

**AMSS 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference**

**Cosponsored by  
Hartford Seminary, Hartford, CT  
October 27 – 29, 2006**

**Abstract Only – Work in Progress**

**“Muslims in Canada: Dispensable Citizenship”**

**By: Itrath Syed  
(Ph. D. Candidate, University of British Columbia, Canada)**

For the past two years, Canadians have engaged in an intense debate about a proposal to make Islamic arbitration in family law matters available to Muslims living in the province of Ontario. This debate has generally been referred to as a debate about *Shari'ah* law. During this debate, various racist tropes were repeatedly invoked with a renewed currency. Much of the opposition to the proposal chose to structure its arguments in ways that reinforced racialized stereotypes of Muslim women as perpetually persecuted and Muslim men as relentlessly oppressive. The debate also systematically constructed the proponents of the proposal as being *foreign*, representing the oppressive state practices of *enemy* states, and thus, constituting a threat to Canadian national integrity as a fifth column. These arguments operated within a seemingly normative paradigm in which Muslims in Canada are considered conditional citizens. Regardless of the actual status of individual members, the community as a whole is constructed as needing to constantly justify its presence in Canada. The further implication of this paradigm is that, however tenuous the presence of Muslims is in Canada, it can be summarily revoked if it does not meet the shifting standards of allegiance to a definition of *nation* that is constructed to exclude Muslims. This paper explores these arguments and contextualizes them in terms of historical anti-immigrant discourses in Canada and the larger context of post 9-11 Islamophobia in Canada, the US and Europe.