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Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures

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Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures

The Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures (EWIC) is an interdisciplinary, transhistorical, global project covering women and Islamic cultures. EWIC entries span the period just before the rise of Islam to the present. EWIC takes on cutting edge issues to stimulate new research and advance the frontiers of knowledge and covers a broad sweep of topics to inform a general audience. The goal of EWIC is to survey numerous facets of women's lives in areas such as society, economy, politics, religion, the arts, popular culture, sports, health, science and environment where Islam has made significant contributions.

With five Associate Editors (Afsaneh Najmabadi, Harvard University; Julie Peteet, University of Louisville; Seteney Shami, Social Science Research Council; Jacqueline Siapno, University of Melbourne; and Jane I. Smith, Hartford Seminary) and a board of 41 International Advisory Editors, the EWIC project is a multiple year effort to bring together upwards of one thousand scholars world-wide to write critical essays on women and Islamic cultures. EWIC has grown from the originally conceived three volumes and 1,500,000 words to 4,000,000 words to be published in a staggered fashion starting with Volume I in the fall of 2003. With research on women and Islamic cultures burgeoning, online, CD and paperback versions are distinct possibilities.

Guiding vision of EWIC

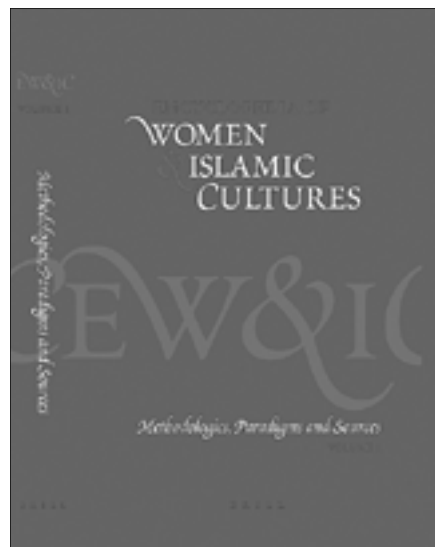
Encyclopedias aim to be authorities, often definitive authorities on their subject matter, a notion the editors are also problematizing. From its first meeting in June 1999 the Editorial Board of EWIC shared an acute appreciation of the situatedness and historicity of knowledge production. At every step we reflected and evaluated the choices before us in terms of the impact our decisions would have on the kind of 'knowledge' EWIC would present and represent. The Editors did not always agree on all issues, but we all recognized that the EWIC project was an opportunity to define a field of knowledge. We choose the title Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures because it conveys an approach to a civilizational history. By using the term 'Islamic cultures' we meant to veer away from the notion that EWIC would focus on religious texts (although it does cover them) and to direct attention to the broad panoply of issues that are embraced within the arms of 'culture'.

We were committed to deessentializing Islam. To do this, we needed to contextualize, historicize and regionalize the experiences of women and Islamic cultures. We designed entries which situated issues of relevance to women within specific historical periods, political regimes and localities. As the production of knowledge is conditioned by the socio-political environments in which it is produced, this historical approach allowed us to identify critical changes in methodologies, re-

sources and paradigms. EWIC worked to decenter the common 'Middle East' focus of research dealing with women and Islamic cultures by recruiting editors, advisory editors, entries and authors from all over the world. As news spread about the EWIC project, scholars and writers began contacting us. The database has grown to over nine hundred self-volunteered potential authors.

The literature in the many fields encompassed by EWIC is rapidly expanding. Research on women and Islamic cultures is theoretically and empirically at the frontiers of many disciplines. At the same time the idea of the 'Muslim woman' or the 'woman and Islam' has come to have a political and historical salience, particularly in Western media and scholarship, but also on a global scale, that is often fabricated for these women, often out of cloth that is not of their weaving. The goal of EWIC is to capture knowledge in the frame of history, to historicize knowledge in the context of place and to place knowledge at the service of those who may be enriched by understanding its processes of production.

SUAD JOSEPH



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For further information about *The Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures*, and for writers interested in contributing to future EWIC volumes and editions, please see <http://sjoseph.ucdavis.edu/ewic> or the Brill website <http://www.brill.nl/>.

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