

## Zayn Kassam, Pomona College, and Guest Editor of *Spotlight on Teaching*



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The other is most commonly viewed as someone who stands outside oneself, against whom one defines oneself, self here being understood as one's race, gender, culture, religion, etc. Three decades ago, in his analysis of media coverage on Islam and Muslims, Edward Said sounded a warning about the consequences of systematically otherizing particular races, classes, or religions:

“Carefully fostered fears of anarchy and disorder will very likely produce conformity of views and, with reference to the ‘outside’ world, greater distrust: this is as true of the Islamic world as it is of the West. At such a time — which has already begun — the production and diffusion of knowledge will play an absolutely critical role” (*Covering Islam*, 153).

In preparation for the Annual Meeting last year, the Committee for Racial and Ethnic Minorities at the American Academy of Religion decided to turn the question of the Other and of knowledge production on its head, and to ask the question uppermost in our minds: How do we as academics living and working in the hegemonic space of “the West” reflect upon the Other within, and how do we diversify knowledge production in that hegemon?

To that end, we held a Special Topics Forum in Washington, D.C., at the AAR Annual Meeting in November 2006 on the subject of “The Other Within: The Study of Religion and Diversifying our Knowledge Production.” The panelists were Stacey Floyd-Thomas, Erin Runions, Andrew

Sung Park, and Gaston Espinosa, with Grace Kim as respondent.

Given the enthusiastic reception to the forum and the energetic discussion that followed, we invited several others to reflect on the subject of the panel in the hopes of bringing the theoretical issues to the attention of scholar-teachers. The reflections featured in this issue of *S potlight on Teaching* may stimulate further thought about the Other in our courses.

In order to focus our lenses, we invited only scholars of Christianity to reflect on the Other within. One question we asked was how might academics who study and teach about a tradition such as Christianity — considered to occupy a hegemonic space within the academy — reflect upon and contribute to knowledge production about the Other within the academy? We felt that such reflections would prove to be thought-provoking for all those engaged in the study of religion more generally, and with particular faith traditions specifically, because in a globalized world, every religious tradition has no choice but to interact or contend with the economic, political, military, and ideological power of what continues to be perceived by much of the world as the largely Christian “West.”