Guest Editorial

The papers included in this special issue (and the one following) grew out of contributions presented on the panel "Ethnography, Misrepresentations of Islam, and Advocacy" at the 116th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) held in Washington, DC during late November and early December 2017. Meryem Zaman and I, the panel co-organizers, felt motivated to draw upon our expertise as anthropologists to respond to the widespread attacks on Islam and Muslims by American politicians, government officials, and media outlets. We called on our fellow social scientists to draw upon their ethnographic experiences to correct misrepresentations of Islam and to advocate for Muslims who are increasingly threatened by anti-Muslim hate and violence. Robert Hefner, James Edmonds, Alisa Perkins, Yamil Avivi, and Katrina Thompson joined us as presenters on the AAA panel.

Meryem and I were keenly aware that doing ethnography brings researchers into interpersonal relationships, interactions, and dialogue with Muslims. We participate in protests with Muslim youth, discussions with Sufi sheikhs, tea parties with members of Islamic revival movements, multi-religious prayer vigils, advocacy projects with Latina Muslims, masjid fundraisers, and worship with queer Muslims. Moreover, as social scientists we are trained to carefully consider the ways we represent others as we write ethnographic reports and vignettes. Equipped with knowledge and insights gained from their ethnographic experiences, contributors to these special issues have tried to challenge misrepresentations of Islam and

Muslims and to correct and replace these depictions with more accurate representations.

However, it is also important to remember that laypeople without such close contact and experiences with Muslims are susceptible to manipulation by elites, media, politicians, and government officials. These influential social segments employ various negative representations of Islam and Muslims that shape popular perception of events and processes (such as 9/11 or immigration) and direct public sentiment. They mediate the cognitive framing and emotions surrounding socially dramatic events. Many Muslims fear the unveiling of the identity of perpetrators of non-state terrorist acts, because we are familiar with the all too common script of using Muslim identity to slander and castigate the entire community. On the other hand, influential social segments frame such events in a different manner when the perpetrator of terrorist acts turns out to be a non-Muslim. In these cases, they tend to steer public attention away from the role religion may play in the hateful ideology of the perpetrator and away from shifting historical and structural conditions that may serve as social stressors for disgruntled individuals and groups. Thus, it is not 9/11 or any other violent acts involving Muslims that produces anti-Muslim hate or Islamophobia; rather, it is this selective mediation which utilizes old Orientalist tropes or more recent negative representations to denigrate Muslims.

There are two broad patterns of state and media misrepresentations of Islam and Muslims: first, there is a "broad stroke" sort of depiction that casts a wide net, envisioning all Muslims to be a threat and Islam as inherently violent, misogynist, and ahistorical. Although these depictions have an old colonial and Orientalist past, they became more prominent and widely circulated post-9/11, especially within the right-wing response to plans for the construction of the Cordoba House project in Lower Manhattan. Right-wing bloggers and politicians hyper-circulated these negative representations within their discourse of a threatening Islamization of America. During Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign and under President Trump's administration, we have been inundated with such aggressive misrepresentations, ranging from rhetoric about 'Muslim bans' to retweets of alt-right white nationalist Islamophobic videos. The second type is an attempt to present a "finer stroke", aiming to distinguish the 'good' Muslims from the 'bad' (and 'ugly') ones. Presidents George W. Bush and Barack H. Obama operated with versions of this Good Muslim/Bad Muslim binary in which they cast the former as those who are 'with us', serving as 'our eyes

and ears', exposing the 'bad' violent extremists. President Obama was even criticized for leaving "Islamic" off of the phrase "violent extremists." In his view, "true Muslims" understand that there is no basis for such violence in Islam. While this second type may be more comforting to many, there is still cause for concern. Political figures and media often use a variety of selective features and litmus tests to separate the "good moderate" Muslims from the "bad extremists." At times, Muslims displaying any inclination toward traditional Islamic practice and belief are cast in the "bad" category and criticized as overly rigid or committed to literal interpretations of scriptures. Thus, it appears that these two modes can be considered as sides of a spectrum rather than as totally distinct. After all, right-wingers often look to former Muslims or Muslim-bashing Muslims as experts to buttress their arguments against Islam. Moreover, President Trump and his ministers are congenial with wealthy Saudi princes whom they value for their economic resources. Therefore, it may be best to view these two broad patterns of misrepresentation as variants on the theme of racializing and othering Muslims with the shared aim of disciplining Muslims into serving sovereign secular power.

The presenters on our AAA panel also suggested some key issues for us to reflect on as we move to advocate for Muslims in these trying times: what kind of strategy should we adopt to advocate for Muslims given the rise of far-right Islamophobia in the US and Europe? How should Muslims seek allies and accomplices in their struggle against anti-Muslim hate, religious intolerance, and social exclusion? Should they take the route of civil rights or interfaith movements? How do they include Muslims of a wide range of religious orientations within a left-leaning movement for social justice? It is clear that Muslim minorities must develop social capital and build bridges across religious communities, as well as with secular groups and atheists, in majority-non-Muslim societies. It may also be important for Muslims and their advocates to invoke the values of religious freedom and tolerance or other core civic ideas in these western secular countries. The broader cultural and socio-political context needs to be carefully considered in each case and an appropriate set of political strategies and tactics should be devised to move forward with campaigns for neutralizing the rise of far-right hatemongers and for the betterment of humanity. The best approach in the United States may not be the best one in France, Germany, or the UK.

In addition, contributors (especially to the second special issue) raise critical questions about recognizing and confronting contradictions within

the imagined Muslim community. How do we advocate given the diversity and internal divisions within the Muslim community? How can Muslims and their advocates champion the causes of subgroups, while also defending the Muslim community from outside attacks? When does a subgroup's claims of unfair treatment from more influential groups within the community play into the hands of dominant discourses of Good/Bad Muslims and other techniques of sovereign secular power? How can Muslims sidestep these pitfalls in order to stand for and embody social justice in the broader society as well as within the Muslim community? It is apparent that right-wingers and other anti-Muslim forces have already available frameworks to gain the most mileage out of internal divisions within Muslim communities. However, it is not yet clear whether Muslim groups have developed the necessary cultural resources or devised the appropriate political responses to face these machinations of power.

In this issue, Robert Hefner reminds us to consider broader socio-historical shifts that influence representations of Islam and advocacy for Muslims. His experiences in the 1970s protesting with Muslims alert us to the possibility of constructing narratives, representations, and advocacy centered around class and structural conditions. Muslims and their socio-economic interests were understood as integral to the proletarian struggles waged by the French Left. Even with the rise of the ultra-right Islamophobes in Europe and the US, I think this approach is significant. Let us consider, for a moment, ultra-right strategies of using populist-oriented rhetoric criticizing "identity politics" and "multiculturalism" to obscure their class interests. Many of the White workers that voted for Trump share interests with most Muslims and other members of the working and middle classes but they have become hostile to identity politics. Here again, as Hefner's Catholic interlocutors noted, waging "culture wars" for liberal inclusion of Muslims may be "a bridge too far." However, Hefner recommends that Muslims enhance democracy and their lived citizenship through engaging "with people from diverse backgrounds in local campaigns of community organizing and betterment." I would add that it is important that these "potential bridge builders" produce broader narratives and representations that target interests and problems of structural conditions of inequality shared across the broad encompassing American working class majority.

James Edmonds directs our attention to the categories and representations we adopt as ethnographers. How do we label Muslims in our studies? I think it highly important that we share his cautious approach

so as to avoid inaccurate, and often hegemonic, compartmentalization of Muslims into opposing categories. In this case, Edmonds has conducted a study with a popular sheikh of Arab descent in Indonesia, a country that scholars often label as "moderate, progressive, liberal, or civil" in contrast to "conservative" Middle Eastern countries. These oppositional categories often do map quite neatly onto media and state representations of "good" and "bad" Muslims. Moreover, he notes that the "everyday" is often conceived in such a way as to rule out "normative" Islamic belief and practice. Edmonds decides to use the sheikh's own ambiguous terms for describing himself and to follow the cultural force of *baraka* and its smelly magic. While it is important to use our interlocutor's local categories in our ethnographic narratives, in this case it left me wondering about this sheikh's ideas about upholding Islamic "requirements" and treatment of Indonesian Muslim minorities and heterodox practices. However, even after collecting answers to these sorts of questions, it may still be most astute for an ethnographer to stress unpredictability and ambiguity rather than applying already overworked labels.

Drawing upon her ethnographic research with the Tablighi Jama'at and Al-Huda piety movements in both Pakistan and the US, Meryem Zaman challenges representations of Islam as a "monolithic and acultural entity which 'hates us' and endorses violence against non-Muslims." In addition, Zaman criticizes scholars who have accepted these movements' self-representation of themselves as top-down movements in which leaders transmit their "interpretations of sacred texts to unquestioningly obedient followers." She argues that male and female members actively contribute to discourses that shape group ideology and subject formation. They interject cultural notions of good and bad into lessons on sacred texts, value the authority of Hollywood stars and the Internet, wear polite but "western"-style clothing, and participate in some American holidays that are not considered religious. Zaman's vignettes demonstrate that members of these two piety movements are actively mediating Islamic tradition and adapting it to the US context.

Meryem and I hope that these two special issues will help to weaken misrepresentations of Muslims and advance advocacy for subgroups as well as for the *umma* writ large. We also hope that they will push Muslims to recognize the complexity of our own self-representations. Indeed, it is important for Muslims from all walks of life to stand up to anti-Muslim hate, intolerance, and exclusion. We hope that this project will serve as an

inspiration for others to utilize their professional skills and talents to combat bigotry and oppression.

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I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Timothy Daniels and his colleagues, Meryem Zaman, Robert Hefner, and James Edmonds, for choosing AJISS for the publication of their important and timely research. This issue showcases leading and emerging anthropologists who have come together to address the layers of misrepresentation and marginalization that various Muslim groups experience. Each article, it should be noted, has been independently reviewed; they are ably introduced by Professor Timothy Daniels, whom I must thank for his initiative to reach out to me and make this issue possible. Finally, I should take this opportunity to invite scholars of Islam as well as those of Muslim societies focused on Islamic thought and Muslim practice to consider submitting their collected papers to AJISS for special issues.

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