

Muslim Women and Sport

Edited by

**Tansin Benn, Gertrud Pfister
and Haifaa Jawad**



International Studies in Physical Education and Youth Sport

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Muslim Women and Sport

Examining the global experiences, challenges and achievements of Muslim women participating in physical activities and sport, this important new study makes a profound contribution to our understanding of both contemporary Islam and the complexity and diversity of women's lives in the modern world.

The book presents an overview of current research into constructs of gender, the role of religion and the importance of situation. It addresses what Islam has to say about women's participation in sport and what Muslim women have to say about their involvement in sport. It highlights the challenges and explores the opportunities for women in sport in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries, utilising a series of extensive case studies in various countries which invite the readers to conduct cross-cultural comparisons. Material on Iraq, Palestine and Bosnia and Herzegovina provides rare insights into the impact of war on sporting activities for women. The book also seeks to make important recommendations for improving access to sport for girls and women from Muslim communities.

Muslim Women and Sport confronts many deeply held stereotypes and crosses those commonly quoted boundaries between 'Islam and the West' and between 'East and West'. It makes fascinating reading for anyone with an interest in the interrelationships between sport, religion, gender, culture and policy.

Tansin Benn is an Associate Professor in the School of Education, University of Birmingham, UK. **Gertrud Pfister** is Professor in the Department of Exercise and Sport Sciences, University of Copenhagen, Denmark. **Haifaa Jawad** is Senior Lecturer in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, Department of Theology and Religion, University of Birmingham, UK.

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Muslim Women and Sport

*Edited by Tansin Benn,
Gertrud Pfister and Haifaa Jawad*

This book is dedicated to all who take positive action to build bridges between people; also, to those whose love and inspiration has enabled all authors and participants to fulfil their ambition to contribute to this volume, including loved ones who sadly died before seeing its fruition.

Contributors

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Tansin Benn is Associate Professor in the School of Education, College of Social Sciences, University of Birmingham, England, and President of IAPESGW 2009–2013. Her specialist research and publication field is the interface of gender, ethnicity, religion and physical education/sport. Her research into the life experiences of British Muslim women in teacher training started in the 1990s and has involved work linking policy, theory and practice at national and international levels. The award of a Leverhulme Research Fellowship to conduct a study in Oman in 2008 resulted in establishing the networks evident in this publication.

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Eman Gaad taught children with special needs in the UK and Egypt before moving into higher education at the University of East Anglia (UK) and then to UAE University as a lecturer on issues of people with special needs. Dr Gaad has been a Senior Lecturer at the British University in Dubai since 2004, where her special research interests centre on the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream education, especially in Arab/Islamic countries. She is currently seconded to the Government of Dubai as a Director of Disability Services in the Community Development Authority.

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Haifaa Jawad is Senior Lecturer in Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, School of Philosophy, Theology and Religion, University of Birmingham, UK. She is Associate Editor of *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* and the *Journal of the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*. In 2004, she was a visiting Professor in Contemporary Islam at the University of Alabama, USA. From 2006 to 2008, she was a visiting lecturer at the Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College, Dublin. She has specialised in the socio-political study of Islam, Islamic thought, women in Islam, and British Islam, especially new Muslims. She has interests in Islamic spirituality and ethics. Among her recent publications are: 'Islamic Spirituality and the Feminine Dimension', in Howie and Jobling (eds), *Women and the Divine*, Palgrave, Macmillan, 2009; 'Islamic Feminism: Leadership Roles and Public Representation', *HAWWA: Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World*, Brill, 7, 1, 2009. Haifaa is currently working on *The Contribution of European Converts to Islam: Britain as a Case Study*, for Continuum International.

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Margaret Talbot OBE was Professor and Head of Sport at Leeds Metropolitan University, England, before becoming the Chief Executive, successively of the Central Council of Physical Recreation, then the Association for Physical Education (UK). Margaret was President of the International Association of Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women from 1997–2005, and is currently President of the International Council of Sports Science and Physical Education. She has contributed at the highest levels to research, policy and delivery of sport and physical education at national and international levels.

Foreword

Professor Darlene A. Kluka

The issue of women, sport and empowerment continuously remains on the agenda of global social change. The concepts of women's empowerment, gender mainstreaming, gender equality and gender equity have been identified as key drivers for promoting women's quality of life. The increased emphasis on the position of women and sport during the last half-century has now been embedded in the broader context of globalization. A record of this can be found in sequential United Nations policy documents, as well as proceedings from the 16 quadrennial IAPESGW World Congresses. These documents track increased global attention to women's rights and have served to facilitate a greater interest and participation in women's sport. IAPESGW has, historically, supported the involvement of girls and women in physical education and sport since its inception in 1949. A half-century later, in 1999, IAPESGW, through its members and leaders, responded to members' requests to work more closely with and for Muslim women in physical education and sport. The strategic initiative involved acknowledging and combating negative stereotypes of Muslim women (predominantly held in the West, but also held in other parts of the world) as oppressed and virtually invisible in the sports arena; and bringing forth understanding, through knowledge exchange, about the diverse experiences of Muslim girls and women in and through physical education and sport internationally. One forum created was in locating the IAPESGW World Congress in Alexandria, Egypt, in 2001. This provided a world platform from which to facilitate an international agenda for the discussion of challenges and opportunities for Muslim girls and women in sport.

During the following 2005 IAPESGW World Congress in Edmonton, Canada, two important events coincided, the opening keynote by the then President, Professor Margaret Talbot, and a seminar on Muslim women in sport. The former raised concerns about the exclusion of Muslim girls and women from physical education and sport, while the latter identified contested views concerning the participation of Muslim women in the Olympic Games. As a result of subsequent discussion between a group of scholars with mutual interest in facilitating the participation of Muslim women in sport, a commitment to pursue an opportunity for extended dialogue at an international level was agreed. Dr Tansin Benn, then an Executive Board member of IAPESGW, and the current President, was

invited by the group to coordinate a study group initiative. Eventually, under the aegis of IAPESGW and with the generous support of Sultan Qaboos University, Oman, a study week on 'Improving opportunities for Muslim girls and women in physical education and sport' took place in February 2008. The result of intense debate and discussion resulted in the 'Accept and Respect' Declaration, as well as this significant book.

This publication is edited by Tansin Benn, Gertrud Pfister and Haifaa Jawad, who are established researchers in socio-cultural, gender and Islamic studies. It presents examples of the diversity in international experiences of young Muslim women through sport and physical education; identifies challenges and achievements; links theory, practice and reflection; contributes to the knowledge-base of multiple realities that defy stereotypes; and opens understanding of different worldviews. This is the first book of its kind that brings Muslim and non-Muslim authors together on this scale of collective authorship, with the mutual interest of increasing knowledge and understanding for and about the sport-related experiences of Muslim women. It will be of value to those genuinely interested in shared knowledge and provision of greater inclusion in all fields of physical activity: policy-makers, leaders, sports governing bodies, organisers, coaches, educators and participants.

This seminal work is testament to the agency of women and the power of collaboration in pursuit of broadening knowledge. IAPESGW, recently celebrating its Sixtieth Anniversary at its 2009 world congress in Stellenbosch, South Africa, is proud to be associated with this groundbreaking book that provides new insights into religious, cultural and social influences on the lives of women through the life experiences of Muslim women in sport.

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