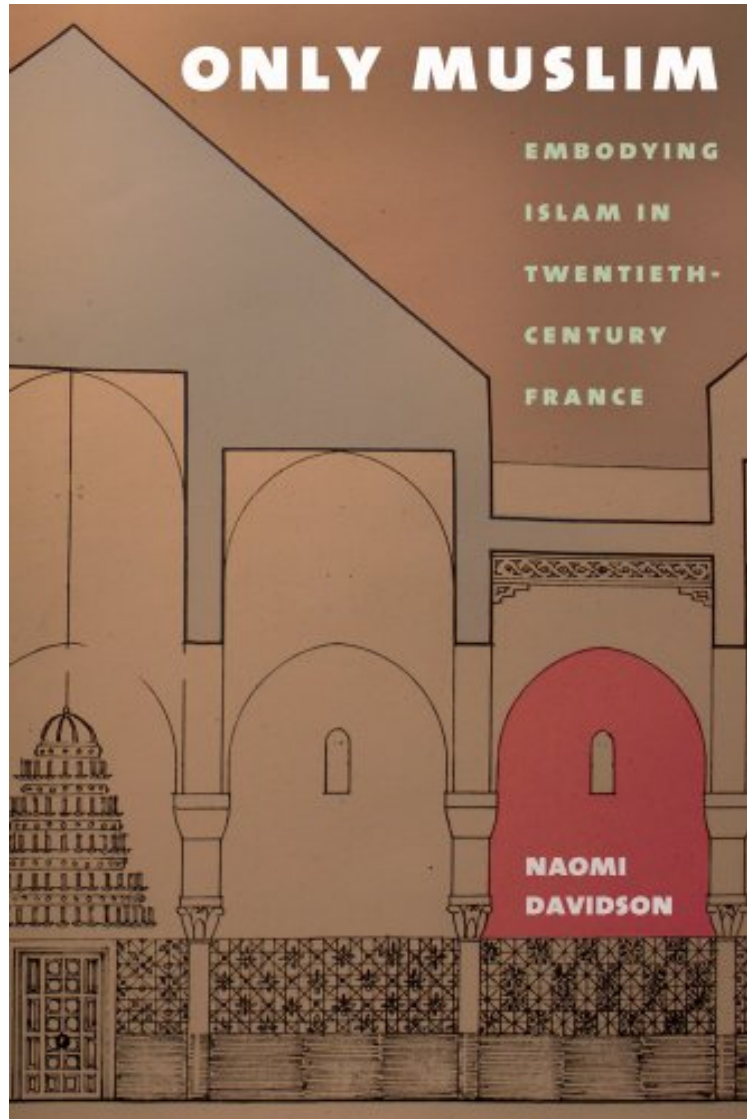


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Only Muslim: Embodying Islam in Twentieth-Century France

Naomi Davidson

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#1968464 in Books Cornell University Press 2012-07-31 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.10 x .80 x 6.10l, 1.00 #File Name: 0801478316320 pages | File size: 24.Mb

Naomi Davidson : Only Muslim: Embodying Islam in Twentieth-Century France before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Only Muslim: Embodying Islam in Twentieth-Century France:

The French state has long had a troubled relationship with its diverse Muslim populations. In Only Muslim, Naomi

Davidson traces this turbulence to the 1920s and 1930s, when North Africans first immigrated to French cities in significant numbers. Drawing on police reports, architectural blueprints, posters, propaganda films, and documentation from metropolitan and colonial officials as well as anticolonial nationalists, she reveals the ways in which French politicians and social scientists created a distinctly French vision of Islam that would inform public policy and political attitudes toward Muslims for the rest of the century. *Islam français*. French Muslims were cast into a permanent "otherness" that functioned in the same way as racial difference. This notion that one was only and forever Muslim was attributed to all immigrants from North Africa, though in time "Muslim" came to function as a synonym for Algerian, despite the diversity of the North and West African population. Davidson grounds her narrative in the history of the Mosque de Paris, which was inaugurated in 1926 and epitomized the concept of *Islam français*. Built in official gratitude to the tens of thousands of Muslim subjects of France who fought and were killed in World War I, the site also provided the state with a means to regulate Muslim life throughout the metropole beginning during the interwar period. Later chapters turn to the consequences of the state's essentialized view of Muslims in the Vichy years and during the Algerian War. Davidson concludes with current debates over plans to build a Muslim cultural institute in the middle of a Parisian immigrant neighborhood, showing how Islam remains today a marker of an unassimilable difference.

"Naomi Davidson's account of how many in France came to see Islam in a particular way, and how that vision determined attitudes and actions toward Muslims, is well researched, convincingly argued, and engagingly written. . . . In one of the books most valuable contributions, Davidson helps us see clearly the limits of *laïcité* as an explanation for France's past and ongoing difficulties in reconciling what she calls 'Muslimness with republican citizenship and membership in the French national community.'" Citation by the 2013 Alf Andrew Heggoy Book Prize Committee, French Colonial Historical Society "This is . . . a historical narrative, academically stringent and intellectually resonant, that has a point to make and consequently follows a particular line of reasoning. . . . What it delivers is a revealing and telling portrait of the French polity, its colonial past, its contemporary tensions and the impasse of its *laïcist* ideology." S. Parvez Manzoor, *The Muslim World Book* (2013) "This well-researched book presents a richly documented institutional history of Islam in 20th century France with particular reference to the buildings in which that history has taken material form. In addition to according a central role to the best-known of those buildings the Grande Mosque de Paris, inaugurated in 1926 Davidson's narrative provides a wealth of information on the construction and management of other Islamic sites both in the French capital and in the provinces." Alec G. Hargreaves, *Contemporary French Civilization* "The great merit of Davidson's work is that it puts French debates about Islam, and French policy concerning Islam, into historical perspective, clearly showing that current debates are not new, but are variants of issues that have been prevalent for a century." John Tolan, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* (January 2014) "Only Muslim is a brilliant book. In it, Naomi Davidson offers a compelling new explanation for one of the knottiest problems confronted by historians of colonial and postcolonial France: the conflation of racial, ethnic, religious, and national identities that underpins the seeming paradox of anti-Muslim racism" against North Africans and prevents the French state from recognizing its Muslim subjects as full citizens. Scholars will certainly be grappling with the big arguments of *Only Muslim* for a long time to come. Jennifer Sessions, *The Journal of Modern History* (September 2014) "In *Only Muslim*, Naomi Davidson provides a new perspective on the place of Islam and Muslim immigrants in French history. One of the remarkable aspects of this outstanding book is its ability to make the dry stuff of bureaucratic archives come alive. With Davidson's astute readings, it becomes the material for an engaging, illuminating story." Joan Wallach Scott, Harold F. Linder Professor, School of Social Science, Institute for Advanced Study, author of *The Politics of the Veil* "Naomi Davidson's book is an exemplary study of postcolonial Europe. Her well-researched, nuanced account of institutions and images in particular the problematic idea of *Islam français* and the raced figure of the Algerian Muslim that influenced French strategies for dealing with diverse Muslim immigrants and anticolonial movements of the twentieth century, enriches our understanding of what still troubles the French vision of *laïcité*. This book belongs equally to the two fields of modern European history and postcolonial studies." Dipesh Chakrabarty, Lawrence A. Kimpton Distinguished Service Professor, The University of Chicago, author of *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* "Analyses of the ways that race and empire shaped modern Europe are rewriting how we think about universalism, citizenship, modernity, and the nation-state. Yet the failure of this vibrant discussion to think astutely about how Islam fits in this new history has become ever more glaring. This landmark book will make all the difference. Naomi Davidson shows how the French Republic invented a 'French Islam,' which found anchor in built spaces, invested Muslim bodies, and invaded the French imagination. This lucid and incisive history brings clarity to pressing questions about immigration, Arabs, the Mediterranean, secularism/*laïcité*, and European identities." Todd Shepard, The Johns Hopkins University, author of *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* "This fascinating and important book is a timely historical intervention in the debate on secularism and Islam in France. Naomi Davidson's meticulous research helps to restore the Muslim dimension of France's recent history, offering a compelling insight into more than a century of state attempts to create an *Islam français*, not only in North Africa but also in the metropole. It will be

required reading for students of modern France and its politics of secularization, and will raise even greater interest in the context of the changes now sweeping through the Muslim world." Ian Coller, La Trobe University