



Deconstructing the Gender Hierarchy in the Interpretation of Quran 4:34: A Contextual Hermeneutical Approach from the Perspective of Amina Wadud

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Article History:

Submitted:
2026-03-06

Accepted:
2026-05-29

Published:
2026-06-30

Abstract

The interpretation of Quranic Surah An-Nisa: 34 in the classical exegetical tradition has given rise to a gender hierarchy that posits qiwamah as the permanent authority of men over women, an understanding that continues to influence social norms, Islamic family law, and gender relations in Muslim societies to this day. This article aims to deconstruct this hierarchical construct through an integrative, contextual hermeneutic approach, using Amina Wadud's thought as its primary methodological foundation. This study employs a qualitative, library-based research method with three stages of analysis: socio-historical, semantic-linguistic, and intra-textual. The results indicate that the gender hierarchy is formed through four hermeneutical mechanisms: the generalization of particular contexts, the naturalization of social constructs, intra-textual selectivity, and the transmission of the exegetes' androcentrism. A semantic-linguistic analysis of the terms qawwamah, faddhala, nusyuz, and dharaba reveals that the Qur'anic text does not support an absolute gender hierarchy; qawwamah is more accurately understood as a conditional and reciprocal functional responsibility. This study contributes to strengthening the epistemological foundation of inclusive gender exegesis. It offers an integrative hermeneutical model relevant to reforming Islamic family law and religious education in Indonesia.

Keywords: Contextual Hermeneutics, Qawwamah, Deconstruction of the Gender Hierarchy, Amina Wadud

1. Introduction

The interpretation of Quranic Surah An-Nisa: 34 is one of the more complex issues in contemporary Islamic studies.¹ This verse is not only viewed as a theological basis for explaining the roles of men and women, but also influences the formation of social norms, the family legal system, and ethical guidelines in family life.² In some classical exegetical literature, the term *qawamah* is interpreted as the basis for legitimizing hierarchical male leadership.³ However, amid an era increasingly prioritizing gender justice and human rights, this understanding is now being critically questioned.⁴ The tension between a normative understanding of the text and current ethical demands highlights the need for a hermeneutical approach that connects the text to its context, ensuring the Qur'an's message remains relevant today without neglecting justice as its guiding principle.⁵

Numerous studies on Surah An-Nisa': 34 have been conducted from various perspectives. First, a comparative analysis of Surah An-Nisa': 1 and 34 in the commentaries of at-Thabari and ar-Razi, conducted by Nurjannah et al.⁶ Second, Asma and Ahmad examined the concept of *qawwam* in Surah An-Nisa' 34 from the perspectives of Ibn Khatir and al-Maraghi.⁷ Third, Nasrullah et al. conducted a study that relates the interpretation of this verse to contemporary social realities, including power dynamics within the family and gender justice in Muslim societies.⁸ Fourth, Achmad and Zainal analyzed Surah An-Nisa: 34 within the framework of Hamka's thought.⁹ Fifth, the study by Siregar et al. argues that interpretations of Surah An-Nisa in classical exegesis are often patriarchal, positioning men as absolute leaders and women as subordinates. However, through a feminist exegetical approach, this verse can be read as a call to foster harmony and mutual responsibility in marital relationships, rather than as a legitimization of violence or domination.¹⁰

Furthermore, studies of Amina Wadud's thought have been conducted extensively in the past from various perspectives. Irsyadunnas examines Amina Wadud's interpretation of gender-related

¹ Nana Gustianda, "Menelusuri Pemahaman Patriarki Dalam Tafsir Q.S. An-Nisa:34 Dan Impikasinya Terhadap Tren Penurunan Pernikahan Di Indonesia," *Jurnal Keislaman* 7, no. 2 (2024): 521-33, <https://doi.org/10.54298/jk.v7i2.261>.

² Muhammad Resky, "Holistic Hermeneutics of Qur'anic Verses: Reinterpreting for Achieving Gender Equality in Contemporary Islamic Society," *Aqwal: Journal of Qur'an and Hadis Studies* 5, no. 2 (2024): 176-91, <https://doi.org/10.28918/aqwal.v5i2.7365>. which often privileges male perspectives and neglects women's experiences. Such interpretations can lead to gender injustices justified by certain verses. The primary objective is to explore Amina Wadud's holistic hermeneutic approach, which aims to affirm gender equality in Qur'anic interpretation. Methodology: Employing a qualitative literature-based approach, this research integrates thematic (*maudu'i*)

³ Asma Syahroni and Ahmad Nurrohim, "The Meaning of Qawwam in Q.S. An-Nisa: 34 (A Comparative Study of the Interpretations of Ibn Kathir and Al-Maraghi)," *Hamalatul Qur'an: Jurnal Ilmu Ilmu Alqur'an* 6, no. 1 (2025): 52-61, <https://doi.org/10.37985/hq.v6i1.477>.

⁴ Zumrotus Sholikhah, "Rekonstruksi Gender Dalam Islam," *IJouGS: Indonesian Journal of Gender Studies* 6, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.21154/ijougs.v6i1.11623>.

⁵ M Shohib, "Pendekatan Hermeneutika Kontemporer Dalam Penafsiran Al-Qur'an," *Journal of Knowledge and Collaboration* 2, no. 7 (2025): 711-18.

⁶ Nurjannah Ismail, Muhammad Firdaus, and Edi Darmawijaya, "Gender Equality in the Qur'an: An Analysis of Surah an-Nisa' Verses 1 and 34 in the Exegesis of Al-Tabari and Al-Rāzī," *Gender Equality: International Journal of Child and Gender Studies* 10, no. 2 (2024): 224, <https://doi.org/10.22373/equality.v10i2.25932>.

⁷ Syahroni and Nurrohim, "The Meaning of Qawwam in Q.S. An-Nisa: 34 (A Comparative Study of the Interpretations of Ibn Kathir and Al-Maraghi)."

⁸ Muhamad Nasrullah et al., "Gender Equality in the Al-Qur'an Surah An-Nisa Verse 34 (Comparative Study of Quraish Sihab and Ibn Asyur)," *Adabuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran* 3, no. 2 (2024): 92-101, <https://doi.org/10.38073/adabuna.v3i2.1517>.

⁹ Achmad Hikmatiyar, Muhammad Arfan Mu'ammam, and Zainal Arifin, "Hamka's Thoughts on Women's Education: Analysis of Al-Azhar's Interpretation (Surah An-Nisa': 34-35)," *Eduvest - Journal of Universal Studies* 4, no. 7 (2024): 5785-8798, <https://doi.org/10.59188/eduvest.v4i7.1225>.

¹⁰ Muhammad Sururi Alfajri Wannahar Siregar, Achyar Zein, and Rahayu Fuji Astuti, "Feminist Interpretation of Qur'an Surah Al-Nisa' Verse 34: An Educational Study on Gender Relations, Structural Violence and the Protection of Women's Rights," *Ahlussunnah: Journal of Islamic Education* 4, no. 1 (2025): 22-32, <https://doi.org/10.58485/jie.v4i1.305>.

verses through the lens of Gadamer's hermeneutics and finds that Wadud's contextual-sociological method yields a reading that differs significantly from classical textual-normative exegesis.¹¹ Meanwhile, Riyani methodologically analyzes Wadud's feminist hermeneutics and concludes that the tawhidic paradigm she advocates is a response to patriarchal constructions within the interpretive tradition.¹² Purnamasari, for her part, analyzes Amina Wadud's interpretation of verses addressing gender-based violence. Sholikhah examines the reconstruction of gender in Islam from a feminist perspective and highlights the importance of epistemological criticism of traditional exegesis.¹³ Arsal, Busyro, and Imran specifically investigate the application of Wadud's feminist hermeneutic method in the context of women's leadership.¹⁴ The review above indicates that most existing studies remain partial in scope. Some focus primarily on critiquing classical exegesis without advancing a systematic methodological reconstruction, while others propose reinterpretations without sufficiently examining the epistemological foundations that sustain gender hierarchy within exegetical traditions. Therefore, a more comprehensive study is required, one that not only deconstructs hierarchical patterns of interpretation but also reconstructs Qur'anic understanding through an integrative contextual hermeneutical approach.

In light of this issue, this study aims to examine the construction of gender hierarchy in the exegesis of QS. An-Nisa: 34 and to deconstruct it through a contextual hermeneutic approach that encompasses historical, linguistic, and philosophical dimensions. By taking Amina Wadud's thought as its primary foundation, this study seeks to reconstruct the understanding of gender relations as functional and ethical rather than hierarchical. Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich the development of contemporary exegetical methodology. Meanwhile, in practice, this study is expected to contribute to fostering a more equitable religious understanding aligned with the dynamics of modern society.

2. Method

This study is a qualitative, library-based research project focused on deconstructing the construction of gender hierarchy in the interpretation of QS. An-Nisa: 34. There are at least three main focuses in this study. First, a genealogical tracing of exegesis to examine how the concept of gender hierarchy was formed, developed, and legitimized within the tradition of exegesis, both classical and contemporary. Second, a semantic-linguistic analysis of several key terms, such as *qawwamah*, *faḍḍala*, *nusyuz*, and *dharaba*, to uncover the diversity of meanings that are often oversimplified in dominant readings. Third, an examination of the contextual hermeneutical approach to generating alternative readings that align more closely with the principles of justice in the Qur'an. Within this framework, the study moves beyond mere description toward critical analysis and reconstruction by re-examining the epistemological assumptions embedded in the exegetical tradition and proposing a more contextual, ethical, and justice-oriented model of interpretation.

¹¹ Irsyadunnas Irsyadunnas and Nurmahni Nurmahni, "Rekonstruksi Tafsir Al-Quran Kontemporer (Studi Analisis Sumber Dan Metode Tafsir)," *Substantia: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 22, no. 1 (2020): 21, <https://doi.org/10.22373/substantia.v22i1.6119>.

¹² Irma Riyani, "Muslim Feminist Hermeneutical Method to the Qur'an (Analytical Study to the Method of Amina Wadud)," *Ulumuna* 21, no. 2 (2017): 298–314, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v21i2.320>.

¹³ Sholikhah, "Rekonstruksi Gender Dalam Islam."

¹⁴ Arsal Arsal, Busyro Busyro, and Maizul Imran, "Kepemimpinan Perempuan: Penerapan Metode Tafsir Hermeneutika Feminisme Amina Wadud," *AL QUDES: Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Hadis* 4, no. 2 (2020): 481, <https://doi.org/10.29240/alquds.v4i2.1976>.

The data sources for this study fall into two categories. First, the primary source is Amina Wadud's work, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, with a primary focus on Chapter 4, titled "Rights and Roles of Women: Some Controversies".¹⁵ Second, the secondary data sources consist of books, articles, and other scholarly works related to QS. An-Nisa: 34, gender exegesis, and Qur'anic hermeneutics. The primary sources serve as the main texts for analysis, while the secondary sources function as critical points of comparison and to strengthen the arguments.

The data analysis technique used is an integrative contextual hermeneutic analysis. The analysis is conducted through three main stages: first, a socio-historical analysis to understand the context in which the verse was revealed and the social conditions of Arab society that underlie the initial construction of meaning; second, a semantic-linguistic analysis of key terms to uncover broader and more dynamic possible meanings; and third, an intra-textual analysis (interconnections between verses) to situate QS. An-Nisa: 34 within the framework of the Qur'an's universal values, such as justice, moral equality, and ethical responsibility. This approach draws on hermeneutical models that emphasize the dialectical relationship between text, context, and reader, as developed by Fazlur Rahman through his theory of "double movement" and by Hans-Georg Gadamer in his concept of the "fusion of horizons." Through this approach, the study not only deconstructs hierarchical interpretations but also reconstructs an understanding that is more relevant to the context of contemporary Indonesian Muslims.

3. Result and Discussion

Biography of Amina Wadud

Maria Teasley, better known as Amina Wadud, was born on September 25, 1952, in Bethesda, Maryland, United States. Amina Wadud is one of the key figures in the development of contemporary Islamic feminism.¹⁶ She grew up in a family with a diverse religious background; her father was a Methodist minister, while her mother was of Arab-African Muslim descent. Her experience as a Black woman in a society still influenced by racism and patriarchy shaped her social sensitivity to various forms of injustice. In 1972, while studying at the University of Pennsylvania, she decided to convert to Islam, which she saw as a way to escape the discrimination she had experienced. Since then, she has used the name Amina Wadud to signify both her religious identity and her intellectual commitment to the development of Islamic thought.¹⁷

Amina Wadud's academic trajectory reflects both breadth and depth across diverse Islamic scholarly traditions. She earned her Ph.D. in Islamic Studies and Arabic from the University of Michigan. Further, she developed her scholarship through academic study at several institutions, including the American University in Cairo and Al-Azhar University, with a focus on Arabic language, philosophy, and Qur'anic exegesis.¹⁸ This cross-institutional academic background has provided her with a broad perspective while fostering a methodological sensitivity to the diversity of approaches

¹⁵ Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹⁶ Rahmah Eka Saputri and Fitrawati, "Konstruksi Hermeneutika Feminis Amina Wadud: Sebuah Upaya Membangun Ulang Makna Ayat-Ayat Bias Gender," *Al-Ubudiyah: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Studi Islam* 5, no. 2 (2024): 211-20, <https://doi.org/10.55623/au.v5i2.365>.

¹⁷ Deffa Cahyana Harits, "Pemikiran Hermeneutika Amina Wadud Muhsin: Agama Keadilan Ditengah Ketidakadilan," *Fathir: Jurnal Studi Islam* 1, no. 1 (2024): 29-37, <https://doi.org/10.71153/fathir.v1i1.37>.

¹⁸ Harits.

in interpreting religious texts. Throughout his academic career, he served as an assistant professor of Qur'anic studies at the International Islamic University of Malaysia in 1989, and from 1992 onward, he was a professor of religion and philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University, retiring in 2008.¹⁹ Furthermore, his involvement as a visiting lecturer at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta demonstrates the influence of his thought, which has also taken root in Indonesian academic circles.

Outside the academic sphere, Amina Wadud is known as a Muslim activist who has consistently championed gender justice. She was involved in the founding of Sisters in Islam in Malaysia. This organization has played a key role in the development of the Islamic feminist movement in Southeast Asia.²⁰ One of the most notable events in her career took place on March 18, 2005, when she led Friday prayers as both khatib and imam for a congregation of men and women in New York. This action sparked widespread controversy while also opening a global debate on women's authority in Islamic religious practice.²¹ Through her ideas and direct involvement, Wadud demonstrated that efforts to achieve gender justice in Islam cannot be separated from daily religious practice, and she emphasized that the renewal of interpretation is part of a tangible social responsibility.

The Intellectual Background of Amina Wadud's Work "The Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective"

The book *The Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* emerged from a long process of intellectual and spiritual reflection, sparked by Amina Wadud's concern about the dominance of androcentric perspectives in the tradition of Islamic exegesis, which is often seen as neglecting women's position.²² The book was first published in 1992 in Kuala Lumpur by Fajar Bakti Publishers, the result of a dissertation supported by Sisters in Islam, and later republished by Oxford University Press in 1999 to reach a wider audience. The context of its writing is inseparable from Wadud's experience as an African-American Muslim woman who has witnessed firsthand how hierarchical interpretations are often used to perpetuate the subordination of women, both in academic and social settings.²³

Amina Wadud's line of reasoning in this work is grounded in two interrelated epistemological frameworks. First, the hermeneutics of tawhid, an interpretive approach that places the oneness of God and its implications for human equality as its guiding principle. Based on this framework, Wadud argues that if God is just and the Qur'an is His word, then gender inequality cannot possibly stem from the text itself, but rather from inadequate human interpretation.²⁴ Second, the concept of the "prior text" the awareness that every interpreter brings specific assumptions, experiences, and backgrounds that influence the process and outcome of interpretation. By emphasizing this, Wadud opens the door to a critical examination of the tradition of exegesis, which has often been regarded as neutral, even though it contains biases that shape the understanding of the text.

¹⁹ Arsal, Busyro, and Imran, "Kepemimpinan Perempuan: Penerapan Metode Tafsir Hermeneutika Feminisme Amina Wadud."

²⁰ Muhammad Fahrizal Amin, "Amina Wadud: Pendekatan Hermeneutika Untuk Gerakan Gender," *Al-Adyan: Jurnal Studi Lintas Agama* 15, no. 2 (2020): 237–54, <https://doi.org/10.24042/ajsla.v15i2.7040>.

²¹ Uswatun Hasanah Harahap and Zulkarnaen Zulkarnaen, "Hermeneutika Feminisme Dalam Tafsir Al-Qur'an: Kajian Metodologi Amina Wadud," *Alhamra Jurnal Studi Islam* 5, no. 1 (2024): 85, <https://doi.org/10.30595/ajsi.v5i1.20646>.

²² Rahmah Eka Saputri and Fitriawati, "Konstruksi Hermeneutika Feminis Amina Wadud: Sebuah Upaya Membangun Ulang Makna Ayat-Ayat Bias Gender."

²³ Zakaria Abdiwali Mohamed Handoko, Agus, "Decolonization of Domestic Violence Interpretation in Contemporary Indonesia: Challenging Misogynistic Interpretations in QS. An-Nisa: 34," n.d., <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.33367/tribakti.v37i1.8068>.

²⁴ Amin, "Amina Wadud: Pendekatan Hermeneutika Untuk Gerakan Gender."

Methodologically, Wadud developed a hermeneutical approach that she describes as holistic and contextual, explicitly grounded in Fazlur Rahman's theory of "double movement".²⁵ This method simultaneously integrates four dimensions of analysis: philological-linguistic analysis of key words in the text; thematic analysis that groups verses based on common themes; socio-historical analysis that situates verses within their social context; and a women's perspective analysis that explicitly incorporates women's experiences as a valid hermeneutical variable.²⁶ The integration of these four dimensions enables Wadud to identify three categories of women's exegesis: traditional exegesis, which is predominantly patriarchal; reactive exegesis, which responds but does not deconstruct; and holistic exegesis, which represents the ideal methodological position she proposes. Through this framework, *The Qur'an and Woman* is not merely a work of criticism, but a methodological proposition that offers a way out of the hermeneutical impasse that has persisted for centuries.²⁷

The Construction of the Gender Hierarchy in the Exegetical Tradition of Surah An-Nisa: 34 and the Hermeneutical Mechanisms That Sustain It

In the discourse on gender relations, Qur'an 4:34 (QS. An-Nisa: 34) has long been regarded as a verse of considerable significance while simultaneously giving rise to interpretive controversies. The construction of gender hierarchy derived from interpretations of this verse did not emerge instantaneously; rather, it evolved through a prolonged process of interpretation that mutually reinforced particular understandings. One of the classical interpretations of QS. An-Nisa: 34 is that of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH), who understood the phrase al-rijāl qawwāmūna 'alā al-nisā' as an affirmation of male superiority, grounded in rational capacity, physical strength, and virtues believed to have been divinely bestowed upon men.²⁸ Al-Zamakhsharī subsequently reinforced this perspective in his work al-Kashshāf, where, through a linguistic approach, he construed the term qawwāmūna as denoting a fixed and unconditional form of structural authority. The dominance of this hierarchical mode of interpretation persisted over a long historical period and played a crucial role in shaping the normative framework of Islamic thought.²⁹ In this regard, as argued by Wadud, such interpretations were influenced by prior text, namely pre-existing androcentric assumptions that informed and shaped the exegetes' understanding of the Qur'anic text.

The first hermeneutical mechanism that contributes to the construction of hierarchy is the tendency to generalize essentially particular contexts. Classical exegetes frequently interpreted the Qur'an's responses to the social conditions of seventh-century Arabia. Subsequently, they transformed them into universal norms presumed to be valid across all times and contexts.³⁰ The situation in which men were the primary breadwinners and women were financially dependent on

²⁵ Rahmah Eka Saputri and Fitrawati, "Konstruksi Hermeneutika Feminis Amina Wadud: Sebuah Upaya Membangun Ulang Makna Ayat-Ayat Bias Gender."

²⁶ Aرسال, Busyro, and Imran, "Kepemimpinan Perempuan: Penerapan Metode Tafsir Hermeneutika Feminisme Amina Wadud."

²⁷ Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective, Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 2019, http://scioteca.caf.com/bitstream/handle/123456789/1091/RED2017-Eng-8ene.pdf?sequence=12&isAllowed=y%0Ahttp://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.regsciurbeco.2008.06.005%0Ahttps://www.researchgate.net/publication/305320484_sistem_pembetulan_terpusat_Strategi_melestari.

²⁸ Ismail, Firdaus, and Darmawijaya, "Gender Equality in the Qur'an: An Analysis of Surah an-Nisa' Verses 1 and 34 in the Exegesis of Al-Tabari and Al-Rāzī."

²⁹ Gustianda, "Menelusuri Pemahaman Patriarki Dalam Tafsir Q.S. An-Nisa:34 Dan Impikasinya Terhadap Tren Penurunan Pernikahan Di Indonesia."

³⁰ Mukhamad Saifunnuha, "Gender Dalam Sorotan Tafsir Di Indonesia (Penelitian Berbasis Systematic Literature Review)," *Musāwa Jurnal Studi Gender Dan Islam* 20, no. 2 (2022): 147–59, <https://doi.org/10.14421/musawa.2021.202.147-159>.

them was used to affirm qawwamah as a permanent social order rather than as a contextual response to specific historical circumstances.³¹ The second mechanism involves the naturalization of social constructs, namely the tendency to regard social differences, such as disparities in educational access and economic conditions, as natural and inherently rooted in biological distinctions.³² Several recent studies indicate that Tafsir al-Misbah, although adopting a more moderate approach, continues to preserve this hierarchical pattern by reframing it through moral considerations and notions of social responsibility.³³

Another mechanism is intra-textual selectivity, namely the tendency to interpret QS. An-Nisa: 34 in isolation without relating it to other Qur'anic verses that offer alternative perspectives. Verses concerning piety as the basis of human excellence (QS. 49:13), the spiritual equality of men and women (QS. 33:35), and the reciprocal relationship between husband and wife in marriage (QS. 2:187) are seldom employed as primary references in the interpretation of this verse.³⁴ In addition, there is the mechanism by which the exegetes' androcentrism is transmitted. Most classical exegetes were men who lived within patriarchal social structures, and the pre-understandings they brought to the interpretive process were therefore predominantly androcentric.³⁵ This condition was far from neutral; rather, it significantly influenced the direction of interpretation, from the selection of lexical meanings to the formulation of the verse's normative implications.³⁶ As Wadud argues, such biases played an active role in shaping the interpretive constructions that subsequently emerged.³⁷

These four hermeneutical mechanisms are deeply interconnected and, together, constitute a framework that may be understood as a "sacred canopy," presenting gender hierarchy as a fixed divine ordinance.³⁸ Research by Karomah and Hidayati (2025) demonstrates that the intellectual foundations underlying classical interpretations of QS. An-Nisa: 34 can be re-examined through the lens of critical hermeneutics, thereby opening the possibility for more inclusive readings when historical and social contexts are adequately considered.³⁹ Within this framework, the central issue lies not in the Qur'anic text itself, but rather in interpretive approaches that remain insufficiently open to a plurality of perspectives. This limitation is particularly evident in the minimal incorporation of women's experiences and viewpoints, despite the fact that women are the group most directly affected by the interpretive constructions that have developed over time.⁴⁰

³¹ Ach Zayyadi, Alvina Amatillah, and Dwiki Oktafiana Wirendri, "Indonesian Mufassir Perspective on Gender Equality: Study on Tafsir Al-Misbah, Tafsir Al-Azhar, and Tafsir Marāh Labid," *MUŞHAF Jurnal Tafsir Berwawasan Keindonesiaan* 1, no. 2 (2021): 74–102, <https://doi.org/10.33650/mushaf.v1i2.2169>.

³² Ahmad Zainal Abidin, M. Imam Sanusi Al-Khanafi, and Eko Zulfikar, "Tafsir Gender Jawa: Telaah Tafsir Al-Iklil Fi Ma'ani Al-Tanzil Karya Misbah Mustafa," *Musāwa Jurnal Studi Gender Dan Islam* 18, no. 1 (2019): 1, <https://doi.org/10.14421/musawa.2019.181.1-17>.

³³ Moh. Nor Ichwan and Faizal Amin, "Quraish Shihab's Interpretation of Gender Equality In Tafsir Al-Misbah," *HUMANISMA : Journal of Gender Studies* 6, no. 1 (2022): 59, <https://doi.org/10.30983/humanisme.v6i1.5406>.

³⁴ Saifunnuha, "Gender Dalam Sorotan Tafsir Di Indonesia (Penelitian Berbasis Systematic Literature Review)."

³⁵ Dadan Rusmana, Nabilah Nuraini, and Yayan Rahtikawati, "Gender Relations on Quranic Interpretation in Indonesia (Interpretation Analysis on Turjuman Al-Mustafid's Tafsir, Al-Azhar's Tafsir, and Al-Misbah's Tafsir)," *FOKUS Jurnal Kajian Keislaman Dan Kemasyarakatan* 8, no. 1 (2023): 1, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jf.v8i1.3893>.

³⁶ Nur Laili Nabila Nazahah Najiyah, Abdul Hamid, and Asa Ade Muliana, "Melacak Bias Gender Dalam Penafsiran Kementerian Agama RI Pada Al-Qur'an Surah An-Nisa Dan Al-Baqarah," *Jurnal Harkat : Media Komunikasi Gender* 18, no. 2 (2022): 94–107, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.15408/harkat.v18i2.29662>.

³⁷ Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*.

³⁸ Saifunnuha, "Gender Dalam Sorotan Tafsir Di Indonesia (Penelitian Berbasis Systematic Literature Review)."

³⁹ Wardatul Karomah and Tri Wahyu Hidayati, "Menafsir Ulang Relasi Gender Dalam Qs. An-Nisa'(4): 34 Aplikasi Pendekatan Hermeneutika Kritik Muhammad Arkoun," *Equality Journal of Gender Child and Humanity* 3, no. 1 (2025): 66–85, <https://doi.org/10.58518/equality>.

⁴⁰ Najiyah, Hamid, and Muliana, "Melacak Bias Gender Dalam Penafsiran Kementerian Agama RI Pada Al-Qur'an Surah An-Nisa Dan Al-Baqarah."

Semantic-Linguistic Analysis of the Key Concepts in QS. An-Nisa: 34

One of the fundamental aspects frequently overlooked in gender studies of QS. An-Nisa: 34 is a careful semantic-linguistic analysis of the key terms that underpin the construction of hierarchy. The principal term that requires examination is *qawwāmūna*, which derives from the root *qāma*. In classical Arabic lexicography, this root encompasses a variety of meanings, including “to establish,” “to maintain,” “to support,” and “to take responsibility..”⁴¹ Semantically, these meanings are more closely associated with responsibility and functional roles than with forms of dominative authority.⁴² Contextual analyses of the use of the term *qawwām* indicate that the type of leadership referred to in the verse primarily concerns the functions of protection, care, and the fulfillment of needs, rather than hierarchical and subordinating relations of power.⁴³

The next important concept is *faḍḍala*, which is commonly translated as “to grant superiority” or “to bestow advantages.” Wadud points out that the text employs the word *ba‘ḍ*, so that the phrase *ba‘ḍahum ‘alā ba‘ḍ* grammatically means “some over others,” rather than “all men over all women.” The use of *ba‘ḍ* therefore limits the meaning of *faḍḍala* to something particular and contextual rather than universal.⁴⁴ The third concept, *nushūz*, is often interpreted in some exegetical literature as a wife’s disobedience to her husband. However, the Qur’an employs the same term for both spouses, referring to the wife in QS. An-Nisa: 34 and the husband in QS. An-Nisa: 128. This fact indicates that *nushūz* cannot be reduced solely to a wife’s disobedience; rather, it refers to a condition of disharmony within the marital relationship. In this regard, Wadud aligns with Sayyid Qutb, who understands *nushūz* as a reciprocal relational phenomenon rather than a unilateral violation within a hierarchical structure.⁴⁵

The fourth and most controversial concept is *ḍaraba*, which is generally translated as “to strike.” Wadud undertakes a lexical analysis of the term, drawing on classical sources such as *Lisān al-‘Arab* and Lane’s *Lexicon*. She demonstrates that *ḍaraba* possesses a range of meanings, including “to set forth an example” and “to undertake a journey,” and therefore does not inherently denote physical violence.⁴⁶ The distinction between *ḍaraba* and its intensive form, *darraba*, which signifies repeated striking, further suggests that the Qur’an deliberately employs a more moderate expression. Consequently, interpreting *ḍaraba* as an act of violence is not a necessary conclusion. This finding is reinforced by Maksum et al., who argue that QS. An-Nisa: 34 is more appropriately understood as an attempt to place strict limitations on the practice of domestic violence that had been deeply entrenched in pre-Islamic society, rather than as a normative legitimation of such acts.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Zayyadi, Amatillah, and Wirendri, “Indonesian Mufassir Perspective on Gender Equality: Study on Tafsir Al-Misbah, Tafsir Al-Azhar, and Tafsir Marāh Labīd.”

⁴² Dzulkifli Hadi Imawan Muhammad Fakhri Amal, “Quraish Shihab’s Hermeneutics in Examining Gender Verses in Tafsir Al-Misbah: Efforts to Find Egalitarian Values in the Qur’an,” *Jurnal Studi Al-Qur’an* 21, no. 2 (2025): 271–84, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.21009/jsq.021.2.04>.

⁴³ Saifunnuha, “Gender Dalam Sorotan Tafsir Di Indonesia (Penelitian Berbasis Systematic Literature Review).”

⁴⁴ Wadud, *Qur’an and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective*.

⁴⁵ Wadud.

⁴⁶ Wadud, *Qur’an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective*.

⁴⁷ Imam Maksum et al., “Analyzing Domestic Violence in the Qur’an through Hermeneutics of H.G. Gadamer: Views of Amina Wadud,” *Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education* 7, no. 2 (2023): 468, <https://doi.org/10.35723/ajie.v7i2.427>. which discredits one party. This research focuses on the thoughts of the philosopher Amina Wadud, a reformist Muslim thinker, in interpreting the Qur’an with her work *Qur’an and Women*. The purpose of this study is to discuss domestic violence further. This research is qualitative; the data were obtained from library sources, with the primary source from the Qur’an and Women. Data processing is done by grouping, reduction, and codification. Meanwhile, in data analysis, Hans-Georg Gadamer’s Hermeneutical approach is that of intelligence subtlety—how to understand (*das Verstehen*)

Overall, the semantic-linguistic analysis of these four key concepts in QS. An-Nisa: 34 yields an important hermeneutical finding: when read carefully and comprehensively, the Qur'anic text does not support the notion of an absolute gender hierarchy.⁴⁸ Zakiah and Nurfaizy, through their application of Abdullah Saeed's contextual hermeneutics, conclude that the values embedded in the verse point instead to the principle of justice, namely the provision of equal opportunities for both men and women to participate in domestic and public spheres.⁴⁹ Accordingly, the issue lies not within the Qur'anic text itself but rather in interpretive approaches that pay insufficient attention to its linguistic dimensions, thereby tending to simplify or even distort meanings that are, in essence, more complex and fundamentally oriented toward justice.⁵⁰

Deconstruction through Contextual Hermeneutics: An Integrative Socio-Historical and Intra-Textual Reading

The application of contextual hermeneutics to QS. An-Nisa: 34 begins with an adequate understanding of the socio-historical context in which the verse was revealed. The social conditions of seventh-century Arabian society were characterized by a strong patriarchal structure, within which women experienced significant limitations in legal rights, economic participation, and personal autonomy. In this context, as Wadud explains, the command for men to provide financial support for women was not merely a confirmation of the existing social order but rather an obligation imposed on men as a counterbalance to the privileged position they enjoyed within the patriarchal system.⁵¹ Accordingly, the concept of *qawwamah* in its original context was not intended to grant men greater power or reinforce male dominance; instead, it linked men's social position to proportional responsibilities, thereby fostering more balanced and equitable relationships.⁵²

The next step in contextual hermeneutics involves a comprehensive intra-textual reading, namely, interpreting QS. An-Nisa: 34 in relation to the overall message of the Qur'an.⁵³ Within this framework, several principles should serve as guiding references. First, there is the principle of *taqwā* as the primary criterion for human worth (QS. 49:13), which does not distinguish between genders.⁵⁴ Second, there is the principle of spiritual and moral equality between men and women (QS. 33:35).⁵⁵ Third, there is the principle of partnership in marriage, symbolized through the metaphor of *libās* (garments) that applies equally to both spouses (QS. 2:187).⁵⁶ Fourth, there is the principle of consultation (*shūrā*) in family decision-making (QS. 2:233), which underscores the importance of

⁴⁸ Naili Rosa Urbah Rusydiana and Hadiana Trendi Azami, "Interpretation QS. an-Nisa': 34 Perspectives of Amina Wadud Muhsin and The Implication of Her Thinking In Indonesia," *Jurnal Ushuluddin* 29, no. 1 (2021): 87, <https://doi.org/10.24014/jush.v29i1.11931>.

⁴⁹ Ade Rosi Siti Zakiah, "Interpretasi Kontekstual Makna Qawwām Dalam Al-Qur'an QS. An-Nisa' 34; Aplikasi Hermeneutika Abdullah Saeed," *Al-Qudwah* 1, no. 2 (2023): 129, <https://doi.org/10.24014/alqudwah.v1i2.22972>.

⁵⁰ Irsyadunnas and Nurmahni, "Rekonstruksi Tafsir Al-Quran Kontemporer (Studi Analisis Sumber Dan Metode Tafsir)."

⁵¹ Wadud, *Qur'an and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*.

⁵² Siti Robikah, "Penafsiran Ulang QS. An-Nisa [4]: 34 Dalam Perspektif Tafsir Maqasidi," *Al Dhikra* 4, no. 1 (2022): 52, <https://journal.ptiq.ac.id/index.php/aldhikra/article/view/1007>.

⁵³ Muhamad Nur, "Hermeneutika Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed Dan Aplikasinya Dalam Relasi Gender," *Halaqah: Journal of Multidisciplinary Islamic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2024): 223–48, <https://doi.org/10.62509/hjis.v1i2.150>.

⁵⁴ Saniasa, Muhammad Yusuf, and Mardan, "Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Perspektif Al-Qur'an (Telaah Tematik Atas Ayat-Ayat Kesetaraan Gender)," *21396 Journal of Innovative and Creativity* 5, no. 2 (2025): 21396–407, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31004/joecy.v5i2.1377>.

⁵⁵ Nurlaila Al-Aydrus, "Gender Dalam Perspektif Islam," *Musawa: Journal for Gender Studies* 15, no. 1 (2023): 38–59, <https://doi.org/10.24239/msw.v15i1.2046>. Allah created human beings (men and women

⁵⁶ Moh. Arif Rakman Hakim, "Konotasi Makna Libās Dalam Pernikahan: Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes Q.S Al-Baqarah [2]:187)," *Jurnal Kajian Islam Interdisipliner* 3, no. 1 (2024): 27–40, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.14421/jkii.v9i1.1372>.

shared participation.⁵⁷ Through this approach, it becomes evident that interpretations positioning QS. An-Nisa: 34 as the foundation of an absolute gender hierarchy are inconsistent with the broader principles of the Qur'an as a whole.

The integration of socio-historical analysis and intra-textual reading yields an alternative understanding in which *qawwamah* is more appropriately conceived as a conditional functional responsibility rather than a permanently inherent structural authority. Its applicability depends upon the fulfillment of two conditions identified by Wadud in her work: the possession of certain advantages (*faḍḍala*) and the ability to provide financial support.⁵⁸ If one or both of these conditions are absent, the corresponding responsibility may shift to the party more capable of fulfilling it. This interpretation is not entirely unprecedented within the Islamic tradition. Ibn ʿĀshūr, through his *maqāṣidī* approach to exegesis, likewise emphasized that *qawwamah* pertains to function and responsibility rather than absolute superiority, taking into account considerations of justice and social context in understanding the verse.⁵⁹

The integrative contextual hermeneutical approach, as proposed by Faridatun Nisa et al. (2025), demonstrates that dominant interpretations of QS. An-Nisa: 34 are shaped by epistemological biases rooted in a structural-functionalist framework that tends to regard gender role differentiation as natural and inevitable.⁶⁰ Once these biases are critically examined and replaced with a more equitable analytical framework, the Qur'anic text can be understood as promoting functional equality in gender relations. Thus, the hermeneutical deconstruction of QS. An-Nisa: 34 is not intended to undermine the authority of the Qur'an; rather, it seeks to recover its ethical message as a mercy to all creation, a message that has long been obscured by the dominance of androcentric perspectives within the exegetical tradition.⁶¹

The Relevance of Deconstructing Gender Hierarchy for Renewing Gender Equality Discourse in Contemporary Indonesian Muslim Contexts

The hermeneutical deconstruction of QS. An-Nisa: 34, as elaborated above, possesses significant and urgent relevance within the contemporary Indonesian Muslim context. Its primary relevance is evident in Islamic family law, particularly in the Compilation of Islamic Law (Kompilasi Hukum Islam, KHI), which still contains provisions on *qiwamah*, especially in Articles 79–80 governing marital relations, where it tends to serve as an absolute normative foundation.⁶² If *qawwamah* is reinterpreted as a conditional responsibility rather than an inherently vested authority, several legal implications, including regulations concerning marriage guardianship (*wali nikah*), maintenance obligations,

⁵⁷ Muhammad Resky, "Holistic Hermeneutics of Qur'anic Verses: Reinterpreting for Achieving Gender Equality in Contemporary Islamic Society," which often privileges male perspectives and neglects women's experiences. Such interpretations can lead to gender injustices justified by certain verses. The primary objective is to explore Amina Wadud's holistic hermeneutic approach, which aims to affirm gender equality in Qur'anic interpretation. Methodology: Employing a qualitative literature-based approach, this research integrates thematic (maudu'i

⁵⁸ Wadud, *Qur'an and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*.

⁵⁹ Robikah, "Penafsiran Ulang QS. An-Nisa [4]: 34 Dalam Perspektif Tafsir Maqasidi."

⁶⁰ Kritik Atas et al., "AL-AFKAR : Journal for Islamic Studies Mengungkap Sisi Bias Gender Dalam Tafsir Al-Manar" 8, no. 4 (2025): 828–44, <https://doi.org/10.31943/afkarjournal.v8i4.2405>. Revealing.

⁶¹ Wahyu Ningsih and Rizki Susanti, "Perempuan, Tafsir, Dan Keadilan Gender: Studi Kritis Hermeneutika Dalam Tradisi Keilmuan Islam," *Jurnal Harkat : Media Komunikasi Gender*, 2025, 97–126, <https://doi.org/10.15408/harkat.v21i1.48948>.

⁶² Doni Azhari and Asmuni Asmuni, "Progressive Steps in Reforming Indonesian Islamic Family Law Through Gender Studies," *Syakhshiyah Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam* 3, no. 2 (2023): 210, <https://doi.org/10.32332/syakhshiyah.v3i2.8020>.

divorce rights, and child custody, require a more critical re-examination.⁶³ A number of studies on gender equality within Indonesian Islamic family law indicate a gradual movement toward more inclusive approaches, although these developments continue to face various normative constraints, thereby necessitating a stronger and more comprehensive hermeneutical foundation.⁶⁴

The second area of relevance concerns Islamic religious education. QS. An-Nisa: 34 is among the Qur'anic verses most frequently taught in Islamic educational institutions throughout Indonesia, ranging from madrasahs to universities.⁶⁵ The manner in which this verse is taught and interpreted directly shapes the perspectives of millions of santri and university students regarding gender relations. If the interpretations conveyed continue to preserve hierarchical constructions that lack adequate hermeneutical grounding, their influence on the internalization of gender values among future Muslim generations will be both enduring and far-reaching.⁶⁶ Consequently, integrating contextual hermeneutical approaches into tafsir curricula is not merely an academic concern but also an important pedagogical necessity for fostering a more just, critical, and contextually grounded understanding of Islam.

The third dimension of relevance relates to the development of gender equality discourse in the public sphere. As the country with the world's largest Muslim population, Indonesia occupies a strategic position in shaping global Islamic discourse on gender issues.⁶⁷ When Indonesian Muslim scholars and intellectuals produce hermeneutical studies demonstrating that the Qur'an, when interpreted contextually and equitably, embodies principles of functional equality in gender relations, such contributions provide an important response to perspectives that regard Islam as inherently patriarchal.⁶⁸ Numerous studies on gender equality from both Islamic legal and positive law perspectives likewise affirm that these principles of equality are consistent with Islam's fundamental values, particularly justice, public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*), and respect for human dignity.⁶⁹

Relevansi keempat yang paling mendasar berkaitan langsung dengan perempuan. The fourth and most fundamental area of relevance concerns Indonesian Muslim women, the group most directly affected by prevailing interpretive constructions. When Muslim women recognize that the subordinate positions they often experience are not absolute divine decrees but rather the products of interpretive processes shaped by particular historical contexts that have since evolved, opportunities emerge for a transformation of consciousness capable of fostering social change from within Muslim communities themselves.⁷⁰ Iregar et al., demonstrate that a contextual feminist reading of QS. An-Nisa: 34 contributes to the restoration of women's dignity, the rejection of religious justifications for

⁶³ Muhammad Mufti, "Gender Equality in Islamic Marriage Law through the Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'a Perspective: A Study on Woman-Initiated Divorce (Cerai Gugat) in Indonesia," *Sawwa: Jurnal Studi Gender* 19, no. 1 (2024): 29–46, <https://doi.org/10.21580/sa.v19i1.22641>.

⁶⁴ St Rahmawati, "Mainstreaming of Gender Equality in Islamic Family Law: Opportunities and Challenges," *Samarah* 4, no. 2 (2020): 360–74, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v4i2.8110>.

⁶⁵ Devi Rizki Apriliani et al., "Gender Dalam Perspektif QS. An-Nisa Ayat 34," *Jurnal Riset Agama* 1, no. 3 (2021): 188–98, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jra.v1i3.15129>.

⁶⁶ Annisa Nur Afifah et al., "Internalisasi Kesadaran Gender Dalam Pendidikan Agama Islam: Pendekatan Holistik Untuk Pengembangan Karakter," *Indonesian Journal of Action Research* 3, no. 1 (2024): 15–24, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ijar.2024.31-02>.

⁶⁷ Handoko, Agus, "Decolonization of Domestic Violence Interpretation in Contemporary Indonesia: Challenging Misogynistic Interpretations in QS. An-Nisa: 34."

⁶⁸ Sholikhah, "Rekonstruksi Gender Dalam Islam."

⁶⁹ Mighfar Shokhibul, "Patriarki Dan Kesenjangan Gender Dalam Tafsir Klasik Dan," *Jurnal Payung Sekaki: Kajian Keislaman* 1, no. 2 (2024): 104.

⁷⁰ Sholikhah, "Rekonstruksi Gender Dalam Islam."

violence, and the strengthening of gender equality within families and society.⁷¹ Accordingly, the hermeneutical deconstruction of this verse is not merely an academic undertaking but also carries tangible social implications for advancing justice for Indonesian Muslim women.⁷²

Conclusion

This study analyzes the construction of gender hierarchy in QS. An-Nisa: 34 through an integrative contextual hermeneutical approach grounded in the thought of Amina Wadud. The findings reveal that the construction of gender hierarchy in interpretations of QS. An-Nisa: 34 does not originate inherently from the text itself but is instead shaped by four hermeneutical mechanisms: the generalization of particular contexts, the naturalization of social constructions, intra-textual selectivity, and the transmission of androcentric biases within the exegetical tradition. The semantic-linguistic analysis further demonstrates that the concepts of *qawwamah*, *faḍḍala*, *nushūz*, and *ḍaraba* do not explicitly endorse an absolute gender hierarchy; rather, they point toward functional, relational, and contextual responsibilities. Accordingly, *qawwamah* is more appropriately understood as a conditional and reciprocal functional responsibility, contingent upon the fulfillment of two requirements: the possession of certain advantages (*faḍḍala*) and the ability to provide financial support. This interpretation is more coherent with the Qur'an's universal principles, including justice, spiritual and moral equality, and the partnership-based relationship between spouses in family life. This study contributes to three principal domains. Methodologically, it proposes an integrative three-dimensional model of contextual hermeneutics encompassing socio-historical, semantic-linguistic, and intra-textual approaches, serving as an analytical framework for other Qur'anic verses on issues of social justice. This approach moves beyond the partial models commonly employed in gender-oriented Qur'anic studies in Indonesia by producing interpretations that are philologically sound, theologically coherent, and socially relevant. Substantively, the study offers more systematic textual and grammatical arguments in support of an inclusive interpretation of QS. An-Nisa: 34 while simultaneously reconstructing the epistemological foundations of gender hierarchy within the exegetical tradition. Practically, these findings bear important implications for the reformulation of Islamic family law, the development of more gender-responsive tafsir curricula, the strengthening of Indonesian Islamic discourse at the global level, and the enhancement of Muslim women's awareness that subordination is not an absolute divine decree.

Several academic limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, addressing four key concepts within a single article necessarily requires a degree of simplification, and thus an in-depth analysis of each term particularly *ḍaraba*, which carries significant lexical complexity and far-reaching legal implications, could not be undertaken comprehensively. Consequently, further monographic studies devoted to each individual concept are highly warranted. Second, the fiqh dimensions of *qawwamah*, especially regarding the application of this hermeneutical reconstruction within Islamic family law across different legal schools and within the framework of Indonesian national law, have not been sufficiently explored. Future research integrating contextual hermeneutics with comparative *uṣūl al-fiqh* and positive law is therefore necessary. Third, because this study is based

⁷¹ Siregar, Zein, and Astuti, "Feminist Interpretation of Qur'an Surah Al-Nisa' Verse 34: An Educational Study on Gender Relations, Structural Violence and the Protection of Women's Rights."

⁷² Imelda Aprilia et al., "Nilai Pendidikan Kesetaraan Gender Q,S An-Nisa Ayat 34 Dalam Tafsir Al-Misbah Dan Tafsir An-Nur," *Sujud: Jurnal Agama, Sosial Dan Budaya* 1, no. 3 (2025): 449–66, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.63822/kmxyz081>.

exclusively on library research, it does not capture the empirical realities of qiwamah's formation and internalization within Indonesian Muslim society. Ethnographic and survey-based field studies are thus strongly recommended to enrich and contextualize these findings more comprehensively.

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