

Rethinking Islamic Feminist Thought on Reinterpreting the Qur'an: An Analysis of the Thoughts of Aminah Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, Asma Barlas, and Riffat Hassan

Dwi Fidhayanti¹, Muhammad Muhammad², Mahbub Aunur Rofiq³, Muhammad Robith Fuadi⁴, Abdul Hakim⁵, Nabrisatul Chusna Bil Makkiy⁶

^{1,2,3,4,6}Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, ⁵University Malaya, Malaysia
¹fidha13@syariah.uin-malang.ac.id, ²muhammadlc@syariah.uin-malang.ac.id, ³mahbub@uin-malang.ac.id,
⁴robith@syariah.uin-malang.ac.id, ⁵iva170089@perdana.um.edu.my, ⁶220204110014@student.uin-malang.ac.id

Abstract

This article aims to revisit Islamic feminist thought on the reinterpretation of the Qur'an by analyzing the views of four major figures in the movement: Aminah Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, Asma Barlas, and Riffat Hassan. This study uses a critical text analysis approach to understand the arguments and interpretations they put forward in interpreting Qur'anic verses related to gender. Through an in-depth analysis of their work in articles, books, and papers of their views. In addition, the article explores the ways in which these Islamic feminists reconstruct an understanding of sacred texts, highlighting differences in approach and common themes in their interpretations. In addition, it evaluates the impact of their reinterpretations of the Qur'an on traditional views in Muslim societies and their implications in the context of social change and gender equality. When examining Islamic feminist views on the Qur'anic reinterpretation, it is important to thoroughly understand the cultural and linguistic context of Arabic. Misconceptions regarding the interpretations of classical Muslim intellectuals, which are often considered discriminatory against women, are often due to a lack of understanding of the cultural and linguistic context of Arabic. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to linguistic and cultural contexts when interpreting sacred texts. On the other hand, feminists should also note that interpretations of the Qur'an do not always result in interpretations that are in line with their principles of gender equality. The theoretical implication is that, in an effort to understand the verses of the Qur'an related to gender issues, it is important to consider the cultural context, language, and comprehensive interpretation. There is room for dialog and deeper understanding between feminist views and traditional interpretations, by taking an approach that combines an understanding of classical Arabic culture with the values of gender equality championed by feminists.

Keywords: *Islamic Feminism, Qur'anic Reinterpretation, Critical Text Analysis, Gender Interpretations.*

Corresponding author:

Muhammad, e-mail: muhammadlc@syariah.uin-malang.ac.id

Article History

Received: 28 December 2023 | Revised: 13 February 2024 | Accepted: 16 February 2024 | Available online: 19 February 2024

How to Cite this Article

Fidhayanti, D., Muhammad, Rofiq, M.A., Fuadi, M.R., Hakim, A. Bil Makkiy, N.C. (2024). Meninjau Kembali Pemikiran Feminis Islam Terhadap Reinterpretasi al-Qur'an: Analisis terhadap Pemikiran Aminah Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, Asma Barlas, dan Riffat Hassan. *Tribakti: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman*, 35(1), 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.33367/tribakti.v35i1.4564>



© 2024. The author(s). Tribakti is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

Introduction

In the modern context, the debate on women's roles and rights in Islam has become an increasingly relevant and important topic.¹ Amid this debate, the Islamic feminist movement emerged as an attempt to reinterpret religious teachings and Islamic traditions to be more inclusive of women's rights. This sentiment is reinforced by the thoughts of prominent Islamic feminist figures such as Aminah Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, Asma Barlas, and Riffat Hassan, who have offered reinterpretations of Qur'anic verses relating to gender issues.² Global Islamic feminist figures ranging from Aminah Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, Asma Barlas, and Riffat Hassan loudly voiced the reinterpretation of the Qur'an. The intended reinterpretation is a change in interpretation that is more favorable for women. Feminists assume that the emergence of interpretations that seem to oppress women is because the mufasirs are dominated by men, so the direction of interpretation is more in favor of men.³

Islamic feminists use Quranic verses to strengthen their arguments for gender equality. In this article, focus is given to the reinterpretation of verses proposed by Amina Wadud, al-Nisā' 4:1; al-Hujurāt 49:13; Ghāfir 40:40; al-Baqarah 2:48; al-Ahzāb 33:35 and al-Rūm 30:21, which highlight attempts to eliminate male agency and domination over women.⁴ Similar ideas are also promoted by Fatima Mernissi, Asma Barlas, and Riffat Hassan, who use almost the same verses used by Amina Wadud to voice their views on gender equality in Islam. However, their interpretations are not always in line with traditional interpretations dominated by male mufasir. They emphasize that gender equality should not be compromised, even if this means challenging patriarchal interpretation.⁵ Islamic feminists have shown that a deeper understanding of the cultural and social context in which certain verses were revealed can result in a more inclusive and progressive interpretation of women's rights in Islam.⁶

In studying feminism, there are often developments and critical schools of thought. Siti Dana Pantj Retnanti classifies them into 8 schools, namely: 1) liberal feminism, 2) radical feminism, 3) postmodern feminism, 4) anarchist feminism, 5) Marxist feminism, 6) socialist feminism, 7) postcolonial feminism, 8) Nordic feminism.⁷ In addition to the eight already discussed, Ruqayya Bahar adds another school: religious feminism.⁸ Islamic feminism is included in religious feminism as well. There are three major perspectives on Islamic feminism. First, it has a desire to eliminate religious norms and consider religion as a source of obstacle to women's rights. This section is

¹ Hind Elhinnawy (she/her/hers), "The role of difference in feminist transnational solidarity: secular Muslim feminists in the United Kingdom and France," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 25, no. 4 (8 Agustus 2023): 593–614, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2023.2206828>.

² Farah Shahin, "Islamic Feminism and Hegemonic Discourses on Faith and Gender in Islam," *International Journal of Islam in Asia* 1, no. 1 (17 Desember 2020): 27–48, <https://doi.org/10.1163/25899996-01010003>.

³ H. A. Ghosh, "Dilemmas of Islamic and Secular Feminists and Feminisms," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 9, no. 3 (2008): 99–116.

⁴ Amina Wadud, "Reflections on Islamic Feminist Exegesis of the Qur'an," *Religions* 12, no. 7 (Juli 2021): 497, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12070497>.

⁵ Wahidul Anam dan Mubaidi Sulaeman, "Reinterpretasi Hadis Mesoginik Kepemimpinan Wanita Dalam Musnad Ahmad Perspektif Maqasid Al-Shariah," *AL QUDS: Jurnal Studi Alquran dan Hadis* 6, no. 3 (28 Desember 2022), <https://doi.org/10.29240/alquds.v6i3.5172>.

⁶ Zamila Abdul Rani, "What Is Islamic Feminism? Promoting Cultural Change and Gender Equality Introduction: Feminism and Islamic Feminism," no. 2 (2015): 978–967.

⁷ Siti Dana Pantj Retnani, "Feminisme Dalam Perkembangan Aliran Pemikiran Dan Hukum di Indonesia," *Jurnal Ilmu Hukum: ALETHEA* 1, no. 1 (2017): 95–109, <https://doi.org/10.24246/alethea.vol1.no1.p95-109>.

⁸ Ruqayya Bahar, "Islamic Feminism as a Rising Field of Inquiry in Contemporary Times," *South Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 02, no. 02 (2021): 101–10, <https://doi.org/10.48165/sajssh.2021.2209>.

referred to as secular feminism.⁹ In addition to the eight already discussed, Ruqayya Bahar adds another school: religious feminism. Second, feminism uses religious norms as a strategy with an emphasis on reinterpreting the Qur'an, questioning the hadiths and sharia formed in the classical period. Third, feminists believe that the Qur'an has indeed guaranteed equal rights and obligations between men and women.¹⁰

Because of the diverse views on Islamic feminism, the Iranian feminist Haideh Moghissi is concerned about the careless use of the term Islamic feminism. According to her, Islamic feminism does not necessarily demand gender equality, but must remain based on religious beliefs and requirements.¹¹ From Haideh's statement, it is clear that feminism, which carries the theme of gender equality and assumes that religious norms undermine gender justice, is a mistake and does not fall under the term Islamic feminism. Margot Badran defines Islamic feminism as a branch of feminist studies that seeks to reinterpret and reflect on Islam with regard to equality between the two sexes.¹² Reform of Islamic law from certain Islamic schools is seen as one way to overcome the discrimination experienced by women. Based on this, feminism attempts to reinterpret the sources of Islamic law using the Qur'anic hermeneutic theory.¹³ The term Ijtihad is used by feminists to build new interpretations of the Qur'an that focus on gender.

Connected research conducted by Heidemarie Winkel,¹⁴ Azam Sarwar et.al,¹⁵ Asma Afsarudin,¹⁶ argues that Islamic Feminism is characterized by debate, a practice enunciated within Islamic values and frameworks. Muslim women bring their experiences to the fore and challenge traditional and post-classical interpretations of the Qur'an and Sunnah. They assert that such interpretations of religious texts are completely biased and are based on male experiences, male-centered questions, and the overall influence of patriarchal society and culture. According to Islamic feminists, Islam has guaranteed women's rights since its inception, thus confirming the idea of egalitarian ethics in Islam. However, the original message of Islam has been hindered by the hegemonic interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence, a product of the patriarchy that has existed in Islamic history for several centuries. Women's rights as mandated in Islam are no longer practiced, and the demand for women's rights is considered by many to be against the basic tenets of Islam. Islamic feminists provide their justifications from the Qur'an and Hadith, and call for reopening the door to ijtihad (reasoning).

Thus, this article aims to investigate and analyze the thoughts of these Islamic feminist figures in the context of reinterpreting the Qur'an in relation to gender issues. Through a critical text analysis approach, this article will explore their arguments and interpretations as well as

⁹ Qudsia Mirza, "Islamic Feminism and gender equality," *International Institute of the Study of Islam in the Modern World* 21 (2008): 30–32.

¹⁰ Ghosh, "Dilemmas of Islamic and Secular Feminists and Feminisms."

¹¹ Haideh Moghissi, "Islamic feminism revisited," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31, no. 1 (2011): 76–84, <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-2010-054>.

¹² Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences* (England: Oneworld, 2011).

¹³ Mirza, "Islamic Feminism and gender equality."

¹⁴ Heidemarie Winkel, "Islamic Feminism. Thinking Gender Justice as a Religious Knowledge Practice," dalam *Exploring Islam beyond Orientalism and Occidentalism: Sociological Approaches*, ed. oleh Christel Gärtner dan Heidemarie Winkel, Veröffentlichungen Der Sektion Religionssoziologie Der Deutschen Gesellschaft Für Soziologie (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2021), 179–210, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-33239-6_8.

¹⁵ Azam Sarwar dan Hong Zeng, "Breaking free from patriarchal appropriation of sacred texts: An Islamic feminist critique of Bol," *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 27, no. 4 (2 Oktober 2021): 465–87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2021.1981526>.

¹⁶ Asma Afsaruddin, *Modern Rereadings Of The Qur'an Through A Gendered Lens* (London: Oxford University Press, 2023).

highlight differences in approach and common themes in their thinking. In addition, it also evaluates the impact of their reinterpretations on traditional views in Muslim societies and their implications in the context of social change and gender equality. With a deeper understanding of these perspectives, it is hoped that there will be room for better dialogue between feminist views and traditional interpretations of Islam.

Method

This study is based on library research. The purpose of the literature is for all data sources to come from written data in the form of books and articles that are closely related to the topic of discussion.¹⁷ Since the article is literature-based, Amri Hamzah explains, "literature research is qualitative research, working at an analytic level and emic perspectives, i.e. obtaining data not based on the perception of the researcher, but based on conceptual facts and theoretical facts."¹⁸ The benefit of the literature method in this article is to objectively see whether there is a new interpretation of the Qur'an voiced by feminist figures. The presence or absence of novelty of interpretation is not based on the author's thoughts, but on existing facts from classic tafsir book documents.

To achieve optimal results, this study used a critical descriptive analysis method that utilizes knife analysis. As explained by Sumandi Suryabarot, the descriptive analysis method is a research approach that aims to present a picture of a particular situation or event. This descriptive research aims to collect basic data descriptively, without the need to pursue or explain the relationships between variables.¹⁹ Because descriptive data is limited to the accumulation of basic data, a critical analysis knife is needed as a material to track the truth of the reinterpretation of the Qur'an. Thus, it can be found accurately whether there is a true reinterpretation or limited to repetition of interpretations that have been initiated by classical mufasir.

Result and Discussion

The Rise of Islamic Feminism and Its Characteristics

The beginning of the rise of Islamic feminism began with women's awareness of the politicization of some Islamic leaders who deprived them of their rights, which were basically given by Islam.²⁰ Thus, the voices of women demanding their rights, as described in Islamic sources, emerged. Unlike Hyder, Shahid Abbas argued that before the Islamic feminist movement, Islam had already upheld the demands of feminists. As evidenced by history, Islam was the first religion to remove the stigma of impurity from women, identify a noble position for women, place women's dignity at the highest level, give them rights, and remove all discrimination based on gender.²¹

Feminism is a movement that women have long voiced. Feminism is a diverse concept of thinking. This study focuses on the history of Islamic feminism. Before the onslaught of feminism

¹⁷ Muhammad Muhammad, "Al-Ummi Dalam Al-Qur'an; Studi Tafsir Tematik Terhadap Literasi Nabi Muhammad," *Tribakti: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman* 31, no. 1 (2020): 49–66, <https://doi.org/10.33367/tribakti.v31i1.963>.

¹⁸ Amri Hamzah, *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan* (Malang: Literasi Nusantara, 2020).

¹⁹ Muhammad Muhammad, *Polemik Argumen atas Autentisitas Teks al-Qur'an Perspektif Ahl al-Sunnah*, ed. oleh Luttfi Fatahillah, I (Bandung: Bitread Publishing PT. Lontar Digital Asia, 2020).

²⁰ Shafaque Hyder, "Global rise of Islamic feminism and its status," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied and Basic Subjects* 1, no. 2 (2021): 1–13.

²¹ Shahid Abbas, Ijaz Asghar, dan Ameer Sultan, "Evolution from Feminism to Postfeminism: Islamic Representation of Womanhood," *Research Journal of Social Science & Economics Review* 2, no. 3 (2021): 108–15, [https://doi.org/10.36902/rjsser-vol2-iss3-2021\(108-115\)](https://doi.org/10.36902/rjsser-vol2-iss3-2021(108-115)).

in 1990, the voice of feminism existed in the 1890s and was developed in Egypt. Departing from Islamic feminists, Egyptian non-Muslims joined Muslim feminists.²² Although feminism has developed in Egypt, the term feminist has not yet been used and recognized. Feminists became a term for the women's movement in Egypt only in 1920, adopted from French (when translated into Arabic *nisāiyah*), and coinciding with the British colonization of Egypt.²³

Although Islamic feminism has been around for a long time, it was in 1990 that Islamic feminism began to spread around the world. It was also this year that a group of Muslim women scholars gathered at a Roundtable on Identity Politics and Women held at the United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics. The purpose of the event was to delve deeper into gender and identity politics, and find solutions to eliminate the oppression of women.²⁴ Post the summit, significant Islamic feminist figures and works such as Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, Asma Barlas, Riffat Hassan, and others emerged.²⁵ Islamic feminist scholars have widely adopted the ideas of this 19th-century figure, although there is no denying the development and modification of feminist thought.

Kaosar Ahmed explains the developments and modifications that occurred in Islamic feminism: 1) traditionalism, 2) modernism, 3) Islamism. Traditionalism is a feminist movement that rejects modernization and westernism. This group assumes that the legal formulation inherited from the classical period is the truth and becomes the classical generation as a representation of the peak of Islamic civilization. The modernism group can be characterized as a group that believes that modern and Western innovations can be harmonized with Islamic ethics and principles.²⁶ This group has a strong belief that the reform of classical Islamic law is possible. Islamism, on the other hand, is characterized by rejecting Westernism and calling for the revival of Islamic law and practice. Group thinking is more directed towards the truth of its own interpretation, and those who contradict its interpretation are considered mistakes or misguidance.

Ahmed-Ghosh provides information about modernist feminism. In examining modernist feminism, she divides it into three major groups: 1) Muslim feminism educated in the West, settled there, and trained by Western feminists. This group emphasizes the discourse on human rights and secularism. 2) Western-educated feminism, especially after the 9/11 tragedy, supports Islamic feminism as a strategy and approach to reinterpreting the Qur'an and reviewing hadith and Islamic law. 3) Feminist groups believe that the Qur'an is indeed an equal right for women.²⁷

Basically, the three existing groups both make the Qur'an a source in their thinking, but what distinguishes the first group is more oriented towards the West and makes human rights a primary source while the Qur'an is a secondary source. The second group is identical to the study of the Qur'an and elaborates on the social, political, or economic conditions that occur. This group makes the Qur'an a primary source while hadith or fiqh law as a secondary source that can be criticized. The third group focuses more on accepting the stipulation that gender inequality is God's

²² Ghada Osman, "Back to Basic: The Discourse of Muslim Feminism in Contemporary Egypt," *Women and Language* 26, no. 1 (2003): 73.

²³ Amina Wadud, Kecia Ali, dan Farid Esack, "History and Politics of Islamic Feminism: A Comparison of the Works on Islam and Gender by," *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* 18, no. 2 (2012): 89–107.

²⁴ Bahar, "Islamic Feminism as a Rising Field of Inquiry in Contemporary Times."

²⁵ Islamic Philosophy, Asma Abdu, dan Ambreen Salahuddin, "Implications of Feminist Thought on Understanding Qur ' an : An Analytical Study" 3, no. 2 (2021): 41–50.

²⁶ Mubaidi Sulaeman, "Reinterpretasi Hadist Mesoginik Tentang Penciptaan Wanita Dari Tulang Rusuk Laki-Laki," *El-Faqih: Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Hukum Islam* 6, no. 2 (27 Oktober 2020): 18–37.

²⁷ Ghosh, "Dilemmas of Islamic and Secular Feminists and Feminisms."

destiny.²⁸ Of the three groups above, this article focuses on the second, whose work involves reinterpreting the Qur'an and reviewing hadith and classical Muslim intellectual arguments.

Emergency Reinterpretation of the Qur'an from a Muslim Feminist Perspective

The basic issue voiced by Islamic feminists regarding the Qur'an is the need to reinterpret Qur'anic verses using a new methodology. From here on, the term women's jihad emerged to bring about women-friendly interpretations. The interpretation of the Qur'an really needs the voice of women, which is to eliminate male patriarchy in interpretation. According to Barlas, no single mufasir is free from subjectivity. Therefore, the Qur'an is legally interpreted by anyone and can be interpreted according to personal needs. People who want to interpret the Qur'an do not have to meet the requirements as standardized by Muslim intellectuals. Barlas even argued that there is no need to study Arabic for mufasir.²⁹ Because mufasirs are predominantly male, the interpretative view is more concerned with men's rights and sometimes oppresses women's rights. Misogynism in the interpretation of Allah's universal words can be eliminated if women interpret it by looking at women's subjectivity.

The Qur'an has remained unchanged in interpretation, from classical times to the present day. The trend in interpretation is towards anti-women. This led the West to assume that Islam oppresses the rights of others. Moving to fulfill the call to reinterpret the Qur'an better is a step that must be taken by Muslims. This step is very urgent to restore hidden women's rights.³⁰ Fatima Marnissi argues that the loss of women's rights as granted by Islam is obscured by conservative Muslim intellectuals in order to preserve the patriarchal system.³¹ This calls for a reinterpretation of the Qur'an and an avoidance of exclusionary-radical Muslim interpretations.

Furthermore, Wadud assumed the importance of reinterpreting the Qur'an away from the patriarchal hegemony that had been built centuries ago. Wadud's initial foundation is that none of the humans can know or fully understand Allah's intentions as in the Qur'an, so from here the door to reinterpreting Allah's words remains open, especially for women who want to uphold justice and equality of rights.³² Because the door to reinterpreting the Qur'an remains open, Wadud voiced the Theology/Tawhid paradigm to interpret and implement new policies in certain countries or globally.³³ The paradigm can only function in Islamic primary sources that are not memorialized by patriarchal hegemonic thinking. Patriarchal hegemony can end when feminist scientists dismantle gender inequality by referring directly to primary sources/al-Qur'an.³⁴

Rifat Hassan maintains that the Qur'an is a holy book that upholds the dignity of women and makes women the subject of special attention. However, this has changed since the early days of Islam due to the bias of previous religions (Jewish, Christian, Baduwi, and others) that have entered and integrated into the Islamic tradition. On the other hand, classical Islamic studies that

²⁸ Mirza, "Islamic Feminism and gender equality."

²⁹ Asma Barlas, "Still Quarrelling over the Quran: Five Interventions," *ISIM Review: International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World* 20, no. 1 (2007): 32–33, <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/17203> Note:

³⁰ Barlas.

³¹ Hyder, "Global rise of Islamic feminism and its status."

³² Amina Wadud, "Can one critique cancel all previous efforts?," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 32, no. 2 (2016): 130–34, <https://doi.org/10.2979/jfemistudreli.32.2.21>.

³³ Amina Wadud, "Foreword," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 10, no. 4 (2008): 435–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616740802393858>.

³⁴ Amina Wadud, "Reflections on islamic feminist exegesis of the qur'an," *Religions* 12, no. 7 (2021): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12070497>.

discuss women's issues are more directed towards sexuality and do not focus on women's rights. Thus, women's rights, which have been explained in the Qur'an, are obscured and lead to the interpretation of sexuality.³⁵ Hassan continued, the Qur'an is an Islamic norm that strongly upholds human rights and releases humans from the shackles of traditionalism, authoritarianism, tribalism, racism, sexism, and slavery.³⁶ To realize this and return to the norms of Islam, especially regarding women's rights, it requires a reinterpretation of the Qur'an that comes out of the logic of sexism.

Feminists are not just calling for reinterpretation of the Qur'an, but feminists also offer theories that can even according to them are very relevant to interpreting the Qur'an according to modern needs. Starting from Marnissi, Wadud, Barlas, to Hassan, they offer hermeneutic theory in re-viewing the Qur'anic text, despite inconsistencies in its use. For example, Barlas divides his hermeneutic theory into three parts, namely: 1) the reading of the Qur'an by using a consistent theological understanding of God, 2) God is Just, 3) God cannot be represented.³⁷ Wadud's version of hermeneutics contains two components: the theology of the vertical model and the theology of God's justice.³⁸

If we briefly explain the approaches used by feminists, then Fatima Amijee's mapping can be said to be appropriate. She explains that there are two approaches to changing the interpretation that has been impressed by patriarchy: 1) the reinterpretation view, or trying to reinterpret the verses of the Qur'an with a more egalitarian concept. 2) Contextual view or placing the verses of the Qur'an in their historical context so that the verses only apply at a certain time and place/history.³⁹ Although feminists have theories and approaches that they think are scientific, it is often found that their theories and approaches are not finalized. For example, the hermeneutics of justice, feminists have not been able to explain the framework of justice they mean other than with anti-synonyms of the *lafal zulum*.

Furthermore, there are special themes that are of concern to feminists in interpreting the Qur'an which according to them classical interpretations seem anti-women and need reinterpretation. These themes are the devotion of a woman, obedience of women, superiority of men, polygyny, and women as witnesses.⁴⁰ The focus in the discussion of family law is on polygyny, divorce, witnesses, and inheritance.⁴¹ In principle, the theme of the discussion of Qur'anic feminists focuses on verses that explain family law. Although there are other feminists whose discussions widen the theme and this has been classified by Ali Ghazanfari in his article entitled "Analysis of the Readings of Contemporary Commentators and Research of the Quran on the Social Status of Women."⁴²

³⁵ Riffat Hassan, "Rights of Women Within Islamic Communities," *Religious Human Rights in Global Perspective*, 1996, 361–86.

³⁶ Hassan.

³⁷ Asma Barlas, "Globalização da igualdade : a mulher," 2012, 201–28.

³⁸ Amina Wadud, "Islam Beyond Patriarchy Through Gender Inclusive Qur'anic Analysis," *Wanted: Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family*, 2009, 95–112.

³⁹ FATEMA AMIJEE, "How to Be a Feminist Muslim," *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, 2022, 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2022.9>.

⁴⁰ Cambridge Collections Online, "12 Women's readings of the Qur'an," 2021, 255–72.

⁴¹ Asma Barlas, "Muslim Women and Sexual Oppression: Reading Liberation from the Quran," *Macalester International* 10, no. 1 (2001): 117–46.

⁴² A. Ghazanfari, S. D. Ramandi, dan A. Mirahmadi, "Analysis of the Readings of Contemporary Commentators and Researchers of the Qur'an on the Social Status of Women," *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding*, 9, no. 4 (2022): 355-372.

A Selection of Verses and Interpretations by Muslim Feminists

Starting from the hypothesis that interpreters are predominantly male, resulting in a gender bias in interpretation, becomes the genesis of the emergence of the need for female interpreters with the hope of being accepted by women and more feminist. From here emerges the idea of women's jihad in interpreting the Qur'an as advocated by Amina Wadud and other feminists. There is a foundation sourced from the Qur'an that feminists use to strengthen gender equality. This article presents verses that are used to bolster arguments for gender equality by four Islamic feminist figures: Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, Asma Barlas, and Riffat Hassan.

Wadud identifies 6 verses that can be used as a basis to reduce male agency over women.⁴³ The six verses highlighted by Wadud are: al-Nisā' 4:1, al-Hujurat 49:13, Ghāfir 40:40, al-Baqarah 2:48, al-Ahzāb 33:35, and al-Rūm 30:21.⁴⁴ Wadud's guidance in her discussion of feminism focused on efforts to reduce male agency and domination over women. The concerns and diagnosis of verses presented by Wadud are not significantly different from the concerns and verses emphasized by Fatima Mernissi, namely: al-Nisā' 4:34, al-Hujurat 49:13, al-Ahzāb 33:35, Ali 'Imrān 3:195, and al-Baqarah 2:177.

Furthermore, the verses used by Asma Barlas to advocate her gender ideas are al-Nisā' 4:2-3, 34, al-Baqarah 2:228, al-Ahzāb 33:35, al-Hujurat 49:13.⁴⁵ A prominent Muslim feminist figure vocalizing feminism within the Quran is Riffat Hassan, born in Pakistan. Numerous discussions have been raised regarding advocating gender equality. Nevertheless, there are selected verses often reiterated in constructing her arguments, namely: Ali 'Imrān 3:195, al-Nisā' 4:124, al-Tawbah 9:71-72, al-Nahl 16:97, and al-Ahzāb 33:35.⁴⁶ According to feminists, these verses need to be interpreted by women without relying on classical interpretations dominated by men.

According to Wadud, the sources of error and truth should not be viewed based on gender. Moral responsibility and the certainty of reward or punishment are applied equally. One's mistakes cannot be deferred from others. This gender equality is depicted in Surah al-Baqarah 2:48 and Surah al-Ghāfir 40.⁴⁷ If patriarchy arises based on Surah al-Baqarah verse 2:228, which, according to the commentators, discusses the issue of divorce rights and the post-divorce obligations of the wife, this foundation is very weak. Barlas explains that verse 228 has two purposes: First, the right of men to divorce their wives without external arbitration. Second, its core aim is to elucidate the annulment of divorce. The focal point of discussion from this verse, as Barlas outlines, revolves around achieving goodness and resolving conflicts between husband and wife, so the relevant meaning is not about the husband's right to divorce but rather the annulment of divorce. Thus, the purpose of this verse leads to something both positive and beneficial.⁴⁸

Regarding goodness, Allah does not discriminate on the basis of gender. Fatima Marnissi explains this through Surah Ali 'Imrān 3:195. Marnissi elucidates that this verse was revealed when Um Salamah inquired the Prophet about the fate of women who migrated to uphold the religion of Islam but were not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an. Allah answered Um Salamah's concern through Ali 'Imrān 3:195, which elucidates the equality between men and women in their deeds. Furthermore, to reinforce the existence of gender equality, this is explained in Surah al-Nisā' 4:1.

⁴³ Wadud, "Can one critique cancel all previous efforts?"

⁴⁴ Wadud, "Islam Beyond Patriarchy Through Gender Inclusive Qur'anic Analysis."

⁴⁵ Barlas, "Muslim Women and Sexual Oppression: Reading Liberation from the Quran."

⁴⁶ Hassan, "Rights of Women Within Islamic Communities."

⁴⁷ Wadud, "Islam Beyond Patriarchy Through Gender Inclusive Qur'anic Analysis."

⁴⁸ Barlas, "Muslim Women and Sexual Oppression: Reading Liberation from the Quran."

According to Wadud, there are two points of focus in this verse: Allah created mankind from a single soul and then created its mate, from which a multitude of humanity arose. According to Wadud, the essence of this verse is evidence of human plurality, interconnectedness, dependency, and how they relate to each other in life. From this, it must be understood that there is awareness of mutual interdependence. This interconnectedness transcends human gender and is outlined in the Qur'an.⁴⁹

Interconnectedness is often interpreted in a manner that discriminates against women, leading to a focus on the interpretation of Surah al-Nisa⁷ 4:2-3 on the concept of polygyny. However, the intention of these verses is not such; Barlas argues that interpretations leading to polygyny stem from patriarchal thinking. There are three aspects that need to be considered by interpreters when engaging with these verses from Barlas's perspective: First, they are limited to orphaned children. Second, this is to achieve justice for them. Third, justice cannot be achieved for men practicing polygyny, as explained in al-Nisa⁷ 4:129. Thus, polygyny constitutes discrimination against women, is a patriarchal interpretation, and is not advocated in the Qur'an.⁵⁰ It is true that Allah may favor men in some respects, as explained in the Qur'an. However, this does not indicate that men are the rulers of women.

Surah al-Nisa⁷ 4:34 explains that men are superior to women, but according to Barlas, this superiority is limited to financial maintenance, meaning men are given strength by Allah to provide more than women in the obligation to provide sustenance. Barlas's assumption stems from the fact that men have a greater share of inheritance than women do. Therefore, it is the duty of men to provide for women.⁵¹ Assuming that men are not arbitrary rulers over women, the wording of the subsequent verse can be understood from the attitude of Prophet Muhammad during marital conflicts, where it is better to remain silent and leave the house than to strike a wife.⁵² Therefore, hitting a wife in any circumstance is not justified in Islamic teachings, especially after considering the example set by Prophet Muhammad.

Because men and women are considered equal in the eyes of Allah, discrimination is not His will. Allah desires men and women to be united and protects one another. The Quran does not create a hierarchy in which men are placed above women nor does it blame each other. Men and women were created to live together in harmony and truth.⁵³ That is Riffat Hassan's interpretation of Surah al-Nisa⁷ 4:124, al-Tawbah 9:71-72, and al-Nahl 16:97. Another proof of equality between men and women, especially in household affairs, lies in Surah al-Rūm verse 30:21. Focusing on the term "mawaddah" (affection), Wadud concludes that household matters are not about competition, conflict, violence, or domination, thus implying that men should not be seen as solely responsible or superior, which would result in women having to submit and obey their husbands. The concept built by the Qur'an is the mutual love between men and women and mutual respect observed in their full equality.⁵⁴ Without such a concept, then "mawaddah" in the Quran cannot be realized.

⁴⁹ Wadud, "Islam Beyond Patriarchy Through Gender Inclusive Qur'anic Analysis."

⁵⁰ Barlas, "Muslim Women and Sexual Oppression: Reading Liberation from the Quran."

⁵¹ Barlas.

⁵² Fatimah Marnissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite, A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (Iggirs: Perseus Books, 1999).

⁵³ Hassan, "Rights of Women Within Islamic Communities."

⁵⁴ Wadud, "Islam Beyond Patriarchy Through Gender Inclusive Qur'anic Analysis."

Furthermore, the foundation for the arguments of global feminism, as mentioned earlier, is Surah al-Aḥzāb 33:35. All interpretations by feminists led to one conclusion: equality between men and women in all respects. Men are not positioned above women; both are moral agents, and all who perform good deeds receive reciprocity from Allah regardless of gender as well as sharing equal responsibilities.⁵⁵ Having equal moral responsibilities, reciprocity between men and women, and eliminating discrimination against women, as occurring in the pre-Quranic era, are the core principles underlying the feminist views of Islam. This indicates that in Islamic teachings, men and women are considered equal in all respects, both in moral obligations and rights and responsibilities. This principle contradicts patriarchal norms, which view men as superior and women as subordinates. In this context, the Qur'an not only introduces gender equality, but also abolishes existing discriminatory practices that existed previously.⁵⁶

Another verse in the Qur'an that serves as the foundation for feminist arguments in upholding gender justice and categorized as a form of reinterpretation of the Qur'an is Surah al-Ḥujūrāt 49:13. Marnissi concludes that this verse is a breakthrough in Islamic teachings to eliminate discrimination against fellow human beings regardless of gender, wealth, or power, which was not present in the pre-Quranic era. The purpose of this verse is to establish that the Qur'an does not consider gender, but that morality is the benchmark. Therefore, it is a mistake to symbolize women as emotional beings, whereas men are symbolized as intelligent beings. There is no gender privileged in the Qur'an, as the benchmark for human excellence is morality.⁵⁷

Wadud explains that this verse reflects the Quran's creative design in using the phrase "zakr wa unthā". The purpose of this phrasing is to depict humans created in pairs, highlighting the aspect of human interaction within social communities. This illustrates the sense of balance and plurality. Moreover, differences (including gender, ethnicity, and others) serve the purpose of mutual recognition, fostering reciprocity. These differences are not subject to Allah's judgment; instead, it is based on the concept of "taqwa" (moral integrity). As human agents with responsibilities, individuals have the freedom to choose between paths of goodness/justice and evil/oppression. While humans have the freedom to make these choices, Allah judges them based on their decisions. Goodness and justice are encompassed within the concept of "taqwa"; therefore, achieving justice requires a harmonious balance between men and women, both in private and public spheres, while also eliminating dichotomies against women. Considering submission to men as the sole criterion for a woman's "taqwa" is a flawed perspective.⁵⁸

Analysis of the Prejudice of Feminists towards Classical Mufassirs

There are important points regarding the prejudices of feminists when examining the interpretations of classical Muslim intellectuals. These biases lead to interpretations that seem misandrists, ultimately resulting in highly subjective interpretations that discriminate against men. After investigating feminist interpretations, the points of bias against classical mufassirs are as follows: 1) Classical mufassirs use expressions, language, or pronouns that refer to males (*mudhakar*). Examples include al-Tabari, al-Bahawi, al-Wahidi, and other mufassirs when interpreting Surah al-Baqarah verses 2:48 and 2:177. Classical mufassirs interpret it similarly to

⁵⁵ Barlas, "Muslim Women and Sexual Oppression: Reading Liberation from the Quran."

⁵⁶ Wadud, "Islam Beyond Patriarchy Through Gender Inclusive Qur'anic Analysis."

⁵⁷ Barlas, "Muslim Women and Sexual Oppression: Reading Liberation from the Quran."

⁵⁸ Wadud, "Islam Beyond Patriarchy Through Gender Inclusive Qur'anic Analysis."

feminists. However, what sets them apart is that mufassirs tend to use the term "*mudhakar*" more when translating the content of those verses. This might lead feminists to perceive patriarchal elements; however, in reality, this is not the case when viewed through the lens of Arabic language rules.

In grammatical Arabic, the rule of using the masculine form (*mudhakar*) is commonly applied; however, it carries meaning for both men and women. This rule is frequently employed in interpreting the Quran by both classical and contemporary Islamic mufasirs. It is important to note that this grammatical rule is not intended for gender discrimination; rather, it is a feature of the Arabic grammar. Misperceptions among feminists are common because they sometimes assume that being a mufasir does not require understanding Arabic, as explained by Barlas.⁵⁹ Hence, gender bias does not stem from mistakes made by classical mufasirs, but rather from the prejudices and lack of understanding of the prevailing Arabic language rules among feminists. If feminists were to adhere to the requirements of the Arabic language as one of the foundational principles in interpreting the Quran, then there would be no disparity in interpretation between classical scholars and feminist interpretations of the two versions.

Moreover, Quranic verses explicitly acknowledge gender distinctions in pronouns, which serve as foundational sources for feminists arguing for gender equality. These verses are found in Surah Ali 'Imran: 195, Al-Nisa': 124, Al-Tawbah: 71-72, Al-Ahzab: 35, Ghafir: 40, and An-Nahl: 97. None of these verses, according to classical or contemporary mufasirs and belittle women. Mufasirs concurs that Islam does not differentiate between the actions of men and women. In fact, Al-Baghawi quoted Al-Dahak as stating that men are like women, and vice versa. Both men and women originate from the same source: Adam and Hawa.⁶⁰ Similarly, the interpretation provided by Ahl al-Sunnah figures clarifies that men are women and women are men, both originating from the same entity. When interpreting the aforementioned verses, mufasirs primarily emphasize two discussions: the righteousness of deeds and the faith of an individual, irrespective of gender. With these two aspects, Allah rewards individuals with goodness regardless of gender. This perspective is elucidated by the contemporary mufasir, Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi.⁶¹

Moreover, Muhammad Mahmud al-Hijazi emphasizes that the essence of faith lies in assisting one another in goodness and loving each other, regardless of gender. This principle was evident during the time of the Prophet, when women played a significant role in warfare according to their capabilities.⁶² This interpretative model is more rational, as it does not limit women's capabilities, unlike feminist interpretations that appear to impose women's abilities to compete with men, thereby exhibiting a sense of misandry. In particular, Ibn 'Ashur contends that all Muslims are interconnected without differentiation between men and women. All individuals possess the freedom to pursue goodness rather than merely conforming to predefined roles.⁶³ Not only the aforementioned mufasir figures but also interpretations from other mufasirs, both from classical and modern times, align in their understanding of the aforementioned verses. None of the Islamic mufasirs discriminated against or disparaged the women. If feminists believe that classical mufasirs discriminate against women in interpreting Quranic verses, then what needs to be questioned is

⁵⁹ Barlas, "Still Quarrelling over the Quran: Five Interventions."

⁶⁰ Al-Husain b. Mas'ud Al-Baghawi, *Ma'ālim al-Tanzīl fī Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān* (Bairūt: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1420).

⁶¹ Muḥammad Sayyid Ṭanṭāwī, *al-Tafṣīr al-Wasīṭ li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Kairo: Dār Nahḍah, 1997).

⁶² Muḥammad Maḥmūd Al-Hijāzī, *al-Tafṣīr al-Wāḍiḥ* (Bairūt: Dār al-Jayl al-Jadīd, 1413).

⁶³ Muḥammad Ṭāhir b. 'Ashūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr* (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisīyah li al-Nashr, 1984).

whether they have engaged with the interpretive works of Muslim intellectuals or whether they are intentionally prejudiced against them.

In the discussion of the creation of humans as outlined in Surah Al-Nisa' verse 1 and Surah Al-Zumar verse 6, feminists do not delve into the details of the phrase "nafs wahidah" mentioned in the verse. Instead, they are more inclined to elaborate on the concept of human creation from the same perspective. The ambiguity in the feminists' interpretation arises when they encounter the subsequent phrase "*wa kbalaq minhā zanjahā.*" Rather than interpreting this phrase, they proceed directly to the subsequent part of the verse, "*wa baththa minhumā rijālan kathīrā wa nisā'a.*" Islamic mufasirs have varied interpretations regarding the phrase "*kbalaq minhā zanjahā*"; some interpret it as Hawa being created from one of Adam's ribs.⁶⁴ Some interpretations suggest that Eve's creation from the same elements as Adam 'emphasizes the unity of human origins, reflecting the close relationship between men and women in creation. This view underscores Eve's equal partnership with Adam, rejecting the notion of her being created from a different or an inferior element. Seen in this light, Eve's creation from the same element as Adam serves as evidence of fundamental equality between men and women in Islam. This argument stresses the shared origin and equal worth of both genders before God, affirming their equal rights and mutual support for human life.⁶⁵

Fakh al-Dīn al-Rāzī provides a detailed explanation regarding the differing interpretations among mufasirs regarding the emphasis on the phrase "*min-hā*" ("from it"). Towards the conclusion of his explanation, he underscores the prevailing opinion that Eve (Hāwā) was created by Adam.⁶⁶ Hence, the term "*nafs wāḥidah*" refers to Adam. The precedence of Adam's significance in the phrase "*wāḥidah nafs*" aligns with the principles of Arabic linguistic norms, encompassing the realm of *Kinayah*, thereby contributing to the Qur'an's literary elegance.⁶⁷ If feminists, particularly Wadud, contend that the pertinent meaning of "*nafs wāḥidah*" is a single entity, then Wadud's interpretation offers nothing novel, as Islamic mufasirs have already expounded upon it. Therefore, the assertion of originality in Wadud's interpretation is superficial and neglects the comprehensive study of Muslim intellectuals' interpretations.

Furthermore, the verse used as a foundation by feminists and considered a reinterpretation of the Qur'an is Surah al-Rūm 30:21. Regarding this verse, Muslim intellectuals differ in interpreting the terms "*mawaddah*" and "*rahmah*," among others. Mujāhid's version suggests that "*mawaddah*" means sexual relations (*jimā'*) and "*rahmah*" means child. Al-Hasan, Ibn 'Abbās, and al-Suddī interpret "*mawaddah*" as love and "*rahmah*" as affection. Some interpret "*mawaddah*" as a man's love for his wife and "*rahmah*" as a husband's affection for his wife by protecting her from anything bad. There are also those who interpret "*mawaddah*" as youth and "*rahmah*" as old.⁶⁸

In a deeper analysis concerning the concept of "*mawaddah*," al-Sha'rāwī asserts that "*mawaddah*" *mawaddah* cannot be attained without mutual love in the bonds of life and mutual roles between the two.⁶⁹ The scholars of al-Azhar also provided interpretations based on the concept of human creation outlined in the phrase "min anfusikum." According to their interpretation, Eve was created from the remaining clay used in Adam's creative process. In addition, Allah created

⁶⁴ Sa'īd Hawwā, *al-Asās fī al-Tafsīr* (Kairo: Dār al-Salām, 1424).

⁶⁵ Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn Al-Qāsimī, *Maḥasin al-Ta'wīl* (Bairūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1418).

⁶⁶ Fakhr al-Dīn Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb* (Bairūt: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth, 1420).

⁶⁷ Jalāl al-Dīn Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Kairo: Maṭba'ah Ḥijāzī, t.t.).

⁶⁸ Muḥammad Ṣadiq Khān, *Fath al-Bayān fī Maqāsid al-Qur'ān* (Bairūt: al-Maktabah al-'Aṣriyah, 1992).

⁶⁹ Muḥammad Mutawallī Al-Sha'rāwī, *Tafsīr al-Sha'rāwī* (Mesir: Akhbār al-Yawum, 1997).

human beings in pairs (male and female) of the same kind, whether in terms of form or logic. There was no distinction between the two, except for gender. Men and women share the same obligation.⁷⁰ From this interpretation, there is a correlation between Surah al-Nisā' 4:1 and Surah al-Rūm 30:21. Surah al-Nisā' 4:1 mentions the creation of humans from a single soul (*nafs wāḥidah*), which is often understood as referring to Adam. Similarly, Surah al-Rūm 30:21 discusses the creation of spouses (*mawaddah* and *rahmah*) as a sign of Allah's power and wisdom. The correlation lies in the idea that just as Adam was created from a single soul, so were his descendants, including Eve. This unity in creation underscores the importance of mutual love and compassion between spouses, as highlighted by Surah al-Rūm. Therefore, these verses collectively emphasize unity and equality between men and women in Islam, as they both originate from the same source and are meant to support and care for each other in marital life.

Adam was the first human created by God, and from him, the rest of humanity was fashioned. From Adam and Eve (Hawā), mankind has multiplied and flourished. In terms of marriage, women were created from the same species and elements as men, originating from Adam and Hawā. Therefore, from a biological standpoint, there are no inherent differences between men and women. This understanding aligns closely with feminist interpretations, emphasizing the equality of the sexes. Thus, it can be concluded that the feminist perspective on gender equality is not a novel concept as it resonates with the fundamental principles found within Islamic teachings and interpretations.

Differences emerge between feminists and Muslim scholars in interpreting Surah al-Nisā' 4:34, particularly regarding the phrase "*al-Rijāl Qawwāmūn 'alā al-Nisā'*." Barlas interprets men's superiority over women as primarily related to their responsibility to provide for their wives, aligning with Muslim scholars' interpretations. This view is elucidated through references to other verses, such as Surah al-Baqarah 2:228, which emphasizes men's higher degree as linked to their greater responsibility to lead the household and provide sustenance. However, al-Hijāzī stresses that this verse does not imply unequal rights and obligations between men and women; rather, it highlights that each gender has distinct roles and responsibilities suited to its nature.⁷¹

In the interpretation of Surah al-Baqarah verse 228 and al-Nisā' verse 34, it is evident that the majority of mufasirs appear to hold views that can be seen as discriminatory against women. This is because of Allah's perceived advantages that men are attributed over women. One concept that justifies the stance of Muslim intellectuals is the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, "أردت أمراً" "وأراد الله غيره" (I intended one thing, but Allah intended another).⁷² This narration is authentic, unquestionable, and frequently cited by Muslim intellectuals, including both mufasirs and muḥadiths. Therefore, it is not an overstatement when al-Ḥijāzī underscores that this verse does not imply discrimination against women's abilities, intelligence, or knowledge. Rather, the purpose of this verse is to safeguard and honor women.⁷³

⁷⁰ Majmū'ah min al-'Ulamā' bi Ishrāf Majma' al-Buḥūth al-Islāmiyah bi Al-Azhar, *al-Tafsīr al-Wasīṭ li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Kairo: al-Hayah al-'Āmah li Shu'ūn al-Maṭābi' al-Amīriyah, 1393).

⁷¹ Al-Ḥijāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Wāḍiḥ*.

⁷² Jamāl al-Dīn 'Abd Allāh b. Yūsuf Al-Zayla'ī, *Takhrīj al-Aḥādīth wa al-Āthār al-Wāqi'ah fī Tafsīr al-Kashshāf li Zamakhsharī* (Riyāḍ: Dār Ibn Khuzaimah, 1414). See also, Basri Basri dan Muhammad Muhammad, "Rethinking Religious Moderation Through The Study Of Indonesian Exegesis: A Study Of Tafsir Al-Azhar By Hamka," *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Humaniora* 21, no. 1 (2023): 41–58, <http://dx.doi.org/10.18592/khazanah.v21i1.8737>.

⁷³ Al-Ḥijāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Wāḍiḥ*.

The next point that they elaborate upon as a reinterpretation of verses is Surah al-Baqarah 2:288. According to Barlas, the emphasis of this verse is not on the right of men to divorce women but rather on the core purpose of the verse, which is the annulment of divorce leading to the continuity of domestic life. Essentially, there is no difference between Barlas's interpretation and that of Muslim intellectuals concerning the points Barlas is making. Barlas focuses on the wording "*wa bu'ūlatubbun aḥaq bi raddibinna fī dhālik in arādū iṣlāḥa.*" However, Muslim intellectuals do not confine themselves solely to interpreting this phrase; they provide a comprehensive interpretation from the beginning to the end of the verse, and even offer thematic interpretations of divorce. Through this model of interpretation by Muslim intellectuals, the impression is that this verse discusses men who divorce their wives.

The feminist interpretation model should not be dismissed, as one of its principles involves feminizing interpretations to make Qur'anic verses appear more compassionate and less harsh. However, it is important to recognize that Surah al-Baqarah 2:228's feminist interpretation is not novel. Similar interpretations have been provided by Muslim mufasirs, both classical and contemporary. As an illustration, Muqātil ibn Sulaimān al-Balkhī interpreted the phrase "*wa bu'ūlatubbun aḥaq bi raddibinna fī dhālik in arādū iṣlāḥa*" as "the husband has the right to reconcile with the divorced wife with the intention of reconciliation, not to harm, the established household."⁷⁴ Ibn Kathīr's interpretation suggests that if a husband divorces his wife in the revocable divorce status (raj'ī) and the wife is still in the waiting period (iddah), it is permissible for the husband to reconcile with his wife with the intention of restoring the relationship and making amends.⁷⁵ This interpretation closely aligns with the perspectives of other Islamic scholars. Hence, there is little disparity between feminist interpretations and those offered by Muslim intellectuals, particularly when focusing on a specific segment of the verse.

The final discussion often cited as the basis for the allegedly highly discriminatory interpretation of women by classical Muslim intellectuals is found in Surah al-Nisa' (4:2-3). According to feminists, the key focus of these verses is polygyny as a means of safeguarding the welfare of orphans and ensuring justice for them. Moreover, polygyny is contingent upon justice. Therefore, the primary purpose of allowing polygyny in this context was to uphold justice for orphans. If justice cannot be ensured, then polygyny is not permissible. In conclusion, polygyny was not observed.

Feminist interpretations essentially align with those of Muslim intellectuals regarding Surah al-Nisa' 4:2-3. Muslim interpreters typically analyze this passage through two main discussions: first, the protection of orphans' property and second, the permissibility of marriage with women other than orphans. First, there is a convergence between feminist and Muslim interpretations. Muslim scholars historically contextualized this verse by highlighting the prevalent mistreatment of female orphans in society at the time. These orphans were often exploited, their wealth was misused, and they were subjected to unfair marriages driven by greed rather than genuine affection. The revelation of this verse aimed to rectify and prevent exploitative practices.⁷⁶ Some interpretations also include widowed women with children, broadening the scope of protection to encompass this vulnerable group.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Muqātil b. Sulaimān Al-Balkhī, *Tafsīr Muqātil bin Sulaimān* (Bairūt: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth, 1423).

⁷⁵ Ismā'īl b. 'Umar Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* (Riyāḍ: Dār Ṭayyibah, 1420).

⁷⁶ Al-Rāghib Al-Aṣḥāhānī, *Tafsīr al-Rāghib al-Aṣḥāhānī* (Mesir: Jāmi'ah Ṭanṭā, 1420).

⁷⁷ Abū al-Layth Al-Samarqandī, *Baḥr al-'Ulūm* (Bairūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1413).

The core of Muslim intellectuals' interpretation of the first point is the prohibition of marrying orphaned women to control their property and marrying orphans with illogical dowries. Based on this interpretation, there is no difference between Muslim intellectuals and feminists. However, the issue arises when considering the phrase "*fankihū mā ṭāba lakum min al-Nisā'*." Feminists tend to skip this phrase and instead focus on another verse, specifically verse 129 of surah al-Nisā', to address what they perceive as discriminatory and patriarchal elements regarding polygyny in the Qur'an. However, this overlooks the second point in the explanation of surah al-Nisā' 4:3, which provides a solution for those concerned about potential injustices against orphans or widows with orphans. Omitting the discussion of the second point may lead to an incomplete interpretation of the Qur'anic verse as it appears to prohibit without offering a resolution. Therefore, it is essential to consider both points for a comprehensive interpretation.

To achieve a comprehensive interpretation, it is crucial to underscore the perspectives of Muslim intellectuals regarding the second aspect of the verse's discussion. Specifically, the phrase "*fankihū mā ṭāba lakum min al-Nisā'*" serves as a solution according to Muslim scholars, addressing the prohibition against marrying orphaned women or widows with orphans. This solution advocates marrying free women.⁷⁸ The Qur'an introduced a maximum limit to marrying a free woman, effectively abolishing the previous tradition of unrestricted marriages. The phrase "*fankihū mā ṭāba lakum min al-Nisā'*" signifies a departure from prior cultural practices. This underscores Islam's commitment to elevating women's status. Initially, men could marry without limitations, but the Qur'an imposes boundaries, reflecting a shift towards greater respect and consideration for women's rights.

The Qur'an not only sets a maximum limit, but also outlines specific conditions for practicing polygyny. Fair treatment of wives is the primary requirement, emphasized in the phrase "*fain khiftum allā ta' dilū fa wāḥidah.*" This underscores that if one cannot maintain fairness among wives, marrying just one woman is sufficient.⁷⁹ In essence, Islam permits men to marry only one woman. However, if a man can maintain fairness when marrying multiple women, then polygyny is permissible for him. The issue of maintaining fairness among multiple wives becomes more nuanced upon further examination by Surah al-Nisā' 4:129, which appears to cast doubt on a man's ability to be fair when married to more than one woman. This verse suggests that achieving fairness in polygynous marriages is impossible. Consequently, based on the conditions outlined in the Quran, polygyny was deemed impermissible. Feminists often leverage this understanding to refute the allowance for polygyny in the Quran. However, this discussion falls within the realm of *ta'arūḍ fī al-Qur'ān*, where the true meaning of the verses must be explored. Upon closer examination, it is understood that Surah al-Nisā' 4:129 addresses the challenge of emotional fairness, while Surah al-Nisā' 4:3 emphasizes fairness in material provision and equitable treatment.⁸⁰

Upon reviewing the interpretations of Quranic verses by Muslim intellectuals, as utilized by feminists, it becomes evident that there is minimal disparity between the two, particularly concerning the interpreted text. However, discrepancies emerge when deriving conclusions from these interpretations. Feminists tend to draw conclusions solely from the interpreted text, without considering the verse in its entirety. In contrast, Muslim intellectuals interpret the Quran comprehensively, deriving conclusions only after examining the verse holistically. The haste in

⁷⁸ Muḥammad b. Idrīs Al-Shāfi'ī, *Tafsīr al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī* (Saudi Arabiya: Dār al-Tadmīriyah, 1427).

⁷⁹ Al-Aṣḥānī, *Tafsīr al-Rāghib al-Aṣḥānī*.

⁸⁰ Al-Samarqandī, *Baḥr al-'Ulūm*.

drawing conclusions exhibited by feminists underscores their subjective approach to Quranic interpretation, a concept vehemently criticized by Asham Ahmad.⁸¹

Conclusion

The conclusion of this article, upon revisiting Islamic feminist perspectives on the reinterpretation of the Quran, underscores the importance of comprehensively understanding the context, culture, and Arabic language when interpreting Quranic verses, particularly concerning gender issues. Biases arise when examining interpretations by classical Muslim intellectuals, who are often perceived as discriminatory against women by certain Muslim feminist groups. However, a thorough analysis of these interpretations reveals that biases and misunderstandings of cultural and linguistic contexts lead to different understandings. Misconceptions about interpretations by classical mufassirs largely stem from a lack of understanding of the Arabic language and the cultural context of that time. For example, the use of the term "mudhakar" in Arabic, sometimes translated as referring to males, actually refers to both genders. This grammatical rule in Arabic is frequently used to interpret the Quran language.

Therefore, it is crucial to consider the linguistic and cultural contexts when interpreting sacred texts. Conversely, feminists should also recognize that interpretations of the Quran may not always align with the gender equality principles they advocate. For instance, interpretations related to polygamy often emphasize the importance of fairness towards wives in practice, rather than solely prioritizing men's rights. This demonstrates that interpretations are not inherently patriarchal but vary depending on the interpreter and context. The theoretical implications of understanding Quranic verses pertaining to gender issues emphasize the importance of considering cultural context, language, and comprehensive interpretations. There is room for dialogue and a deeper understanding of feminist perspectives and traditional interpretations by integrating an understanding of classical Arab culture with the gender-equality values advocated by feminists. Thus, a more holistic and inclusive understanding of Quranic teachings can be achieved in a modern context.

References

- Abbas, Shahid, Ijaz Asghar, dan Ameer Sultan. "Evolution from Feminism to Postfeminism: Islamic Representation of Womanhood." *Research Journal of Social Science & Economics Review* 2, no. 3 (2021): 108–15. [https://doi.org/10.36902/rjsser-vol2-iss3-2021\(108-115\)](https://doi.org/10.36902/rjsser-vol2-iss3-2021(108-115)).
- Afsaruddin, Asma. *Modern Rereadings of the Qur'an Through A Gendered Lens*. London: Oxford University Press, 2023.
- Aḥmad, b. 'Ajībah. *al-Baḥr al-Madīd fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Majīd*. Bairūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2002.

⁸¹ Lenggak Tunku, Off Jalan, dan Duta Kuala, "Feminisme Islami: Suatu Kritikan terhadap Faham Keadilan Musawah 1 Conception Of Justice Md. Asham Ahmad Centre for the Study of Shari'ah , Law and Politics . Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia. No. 2, Pendahuluan Feminisme secara ringkas" 24, no. 1 (2022): 1–32.

- Meninjau Kembali Pemikiran Feminis Islam Terhadap Reinterpretasi al-Qur'an
Dwi Fidhayanti, Muhammad Muhammad, Mahbub Aunur Rofiq, Muhammad Robith Fuadi, Abdul Hakim,
Nabrisatul Chusna Bil Makkiy
- Ahmed, Mohammad Kaosar. "Islamic Feminism": Is That an Oxymoron? Common Misconception about Feminism," no. January 2009 (2019).
- Al-Aṣfahānī, Al-Rāghib. *Tafsīr al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī*. Mesir: Jāmi'ah Ṭaṭṭā, 1420.
- Al-Azhar, Majmū'ah min al-'Ulama' bi Ishraf Majma' al-Buḥūth al-Islāmiyah bi. *al-Tafsīr al-Waṣīṭ li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*. Kairo: al-Hayah al-'Āmah li Shu'un al-Maṭabi' al-Amīriyah, 1393.
- Al-Baghāwī, Al-Husain b. Mas'ūd. *Ma'ālim al-Tanzīl fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Bairūt: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1420.
- Al-Balkhī, Muqātil b. Sulaimān. *Tafsīr Muqātil bin Sulaimān*. Bairūt: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth, 1423.
- Al-Dīn, Kamāl, dan 'Abd al-Ḥāmid Muḥammad. "Qawāid Taghlīb al-Mudhakar wa al-Muannath fī al-Qur'ān." *Majallab Kuliab al-Qur'ān al-Karīm Jāmi'ah al-Qur'ān al-Karīm wa al-'Ulūm al-Islāmiyah al-Sudān*, no. 7 (2016): 308–36.
- Al-Ḥijāzī, Muḥammad Maḥmūd. *al-Tafsīr al-Wāḍiḥ*. Bairūt: Dār al-Jayl al-Jadīd, 1413.
- Al-Qāsimī, Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn. *Maḥasin al-Ta'wīl*. Bairūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1418.
- Al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn. *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*. Bairūt: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth, 1420.
- Al-Samarqandī, Abū al-Layth. *Baḥr al-'Ulūm*. Bairūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1413.
- Al-Shāfi'ī, Muḥammad b. Idrīs. *Tafsīr al-Imām al-Shāfi'ī*. Saudi Arabiya: Dār al-Tadmīriyah, 1427.
- Al-Sha'rāwī, Muḥammad Mutawallī. *Tafsīr al-Sha'rāwī*. Mesir: Akhbār al-Yawum, 1997.
- Al-Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn. *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. Kairo: Maṭba'ah Ḥijāzī, t.t.
- Al-Zayla'ī, Jamāl al-Dīn 'Abd Allāh b. Yūsuf. *Takhrīj al-Aḥādīth wa al-Āthār al-Wāqī'ah fī Tafsīr al-Kashshāf li Zamakhsarī*. Riyāḍ: Dār Ibn Khuzaimah, 1414.
- AMIJEE, FATEMA. "How to Be a Feminist Muslim." *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, 2022, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2022.9>.
- Anam, Wahidul, dan Mubaidi Sulaeman. "Reinterprestasi Hadis Mesoginik Kepemimpinan Wanita Dalam Musnad Ahmad Perspektif Maqasid Al-Shariah." *AL QUDS: Jurnal Studi Alquran dan Hadis* 6, no. 3 (28 Desember 2022). <https://doi.org/10.29240/alquds.v6i3.5172>.
- b. 'Āshūr, Muḥammad Ṭāhir. *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tamwīr*. Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisīyah li al-Nashr, 1984.
- Badran, Margot. *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*. England: Oneworld, 2011.
- Bahar, Ruqayya. "Islamic Feminism as a Rising Field of Inquiry in Contemporary Times." *South Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 02, no. 02 (2021): 101–10. <https://doi.org/10.48165/sajssh.2021.2209>.
- Barlas, Asma. "Globalização da igualdade: a mulher," 2012, 201–28.

- . “Muslim Women and Sexual Oppression: Reading Liberation from the Quran.” *Macalester International* 10, no. 1 (2001): 117–46.
- . “Still Quarrelling over the Quran: Five Interventions.” *ISIM Review: International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World* 20, no. 1 (2007): 32–33. <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/17203> Note:
- Basri, Basri, dan Muhammad Muhammad. “Rethinking Religious Moderation Through the Study of Indonesian Exegesis: A Study of Tafsir Al-Azhar By Hamka.” *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Humaniora* 21, no. 1 (2023): 41–58. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18592/khazanah.v21i1.8737>.
- Elhinawy (she/her/hers), Hind. “The role of difference in feminist transnational solidarity: secular Muslim feminists in the United Kingdom and France.” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 25, no. 4 (8 Agustus 2023): 593–614. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2023.2206828>.
- Ghazanfari, A., S. D. Ramandi, dan A. Mirahmadi. “Analysis of the Readings of Contemporary Commentators and Researchers of the Qur’an on the Social Status of Women.” *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding*, 9, no. 4 (2022): 355–372.
- Ghosh, H. A. “Dilemmas of Islamic and Secular Feminists and Feminisms.” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 9, no. 3 (2008): 99–116.
- Hamzah, Amri. *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan*. Malang: Literasi Nusantara, 2020.
- Hassan, Riffat. “Rights of Women Within Islamic Communities.” *Religious Human Rights in Global Perspective*, 1996, 361–86.
- Hawwā, Sa‘īd. *al-Asās fī al-Tafsīr*. Kairo: Dār al-Salām, 1424.
- Hyder, Shafaque. “Global rise of Islamic feminism and its status.” *Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied and Basic Subjects* 1, no. 2 (2021): 1–13.
- Ibn Kathīr, Ismā‘īl b. ‘Umar. *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Aẓīm*. Riyāḍ: Dār Ṭayyibah, 1420.
- Marnissi, Fatimah. *The Veil and the Male Elite, A Feminist Interpretation of Women’s Rights in Islam*. Inggirs: Perseus Books, 1999.
- Mirza, Qudsia. “Islamic Feminism and gender equality.” *International Institute of the Study of Islam in the Modern World* 21 (2008): 30–32.
- Moghissi, Haideh. “Islamic feminism revisited.” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31, no. 1 (2011): 76–84. <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-2010-054>.
- Muhammad, Muhammad. “Al-Ummi Dalam Al-Qur’an; Studi Tafsir Tematik Terhadap Literasi Nabi Muhammad.” *Tribakti: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman* 31, no. 1 (2020): 49–66. <https://doi.org/10.33367/tribakti.v31i1.963>.
- . *Polemik Argumen atas Autentisitas Teks al-Qur’an Perspektif Ahl al-Sunnah*. Disunting oleh Luttfi Fatahillah. I. Bandung: Bitread Publishing PT. Lontar Digital Asia, 2020.
- Muhammad, Muhammad, Syarifatul Marwiyah, dan Ainur Rohmadani. “Pluralism in the Qur’an: Critical Analysis of Surah al-Baqarah 2: 62 Interpretation in Indonesia.” Dalam *4th Annual*

Meninjau Kembali Pemikiran Feminis Islam Terhadap Reinterpretasi al-Qur'an
Dwi Fidhayanti, Muhammad Muhammad, Mahbub Aunur Rofiq, Muhammad Robith Fuadi, Abdul Hakim,
Nabrisatul Chusna Bil Makkiiy

International Conference on Language, Literature and Media (AICOLLIM 2022), disunting oleh Rohmani Nur Indah, Miftahul Huda, Irham Irham, Muzakki Afifuddin, Masrokhin Masrokhin, dan Deny Efiti Nur Rakhmawati, 725:609–17. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*. Paris: Atlantis Press SARL, 2023. https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-002-2_57.

Online, Cambridge Collections. “12 Women’s readings of the Qur’ān,” 2021, 255–72.

Osman, Ghada. “Back to Basic: The Discourse of Muslim Feminism in Contemporary Egypt.” *Women and Language* 26, no. 1 (2003): 73.

Philosophy, Islamic, Asma Abdu, dan Ambreen Salahuddin. “Implications of Feminist Thought on Understanding Qur’ān: An Analytical Study” 3, no. 2 (2021): 41–50.

Rani, Zamila Abdul. “What Is Islamic Feminism? Promoting Cultural Change and Gender Equality Introduction: Feminism and Islamic Feminism,” no. 2 (2015): 978–967.

Retnani, Siti Dana Panti. “Feminisme Dalam Perkembangan Aliran Pemikiran Dan Hukum Di Indonesia.” *Jurnal Ilmu Hukum: ALETHEA* 1, no. 1 (2017): 95–109. <https://doi.org/10.24246/alethea.vol1.no1.p95-109>.

Sadiq Khān, Muḥammad. *Faṭḥ al-Bayān fī Maqāsid al-Qur’ān*. Bairūt: al-Maktabah al-‘Aṣriyah, 1992.

Sarwar, Azam, dan Hong Zeng. “Breaking free from patriarchal appropriation of sacred texts: An Islamic feminist critique of Bol.” *Asian Journal of Women’s Studies* 27, no. 4 (2 Oktober 2021): 465–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2021.1981526>.

Sayyid Ṭantāwī, Muḥammad. *al-Tafsīr al-Wasīṭ li al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*. Kairo: Dār Nahḍah, 1997.

Shahin, Farah. “Islamic Feminism and Hegemonic Discourses on Faith and Gender in Islam.” *International Journal of Islam in Asia* 1, no. 1 (17 Desember 2020): 27–48. <https://doi.org/10.1163/25899996-01010003>.

Sulaeman, Mubaidi. “Reinterpretasi Hadist Mesoginik Tentang Penciptaan Wanita Dari Tulang Rusuk Laki-Laki.” *El-Faqih: Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Hukum Islam* 6, no. 2 (27 Oktober 2020): 18–37.

Tunku, Langgak, Off Jalan, dan Duta Kuala. “Feminisme Islami: Suatu Kritikan terhadap Faham Keadilan Musawah 1 Conception Of Justice Md . Asham Ahmad Centre for the Study of Shari’ah , Law and Politics . Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia. No. 2, Pendahuluan Feminisme secara ringkasn” 24, no. 1 (2022): 1–32.

Wadud, Amina. “Can one critique cancel all previous efforts?” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 32, no. 2 (2016): 130–34. <https://doi.org/10.2979/jfemistudreli.32.2.21>.

———. “Foreword.” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 10, no. 4 (2008): 435–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616740802393858>.

———. “Islam Beyond Patriarchy Through Gender Inclusive Qur’anic Analysis.” *Wanted: Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family*, 2009, 95–112.

———. “Reflections on islamic feminist exegesis of the qur’an.” *Religions* 12, no. 7 (2021): 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12070497>.

———. “Reflections on Islamic Feminist Exegesis of the Qur’an.” *Religions* 12, no. 7 (Juli 2021): 497. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12070497>.

Wadud, Amina, Kecia Ali, dan Farid Esack. “History and Politics of Islamic Feminism: A Comparison of the Works on Islam and Gender by.” *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* 18, no. 2 (2012): 89–107.

Winkel, Heidemarie. “Islamic Feminism. Thinking Gender Justice as a Religious Knowledge Practice.” Dalam *Exploring Islam beyond Orientalism and Occidentalism: Sociological Approaches*, disunting oleh Christel Gärtner dan Heidemarie Winkel, 179–210. Veröffentlichungen Der Sektion Religionssoziologie Der Deutschen Gesellschaft Für Soziologie. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-33239-6_8.