

Decolonization of Domestic Violence Interpretation in Contemporary Indonesia: Challenging Misogynistic Interpretations in QS. An-Nisa: 34

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Abstract

Domestic violence remains a persistent crisis in Indonesia, sustained not only by socio-economic pressures and gender inequality but also by religious discourses that normalize male authority within marriage. This article examines how Qur'anic interpretation, especially Surah An-Nisa verse 34, has been repeatedly used to justify gender hierarchy and, in some contexts, to legitimate coercion and violence against wives. The study employs a qualitative literature-based design that integrates critical hermeneutics, discourse analysis, and comparative exegesis, informed by feminist hermeneutics and decolonial theory. The findings show that dominant classical tafsir constructs qawwamun as inherent male leadership, reduces nushuz to a wife's disobedience, and accepts daraba as regulated but permissible physical discipline. Together, these interpretations create an epistemic framework that renders domestic violence morally intelligible and socially governable through patriarchal household norms. In contrast, contemporary Indonesian reinterpretations advanced by Musdah Mulia and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir reframe the verse through justice, reciprocity, and the protection of life and dignity, thereby rejecting violence as ethically incompatible with Qur'anic objectives. This article argues that such progressive tafsir constitutes a project of epistemic decolonization because it challenges the universalization of historically contingent patriarchal exegesis and repositions interpretive authority within context-sensitive ethical reasoning grounded in women's lived realities. Theoretically, the study contributes to Qur'anic studies and gender justice scholarship by conceptualizing feminist tafsir as a decolonial intervention rather than a simple alternative reading, while also offering a faith-based epistemic foundation that strengthens legal advocacy and supports the implementation of Indonesia's Domestic Violence Law.

Keywords: *domestic violence; QS. An-Nisa: 34; classical tafsir; feminist hermeneutics; decolonial theory.*

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Introduction

Violence against women, particularly within the domestic sphere, remains one of Indonesia's most pressing and pervasive human rights challenges. Despite legal advancements and increased public awareness, statistical data consistently reveals a harrowing reality for millions of women.¹ According to the 2024 Annual Report from the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan), there were 289,111 reported cases of violence against women in 2023. While this figure represents a decrease from the previous year, the data underscores the endemic nature of the problem, with the personal domain the household remaining the most common site of violence.²

Further disaggregation of data paints an even more detailed picture of the crisis. Komnas Perempuan's 2023 report highlighted that psychological violence was the most dominant form, accounting for 3,498 cases (41.5%), followed closely by physical violence at 2,081 cases (24.7%) and sexual violence at 2,078 cases (24.6%). The 2024 National Women's Life Experience Survey (SPHPN), a comprehensive study conducted by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (Kemen PPPA) and the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), revealed the staggering lifetime prevalence of such violence: one in four Indonesian women aged 15–64 has experienced physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lives. Crucially, the survey found that households were the most frequent setting for this violence, with 13,307 cases reported in 2024, and wives constituting the majority of victims. In 2021, data showed that 79% of all violence against women occurred at home, with violence against wives making up half of those cases.³

These official statistics, however, represent only the tip of the iceberg. The problem of underreporting is significant, driven by a confluence of cultural, social, and psychological factors. Many victims are reluctant to report abuse because they feel ashamed, lack a comprehensive understanding of their legal rights under existing laws, or have tragically internalized the violence as a normal, albeit painful, aspect of marital life. The desire to protect their children from the social stigma of a broken home or to maintain family harmony, however illusory, also serves as a powerful deterrent to seeking legal recourse. This culture of silence is not merely a product of individual choices but is sustained by a broader ideological framework that often privatizes domestic abuse and, in some interpretations, provides it with a veneer of religious legitimacy.⁴

At the heart of the ideological and theological debates surrounding domestic violence in Muslim societies lies Surah An-Nisa, verse 34 of the Qur'an. This verse, which addresses the relationship between husbands and wives, has historically been a focal point for interpretations that establish a hierarchical gender structure within marriage.⁵ The text reads:

“Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah

¹ Wahidah Zein Br Siregar, “Causes and Impacts of Domestic Violence against Women: Cases in Indonesia,” *Jurnal Sosiologi Dialektika* 19 (June 2024): 77–88, <https://doi.org/10.20473/jsd.v19i1.2024.77-88>.

² Sadullayeva Dilbar, “Gender Inequality and Violence Against Women,” *Indonesian Journal of Social Development* 2, no. 2 (2024): 8, <https://doi.org/10.47134/jsd.v2i2.3209>.

³ Dilbar, “Gender Inequality and Violence Against Women.”

⁴ Kukuh A. Tohari, “Story and Voices Against Violence Against Women,” 2 Desember 2024, 2024, <https://careindonesia.or.id/en/sayaberani-story-and-voices-against-violence-against-women/>.

⁵ Muhammad Siregar, Achyar Zein, and Rahayu Astuti, “Feminist Interpretation of Qur'an Surah al-Nisa' Verse 34: An Educational Study on Gender Relations, Structural Violence and the Protection of Women's Rights,” *Ablussunnab: Journal of Islamic Education* 4 (April 2025): 22–32, <https://doi.org/10.58485/jie.v4i1.305>.

would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) strike them; but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means (of annoyance): For Allah is Most High, great (above you all).”⁶

For centuries, dominant classical interpretations have understood this verse as granting men authority (*qanwamun*) over women, demanding obedience (*qanitat*) from wives, and permitting physical discipline (*daraba*) as a final measure against perceived disobedience (*nushuz*). This interpretive framework has had profound and devastating consequences. In contemporary Indonesia, it is not uncommon for perpetrators of domestic violence to invoke a distorted understanding of this verse as a theological justification for their abusive actions. Such interpretations transform a sacred text into an instrument of oppression, providing religious sanction for acts of physical, psychological, and emotional violence.⁷ Consequently, QS. An-Nisa: 34 is not an inert historical text but a dynamic and contested ideological battleground. It is the site where patriarchal worldviews clash with egalitarian ethics, where traditional authority is challenged by contemporary experiences of suffering, and where the very meaning of justice within the Islamic tradition is debated and redefined. The struggle to interpret this verse is, therefore, inextricably linked to the struggle to eradicate domestic violence.⁸

This paper argues that a meaningful challenge to the theological underpinnings of domestic violence requires more than just a new interpretation; it demands a *decolonization* of the interpretive process itself. Decolonial theory posits that colonialism was not merely a political and economic project but also an epistemic one, establishing Eurocentric knowledge systems as universal while marginalizing or erasing other ways of knowing. This "coloniality of knowledge" persists even after formal political independence, shaping academic disciplines, social norms, and even religious thought.⁹ Within Islamic studies, a parallel process can be observed. A specific set of classical, male-authored, and predominantly Arab-centric interpretations of the Qur'an, produced within specific patriarchal socio-historical contexts, have been elevated to a quasi-canonical status. This interpretive tradition, often presented as timeless and universally authoritative, functions as a hegemonic knowledge system. It marginalizes the voices, experiences, and interpretive authority of women and non-Arab Muslims, including those in Indonesia. When this disembodied, ahistorical *tafsir* is used to invalidate the lived reality of an Indonesian woman suffering from abuse, it constitutes a form of epistemic violence.¹⁰

Therefore, the work of contemporary Indonesian Muslim feminists represents a profound act of "epistemic disobedience". By insisting that the lived experiences of Indonesian women, the principles of gender justice, and the local socio-legal context are valid and necessary components of the interpretive process, they challenge the very foundations of this hegemonic knowledge

⁶ Maulana Muhammad Ali, *Al Qur'an Terjemah Dan Tafsir* (Darul Kutubil Islamiyah, 2015).

⁷ Sayyed Mostafa Ahmadzadeh, "The Semantics of Daraba in the Verse 34 of Surah An-Nisa," *International Journal of Textual and Translation Analysis in Islamic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2023): 57–73.

⁸ Roihan Muhammad Iqbal Karim and Ainur Rhain, "Perspective of Gender Equality in Surah An-Nisa': 34 (Comparative Study of Tafsir At-Thabari and Tafsir Al-Azhar)," *Hamalatul Qur'an: Jurnal Ilmu Ilmu Alqur'an* 5, no. 2 (2024): 863–72, <https://doi.org/10.37985/hq.v5i2.380>.

⁹ Mark Woodward, "Paradigms, Models, and Counterfactuals: Decolonizing the Study of Islam in Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* 32, no. 1 (2025): 101–35, <https://doi.org/10.36712/sdi.v32i1.46005>.

¹⁰ Wahyu Rizki, "QIRĀ'AH MUBĀDALAH APPROACH TO THE QUR'AN: The Interpretation of Q.S. al-Nisā' [4]: 34," *ULUL ALBAB Jurnal Studi Islam* 21 (December 2020): 269–88, <https://doi.org/10.18860/ua.v21i2.10218>.

system. Their goal is not simply to replace one interpretation with another, but to decolonize the methodology of *tafsir* itself, liberating it from the constraints of a universalized patriarchy and re-grounding it in the pursuit of justice for their own communities.¹¹

Accordingly, this paper advances the thesis that the struggle against domestic violence in Indonesia is inseparable from the decolonization of Islamic interpretation. Through critical engagement with Surah An-Nisa verse 34, Indonesian scholars and activists articulate a hermeneutical framework grounded in justice, reciprocity, and the higher objectives of Islamic law, while remaining attentive to lived realities. This approach not only contests misogynistic readings of the Qur'an but also reclaims Islamic knowledge as a dynamic, embodied, and socially transformative tradition. Methodologically, this study employs qualitative library research using critical hermeneutics and comparative analysis. It examines classical interpretations alongside feminist and decolonial readings to reveal how interpretive authority is constructed, contested, and reconfigured. By situating Indonesian feminist *tafsir* within a decolonial epistemological framework, this research contributes to broader debates on Qur'anic interpretation, gender justice, and the role of Islamic knowledge in confronting structural violence.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative literature-based research design aimed at critically examining the interpretation of QS. An-Nisa: 34 and its discursive relationship to domestic violence in the Indonesian Muslim context. Rather than treating texts as isolated doctrinal artifacts, this design enables a systematic analysis of how Qur'anic interpretation operates as an epistemic practice that shapes social norms, gender relations, and moral justification of violence.¹² The qualitative approach is particularly suitable because the research focuses on meanings, interpretive logics, and power relations embedded in religious discourse rather than on measuring behavioral variables.¹³

Table 1. Data, Sources, and Analytical Techniques

Type of Data	Data Description	Sources	Corpus Size	Analytical Techniques
Primary Qur'anic Text	QS. An-Nisa: 34 as the core text on marital relations and authority	The Qur'an	1 verse	Critical hermeneutics focusing on structure, semantics, and ethical orientation
Classical Tafsir Texts	Interpretations of QS. An-Nisa: 34 in authoritative classical tafsir (3rd–10th H)	Canonical Sunni tafsir widely used in Indonesia	12 tafsir works	Critical hermeneutics to identify patriarchal assumptions and epistemic authority

¹¹ Soe Tjen Marching, "Decolonising Feminism and Feminist Decolonialism: The Case of the #metoo Movement in Indonesia," *Intersectional Feminist Research Methodologies: Applications in the Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2024, 47–62, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003399575-4>.

¹² Alison Nightingale, "A Guide to Systematic Literature Reviews," *Surgery (Oxford)*, Determining surgical efficacy, vol. 27, no. 9 (September 2009): 381–84, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mpsur.2009.07.005>.

¹³ SJ Agius, "Qualitative Research: Its Value and Applicability," *The Psychiatrist*, no. Query date: 2025-06-18 05:14:19 (2013), <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/the-psychiatrist/article/qualitative-research-its-value-and-applicability/51B8A4C008278BA4BA8F518060ED643C>; G Allan, "Qualitative Research," *Handbook for Research Students in the Social Sciences*, no. Query date: 2025-06-18 05:14:19 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003070993-18>.

Contemporary Feminist & Progressive Tafsir	Feminist and progressive reinterpretations addressing gender justice and domestic violence	Global Muslim feminist and Indonesian scholars	8 major works	Discourse analysis and comparative analysis (<i>tafsir muqaran</i>)
Key Qur'anic Concepts	Usage of <i>qanwamun</i> , <i>nushuz</i> , <i>daraba</i> across interpretive traditions	Tafsir texts, feminist scholarship, legal discourse	3 core concepts (across all texts)	Discourse analysis tracing semantic shifts and ideological functions
Socio-Legal Domestic Violence Data	Reports and surveys on violence against women in Indonesia	Komnas Perempuan, SPHPN, Indonesian statutes	10 institutional documents	Contextual and interpretive analysis linking discourse to social reality
Secondary Scholarly Literature	Studies on hermeneutics, Islamic feminism, and decolonial theory	Peer-reviewed journals and monographs	25 academic sources	Theoretical synthesis and decolonial epistemic analysis

The data corpus consists of four clearly defined categories. First, the primary textual data include the Qur'anic verse QS. An-Nisa: 34 and its interpretations in twelve authoritative classical tafsir works produced between the 3rd and 10th centuries Hijri, representing dominant Sunni exegetical traditions. These include works commonly cited in Indonesian religious education and preaching. Second, the study analyzes eight major contemporary feminist and progressive tafsir texts, including both global Muslim feminist scholarship and Indonesian reinterpretations, with particular attention to writings that explicitly address gender justice, domestic violence, and marital ethics. Third, the research examines ten institutional and socio-legal documents, including official reports from Komnas Perempuan, the National Women's Life Experience Survey (SPHPN), and relevant Indonesian legal statutes on domestic violence. Fourth, secondary analytical data consist of peer-reviewed journal articles and academic monographs that discuss Qur'anic hermeneutics, Islamic feminism, and decolonial theory, selected through purposive sampling based on relevance and citation impact.¹⁴

Data analysis is conducted through three interrelated and sequential analytical procedures. First, critical hermeneutical analysis is applied to the selected tafsir texts to identify their interpretive assumptions, socio-historical contexts, and normative constructions of gender relations.¹⁵ This stage focuses on uncovering how authority, obedience, and discipline are epistemologically justified within classical interpretations and how these justifications are sustained through claims of textual universality and divine intent. Second, discourse analysis is employed to examine the use and transformation of key Qur'anic terms—particularly *qanwamun*, *nushuz*, and *daraba*—across classical tafsir, contemporary feminist interpretations, and legal or institutional texts. This analysis traces how specific lexical choices and semantic framings function to normalize, contest, or delegitimize hierarchical gender relations and domestic violence. Third, a comparative interpretive analysis (*tafsir*

¹⁴ C Anderson, "Presenting and Evaluating Qualitative Research," *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, no. Query date: 2025-06-18 05:14:19 (2010), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0002945923041232>.

¹⁵ Carl Auerbach and Louise B. Silverstein, *Qualitative Data: An Introduction to Coding and Analysis* (NYU Press, 2003).

muqaran) systematically juxtaposes classical patriarchal interpretations with contemporary feminist and Indonesian reinterpretations. The comparison is conducted across three analytical dimensions: interpretive methodology, ethical orientation, and socio-legal implications. This allows the study to identify points of rupture, continuity, and methodological innovation within the interpretive tradition.

The final stage of analysis synthesizes these findings within a decolonial theoretical framework, interpreting feminist tafsir as a form of epistemic intervention that challenges the coloniality of religious knowledge. By linking textual interpretation to empirical data on domestic violence and to broader structures of knowledge production, the study constructs an integrated analytical narrative that connects theology, social reality, and epistemic justice. This methodological design ensures analytical rigor, transparency, and relevance to contemporary debates in Qur'anic studies, Islamic anthropology, and gender justice.

Results and Discussion

Forging Hierarchy: Deconstructing Qawwamun, Nushuz, and Daraba in Classical Exegesis

Classical interpretations of QS. An-Nisa: 34 are largely structured around a hierarchical reading of three key Qur'anic terms—*qawwamun*, *nushuz*, and *daraba*—which together form an integrated normative framework legitimizing male authority and female subordination within marriage. Rather than being interpreted as ethical guidance contingent upon context, these terms are systemically elaborated in classical tafsir as juridical and moral foundations for patriarchal domestic order.

The term *qawwamun* occupies a central position in this interpretive architecture. Classical exegetes consistently read it not merely as functional responsibility but as comprehensive male authority over women. Ibn Kathir, in his *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim*, defines *qawwamun* as male leadership (*riyasa*), guardianship, and disciplinary authority, explicitly stating that a husband is entitled to correct and discipline his wife should she deviate from proper conduct.¹⁶ A similar interpretation is found in al-Tabari, who emphasizes that men's *qiwamah* is divinely grounded in both ontological preference (*bi ma faddala Allahu ba'dahum 'ala ba'd*) and material provision (*bi ma anfaqu min amwalibim*). For al-Tabari, men's superiority is evidenced through intellect, physical capability, and suitability for leadership—qualities that, in his view, justify male dominance within the household.¹⁷

This logic is further reinforced by al-Qurtubi, who explicitly links *qiwamah* to legal authority (*wilayah*) and governance (*siyasa*). In his commentary, the husband is positioned as a ruler within the domestic sphere, while the wife is conceptualized as a subject obligated to obedience.¹⁸ Likewise, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi provides a more philosophically nuanced but ultimately convergent argument: he rationalizes male authority by appealing to what he considers natural differences in rational capacity and emotional stability between men and women. Although al-Razi's analysis

¹⁶ Ismā'il ibn 'Umar Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* (Darussalam, 2000).

¹⁷ Abu Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir Ath-Thabari, *Tafsir Ath Thabari Jami' Al Bayan Fi Ta'wil Al Qur'an* (Pustaka Azzam, 2007).

¹⁸ Muhammad Bin Ahmed Al-Ansari Al-Qurtubi Abu Abdullah, *Tafsir al-Qurtubi al-Jami' li-Ahkām al-Qur'an* (Hussein Elasrag, 2021).

appears more speculative, it nonetheless reinforces the same hierarchical conclusion—male leadership as a normative and divinely endorsed structure.¹⁹

Within this framework of *qiwamah*, the concept of *nushuz* functions as a disciplinary trigger. Classical tafsir overwhelmingly defines *nushuz* as a wife's defiance or rebellion against her husband's legitimate authority. al-Jassas, in *Abkam al-Qur'an*, frames *nushuz* as a legal violation that suspends a wife's marital rights and activates corrective measures. Behaviors categorized as *nushuz* include refusal of sexual relations, leaving the home without permission, or challenging the husband's authority. Although the Qur'an also recognizes male *nushuz* (QS. An-Nisa: 128), classical legal discourse marginalizes this possibility, rendering *nushuz* an asymmetrical and gendered concept primarily weaponized against women. As a result, female agency is pathologized, while male authority remains structurally unquestioned.²⁰

The culmination of this hierarchical and disciplinary logic is found in the classical interpretation of *daraba*. Across major tafsir traditions, *daraba* is predominantly understood in its literal sense as physical ضرب (*beating*). Ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and al-Tabari all accept this meaning, while attempting to regulate its application through juridical qualifications. These include stipulations that the beating should be light (*ghayr mubarrih*), avoid the face, and not cause visible injury. Some commentators even recommend symbolic striking with a *miswak*. However, these mitigating interpretations do not challenge the foundational premise: that a husband possesses a divinely sanctioned right to use physical force as a corrective measure. Instead of problematizing violence itself, classical tafsir normalizes it by embedding it within a moral-legal framework of discipline and obedience.

Table 2. Variations of Classical Tafsir on QS. An-Nisa: 34 (Qawwamun–Nushuz–Daraba)

Classical Tafsir	Interpretation of Qawwamun	Interpretation of Nushuz	Interpretation of Daraba	Normative Implication
Al-Tabari (<i>Jāmi' al-Bayān</i>)	Male <i>qiwamah</i> is divinely grounded in (1) divine preference (<i>fadh</i>) and (2) financial provision; implies leadership in the household	Primarily understood as wife's defiance/rebellion against legitimate marital authority	Read literally as striking, though implicitly positioned as the final corrective stage	Establishes structural hierarchy: husband as leader/authority, wife as subject of governance
Ibn Kathir (<i>Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim</i>)	<i>Qawwamun</i> = male leadership, guardianship, and disciplinary authority (husband may correct the wife)	Treated as wife's misconduct/disobedience, including refusal of marital obligations	Interpreted as beating/striking with restrictions (non-severe; regulated)	Normalizes corrective violence as religiously intelligible discipline
Al-Qurtubi (<i>Al-Jāmi' li Ahkam al-Qur'an</i>)	Links <i>qiwamah</i> to wilayah (legal guardianship) and siyāsah	<i>Nushuz</i> = wife's refusal of obedience and disruption of marital order	Striking is permitted as regulated discipline, often	Converts marriage into a juridical governance system, legitimizing

¹⁹ Fakhruddin Ar-Razi, "Mafatihul Ghaib," *Beirut: Dar Ihya'at-Thuros al-Arabi* 1420 (2000).

²⁰ Al-Jassas; Ahmad bin Ali al-Razi al-Jassas Abu Bakar, *Abkam Al-Qur'an* (Dar Ihya al-Kutub al-Arabiyya, 1956).

	(governance) inside marriage		tied to juristic conditions	authority and compliance
Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (<i>Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb</i>)	Rationalizes male leadership using arguments of perceived natural differences (reason, temperament, capacity)	Generally aligns with the gendered reading: wife's defiance against household leadership	Maintains the literal permissibility of physical correction, often discussed within moral-theoretical reasoning	Reinforces hierarchy through philosophical legitimization, giving patriarchy "rational" grounding
Al-Jassas (<i>Aḥkām al-Qur'ān</i>)	Treats <i>qiwāmah</i> as a basis for male authority tied to legal responsibilities	Defines <i>nushūz</i> as a legal breach by the wife that may suspend her rights and triggers disciplinary measures	Accepts literal striking within a juristic disciplinary procedure	Strongly institutionalizes the verse as fiqh-oriented regulation, with asymmetrical enforcement against women

Overall, the classical exegetical variants above display a relatively consistent pattern: *qiwāmah* is constructed as a religious legitimization of male leadership, *nushūz* is narrowly defined as a wife's disobedience, and *daraba* is accepted as a form of physical "discipline" that is regulated but not repudiated. While individual exegetes differ in the mode of justification—whether text-historical, juristic (*fiqh*), or philosophical—these variations do not fundamentally alter the same normative architecture of marital hierarchy. In this sense, QS. An-Nisa: 34 in classical tafsir functions as an epistemic apparatus that systematically produces domestic asymmetry and supplies interpretive grounds through which coercive practices become morally and religiously intelligible.

Taken together, this interpretive apparatus crystallizes into a comprehensive epistemic system that legitimizes male dominance, constrains female subjectivity, and normalizes domestic violence through the language of order, correction, and moral regulation. As a result, the marital home—ideally envisioned elsewhere in the Qur'an as a space of *mawaddah wa rahmah*—is reimagined as a site where coercion may be theologically authorized under specific conditions. This legacy is not merely textual; it continues to circulate socially through religious teaching and everyday moral reasoning, shaping gender norms and domestic ethics in contemporary Muslim societies, including Indonesia.

From Text to Trauma: The Social and Legal Perpetuation of Misogynistic Tafsir in Indonesia

This classical interpretive framework is not a relic confined to medieval manuscripts; it remains a living discourse with tangible and quantifiable consequences in contemporary Indonesia. Misogynistic interpretations of QS. An-Nisa: 34 continue to be actively reproduced through religious sermons (*khutbah*), instructional practices in *pesantren*, popular Islamic literature, and increasingly through digital religious platforms. These interpretive patterns embed patriarchal norms deeply within the socio-religious fabric of Indonesian society, shaping collective perceptions of marital authority and normalizing asymmetrical power relations between husbands and wives.²¹

²¹ Alfitri Alfitri, "Protecting Women from Domestic Violence: Islam, Family Law, and the State in Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* 27, no. 2 (August 2020): 2, <https://doi.org/10.36712/sdi.v27i2.9408>.

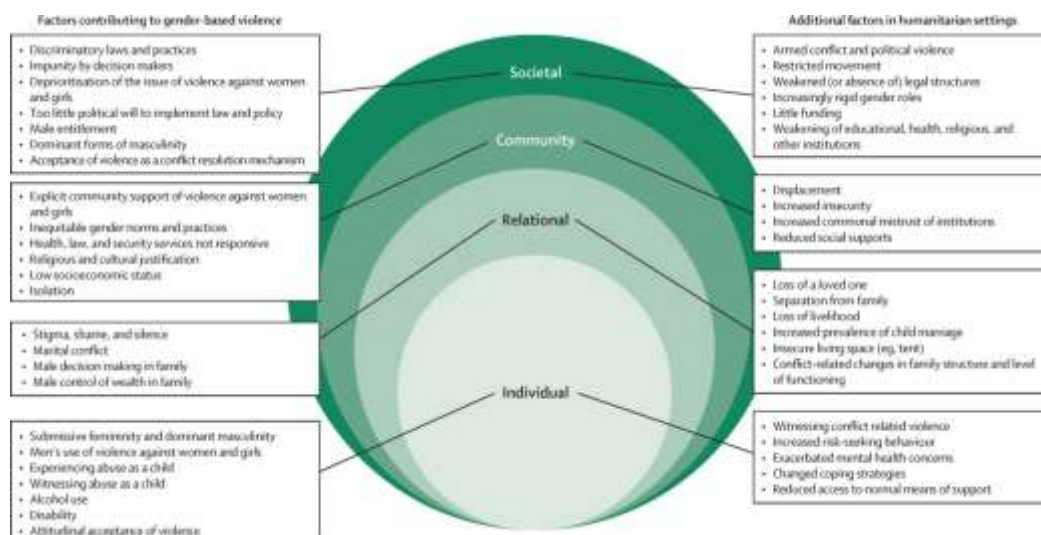


Figure 1. Epistemic-Structural Dynamics of Domestic Violence Against Women in Indonesia

This figure illustrates the layered relationship between patriarchal Qur'anic interpretation, socio-cultural structures, and the persistence of domestic violence against women in Indonesia. At the epistemic level, classical patriarchal interpretations of QS. An-Nisa: 34—particularly the concepts of *qiwamah*, *nushuz*, and *daraba*—function as authoritative knowledge that legitimizes male dominance and female obedience.²² These interpretations are reproduced through religious institutions and media, shaping patriarchal cultural norms and gender inequality. At the structural level, these norms intersect with socio-economic vulnerability and weak law enforcement, constraining the implementation of domestic violence legislation. At the empirical level, this convergence results in high rates of domestic violence, psychological trauma, and underreporting, creating a cyclical process in which epistemic authority continuously reinforces structural and embodied violence.²³

Recent quantitative data underscore the severity of this impact. National data from 2024–2025 indicate that cases of domestic violence (*Kekerasan Dalam Rumah Tangga*—KDRT) against women remain alarmingly high, with approximately 1,000 new cases recorded every month and a peak of 1,395 cases reported in July 2025 alone.²⁴ Although some reports note a minor downward fluctuation in certain periods, the overall trend demonstrates a persistent and structural pattern of

²² Aziz Miftahus Surur and Aris Anwaril Muttaqin, “Qur’anic Strategy Realizing Couple Harmony in Surah Al-Ahzab Verse 28,” *Al-Karim: International Journal of Quranic and Islamic Studies* 1, no. 1 (March 2023): 1, <https://doi.org/10.33367/al-karim.v1i1.3526>; Muhamad Nasrullah, Fantri Indarti, and Azzam Ghufrani, “Family Resilience Strategies in the Contemporary Era: A Comparative Analysis of Al-Azhar and Ibn Katsir’s Tafsir on Surah At-Tahrim Verse 6,” *Al-Karim: International Journal of Quranic and Islamic Studies* 2, no. 2 (August 2024): 115–37, <https://doi.org/10.33367/al-karim.v2i2.6032>.

²³ Bianca J. Smith and Atun Wardatun, “Domestic Violence and Islamic Spirituality in Lombok, Indonesia: Women’s Use of Sufi Approaches to Suffering,” *Contemporary Islam* 16, no. 2 (October 2022): 427–47, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-022-00495-5>; Mufidah Cholil and Sudirman Sudirman, “GENDER EQUALITY IN ISLAMIC FAMILY LAW: Breaking the Chain of Domestic Violence to Achieve Harmonious Family,” *Kafa’ah: Journal of Gender Studies* 9, no. 2 (December 2019): 131–46, <https://doi.org/10.15548/jk.v9i2.270>.

²⁴ Nabilah Muhammad, “Reports of Domestic Violence Cases in Indonesia Soared in 2024 | Pusat Data Ekonomi Dan Bisnis Indonesia | Databoks,” Databoks, [databoks.katadata.co.id, December 16, 2025, https://databoks.katadata.co.id/en/demographics/statistics/69411909b235f/reports-of-domestic-violence-cases-in-indonesia-soared-in-2024](https://databoks.katadata.co.id/en/demographics/statistics/69411909b235f/reports-of-domestic-violence-cases-in-indonesia-soared-in-2024).

violence rather than a substantive decline. Approximately 58.75% of these cases occur within the household, confirming that the domestic sphere remains the most dangerous space for women.²⁵

In terms of typology, physical violence accounts for around 42% of reported cases, followed closely by sexual violence at 34%, psychological violence at 14%, and economic violence at 10%.²⁶ These figures are particularly significant when read alongside dominant religious discourses that emphasize male authority (*qiwamah*) and female obedience (*qanitat*). Physical and sexual violence—forms most closely associated with bodily control—thus emerge as the most prevalent manifestations of gendered domination. The perpetrators are predominantly individuals from the victim's closest social circle, including husbands, intimate partners, or other family members, reinforcing the link between intimate authority and violence.

The psychological consequences of this violence are equally profound and measurable. Empirical studies conducted by academic institutions and documented in national reports consistently show that women survivors of KDRT experience heightened negative emotional states, including sadness, anger, apathy, loneliness, social withdrawal, and difficulty forming trust-based relationships. These emotional patterns significantly increase the risk of long-term mental health disorders, including depression and trauma-related conditions. One documented outcome is Battered Woman Syndrome (BWS), a psychological condition in which prolonged exposure to domestic violence leads victims to remain with abusive partners due to fear, dependency, and internalized self-blame. This condition cannot be separated from religious narratives that frame endurance and obedience as moral virtues for wives.²⁷

Structural analysis of KDRT data further reveals that violence is driven by intersecting factors. Patriarchal culture and gender inequality constitute the primary structural drivers, reinforced by religious interpretations that legitimize male dominance. These are compounded by socio-economic vulnerabilities, particularly women's economic dependence and limited access to social support networks. Psychological stressors—such as financial pressure and unresolved trauma on the part of perpetrators—interact with these structures, while weak law enforcement exacerbates the problem. Despite the existence of Law No. 23/2004 on the Elimination of Domestic Violence (UU-PKDRT), enforcement remains inconsistent. Data indicate that many cases are diverted toward reconciliation rather than legal accountability, often in the name of preserving family harmony.²⁸

Additional data further demonstrate the expansive reach of gender-based violence beyond the household. As of April 2024, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection recorded 2,681 cases of sexual violence in higher education institutions, indicating that patriarchal power relations extend into formal educational spaces. Moreover, data from Pusiknas Bareskrim

²⁵ Nabilah Muhammad, "10,000 Cases of Domestic Violence Occurred in Indonesia until Early September 2025 | Pusat Data Ekonomi Dan Bisnis Indonesia | Databoks," Databoks, databoks.katadata.co.id, September 19, 2025, <https://databoks.katadata.co.id/en/demographics/statistics/68ccdc19a2d47/10000-cases-of-domestic-violence-occurred-in-indonesia-until-early-september-2025>.

²⁶ Sonya Hellen Sinombor, "Bayang-bayang Kekerasan Terus Menyertai Perempuan Indonesia," Kompas.id, Kompas, December 29, 2025, <https://www.kompas.id/artikel/bayang-bayang-kekerasan-terus-menyertai-perempuan-indonesia>.

²⁷ Lenore E. A. Walker, "Battered Woman Syndrome: Empirical Findings," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1087 (November 2006): 142–57, <https://doi.org/10.1196/annals.1385.023>.

²⁸ Mahfud Mahfud and Rizanizarli Rizanizarli, "Domestic Violence against Women in Indonesia: The Recent Domestic Violence Elimination Law Analysis," *Fiat Justisia: Jurnal Ilmu Hukum* 15, no. 4 (June 2021): 385–98, <https://doi.org/10.25041/fiatjustisia.v15no4.2276>.

Polri show a significant increase in online gender-based violence (KBGO), revealing how patriarchal domination adapts to digital environments while maintaining its core logic of control and intimidation.

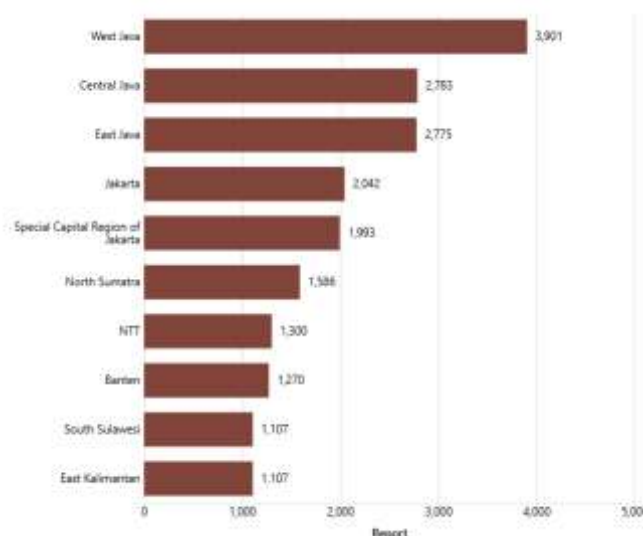


Figure 2. 10 Provinces with the Highest Number of Reported Cases of Violence Against Women

The provincial distribution of reported cases indicates a marked concentration in Java, with West Java recording the highest number of reports (3,901), followed by Central Java (2,783) and East Java (2,775), while Jakarta remains among the top contributors (2,042). Outside Java, North Sumatra (1,586) and East Nusa Tenggara (1,300) emerge as notable reporting provinces, with Banten (1,270), South Sulawesi (1,107), and East Kalimantan (1,107) also showing substantial figures. This pattern suggests that the geography of domestic violence reporting is shaped not only by population size and urban density but also by uneven institutional capacity, public awareness, and access to reporting mechanisms. Consequently, lower numbers in certain regions should not indicate lower prevalence, but may reflect persistent underreporting due to socio-cultural constraints and limited support infrastructures.²⁹

Taken together, these quantitative indicators expose a clear and systematic relationship between patriarchal religious interpretation and the persistence of gender-based violence in Indonesia. Classical tafsir does not merely shape abstract theological positions; it operates as an epistemic resource that legitimizes domination, silences victims, and weakens legal protection mechanisms. The persistence of KDRT, despite legal reforms and public awareness campaigns, underscores that violence against women is not only a legal or social problem but also an interpretive and epistemological one. Addressing it therefore requires confronting the religious knowledge structures that continue to authorize harm under the guise of obedience, discipline, and moral order.

A Bridge to Reform: The Contextual-Normative Interpretation of M. Quraish Shihab

Between the rigid architecture of classical exegesis and the radical critique of feminist hermeneutics stands the influential work of M. Quraish Shihab, arguably Indonesia's most

²⁹ Muhammad, "Reports of Domestic Violence Cases in Indonesia Soared in 2024 | Pusat Data Ekonomi Dan Bisnis Indonesia | Databoks."

prominent contemporary Qur'anic scholar.³⁰ His magnum opus, *Tafsir Al-Misbah*, employs a socio-cultural interpretive method known as *Adabi Ijtima'i*, which seeks to connect the Qur'anic text with the social realities and cultural contexts of its audience.³¹ This approach represents a significant reformist step, moving the discourse on QS. An-Nisa: 34 away from decontextualized literalism, even if it does not fully align with a feminist framework.³²

Shihab's interpretation of *nusyuz* marks a crucial departure from the classical gendered view. He defines *nusyuz* as an act of defiance stemming from a sense of superiority over one's partner, a concept applicable to both spouses.³³ He explicitly acknowledges that a husband can be guilty of *nusyuz* if he is arrogant, belittles his wife, or fails to fulfill his obligations, referencing QS. An-Nisa: 128 as the textual basis for this reciprocity. This balanced definition challenges the traditional paradigm that almost exclusively targets women's behavior.³⁴

However, when addressing a wife's *nusyuz*, Shihab's interpretation follows the three-step process outlined in the verse, albeit with contextual nuances. He presents the sequence of advising, followed by separation in bed (*wahjuruhunna fi al-madhajji*), and finally, striking (*wadribuhunna*).³⁵ His understanding of the second step is particularly reformist; he interprets "in the place to lie down" as a command for the husband to remain within the bedroom, using the withdrawal of intimacy as a tool for mutual introspection rather than outright abandonment, which could escalate the conflict.³⁶

On the most contentious point, the term *daraba*, Shihab's position is complex. He permits a form of "beating" but insists it must not cause injury or pain, framing it as a final, non-commendable resort intended to "awaken" a defiant wife.³⁷ While this maintains the possibility of physical contact, it significantly curtails the violence permitted in more rigid interpretations. Crucially, he also acknowledges that if these three steps fail, the prescribed solution is not further unilateral action but community-led arbitration, as outlined in the subsequent verse (4:35).³⁸

Ultimately, Quraish Shihab's interpretation serves as a critical bridge. It validates the need for contextual reading, acknowledges the reciprocity of marital misconduct, and places firm limits on permissible physical discipline. Yet, by maintaining the framework of male leadership and not categorically rejecting the act of striking, his reformist-contextual approach stops short of the full deconstruction of hierarchy demanded by the feminist and decolonial hermeneutics of scholars like Mulia and Kodir.

³⁰ Georges Tamer, *Contemporary Qur'anic Hermeneutics* (Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2025).

³¹ Munirul Ikhwan, *An Indonesian Initiative to Make the Qur'an Down-to-Earth: Muhammad Quraish Shihab and His School of Exegesis*, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.17169/refubium-12771>.

³² Lolla Pitaloka, *Mushaf: Jurnal Tafsir Berwawasan Keindonesiaan Indonesian Qur'anic Interpretations On The Concept Of Nush Ū Z: A Comparative Study Of Classical And Reformist Approaches Among*, 5, no. 2 (2025): 214–34, <https://doi.org/10.33650/mushaf.v5i2.11134>.

³³ M. Quraish Shihab, "Tafsir Al-Misbah," *Jakarta: Lentera Hati* 2 (2002): 52–54.

³⁴ M. Quraish Shihab, *Al-Quran dan Maknanya* (Lentera Hati, 2020).

³⁵ M. Quraish Shihab, *Jilbab, Pakaian Wanita Muslimah: Pandangan Ulama Masa Lalu dan Cendekiawan Kontemporer* (Lentera Hati Group, 2012).

³⁶ M. Quraish Shihab, *M Quraish Shihab Menjawab 101 Soal Perempuan Yang Patut Anda Ketahui* (Lentera Hati, 2010).

³⁷ M. Quraish Shihab, *Perempuan: Dari Cinta sampai Seks, dari Nikah Mut'ah sampai Nikah Sunnah, dari Bias Lama sampai Bias Baru* (Lentera Hati Group, 2010).

³⁸ M. Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan Al-Quran: Tafsir Tematik atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat* (Mizan Pustaka, 1996).

Feminist Hermeneutics as a Counter-Hegemonic Praxis

In response to the deep-seated patriarchal structures within classical Islamic interpretation, a powerful counter-hegemonic movement has emerged globally and taken a particularly dynamic form in Indonesia. This movement, broadly defined as Islamic feminism, utilizes critical hermeneutical tools to reread the Qur'an and other sacred texts through a lens of gender justice and equality.³⁹ This approach is not an attempt to impose "Western" values onto Islam, but rather an indigenous intellectual effort to reclaim what its proponents see as the Qur'an's core ethical message of justice, which they argue has been obscured by centuries of patriarchal exegesis.⁴⁰ The Indonesian feminist *tafsir* movement, while connected to global intellectual currents, has developed its own unique methodologies and institutional forms, synthesizing international theory with local epistemologies and responding directly to the urgent socio-legal crisis of domestic violence in the archipelago.⁴¹

To clarify the fundamental chasm between the classical and progressive paradigms, the following table provides a comparative analysis of the key terminologies in QS. An-Nisa: 34.

Table 3. Comparative Analysis of Key Terminologies in QS. An-Nisa: 34

Term	Classical Interpretation (e.g., Ibn Kathir, Al-Tabari)	Feminist/Progressive Interpretation (e.g., Wadud, Mulia, Kodir)
<i>Qawwamun</i>	Inherent male authority and leadership based on divine preference and financial obligation. Implies a right to discipline.	Functional, context-dependent responsibility for maintenance, not inherent superiority. Can be held by whoever is most capable, male or female. Based on reciprocal care.
<i>Nushuẓ</i>	A wife's disobedience, rebellion, or ill-conduct against her husband's authority.	A violation of the marital contract by <i>either</i> spouse. A disruption of the relationship's harmony and reciprocity, applicable to both husbands and wives.
<i>Daraba</i>	To strike or beat, albeit with qualifications (e.g., "lightly," not on the face). The final step in disciplining a disobedient wife.	Polysemous term with multiple meanings. Progressive interpretations include "to separate," "to leave," or "to go out and seek arbitration," rejecting physical violence as contrary to Qur'anic ethics.

The intellectual groundwork for much of contemporary Islamic feminist thought was laid by the American scholar Amina Wadud, whose seminal work *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* has been profoundly influential in Indonesia and across the Muslim world. Wadud proposed a radical shift in interpretive methodology, moving away from atomistic, literalist readings toward a holistic and ethically grounded hermeneutic.⁴² At the core of her methodology is the Tawhidic Paradigm. *Tawhid*, the foundational Islamic principle of the absolute oneness and incomparability of God, becomes for Wadud a hermeneutical key. If God is one and absolute, then no created being or social hierarchy can claim absolute authority or inherent

³⁹ Zezen Zaenal Mutaqin, "Culture, Islamic Feminism, and the Quest for Legal Reform in Indonesia," *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 24, no. 4 (October 2018): 423–45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2018.1524549>.

⁴⁰ Valentine M. Moghadam, "Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents: Toward a Resolution of the Debate," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 27, no. 4 (June 2002): 1135–71, <https://doi.org/10.1086/339639>.

⁴¹ Farid Muttaqin, "Feminist Interpretation of the Quran As An Ideological Critique Against Patriarchy (An Indonesia Context)," *Jurnal Masyarakat Dan Budaya* 17, no. 1 SE-Articles (September 2015): 29–36, <https://doi.org/10.14203/jmb.v17i1.119%2520>.

⁴² Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

superiority.⁴³ The classical interpretation of *qanwamun* as signifying innate male superiority over women thus becomes a form of *shirk* (associating partners with God), as it elevates a relative, socially constructed hierarchy to the level of divine, absolute truth. The Tawhidic paradigm insists on the fundamental spiritual equality of all human beings before God.⁴⁴

Building on this foundation, Wadud champions a method of Holistic Reading (Intratextuality). This approach rejects the practice of interpreting verses in isolation and insists that any single verse must be understood in light of the Qur'an's overarching ethical worldview. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes principles of justice (*'adl*), kindness (*ihsan*), and mutual protection (*awliya' ba'dubum min ba'd*). Therefore, an interpretation of QS. An-Nisa: 34 that leads to injustice, cruelty, and the violation of a woman's dignity and physical safety is, by definition, an invalid interpretation because it contradicts the holistic message of the sacred text. Applying this method, Wadud argues that *qanwamun* must be understood as a conditional and functional role of financial maintenance, not a blanket grant of authority, and that the command *daraba* cannot mean physical violence, as this would violate the Qur'an's general principles of compassion and justice.⁴⁵

Musdah Mulia's Maqasid-based Reinterpretation of Qiwwamah as Functional Responsibility

While deeply influenced by global feminist thought, Indonesian scholars have developed distinct approaches rooted in local intellectual traditions and responsive to the specific challenges of their society. Siti Musdah Mulia, a leading Indonesian Muslim intellectual and activist, offers a powerful reinterpretation of QS. An-Nisa: 34 grounded in the legal philosophy of *maqasid al-shari'ah* (the higher objectives of Islamic law).⁴⁶ Mulia argues that *qiwwamah* (the concept of authority derived from *qanwamun*) should not be understood as an "essentialist doctrine of male superiority" but rather as a flexible, sociological, and context-dependent construct.⁴⁷ She deconstructs the classical argument through two primary lenses. First, through Linguistic Analysis, she contends that the term *al-rijal* ("the men") in the verse is grammatically particular, not universal. This means the verse is not making a blanket statement about all men for all time, but is describing a specific social reality in 7th-century Arabia where men were typically the sole providers. It is descriptive, not prescriptive. If the context changes as it has in modern Indonesia, where many women are primary breadwinners or co-providers then the application of the verse must also change.⁴⁸

Second, and most centrally, Mulia employs the framework of *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*. This legal theory posits that all of Islamic law aims to achieve certain essential objectives, chief among them

⁴³ Amina Wadud, "Towards a Qur'anic Hermeneutics of Social Justice: Race, Class and Gender," *Journal of Law and Religion* 12, no. 1 (June 1995): 37–50, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1051608>; Amina Wadud, "Qur'an, Gender and Interpretive Possibilities," *Hanwa* 2, no. 3 (January 2004): 316–36, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1569208043077297>.

⁴⁴ Gisela Webb, *Windows of Faith: Muslim Women Scholar-Activists in North America* (Syracuse University Press, 2000); Amina Wadud, "Foreword: Engaging Tawhid In Islam And Feminisms," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 10, no. 4 (December 2008): 435–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616740802393858>.

⁴⁵ Omid Safi, *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism* (Simon and Schuster, 2003).

⁴⁶ Musdah Mulia, *Kemuliaan Perempuan dalam Islam* (Elex Media Komputindo, 2014); Ani Nuraeni and M Ariyanto, "Women as Heads of Families: An Analysis of Musdah Mulia's Thoughts and Interpretation Methods on Women's Leadership," *Strata Social and Humanities Studies* 3 (April 2025): 39–47, <https://doi.org/10.59631/sshs.v3i1.354>.

⁴⁷ Musdah Mulia, *Muslimah Sejati: Menempub Jalan Islami Meraib Ridha Ilahi* (Marja30, 2011).

⁴⁸ Musdah Mulia, "Hukum Islam Dan Dinamika Feminisme Dalam Organisasi Nahdlatul Ulama," *Al-Ahkam*, April 21, 2013, 37–56, <https://doi.org/10.21580/ahkam.2013.23.1.72>; Musdah Mulia, *Muslimah Reformis for Milenial* (Elex Media Komputindo, 2021).

being the preservation of religion (*hifẓ al-dīn*), life (*hifẓ al-nafs*), intellect (*hifẓ al-'aql*), lineage (*hifẓ al-nasl*), and property/dignity (*hifẓ al-māl/ 'ird*). An interpretation of QS. An-Nisa: 34 that legitimizes domestic violence directly violates the most fundamental *maqasid*, especially the preservation of life and dignity.⁴⁹ Therefore, any such interpretation is legally and ethically invalid, regardless of its historical precedent. For Mulia, justice is one of the primary objectives of the Shari'ah. This *maqasid*-based reasoning leads to a revolutionary conclusion: leadership (*qiwamah*) within the family is not a matter of gender but of capability. The person most competent to manage the household's affairs financially, emotionally, and managerially should hold that responsibility, whether male or female. This approach provides a robust Islamic theological basis for recognizing women as heads of households and for categorically rejecting any religious justification for domestic violence.⁵⁰

Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir's Qira'ah Mubadalah and the Principle of Reciprocity

Another uniquely Indonesian contribution to progressive Islamic thought is the methodology of *Qira'ah Mubadalah* (Reciprocal Reading), developed by Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, a prominent *kyai* (traditional Islamic scholar) and activist from Cirebon.⁵¹ This hermeneutic was developed through his extensive work with grassroots women's organizations and is designed to address gender-biased interpretations directly from within the Islamic textual tradition.⁵² The core principle of *mubadalah* is that the Qur'an's message is fundamentally just and egalitarian, and that many verses which appear to address only one gender contain an underlying principle of reciprocity that is applicable to both. The goal is to read texts not as a set of one-sided commands, but as a guide for building mutual, cooperative, and just relationships.⁵³

When applied to QS. An-Nisa: 34, *mubadalah* yields a radically different understanding. Kodir argues that the verse is not a charter for male domination but a procedure for conflict resolution within the household, a procedure that applies to both spouses.⁵⁴ He reinterprets the three key terms through a reciprocal lens. He argues that *nushuz* is not simply a wife's disobedience, but a violation of the marital pact by either spouse. He points to QS. An-Nisa: 128, which explicitly discusses the possibility of *nushuz* from a husband, as proof that the concept is inherently reciprocal. Therefore, the steps for resolution should also be reciprocal.⁵⁵

Most significantly, Kodir offers an alternative interpretation of *daraba*. Drawing on the word's polysemy (multiple meanings) throughout the Qur'an, where it is used to mean "to travel," "to set forth an example," or "to separate," he argues that it should not be translated as "to hit". Instead, in the context of a failing marital negotiation, *wa-dribuhunna* should be understood as "go out and

⁴⁹ ابن عاشور, *Maqashid al-Shariah Al-Islamiyah* (Rufoof, 1903).

⁵⁰ Ahmad Saerozi, Muhamad Nurudin, and Abdullah Hanapi, "Implementation of Qira'ah Mubadalah on Verses and Hadiths on Family Issues and Its Contribution in Determining Public Policy," *Jurnal SMART (Studi Masyarakat, Religi, Dan Tradisi)* 11 (June 2025): 138–50, <https://doi.org/10.18784/smart.v11i1.2918>.

⁵¹ Lukman Hakim, "Corak Feminisme Post-Modernis Dalam Penafsiran Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 21, no. 1 (2020): 237–59.

⁵² Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, *Qira'ah Mubadalah* (IRCiSoD, 2021).

⁵³ Hakim, "Corak Feminisme Post-Modernis Dalam Penafsiran Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir"; Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, "Mafhum Mubadalah: Ikhtiar Memahami Qur'an Dan Hadits Untuk Meneguhkan Keadilan Resiprokal Islam Dalam Isu-Isu Gender," *Jurnal Islam Indonesia* 6, no. 02 (2016).

⁵⁴ Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, "Islam Dan Kekerasan Dalam Rumah Tangga (KDRT): Pembahasan Dilema Ayat Pemukulan Istri (An-Nisa, 4: 34) Dalam Kajian Tafsir Indonesia," *Holistik: Journal for Islamic Social Sciences* 12, no. 1 (2011), <https://www.syekhnurjati.ac.id/jurnal/index.php/holistik/article/viewFile/80/82>.

⁵⁵ KH Husein Muhammad, *Fiqh Perempuan ; Refleksi Kiai atas Wacana Agama dan Gender* (Lkis Pelangi Aksara, 2001).

seek help" or "engage in a process of separation to seek third-party arbitration." This interpretation is supported by the very next verse (4:35), which prescribes appointing arbiters from both families if a breach is feared. This reading completely removes any textual justification for physical violence and reframes the final step as a move toward community-mediated resolution, not unilateral punishment.⁵⁶

Collective Voices: The Role of KUPI and Civil Society in Advocating for Gender-Just Islam

The shift toward a gender-just understanding of Islam in Indonesia is not merely the work of individual scholars but is also being driven by powerful collective movements. The most significant of these is the Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI), a uniquely Indonesian institution that brings together female religious scholars, academics, and activists to produce religious knowledge from women's perspectives.⁵⁷

KUPI has been instrumental in challenging patriarchal interpretations of texts related to violence against women. In its first congress in 2017, it issued fatwas (religious edicts) declaring sexual violence, child marriage, and environmental destruction to be *haram* (religiously forbidden). While not explicitly a fatwa on KDRT, the ruling against sexual violence—which KUPI defines as including marital rape—provides a strong theological condemnation of a key component of domestic abuse. Crucially, KUPI has officially adopted the *mubadalah* methodology as one of its core hermeneutical approaches, thereby institutionalizing and legitimizing this progressive interpretive framework within a body of recognized religious authorities.⁵⁸

This religious advocacy is deeply intertwined with the work of secular and civil society organizations. KUPI collaborates closely with organisations such as Komnas Perempuan, the Legal Aid Foundation of the Indonesian Women's Association for Justice (LBH APIK), and the Fahmina Institute (an NGO co-founded by Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir) to translate theological reinterpretations into concrete legal and social change. These alliances were critical in the advocacy campaigns for the passage of the UU-PKDRT in 2004 and, more recently, the Law on the Crime of Sexual Violence (UU-TPKS) in 2022. This demonstrates a powerful praxis where progressive *tafsir* is not an abstract academic exercise but a vital tool for empowering victims, educating the public and state officials, and building a robust, faith-based argument for gender justice in the legal sphere.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir et al., "Maqāṣid Cum-Mubādalāh Methodology of KUPI: Centering Women's Experiences in Islamic Law for Gender-Just Fiqh," *AL-IHKAM: Jurnal Hukum & Pranata Sosial* 19, no. 2 (October 2024): 519–45, <https://doi.org/10.19105/al-lhkam.v19i2.16617>.

⁵⁷ Nur Shofa Ulfiyati, "Pandangan Dan Peran Tokoh Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI) Dalam Mencegah Perkawinan Anak," *De Jure: Jurnal Hukum Dan Syar'iah* 11, no. 1 (2019): 23–35, <https://doi.org/10.18860/j-fsh.v11i1.6488>; Kamala Chandrakirana and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, "Chronicles of a Collective Claim to Religious Authority: KUPI's Women Ulama," *African Journal of Gender and Religion* 31, no. 1 (2025): 17–40, <https://doi.org/10.36615/t0726023>.

⁵⁸ Akhmad Arif Junaidi, "Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI) and Mubādalāh Approach in Interpreting the Gender Biased-Qur'anic Verses," *Sawwa: Jurnal Studi Gender* 18, no. 1 (2023): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.21580/sa.v18i1.17269>.

⁵⁹ Amrin Ma'ruf, Wilodati Wilodati, and Tutin Aryanti, "Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia Dalam Wacana Merebut Tafsir Gender Pasca Reformasi: Sebuah Tinjauan Genealogi," *Musāwa Jurnal Studi Gender Dan Islam* 20, no. 2 (2022): 127–46, <https://doi.org/10.14421/musawa.2021.202.127-146>.

Decolonizing Tafsir: A Framework for Epistemic Justice

The rejection of misogynistic interpretations of QS. An-Nisa: 34 by Indonesian Muslim feminists is more than a modern, liberal revision of tradition. It is a profound and necessary act of decolonization. This process involves dismantling a specific form of epistemic violence inherent in the production, universalization, and imposition of patriarchal *tafsir*. The colonality of knowledge does not only operate through Western hegemony but can also be reproduced within religious traditions when a single, dominant perspective erases and invalidates the experiences and knowledge of marginalized groups. For Indonesian women, challenging patriarchal *tafsir* is a struggle for epistemic justice the right to interpret their own faith in a way that affirms their dignity, protects their lives, and reflects their lived realities.

The history of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*) reveals a process of canonization that mirrors the logic of colonial knowledge systems. Interpretations produced in specific historical moments and cultural milieus primarily by elite, male, Arab scholars in classical Islamic empires were gradually codified and elevated to a position of almost unassailable authority. Works like those of al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir, while historically invaluable, came to be seen not as products of their time but as timeless, universal, and objective representations of the Qur'an's meaning.⁶⁰

This process of universalizing a local epistemology effectively colonizes the interpretive landscape. It establishes a center (the classical Arab-Islamic tradition) and a periphery (all other Muslim cultures and experiences). The postcolonial era in Indonesia has seen a complex reaction to this legacy. In some conservative circles, an uncritical defense of this classical canon is performed as a sign of "authentic" Islamic identity, a form of resistance against Western cultural hegemony. However, this move fails to recognize the internal power dynamics and patriarchal structures embedded within that very canon. It replaces one form of external hegemony with an internalized, inherited one. A decolonial critique, therefore, must unsettle this canon, not by discarding it, but by historicizing it and refusing its claim to universal authority. It asserts that the interpretive traditions of Indonesian Muslims are not peripheral but are legitimate sites for the production of Islamic knowledge in their own right.

A truly decolonized *tafsir* must fundamentally shift its epistemic center of gravity. It must move from a purely text-focused approach, where meaning is believed to reside solely within the words and the classical commentaries upon them, to a dialogical approach that centers the lived experiences of the marginalized. In the context of domestic violence, the "subaltern" the group whose voice has been silenced by hegemonic structures is the female victim.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Nurjannah Ismail, Muhammad Firdaus, and Edi Darmawijaya, "Gender Equality in the Qur'an: An Analysis of Surah an-Nisa' Verses 1 and 34 in the Exegesis of al-Tabari and al-Rāzī," *Gender Equality: International Journal of Child and Gender Studies* 10 (September 2024): 224, <https://doi.org/10.22373/equality.v10i2.25932>.

⁶¹ Dewi R Azizah and Stacey K Sowards, "Creating Alternative Media in Indonesia: Decolonial Feminist Perspectives from Sekolah Pemikiran Perempuan," *Feminist Media Studies*, 2025, 1–16.

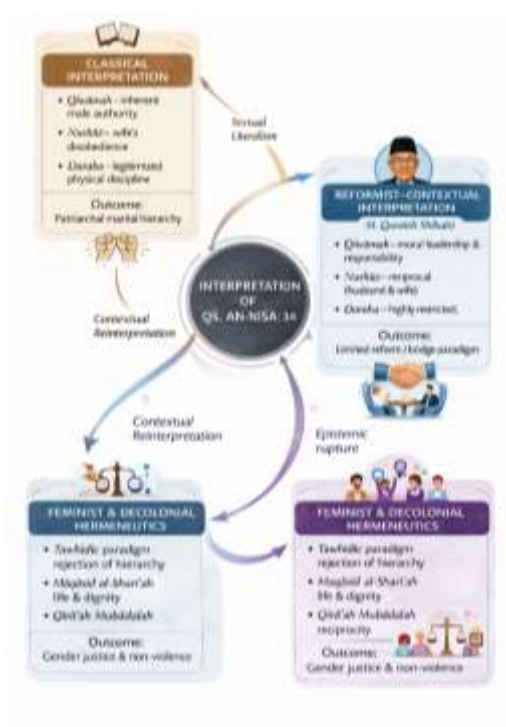


Figure 3. Mind Map of Interpretive Trajectories of QS. An-Nisa: 34: From Patriarchal Literalism to Feminist–Decolonial Hermeneutics

The methodologies developed by Indonesian feminists are a powerful enactment of this decolonial shift. The work of KUPI, for example, explicitly names women's experiences (*pengalaman perempuan*) as a valid source and starting point for religious deliberation and interpretation. This is a revolutionary move. It argues that the pain, suffering, and quest for justice of an Indonesian woman facing abuse are not external to the interpretive process but are, in fact, crucial data for understanding God's will. An interpretation that produces violence and suffering is, from this perspective, a failed interpretation. This approach challenges the traditional hierarchy of knowledge that places the abstract, disembodied text at the apex. Instead, it proposes a hermeneutical circle where text, historical context, and contemporary experience are in constant, critical dialogue. It is an assertion that God's message of justice must be audible in the lives of the most vulnerable, and if it is not, the fault lies not with the text but with the patriarchal and colonial lenses through which it has been read.⁶²

The ultimate measure of a decolonized hermeneutic is its transformative power—its ability to contribute to the liberation of oppressed communities. The progressive interpretations of QS. An-Nisa: 34 in Indonesia are not confined to academic seminars; they are potent tools for social and legal change, directly impacting the implementation of laws like the UU-PKDRT. First, these new interpretations provide crucial theological support for victims. By offering a reading of Islam that condemns violence and affirms equality, scholars and activists can reassure victims that seeking help and demanding justice is not an act of religious disobedience but is, in fact, aligned with the

⁶² Muttaqin, "Feminist Interpretation Of The Quran As An Ideological Critique Against Patriarchy (An Indonesia Context)."

core principles of their faith. This helps to dismantle the psychological burden of self-blame and religious guilt that often traps women in abusive situations.⁶³

Second, this body of progressive *tafsir* serves as an educational tool to counter religious justifications for violence. Organizations are using these interpretations in training programs for law enforcement, social workers, and, critically, for judges in Indonesia's Religious Courts. By demonstrating that interpretations permitting violence are neither the only nor the most authentic readings of the Qur'an, they equip legal practitioners with the theological arguments needed to reject abusers' claims of religious sanction and to apply the law from a perspective of gender justice.

Finally, this decolonized *tafsir* provides a compatible Islamic ethical framework for legal advocacy. It allows activists to argue for the strengthening and full implementation of the UU-PKDRT not as a "Western" or "secular" imposition, but as a manifestation of Islamic principles of justice (*'adl*), compassion (*rahmah*), and the preservation of life and dignity (*hifz al-nafs wa al-'ird*). By bridging the perceived gap between religious values and human rights law, this interpretive praxis helps to build a broad-based societal consensus against domestic violence, making it indefensible on any grounds, be they legal, cultural, or religious.⁶⁴

Conclusion

This paper argues that the ongoing crisis of domestic violence in Indonesia is sustained not only by socio-economic pressures but also by a patriarchal interpretive tradition that weaponizes religious authority. Classical readings of QS. An-Nisa: 34—through hierarchical constructions of *qawwamun*, the gendered narrowing of *nushuẓ*, and the literal acceptance of *daraba*—have long provided theological legitimacy for male dominance and coercion. When this exegetical canon is uncritically reproduced within a postcolonial society, it becomes a form of epistemic colonization: a historically contingent patriarchal knowledge system is universalized, while the lived suffering and moral claims of Indonesian women are rendered invisible or invalid.

In response, contemporary Indonesian Muslim scholars and activists advance a decolonial hermeneutical project that reorients interpretive authority toward justice, reciprocity, and real-life harm. Through *maqasid*-based reasoning and *qira'ah mubadalah*, this approach does not merely offer an alternative reading but disrupts the epistemic foundations that normalize violence. Its implications are far-reaching: it calls for the reconstruction of Islamic family law on partnership and shared responsibility, the reform of religious education and public preaching to delegitimize violence-justifying theology, and the strengthening of legal implementation by providing religious legitimacy for protective laws such as UU-PKDRT and UU-TPKS. Ultimately, this shift seeks to make violence against women indefensible—legally, culturally, and theologically—while restoring the Qur'anic ethical horizon of marriage as a site of love, mercy, and human dignity.

⁶³ Mohammad Sahli Ali et al., "Mubadalah : Metode Interpretasi Adil Gender Bagi Hakim Pengadilan Agama Dalam Memutus Sengketa Hukum Keluarga Mubadalah: Methods of Gender Justice Interpretation for Religious Court Judges in Deciding Family Law Concerns," *Equality: Journal of Law and Justice* 1, no. 2 (2024): 137–58.

⁶⁴ Nofiardi, "Undang-Undang Nomor 23 Tahun 2004 Tentang KDRT Dalam Perspektif Pemikiran Hukum Islam Klasik Dan Modern," *Alburriyah: Jurnal Hukum Islam* 01, no. 02 (2016): 165–80.

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