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Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures, volume IV, Economics, Mobility and Space,
edited by Suad Joseph, Brill. Leiden-Boston 2007.

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The first volume of the six-volume *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures* (EWIC) set up the EWIC project as an “interdisciplinary, transhistorical, and transnational” work, spanning “all facets of the life of women” in the “civilizations and societies in which Islam has played a historic role” (I: xxi), from the rise of Islam to the present day and extending from West Africa to Central and South Asia, according to the general editor, Suad Joseph (I: xxxiii). In line with this plan, EWIC’s editorial board has organized the fourth volume around the themes of ‘Economics, Education, Mobility and Space’. Volume I focused on ‘Methodologies, Paradigms and Sources’ [2003]; volume II on ‘Family, Law and Politics’ [2005]; and volume III on ‘Family, Body, Sexuality and Health’ [2005]. Volume V on ‘Practices, Interpretation and Representation’ and volume VI (Supplement and Index) are expected to appear in 2007. The fourth volume is primarily concerned with examining the material conditions affecting the daily realities of women in predominantly Muslim societies, as well as Muslim women in non-Muslim societies.

Under the broad headings of 'Cities', 'Development', 'Economics', 'Education', 'Environment', 'Migration,' and 'Space', EWIC's volume IV covers topics as sweeping as colonial cities, global cities, Islamic cities, homelessness, urban identities and movements, discourses and practices for development, farming and development, housing policies, non-governmental organizations, sustainable development, credit organizations, marketing, craft industries, foreign aid, informal and formal labor markets, Islamic banking, labor and health, land reform, trade, domestic labor, pastoral economies, professional occupations, sex workers, education from pre- to post-colonial periods, environment, migration, and space. It also includes entries under the headings 'Information Technology', 'Poverty', 'Slavery' and 'Tourism'. The volume "looks for evidence of agency, whether it is found in women's activism in non-governmental or community-based organizations, credit associations, or the possibilities created by education" (p. xxiii). Entries are organized by geographical region and are sometimes preceded or replaced by a conceptual overview. The volume contains 263 entries, including 15 overviews, each followed by a bibliography, the whole written by over two hundred contributors.

A first conceptual challenge that emerges from the *Encyclopedia's* overall aim is whether Islam constitutes an overarching theme across all the phenomena covered. The editors no doubt face this challenge in all the volumes, but it is particularly sharp in volume IV with its themes revolving around the material conditions of everyday life. This reader finds that evidence of Islamic culture as a common thread in economics, education, mobility, and space is tenuous indeed. As Joseph notes in the preface, this question invites more extensive comparative research.

The organization by geographical region of the entries on most of the topics covered is both useful and commonsensical. However, the choice of regions is unsystematic since, as Joseph admits, it was a matter of the availability of contributors rather than theoretical conceptualization. This means that one of the principal functions that this volume is intended to fulfill is somewhat compromised, since the usefulness of any work of reference is based in the predictability of its contents, a quality produced by uniformity of organization and comparability across entries.

The thematic overviews that precede some of the geographically specific entries provide the history of scholarly thought on the topic in question, setting it in the context of Islam and Islamic cultures, and fleshing out its effect and relevance to women. Hence Minako Sakai's overview entry on "The Environment" traces the origins of environmentalism in the west to the science of forestry, and links the rising concern about ecology in the west to the notion of sustainable development. The author then discusses Islam's understanding of the environment, and moves to a discussion of women's land rights in the Muslim world, attributing some of the environmental problems faced by Muslim countries to the severance of the relationship between women and the land. Adam Sabra's overview on 'Poverty' opens with a succinct discussion of poverty from the standpoint of Islam, linking much of the Muslim world's sociological treatment of poverty, its attitude towards the poor, and its institutions for poverty alleviation to the religious doctrine underlying these practices and attitudes, before discussing poverty as it is faced by women in the Muslim world.

These introductory sections are well written, informative, and closer to the ethos of a work that defines itself as more "transhistorical" than most of the other entries in the volume; the vast majority of the regional entries are focused on present day understanding and practice of the topics in question and offer little by way of history. The overview sections also address some of the difficulties that arise from the arbitrariness of the geographic divisions by providing general

entries that are not bound to a particular part of the Muslim world. However, as is the case with the choice of geographic divisions, it is also unclear to the reader on what basis the editors chose to include overviews for some topics and not for others.

According to the defining mission set out in Volume I, the *Encyclopedia* is intended to encompass all eras of Islamic culture. However, outside of the overview sections described above, the content of this volume is confined primarily to contemporary or very recent historical periods. Hence, the “transhistorical” dimension is largely lost. For example, little is said about the four main topics of Volume IV in relation to early and middle Islamic cultures. A notable exception is found in some of the entries on inherently dynamic processes such as urbanization and colonialism. The entries under ‘Colonial Cities’ all flesh out the contrast between the pre-colonial urban landscapes and colonial cities. Petra Kuppinger’s contribution under this heading on the ‘Arab World’ provides an excellent treatment of the changes to urban life introduced by colonialism, and her carefully chosen headings relate the topic to the intersection of public space, the economy, and women’s daily lives. Similarly William J. Glover’s entry on ‘South Asia’ gives the reader a useful picture of the transformations involved with the advent of colonialism, though it is too brief when contextualizing the topic in Islamic cultures and women’s lives.

Economics, one of the four main themes of Volume IV, is covered in 24 different headings encompassing various aspects of the economy ranging from the labor market (child labor, agricultural and industrial labor, labor and health, paid domestic labor, sex workers, etc. ...), the financial market (access to credit and Islamic banking), and consumption (commodification and consumption), to the different productive sectors of the economy. One topic central to development studies that is omitted here though it deserves attention is saving behavior, intra-household, and intergenerational distributional decisions more generally. The more pressing gap in the entries on ‘Economics’ comes from the fact that no effort is made to incorporate any scholarly work on economics, and the entries use the language of public policy, which only borrows some concepts and findings from economic scholarship. Although academic work in economics has been slow to respond to the critiques made by women’s and gender studies, as well as to adequately address challenges and questions emerging from the Muslim world, there are important findings in the empirical economics literature regarding women in the Arab and Muslim worlds that are extremely relevant to some of the ‘Economics’ sections. The same can be said of many paradigms, concepts, and findings from labor and development economics that are applicable to any discussion of women and Islamic cultures.

Many of the entries describe the evolution of debates on the topic in question, and explicitly identify gaps in relevant literatures; two examples are the entries on ‘Sub-Saharan Africa’ and the ‘Arab World’ under the heading of ‘Environment: Change and Natural Resource Extraction’. This gives the volume under review the feel of a rich and extensive reader on women and Islamic cultures rather than an encyclopedia in the classical understanding of the term. Most of the limitations described above are less relevant if the book is intended as a reader, since a reader would have less need to be transhistorical, and less concern for the uniformity of format and coverage across entries which is essential for a work of reference.

For researchers interested in the four main themes covered in Volume IV, the *Encyclopedia* provides the fruit of an immense effort to collect entries from a wide variety of scholars sensitive to the need for the richness and importance of an interdisciplinary approach. Overall, the vast survey it affords of factors affecting the material realities of the everyday lives of women in

Muslim communities is a timely and critical guide for scholars, activists, policy makers, analysts, and general readers.

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