



REVISITING QUR'ANIC VISIONS OF EQUALITY: A HERMENEUTICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION DISCOURSE

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to reexamine Qur'anic verses concerning women through the lens of philosophical hermeneutics and critical gender philosophy, with the objective of constructing an emancipatory narrative that affirms the principles of equality and freedom for women in Islam. The analysis focuses on key verses such as Q.S. Al-Ahzab [33]:35, Q.S. Al-Nisa [4]:1 and [4]:34, Q.S. Al-Tawbah [9]:71, Q.S. Al-Hujurat [49]:13, and Q.S. Al-Isra [17]:70. Employing a library research method, this study analyzes primary sources (the Qur'an and both classical and contemporary tafsir) alongside secondary literature, including the works of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, Judith Butler, Nancy Fraser, among others. The analytical framework integrates the concepts of *fusion of horizons* and *distanciation* to facilitate a critical rereading of the texts, while also applying theories of performativity and recognition justice to deconstruct entrenched patriarchal biases in interpretation. The findings reveal that the Qur'an offers a robust ethical and theological framework for articulating an emancipatory theology grounded in the principles of *rahmah* (compassion), *karāmah insāniyyah* (human dignity), and *ta'dil* (justice). As such, women in the Qur'an are positioned not merely as objects of legal discourse, but as autonomous ethical and social subjects. A justice-oriented reinterpretation, therefore, is imperative for the development of an inclusive, transformative Islamic paradigm that is responsive to contemporary gender equality discourses.

Keywords: Philosophical Hermeneutics; Feminist Exegesis; Emancipatory Theology; Human Dignity; Gender Equality

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji ulang ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an yang berkaitan dengan perempuan melalui pendekatan hermeneutika filosofis dan filsafat gender kritis, guna membangun narasi emansipatif yang menegaskan prinsip kesetaraan dan kebebasan perempuan dalam perspektif Islam. Fokus analisis diarahkan pada sejumlah ayat utama, antara lain Q.S. Al-Ahzab [33]:35, Q.S. Al-Nisa [4]:1 dan [4]:34, Q.S. Al-Tawbah [9]:71, Q.S. Al-Hujurat [49]:13, serta Q.S. Al-Isra [17]:70. Metode yang digunakan adalah studi kepustakaan dengan menelaah teks-teks primer (Al-Qur'an dan tafsir klasik maupun kontemporer) serta literatur sekunder yang mencakup pemikiran Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, Judith Butler, Nancy Fraser, dan tokoh-tokoh lainnya. Analisis dilakukan melalui pendekatan *fusion of horizons* dan *distanciation* untuk membuka ruang interpretasi yang kritis terhadap teks, disertai penerapan teori performativitas dan keadilan pengakuan guna mendekonstruksi bias patriarkal yang mengendap dalam tafsir. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa Al-Qur'an mengandung kerangka etik dan teologis yang kuat dalam mendukung terbentuknya teologi emansipatif yang berakar pada prinsip *rahmah*, *karamah insaniyyah*, dan *ta'dil*. Dengan demikian, perempuan dalam Al-Qur'an tidak hanya diposisikan sebagai objek hukum, tetapi sebagai subjek etis dan sosial yang otonom. Reinterpretasi berbasis keadilan menjadi keniscayaan dalam membangun paradigma Islam yang inklusif, transformatif, dan responsif terhadap dinamika kesetaraan gender kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: Hermeneutika Filosofis; Tafsir Feminis; Teologi Emansipatif; Karamah Insaniyyah; Kesetaraan Gender



INTRODUCTION

The study of gender relations in the Qur'an has undergone a significant epistemological shift, paralleling the growing scholarly attention toward gender-justice-oriented exegesis. Over the past few decades, hermeneutical and feminist approaches to the sacred text have gained prominence within academic discourse. Qur'anic hermeneutics, as an interpretive framework, opens up new possibilities for exploring the nuanced meanings of verses addressing women and gender equality. Scholars such as Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas have pioneered transformative readings that foreground *musawah* (equality) and ethical justice as intrinsic Islamic principles (Noor, 2024). Their works simultaneously challenge entrenched patriarchal narratives that dominate classical tafsir traditions.

Feminist tafsir is not merely a corrective to androcentric interpretations, but a constructive theological project that affirms women's agency within Islamic ethics. These interpretations transcend historical bias by reconstructing a theological vision that is inclusive and emancipatory (Bakhshizadeh, 2023). In this regard, the intersection of gender philosophy and Islamic ethics becomes critical in uncovering the liberatory potential embedded in the Qur'anic message. Re-readings of verses such as Qur'an 33:35 and 9:71 demonstrate that the Qur'an inherently upholds values of equality and social partnership between men and women (Abou-Bakr, 2020).

A core issue in the study of gender in tafsir is the dominance of normatively legalistic approaches, which often portray women as passive juridical entities. Classical exegetes like al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī frequently interpreted gender-related verses through a patriarchal lens that affirmed male superiority. Verses such as Qur'an 4:34

exemplify how textual meanings were shaped by historical contexts and patriarchal values, thereby perpetuating gender hierarchies in contemporary Muslim societies (Dutta, 2022). Consequently, the Qur'an's universal humanist message is often reduced to a justification of asymmetric power relations.

Recent scholarship increasingly advocates for an interdisciplinary methodology that synthesizes philosophical hermeneutics and gender theory. Such an approach allows for more reflective, context-sensitive interpretations capable of deconstructing hidden structures of domination within layers of exegesis. By integrating hermeneutic theories from thinkers like Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur with feminist insights from Judith Butler and Nancy Fraser, tafsir can be repositioned as a tool of emancipation rather than a medium for the reproduction of norms (Duderija, 2020). This intellectual synthesis facilitates a dynamic dialogue between text and evolving social realities.

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer emphasizes the role of the reader's historical situatedness—*prejudices* and *horizons*—in shaping interpretive understanding. This is profoundly relevant to Qur'anic gender hermeneutics, as it enables a reappraisal of equality that transcends rigid legalism. Paul Ricoeur, through his *Interpretation Theory*, offers a deconstructive lens to uncover latent meanings concealed beneath literalist readings. Applied to contested verses such as Qur'an 4:34, this approach reorients interpretation toward notions of mutual responsibility and ethical obligation, rather than gendered domination (Barlas, 2023).

In *Qur'an and Woman*, Amina Wadud establishes a theology that positions women as spiritual and moral agents, equal to men in their ethical and religious capacities. She argues that the Qur'an does not privilege male superiority but rather emphasizes parity

in faith, deeds, and social responsibility. Asma Barlas, in *Believing Women in Islam*, reinforces this egalitarian framework by advocating for a Qur'anic hermeneutics rooted in divine justice and human dignity. Together, they offer a progressive theological vision grounded in Qur'anic ethics (Noor, 2024).

The contributions of Judith Butler and Nancy Fraser are likewise indispensable for understanding the socio-discursive dynamics within tafsir. Butler's *Gender Trouble* critiques the essentialist construction of gender, advancing the notion of performativity—a perspective aligned with the deconstruction of patriarchal significations in Qur'anic interpretation. Meanwhile, Fraser's *Justice Interruptus* introduces a dual-dimensional approach to justice—redistribution and recognition—that can serve as an analytical lens for interpreting gender relations in the Qur'an as simultaneously ethical and political (Rofiq & Tidar, 2024).

While contemporary exegetical studies have made significant strides toward more equitable readings of the Qur'an, much of the scholarship remains confined to *fiqh*-oriented paradigms, emphasizing legal dimensions at the expense of philosophical and ethical inquiries. Legal-formalistic tafsir often fails to excavate the deeper normative aspirations embedded in gender-related verses, particularly in the face of socio-historical transformations and rising awareness of gender justice (Bakhshizadeh, 2023). As such, the emancipatory narrative of the Qur'an remains under-articulated in academic discourses.

Moreover, there is a noticeable gap in systematic efforts to integrate philosophical hermeneutics (Gadamer and Ricoeur) with gender theory (Butler and Fraser) into a cohesive methodological framework. This intersection is crucial for constructing a critical interpretive approach capable of

addressing contemporary challenges surrounding gender justice in Islam. Much of the existing literature focuses on critiquing traditional exegesis without constructing an affirmative and transformative theological narrative (Abou-Bakr, 2020). This study seeks to address that lacuna by proposing a comprehensive and reformative interpretive paradigm.

This research aims to analyze Qur'anic verses concerning women's equality and freedom through the lens of philosophical hermeneutics. By bridging the thought of Gadamer and Ricoeur with contemporary feminist philosophy—including the works of Butler and Fraser—this study endeavors to reconstitute the Qur'anic image of women as spiritual, social, and ethical subjects. Beyond mere apologetics, this approach seeks to reconstruct a theology of equality rooted in the ethical imperatives of the Qur'an.

The scholarly novelty of this study lies in three key aspects: first, the integration of philosophical hermeneutics with gender theory in Qur'anic exegesis; second, the construction of a feminist theological narrative that is not only defensive but also constructive and emancipatory; and third, the formulation of a conceptual framework for an emancipative theology grounded in the Qur'anic text. The scope of this research encompasses critical analysis of key verses that articulate messages of equality (Qur'an 33:35, 4:1, 4:34, 9:71, 49:13), along with comparative engagement between classical and contemporary interpretations. Ultimately, this study contributes to a more inclusive, justice-oriented vision of Islamic theology.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach grounded in philosophical hermeneutics and critical gender philosophy as its core methodological framework. The selection of

this approach is driven by the need to excavate the deep-seated meanings embedded in Qur'anic verses concerning women, particularly in relation to issues of equality and autonomy. Philosophical hermeneutics, as developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer (2024), provides the epistemological foundation for this inquiry, emphasizing the dialogical interplay between the revelatory text and contemporary ethical horizons through the concept of *fusion of horizons*. Within this paradigm, the Qur'an is not treated as a static or closed text, but rather as a dynamic field of meaning that is continuously shaped through the interpretive relationship between the reader and their socio-historical context.

Complementing this is a critical gender philosophical approach, which interrogates the dominative structures that have historically shaped Qur'anic exegesis. Drawing upon Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and Nancy Fraser's notion of the politics of recognition, this study critically assesses how female subjectivity has often been marginalized within religious and symbolic structures. These theoretical perspectives allow for a re-examination of interpretive traditions that may have reinforced patriarchal norms under the guise of theological authority.

The primary objects of analysis are selected Qur'anic verses that possess strong relevance to gender equality, including Q.S. Al-Ahzab [33]:35, Q.S. Al-Nisa [4]:1 and [4]:34, Q.S. Al-Tawbah [9]:71, Q.S. Al-Hujurat [49]:13, and Q.S. Al-Isra [17]:70. Supplementary primary sources consist of classical tafsir works by exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, and Ibn Kathīr, as well as contemporary feminist interpretations authored by Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, and Ziba Mir-Hosseini. Secondary data are drawn from verified scholarly literature on hermeneutics (notably Gadamer and Paul

Ricoeur) and gender philosophy (Butler, Fraser, and de Beauvoir), accessed via reputable academic databases such as JSTOR, Scopus, and Google Scholar.

Data collection is conducted through documentary analysis, which involves the systematic selection of relevant verses, thematic classification of classical and feminist exegesis, and exploration of philosophical literature to support both normative and structural critique. The data analysis proceeds in three stages. First, philosophical hermeneutics is employed to interpret the textual meanings through *fusion of horizons* and *distanciation* (Ricoeur, 1981), enabling a critical distancing from conventional readings. Second, critical gender analysis is applied, utilizing Butler's framework of socially constructed gender and performativity, alongside Fraser's theory of marginal identity recognition. This stage facilitates the deconstruction of patriarchal narratives within classical interpretations while simultaneously identifying the emancipatory potential of the Qur'anic text.

The third stage involves conceptual synthesis aimed at constructing an alternative narrative of women in the Qur'an as spiritually, ethically, and socially equal subjects. The central parameters for this study include the identification of patriarchal bias within exegetical traditions, the presence of linguistic and narrative structures that affirm gender parity, and the extent to which both text and interpretation recognize women as autonomous agents. The structural parallelism found in Q.S. Al-Ahzab [33]:35 and the portrayal of women as *awliyā'* (protective allies) in Q.S. Al-Tawbah [9]:71 serve as key indicators of substantive equality. In contrast, the interpretation of "*qawwāmūn*" in Q.S. Al-Nisa [4]:34 within classical exegesis becomes the focal point for critique, as it epitomizes the entrenchment of discursive male dominance. This verse is

reinterpreted through the ethical framework of Qur'anic values—*rahmah* (compassion), *karamah* (dignity), and *ta'dil* (justice)—as developed by Syafiq and aligned with the broader aims of Islamic liberation theology.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reconstructing the Meaning of Equality in Qur'anic Emancipatory Verses

The verse Q.S. *Al-Ahzab* [33]:35 stands as a pivotal textual affirmation of gender parity within the Qur'an, explicitly aligning men and women in terms of spiritual and ethical accountability. The use of paired terms—*al-muslimin wa al-muslimat*, *al-mu'minin wa al-mu'minat*, and so forth—reveals a deliberate linguistic symmetry, underscoring an unequivocal spiritual equality unconditioned by biological sex. This structural parallelism affirms that in the vertical relationship between the human and the Divine, both men and women hold equivalent potential for divine reward, forgiveness, and honor. Interpreted through a Gadamerian hermeneutic lens, the verse exemplifies a *fusion of horizons*—an interpretive convergence between the historical context of the text and the contemporary reader's horizon, particularly in the context of gender justice (Noor, 2024).

Such a hermeneutic approach transcends the limitations of literalist exegesis, inviting instead a rearticulation of meaning within the frameworks of ethics and justice. Accordingly, Q.S. *Al-Ahzab* [33]:35 is not merely descriptive, but normative: it articulates foundational Islamic values of *musawah* (equality), *karamah* (dignity), and *hurriyyah* (freedom). Amina Wadud reinforces this interpretation by highlighting that the symmetrical construction of the verse affirms the full recognition of women as autonomous spiritual subjects.

A similar emancipatory ethic is found in Q.S. *Al-Tawbah* [9]:71, wherein the Qur'an

declares that believing men and women are *awliya'* (mutual allies) to one another. This verse moves beyond spiritual parity to emphasize active social solidarity and reciprocal responsibility. It affirms not only faith but also social action, thereby legitimizing the full participation of women in public and communal affairs. Further, Q.S. *Al-Nisa* [4]:1 lays an ontological foundation for human equality, affirming that all humans originate from a single soul (*nafsin wahidah*), thus establishing an existential parity between the sexes.

Despite these egalitarian themes, classical exegetical traditions often underemphasized the gender-equal dimensions of such verses, focusing primarily on juridical or textual interpretations while overlooking their ethical and emancipatory implications. In contrast, contemporary interpretive frameworks—exemplified by the works of Wadud and Barlas—redirect the exegetical trajectory from legal-normative readings toward more inclusive, spiritual-ethical narratives (Adam, Haddade, and Damis, 2022). Their work demonstrates the potential of Qur'anic texts to serve as theological foundations for gender justice within Islam.

The integration of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics further enriches this interpretive turn. The notion of *Wirkungsgeschichte*—the effective history of a text—reveals that interpretations of gender in the Qur'an are not ideologically neutral but shaped by historically contingent patriarchal frameworks. As van Wyk (2023) argues, past readings are sociocultural constructions, not absolute truths embedded within the text itself. Thus, contemporary re-readings grounded in a commitment to justice and equality are not only legitimate but necessary in the evolving discourse of Qur'anic interpretation (Digarizki, 2021).

Recent studies lend empirical support to these interpretive claims. For instance, Utami Ginting and Lestari Dara Cinta (2024) emphasize that the Qur'an contains a substantive ethic of justice, which can inform gender-equitable ethical frameworks within Islamic thought. These findings reinforce the assertion that the Qur'an not only accommodates but actively legitimizes principles of women's emancipation, while simultaneously critiquing the patriarchal constructs that have historically shaped exegetical traditions (Journal, 2017).

Accordingly, verses promoting *musawah* in the Qur'an should not be perceived merely as static normative elements but as dynamic, narrative-rich texts with transformative potential. When engaged through Gadamerian hermeneutics, these verses facilitate a dialogical merging of historical textuality with the aspirations of modern readers advocating gender equity. This process confers religious legitimacy upon the struggle for gender justice, positioning women not as passive recipients but as active agents within the spiritual and sociopolitical spheres of Islam.

This study contributes meaningfully to the broader discourse on Qur'anic exegesis by proposing an interdisciplinary framework that synthesizes philosophical hermeneutics and gender theory. It responds to a lacuna in current literature, which remains largely fragmented between feminist critiques and traditional theological inquiry. The research demonstrates that a constructive integration of these approaches yields deeper, contextually responsive interpretations of the sacred text.

Ultimately, reconstructing the meaning of gender-equal verses in the Qur'an offers a vital conceptual basis for gender-conscious public policy, inclusive Islamic education, and the spiritual empowerment of Muslim women. Such an approach reimagines the

Qur'an not as a restrictive legal code but as a liberating scriptural source grounded in the ethical values of *musawah*, *hurriyyah*, and *karamah*. In doing so, it charts a path toward a theology of liberation that is both authentically Islamic and socially transformative.

Patriarchal Exegesis and Gender Philosophy Critique of Classical Traditions

The verse Q.S. al-Nisā' [4]:34 is among the most frequently cited Qur'anic texts used to justify hierarchical gender relations within Islamic discourse. Classical exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, and Ibn Kathīr interpreted the phrase *al-rijālū qawwāmūna 'ala al-nisā'* as a manifestation of male superiority over women. Their interpretations emphasize male authority, guardianship, and regulation of women, a framework deeply embedded in the patriarchal cultural milieu in which these scholars lived and wrote (Holistik and Qur 2024). These interpretations have become deeply entrenched in Islamic socio-religious discourse, perpetuating gender inequality in both religious practice and family law.

However, the hermeneutical philosophy of Paul Ricoeur offers a critical lens through the concept of *distanciation*, which introduces a necessary gap between the text and the reader to mitigate historical bias. This methodological distancing enables a re-reading of texts traditionally sanctified by classical interpretations, uncovering the extent to which cultural, political, and ideological factors have shaped the meanings ascribed to scripture. In the case of Q.S. al-Nisā' [4]:34, such an approach reveals that the dominant, hierarchical reading is not inherent to the divine message but rather a historical construct imposed upon the text.

Classical tafsir was heavily influenced by the masculinist structures of pre-modern

societies, where women were relegated to domestic and subordinate roles. The patriarchal order embedded in these historical social configurations informed the epistemological frameworks through which exegetes interpreted gender-related verses (Arsal, Busyro, and Imran 2020). This reflects a form of interpretive bias wherein prevailing gender norms were projected onto the Qur'anic text.

Contemporary gender philosophy, particularly Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, offers a compelling critique of patriarchal exegetical paradigms. Butler argues that gender identity is not ontologically fixed but is constructed through repeated social performances. Thus, when classical exegetes interpret *qawwāmūn* as a divine endorsement of male dominance, they are, in effect, reproducing socio-cultural constructs rather than objectively explicating the text. Roodsaz (2024) supports this view, asserting that deconstructing gender binaries allows for a more inclusive and pluralistic reading of religious texts.

Feminist exegetes such as Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas have demonstrated that ethical and just interpretations of the Qur'an are not only possible but also methodologically sound. Wadud reinterprets *qawwāmūn* as denoting relational responsibility rather than structural domination. Meanwhile, Barlas emphasizes the critical distinction between divine text and its historical interpretations—an effort to reclaim the Qur'an's ethical authority from patriarchal distortions (Elena and Lorenzo 2024). These interpretive strategies align with Islam's foundational commitment to substantive justice and the equal dignity of all human beings (Rozy 2023).

This analysis underscores that the dominance structure found in classical tafsir is not inherent to the Qur'anic text itself but is a product of the patriarchal interpretive

horizons in which those readings emerged. This conclusion resonates with the egalitarian ethos of Q.S. al-Aḥzāb [33]:35, which affirms the spiritual equality of men and women. When read through the dual lenses of hermeneutics and gender theory, both verses reveal a Qur'anic vision fundamentally grounded in justice and gender equity—one that has been obscured by androcentric exegetical traditions.

Scholarly critiques of patriarchal exegesis are thus essential for the reconstruction of Islamic interpretive methodology. By integrating Ricoeur's hermeneutics and Butler's performativity theory, a new discursive space is created—one that is more attuned to contemporary demands for social justice. This epistemological shift paves the way for tafsir that is ethical, participatory, and contextually relevant. Challenging classical interpretations should not be seen as an act of subversion but rather as an effort to revitalize the Qur'an's moral message in accordance with the exigencies of the modern world.

Such approaches are liberatory in nature. They enable Muslim communities to transcend interpretations that marginalize women and instead support more equitable religious policies. In the realm of education, for example, a Qur'anically grounded and ethically inclusive tafsir can serve as a foundational pillar for developing progressive Islamic curricula. This would affirm women's rightful participation in public religious, social, and political spheres, in line with the inclusive vision articulated in Q.S. al-Tawbah [9]:71. Ultimately, the reconstruction of tafsir is not merely an academic enterprise; it is a spiritual and sociopolitical movement toward realizing Islam as *rahmatan li-l-'ālamīn*—a mercy to all of humanity, free from gender-based discrimination.

Women as Ethical and Social Subjects in the Qur'an

The Qur'anic verse Q.S. Al-Tawbah [9]:71 explicitly affirms that believing men and women are *awliya' ba'dubum li ba'd*—protectors and allies of one another. This declaration marks a profound shift in the gender paradigm, transitioning from hierarchical subordination to mutual partnership. It reframes gender dynamics within Islamic ethics by recognizing women not as peripheral participants confined to the domestic or spiritual domain, but as integral social and political agents within the Muslim community. As Darzi (2023) argues, this verse does not merely include women in society's moral framework—it affirms their embeddedness in the very fabric of Islamic social ethics.

The Qur'an further reinforces this paradigm through its portrayal of key female figures such as the Queen of Sheba, Maryam, the mother of Musa, and the wife of Pharaoh. These women are not passive characters; rather, they embody agency, wisdom, and moral resolve. Interpreted through Paul Ricoeur's framework of *narrative identity*, their stories illustrate that identity is constituted through active engagement in one's own narrative. These women do not merely inhabit the Qur'anic text—they shape its unfolding through their ethical choices and social actions (Ardiansyah et al., 2024).

Maryam, for instance, emerges not only as a paragon of spiritual purity but as a courageous figure who confronts social stigma. The Queen of Sheba is depicted as a discerning and diplomatic leader in her interactions with Prophet Sulayman. The mother of Musa and the wife of Pharaoh exercise profound moral agency within politically fraught circumstances, demonstrating that women's ethical decisions can have historical and revelatory significance. Amina Wadud has rightly

emphasized that such portrayals affirm the legitimacy of women as both spiritual and social subjects in Islam—equal to men in moral capacity and accountability.

Classical exegetical traditions, however, often marginalize these narratives, reducing the roles of women to those of mothers and wives. A re-examination of these texts through the lens of *narrative identity* opens a pathway for reinterpretation—one that foregrounds female agency and moral complexity. Ricoeur's hermeneutic model allows us to see that women in the Qur'an are not merely enacting divine commands; they are actively articulating ethical subjectivity through conscious decision-making and reflection (Frandsen, Pedersen, and Agerskov, 2020).

Moreover, the notion of *ethical subjectivity* within Islamic texts illuminates how women are portrayed as capable of autonomous moral reasoning. As Nielsen et al. (2023) argue, Qur'anic female figures frequently confront complex ethical dilemmas and demonstrate the capacity to choose actions aligned with justice and human dignity. This suggests that Islamic morality is not gender-determined but is instead grounded in rational discernment and spiritual accountability, open to all moral agents regardless of gender.

In this context, Q.S. Al-Tawbah [9]:71 assumes strategic significance. It is not merely a call for social cooperation; it is a theological assertion of women's integral role within the moral architecture of the *ummah*. Women are not simply "accompanied"—they *accompany*, contributing to a reciprocal ecosystem of shared responsibility and support. This perspective moves beyond literalist interpretations that position women as secondary to men and challenges reductive patriarchal readings of the text (Mainiyo, 2023).

This analysis reinforces earlier scholarly arguments that the Qur'an substantively advances the principle of spiritual and social equality between genders. While Q.S. Al-Ahzab [33]:35 linguistically and theologically affirms gender parity, and Q.S. Al-Nisa [4]:34 invites critical reflection on patriarchal structures, Q.S. Al-Tawbah [9]:71 complements these by illustrating women's active participation in communal ethical life.

Academically, such a reading enriches contemporary exegetical approaches that reposition women as historical agents in the narrative of revelation, rather than as passive recipients. Ricoeur's *narrative identity* offers not only a philosophical lens for textual interpretation but also reinforces the argument that women's Islamic identity is constituted through action, reflection, and participation in ethical Islamic projects.

Practically, these findings have important implications for Islamic education, family law reform, and the empowerment of women in religious institutions. By amplifying Qur'anic narratives that affirm women as ethical and social subjects, Muslim communities can move toward a gender justice paradigm that is not in tension with revelation but rooted in it. This perspective also offers a theological foundation for reevaluating public policies that have historically overlooked the moral and civic capacities of women in religious and national life.

In sum, the integration of Ricoeur's hermeneutics, the concept of ethical subjectivity, and the representation of women in the Qur'an provides a robust theological and ethical framework for an inclusive and gender-equitable Qur'anic hermeneutic. These narratives are not merely inspirational; they are theological sources of emancipation and social justice.

Towards an Emancipatory Theology: Formulating a Qur'anic Gender Ethic

Qur'an 17:70 declares, "*Indeed, We have honored the children of Adam*" (*wa laqad karramnā banī Ādam*), affirming the intrinsic dignity of all human beings without distinction based on gender. This verse serves as a theological cornerstone for articulating the principle of *karāmah insāniyyah*—human dignity—as the moral foundation of an emancipatory theology in Islam. Within the Qur'anic worldview, human worth is not contingent upon biological sex, social status, or cultural background, but is instead rooted in moral and spiritual capacity, as well as the existential responsibility of humans as stewards (*khalīfah*) of the earth. This hermeneutical entry point offers a robust basis for constructing a gender ethic that is just, inclusive, and grounded in *rahmah* (compassion) and *ta'dīl* (justice).

This Qur'anic ethical framework resonates with Nancy Fraser's critical theory, particularly her emphasis on justice not merely as equitable distribution of resources, but also as symbolic recognition of marginalized identities. In the field of Qur'anic exegesis, women's identities have often been eclipsed or diminished by patriarchal interpretive traditions that dominate Islamic discourse. Hence, recognition of *karāmah* must not be confined to the spiritual plane alone; it must be embedded in the socio-political and institutional architectures that shape lived realities.

The ethic of *rahmah*—as encapsulated in Qur'an 21:107, "*We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to all the worlds*"—furnishes a normative compass for Islamic moral reasoning. It foregrounds compassion, empathy, and collective responsibility as core values in Islamic teachings. This principle propels a hermeneutic of the Qur'an oriented toward *maṣlaḥah* (public good) and

preferential option for the oppressed. Within this frame, women—often relegated to the peripheries of religious and social structures—must be re-centered as full ethical subjects. Such an approach does not merely defend women's inclusion but calls for a transformative and participatory theological reimagination.

An emancipatory theology in Islam rests upon the confluence of three interdependent pillars: the Qur'anic ethical triad of *rahmah*, *ta'dil*, and *karamah*; Islamic liberation theology; and Nancy Fraser's theory of justice. Fraser's twin concepts of *recognition* and *redistribution* are particularly vital for re-examining gender dynamics within Islamic thought. Inequality is not solely the result of denied rights but also of the systematic erasure of women as moral and social agents. Within Muslim feminist discourse, Fraser offers a critical lens through which to understand how power is reproduced through symbolic and cultural structures (Zaharin, 2022; Saffari, 2023).

Concurrently, Islamic liberation theology, as pioneered by Asghar Ali Engineer and developed by contemporary scholars such as Sarnoto, offers a spiritually grounded critique of structural oppression. Here, exegesis is not treated as an ahistorical exercise but as an ethical endeavor that weds faith with social justice (Sarnoto, Rahmawati, & Hayatina, 2021). Qur'anic verses are interpreted through the lived experiences of marginalized communities—including women—who have endured both symbolic and institutional forms of subjugation.

The ethic of *rahmah* deepens this framework by positioning empathy and compassion as the moral substratum of interpretation. This is crucial for cultivating a hermeneutic that transcends legalistic rigidity and becomes responsive to real human suffering. *Rahmah* serves as a moral compass, enabling exegetes to discern divine intent

amidst complex social realities. As articulated in the works of Chaudhry (2023), such a reading strategy enables the Qur'an to become a living document—one that speaks to the ethical and emotional exigencies of contemporary life. In this sense, an emancipatory theology emerges not merely from intellectual reflection, but from an ethical and emotional commitment to human dignity.

Academically, this formulation contributes significantly to the advancement of modern Islamic theology by bridging the revelatory text with contemporary socio-ethical contexts. It envisions the Qur'an not as a tool of legitimation for patriarchal structures, but as a transformative source of ethical liberation. Emancipatory theology integrates spirituality, ethics, and social struggle into a coherent value system aligned with the Islamic vision of *rahmatan li'l-'alamīn*—a mercy to all creation.

Practically, this framework holds promise for gender-responsive policy formulation, Islamic family law reform, and the development of progressive curricula in Islamic education. It also offers a compelling theological grounding for advocacy movements that advance women's rights in Muslim communities. By foregrounding the principles of *rahmah*, *karamah*, and *ta'dil* as pillars of Qur'anic ethics, Muslim societies can reconstruct gender relations along lines that are more just, humane, and holistic. A revelation-based emancipatory theology is thus not merely an academic project—it is a spiritual and sociopolitical pathway toward the transformation of the ummah, toward a society that is not only structurally just but also infused with compassion and grounded in a full recognition of human dignity.

CONCLUSION

This study affirms that the Qur'an provides a robust theological foundation for

constructing a narrative of women's emancipation. By employing a philosophical hermeneutic and critical gender theory approach, verses such as Q.S. Al-Ahzab [33]:35, Q.S. Al-Tawbah [9]:71, and Q.S. Al-Isra [17]:70 may be reinterpreted as affirming the principles of *musawah* (equality), *karāmah insāniyyah* (human dignity), and *rahmah* (compassion) in ways that transcend gender discrimination. Classical exegetical traditions—often laden with patriarchal bias, as exemplified in interpretations of Q.S. Al-Nisa [4]:34—have been critically reconstructed through the theoretical lenses of Ricoeur's *distanciation*, Gadamer's *fusion of horizons*, Butler's theory of *performativity*, and Fraser's *politics of recognition*. Together, these frameworks deconstruct embedded structures of domination and enable more egalitarian ethical readings.

The findings of this research suggest that women in the Qur'an are not positioned as passive subjects of legal injunctions or subordinate actors within the social order, but rather as fully-fledged spiritual, ethical, and political agents. Qur'anic female figures such as Maryam, the Queen of Sheba, and the wife of Pharaoh serve as paradigms of autonomous moral agency. Accordingly, an emancipatory theology rooted in *ta'dil* (justice), *rahmah* (compassion), and *karāmah* (dignity) is imperative for articulating an inclusive and transformative Islamic paradigm.

Future research should consider expanding this theological framework into the realms of public policy, Islamic education, and interdisciplinary scholarly discourse—particularly those committed to advancing gender justice grounded in divine revelation.

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