Editorial Statement

This second issue provides a collection of articles that broadly engage the continuing problem of Islamophobia and the global anti-Muslim phenomenon while anchoring the publication in a theoretically and empirically grounded framework. While no one thread ties all the articles together, this issue attempts to further our collective knowledge about Islamophobia and its various manifestations through academic and community-based research. We hope this issue will foster further research and engagement in academic institutions and in civil and human rights organizations with the intended goal of ending racism in all its forms, Islamophobia included.

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In a recent article analyzing a host of survey results focusing on Muslims and Islam since 2001, University of North Carolina sociology professor Charles Kurzman concluded that the data illustrates how “American attitudes toward Muslim Americans have grown more negative” and “a growing segment of the… population is willing to express negative views about Muslim-Americans in recent years.” Since 2006 the data has shown a steadily increasing percentage of Americans responding unfavorably when asked about Muslims in general. The survey results and Kurzman’s analysis raise important questions as to the causes of this steady shift, the forces behind it and how best to reverse it in the future.

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For some, rising anti-Muslim sentiments are immediately explained away as a “natural” outcome of the many violent events in the Muslim world and “terrorism” in general. However, we maintain that the rising negative sentiments may have to do with the presence of a well-organized and well-funded Islamophobic industry that has managed to invade and capture civil society and public discourses without serious contestation. Up to this point, anti-racist and progressive voices have not been effective in challenging this industry, nor have they been able to provide the needed resources to mount regional and national responses.

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The engagement with Islamophobia, as an arena for civil rights work, has not yet become firmly established within the broad civil rights groupings and organizations, with a few exceptions.
This is due in part to confusing the defense of Muslims, as a religious ethnic grouping, with arguments in support of Islam as a religion with particular textual traditions and historical contexts. We maintain that the success of the Islamophobic industry is centered on problematizing Islam in civil society discourse to such an extent that it has made it possible for civil and human rights organizations to distance themselves from the affected communities. In many encounters, the Muslims’ civil and human rights are subject to contestation due to an Islamophobic focus on the textual tradition, for example certain readings of the Koran, which is then utilized to foment discord and push for exclusionary measures directed at the Muslim subject. There have, however, been some hopeful signs of change.

This issue comes on the heels of two major events this past year. First, there was the legal victory by the CAIR-San Francisco Bay Area (CAIR-SFBA) office and the Legal Aid Society-Employment Law Center (LAS-ELC) against clothing retailer Abercrombie & Fitch over the firing of a Muslim worker who refused to remove her hijab as a condition for employment. In a 25-page decision, U.S. District Judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers emphatically ruled that the popular clothing manufacturer violated federal and state civil rights laws against workplace discrimination when they fired the employee in 2010. The lawsuit and ruling serves as a reminder that the rights of Muslims and the free exercise of religion in the workplace shall not be infringed upon, and that the struggle to define one’s existence against the long shadow of Islamophobia starts with one victory at a time.

The second important event is the release of Honor Diaries, a 60-minute film that seemed to legitimately cover violence against Muslim women in order to raise awareness and inspire direct action. However, the film is disingenuous in that it quickly overlays the struggles against victimization with an Islamophobic campaign. Supported by men and women with affiliations with The Clarion Project, a pro-Israeli non-profit organization that produces films about the threat of Islamic extremism, Honor Diaries dangerously conflates violence against women with Islam. This film replicates Islamophobic discourses in the guise of supporting Muslim women, and it ignites anti-Muslim sentiments. However, a robust hashtag movement, #DishonorDiaries, was created to demystify and challenge the anti-Muslim fear-mongering that the film perpetrated.
Both of these events, and many others that we could not cover in time for the printing of this issue, continue to remind communities around the world that despite the enduring permanence of Islamophobia, various modes and tactics of organized resistance are available as steps to justice, liberation, and emancipation.

Hatem Bazian  
University of California, Berkeley  
Co-Founder, Zaytuna College  

Maxwell Leung  
California College of the Arts  

About the Cover  
The cover was provided courtesy of Khalil Bendib, an artist and political cartoonist. Entitled “Gibberish,” the cartoon depicts the opening phrase to The Preamble to the U.S. Constitution, and language to the Fourth Amendment against unreasonable search and seizures in the Bill of Rights, on a document held by three agents of government, most notably the CIA and the FBI. The laws that protect individuals from warrantless searches, unrestricted encroachments from government surveillance, and race-based discriminatory tactics are “gibberish” in a post-9/11 America, especially where Muslims are concerned. For more of Khalil Bendib’s work, see: http://www.bendib.com/.