

Ilyse R. Morgenstein Fuerst and Brannon Wheeler, eds. *Words of Experience: Translating Islam with Carl W. Ernst*. Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2021. 308 pages.

The career of Carl Ernst, the William R. Keenan, Jr. Distinguished Professor in Religion at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has been and continues to be one of remarkable distinction and critical significance for the academic field of Islamic studies as well as religious studies more broadly. Having published a sizeable body of scholarship in the form of monographs and articles and mentored generations of scholars, the present edited volume represents a festschrift in honor of his work, person, and contributions. As disclosed at the outset of the volume in the “Acknowledgements,” *Words of Experience* was developed out of the “Translating Islam” conference organized in October 2017 by students and colleagues. The resulting collection, however, is not a conventional festschrift in that its orientation is not fixed solely on honoring Ernst and his scholarly achievements. For instance, a bibliography documenting Ernst’s oeuvre is absent from the volume. Instead, and more compellingly, Ernst pens an “Afterword” offering his own voice to the scholarship collected within the work. As he discloses, he agreed to the conference and resulting volume on the condition “that the papers and presentations should be focused on directions for future research in Islamic studies ...” (290). As a result, the contributions included in the volume are first and foremost oriented to future scholarly horizons, but do so by building upon Ernst’s impressive body of scholarship in different ways.

Opening this formidable collection is a framing “Introduction” penned by Bruce Lawrence, a longtime colleague of Ernst and an important scholar of Islamic studies in his own right. Lawrence not only surveys the essays included in the volume, but provides an important outline of Ernst’s scholarship so that the reader can better appreciate how each chapter relates to his scholarly legacy. Of the thirteen essays that constitute the edited volume, six are placed in Part I, which the editors have entitled “Carl Ernst as *Shaykh al-Qabd*,” while the final seven make up Part II, entitled “Carl Ernst as *Shaykh al-Bast*.” The dividing principle of the book draws upon that important pair of concepts from the classical Sufi lexicon, *qabd* and *bast*, which are often likened to the “contraction” and “expansion” of a rhythmically beating heart. The terms are taken here to mean “condensed, contained, bounded” and “expansive, exploding, unbounded” respectively (2). The pieces contained in Part I reflect more “contained” studies that are inspired by a discrete aspect of Ernst’s work, while the pieces in Part II are more “expansive” studies that draw more capaciously from the scholarly whole.

With regards to Part I, both Michael Muhammad Knight and Frederick S. Colby draw upon Ernst's insights in the field of Sufi studies in order to bring further sophistication to their respective subjects. Colby, whose work on ascension narratives is well-known and established, revisits Ernst's early study of Rūzbihān Baqlī (d. 606/1209) for analytical tools to better understand the visionary dreams of the Prophet Muhammad experienced by and related to the North African traditionist Ibn Abī Jamra (d. ca. 699/1300). Knight, for his part, brings further attention to the Ansaru Allah Community/Nubian Islamic Hebrews in North America. Specifically, he uses them to further problematize prevailing conceptualizations and categorizations of Sufism. The essays by Ali Altaf Mian and Joy and James Laine, build upon Ernst's scholarship in South Asian religious studies. In his concise, but insightful contribution Mian draws attention to how the works of several South Asian Muslims, which engage with Hinduism in significant ways, were variously inflected by prevailing colonial discourses and other factors. Joy and James Laine, in their chapter, examine the complex ways that the practice of yoga has been undertaken and consumed across a shifting matrix of categories – Hinduism, Sufism, religion, and secularity – from the medieval Persianate past to modern day California. A concern with conceptions of “religion” is also the central occupation of Brannon Ingram's chapter. Referencing the ways that Ernst has problematized preceding definitions of religion and *dīn*, Ingram brings further nuance to the issues involved therein before examining how modern Islamists, namely Mawdudi (d. 1979) and Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), adapted their understandings of these terms in their respective contexts. Then, Samah Choudhury's incisive critique of Ayad Akhtar's lauded play *Disgraced* closes Part I. Importantly, her piece draws attention to the critical work that Ernst has done with regards to Islamophobia, an area of increasing ethical concern as several later pieces point out.

While the chapters of Part II draw upon Ernst's body of scholarship more broadly, the contributions here have similar disciplinary interests as those of Part I. For example, the first three chapters of Part II are concerned most explicitly with Sufi studies. Robert Rozehnal, for instance, offers an helpful analysis of the structures underlying the digital presence, or more precisely “Cyberscape,” of the Inayati Order, a predominantly anglophone Sufi order. The focus of F. Cangüzel Güner Zülfikar's chapter shifts to the Turkish academy and how Ernst's work in Sufism provides productive paradigms and approaches for scholars operating in the turkophone world. Then, Katherine Pratt Ewing's chapter, which opens Part II, critically examines how conceptions of Sufism have shifted and been formed in the post-colonial context in

ways that contest, contravene, and domesticate the range of popular practices that have traditionally developed out of it. Tracing out the historical precedents for such maneuverings, Ewing then turns to more contemporary examples of such politicization, especially with respect to modern Pakistan and Morocco.

The final four essays that close out Part II address other areas of significance for Ernst's scholarly career. Brannon Wheeler, inspired by a provocative description of Ernst's own positionality with respect to an earlier study, explores four different personalities involved in the study of religion and their respective approaches: "The Professor" media pastor William Eugene "Gene" Scott (d. 2005), the traveling nineteenth century scholar William Robertson Smith (d. 1894), the medieval scholastic Roger Bacon (d. 1292), and the French philosopher and esotericist Henry Corbin (d. 1978). Wheeler uses these four distinctive figures in order to interrogate and explore what lies behind Ernst's "experience" of the study of religion with subtlety and insight. Candace Mixon turns importantly to tracing the institutional contours of Ernst's scholarly career. She not only describes the programming developments and funding sources that came to be at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill during Ernst's ongoing tenure there, but also the networks and engagements beyond UNC that emerged alongside it, especially with respect to the arts. Mixon's chapter importantly grounds Ernst's work to the contexts in which it emerged and operated.

Building directly upon this (con)textual survey is Ilyse R. Morgenstein Fuerst's chapter "Writing, Doing, and Performing the Future of Islamic Studies" that raises critically important questions for all of us involved within the field of Islamic studies, regardless of specialization or subfield. Reflecting on Ernst's scholarship, Morgenstein Fuerst asks why, for whom, and how we go about the scholarship that we pursue. These questions, however, are not merely a matter of abstraction but embedded in the many forms of labor that we scholars undertake especially as it pertains to public scholarship, representational dynamics, and the ethics of mentorship. Given the increasingly politicized and precarious state of higher education, but also taking into account the exploitative ways that the Euro-American academy is structured, Morgenstein Fuerst's essay is an important intervention with which every scholar of Islamic studies should read and engage. The last essay by Katie Merriman complements the two preceding chapters exceedingly well in analyzing what we might learn from instructive cases drawn from Ernst's career. Addressing many of the concerns underscored and discussed by Morgenstein Fuerst, Merriman delineates key principles and practical strategies for moving productively and collaboratively forward in the realm of Islamic studies.

When taken as a whole, this rich and diverse collection of essays, reflects in many ways the rhythmic ebb and flow at the heart of Carl Ernst's vital and animating body of scholarship. Each piece, in its own matter, is working to carve new pathways. Whether engaging with specific subfields, exploring the limits, ambiguities, and intersections of disciplines, or critically assessing and challenging the structures of the academy, the works gathered herein disclose where the thrumming heart of scholarship could and ought to go.

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