



Gender Relations in the Qur'an: Efforts to Humanize Women Through a Feminist Interpretation Perspective

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Abstract

This study examines women's emancipation as an essential mission of the Qur'an in promoting justice and peace. While numerous Qur'anic verses condemn oppressive pre-Islamic practices and affirm women's full human dignity, patriarchal traditions rooted in Jahiliyyah norms continue to shape gender relations in many Muslim societies. To address this gap, gender-sensitive Qur'anic interpretation remains crucial. This article analyzes gender relations in pre-Islamic Arab society and explores Qur'anic verses that dismantle these oppressive traditions, demonstrating the Qur'an's transformative vision of humanizing women. Employing a feminist interpretive framework, combined with contextual and textual approaches, this study reveals how the Qur'an reconstructs the position of women as whole, autonomous human beings. Pre-Islamic gender relations were characterized by systemic violence against women, including female infanticide, commodification of women, and discriminatory treatment during menstruation. The Qur'an challenges these practices through explicit prohibitions and ethical reforms. Key themes include the prohibition of violence against women, expressed in Q.S. al-Nahl 58–59 on female infanticide, Q.S. al-Nur 33 on protection from sexual coercion, Q.S. al-Baqarah 222 on reproductive health, and Q.S. al-Nisā' 32 on domestic violence. Meanwhile, the principle of gender equality is articulated in Q.S. al-Tūr 56 and Q.S. al-Baqarah 30, affirming men and women as equal servants and vicegerents of God. The contextual interpretation of Q.S. al-Nisā' 34 further emphasizes the flexibility and reciprocity of marital rights and obligations.

Contribution: The main contribution of this study lies in offering an integrative Qur'anic gender hermeneutic that combines feminist, textual, and contextual readings to highlight the Qur'an's emancipatory ethos. This approach provides a framework for re-evaluating patriarchal interpretations and strengthens contemporary efforts toward gender-just Islamic thought.

Keywords: *Humanization of Women, Relational Verses, Feminist Interpretation*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji emansipasi perempuan sebagai salah satu misi fundamental Al-Qur'an dalam mewujudkan keadilan dan perdamaian. Meskipun banyak ayat Al-Qur'an yang mengecam praktik-praktik opresif pra-Islam dan menegaskan martabat kemanusiaan perempuan secara utuh, tradisi patriarkal yang berakar pada norma-norma Jahiliyyah masih memengaruhi relasi gender di berbagai masyarakat Muslim. Untuk menjembatani kesenjangan ini, interpretasi Al-Qur'an yang sensitif gender menjadi sangat penting. Artikel ini menganalisis relasi gender dalam masyarakat Arab pra-Islam dan menelaah ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an yang membongkar tradisi-tradisi opresif tersebut, sehingga memperlihatkan visi transformatif Al-Qur'an dalam memanusiaikan perempuan. Dengan menggunakan kerangka tafsir feminis yang dikombinasikan





dengan pendekatan kontekstual dan tekstual, penelitian ini mengungkap bagaimana Al-Qur'an merekonstruksi posisi perempuan sebagai manusia yang utuh dan otonom. Relasi gender pra-Islam ditandai oleh kekerasan sistemik terhadap perempuan, seperti praktik pembunuhan bayi perempuan, komodifikasi perempuan, dan perlakuan diskriminatif terhadap perempuan yang menstruasi. Al-Qur'an menentang praktik-praktik ini melalui larangan eksplisit dan reformasi etis. Tema-tema utama meliputi larangan kekerasan terhadap perempuan, sebagaimana tercermin dalam Q.S. al-Nahl 58–59 tentang pembunuhan bayi perempuan, Q.S. al-Nūr 33 tentang perlindungan dari pemaksaan seksual, Q.S. al-Baqarah 222 tentang kesehatan reproduksi, dan Q.S. al-Nisā' 32 tentang kekerasan dalam rumah tangga. Sementara itu, prinsip kesetaraan gender ditegaskan dalam Q.S. al-Tūr 56 dan Q.S. al-Baqarah 30 yang menempatkan laki-laki dan perempuan sebagai hamba dan khalifah Allah secara setara. Interpretasi kontekstual terhadap Q.S. al-Nisā' 34 menekankan fleksibilitas serta prinsip timbal balik dalam hak dan kewajiban suami-istri.

Kontribusi: Kontribusi utama penelitian ini terletak pada penyajian hermeneutika gender Al-Qur'an yang integratif dengan memadukan pembacaan feminis, tekstual, dan kontekstual untuk menegaskan etos emansipatoris Al-Qur'an. Pendekatan ini menawarkan kerangka untuk mengevaluasi kembali tafsir patriarkal dan memperkuat upaya kontemporer menuju pemikiran Islam yang berkeadilan gender.

Kata Kunci: *Pemanusiaan Perempuan, Ayat Relasional, Tafsir Feminis.*

Introduction

The debate about the position and relationship of women in the Qur'an continues to be one of the most dynamic issues in contemporary exegesis studies. In recent decades, the emergence of feminist exegesis has served as a critical response to classical readings that are considered to potentially perpetuate gender hierarchy.¹ A number of studies show that some traditional interpretations are shaped by the social structures, power relations, and patriarchal ideologies of the societies in which the texts are interpreted.² Social-psychological studies of Islamic feminism, for example, show that religious experiences during the early formation of Islamic tradition tended to be written from a male perspective, thereby influencing how gender verses were framed and given meaning.³ This condition led feminist interpretations to view the need for gender awareness and methodological reconstruction in reading texts.⁴

Studies of classical interpretations such as those by al-Tabari reveal two main patterns: on the one hand, there is a reproduction of hierarchical gender structures; on the other hand, there is a

¹ Celene Ibrahim, *Women and Gender in the Qur'an*, Women and Gender in the Qur'an (Oxford University Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190063818.001.0001>.

² Roshimah Shamsudin and Aiza Maslan Baharudin, "The Creation of Women from the Perspective of Mufasssirin and Muhaddithun between Past and Present Scholars," *MATEC Web Conf.* 150 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1051/mateconf/201815005064>.

³ Marziyeh Bakhshizadeh, "A Social Psychological Critique on Islamic Feminism," *Religions* 14, no. 2 (February 2023): 202, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14020202>.

⁴ Hassan al-Shafie, "The Qur'an, Faith and the Impact of the Feminist Interpretative Movement on the Arabic Text and its Legacy," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 6, no. 2 (2004): 170–83, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2004.6.2.170>.





pluralistic methodology that opens up space for reinterpretation in the modern era.⁵ This shows that the tradition of interpretation itself is not monolithic, and allows for the development of new readings that are more responsive to gender justice. Several contemporary studies even assert that when modern interpretations undertake a methodological reorientation, readings of gender verses become more inclusive, dialogical, and pro-equality within the framework of Islamic principles.⁶

The development of feminist interpretation then reinforced a new direction in Qur'anic studies by presenting a hermeneutic approach that emphasizes justice, equality, intersubjectivity, and criticism of structural bias in the tradition of interpretation.⁷ Figures such as Amina Wadud and Zaitunah Subhan have encouraged the reinterpretation of verses on gender—such as QS. al-Nisā' [4]:34—to formulate a new understanding that is more humanistic and egalitarian.⁸ Further research shows that the feminist approach not only questions the text, but also reassesses social structures, symbolic violence, and practices that harm women in Muslim societies, including polygamy and family authority imbalances.⁹

In Indonesia, various works show that local interpretations also contribute to the discourse on women's human rights. Kiai Sholeh Darat's interpretation of Faidh al-Rahmān, for example, , emphasizes the ontological equality of men and women and the importance of flexibility in inheritance law in order to preserve human values.¹⁰ Modern interpretations such as Hamka's Tafsir al-Azhar also promote equality, acknowledge social change, and strengthen women's participation

⁵ Samiullah Adel, Mahmood Rahimi, and Asadullah Mohammadi, *Rethinking Quranic Interpretation: Insights from al-Tabari's Classical Tafsir*, ZAIN Publications, January 2025, <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14576/472>.

⁶ Farah Shahin, "Islamic Feminism and Hegemonic Discourses on Faith and Gender in Islam," *International Journal of Islam in Asia* 1, no. 1 (2020): 27–48, <https://doi.org/10.1163/25899996-01010003>; Asma Afsaruddin, "Islamic Feminism(s): Promoting Gender Egalitarianism and Challenging Constitutional Constraints," in *Social Difference and Constitutionalism in Pan-Asia*, ed. Susan H. Williams (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 292–315, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139567312.016>.

⁷ Jerusha Tanner Rhodes, "Feminist Exegesis and beyond: Trajectories in Muslima Theology," in *Muslim Women and Gender Justice: Concepts, Sources, and Histories* (Taylor and Francis, 2019), 17–32, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351025348-2>.

⁸ Muhammad Fauzi Noor, "A FEMINIST INTERPRETATION OF QUR'ANIC TEXTS BY AMINA WADUD AND ZAITUNAH SUBHAN," *INTIHA: Islamic Education Journal* 1, no. 3 (August 2024): 144–56, <https://doi.org/10.58988/intiha.v1i3.311>; Aksin Wijaya, Ibnu Muchlis, and Dawam Multazam Rohmatulloh, "Rethinking Gender Justice in the Quran: A Critical Exploration of Muslim Feminist Perspectives," *Journal of Quranic and Hadith Studies* 26, no. 1 (March 2025): 77–98, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v26i1.5704>.

⁹ Nuraan Davids, "Are Muslim Women in Need of Islamic Feminism? In Consideration of a Re-Imagined Islamic Educational Discourse," *British Journal of Religious Education* 37, no. 3 (2015): 311–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2014.944096>.

¹⁰ Yuyun Affandi et al., "The Humanization of Women in the Tafsir Faidh Ar-Rahmān by Kiai Saleh Darat," *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 79, no. 1 (July 2023): 5, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8732>.





in the public sphere.¹¹ These findings show that efforts to rehumanize women have historical roots in the interpretive traditions of the archipelago.

Nevertheless, feminist discourse in Qur'anic studies still faces several epistemological challenges. Some critics argue that feminism has the potential to misread the text, such as the accusations against Sisters in Islam,¹² or that feminist interpretations are considered to deviate from the framework of Sharia law.¹³ On the other hand, recent research shows that such criticism often arises from tensions between established patriarchal paradigms and new hermeneutical approaches oriented towards *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, justice, and equality.¹⁴ In fact, contemporary *maqāṣidī* approaches are increasingly being used to interpret sensitive aspects such as female sexuality or family authority in a more equitable manner (see research on QS. Āli 'Imrān:14, 2025).¹⁵

The research map shows that the issue of male-female relations in the Qur'an is no longer understood solely as a matter of law or family structure, but as an epistemological, ethical, and humanitarian issue. However, studies that specifically highlight how the Qur'an contains principles of full humanization of women—which not only affirm moral equality but also challenge hierarchical structures—are still relatively limited. Most studies focus on specific verses or specific exegetes, while comprehensive analyses of verses on gender relations that highlight the theme of women's humanization as a hermeneutical concept have not been widely conducted.

The epistemological conditions and gaps in this research form an important basis for studies that seek to reformulate the relationship between men and women in the Qur'an through a feminist interpretive perspective with an emphasis on the full humanization of women. This kind of reading is not only relevant to the development of contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics, but also has an impact on social praxis, Islamic education, and the construction of more equitable gender relations in Muslim societies.

¹¹ Zulfikri Zulkarnaini, "Feminist Exegesis in Hamka's Tafsir Al-Azhar," *Journal of Qur'anic and Hadith Studies* 22, no. 2 (July 2021): 403–26, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.2021.2202-07>.

¹² Roshan Iqbal, "Nurturing Gender Justice: Qur'anic Interpretation and Muslim Feminist Thought," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 39, no. 2 (2023): 59–61.

¹³ Lahmuddin Lahmuddin, Alber Oki, and Henri Toga Sinaga, "Indonesia The Position Of Muslim Women From The Perspective Of The Quran: A Critique Of Feminism," *ZAD Al-Mufasssir* 6, no. 1 (June 2024): 145–59, <https://doi.org/10.55759/zam.v6i1.147>.

¹⁴ Tazeen M. Ali, "Qur'anic Literacy as Women's Empowerment: Cultivating Interpretive Authority at the Women's Mosque of America," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 89, no. 4 (2021): 1434–61, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfab098>.

¹⁵ Sarwanih, "Reinterpreting Female Sexuality in Islam: A Maqāṣidī Exegesis of QS Āli 'Imrān:14 toward Gender-Just Hermeneutics," *Al Furqan: Journal of Quranic Studies and Exegesis* 8, no. 1 (August 2025): 107–18, <https://doi.org/10.58518/alfurqon.v8i1.3586>.





"Can a woman be a leader of Muslims?" I asked my grocer, who, like most grocers in Morocco, is a true 'barometer' of public opinion. "I take refuge in Allah!" he exclaimed, shocked, despite the friendly relations between us. Aghast at the idea, he almost dropped the half-dozen eggs I had come to buy. "My God protect us from the catastrophes of the time!" mumbled a customer who was buying olives, as he made as if to spit. My grocer is fanatical about cleanliness, and not even denouncing a heresy justifies dirtying the floor in his view. A second customer, a schoolteacher whom I vaguely knew from the newsstand, stood slowly caressing his wet mint leaves, and then hit me with a Hadith that he knew would be fatal: "Those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity!" Silence fell on the scene. There was nothing I could say. In a Muslim theocracy, Hadith collections are works that record in minute detail what the Prophet said and did. They constitute, along with the Koran, both the source of law and standard for distinguishing the true from the false, the permitted from the forbidden—they have shaped Muslim ethics and values.¹⁶

This incident inspired Mernissi to contextualize the meaning of the Qur'an and Hadith. She used historical and anti-patriarchal analysis to dismantle *mainstream* views that were heavily biased against women. The patriarchal system was also evident in the social realities of almost all feminist interpreters. Another example is Qasim Amin, Abduh, and al-Tahtawi in the Egyptian context, where at that time women were still very much confined by the power of the male elite. This was not only in terms of education and politics, but also in terms of dress style. In Indonesia itself, the patriarchal system is also evident in domestic aspects, such as the provision that the husband is the head of the family, while the wife is responsible for managing the household and must obey her husband. Meanwhile, in the public sector, the patriarchal system is also evident in the restrictions on women in the field of judicial *ijtihad*.¹⁷ This reality then invited Muslim intellectuals to revitalize the principle of egalitarianism in Islam, which led to the value of equality for all human beings.¹⁸ From this value of equality, the formulation of Human Rights (HAM)¹⁹ emerged as part of *maqasid al-shari'ah* (the

¹⁶Fatima Mernissi, *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (Cornwall: T.J. Press, 1991), 1-2.

¹⁷Etin Anwar, *A Genealogy of Islamic Feminism*, in *A Genealogy of Islamic Feminism* (2018), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315193090>.

¹⁸Among the theological references to the principle of equality is Surah Ali Imran verse 195, which shows the value of equality between men and women in achieving success. See: Nasaruddin Umar, *Arguments for Gender Equality from the Perspective of the Quran* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 2001).

¹⁹Human rights from an Islamic perspective were presented by a number of Islamic scholars at a UNESCO forum in 1981. They pointed out aspects of human rights that are consistent with Islam, namely: the right to life, equality, freedom, protection from discrimination, justice, access to education, and others. A series of *arguments* are also attached in the reference section. See: University of Toronto Bora Laskin Law Library, International Protection of Human Rights; <http://www.lab-lib.utoronto.ca/resguide/humrtsgu.htm>. Accessed on November 4, 2023.





objectives of sharia) to protect against all forms of discrimination caused, among other things, by the patriarchal system.²⁰

Studies discussing feminist verses in the context of male-female relations have been extensively researched and have provided new findings in the context of gender equality. Zumrotus Sholikhah, in her research, discusses classical interpretations of verses in the Qur'an that tend to be gender-biased and patriarchal, as they were born in a socio-cultural context that positioned men as the center of authority. This study describes the Islamic feminist movement, which reinterprets these verses using a critical hermeneutic approach to restore the principles of justice and gender equality. The Muslim feminists discussed in this paper include Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, and Fatima Mernissi. They reject patriarchal interpretations by offering new interpretations that are more inclusive and responsive to women's experiences. This study only focuses on highlighting the patriarchal classical interpretations that Islamic feminists are trying to transform, but does not discuss the social issues of gender inequality against women since pre-Islamic times, which are still crucial issues in Indonesian society.²¹

Second, an article written by Aceng Fathurrohman et al entitled "Islam, Feminism, and Gender: Maudhu'i's Interpretive Perspective" examines the interpretation of Qur'anic verses related to issues of feminism and gender. This paper presents the history of feminism, the meaning and relationship of gender before and after Islam, and analyzes verses related to justice, inheritance, polygamy, and leadership rights. However, in examining the verses of the Qur'an in this paper, it uses a modern interpretation of the maudhu'i approach from the perspectives of Sayyid Quthb, Hamka, and Amina Wadud, not focusing solely on Islamic feminist figures.²²

Continuing the mainstreaming of gender-just interpretation narratives, this paper explores the understanding of verses on male-female relations from a feminist interpretation perspective and a contextual approach, with a focus on the full humanization of women. As emphasized by Sinta Nuriyah, in order to reconstruct a social system that is no longer stable, reinterpreting religious texts

²⁰Human rights (HAM) are a development of *maqasid hifdh al-'ird* formulated by a number of maqasid experts such as Yusuf al-Qardawi and Ahmad al-Rayshuni. See: Jasser Auda, "Maqasid al-Sharia has a Philosophy of Islamic Law (a Systems Approach)" (The International Institute of Islamic Thought London, 2007).

²¹ Zumrotus Sholikhah, "Gender Reconstruction in Islam: A Critical Study of Traditional Interpretation from a Feminist Perspective," *IJouGS: Indonesian Journal of Gender Studies* 6, no. 1 (2025), <https://jurnal.iainponorogo.ac.id/index.php/ijougs/article/view/11623>.

²² Aceng Fathurrohman, Agna Fikri Al Rifai, and Astri Aisyah Darma, "Islam, Feminism, and Gender: The Perspective of Maudhu'i Interpretation," *JISMA: Journal of Social Sciences, Management, and Accounting* 3, no. 1 (2024): 1293–306.





is an important strategy, in addition to cultural guerrilla warfare and social movements.²³ In addition to reinterpreting texts using a contextual approach, this paper also revitalizes verses of the Qur'an that outwardly show emancipation for women, such as the prohibition of killing female infants. Thus, this paper also presents the principle of the full humanization of women in the apparent meaning of the text, in addition to contextualizing the meaning of verses that are no longer relevant.

This paper falls under the category of qualitative research and is based on *library research*. Starting from a discussion focused on the full humanization of women in the Qur'an from a feminist interpretive perspective, this paper is divided into two important components as problem formulations. *First*, it discusses how pre-Islamic Arab gender relations were a narrative of oppression of women before the Qur'an was revealed. *Second*, it examines how verses on male-female relations are interpreted from a feminist perspective as an effort to fully humanize women.

To solve the problem, this paper uses an explanatory analysis method,²⁴ and a contextual approach with feminist interpretation as the perspective for reading verses on male-female relations. In addition, a textual approach is also used to reveal the literal meaning of the text, which already shows emancipation for women. The themes discussed include the prohibition of violence against women and the equality of rights and obligations between men and women.

Pre-Islamic Arab Gender Relations

Pre-Islamic Arab gender relations were not so different from those in neighboring regions, including the northern hemisphere. Julia Cleves Mosse found that gender relations in the Middle East were very similar to those in America and Europe. These patterns can be seen in the smallest social units, such as families, as well as in broader social units, such as tribes, races, nations, and so on.²⁵ This is because gender relations are determined by the division of functions and roles between men and women in society. In Roman and Greek family traditions, the head of the household was the man (father/husband). They had absolute power in economic and legal matters for all family members,

²³Sinta Nuriah Abdurrahman Wahid, *Women and Pluralism* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2019), 38.

²⁴Explanatory analysis is an analysis that serves to provide a deeper explanation than simply describing or presenting the content/meaning of the interpretive text. See: Henry Van Laer, *Philosophy of Science*, trans. Yudian W. Asmin and Torang Rambe (Yogyakarta: LPML, 1995), 117; Sahiron Syamsuddin, "Approaches and Analysis in Exegetical Text Research: An Overview," *Jurnal Suhuf*, No. 1, Vol. 12, June 2019, 140-141.

²⁵ Julia Cleves Mosse, *Half the World Half a Chance: An Introduction to Gender and Development* (Oxfam GB, 1993), <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/handle/10546/122709>.





including children, wives, and slaves.²⁶ This pattern continued until at least the 19th century, when constitutions granting freedom to married women and the abolition of slavery began to be implemented in Western Europe.²⁷

In line with this, gender relations in Arab societies also have a relatively similar structure. In the domestic sphere, men are responsible for providing for all family members, including fulfilling their needs and ensuring their safety.²⁸ This tradition has led to men dominating leadership roles in both the domestic and public spheres.²⁹ For example, in addition to their position as head of the household, men also have the privilege of holding positions as tribal chiefs and leaders of rituals or other ceremonial events. Not only that, career advancement is also limited to men. Women, on the other hand, are only given the authority to take care of reproductive and domestic tasks. In Javanese society, this is in line with ancient Javanese philosophy, which states that a woman's domain is the kitchen, the well, and the bed.³⁰

More specifically, male monopoly of power in the domestic sphere in Arab society is evident in his authority as guardian of marriage, giving him the right to choose a spouse for his children (). Men also have the right to practice polygamy. If a man is killed in battle, his ransom value is greater than that of a woman. Men are entitled to inheritance, while women are not. In the public sphere, men generally have greater opportunities than women to gain prestige and achievement in society.³¹ For example, only men are assigned to go to war. War was one way to achieve a better standard of living in pre-Islamic Arab tradition.³² Thus, if victorious in battle, only men had the right to manage the spoils of war (*ghanimah*). On the other hand, in tribal areas, men not only controlled social and economic rules. They also had the authority to control the population of a tribe. If the population

²⁶ Lestari Dara Cinta Utami Ginting et al., "Women in the Public Sphere: Gender Equality in Islamic Theology," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 105, no. 1 (2024): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.10518>.

²⁷ J. C. Mosse, *Half the World Half a Change: an Introduction to Gender and Development*, trans. Hartian Silawati (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2007), 64.

²⁸ Kalsoom Paracha and Aiman Khalid, "Inclusiveness of Women's Empowerment in Muslim Societies," *Islamic Studies* 62, no. 2 (2023): 275–88, <https://doi.org/10.52541/isiri.v62i2.2362>.

²⁹ Tamer Koburtay et al., "Misconceptions and Misunderstandings: An Exploration of the Interplay of Religion, Culture and Gender from Muslim Scholars and Clerics," *Career Development International* 28, nos. 6–7 (2023): 649–65, <https://doi.org/10.1108/CDI-03-2023-0082>.

³⁰ Karimuddin Nasution and Mohd Faizulamri Mohd Saad, "Analysis of Feminist Principles in The Da'wah Agenda of Gender Equality," *International Journal of Media and Communication Research* 1, no. 2 (July 2020): 14–23, <https://doi.org/10.25299/ijmcr.v1i2.5269>.

³¹ Tanvir Anjum, review of *Review of Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*, by Leila Ahmed, *Islamic Studies* 45, no. 3 (2006): 443–49.

³² Feyza Betül Köse, "Women in Pre-Islamic Arab Society," *Akademik Siyer Dergisi*, no. Cahiliye Özel Sayısı (December 2024): 76–91, <https://doi.org/10.47169/samer.1459683>.





exceeded the available natural resources, war became one way to control the human population. Thus, war was not only the result of tribal fanaticism, but sometimes also a means of stabilizing the population.³³

In addition to warfare, another way of controlling the population that is also detrimental to women is the tradition of infanticide. The proportional and selective killing of female infants is carried out as a preventive measure in economic matters. This is because there are concerns that limited natural resources will not be able to meet their needs. A number of verses in the Qur'an narrate this tradition, namely Q.S. Alisra 'verse 31 and Alan'am verse 151. However, economic motives are not the only basis for the tradition of infanticide.³⁴

There are other motives underlying the tradition of infanticide, including religious and social status motives. Some followers of the teachings of the Prophet Abraham misunderstand the slaughter of Abraham's son as a form of sacrifice. They then turned it into a religious ritual, giving rise to the tradition of slaughtering one son in each family.³⁵ This is as indicated in Surah Alan'am verse 137. In religious ceremonies in Central East, girls are offered as sacrifices. For example, a routine ceremony on the Nile River involves offering virgins as sacrifices so that the water will flow again. This tradition is carried out every 13th night of the month when the Nile River begins to dry up.³⁶

The social status motive lies in the tradition of killing female infants, which is based on the belief that women are a disgrace to the family. Pre-Islamic Arab societies practiced this to avoid a decline in the family's caste if the female infant were to marry someone of lower social status. In addition, they also practiced this to alleviate concerns that if they lost a war, their daughters would be taken hostage and made concubines by the enemy.³⁷ The killing of female infants based on the belief that female infants are a disgrace is also narrated in the Qur'an in Surah Annahl verse 58. Thus, the practice of killing female infants can be motivated by economic reasons, social status, and religious rituals.

³³ Zunly Nadia and Niswatin Faoziah, "Gender Equality within Family in Islamic Perspective: Insights from The Hadiths of Ummul Mukminin," *Journal of Qur'anic and Hadith Studies* 25, no. 1 (June 2024): 161–86, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v25i1.5260>.

³⁴K. S. Nathan and Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Islam in Southeast Asia: Political, Social and Strategic Challenges for the 21st Century* (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005).

³⁵ Ahmed A. Karim, Huda Al-Jundi, and Radwa Khalil, "Female Pioneers in Islamic Middle Ages: A Theological and Psychological Perspective," in *Female Pioneers from Ancient Egypt and the Middle East: On the Influence of History on Gender Psychology*, ed. Ahmed A. Karim, Radwa Khalil, and Ahmed Moustafa (Springer Singapore, 2021), 29–45, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-1413-2_3.

³⁶ Suzanne Onstine, "Gender and the Religion of Ancient Egypt," *Religion Compass* 4, no. 1 (2010): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8171.2009.00178.x>.

³⁷Umar, *Arguments for Equality...*, 124.





The traditions of warfare and infanticide are the result of male supremacy. The ability and skill to use weapons are attributed to men. Masculinity is a requirement for men, making them suitable to be the head of the household and tribe. As a consequence, women are trained to play a behind-the-scenes role with a dominant femininity in order to succeed men.³⁸ This pattern demonstrates the power relationship of men over women and therefore men are given the freedom to practice polygamy with women from lower castes, while women are only allowed to practice monogamy and only with men of equal status. Gender relations between men and women in the pre-Islamic Arab world were heavily influenced by patriarchal culture, which resulted in the stratification of male and female roles. Men acted as leaders in both the public and domestic spheres, while women's roles were limited to members and managers of the domestic sphere.³⁹

However, patriarchal culture is not fundamental to Arab society, nor did it originate there. Before that, ancient Middle Eastern societies were steeped in matriarchal culture. This is based on archaeological findings that prove that ancient Middle Eastern women were highly respected before the emergence of urban centers and city-states. This archaeological discovery refers to *Çatal Höyük*, an ancient Neolithic settlement in Anatolia, Turkey, which dates back to 6000 BC. In this settlement, more paintings and decorations depicting women were found on walls and in tombs than depictions of men.⁴⁰

In addition to *Çatal Höyük*, there are other archaeological discoveries that show that Neolithic Middle Eastern cultures revered goddesses until two millennia BC. Then, at some point, male dominance began to emerge, causing matriarchal cultures to transition into patriarchal ones. Laila Ahmed mentions that this dominance occurred before the rise of urban societies. One of the reasons for this is Gerda Lerner's theory, which states that the importance of providing employment and increasing the population led to the widespread kidnapping of women, resulting in competition over women's sexuality and productivity. As a result, a warrior culture emerged that emphasized male dominance.⁴¹

³⁸ Busran Qadri and Ihsan Mulia Siregar, "Islamic Renewal in the Field of Family Law: A Historical Analysis of Gender Equality," *El-Ussrah: Journal of Family Law* 6, no. 2 (December 2023): 444–55, <https://doi.org/10.22373/ujhk.v6i2.17128>.

³⁹ Mohammad Reza Aram, Mohammed Hussain Rajabi Davani, and Davood Mahdavi Zadehgan, "The Change of the Family from the Pre-Islamic Era to the Time of Amir al-Mo'menin (AS)," *The Women and Families Cultural-Educational* 16, no. 57 (January 2022): 127–55.

⁴⁰ Pinar Melis Yelsalı Parmaksız, "Thirty Years of Gender and Women's Studies in Turkey," *Women's Studies International Forum* 77 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2019.102279>.

⁴¹ 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>.





Feminist Interpretation as a Genre of Interpretation of Verses on Male-Female Relations

Feminist interpretation is a genre of interpretation that targets verses on male-female relationships as objects of interpretation, using gender analysis. This interpretation was born along with the awareness of male-female equality, which was an impact of Western feminism. In addition, feminist interpretation emerged as a critique of interpretations that did not pay enough attention to women's experiences, resulting in gender-biased interpretations.⁴² Etin Anwar, an Indonesian expert on Islamic Feminism, states that the root cause of this gender bias is relationships built on extensive *dependency*. This type of relationship necessitates the surrender of authority to the majority group to regulate the minority group—in this case, men over women.⁴³ Meanwhile, the foundation of the feminist interpretation paradigm consists of the principles of equality (*al-musawah*), justice (*al-'adalah*), propriety (*al-ma'ruf*), and deliberation (*al-mushawarah*).⁴⁴ The paradigms that form the basis of feminist interpretation include the distinction between the concepts of sex and gender. Quoting Nasaruddin Umar, sex is understood as something that cannot be changed in humans, namely something that is biological in nature—gender, for example. Meanwhile, gender is formed by social constructs—simply put, we can interpret this as roles.⁴⁵ In the latter case, feminist interpretation does not differentiate between men and women.

Broadly speaking, the approach used in feminist interpretation is essentially a contextual approach—as popularized by contemporary interpreters. However, this approach is formulated in a variety of terms, with each figure even having their own terminology. For example, *Tafsir Kebencian* (*Interpretation of Hatred*) by Zaitunah Subhan (b. 1950), which is characterized by its suspicious perspective⁴⁶; Fatima Mernissi (d. 2015) with *Women and Islam: a Historical and Theological Enquiry*,

⁴² Yeşim Kasap Çetingök, "On the possibilities for transforming secularly- and Islamically-shaped feminist discourses and the subject positions of Muslim women," *Osterreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 41 (2016): 145–60, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11614-016-0235-5>.

⁴³ Anwar, *A Genealogy of Islamic Feminism*.

⁴⁴ Eni Zulaiha, "FEMINIST TAFSIR: HISTORY, PARADIGM, AND VALIDITY STANDARDS OF FEMINIST TAFSIR," *Al-Bayan: Journal of Quranic Studies and Interpretation*, ahead of print, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.15575/al-bayan.v1i1.1671>.

⁴⁵ Nasaruddin Umar, *Arguments for Gender Equality from the Perspective of the Qur'an* (Makassar: CV. Kreatif Lenggara, 2023).

⁴⁶ Zaitunah Subhan, *Tafsir Kebencian: Studi Bias Gender Dalam Tafsir Al-Quran* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1999).





which is characterized by its *anti-patriarchal* perspective and *historical analysis*⁴⁷ ; Amina Wadud (b. 1952) in *Quran and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text in Women's Perspective*, with its Tawhidic Hermeneutics perspective⁴⁸ ; Sachiko Murata (b. 1943) in *The Tao of Islam* with her Islamic Taoism perspective⁴⁹ ; Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir (b. 1971) in his *Qira'ah Mubadalah*, which is characterized by its reciprocal interpretation.⁵⁰ This article does not analyze each approach in detail. However, one thing that must be emphasized is that, substantively, these approaches have relatively similar principles. These principles are derived from the Qur'an, which include justice (*al-'adalah*), equality (*al-musawah*), benefit (*al-mashlahah*), propriety (*al-ma'ruf*), and deliberation (*as-shura*). And, the goal is also the same, to produce gender- t interpretations, which is one of the important steps to stop violence against women.

As a genre of interpretation, feminist interpretation has various styles. There are six styles of reading the Qur'anic text from a gender perspective according to Ghazala Anwar and Budhy Munawwar Rahman. It is important for us to know these six styles to facilitate the identification of feminist interpretations based on their respective characteristics. *First*, the apologetic feminist interpretation style. This approach is based on the perception that the Qur'an and hadith have fulfilled the rights needed by men and women. According to this approach, the difference in the Qur'an's attitude towards men and women is only in biological terms. This approach acknowledges that the patriarchal culture that exists in some Muslim societies violates the rules laid down in the Qur'an. This style of interpretation uses philological and contextual methods. However, it does not seek to reinterpret the Qur'an, but rather to teach women the existing interpretations. On the other hand, this style of interpretation also recognizes deviations from women's interests. According to Anwar, this style of interpretation is the safest compared to other styles because there are no objections to classical interpretations.⁵¹ Sachiko Murata falls into this category because her interpretation does not deconstruct established interpretations. She offers a new approach to contextualizing classical Sufi interpretations.

⁴⁷Fatimah Mernissi, *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Inquiry* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991).

⁴⁸Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁴⁹Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), 15.

⁵⁰Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, *Qira'ah Mubaadalah: Progressive Interpretation for Gender Justice in Islam* (Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2019), 119.

⁵¹Ghazala Anwar, "Muslim Feminist Theological Discourse," in *Feminist Theological Discourse*, ed. Zakiyuddin Baidhawiy (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1996), 3.





Second, the reformist style, which is a feminist style of interpretation that reinterprets verses on male-female relationships. This style is based on the awareness that existing interpretations do not represent women's interests, so it is necessary to seek a reinterpretation. Like the apologetic style, the reformist style also uses philological and contextual methods. However, unlike the apologetic style, this style uses these two methods to reconstruct interpretations.⁵² This style of interpretation is slightly more established than the apologetic style, as it has made efforts to reinterpret verses. *Third*, the transformationist style. This style emerged from the desire to transform the patriarchal system in society by using old interpretive tools, which were then developed into a more relevant form to solve gender relations issues. This style uses *upgraded* classical interpretation methods. For example, the updating of the concepts of *muhkamat* and *mutashabihat* verses, carried out by Masdar Farid Mas'udi, an Indonesian intellectual concerned with gender equality. The development he formulated is that the focus of these two concepts is the substance of the verse.⁵³ Through this understanding, verses that appear sexist when read literally can be overcome by looking at their substance, thus giving rise to a new understanding that is gender-fair.

Fourth, the rationalist style, which is a style of feminist interpretation that uses justice as the basis for interpreting verses on gender relations. This style defines justice as a principle of interpretation derived from the Qur'an. This means that interpreters with this style take the value of justice from some verses and then use it as the basic principle for interpreting verses on gender relations that do not literally reflect justice. Thus, the verse is then directed towards the basic principle of justice itself. The method used in this style is contextual hermeneutics, because historical context is an important aspect to analyze, both in terms of the history of the Qur'an and the reality of the exegete's environment. Quoting Arif Syarif, one of the feminist exegetes of this style is Riffat Hassan, a feminist exegete from Pakistan.⁵⁴ Hassan bases her reading of verses on gender relations with Allah's justice, which is reflected in various verses as a *fundamental value*. Allah, the Most Just, requires His words to be in harmony with His justice. Then, she conducts a *historical-empirical* analysis and reinterprets interpretations that are not in accordance with this *fundamental value*.⁵⁵

⁵²Anwar, "Theological Discourse...", 4.

⁵³Anwar, "Theological Discourse...", 6-7.

⁵⁴Ahmad Arif Syarif, "Gender Relations Between Husband and Wife: A Study of the Views of Aisyiyah Leaders," *Sawwa: Journal of Gender Studies*, ahead of print, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.21580/sa.v13i1.2743>.

⁵⁵Riffat Hassan, "Feminism and the Qur'an: A Conversation with Riffat Hassan," *Jurnal Ulumul Quran*. Vol. 2, 1990, 87.





Fifth, the rejectionist approach, which uses women's experiences as the basic principle of interpretation. This approach rejects all sources of interpretation that contain discriminatory understandings of women, even if they come from the Hadith or the Qur'an. Quoting Shinta Nurani, feminist interpreters who tend to follow this style include Fatimah Mernissi and Tasleema Nasreen.⁵⁶ *Sixth*, the postmodernist style, which seeks to change male centrality (*ex-centralism*), based on the assumption that men are not the center of spiritual and social affairs. The first step that must be taken is to reject all arguments that reinforce gender inequality in Islamic discourse. The theological basis of this style is the principle of equality before Allah as stated in the Qur'an. Among the feminist interpreters of this style are Mansour Fakih and Asghar 'Ali Engineer.⁵⁷

Interpretation of Verses on Male-Female Relations: Narrating Women as Whole Human Beings

Prohibition of Violence against Women

The prohibition of killing female infants is one example of the Qur'an's efforts to dismantle traditions of violence against women. As explained earlier, killing female infants was a common practice in Jahiliyyah Arab society. This is stated in Surah An-Nahl verses 58-59:

وَإِذَا بُشِّرَ أَحَدُهُم بِالْأُنْثَىٰ ظَلَّ وَجْهُهُ مُسْوَدًّا وَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ
يَتَوَارَىٰ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ مِنْ سُوءِ مَا بُشِّرَ بِهِ ۚ أَيُمْسِكُهُ عَلَىٰ هُونٍ أَمْ يَدُسُّهُ فِي التُّرَابِ ۚ أَلَا سَاءَ مَا يَحْكُمُونَ

"But when one of them is given news of the birth of a girl, his face darkens and he is filled with anger." "He hides himself from the people because of the bad news that has been given to him. Will he keep her and bear the disgrace, or will he bury her alive in the ground? Remember how terrible the decision they made is."

Quoting Muhammad al-Ghazali in *al-Mar'ah fil Islam*, before the Prophet came with the teachings of Islam, societies around the world stigmatized women with various negative things, even to the point of not considering them human beings. In ancient Rome, women were only used as objects of sexual desire and had no rights whatsoever. The same was true in Jahiliyyah Arab society. They stigmatized women as a source of poverty and lowliness. This stigma then gave rise to the tradition of killing female babies alive, as narrated in the verse above.⁵⁸ Then, the Prophet came and conveyed that verse to his people, so that they would realize that their actions were wrong. Allah concluded His words with an explanation that what they were doing was wrong. According to a

⁵⁶Shinta Nuraini, "The Quran and the Creation of Women in Feminist Interpretation," *HERMENEUTIK*, ahead of print, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.21043/hermeneutik.v12i1.6023>.

⁵⁷Abdul Mustaqim, *Paradigm of Feminist Interpretation* (Yogyakarta: Logung Pustaka, 2008).

⁵⁸Muhammad al-Ghazali et al., *al-Mar'ah fi al-Islam* (Egypt: Mathbu'ah Akhbar al-Yaum, n.d.), 11-12.





narration in *Tafsir al-Baghawi*, the phrase *ala sa'a ma yahkumun* at the end of the verse means a strong condemnation of the burial of female infants alive.⁵⁹

Cases of sexual violence, which are one of the main focuses of feminist thinkers and women's protection agencies, have actually found normative footing since the Qur'an was revealed. Among others, in Surah An-Nur verse 33. In short, this verse prohibits coercion into prostitution. The following is the wording of the verse and its translation:

...وَلَا تُكْرِهُوا فَتِيَّتَكُمْ عَلَى الْبِغَاءِ إِنْ أَرَدْنَ تَحَصُّنًا لِّتَبْتَّغُوا عَرَضَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَمَنْ يُكْرِهْهُنَّ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ مِنْ بَعْدِ

“And do not force your female slaves into prostitution, when they themselves desire chastity, in order to seek the gains of this world. Whoever forces them, then indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful (to them) after they have been forced.”

There are several versions regarding the context of the revelation of Surah An-Nur verse 33. However, according to the majority of exegetes, this verse was revealed in relation to Abdullah bin 'Ubay's coercion of his two female slaves, Mu'adzah and Musaykah, to engage in prostitution and hand over their earnings to 'Ubay. Al-Wahidi mentions in his *Asbabun Nuzul*:

وقَالَ الْمُفَسِّرُونَ: نَزَلَتْ فِي مَعَاذَةَ وَمَسِيكَةَ جَارِيَتَيْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ أَبِي الْمُنَافِقِ كَانَ يَكْرِهُمَا عَلَى الزَّانَا لَضَرْبِيَّةٍ يَأْخُذُهَا مِنْهُمَا، وَكَذَلِكَ كَانُوا يَفْعَلُونَ فِي الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ يُؤَاجِرُونَ إِمَاءَهُمْ فَلَمَّا جَاءَ الْإِسْلَامُ قَالَتْ مَعَاذَةُ لِمَسِيكَةَ⁶⁰

The exegetes opine that this verse was revealed in the context of Mu'adzah and Musaykah, two female slaves of Abdullah bin 'Ubay, whom he forced into prostitution with the aim of profiting from their prostitution. This practice was customary among the Jahiliyyah society, who did this to female slaves. And, since Islam came, Mu'adzah said to Musaykah: “The problem we are facing now (being forced into prostitution) has two possibilities. If it is good, then we will do it more, but if it is bad, then of course we will reject it.” Then, Allah revealed this verse (Surah An-Nur verse 33)."

From the reason for revelation, it can be understood that this verse prohibits forcing female slaves into prostitution. Even in another version of the reason for revelation, written by Ibn 'Asyur in *at-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, as well as al-Baghawi in *Ma'alimut Tanzil*, this passage was revealed in

⁵⁹al-Baghawi, *Ma'alim al-Tanzil* (Riyadh: Dar al-Thaibah, 1990), Volume 5, 25.

⁶⁰Abu Hasan bin Ali Ahmad al-Wahidi, *Asbab al-Nuzul al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1991), 53.





response to the protest of Abdullah bin 'Ubay's female slave to the Prophet, regarding her being forced into prostitution.⁶¹

Prohibition of Domestic Violence

Domestic conflicts often lead to violence against women. Instead of resolving the conflict between the two parties, violence exacerbates the situation and discriminates against women's human rights. Sadly, this problem is getting worse, as indicated by the increasing frequency of domestic violence. According to a survey by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (PPPA) on December 27, there have been 23,833 cases of violence throughout 2023, and 21,026 victims of all cases were women. A total of 14,541 cases were domestic violence with a total of 15,614 victims. This is the highest category compared to others.⁶²

The interpretation of verses that form the basis of Islamic law has contributed to the normalization of domestic violence. These verses include Q.S. Annisa [4]: 34, or more precisely the phrase *wadribuhunna*, which is interpreted as "beating one's wife" as a way of resolving marital conflicts. In a society that upholds human rights and humanitarian principles, reinterpreting this phrase is a priority.

واللاتي ختافون نشوزن فعظوهن واهجروهن في المضاجع واضربوهن فإن أطعنكم فلا تبغوا عليهن سبيلا إن الله كان عليا كبيرا

"As for those women from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them, leave them alone in bed, and (if necessary) beat them. But if they obey you, then seek no means against them. Truly, Allah is Exalted and Great."

The passage from Surah An-Nisa verse 34 is often misused to legitimize domestic violence. According to Musdah Mulia, cases of domestic violence against wives are caused by the assumption that men have a higher status than women.⁶³ This assumption is based, among other things, on the previous verse about the concept of *qiwamah*, which will be discussed in the next sub-section. In relation to the steps to resolve a wife's nusyuz (disobedience) as stated in the above verse, there is a more humane interpretation that does not normalize the act of beating.

First, negotiation of the application of verses with local customs and culture. One of the interpreters who offers this alternative is Ibn 'Asyur. According to him, the provision of separating a

⁶¹al-Baghawi, *Ma'alim al-Tanzil*..., 24.

⁶²Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, <https://kekerasan.kemenpppa.go.id/ringkasan>, accessed on December 27, 2023.

⁶³Musdah Mulia, "Gender Inequality," *Encyclopedia of Reformist Muslim Women*, ed. Ira D Aini (South Tangerang: BACA Publishing, 2020), 559.





nusyuz wife is not applied absolutely, in the sense that it must be returned to local customs. In this case, according to him, beating can only be applied in societies that are harsh and use a patriarchal system.

For example, pre-Islamic Arab society did not consider beating to be violence, and even women felt the same way. In this context, resolving nusyuz by beating could be done to teach a lesson without involving anger.⁶⁴ Therefore, if in a particular custom and culture the community does not consider beating to be an alternative for resolving domestic conflicts, then beating one's wife cannot be justified under any circumstances. This is similar to the customs and culture of the majority of the world's communities today, which prioritize the principle of humanism by abandoning physical punishment in education and community life.

Second, the development of the meaning of *dharaba*. *Dharaba* in the Qur'an has many meanings. Among them is 'to make (a parable)' as in Q.S. Ibrahim verse 24; 'to go' as in Q.S. Annisa verse 94; and 'to hold or make' as in Q.S. Annahl verse 74. Meanwhile, in the *al-Munawwir* dictionary, *dharaba* can mean to turn away, to ignore, and to not pay attention.⁶⁵ The meaning of turning away or ignoring is supported by a hadith as quoted by Zaitunah Subhan, which means: "I am surprised at a man who beats his wife. He is the one who deserves to be beaten. Do not beat your wives with sticks because you will *be punished*. You can decide not to provide for your wives on a daily basis. This action is more beneficial for you in this world and the hereafter."⁶⁶

This hadith reinforces the interpretation of *dharaba* as 'ignoring or neglecting' one's wife. After the previous two steps have been unsuccessful, the act of ignoring can be chosen by not interacting with the wife at all, so that she will hopefully realize her mistake. Substantively, this final step represents the most difficult choice that can be made to resolve domestic conflict. Subhan directs it by completely severing interaction as an instrument that has serious consequences, because interaction is very difficult to avoid in a marital relationship. Clearly, the steps taken must be in accordance with the principles of reconciliation (*islah*), adding good deeds (*ihsan*), and refraining from bad deeds (*takwa*), as stated in Q.S. Annisa verse 128. Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir emphasizes that

⁶⁴Ibnu 'Asyur, *al-Tahrir wa...*, Vol. 5, 41.

⁶⁵A. Warson Munawwir, *Kamus al-Munawwir* (Yogyakarta: Pondok Pesantren al-Munawwir, 1984), 874.

⁶⁶Zaitunah Subhan, *Alquran & Perempuan: Menuju Kesenjangan Gender dalam Penafsiran* (Jakarta: Prenadamedia Group, 2015), 197.





'firm action' can be an option to resolve nusyuz without resorting to physical violence, as this is not in line with the principle of reconciliation in cases of nusyuz.⁶⁷

Equality of Rights and Obligations

Equality as servants is explicitly mentioned in Q.S. Attur verse 56: وما خلقت الإنس والجن إلا ليعبدون.

"I did not create jinn and humans except to worship Me." The term al-insan includes both men and women. This means that the purpose of the creation of men and women is as objects of the Prophet Muhammad's preaching, so that both are required to worship. What distinguishes their status is the quality of their piety, not their gender or ethnicity, as emphasized in Q.S. Al-Hujurat 13. In another verse, it is also explained that men and women are equal as caliphs who are mandated to prosper the earth. In this case, they are both considered as subjects who care for and preserve the earth. Various verses that explicitly mention this equality are Q.S. Albaqarah verse 30, Ala'raf verse 172, Alan'am 165, and many more.

The use of the term 'bani adam' and the pronoun 'kum' refers to humans in general. In the *taghlib* rule, the pronoun kum also includes women. Thus, the mandate of khalifah is carried out equally by men and women.⁶⁸ In the verses about human khalifah on earth, there is no mention of any particular group, tribe, or gender. This further reinforces that the mission to prosper the earth applies universally.

Equality between women and men as servants and caliphs does not mean equality in terms of quantity. Women's unique experiences are also taken into consideration in the application of Sharia law. There are acts of worship that are not intended for women as long as they experience these unique experiences.⁶⁹ For example, the prohibition of prayer and fasting during menstruation and postpartum bleeding, as well as the permissibility of breaking the fast during Ramadan for pregnant and breastfeeding women. Such provisions represent a dispensation that considers the greater good, rather than the subordination of women in Islamic law.

It is widely known that QS An-Nisa' (4: 34) has given rise to a variety of contradictory interpretations. From the perspective of classical *exegetes* such as al-Zamakhshari, al-Razi, Ibn Kathir, and others, this verse legitimizes the superiority of men over women in the domestic sphere, as well

⁶⁷Kodir, *Qira'ah Mubaadalah...*, 418.

⁶⁸Kodir, *Qira'ah Mubaadalah...*, 244-248.

⁶⁹Nur Rofiah, *Muslim Women's Critical Reasoning: Reflections on Womanhood, Humanity, and Islam* (Bandung: Afkaruna, 2020), 32-33.





as in the public sphere. They agree that this verse legitimizes men as leaders, thereby giving rise to the understanding of male superiority, while women are the led, thus giving rise to the understanding of female inferiority. They also agree that this hierarchical structure is due to men's superior intellect and physical strength compared to women.⁷⁰

In another fragment, contemporary scholars such as Quraish Shihab and Yusuf Qardlawi interpret this verse as specifically containing guidelines on the relationship between husband and wife in running a household. Furthermore, they state that the husband is the main person responsible for the household. This is based on an understanding of the verse, which explicitly places the husband as the subject who has advantages and can support the needs of the family. The following is the text of the verse:

,Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other

الرجال قوامون على النساء بما فضل الله بعضهم على بعض وبما أنفقوا من أموالهم ﴿٣٥﴾

"Men (husbands) are protectors of women (wives), because Allah has made some of them (men) superior to others (women), and because they (men) have provided for them from their wealth."

From the interpretation of classical *exegetes*, it can be understood that they interpret the words *al-rijaal* and *al-nisaa'* literally as men in their general sense, thus giving rise to the understanding that men are the leading subjects, and conversely, women are always the led objects. They used the hadith about the Prophet's statement that a country cannot be successful if it is led by a woman to reinforce their interpretation. Similarly, they argued that men have a more intelligent mind and a stronger physique than women.

Unlike Quraish Shihab and Yusuf Qardlawi, who interpret this verse more in terms of the relationship between husband and wife, by correlating *the siyaqul* ayat (context of the verse) which discusses the issue of financial support in the household, they conclude that the term *qawwaam* in this verse refers to male leadership in the family.⁷¹ As a counterargument to the hadith on female leadership above, Yusuf Qardlawi applies the hadith to social conditions when women were still less

⁷⁰These classical exegetes refer to physical strength as *al-quwwah/al-qudrah* and mental capacity as *al-'aql*. According to them, men have a higher level of *al-quwwah/al-qudrah* and *al-'aql* than women. See: Mah}mu>b bin 'Umar al-Zamakhshariy al-Khawa>rizmiy, *Al-Kashsha>f 'an H{aqa>'iq al-Tanzi>l Wa 'Uyu>n al-Aqa>wil Fi> Wujuh al-Ta'wil* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifat, n.d.).

⁷¹Shihab, *Tafsir al-Mishbah...*, Volume 2, 512.





civilized, as was the case in the Roman Empire in 9 AH, which was in turmoil when led by Queen Kisra, which in fact led to the emergence of this hadith.⁷² The two models of interpretation above need to be developed further. Based on actual conditions, these interpretations seem irrelevant, because today the role of women in both the public and domestic spheres is not entirely insignificant compared to that of men. One way to do this is to illustrate *the historical setting* of the husband-wife relationship at the time the verse was revealed with the current reality and explore the substance of the verse itself.⁷³

Hussein Muhammad emphasized that there has been a cultural shift in the system of husband-wife relations, which then became an important basis for reconstructing the interpretation of QS An-Nisa' (4: 34) above. In the narrative of the family system of the past, women as wives were in a subordinate position due to the strong patriarchal culture. The role of men as husbands was that of leaders responsible for the stability of the household.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, wives were under the authority of their husbands, and in such conditions, we can say that women were *second- -priority*. Women were at the nadir of marginalization during the pre-Islamic era. They were like commodities that could be sold, inherited, enslaved, and burned to the ground for free. Then came Islam, bringing teachings that gradually elevated the status of women, while adapting to the patriarchal culture still prevalent in Arabian society. At this point, women received half the inheritance of men.⁷⁵

In the marriage sector, there are restrictions on polygamy, commands to establish good relationships, and lenient provisions on *nushuz*. All of these arrangements remained in place as long as patriarchal culture prevailed, at least until the trend of *gender equality* emerged in the 19th century. Subsequently, patriarchal culture began to lose its footing, both theologically and sociologically. This condition is indicated by the spirit of contemporary interpreters to explore the meaning of verses based on their essence and compromise with the current reality, where women play many roles.⁷⁶ In the family sphere, women demonstrate their roles as good wives and mothers, and in the public

⁷² Serine Louiz, "Guiding Women's Roles in the Thought of Imam Yūsuf al-Qaraḏāwī," *Journal of College of Sharia and Islamic Studies* 43, no. 1 (2025): 269–94, <https://doi.org/10.29117/jcsis.2025.0407>.

⁷³ Sulastri Caniago et al., "Gender Integration in Islamic Politics: Fiqh Siyasah on Women's Political Rights since Classical to Contemporary Interpretations," *MILRev: Metro Islamic Law Review* 3, no. 2 (2024): 411–31, <https://doi.org/10.32332/milrev.v3i2.9962>.

⁷⁴ Arbia Lanani, "Aspects of Maqāṣid-Based Renewal and Its Impact on Fatwas Involving Women and the Family by Sheikh Yūsuf al-Qaraḏāwī," *Journal of College of Sharia and Islamic Studies* 43, no. 1 (2025): 81–105, <https://doi.org/10.29117/jcsis.2025.0400>.

⁷⁵ KH Husein Muhammad, *Fiqh Perempuan: Refleksi Kiai atas Tafsir Wacana Agama dan Gender* (Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2019), 181.

⁷⁶ Scott Kugle and Stephen Hunt, "Masculinity, Homosexuality and the Defense of Islam: A Case Study of Yusuf al-Qaraḏawī's Media Fatwa," *Religion and Gender* 2, no. 2 (2012): 254–79, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18785417-00202005>.





sphere, they have proven their capability and credibility as leaders, entrepreneurs, and the like. In light of this reality, QS An-Nisa' (4: 34) above is important to interpret contextually, by taking the substance of the verse and elaborating it with the facts that exist today.⁷⁷

Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, in his *Qira'ah Mubaadalah*, states that the substance of QS An-Nisa' (4: 34) above is that whoever has greater capacity in terms of finances or authority in managing husband-wife relations is responsible for fulfilling the family's financial needs and managing the family's livelihood.⁷⁸ At the same time, Faqih states that the use of the term *ar-rijaal* as leaders has a contextual meaning. As we know, men actually had more authority at the time this verse was revealed, so men were obliged to be leaders of the family. Conversely, not only men, but women can also be managers of the household if circumstances require it.⁷⁹

The meaning of *ar-rijaal* as not exclusively referring to men can also be found in QS At-Taubah (9: 108), QS An-Nur (24: 37), and QS Al-Ahzab (33: 23). In these three verses, even though the wording only addresses men by mentioning the term *ar-rijaal*, women are also included. Thus, it strengthens the authority of women to participate in managing the household. This is reinforced by the context of QS An-Nisa' (4:34), which is in the form of a narrative *ikhbar* (providing information), which in terms of *usul fiqh* logic merely provides information that does not indicate a teaching. Reflecting on reality and adhering to the substance of the verse that must always be upheld, a new interpretation of QS An-Nisa (4:34) above emerges.⁸⁰

The rights and responsibilities of husbands and wives are very flexible depending on the circumstances of each household, which of course differ. Men are responsible for providing for the family and maintaining family stability if they have the capacity to do so and their wives are carrying out reproductive duties, such as pregnancy, breastfeeding, or raising children, which prevent them from being optimally productive. Likewise, if the wife has more capacity than her husband, then it is her obligation to fulfill the needs and maintain the stability of the family. These provisions are very flexible and must remain based on the three objectives of marriage, which are a strong agreement (*mithaaqan ghalidhan*). The three objectives, as formulated by Faqihuddin Abdul Qodir, are:

⁷⁷ Alean Al-Krenawi, "One Father, Many Mothers: Sibling Relationships in Polygamous Families," in *Brothers and Sisters: Sibling Relationships Across the Life Course*, ed. Ann Buchanan and Anna Rotkirch (Springer International Publishing, 2020), 153–69, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-55985-4_9.

⁷⁸ Lukman Hakim, "POST-MODERN FEMINISM IN THE INTERPRETATION OF FAQIHUDDIN ABDUL KODIR," *Journal of Qur'anic and Hadith Studies* 21, no. 1 (January 2020): 237–59, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.2020.2101-12>.

⁷⁹ Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, *Qira'ah Mubadalah* (IRCISO, 2021).

⁸⁰ Raymond K. Farrin, "Surat Al-Nisa and the Centrality of Justice," *AlBayan* 14, no. 1 (2016): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22321969-12340028>.





establishing a good relationship, fulfilling financial and sexual needs. In realizing these objectives, it must also be based on the principle of *mushawarah* (exchanging opinions), so that the decision is fair for both parties.⁸¹

Conclusion

The full humanization of women is one of Islam's missions to bring peace to the earth. This is closely related to the social context of pre-Islamic Arab society, which adhered to a patriarchal system. Gender relations in pre-Islamic Arab tradition were rife with gender inequality. Customs oppressed the human dignity of women. In the domestic sphere, women were the complete property of their fathers, grandfathers, or husbands. Women were commodities that could be inherited and traded. From birth, their presence was considered a disgrace, giving rise to the tradition of killing female infants. In the public sphere, women had no authority to pursue a career, participate in war, be promoted, let alone become a tribal chief. Menstruating women were also stigmatized and discriminated against (considered unclean and deported).

These traditions were then abolished either directly or gradually. Among the forms of oppression against women that are condemned and strictly prohibited in the Qur'an are the killing of female infants in Q.S. *Annahl* verses 58-59 and sexual violence against women in Q.S. *Annur* verse 33. The prohibition of domestic violence and attention to reproductive health are also evident in the main messages of *Surah An-Nisa* verses 34 and *Surah Al-Baqarah* verse 222. Meanwhile, the narrative of equality between women and men is explicitly stated in *Surah Attur* verses 56; *al-Hujurat* verse 13, and *Albaqarah* verse 30, which show equality as objects in their capacity as servants and subjects in their capacity as stewards of the earth. Meanwhile, the equality of men and women as partners is also evident in the contextual interpretation of the first part of *Surah An-Nisa* verse 34. The main message of this verse is the flexibility of the rights and obligations of men and women in managing the household, which includes aspects of relationships, finances, and sex, which in its application adheres to the five principles of marriage. These five principles include '*mithaqan ghalidhan*,' '*al-zauj*,' '*mu'asyarah bi al-ma'ruf*,' '*musyawarah*,' and '*taradin minhuma*.'

⁸¹Kodir, *Qira'ah Mubaadalah...*, 369–371.





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