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**““Can Muslim Women Lead Prayers?: Reevaluating the Legal and Philosophical Foundations of Women’s Legal Competence in Islamic Law”**

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The recent debate on whether Muslim women can or cannot lead a gender-mixed prayer has wider implications than the specific subject matter itself about key Islamic legal concepts and Muslim’s perception of Islamic law. Since the beginning of the controversy, pro and con *fatawa* and opinions started to be circulated by different Islamic organizations and heated discussions and polarizing debates began to take place among local Muslim communities and professional groups. But what is really at stake here? What are the underlying concerns and presumptions of both opposing views on gender issues and men and women’s religious and legal competence? According to Islamic sources, what are the qualifications that render a person competent or incompetent to lead a prayer? What does classic and contemporary Islamic scholarship have to say on the issue, and on what basis? If according to the classic sources of Islamic law, underage children, slaves and sinful people may lead prayer, why are women considered to be incompetent in leading prayers? How can this contradiction be explained? What is the main concern of the traditional view which prohibits women from leading prayers? Is it the physical differences of men and women and the modesty rules that should apply to women or is it the presumed mental and religious inferiority of women and their incompetence to occupy leading religious, political and legal positions vis-à-vis men? According to both the classical scholars’ views and presumptions on women in general and the texts of the opinions and *fatawa* produced on the subject thus far, the issue of whether women may or may not lead a congregational prayer does definitely entail deeper layers of a bigger controversy on the meaning of such key Islamic terms as “*wilayah*” and “*qiwamah*,” and women’s ability to occupy leading positions in society. These deeper layers of controversy inevitably provoke us to reconsider such closely connected basic issues as women rights, gender equality and interpretation methods of Islamic sources, especially the Hadith literature on women - issues that are themselves still pending a satisfying and authentic scholarly solution. This paper will illuminate the core concern in this recent Islamic legal debate which is widely ignored or refused to be acknowledged by the majority of the contemporary participants.