



**North American Association of Islamic
and Muslim Studies (NAAIMS)**

**[Formerly the Association of Muslim Social
Scientists of North America (AMSS)]**

**Presents
The 49th Annual Conference**

“The Future of Islamic Studies”

Saturday December 19, 2020

Cosponsored By:

**Department of Religious Studies
University of Oregon, Eugene, OR**

The North American Association of Islamic and Muslim Studies (NAAIMS)

**P.O. Box 5502
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A Virtual Conference on the Zoom platform
Registration Required – details forthcoming:
All Sessions held in Eastern Standard Time (UTC-05:00)

- 10:30 – 10:45 a.m. Welcoming Remarks by NAAIMS President
Frederick S. Colby, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR
(Program Chair)
- 10:45 – 11:00 a.m. Introductory Remarks: NAAIMS Vice President
Sarra Tlili, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL

11:00 a.m. – 12:45 p.m. Part 1:
Theme: Rethinking the Profession of Islamic Studies
Moderator: Zahra Ayubi (Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH)

Oludamini Ogunnaike (University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA): “You Are Studying us, but Who is Studying You?: Race, Epistemology, and Pedagogy in Islamic Studies”

Ilyse R. Morgenstein-Fuerst (University of Vermont, Burlington, VT): “It Doesn’t Ad(d) Up: Academic Hiring, Racialized Bias, and the Future of Islamic Studies”

12:45 p.m. – 1:15 p.m. EST Mid-Conference Break

1:15 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. Part 2:
Theme: New Directions in Research and Teaching
Moderator: Mohammad H. Khalil (Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI)

Carl W. Ernst (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC): “The Writings of Omar Ibn Said: The Implications of Race and Slavery for Islamic studies”

Seemi Bushra Ghazi (University of British Columbia, British Columbia, Canada): “This is the Book: Envisioning Islamic Studies Futures from a Qur’anic Arabic Classroom”

3:00 p.m. Concluding Remarks
NAAIMS President

Biographical Profiles of Participants

Profiles are Listed in Alphabetical Order by First Name:

Carl W. Ernst [cernst@email.unc.edu] studied comparative religion at Stanford University, Stanford, CA (A.B. 1973) and Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (Ph.D. 1981). He taught at Pomona College, Claremont, CA (1981-1992), and served as visiting lecturer at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, France (1991, 2003, 2019-21), the University of Seville, Spain (2001), and the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2005, 2010). His published research, based on the study of Arabic, Persian, and Urdu, has been mainly devoted to the study of three areas: general and critical issues of Islamic studies, premodern and contemporary Sufism, and Indo-Muslim culture. He has received research fellowships from the Fulbright program, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation. An elected Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, he served on the faculty of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) since 1992 as department chair (1995-2000), and Zachary Smith Professor (2000-2005). He is currently William R. Kenan, Jr., Distinguished Professor (2005 - present) and co-director of the Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies at UNC.

Frederick (Rick) S. Colby [fscolby@uoregon.edu] is associate professor of religious studies, and director of the Middle East and North Africa Studies program at the University of Oregon, Eugene, OR. He currently serves as President of the North American Association of Islamic and Muslim Studies (NAAIMS). Aside from his monograph *Narrating Muhammad's Night Journey* (SUNY Press, 2008), Colby's book-length publications include an edition and translation of an Arabic treatise by the early Sufi Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sulamī entitled *The Subtleties of the Ascension* (Fons Vitae, 2006), as well as a volume of essays co-edited with art historian Christiane Gruber entitled *The Prophet's Ascension: Cross-Cultural Encounters with the Islamic mi'raj Tales* (Indiana University Press, 2010). From 2011-2017, Colby served two terms as co-chair of the Study of Islam section of the American Academy of Religion (AAR), first with co-chair Dr. Kecia Ali (2011-12), and then with co-chair Dr. Juliane Hammer (2012-17). Before his graduate studies, Colby spent a year as a Thomas J. Watson fellow living in Egypt and making short trips to neighboring countries while researching coffeehouse culture. Subsequently, he earned an M.A. in Near Eastern languages and civilizations from the University of Chicago (1995), and a Ph.D. in religion (specialization in Islamic studies) from Duke University, Durham, NC (2002). While engaged in dissertation research analyzing historic Arabic manuscripts preserving premodern discourses about the Prophet Muhammad's famous Night Journey and Ascension that later formed the basis of his first monograph, Colby received a Fulbright fellowship for research in Syria (1999-2000), and two four-month fellowships (2000) from American Research Institute in Turkey (ARIT) and the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE).

Ilyse R. Morgenstein-Fuerst [imorgens@uvm.edu] is associate professor of religion and associate director of the Humanities Center at the University of Vermont (UVM), Burlington, VT. She earned her Ph.D. at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC in religious studies, with a specialization in Islamic studies; a Master's of Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, MA; and a B.A. from Colgate University, NY in religion and Asian studies. Her research centers on Islam and Muslims in South Asia;

histories of imperialism; and theories of religion, race, and language. Her first book is titled *Indian Muslim Minorities and the 1857 Rebellion* (I.B. Tauris, 2017; paperback 2020). She is co-editor of the forthcoming volume *Words of Experience: Translating Islam with Carl W. Ernst* (Equinox, 2020). Her next book (in process) is about global Islamophobia and antisemitism. Morgenstein-Fuerst is the author of numerous articles about Islam, Islamic studies, and religion in South Asia that appear in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, *Comparative Islamic Studies*, and *The Muslim World*, among others. She is also the co-host and co-producer of the grant-funded podcast *Keeping It 101: A Killjoy's Introduction to Religion*. At UVM, and has been recognized as an award-winning teacher whose courses are about the study of religion, Islamic practice and history, race and imperialism, and, occasionally, Hindu traditions.

Mohammad H. Khalil [khalilmo@msu.edu] is professor of religious studies, adjunct professor of law, and director of the Muslim Studies Program at Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI. He specializes in Islamic thought and is author of *Islam and the Fate of Others: The Salvation Question* (Oxford University Press, 2012) and *Jihad, Radicalism, and the New Atheism* (Cambridge University Press, 2018); and editor of *Between Heaven and Hell: Islam, Salvation, and the Fate of Others* (Oxford University Press, 2013) and *Muslims and US Politics Today: A Defining Moment* (Harvard University Press and ILEX, 2019). Before returning to his hometown of East Lansing, he served as assistant professor of religion and visiting professor of law at the University of Illinois. Khalil has presented papers at various national and international conferences and has published peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters on various topics, from early Islamic historiography to bioethics. He serves on multiple editorial boards, including the *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies (JIMS)*, and has served on the board of directors of the Society for the Study of Muslim Ethics. He is currently a member of the board of directors of the North American Association of Islamic and Muslim Studies (NAAIMS). Khalil received the Michigan State University Teacher-Scholar Award in 2015.

Oludamini Ogunnaike [oo4qw@virginia.edu] is assistant professor of African religious thought and democracy at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA, where he teaches courses on African religious, philosophical, and artistic traditions. His research falls into two general areas: the intellectual history and literary studies of the Islamic and indigenous traditions of West Africa (redressing the general neglect of Sub-Saharan Africa as an important center of Islamic scholarship and literary production and the neglect of the intellectual dimensions of indigenous African religious traditions), and employing the insights and ideas from these traditions to contribute to contemporary philosophical debates relevant to a variety of disciplines. Ogunnaike received his Ph.D. in African studies and the study of religion from Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (2015). He has previously taught at the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA, and Stanford University, Stanford, CA. He is the author of *Deep Knowledge: Ways of Knowing in Sufism and Ifa; Two West African Intellectual Traditions* (Penn State University Press, 2020) and *Poetry in Praise of Prophetic Perfection: West African Madīḥ Poetry and its Precedents* (Islamic Texts Society, 2020) and numerous articles on Sufism and Yoruba religious traditions.

Sarra Tlili [satlili@ufl.edu] is associate Professor of Arabic literature and language at the University of Florida, Gainesville, FL. She obtained her Masters and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Pennsylvania, Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations Department. Before joining the University of Florida she taught at the American Department of State's Foreign

Service Institute in Tunis, the Middlebury Arabic Language Summer Program, and the NELC Department at the University of Pennsylvania. Her main research areas are animal and environmental ethics in Islam and Qur'anic stylistics. Tlili serves as vice-president of the North American Association of Islamic and Muslim Studies (NAAIMS), she also serves on the editorial board of NAAIMS bi-annual double-blind peer-reviewed publication, the *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies (JIMS)*. Her recent publications include "Fa'ṣḍa' bi-Mā Tu'mar: A Motif-Based Study of Sūrat al-Ḥijr" (JIQSA 2019. 59 – 83), "The Canine Companion of the Cave: The Place of the Dog in Qur'anic Taxonomy" (*Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies*, 2018, 3.2), "Animal Ethics in Islam: A Review Article," (*Religions* 2018, 9, 269, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9090269>), and "From Breath to Soul: The Qur'anic Word *Rūḥ* and its (Mis)interpretations," (in Joseph Lowry, Shawkat Toorawa, eds. *Arabic Humanities, Islamic Thought: Essays in Honor of Everett K. Rowson*. Leiden: Brill, 2017. 1-21). She is also the author of *Animals in the Qur'an*, (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Seemi Bushra Ghazi [seemi.ghazi@ubc.ca] is a lecturer in Classical and Qur'anic Arabic in the Department of Classical, Near Eastern and Religious Studies at the University of British Columbia, Canada. She is currently working on a Muslim feminist interpretation of the Qur'anic narrative of Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba. She pursued religious studies and Islamic studies at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges, Haverford, PA; King Abdul Aziz University, Saudi Arabia, University of Chicago, IL; American University in Cairo, Egypt; and Duke University, Durham, NC. Ghazi has a special interest in Islamic languages, literatures and cultures; Qur'anic studies; Sufism; and Islam and gender, particularly Muslimah feminist theology and exegesis. She is also a poet and a practitioner of Muslim vocal arts, performing devotional song in Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Turkish. Her Qur'an recitations have been featured in Michael Sells, "Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations," and the BBC documentary, "Islam: Empire of Faith."

Zahra Ayubi [Zahra.ayubi@dartmouth.edu] is assistant professor of Islamic studies in the Department of Religion at Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH. She specializes in women and gender in premodern and modern Islamic ethics and has published on gendered concepts of ethics, justice, and religious authority, and on Muslim feminist-thought and American Muslim women's experiences. Her first book, *Gendered Morality: Classical Islamic Ethics of the Self, Family, and Society* (Columbia University Press, 2019) rethinks the tradition of Islamic philosophical ethics from a feminist critical perspective. She interrogates how medieval Islamic ethicists conceive of the ethical human being as an elite male within a hierarchical cosmology built on the exclusion of women, and non-elites. She completed her doctoral work at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC, and her undergraduate studies at Brandeis University, Waltham, MA. Ayubi is currently a member of the board of directors of the North American Association of Islamic and Muslim Studies (NAAIMS).

Abstracts

Abstracts are Listed in Alphabetical Order by Author's First Name:

Carl W. Ernst (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC): “The Writings of Omar Ibn Said: The Implications of Race and Slavery for Islamic Studies”

When considering the future of an academic field like Islamic studies, it is important to acknowledge genealogies linking our inquiries to previous eras in our history when the seeds of these research areas were sown. The habits of Orientalism became established in America in the early 19th century, when our predecessors encountered Islam in the form of enslaved African Muslims who were pressured to convert to Christianity. In this talk I will explore the Arabic writings of Omar Ibn Said (1770-1864), which fascinated his enslavers despite their complete incomprehension of the contents of the documents. Enlisting amateur scholars of Arabic, missionaries, and members of the American Colonization Society, they invented fantasies based on racial and religious prejudices to account for the existence of a literate African, even as their consultants arrogantly criticized the documents for their defective Arabic. Newly discovered quotations in Omar's writings from works on Islamic law, theology, and Sufism, combined with a rhetorical analysis of the documents, demand a reconsideration of Omar's scholarship and of his supposed conversion to Christianity. In particular, the impossibility of his “autobiography” – unique among “slave narratives” since it was entirely written in the condition of slavery – requires a new approach to this unreadable archive, to evaluate the roles of racism and slavery in the colonial formation of the study of Islam. Critical recognition of these factors at the origins of Islamic studies is an important step toward establishing Islamic studies as a normal part of the humanistic and social scientific disciplines.

Ilyse R. Morgenstein-Fuerst (University of Vermont, Burlington, VT): “It Doesn't Ad(d) Up: Academic Hiring, Racialized Bias, and the Future of Islamic Studies”

Job advertisements for Islamic studies faculty positions provide material and significant insight into the construction and reification of a normative Islam. These ads serve to further entrench inaccurate notions of “authentic” Islam. Quantitative and qualitative data demonstrate how religious studies colleagues craft job-calls that replicate stereotypes about Islam and Muslims, including how the study of Islam functions with an Arab- and Arabic-centric emphasis. Such ads prefer specific regions (the Middle East), languages (Arabic), and subjects (texts). Stated hiring preferences, including teaching obligations, entrench an “essence” of Islam or Islamic studies at odds with scholarly discourse about Islam, Islamic studies, and religious studies that may be summarized as a simple, troubling equation: Islam = Middle East + Arabic + Texts. This prevalent job ad equation doesn't add up - it does not square with what we know about Islam and Muslims. In this presentation, I will address how university hiring practices effect Islamic studies, draw upon Orientalist and racist ideas, and limit the future of Islamic studies. However, I will also suggest practical ways to push for structural and significant change.

Oludamini Ogunnaiké (University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA): “You Are Studying Us, but Who is Studying You?: Race, Epistemology, and Pedagogy in Islamic Studies”

Recent protests against police-killings and systemic racism have led to something of a reckoning, in certain segments of the academy, with its own issues of systemic racism -

highlighted in numerous articles, e-mail chains, and the #BlackintheIvory twitter thread. This had led to some discussions of racism in the field of Islamic studies: in patterns of anti-Black prejudice in interpersonal interactions, scholarship and teaching about Black Muslims, race and racism within Muslim communities. I will focus on the more powerful dynamics that continue to structure and shape the epistemologies and pedagogies used in Islamic studies and the ways in which these dynamics are entwined with those of contemporary racialization. By taking the history of Islamic studies in the American Academy of Religion (AAR) during the past three decades as a case study and comparing it to the institutional history of Black/Africana studies, I will illustrate the some racialized dynamics that have set the epistemological boundaries of the field by examining the ways in which these boundaries have been policed and maintained when challenged, and the way these dynamics have structured and continue to set the terms of “constructive” vs. “descriptive,” “confessional” vs. “academic” debates that continue in various forms in Islamic studies in the Euro-American Academy. Drawing on the work of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Edward Curtis, Ruth Mas, Omid Safi, Wael Hallaq, Zahra Ayubi, and recent work on Islamic education in West Africa, as well as that of Saidiya Hartman, Fred Moten, and Vincent Lloyd in Black/Africana studies, I will argue that the supposed contemporary “resolution” of the tension between the “confessional” and “academic” approaches to Islamic studies is analogous to the once-proclaimed liberal “post-racial” - that is, but another, more diffuse and subtle deployment of the same ideas and forces that produced the original categories of domination and conflict.

Seemi Bushra Ghazi (University of British Columbia, Canada): “This is the Book: Envisioning Islamic Studies Futures from a Qur’anic Arabic Classroom”

I will reflect on Islamic studies futures from my site as a student and teacher of Classical and Qur’anic Arabic over the past 3 decades. I witness these futures in my students, the harbingers of what is to come. I find myself in a unique position, inviting first year undergraduate students to attend my class on Classical Arabic taught through an approach highlighting the prismatic Qur’anic- and Grammar-centered textbook by Hanna Kassis, a Palestinian Anglican Islamicist. I strive for a humanistic- and humanities-oriented approach to Islamic studies that re-centers texts as sites of creative and productive inquiry. The students themselves bring embodied histories and geographies that interrogate and dissolve any number of our disciplinary binaries: East/West, inside/outside, practitioner/scholar, substance/form. I will highlight the innovative work of several students, a student from Hong Kong who created a series of Black Lives Matter art pieces in Arabic calligraphy; a Latin American student who wrote and illustrated a children’s book interpreting *Surah Inshirah* (The Expansion) to talk about the “Cov-Eid” challenges of a Muslim girl during a pandemic; a Kenyan Canadian anthropologist who applied close grammatical analysis to analyzing the marginalized subjectivity of African domestic laborers in Beirut as articulated in Lebanese Law. Our discipline also continues to grapple with a methodological and even ideological divide between theoreticians and textualists. The close Qur’anic reading in our classroom allows a pedagogical space in which both flourish. It will be interesting to explore the encounters, textual, theoretical and pedagogical, which have kindled students’ creative engagement with Islamic studies, whether in the academy or in other domains.