TAJDID: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin

CONTESTING FEMALE RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY IN DIGITAL SPACE: A Hermeneutical Study of Reactions to Amina Wadud's Friday Prayer Leadership

Naili Rosa Urbah Rusydiana*
UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia
nailirosaa@gmail.com
* Corresponding Author

Rika Lusri Virga
UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia
rika.virga@uin-suka.ac.id

Mohammad Afri Muadom
Al-Azhar University Cairo, Egypt
mohammad9muadom@gmail.com

Abstract
This study examines the controversy surrounding female imams in mixed prayers led by Amina Wadud in New York on March 18, 2005, which took place in the digital space. This study does not test the validity of Islamic law regarding female imams, but rather investigates how the practice of female prayer leaders is debated, questioned, defended, and disseminated globally within the realm of religious discourse by various groups, such as academics, religious scholars or authorities, as well as the general public, which is stored in digital archives such as online news portals and digital documents in online libraries. By drawing on a progressive Islamic framework, this research aims to highlight changes in the production of religious meaning and examine the forms of negotiation by spiritual authorities in the public sphere. This research uses a qualitative method with a hermeneutic approach, and it broadly describes two main responses: first, rejection of female imams based on textual interpretations of hadiths and

classical fiqh consensus. Second, defense based on a contextual approach to gender justice and reinterpretation of Islamic sources. The analysis in this study is conducted through three aspects: historicization, contextual text production, and public reception. The findings of this study indicate that Wadud's case not only challenges the normative boundaries of religious authority but also opens global discussions about women's spiritual rights and patriarchal structures in religious practices. This practice serves as a valuable starting point in the history of contemporary Islamic discourse, particularly in terms of resistance to masculine interpretations and dominance within religious authority. This study offers a fresh perspective on the legitimacy, interpretation, and transformation of inclusive religious traditions.

Keywords: Amina Wadud; Female Imam; Progressive Islam; Religious Authority

Abstrak

Penelitian ini menelaah tentang kontroversi imam perempuan dalam salat campuran oleh Amina Wadud di New York pada 18 Maret 2005 yang terjadi di ruang digital. Penelitian ini tidak menguji keabsahan terhadap hukum fikih tentang imam perempuan, melainkan menyelidiki bagaimana praktik imam salat perempuan diperdebatkan, dipertanyakan, dibela, dan disebarluaskan secara global dalam lingkup wacana sosial keagamaan oleh berbagai kalangan, seperti akademisi, ulama atau otoritas keagamaan, serta masyarakat luas yang tersimpan di arsip digital seperti pada portal-portal berita online dan dokumen-dokumen digital di perpustakaan online. Dengan memetik wadah kerangka Islam yang progresif, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyoroti perubahan produksi makna keagamaan dan melihat bentuk negosiasi oleh kalangan otoritas spiritual dalam ruang publik. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan hermeneutika, studi ini menggambarkan secara garis besar dua respons utama: *pertama*, penolakan terhadap imam perempuan yang didasarkan pada tafsir tekstual atas hadis beserta konsensus fiqh klasik. *Kedua*, pembelaan yang didasarkan pada pendekatan kontekstual terhadap keadilan gender, dan reinterpretasi sumber Islam. Adapun analisis penelitian ini dilakukan melalui tiga hal, yakni historisasi, produksi teks konteks, dan resepsi publik. Sementara hasil temuan dalam penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa kasus yang terjadi oleh Wadud tidak hanya menggoyahkan batas normatif otoritas keagamaan, akan tetapi juga membuka diskusi secara global tentang hak spiritualitas perempuan dan struktur patriarki dalam praktik keagamaan. Berangkat dari praktik tersebut menjadi titik awal yang berharga sepanjang sejarah wacana Islam kontemporer, dengan memperhatikan resistensi terhadap interpretasi dan dominasi maskulin dalam otoritas keagamaan. Studi ini memberikan kebaruan pada interpretasi yang baru tentang legitimasi, tafsir, serta perubahan tradisi keagamaan yang inklusif.

Kata Kunci: Amina Wadud; Imam Perempuan; Islam Progresif; Otoritas Agama

Introduction

On Friday, March 18, 2005, Amina Wadud, a professor of Islamic studies specializing in Qur'ānic exegesis and gender, caused a stir in Islamic history by conducting a mixed-gender Friday prayer and sermon at New York Cathedral.[1] The incident spread globally through websites on the internet and generated a variety of responses in the digital space. As we know, the digital space is a new product of developments in communication technology. Its presence has transcended space and time in conveying various events around the world.

The debate among Muslims worldwide, especially among scholars in America and the Middle East. Wadud, as an *imam*, received a lot of pressure and threats from various parties to be tried for violating Islamic law, as had happened before.[2] This event is said to be a celebration, a challenge, and a first step for women activists who are marginalized in the discourse on gender and feminism in America.

According to Hammer, the imam's practice in this event was a performance in which the organizers, congregation, and media representatives all contributed to shaping the meaning of the imam. He argues that the prayer committee had two main objectives during the performance: to challenge inadequate representations of Muslim women and men through the performance of prayer, and to foster productive and critical debate about prayer leadership and gender justice more broadly in America or other Muslim communities.[3] Thus, priesthood becomes an act that has symbolic meaning despite its discursive, spatial, and temporal limitations, and its various dimensions are

---

[1] Amina Wadud Muhsin, *Qur'an and Woman ; Rereading the Sacred Text From a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). 249

[2] Muhsin, Qur'an and Woman, . 255

[3] Cemil Aydin and Juliane Hammer, "Muslims and Media: Perceptions, Participation, and Change," *Contemporary Islam* 4, no. 1 (2010): 1–9, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-009-0098-7.

publicized, discussed, and implemented through various forms of media.

The above polemic shows the convergence of Islamic modernity, which has an impact and changes power structures such as patriarchal culture that has been rooted for thousands of years. When religion is used as a bastion in the cultural war against the forces of modernization and "Westernization," culturally 'commodified' female figures, symbols of "*tradition*," and manifestations of sexuality, become synonymous with politics. Therefore, the objectives of culture and religion give rise to the emergence of Islamic fundamentalist movements. Current debates on feminism, gender, and women's rights in Islam are heavily laden with ideological content, as they are rooted in the broader historical tensions between the East and the West.

In this section, the author compiles a map of relevant literature in this study, which aims to place this study in a broader academic context while also identifying the gaps that this study seeks to explain. First, the debate on religious authority and gender discourse has become an important and ongoing discourse in the field of contemporary Islamic studies. Scholars such as Mernisi and Wadud themselves are two figures who have opened up a broad discussion on how classical constructions have succeeded in positioning women as passive subjects, especially in the context of public rituals.[4] In his book, Wadud has emphasized that there is no explicit prohibition in the Holy Qur'an regarding female prayer leaders. Hosseini expands on this explanation by emphasizing "gender justice-based interpretation" as a more contextual form of Islamic legal analysis.[5]

---

[4] Fatima Mernissi, *Women and Islam An Historical and Theological Enquiry*, ed. Trans Mary Jo Lakeland (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991); Muhsin, *Qu'an and Woman ; Rereading the Sacred Text From a Woman's Prespective*.

[5] Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Muslim Women's Quest for Equality: Between Islamic Law and Feminism," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 4 (2006): 629–45, https://doi.org/10.1086/508085.

Second, progressive Islam and gender hermeneutics. Scholars such as Safi have coined the term Progressive Muslim, which refers to groups that advocate for social justice, pluralism, and equality in Islam.[6] Progressive Islam is not merely a reinterpretation of a new or old text, but rather aims to challenge authority structures that limit women's participation. In this case, the hermeneutics used include contextual, historical, and ethical readings as presented by Abu Zayd and Paul Ricoeur.[7] Similarly, Barlas shows that the dominance of interpretation does not stem from the establishment of the text, but rather from a more masculine reading of the text.[8]

Third, Wadud's study of female prayer leaders has been highlighted by various groups. In his book, Hammer sees this event as a reformative moment, creating a new discourse on women's ritual space. Specifically, Leena El-Ali has mapped the differences between those who defend and those who reject this idea in America and Europe.[9] However, there is not much research data that specifically analyzes how the discourse on female religious authority is produced and debated through the framework of gender hermeneutics in the post-Amina Wadud context.

---

[6] Omad Safi, "What Is Progressive Islam?," *Scholarlypublications* 13, no. 1 (2003): 48–49, https://scholarlypublications.universiteitleiden.nl/handle/1887/16920.

[7] Nasr Abu Zayd, *Reformation of Islamic Thought, a Critical Historical Analysis*, *Amsterdam University Press* (Den Haag/Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006).

[8] Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam Unreading Patriarchal Interpretatuons of the Qur'an*, Revised Ed (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019).

[9] Meena Sharify-Funk and Munira Kassam Haddad, "Where Do Women Stand in Islam Negotiating Contemporary Muslim Prayer Leadership in North America," *Feminist Review* 102, no. 1 (2012): 41–61, https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.2012.10; Meena Sharify-Funk, *Muslim Women in Contemporary North America: Controversies, Clichés, and Conversations.* (Routledge, 2022); Sharify-Funk and Haddad, "Where Do Women Stand in Islam Negotiating Contemporary Muslim Prayer Leadership in North America."

Various previous studies have discussed the legal aspects of prohibiting women from becoming imams.[10] This study refers more to the hadith of Ummu Waraqa and the practices of the companions. However, most of these studies focus only on normative aspects, without further exploring how Wadud's practices can be perceived, accepted, or rejected in contemporary social and academic discourse. Meanwhile, from a fragmentary perspective based on the impact of the female imam's practice in prayer on March 18, 2005, it includes reflective,[11] politicization,[12] reinterpretation,[13] biography,[14] dan meditation.[15] In addition, there is also debate regarding the responses of Muslim scholars in terms of interpretation and fiqh, such as the main roots of Muslim scholars' hermeneutics in reading female imams and discourse regarding female authority.[16] This is where the gap in this study lies, in that it attempts to map and analyze the responses that have emerged to these practices, which are considered part of the

---

[10] Ahmad Baidowi, "Amina Wadud Dan Wacana Tafsir Feminis," *Refleksi; Jurnal Filsafat Dan Pemikiran Islam* 9, no. 1 (2009); Ahmad Baidowi, "Tafsir Feminis (Studi Pemikiran Amina Wadud Dan Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd)," *Disertasi* (2009); Stak Roohi Khan, "An Analysis of Muslim Women's Rights Based on the Works of Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, and Riffat Hassan" (Havard University, 2020); Nurun Najwah, "Pembacaan Ulang Terhadap Imamah Sholat Perempuan," *Musawa* 6, no. 2 (2008): 213–40; Nurun Najwah, "The Rejection of Women Imams in Indonesia : Between Religious and Socio-Cultural Texts," *Journal of Internasional Women's Studies* 24, no. 5 (2022): 1–16.

[11] Imam Zahid Shakir, *Scattered Pictures, Reflection of an American Muslim*, *Экономика Региона* (United States of America: Zaytuna Institute, 2005).

[12] Sofia Tsourlaki, "(Re) Politisasi Masjid Dan Penggunaan Media Sosial Oleh Khaled Abou El Fadl Dan Amina Wadud Sebagai Sarana Pembentukan Identitas Keagamaan Berdasarkan Nilai-Nilai Islam Progresif," 2020.

[13] Jamal Al-Bana, *Jawaz Imamah Al-Marah Al-Rijal*, n.d.

[14] Laury Silvers Kecia Ali, Juliane Hammer, *A Jihad for Justice, Honoring The Work and Life OF Amina Wadud*, ed. Kecia Ali (USA: USA by 48HrBooks, 2012), papers3://publication/uuid/A0D2B018-AC62-48DA-863B-FC54B83C8863.

[15] Jesper Petersen, "Media and the Female Imam," *Religions* 10, no. 3 (2019), https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10030159.

[16] Etin Anwar, "Sexing the Prayer: The Politics of Ritual and Feminist Activism in Indonesia," in *Muslima Theology*, ed. Marcia Hermansens and Elif Medeni Ednan Aslan (Peter Lang AG, n.d.).

development of interpretation, changes in authority, and the social construction of gender in Islam.

This study is significant in the academic study of Islam and gender by highlighting a hermeneutic analysis of the events that occurred on March 19, 2005. In other words, it does not merely fill a gap in the legal literature but also offers a broader, more critical, and ethical perspective. This study also provides a profound reflection on the dynamics of determining women's rights to become imams in the context of a Muslim-majority society such as Indonesia. While understanding that issues of religious interpretation do not stop at linguistic aspects alone, but are broader in the context of historicization. This research clearly presents an argumentative defense that women becoming imams is part of modern ijtihad initiated by Amina Wadud.

This study focuses on how the public, academics, and religious authorities responded to Imam Wadud's prayer on March 18, 2005. Additionally, it examines the epistemological and ideological aspects of the two sets of arguments both rejecting and defending regarding Wadud's practice of female imamate. Furthermore, it explores how a gender hermeneutics approach can provide deeper insights into the dynamics of interpretation, religious authority, and the legitimacy of such sermons.

This study sets clear boundaries on the collection of responses to events by Wadud in 2005, which are well documented in academic publications, popular media, and writings by religious leaders and public figures. This study does not evaluate the chain of transmission of hadith, the quality of hadith, the authentication of hadith, or even issue legal rulings. Instead, it focuses on how hadith, history, and religious authority can be mobilized to either sharpen or reject the legitimacy of women's rights in public spiritual matters.

As a researcher in the field of gender hermeneutics, the author positions the practice of female imams as a renegotiation of authority in the religious ritual space. According to the author, the

issue of the debate over female imams is not merely a matter of ritual law but concerns the expansion of interpretive authority, gender representation, and power structures. Through the case of Amina Wadud, this study shows that religious practices are never neutral or free from various forms of power authority. This is evident in the debate over who has the right to lead prayers, deliver sermons from the pulpit, and whose authority is recognized.

This research uses qualitative methods, using critical hermeneutics. This study focuses on discourse analysis and the production of religious meaning in response to the practice of female prayer leaders. The primary data sources in this study are news articles from Al Jazeera, New York Times, MuslimWakeUp, statements or comments from public figures, and recordings of sermons. It is supplemented by other secondary sources such as academic journals, opinions of scholars, and Islamic gender literature. Data analysis techniques use Paul Ricoeur's three-layer hermeneutic approach, namely historicization, meaning production, and reception or interpretation. The data is analyzed systematically to identify the main arguments that emerge in the two camps, namely the defenders and the opponents.

Result and Discussion
Female Imams in the Digital Space: Interpretation, Identity, and Representation

The initial framework for understanding the direction of the discussion and defense related to female imams in prayer begins with explaining the historical record of incidents involving female imams on March 18, 2005. Previously, Wadud had done the same in 1994 in South Africa, but it was not publicized[17]. The important

---

[17] Both sermons use two languages in prayer, namely Arabic and English. Wadud has been used as a pawn or keyword in international media searches for this case. Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad; Women's Reform in Islam* (Oneworld Publications, 2008). 34

part is that before the prayer was performed, it had been proven that the organizing committee or the responsible party had already informed the media on March 7, 2005, through the sponsor's website, MuslimWakeUp[18].

The event was seen as deviating from tradition but was considered proof of gender equality by the committee and participants. The case involved challenging the privilege of men leading Muslim prayers and blurring previously established gender boundaries. Before the event began, Wadud stated in an article in Hammer that the committee deliberately exaggerated the event to the media by describing it as "the first" in contemporary history. She also justified her decision to avoid media attention by declining interviews outside the press conference that day. One such interview was the one she gave at the end of the year. Wadud stated that, unlike Nomani, who enthusiastically volunteered to lead the prayer, she had concerns and worries about her safety and that of her children[19].

During the event, attendees questioned the appropriateness of female leadership in ritual worship. During the tour, she delivered a Friday sermon on Muslim women at the Claremont

---

[18] This website was created by Ahmad Nassef and Lawad Ali in 2000. The website serves a useful purpose as a voice for American Muslims and for broader, more open dialogue. The website's headquarters were located in Pleasantville, New York, until 2007, when it was shut down and renamed "Progressive Muslim Online Americanasine." See City until they finally found a venue at the home of the Cathedral Synod of St. Mary's. John the Divine, the mother church of the Episcopal Diocese of New York. Initially, the change in worship location for security reasons was not announced before participants confirmed their attendance. Participation was done through a form available on the MuslimWakeUp website. Participants were then informed of the event location. Most New Yorkers were not interested in the event, so the event organizer, Nomani, quickly deployed over 20 police officers to secure the venue and inspect each participant's belongings, including bags, clothing, and accessories. The registration list is crucial for security control at St. John's Cathedral NYC, where only those listed on the roster are permitted to enter the event. A total of 10 individuals referred to as "Piagam Hak Asasi Wanita Muslim di Masjid". Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad ; Women's Reform in Islam*.23.

[19] Juliane Hammer, *American Muslim Women, Religious Authority, and Ativism*, *University of Texas Press*, 2012. 56

Main Road Mosque and "surrender," or voluntary obedience to Allah through personal and social struggle. Wadud further stated that she believes that mixed prayer is very important because it has the potential to change Muslims' perceptions of leadership. For this reason, Wadud accepted the request to demonstrate that humans have the same horizontal line. Additionally, humans are never separated based on gender except biologically, and there is not a single word in the Qur'an that prohibits women from becoming leaders.[20] The press conference moderator was El Tantawi (Progressive Muslim Union) as the co-sponsor of the 2005 Friday Prayer.[21] nother opinion states that Nasir al-Husaini (Al Jazeera correspondent in New York) reported that around 90 non-Arab Muslim men and women attended the prayer event. Meanwhile, fewer than ten people protested against the action[22] Suhayla El-Attar led the prayer call as seen in the video without wearing a hijab while performing the prayer call with an Arabic accent.[23]

---

[20] Léon Buskens. Thijl Sunier, "Authoritative Landscapes: The Making of Islamic Authority among Muslims in Europe: An Introduction," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 11, no. 1 (2022).

[21] He then described the prayer as a historic event, the first time in recorded history that a woman had led Friday prayers and delivered a sermon. He then introduced each speaker, Ahmad Nassef, a man who supports the struggle for women's rights. Next was Saleemah Abdul Ghafur, a member of the Nomani Muslim Women's Freedom Tour community. Ghafur also elaborated on the hadith of Ummu Waraqa, which states that women are entitled to lead. Ghafur then introduced Suhayla El-Attar, a young woman tasked with calling the azan. According to El Tantawi, Suhayla's bold participation represents the beautiful voice of marginalized women in public rituals, including at the mosque.

[22] Editor, "Woman Leads Controversial US Prayer A Woman Has Led a Controversial Mixed-Gender Islamic Prayer Service, with Organisers of the Event Saying They Are 'Ushering Islam into the 21st Century'.," Aljazeera, 2005, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2005/3/19/woman-leads-controversial-us-prayer.

[23] In this context, Nomani was one of the most involved in the female prayer leader incident. Therefore, Nomani also provided many introductions, claiming that this event was new because it had been published internationally. However, some claims accuse Nomani of having political and economic motives by marketing her writings in book form during the event, see Editor,

Meanwhile, Hammer noted the essence of Wadud's sermon from the audio recording, stating that;

> "Gender equality is realized because of the balanced concept of the Tawhid paradigm, namely horizontal interdependence. No human being is superior to another except for our Creator, the Lord of the universe. This resolves the explanation of the meaning and essence of humanity between men and women. Additionally, as a woman, a child, and an African-American mother, Wadud reflects that the concepts of male and female gender are created through the same process; the only difference lies in a woman's ability to give birth, breastfeed, and menstruate."[24]

The awareness demonstrated by participants and those fully involved in the event showed intent and attracted international response. The sermon delivered by Wadud at the 2005 prayer gathering was written in full through Hammer's research.[25] The significance of the 2005 joint prayer extended to a new movement or community, the El Tauwhid Jumma Circle, which was inspired by it. On July 2, 2005, Pamela Taylor participated in organizing a similar event by leading and delivering a sermon at the United Muslim Association of Canada Mosque[26]. Thus, this is not significantly different from the explanations provided by female activists discussing equality, humanity, and individuals with

---

"The Woman-Led Prayer That Catalyzed Controversy." Additionally, Nomani mentions several important reasons why she promotes this practice. She was inspired by Wadud's method of interpreting gender bias and the findings she obtained from several seminars or workshops, lihat Sharify-Funk and Haddad, "Where Do Women Stand in Islam Negotiating Contemporary Muslim Prayer Leadership in North America.".

[24] Hammer, *American Muslim Women, Religious Authority, and Ativism*. 87

[25] In addition to the efforts made by Wadud through media appearances and publications in 2005, Wadud still had the enthusiasm to spread her knowledge and insights about divinity and humanity in several subsequent sermons in England and Spain. (2008). Lihat Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad; Women's Reform in Islam.*

[26] Beliefnet, "Country's First Woman-Led Islamic Prayers Held at United Muslim Association Mosque," Havard Edu, n.d.

disabilities. Although it does not align with the explanations of other female figures besides Taylor in this context, it can be categorized as sharing the same essence regarding gender morality.

Chronologically, the debate about female imams began following media coverage through an announcement on the MuslimWakeUp website. Due to this mediation, the initial situation was continuously, deeply, and generally discussed. However, in this case, the author needed assistance to directly access the website to see the global debate. Hammer is one of the researchers who successfully accessed the website by categorizing the initial discussion through MuslimWakeUp mediation.

This initial debate can be categorized into three areas: First, global discussions among Muslims, including accusations related to gender, morality, and other issues. The MuslimWakeUp website is an important source that has published several opinions and discussions over the past few months. Second, supporters and opponents are spread globally, particularly in North America and the Middle East, including Muslim scholars, non-Muslims, activists, and the general public. Third, the level of discourse is divided into two aspects. First, the debate centers on the legal question of whether female imams are permitted to lead prayers. On the other hand, another part discusses the meaning of prayer, both symbolically, authoritatively, and liberally, even addressing discourse on progressive values and human rights. The following is a classification table:

Tabel 1

No.	Groups	Supporters			Criticism
		+	+/-	-	
1.	Syekh Muhammad eltantawi, Yusuf al-Qardawi, Khaled Abou el Fadl, Hamza Yusuf, Umar Naseer, Nahrukh Arif Tayyed (UK))		✓		Fatwa: Women should be allowed to lead mixed-gender congregations in prayer if the community agrees to it.

2.	The response from the announcement on March 12 to the event on March 18, 2005, was documented through various media platforms, including the Web, Muslim WakeUp, Nedhamson AB, and Wire.	✓	✓	✓	Discussions on allowing women to become prayer leaders and discourse on human rights and progressive values.
3.	Jamal Al Bana	✓			Analysis of Hadith and review of the opinions of the four imams of the madhhab regarding the call to prayer and the imam of prayer. He argues that what Wadud has done actually has a lot of support from Islamic texts.
4.	Leena Ali	✓			Support is provided through historical evidence of legal endorsement in the medieval period for women serving as leaders.
5.	Laury Silvers and Ahmad Elwa	✓			Support and response are examined from a social perspective in the context of women's just participation in worship spaces. The argument, situated within the 2005 debate on female-led prayer, explores new approaches to the issue and asserts that Muslims should support women-led prayers as an act of solidarity and civil disobedience even in the absence of strong legal arguments. It identifies the unrestricted prohibition of female prayer leadership as a form of gender injustice and a broader indication of the marginalization of Muslim women within their own communities.
6.	Turun Najwah		✓		Support for the issue of

					women's position in congregational prayer and the qualifications for becoming an imam is examined from the perspective of relevant hadiths.
7.	Imam Zahid Shakir,			✓	A critique is directed at the validity of the hadith of Umm Waraqa. The author expresses disagreement while also responding to Navin Reda (a participant in the 2005 event), who wrote an article and statement on the MuslimWakeUp website.
8.	Simonetta Colderini	✓			Support for the question "Can a woman lead prayer?" is provided by analyzing hadiths relevant to female prayer leadership, which have been reported and used in doctrinal-legal literature as scholarly evidence to identify the underlying discourse and the development of the debate. The most significant hadith collection cited in this research originates from the 9th and 10th centuries.
9.	Marion Katz	✓			Support is offered by critically engaging the debate on women's right to attend the mosque, with references to early scholars and hadith including the positions of the four founding imams of the major Sunni schools of law.
10.	Sa'diyya Shaikh &Fatima Seedat (the Womens Khutbah)	✓			The focus of support lies in collecting women's *khutbahs* to produce innovative literature.
11.	Faqihuddin Abdul Qadir	✓			The focus is presented through an explanation of two hadiths on female prayer leadership, delivered in a brief written format.
12.	Etin Anwar	✓			Departing from the 2005 case, this study focuses on

					examining the mechanisms of women's worship practices if implemented in Indonesia through mixed-gender congregations. It includes interviews with Muslim feminists and activists such as Amani Lubis, Yoyoh Yusroh, Neng Dara Afifah, and Kyai Haji (KH).
13.	Timur Yuskaev	✔			The argument focuses on the issue and interpretive content presented by Wadud in her 1994 and 2005 *khutbahs*. This book outlines a comparative study of the strengths of oral and written interpretations as demonstrated by Fazlur Rahman, Amina Wadud, Warith Deen Muhammad, and Hamza Yusuf.
14.	Mohammad Hashas-Imams in Europe	✔			Focus on briefly addressing the crisis of religious authority in modern Islam by positioning *imamah* within Islamic scholarship, to show that *imamah* is not an independent scholarly position but rather an administrative role in managing the religious affairs of the faithful at the local level.
15	Inggrid Mattson.Mantan presiden masyarakat islam Amerika Utara /ISNA 2001		✔		Their argument lacks a substantiated foundation. While they express disapproval of women leading prayers particularly Friday (*Jumuʿah*) prayers they fail to offer a viable alternative or solution. Instead, the discourse is often diverted toward broader concerns about leadership within institutional or organizational domains, without addressing the core theological and legal questions regarding women's capacity to

					serve as prayer leaders. This deflection tends to obscure rather than resolve the central issue, leaving the debate stagnant and reinforcing existing hierarchies without critical engagement.

Based on the table above, it can be seen that the formation of imams in the social reality of the digital space influences the change of religious sources to become subjective. The digital space provides many opportunities for scholars to openly express their opinions on these events. By adopting Habermas' concept, the digital space becomes a forum for discussion. There, answers, opinions, criticism, and even online discussions will emerge. Furthermore, a discussion process will take place that involves authoritarian participation from the community. This digital space then evolves into a new public space where society has full power.[27]

The conflict originated from fatwas issued by sheikhs in the Middle East, such as Yusuf al-Qardawi, which were disseminated through online portals. He openly rejected female imams but permitted female imams within the family sphere.[28] Abou el Fadl argues that women must seek permission from their families to lead Friday prayers, and the congregation agrees with this to the extent that they proceed with other fatwas, such as those issued by Umar Naseer,[29] Hamza Yusuf, dan Sheikh Muhammad el Tantawi, regarding the prohibition of women serving as imams for Friday

---

[27] Kholil Lur Rochman Kholil and Wahyu Budiantoro, "Cyberfeminisme: Pembebasan Psikologi Perempuan Di Ruang Digital," *KURIOSITAS: Media Komunikasi Sosial Dan Keagamaan* 15, no. 1 (2022): 97–121, https://doi.org/10.35905/kur.v15i1.2587. 100

[28] Ahmad Rofiq, "Kepemimpinan Perempuan Dalam Pemikirin Dr. Yusuf Alqardlawi (Review Book Min Fiqhi Al-Daulati Fi Al-Islam)," Gender Dalam Pendidikan, 2021.

[29] Umar Naseer, "Why Aren't There Female Imams in Islam? The Answer May Not Be What You Think.," Rational Religion, 2021, https://rationalreligion.co.uk/why-arent-there-female-imams-in-islam-a-response-to-emma-barnett-on-bbc-radio-4/.

prayers mixed with male congregants.[30] In Habermas'[31] concept of the "ideal conversation situation," communication occurs without barriers. This only happens if everyone receives information on equal terms to have and use the same speech acts. Habermas' framework of thought states that if we understand it, replacing class struggle as physical revolution with class struggle as a dialogical relationship, there will be no debate or conflict.

Reimagining Women's Religious Authority: Theological and Social

In this framework, reinterpretation has become a form of ijtihad to address the reproduction of injustice in women's spiritual space. Similarly, gender hermeneutics invites readers to consider the historical context with various social, political, economic, and moral dimensions in reading verses about women. In ritual leadership, Hosseini asserts that this approach is the starting point for a new space of ijtihad, as an effort to bridge the gap between textual authority and the demands of equality for the modern society of today.[32] Thus, advocating for female imams is not seen as a rebellion against tradition, but rather an ijtihad and an expression that interpretation also changes depending on who is reading and where it is being read.

The practice of female prayer leaders carried out by Wadud can be understood as contemporary ijtihad. Its purpose is to see how Islamic texts and traditions can be reinterpreted while considering the social context. If examined deeply, female prayer leaders have existed since the time of Prophet Muhammad, with textual evidence being the well-known hadith of Ummu Waraqa.

Several figures involved in Friday prayers in New York are at the forefront of what is known as progressive Muslims. Some

---

[30] Umar Naseer.

[31] Kholil and Budiantoro, "Cyberfeminisme: Pembebasan Psikologi Perempuan Di Ruang Digital."

[32] Mir-Hosseini, "Muslim Women's Quest for Equality: Between Islamic Law and Feminism." 33

agree with the term, while others do not. Wadud himself says that progressive articulation is not based on anyone in particular. However, progress continues to occur in Islam, which continues to undergo dynamics to make the growth of religious values more advanced than before.[33] The term "progressive" refers to the initial elements of progress, which means moving forward. According to Omid Safi, who first coined the term, progress is part of every human being's acceptance in an open, honest, trustworthy, and critical space.[34] Progressive Islam is an epistemological framework that emphasizes that religious texts must be read through a social and ethical context. Progressive means balancing an understanding of traditional classical works with modernity.[35]

From a conservative perspective, as expressed by Qaradawi, they reject the legitimacy of female imams based on hadiths emphasizing that men are leaders. This is further reinforced by the stigma that women belong in the domestic sphere.[36] According to Qardawi, the practice of female imams leading prayers, as done by Wadud, violates Islamic consensus and tradition. Meanwhile, from Shakir's perspective, the hadith of Ummu Waraqa is insufficient as a legal basis for determining whether female prayer leaders are permissible or not.[37] This is because it would place religious authority solely in the hands of men, and the resulting law could become rigid and closed to interpretive dynamics.

The progressive approach advocated by scholars such as Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, and others is grounded in firm principles of justice and equality. They not only reinterpreted literalist readings of Islamic texts but also challenged hadith-based understandings that marginalize or discriminate against women.

---

[33] Editor, "Interview : Amina Wadud," Frontline, 2014.

[34] Omid Safi, "American Muslim Identity : Race and Ethnicity in Progressive Islam," n.d. 71

[35] yasmin Amin, *Early Muslim Women As Moral Paragons In Classical Islamic Literature* (The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Women, 2023). 79

[36] Rofiq, "Kepemimpinan Perempuan Dalam Pemikirin Dr. Yusuf Al-Qardlawi (Review Book Min Fiqhi Al-Daulati Fi Al-Islam)." 54

[37] Shakir, *Scattered Pictures, Reflection of an American Muslim*. 33

Within this perspective, religious authority is often represented as exclusively male, whereas such authority is neither inherently male nor fixed it is, rather, historically and critically constructed. Wadud's prayer event thus opened a more articulate space for negotiating the dynamics of contemporary Islam.

.In the context of Muslim public events in the United States, much of the opposition, especially that voiced through media against female led mixed gender prayers, is based on gender roles rather than on the substance or objectives of the prayer itself. In contrast, scholar Simonetta argues that many classical Sunni and Shi'a scholars did, in fact, allow women to lead prayers. Nonetheless, juridical rulings on female imams have often followed the *ijmāʿ* (consensus) of scholars from the four major schools of thought. For example, the Mālikī and Ḥanafī schools generally prohibit women from leading mixed-gender congregational prayers. The Ḥanafī school further explains that while it is considered *makrūh* (discouraged), it is still permissible for women to lead other women in prayer.[38]

In addition, Najwah contributes to the discourse on female prayer leadership by examining broader issues such as gender roles and the qualifications for leading prayer. She argues that the variations found in the hadith of Umm Waraqa reflect a particular social context in premodern Arab society, in which women were often encouraged to pray at home. However, historical accounts also suggest that during the Prophet's time, many women participated in congregational dawn (*fajr*) prayers due to concerns over public safety during times of brighter daylight, such as at noon (*ẓuhr*) or afternoon (*ʿaṣr*) prayers.[39]

Beyond the legal debates among Muslims regarding the permissibility of women leading prayer, other scholars have critically engaged with this issue by referencing classical historical sources that are often overlooked or underrepresented. For

---

[38] Al-Bana, *Jawaz Imamah.* 25

[39] Najwah, "Pembacaan Ulang Terhadap Imamah Sholat Perempuan." 49

instance, Leena Ali notes that during the Umayyad era, after the time of the Prophet, a woman named Ghazala led congregational prayers.[40] Similarly, Marion Katz refers to historical discussions about women's right to worship in mosques in cities such as Baghdad, Kufa, Egypt, and Mecca, debates that reflect broader negotiations over women's participation in public religious spaces.

This sense of historicity offers coherent and compelling evidence that complements diverse interpretations of the hadith compilation surrounding Ummu Waraqa. Those who reject the legitimacy of female imams, particularly groups that stress prohibition, often lack sociologically grounded scholarly arguments. In a broader global context, there have been emerging congregations composed of both men and women that seek to establish female-led mosque communities. For example, in China, a well-established tradition of women's mosques has flourished, constituting the largest such network to date. In other regions, new and inclusive congregations have also emerged, challenging established norms around gender and sexual diversity in religious spaces. Recent developments in the United States and Europe include the founding of mosques explicitly led by and for women. Although female-only mosques have existed for centuries in China, their contemporary resurgence has catalyzed transnational conversations, signaling a significant shift in ongoing debates about gender and religious authority.

Amina Wadud's mediated act of delivering the Friday sermon (*khuṭbah*) reflects a convergence of modern Muslim intellectual thought on female religious authority within sacred spaces. Yet, it cannot be denied that the transformation from early Muslim communities to the present day has not resulted in the full empowerment of women at the pulpit or within the mosque. Reactions to this heated debate have fueled the emergence of new configurations of authority. As Katz observes, for contemporary

---

[40] Leena El-Ali, *No Truth Without Beauty, God, the Qur'an, and Women's Rights* (Arlington, VA, USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

Muslims, women's sermons and access to the pulpit represent not merely a symbolic act but a profound spiritual, ethical, and political transformation, a reimagining of religious authority in light of gender justice.

The shifting issues and concerns from early Muslim communities to the present have given rise to new claims about what constitutes modernity in the practice of women delivering sermons in the mosque, particularly as reflected in the case of Amina Wadud. Her 2005 sermon leaves an empirical trace that continues to influence broader discourses on textual interpretation both This study aims to provide a deeper and more critical analysis of the changes and challenges faced by sources of religious authority within secular-liberal societies particularly in contexts such as the United States and Indonesia following the events of March 18, 2005, at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York. At the same time, it briefly highlights ongoing debates surrounding the concept of *imamate* as interpreted by various scholars. The global sociopolitical realities of secularism in the American context reveal how religious visibility in public life is increasingly contested. Within this framework, the institution of the *imamate* itself is undergoing a transformation in its roles and meanings. Scholars and historians of religion have taken particular interest in these developments, recognizing them as crucial indicators of broader shifts in the discourse on gender, power, and religious legitimacy.

The above debate demonstrates that the events of March 18/25 marked a significant rupture in previously established forms of religious authority within the American context. This shift in authority has sparked a broader discourse on human equality, justice, human rights, and related ethical concerns. In general, based on the perspectives of supporting groups, it can be concluded that female leadership in prayer whether in all-female, all-male, or mixed-gender congregations is religiously permissible. However, the situation becomes more complex in the case of

Friday (*Jumuʿah*) prayers, which have been led by female imams among groups of activists and academic figures in the United States. The question of whether this practice is religiously acceptable or not largely depends on the surrounding social and cultural context and the nature of the community's response.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the author concludes that Amina Wadud's participation in the mixed gender congregational prayer and her role as Friday prayer leader in 2005 were not merely an act of worship. Rather, it marked a critical moment that triggered deeper debates concerning scriptural interpretation, religious law, spiritual rights, and religious authority. This study reveals that both the defense and rejection of female imams as circulated through various media platforms are constructed through differing hermeneutical approaches, social contexts, and political-ideological interests.

Supporters, often aligned with progressive Muslim thought, reinterpret religious texts by emphasizing principles of justice, equality, and contextual ethics. In contrast, opposing groups tend to rely on normative frameworks grounded in classical fiqh, legal consensus, and literalist interpretations of scripture. Within the Indonesian Muslim context, resistance to female prayer leadership reflects the entrenched challenges posed by cultural and institutional conservatism. Nonetheless, there remain openings for engaging with gender-just religious discourses. As the author of this study, I position the research from a progressive standpoint, advocating for a re-reading of religious authority through the lens of social and spiritual justice. From this perspective, Wadud's act can be understood as a legitimate *ijtihād* a juristic effort grounded in both ethical and theological principles. Thus, this research offers a scholarly contribution that not only reconsiders debates on gender and authority but also expands the horizon of inquiry within the broader field of Islamic studies.

Bibliography

Al-Bana, Jamal. *Jawaz Imamah Al-Marah Al-Rijal*, n.d.

Amin, Yasmin. *EARLY MUSLIM WOMEN AS MORAL PARAGONS IN CLASSICAL ISLAMIC LITERATURE.* The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Women, 2023.

Anwar, Etin. "Sexing the Prayer: The Politics of Ritual and Feminist Activism in Indonesia." In *Muslima Theology*, edited by Marcia Hermansens and Elif Medeni Ednan Aslan. Peter Lang AG, n.d.

Aydin, Cemil, and Juliane Hammer. "Muslims and Media: Perceptions, Participation, and Change." *Contemporary Islam* 4, no. 1 (2010): 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-009-0098-7.

Baidowi, Ahmad. "Amina Wadud Dan Wacana Tafsir Feminis." *Refleksi; Jurnal Filsafat Dan Pemikiran Islam* 9, no. 1 (2009).

———. "Tafsir Feminis (Studi Pemikiran Amina Wadud Dan Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd)." *Disertasi*, 2009.

Barlas, Asma. *Believing Women in Islam Unreading Patriarchal Interpretatuons of the Qur'an.* Revised Ed. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019.

Beliefnet. "Country's First Woman-Led Islamic Prayers Held at United Muslim Association Mosque." Havard Edu, n.d.

Broadcasting, West Virgina Public. *Asra Nomani Speaks about "The Mosque in Morgantown" Documentary.* Amerika Serikat, 2009. https://youtu.be/wlB4m8HaENU?si=mKKqPyMBGLypG MBh.

Editor. "Interview : Amina Wadud." FRONTLINE, 2014.

———. "The Woman-Led Prayer That Catalyzed Controversy." Havard University, n.d. https://hwpi.harvard.edu/pluralismarchive/amina-wadud-2005.

———. "Woman Leads Controversial US Prayer A Woman Has Led a Controversial Mixed-Gender Islamic Prayer Service, with Organisers of the Event Saying They Are 'Ushering Islam into the 21st Century'." Aljazeera, 2005. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2005/3/19/woman-leads-controversial-us-prayer.

El-Ali, Leena. *No Truth Without Beauty, God, the Qur'an, and Women's Rights.* Arlington, VA, USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.

Hammer, Juliane. *American Muslim Women, Religious Authority, and Ativism. University of Texas Press*, 2012.

Kecia Ali, Juliane Hammer, and Laury Silvers. *A Jihad for Justice, Honoring The Work and Life OF Amina Wadud*. Edited by Kecia Ali. USA: USA by 48HrBooks, 2012. papers3://publication/uuid/A0D2B018-AC62-48DA-863B-FC54B83C8863.

Khan, Stak Roohi. "An Analysis of Muslim Women's Rights Based on the Works of Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, and Riffat Hassan." Havard University, 2020.

Kholil, Kholil Lur Rochman, and Wahyu Budiantoro. "Cyberfeminisme: Pembebasan Psikologi Perempuan Di Ruang Digital." *KURIOSITAS: Media Komunikasi Sosial Dan Keagamaan* 15, no. 1 (2022): 97–121. https://doi.org/10.35905/kur.v15i1.2587.

Mernissi, Fatima. *Women and Islam An Historical and Theological Enquiry*. Edited by Trans Mary Jo Lakeland. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991.

Mir-Hosseini, Ziba. "Muslim Women's Quest for Equality: Between Islamic Law and Feminism." *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 4 (2006): 629–45. https://doi.org/10.1086/508085.

Muhsin, Amina Wadud. *Qu'an and Woman ; Rereading the Sacred Text From a Woman's Prespective*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Najwah, Nurun. "Pembacaan Ulang Terhadap Imamah Sholat Perempuan." *Musawa* 6, no. 2 (2008): 213–40.

———. "The Rejection of Women Imams in Indonesia : Between Religious and Socio-Cultural Texts." *Journal of Internasional Women's Studies* 24, no. 5 (2022): 1–16.

Petersen, Jesper. "Media and the Female Imam." *Religions* 10, no. 3 (2019). https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10030159.

Rofiq, Ahmad. "KEPEMIMPINAN PEREMPUAN DALAM PEMIKIRIN DR. YUSUF AL_QARDLAWI (Review Book Min Fiqhi Al-Daulati Fi Al-Islam)." *Gender Dalam Pendidikan*, 2021.

Safi, Omad. "What Is Progressive Islam?" *Scholarlypublications* … 13, no. 1 (2003): 48–49. https://scholarlypublications.universiteitleiden.nl/handle/1887/16920.

Safi, Omid. "American Muslim Identity : Race and Ethnicity in Progressive Islam," n.d.

Shakir, Imam Zahid. *Scattered Pictures, Reflection of an American Muslim. Экономика Региона*. United States of America: Zaytuna Institute, 2005.

Sharify-Funk, Meena. *Muslim Women in Contemporary North America: Controversies, Clichés, and Conversations*. Routledge, 2022.

Sharify-Funk, Meena, and Munira Kassam Haddad. "Where Do Women Stand in Islam Negotiating Contemporary Muslim Prayer Leadership in North America." *Feminist Review* 102, no. 1 (2012): 41–61. https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.2012.10.

Thijl Sunier, and Léon Buskens. "Authoritative Landscapes: The Making of Islamic Authority among Muslims in Europe: An Introduction." *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 11, no. 1 (2022).

Tsourlaki, Sofia. "(Re) Politisasi Masjid Dan Penggunaan Media Sosial Oleh Khaled Abou El Fadl Dan Amina Wadud Sebagai Sarana Pembentukan Identitas Keagamaan Berdasarkan Nilai-Nilai Islam Progresif," 2020.

Umar Naseer. "Why Aren't There Female Imams in Islam? The Answer May Not Be What You Think." Rational Religion, 2021. https://rationalreligion.co.uk/why-arent-there-female-imams-in-islam-a-response-to-emma-barnett-on-bbc-radio-4/.

Wadud, Amina. *Inside the Gender Jihad ; Women's Reform in Islam*. Oneworld Publications, 2008.

Zayd, Nasr Abu. *Reformation of Islamic Thought, a Critical Historical Analysis. Amsterdam University Press*. Den Haag/Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006.