

Only Muslim: Embodying Islam in Twentieth-Century France

FOR more than two decades, French public discourse has cast Islam as a challenge to French secularism. Journalists and politicians have taken headscarves and halal meat, prayers in public streets and requests for women's-only swimming pool hours, as evidence that recent immigrants to France, especially from North Africa, pose a new and visible threat to the norms and laws that govern a religiously neutral public sphere. In these accounts, Muslims are seen to repeatedly physically transgress the republic's cherished laicite. These corporeal transgressions are imagined to represent Muslims' inability to properly privatize their faith. Naomi Davidson's important book offers crucial historical insight into why the body is the focus of public debate about Islam. In doing so, it offers compelling correctives to standard narratives about the "Muslim problem" in modern France.

First, the book suggests that these state concerns are not just a recent phenomenon. It shows that managing Muslims has a much longer colonial as well as postcolonial history. Secondly, by focusing on "Muslims" and "Muslimness" Davidson questions "the usefulness of laicite as a category for understanding the history of Islam in France" (p. 12). Standard accounts of laicite, in her view, fail to account for why Muslim bodies and embodied practices garner so much state attention. In order to understand the pervasive corporealization of Islam, she argues, one needs to attend to questions not just of religion, but also of race. Indeed, writes Davidson, "Muslim" must be understood "as a category of racial difference rather than as one of religious difference" (p. 11).

"Muslim" in the state discourses and practices of what she terms "Islam

Judul Buku
Only Muslim: Embodying Islam in Twentieth-Century France

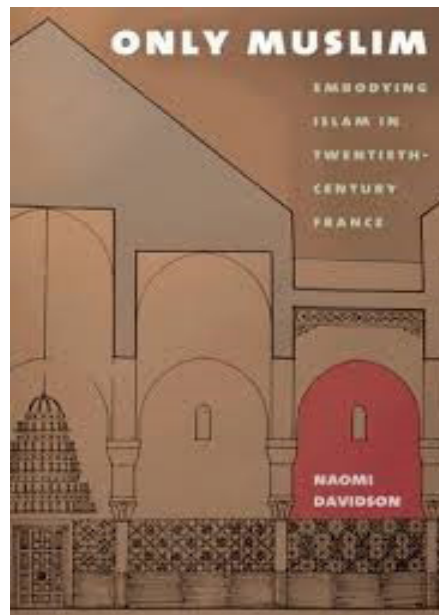
Penulis
Naomi Davidson

Penerbit
Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2012

Jumlah Halaman
xi, 299

ISBN
978 0 8014 7831 4

Peresensi
Judith Surkis



frangais" is simultaneously homogenizing and particularizing. It presumes that Muslims possess a unified "culture" that expresses itself in distinct ma-

terial forms such as architecture and food. In its materialized particularity, the Muslimness of North African migrants resists assimilation into the universal and presumptively disembodied abstraction of French citizenship. The racialization of religion that Davidson describes recalls the fate of Jews and Judaism in post revolutionary France and colonial North Africa. Throughout the book, Davidson productively draws out such parallels and divergences in order to clarify the specific ways in which North Africans have been racialized.

How did "Islam frangais" produce Muslimness as an embodied condition?

In order to illustrate how state officials were as concerned with Muslim bodies as they were with souls, Davidson adopts a highly original phenomenological approach to the state and colonial archive. Studying architectural plans of Mosques alongside official correspondence, Davidson reconstructs how officials conceived a Muslim "built environment." She details how "Islam frangais" assigned embodied practices (praying, eating; healing) to specific places and spaces. In the process, she shows how the state produced ideas about North African colonial migrants' prayer habits and hygiene, culinary and vestimentary practices. Since the First World War, the institutions that were created to at once serve and surveil "Muslim" migrants in the metropole conceived their faith in material terms — as matters of architectural and aesthetic detail, bodily conditions, and embodied "traditions".

(Sumber: *Canadian Journal of History*, ISSN 0008-4107, 09/2014, Volume 49, Issue 2, p. 289)

The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament (Islam and Modernity)

IN *The Impossible State*, Wael Hallaq argues that the modern state is a bad fit for Muslims. This is so because the paradigm of “Islamic Governance,” developed through centuries of Islamic rule, and the modern state of the West, are incompatible, if not altogether contradictory. The modern state as sovereign, a European invention and an expression of the unique unfolding of Europe’s history, is characterized by: an always-faltering separation of powers between executive, legislative, and judiciary branches; a separation between the “is” and the “ought to be”; and the primacy of the political over everything else (not to mention the state’s penetration of its population à la Foucault)—all of which goes against the very grain of the Islamic nonstate. The latter, by contrast in Hallaq’s view, is organized organically around God’s sovereignty, with shari(a as the moral code, or the privileged expression of His Will. The translation of shari(a into law unfolds through the work of a learned juristic class that mediates between the community, to which the jurists are organically connected, and God the sovereign.

The world of Islam is moral through a sort of excellence that rejects the separation between fact and norm. Its “political” realm is confined to executive rulers of rotating dynasties who remain external to the embryonic tight embrace between jurists and community, and whose role is to tax, organize armies, and regulate on the margins. In this universe, the organizing principle of life is the individual Muslim’s “care of the self,” which involves fashioning oneself as moral according to the dictates of the shari(a. This care of self is in contradistinction to the pitiable plight of the modern Western citizen whose subjectivity is fashioned by the state for its own selfish utilitarian

Judul Buku

The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament (Islam and Modernity)

Penulis:

Wael Hallaq

Penerbit

New York: Columbia University Press, 2012

Jumlah Halaman

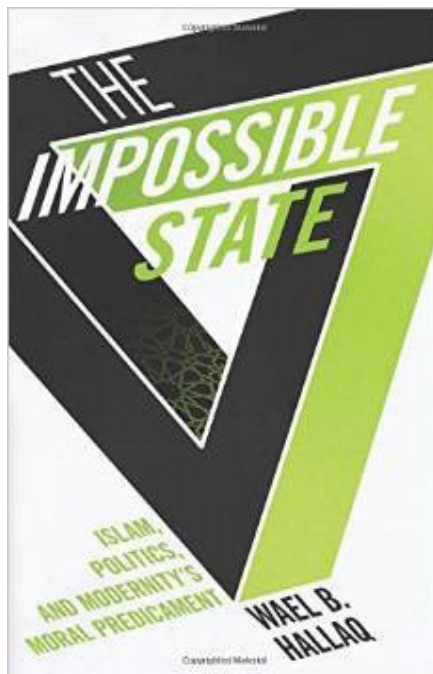
272

ISBN

978-0231162579

Peresensi

Lama Abu Odeh



ends. Pulling a Huntington-in-reverse, Hallaq argues not only that the modern state, which was thrust by Europe onto Muslim shores, is a bad fit for Muslims, but also that it is decidedly inferior to the counter model of Islamic governance. After all, Muslims, due to their “paradigm” of governance, had lived in peace and tranquility for centuries. They were spared the kind of tumult and revolution that occurred in Europe because, historically, they were free of the tyranny of monarchs, the cruelty of feudalism, and the abuses of the church, all of which had forced their European compatriots to rebel!

Hallaq ends by, on the one hand, inviting the West to recognize the radical difference of the Muslim other and to give up its imposed universalisms. In fact, he invites the West to open its heart and mind to the Islamic model, for who knows, it might learn to be enlightened by it. On the other hand, he expresses skepticism toward contemporary projects of Islamic reconstruction of law, such as in the area of Islamic finance, because the modern state is the background assumption and the locus for such projects. The problem, according to Hallaq, is that such attempts proceed to reconstruct law while leaving aside the reconstruction of the moral Muslim whom Islamic governance assumed to be the ontological prior to law and litigation. Deprived of the moral context that lends them the quality “Islamic”, such projects are either inauthentic or doomed to failure.

(Sumber: *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46.1 (Feb 2014): 216-218)

They were spared the kind of tumult and revolution that occurred in Europe because, historically, they were free of the tyranny of monarchs, the cruelty of feudalism, and the abuses of the church, all of which had forced their European compatriots to rebel!

