is vastly misunderstood. Once upon a time, the veil in all its multiplicity was more or less taken for granted everywhere as, at the very least, an essential expression of the divine mysteries. Today, veiling is globally polarizing, a locus for the struggle between Islam and the West and between modern and traditional interpretations of Islam, a battleground for power and political agendas.

Veiling spans time long before Islam and space far beyond the Middle East. This talk will engage received wisdom about veiling practices worldwide, and is based on material presented in my 2008 anthology, *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics* (University of California Press). The talk will put veiling into universal context by reviewing various practices -- among them male veiling, veiling in pre-Abrahamic periods, in Judaism and Christianity, purdah in India, the politics of hair, and the veil in popular culture -- and reflecting on the great ubiquity, importance and profundity of the veil throughout human history and imagination. We will consider how current issues of the veil are related to and also distract from deeply urgent feminist concerns of poverty, disease, hunger, maternal and infant death rates, environmental degradation, and war.

Speakers (Organized in alphabetical order)

Rikke Andreassen

Associated Professor
Malmö University

Title of Presentation:

Destabilizing Effects of the Veil(s) - Examples from Contemporary Europe

This paper moves beyond traditional discourses of the veil as either oppressive or liberating. It argues for not simply replacing a paranoid reading of the veil with a reparative reading (Sedgwick); but instead to ask new questions. The question is not ‘Can the veil be subversive?’ but rather in which specific moments and spaces are veils destabilizing? By analyzing European examples of legislation and debate, I show how women’s veiling function as a tool to resist mainstream European society (Yeğenoğlu). But

more importantly I take this analysis further and how this resistance destabilize historically well-established political formations like the political right-left wing division and the women's movement(s). The subversive potential of the veil is not simply the resistance (Yeğenoğlu; Fanon) but rather the (unintended) destabilizing effects of resistance. I further illustrate how veiling destabilizes hegemonic representation of nationality and whiteness when large amounts of women wearing niqabs are white converts.

Heather Marie Akou

Assistant Professor
Indiana University

Title of Presentation:

Islamic Swimsuits: Filling a Need or Creating a New One?

In response to consumer demand as well as events like the Asian Games and Islamic Solidarity Games, several online retailers have begun selling Islamic swimsuits. The “burqini,” for example, manufactured by the Australian-owned company Ahiida, consists of pants and a thigh-length tunic with a hood, covering everything but the hands, face, and feet of the wearer. The polyester fabric, which is also used by surfers and offers protection from the sun up to SPF 50+, is designed to allow maximum modesty as well as mobility. Although the company's website claims that “Our garments are designed with the respect of Islamic values and aimed to enhance the lifestyle of the active Muslim female,” swimsuits like this raise several questions: Are they really hijab? Are they really necessary? And to what degree does this create new stereotypes concerning what the “proper” Muslim female athlete should look like?

Ailya Vajid, Celene Ayat Lizzio, Lulie El-Ashry, and Naila A. Baloch

Harvard University and Tufts University

Title of Presentation:

Critiquing the Gendered Concepts of 'Awra and Fitna within Classical Muslim Jurisprudence

With recourse to Baber Johansen's most recent work on 9th through 16th century Islamic legal discourse (*fiqh*), this paper presents a concise trajectory of the major developments in pre-modern legal theorists' construction of *'awra*, the legal term for the parts of the body that require some degree of concealment according to dominant strains of argumentation. Following Johansen's insights, this paper demonstrates how social class, particular notions of gender, and ideas about human nature and biology explicitly informed jurists' conceptions of who is advised, permitted or *not* permitted to conceal certain parts of their body, and in what contexts. The paper then employs various theoretical lenses to offer

up frameworks for grappling with 'awra as a functional legal concept distinct from its Quranic usage. Through engaging with and critiquing the jurists' legal conception of 'awra, it is our intention to show how specific pre-modern circumstances and normative assumptions pertaining to the dignity, biology and social function of human beings have--under the pretense of God's law--heavily informed contemporary religious identity and devotional practice.

Ayse Batur

Ph.D. Candidate

University of Western Ontario

Title of Presentation:

The Mythology of the Veil

This paper provides a mythological reading of the discourse of the veil especially as it emerged in Europe in the last 20 years. In order to trespass the impasses of the debates around the veil that aim to make sense of the veil, the paper will argue that the veil is not a symbol or a sign, but it's a myth; it's a stolen speech, draining the particular cultural, regional histories of a clothing, restoring in its place an "Islamism," and moreover, distorting the religious history of European societies and its colonial past. Hence, the semiological method of Roland Barthes is employed for a reading of the veil, in an attempt to look at the debates from the point of view of the veil itself, that is, of the particular object of that is worn by a particular person.

Valerie Behiery

Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and Concordia University

Title of Presentation:

Alternative Narratives of the Veil in Contemporary Art

The mainstream use of the veil as a visual shorthand for the oppressed Muslim woman, and by extension for the misogyny of Islam, stands in sharp contrast to representations of the veil in contemporary art unequivocally delineating complex views of the sign, both as a garment and as a representational strategy. As the latter have yet to be critically examined, I am proposing, to map, through an analysis of specific works produced by women artists of Muslim descent, three alternative visual narratives of the veil. The contextualized veil, the postcolonial veil and the *subject-ive* veil all simultaneously subvert and rewrite the sign, often using the veil itself to operate its re-inflection. Both the specific works and the new narratives of the veil they bring forward reorient the gaze; by displacing *the* veil, a site of cross-cultural mistranslation, they remap the world and uncover the possible spaces of transnational communication.

Victoria I. Burke

Lecturer

University of Toronto

Title of Presentation:

Virgin Desire: Hegel, Lacan, and the Politics of the Veil

For Hegel, self-consciousness' relation to itself is an identity which is difference, and comprehension of this self-relation is the object of desire. This self-relation can only be known to self-consciousness when it is reflected in the recognition of another. Lacan develops Hegel by adding that the reflection in the recognition of the other is an imagined fantasy, the *petite object a*. Man's identity with himself is a fantasy of self-possession that forever eludes him, and to which his only access is his reflection in the eyes of the other. The woman, perhaps the veiled woman, is not herself a subject and thereby not an agent struggling for power in the community of mutual recognition, but nevertheless holds the unrepresentable, but indispensable power of *recognizing*. She is self-consciousness' veiled, but living mirror.

Daelana Burrell

Diablo Valley College

Title of Presentation:

Over Exposed and Completely Covered: Veiling and Contradiction in the Work of Ghada Amer

The extremes and contradictions in the work of contemporary transnational artist Ghada Amer mirror the fallacies associated with polarized positions on the veil, especially the possibilities of women's sexuality and bodily agency that are circumscribed, assumed, or eliminated by these positions. At one extreme, Amer's works show explicit female sexuality, while at the other, she also deals with the complete shrouding of the female form. Amer's art practice centers around female sexuality and explores the dangers of complete cover as well as complete exposure, with each extreme standing in for a polarized position on veiling and cover. She invokes the erotic possibilities in each position: the sexualization of cover, where a glimpse of finger can be erotic, and pornographic representations of women engaging in sex acts. This reflects an important contradiction occurring in contemporary society: the erotics of both veiling and exposure and their concomitant negation of sexual agency.

Ipek A. Celik

Post-Doctoral Fellow
Brown University

Title of Presentation:

Veiled Women's Narratives as Marketable Commodities

Since the 1980s the mainstream media in Germany has frequently focused on its minorities' supposed "failure to integrate" into Western liberal democracy. The figure of the veiled Muslim woman, frequently portrayed as the victim of patriarchal tradition and ahistorical religion, provides key visual evidence in this narrative. Fiction and films in Germany have often portrayed veiled women's lives through narratives of claustrophobia and imprisonment in the domestic sphere. This paper analyzes Turkish-German writer Feridun Zaimoglu's collections, *Head-Stuff* and *Black Virgins*, interviews conducted with Turkish-German and Muslim women respectively. I inquire into the possibility for constructing a space where the experience of veiled minority women can provoke theorization of symbolic societal violence without the assumption of passive victimhood. I further explore market forces that impact the performance of being a "minority writer" in Germany in order to theorize the relationship between symbolic societal violence, liberal German consumption, and market expectations.

Diane Detournay

Ph.D. Candidate
University of Minnesota

Title of Presentation:

Mary Wollstonecraft and the Figure of the Oppressed Muslim Woman

In *The Politics of the Veil*, Joan Scott makes the provocative argument that the insistent focus on the veil as an object of controversy reveals the anxieties at the heart of French republicanism. In particular, she suggests that the veil makes visible the contradictions in a model of abstract individualism that conceives of equality in terms of sameness. Put otherwise, the veiled Muslim woman affirms what French republicanism must disavow: the irreducible *meaningfulness* of sexual difference. This paper argues that the figure of the Muslim woman is more intimately interwoven into the conceptual structure of liberalism than Scott's argument allows. Returning to Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* (1792) reveals that, at its emergence, the political subject of feminism is rendered coherent through the oppression of Islam. More than a source of anxiety, then, the figure of the oppressed Muslim woman is a difference that the lineage of women's rights cannot do without.

Aude Dieudé

Ph.D. Candidate
Duke University

Title of Presentation:

Histories of the Veil, Veiled Histories

In the French language, the terminology of the veil encapsulates two different definitions and notions depending on whether it is masculine or feminine. On the one hand, “un voile” refers to a light and transparent piece of clothing covering the woman’s face or body, such as the piece of fabric that covers the face, forehead or hair of a woman for religious reasons. On the other, “une voile” has a completely different meaning in the French language and can be translated in English by the word “sail” thanks to which the (slave)ship can move forward with the strength of the wind; so are the colonial implications embedded within this particular word. Thinking about both definitions of the same word through the lenses of colonialism, gender and race, my attempt is to explore how the stories of the concept of the veil highlight the veiled histories of orientalism, exoticism, and slavery.

Anicée (Anisseh) Van Engeland

Reader in International Law
University of Bedfordshire

Title of Presentation:

Chador Passport and the Empowerment of Iranian Women Under the Islamic Republic

A notable feature of the protests that sprang to life since the manipulation of elections results in June 2009 in Iran is the absence of women tearing up their veils. Some expected women to take the opportunity of the massive scale cheat of Ahmadinejad to put an end to the Islamic republic of Iran. The reason why Iranian women did not burn or tear their veil apart is because Iranian women have long been used to consider it as a passport for freedom and social existence. It is called the chador-passport which allows Iranian women to access most levels of public sphere. The trade-off has been too rewarding for women to challenge all these *acquis*. The paper will explain why the veil is not so much an issue in Iran although it has become a tool for propaganda for those wishing to see the end of the regime.

Melissa Finn

Ph.D. Candidate
York University

Title of Presentation:

The Epistemology of the Veil and the Polyphonic Voice

The classical and mainstream, even feminist understandings of the veiled woman's knowing operate largely within a phallogocentric and scientific paradigm. Through this paradigm, the veiled woman is treated as a passive object (carved, frozen, docile), observable (and discoverable despite her covering), singular, dialectical, and specular (a mirror presentation of being). The voice of this docile object is singular and muted. Slightly more progressive thinkers measure the operative nature of a veiled woman's voice relative to the extent of disclosure. This view recognizes that multiple forms of veiling produces multiple forms of voice. On one end of the spectrum, the woman in full burka is unknowing and muted, and on the other end of the spectrum, the woman minimally veiled, or even better, unveiled, is knowing and expressive. Such conceptualizations distort the ontology of the veiled woman (presenting it as multiple relative to the degree of veiling) and inaccurately differentiate her knowing (presenting it as singular or pseudo-multiple). In addressing the inaccuracies of these views, this paper asks one simple question: what is the true epistemology of the veiled woman, as such? I suggest that Bakhtin's concept of polyphony provides useful clues to locate and describe this epistemology. Bakhtin was fascinated with the unitary subject, especially in literature, who possessed multiple forms of consciousness. Employing the insights of Bakhtin's literary theory (but being unhampered by its limitations), this paper argues that the ontology of the veiled woman is unitary and the epistemology authentically polyphonic. Within the parameters of Islamic epistemology and therefore outside the phallogocentric scientism of disembodied knowingness, the voice of the veiled woman is not graspable, her ontological unity produces consciousness that is unfinalizable, precisely because it is continually transformed through interaction. There is no fixed image of the veiled woman precisely because there is no monologic unity in the epistemology of the veiled woman. The veiled woman's polyphonic voice is revealed in those moments when the limits of her character and personality are exceeded, when she ceases to be herself or to be what is expected of her (and thus embraces her inherent mystique), when she ruptures singular, finalizing representations, and as she actively embodies subjectivity, nomadic departure, multi-relationality, and connectiveness.

Sana Ghani

M.A. Candidate

University of Alberta

Title of Presentation:

Unveiling Narratives: The Veil as a Discursive Pattern in Abu-Lughod's Veiled Sentiments

Lila Abu-Lughod's *Veiled Sentiments*, an ethnography of a Bedouin community of the Egyptian Western Desert, has been highly acclaimed for its fascinating analysis of gender relations, traditions of oral lyric

poetry and their implication in a system of social hierarchy. In my paper, I attempt a critical reading of this ethnography by bringing Todorov's analysis of the aspects of narrative and Ricoeur's theory of metaphor to bear on this literary text. Through a rigorously close reading of her text, I find that her analysis is itself discursively structured as an 'unveiling'. The narrator sets up a promise for the narratee of a transition from a state of external objective observation, to revelation of the internal subjective 'truth' concealed behind various 'veils' or boundaries. I want to bring my analysis into a larger discussion of the rhetorical trope of the 'veil' or 'unveiling' in Western narratives of recognition of truth.

Shahla Haeri

Associate Professor
Boston University

Title of Presentation:

Veiling Mannequins: Market Meets Modesty in Iran

In this paper/performance I explore the intersection of modesty and market by looking at the images of veiled mannequins prominently displayed in the windows of shops and stores in several cities in Iran, including Tehran. I plan to create a power point presentation of the many photos I have taken in several cities in Iran in the past two years (2008-09). I ask why is it necessary to cover a female mannequin's hair while exposing the rest of her body in provocative dresses. What is so troublesome about women's hair that ought to be covered even if it is displayed by a mannequin? How do shops in the bazaars and boutiques in the elegant neighbourhood of Iranian cities try to negotiate the religious state's mandate for female modesty, women's desire for western fashion, and market vagaries?

Anya Hussain

M.A. Candidate
Ryerson University

Title of Presentation:

Is Punk Music Haram?: Reflections on the Veil in Taqwacore

This paper seeks to examine the ways in which the discourse surrounding the Veil is disrupted and reappropriated within the Islamic punk scene. *The Taqwacores*, written in 2003 was a fictional account of the lives of young Muslim punks, and has given birth to an actual musical subculture that flirts with the transgressions between Islam and punk rock. This paper will pay particular attention to the way the Veil has been subversively used as a prop to enhance performative dimensions in Taqwacore and will analyze the Veil as a potent signifier within the lyrics and artwork (album covers) of artists in this musical scene. In doing so, some questions I wish to explore include; how does Taqwacore disrupt contemporary

discourses surrounding the Veil? How does this space reposition their Muslim identities within Islam and Western culture? If so, what does it mean to be both a punk and a veiled woman?

Celeste Ianniciello

Ph.D.

University of Naples L'Orientale

Title of Presentation:

Veiled Identities, Intercultural Visions: the Art of Zineb Sedira

In Western discourses the veil is often instrumentally associated to cultural backwardness and female oppression, thus transcending the multiplicity and complexity of veiling practices.

My paper will consider the weight of the veil in the intercultural dialogue and in the strategies of power by focusing on the language of visual art. In particular, I shall analyse the autobiographical artworks of Zineb Sedira where a "veiled" identity emerges in the interstices of different cultures and geographies (Algerian, French, English). The image of the veiled woman becomes, in Sedira's art, an interrogative space, a critical instance against the power over women. I shall, then, emphasize how the artist challenges what she terms as "the veiling of the mind", i. e. censorship and auto-censorship, or the impossibility and inability to comprehend the multiplicity of the veil - as well as cultural and sexual identity - in both Islamic and Western (or non-Islamic) societies.

Roshan Jahangeer

Ph.D. Candidate

York University

Title of Presentation:

Phantasizing Pain: Unraveling the Trauma of Forced Unveiling

This paper prepares the ground for a theoretical elaboration of the bodily subjectivity that is formed through the performative practice of veiling. I depart from Frantz Fanon, who has theorized that the body of the unveiled Algerian woman undergoes spatial disorientation while traveling through the once familiar city, and borrow from psychoanalysis in asking whether sensations of the veil remain as phantasm on the surface of the once-veiled body? What happens to the veiled body that has been coerced to unveil itself through threat of legal punishment? Is there a type of phantasmic pain that results from forced unveiling that is only intelligible to those who exist within a particular cultural, religious or bodily subjectivity? I examine these questions in relation to theory and policy surrounding

the veil and Muslims in contemporary society.

Elissa Lerner

M.A. Candidate
New York University

Title of Play:

Abraham's Daughters

Sarah, a Jew, Ranya, a Muslim, Kate, a Christian, and Will, an atheist, meet in their first hours of freshman year and form a companionship. At this elite American university, three young women deal with their relationships to each other and their beliefs in the face of the challenges of freshman year. The play addresses issues, misconceptions, or prejudices that are not often raised upfront. How does a veiled woman deal with university drinking and hook-up culture? In what ways does an external religious symbol aid or detract from internal spiritual rigor? How do we find answers to questions we are embarrassed to ask? Ranya's story is that of a bright American-born Muslim, raised by her religious but liberal Lebanese family. She is caught between her traditions and integration, grappling with sexuality as taboo and liberation, and most of all coping with her new Jewish and Christian friends, as her first year of college unfolds from within and around her.

Christina Lindholm

Associate Dean
Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts

Title of Presentation:

Retaining an Islamic Image: The Modern Abaya in Qatar

Sura 24: 31 of the Qur'an admonishes women to cover so as not to attract the male gaze. This is the reason given for the billowing black robes worn by almost all Muslim women in the tiny Persian Gulf country of Qatar. These abayas, worn for years in the pre-oil era, are now being replaced on a frequent basis by robes that still conceal the female form but display a wide variety of embellishment. Sandikci and Ger state that 'The appeal and pursuit of a chic, elegant, and modern look...point to the universal attraction of the Western notion of fashion.'

Now near the top of the world index for income per capita, Qatari women are able to afford and have embraced a fashion cycle that requires distinctive robes in the latest styles. This paper explores the tensions between presenting a modern, fashionable self and adhering to Islam's requirements for

modesty.

Megan MacDonald

Ph.D. Candidate

State University of New York (Buffalo)

Title of Presentation:

SUR/VEIL: The Veil as Blank(et) Signifier

Examining the veil as a purported marker of difference in the West opens up connections between surveillance, desire, terror and resistance. The world surveil connects the gaze-as-surveillance, locating it when the word is split: sur/veil, *on* the veil. Serving as a blank(et) signifier, the veil both encompasses discourses, refusing specificity and allowing for “blanket statements,” while also serving as a muting device of alternative voices.

Following the traveling veil involves reconstruction of a complex genealogy: such a genealogical project revisits Fanon’s “Algeria Unveiled” as an instance of women’s resistance in the colony, that moves to the ex-metropole and the ban on religious symbols in French public schools (where postcolonial France reveals its inability to both mourn a lost colonial past and “assimilate” those it used to rule) and arrives at Azadeh Moaveni’s memoir “Lipstick Jihad” where we witness performative citizenship in Tehran and Manhattan. Such a genealogical approach to the question of the veil moves beyond the notion of veil as screen for western fantasies (where fear and desire are in constant slippage) or the calls for rescuing women. What it calls for is the exchange and solidarity between disciplines, texts, and practices rather than a complicity with the rhetoric of a global ‘war on terror’ and military-industrial agendas.

Svitlana Matviyenko

Ph.D. Candidate

University of Missouri-Columbia

Title of Presentation:

The Veil between Fear and Jouissance

The veil participates in many realms of culture, closely pertaining to the discourses of theory and policy that interpret the complexity of its manifestations of the “visible” and “invisible” in a variety of contexts. In Seminar XI, Lacan distinguishes between the field of vision and the scopic field respectively as “a relationship to reality without *jouissance*” and the field one does not perceive, does not feel, does not see, and where one does not experience the loss of the *objet petit a*. Unlike the field of vision, the scopic field “can permit the forgetting of castration and it is also a field that reduces anxiety, a pacifying field”

(Miller, *The Prisons of Jouissance* 50). I see the attempt to interpret the veil through Lacanian theoretical elaborations on the fields of vision and the scopic field as contributing to transcending fear and the beginning of a dialogue.

Arshavez Mozafari

Ph.D. Candidate
University of Toronto

Title of Presentation:

The Primordial Glance: Hegel, Lacan and Suhrawardi

Nima Naghibi

Associate Professor
Ryerson University

Title of Presentation:

Compassionate Subjects, Objects of Compassion: The Unveiling of Neda and the Post-Election Protests in Iran

On June 20, 2009, a young woman, Neda Agha-Soltan was shot and killed by sniper fire during the post-election unrest in Iran. The last moments of her death were captured by a cell phone video camera, and after it was posted on YouTube, it immediately became one of the site's most watched videos. Television news stations played the footage of Neda's death on a loop. There are now websites such as "weareallneda.com" where people post comments and mourn her death, as well as numerous Facebook pages devoted to Neda's memory.

This paper will explore the ways in which the endless circulation of Neda's (veiled and unveiled) body, and the repeated posting of the video of her grisly death create a highly problematic relationship between the spectator as compassionate subject and the actor as the object of compassion. Further, this endless looping of the video of Neda's death on social networking sites and on news media have made a spectacle of Neda's death, invoking representations of the idealized, romanticized, and veiled/unveiled corpse.

Amber Fatima Riaz

Ph.D. Candidate
University of Western Ontario

Title of Presentation:

Veiled Interstitialities: Re-imagining the Muslim Veil

I use a multidisciplinary approach to show that the cloak (burqa) adopted by some Muslim women functions as a closet, or a “third space” which is free from patriarchal controls. The burqa allows women to transgress the border between public and private, and becomes the curtain that shields the feminine body from the male gaze. I highlight the complexity of the veil by drawing upon multiple voices: Luce Irigaray constructs the veil as a curtain that reveals and conceals a body simultaneously, creating an intensely feminine space (“Belief Itself”). Homi K. Bhabha conceptualizes interstitial spaces inhabited by hybrid postcolonial subjects that allow dialogue to take place. I see the burqa as a point of collision between these two ideas about “enclosed” spaces. My proposed paper will explore this intersection, in order to re-construct the veil as a tool used by women to navigate the borders between religious injunction and cultural practice.

Jenna D. Rice

Ph.D. Candidate
Stanford University

Title of Presentation:

Approaching God: Veiling, Secularity, and Subjectivity in the French Republic

This paper is based on preliminary ethnographic research in Arabic language schools in the suburbs of Paris, France in 2005, and 9 months of study at Sciences Po, Paris from 2003-2004, the year when the “headscarf controversy” reached its most recent crescendo. Drawing upon sustained conversations with veiled Muslim women between the ages of 12 and 26, I examine the ways in which these women speak their experience through frames inspired at once by Islamic vocabularies, and by popular discourses on secularity, or *laïcité*. Drawing upon thinkers such as Dakhliya, Mahmood, and Merleau-Ponty, I argue that there is something that evades French political discourse on the headscarf that may, in fact, pose a challenge to the Republic of a very different nature: for my interlocutors, veiling indexes a set of practices and understandings about being in the world that destabilize certain liberal and republican presuppositions about the normative French subject.

Stacey Scriver

Post-Doctoral Researcher
National University of Ireland

Title of Presentation:

Dislocating the Veil

If gender is performative then the wearing of the veil is an act of theatre that at once creates and encloses a new gender. But this 'gender', and the cultural meanings it translates, is, like other gender identities, by no means uniform. Approaching the 'veiled woman' as a unique gender is both constraining and constructive. It undermines the legitimacy of non-Muslim/un-veiled feminists to speak for the veiled woman and universalises the various women who wear the veil; but, it also opens space for new discourses that allow the veiled woman to represent her interests as distinct from, and often in contradiction to, those of mainstream Western feminism. This paper considers the possibilities and ramifications for theory and policy of dislocating the veiled woman from the normative discourses of women's issues and subjectivity within the context of the Western world.

Faegheh Shirazi

Professor
University of Texas at Austin

Title of Presentation:

Islam and Barbie: the Commodification of Hijabi Dolls

This study examines the issue of the commodification of Islam, specifically in the context of toys and more precisely, in the context of what is marketed and sold as "Islamic" or "Muslim" dolls. In this particular study, I refer to this emerging phenomenon as "hijabi" dolls. One of my objectives is to question the validity of associating a religion with a toy; in this case, a doll. Can the costuming of a child's plaything equate imbuing this object with a reverent quality? New entrepreneurs and their strategic marketing techniques are challenging the monopoly of Barbie, the American cultural icon. By intentionally appealing to concerned Islamic consumers—comparing and contrasting Barbie's morality, look, and accoutrements with the more conservative "Hijabi" dolls—these entrepreneurs are transforming an innocent, fanciful plaything into a powerful symbol for religious correctness and piety. In doing so, they are turning profits and engaging in opportunistic exploitation. The dolls, after all, are simply symbols fueling a necessary debate about the significance and implications of religious commodification.

Kim Shively

Assistant Professor
Kutztown University

Title of Presentation:

Muddying the Waters: Headscarves and Islam in Modern Turkey

The visibility of the Islamic headscarf is an issue of intense contention in Turkey. The secularist establishment is concerned that allowing Islamic practices like veiling in public institutions would endanger Turkish-style laicism, while those who oppose the government agitate for the freedom to practice religion as they see fit. This paper discusses how the headscarf debate in Turkey stems, in part, from very different understandings of what “Islam” is. The secularist state has established policies based on an interpretation of Islam that maintains that certain religious practices, such as veiling, can be discarded without harm to the practitioner’s faith. Yet this characterization of Islam is based on a Western, especially Protestant, concept of religion, where private individual faith is emphasized over social religious practice. Such an interpretation conflicts with other understandings of Islam thriving in Turkey, especially those interpretations that maintain that practices like veiling are essential to genuine Islam.

Smriti Singh

Assistant Professor
Indian Institute of Technology Patna

Title of Presentation:

Purdah and Castration: An Examination of Indian Writings

This paper will deal with the notion of the ‘purdah’ (veil) in Indian writings. How is the veil related to sexuality? The paper will examine if the idea of veiling is linked to the phenomenon of castration as explained by Freud. Fanon, in his work ‘Algeria Unveiled’, places great emphasis upon the sacred status of women in relation to the anti-colonial struggle. Thus, the act of forced unveiling was considered tantamount to colonial infiltration and occupation. If Fanon’s logic is to be accepted, then are women raping—and thus castrating—themselves by discarding the veil? The paper will examine these questions by studying the writings of nationalists during pre-independent India. The theories of Freud, Lacan and feminist critics such as Luce Irigaray will be applied.

Maria Stehle

Assistant Professor
University of Tennessee Knoxville

Title of Presentation:

Gender, Performance, and Cityscape: Germany and the Veil in Popular Culture

Since the 1990s, the veil plays a powerful role in negotiating questions of national/cultural belonging, gender identity, and definitions of public space in Germany. I examine veiling in TV and hip-hop in order to theorize its relationship to gendered and racialized city-spaces. Many seek to escape this politically loaded discourse by avoiding female characters wearing hijab. Others, aware of the impossibility of escaping the racialized politics of headscarf debates, deploy the headscarf to express alternate forms of communal attachment, female emancipation, or as political provocation. I analyze the potential of the veil as performance, as fashion icon, and as a symbol of defiance in recreating the German cityscape. How do artists intervene in mainstream discourses of veiling? How do they position themselves in relationship to constructions of gender, femininity, and belonging? How do they use the veil as a vehicle to renegotiate spaces rendered and gendered “public” and “private”?

Tom Stern

Lecturer

University College London

Title of Presentation:

Discovering the Covered: The Veil in 19th Century European Philosophy

In his poem, 'The Veiled Statue at Sais', Schiller tells the story of a student who, in his frenzied need to discover the truth, hears of a veiled statue and of the myth that whoever lifts the veil will behold the truth. Unable to restrain himself, the student lifts the veil and is rewarded with unspeakable horror and an early demise. My paper uses Schiller's poem as the start of a discussion about the significance of the veil (and other forms of facial concealment) as it appears in the writings of a number of key figures in the history of thought in Western Europe (focusing in particular on Nietzsche and Proust).

The image of the veil occurs not as a symbol of innocence or chastity, but rather as one of empowerment and possibility. That is, the veil is used not as a mode of concealment, but rather as something that reveals and opens up. This is evident, for example, in Schiller's poem, in which the student learns — only too late — to respect the power and truth of the veil and what it reveals to him.

Cory Stockwell

Ph.D. Candidate

University of Minnesota

Title of Presentation:

Duras to Lispector, the Time of the Veil

My paper seeks to approach current debates around the veil through an examination of two twentieth century novels: *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein*, by Marguerite Duras, and *The Hour of the Star*, by Clarice Lispector. In each of these novels, I argue, one finds a profound reflection on the veil, and specifically its relationship to the question of secrecy: by way of the veil, I contend, Duras and Lispector investigate a secrecy that one might call essentially feminine. The veiled existence led by the female protagonists of both of these novels is undoubtedly, to a certain degree, an oppressive one. I argue, however, that each of these novels articulates a special relationship between the veil and *time*; in this relationship, and the “shattered time” that marks each narrative, a subversive or emancipatory potential of secrecy can be imagined.

Summer Sutton

Visiting Assistant Professor
Texas Tech. University

Title of Presentation:

Architecture and the Veil

The “veil” is a significant part of Islamic society, not only as a piece of cloth, but as a concept of how an ideal Islamic society can be formed. The “veil” can be interpreted in many different ways but particularly in architecture, it is a definer of public and private spaces in a particular way that can be associated with the Islamic world. Sharjah, known as the cultural capital of the Middle East, is undergoing a rejuvenation of its downtown heritage and commerce district. With this site in mind, this architectural proposal address the issues of contemporizing the aesthetic culture of Sharjah in a way that respects and embraces religious and cultural values within the newly globalized environment. This is done by using the concept of “veiling” through an analogous understanding of veiling and revealing in the societies of the Arabian Gulf (in religious and cultural contexts) and applying those concepts to architectural design.

Mahdi Tourage

Assistant Professor
University of Western Ontario

Title of Presentation:

The (Veiled) Phallus and the Erotics of Sacrifice in the Qur’anic Tale of Abel and Cain

In a recent article, the philosopher and cultural critic Slavoj Žižek examined the “archives” of Islam for their “fantasmatic secret history” that effectively sustains Islam’s explicit narrative. One Qur’anic passage of particular interest to Žižek is the tale of the sons of Adam, one killing the other after the victim’s sacrifice was accepted by God and the killer’s was rejected. This paper is a critical examination of Žižek’s reading of Islam’s “secret history” with a focus on the issue of sacrifice. Using Lacan’s theory of signification, I will take Žižek’s insights to their theoretical conclusion and argue that in this passage from the Qur’an a latent erotic motif is integral to sacrifice. More importantly, the fantasmatic secret history of this tale is signified by what can be formulated as the (veiled) phallus.

Amina Triki-Yamani

Université de Montréal

Title of Presentation:

Internal Learning Conflicts Amongst Muslim Students Wearing the Hijab

My communication relates to the conflicts generated by the coexistence of state and religious learning amongst French Muslim students, of North African origin, living in France, and whose custom is to wear the hijab and to attend the mosque regularly. I detected two forms of learning conflict in the reasoning of seventeen young women interviewed: interpersonal or institutional conflict confronting the Muslim student at the state institution, most often represented by a University professor, and also inner conflicts or conflicts of a personal nature. These conflicts were initiated by the coexistence of both secular knowledge and religious knowledge in the minds of these female students. In a clinical analysis of their discourse which was characterized by frequent references to the Koranic passages, I was able to use the concept of *self-skin* (“Moi-peau”) as developed by D. Anzieu (1995) in order to understand how the hijab can be at once the element which creates interpersonal conflicts of knowledge among the *moutahajjibate* students and the means by which internal conflicts of knowledge are managed.

Muhammad Velji

Ph.D. Candidate

University of South Florida

Title of Presentation:

Seductive Piety: Faith and Fashion through Lipovetsky and Heidegger

The purpose of this paper is to problematize and change how we theoretically view concepts such as the

secularization, privatization and the commodification of religion by looking at the situation of Indonesian women who wear the veil fashionably. Through the analytical lens of Gilles Lipovetsky's theory of fashion, I argue that faith and fashion are not mutually exclusive but can be melded to create unique but faithful forms of religiosity. Since religious change is very much a human practice, I would like to instead view those who fashionably veil through the Heideggerian lens of analysis, espoused by Hubert Dreyfus, as creative reappropriators disclosing new worlds for others to themselves reappropriate. It is via this personal self-expression through fashion that women bring the individualization and democratization of religious authority back into the political and public spheres while skilfully negotiating religious, aesthetic and political pressures.

Beverly M. Weber

Assistant Professor
University of Colorado at Boulder

Title of Presentation:

Hijab Martyrdom, Headscarf Debates: Rethinking Violence, Secularism, and the 'New Europe'

The 2009 courtroom murder of Egyptian Marwa el-Sherbini by the defendant, who was challenging his conviction for Islamophobic hate speech, is considered by many to be the first Islamophobic murder in Germany. While the German press and national officials were slow to react; el-Sherbini was quickly dubbed the "hijab-martyr" in Iran and Egypt. I juxtapose the discussions of el-Sherbini's murder and the case of Fereshta Ludin, a German public schoolteacher who fought to wear hijab. The portrayal of the German state as the patronizing protector of the Muslim woman serves to legitimate German power in the EU, to exclude Turkish EU participation, and to obscure nationalist sentiment guised as identification with "Europe." My analysis reveals the need to retheorize the relationship between modernity, communal attachment, secularism, and violence. I argue such a theorization must address the role of racism in German democracy, new relationships between religious/communal attachment and notions of the public/private, and understandings of secularism and its relationship to a nonviolent future.

Naomi Furnish Yamada

Ph.D. Candidate
University of Hawaii at Manoa

Title of Presentation:

One Veil and Two Notions of Tradition: the Exceptional Relic, the Inclusionary Present

As in many churches in Nagasaki, Catholic women in the Goto archipelago wear chapel veils during

mass. The veil in this context is discursively linked to tradition, but the signified 'tradition' is a signifier of its own. In Nagasaki, Catholic parishioners' notion of tradition can be interpreted as a return to a global fold after centuries of isolation and "hidden Christian" practice. Journalists and visitors to Nagasaki, however, routinely 'read' the veils in the vein of gendered hierarchy and conservatism, and subsequently affix the label "traditional."

In this paper, I use the Catholic chapel veil as an illustration of how a conflation of different discourses on tradition occurs. Viewing the meaning and use of the veil in Nagasaki as a regional interpretation of a global form, I sketch out the discursive context with ethnographic observations from Goto, and with online postings from a Japanese Catholic discussion group on the veil.