


BOOK REVIEW

“Sufi Women, Embodiment, and the ‘Self’: Gender in Islamic Ritual” by Jamila Rodrigues

Jamila Rodrigues *‘Self: Gender in Islamic Ritual’* (London: Routledge, 2023), 184 PP, £125.00 HBK, ISBN 9780367374006

Reza Adeputra Tohis 

Faculty of Ushuluddin Adab and Da'wah, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Manado, North Sulawesi, Indonesia.
Email: reza.tohis@iain-manado.ac.id

This book is an ethnographic study of the Sufi ritual practices and embodied experiences among the female members of the Naqshbandi community in Cape Town, South Africa. The specific Sufi ritual in question is *hadra*, often called the “Sacred Dance,” a religious gathering that combines bodily movement, the recitation of sacred texts, and music to achieve closeness to God. The book’s main argument is that *hadra* serves as a somatic platform for Sufi women to express their identity and piety, made visible through their bodies and bodily movements during the ritual.

The underlying issue addressed in this book is the distortion of Islam in Portugal, South Africa, which is often perceived as socially closed, patriarchally violent, and oppressive toward women. Many people, particularly in Western societies, view Muslims as a socially marginalized group and assume that all Muslim women are submissive and less knowledgeable. However, within this community, women play a crucial role. Therefore, Jamila Rodrigues aims to “indirectly” challenge these views by researching and demonstrating how Sufi women actively engage in religious practices, shaping their knowledge, self-concepts, and pious identities through the ritual of *hadra*. For her, this is a form of loyalty to the Sufis and women themselves.

Rodrigues employs an ethnographic methodology with an interdisciplinary approach, encompassing symbolic anthropology, somatic studies, and Islamic Sufism theology. Data was collected through participant observation and in-depth interviews with female members, referred to as Sufi Women, of the Naqshbandi community, primarily in Cape Town, South Africa, with additional data from Lefke, Cyprus.

The book consists of nine chapters, including the introduction. It begins with an introductory chapter that describes Jamila Rodrigues’ background, her interest in Islam, Sufism, and the role of women in the *hadra* ritual. She states that her interest arose from her journey as a dancer and a Muslim anthropologist who was interested in the relationship between the body, culture, and religious expression.