

Women's Rights in the Qur'an: An Epistemological Re-examination of Theological, Moral, and Social Frameworks

Hak Perempuan dalam Al-Qur'an: Pembacaan Ulang Epistemologis atas Wacana Teologis, Moral, dan Sosial

Enok Ghosiyah

University of PTIQ Jakarta

enokhants@gmail.com

Ikhwan Ansori

University of PTIQ Jakarta

ikhwan.ansori95@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to reconstruct the epistemology of understanding women in the Qur'an through theological, moral, and social approaches. Historically, interpretations of verses concerning women have been influenced by patriarchal cultural biases, undermining the Qur'an's universal humanistic values. Employing thematic exegesis (maudhu'i) and contextual hermeneutics, this research analyzes verses on human creation, spiritual equality, and women's social roles within the framework of tawhid (divine unity) and justice. The findings reveal that the Qur'an affirms women as moral and spiritual beings with dignity equal to men, grounded in the principles of tawhid, justice ('adl), and societal welfare (maslahah). These principles serve as a theological foundation for the full humanity of women in both social and moral contexts. The epistemological reconstruction challenges patriarchal interpretations and offers an inclusive, transformative paradigm for Qur'anic gender discourse. By integrating theological rigor with ethical-social analysis, this study contributes to contemporary Islamic scholarship, advocating for gender justice aligned with the Qur'an's egalitarian ethos. The proposed framework not only reinterprets classical exegesis but also provides a normative basis for equitable gender relations in Muslim societies.

Keywords: Qur'anic hermeneutics, gender equality, tawhid, thematic exegesis, Islamic feminism.

Abstrak

Studi ini bertujuan merekonstruksi epistemologi pemahaman tentang perempuan dalam Al-Qur'an melalui pendekatan teologis, moral, dan sosial. Secara historis, penafsiran ayat-ayat tentang perempuan sering kali dipengaruhi bias budaya patriarki, yang mengaburkan nilai-nilai kemanusiaan universal yang diajarkan Al-Qur'an. Dengan menggunakan

metode tafsir tematik (maudhu'i) dan hermeneutika kontekstual, studi ini menganalisis ayat-ayat tentang penciptaan manusia, kesetaraan spiritual, dan peran sosial perempuan dalam kerangka tauhid (keesaan Ilahi) dan keadilan. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Al-Qur'an menegaskan perempuan sebagai subjek moral dan spiritual yang memiliki martabat setara dengan laki-laki, berdasarkan prinsip tauhid, keadilan ('adl), dan kemaslahatan (maslahah). Prinsip-prinsip ini membentuk fondasi teologis bagi pengakuan penuh atas kemanusiaan perempuan dalam konteks sosial dan moral. Rekonstruksi epistemologis ini menantang penafsiran patriarkal dan menawarkan paradigma inklusif-transformatif dalam wacana Al-Qur'an tentang gender. Dengan menggabungkan analisis teologis dan sosio-etis, penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi bagi studi Islam kontemporer dengan mendorong keadilan gender yang selaras dengan semangat egaliter Al-Qur'an. Kerangka yang diajukan tidak hanya menafsirkan ulang tafsir klasik, tetapi juga memberikan dasar normatif bagi relasi gender yang berkeadilan dalam masyarakat Muslim.

Kata kunci: *Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an, kesetaraan gender, tauhid, tafsir tematik, feminism Islam.*

Introduction

The debate regarding the position and humanity of women in Islam is one of the most important epistemological issues in contemporary Islamic studies.¹ In the context of the Qur'an, women are not only present as biological entities, but also as moral and spiritual subjects who play an active role in human history. However, interpretations of verses related to women are often framed by patriarchal social and cultural views that developed in the past.² As a result, sacred texts are often understood partially and do not fully reflect the universal values of justice that are at the core of the Qur'an's

¹ Galym Zhussipbek, Assyltay Tasbolat, and Zhanar Nagayeva. "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Overcoming the Persistence of Patriarchal Islamic Interpretations: Gender Equality, the Development of Empathy and Children's Rights, and Insights from the Reformist Eurasian Scholars of the Early Twentieth Century." *Open Theology*, 10 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2022-0243>.

² Ajla Čustović. "Equal Before God but Not Equal Before His Law? Sharia Law and Women's Right to Interpretation in the Light of the Human Rights Debate." *Religions* (2025). <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16030362>.

teachings. This interpretive bias has given rise to views that place women in a subordinate position, both within the family and in society.³

The main problem that arises in this issue lies in the epistemological dimension of interpretation. Many classical interpretations rely on the social constructs of patriarchal societies, rather than on the theological principles of the Qur'an, which affirm spiritual and moral equality between men and women. In this context, the humanization of women is not merely a social issue, but part of the scientific responsibility to restore the meaning of humanity in accordance with the values of monotheism and justice. The full humanization of women means recognizing their existence as beings who have the same dignity, potential, and moral responsibility as men.⁴

An epistemological reconstruction of the Qur'an's understanding of women is important because it touches on theological, moral, and social aspects simultaneously. Theologically, the Qur'an affirms that all human beings, regardless of gender, were created from one nafs (QS. al-Nisā' [4]: 1).⁵ This shows that the humanity of women and men originates from the same source,⁶ and that both have equal spiritual potential. Morally, the Qur'an emphasizes the principles of justice ('adl) and goodness (ihsan) that

³ H. Mohamed. "Muslim Women on the Margin: On Whose Authority Does Islamic Knowledge Rest." *Religions* (2022). <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13090817>.

⁴ Sana Kadhim Qati. "Hermeneutic Islamic Feminism: An Epistemological Intellectual Approach." *Proceedings of The 2nd Global Conference on Women's Studies* (2021). <https://doi.org/10.33422/2nd.womensconf.2021.06.327>.

⁵ 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* (2024). <https://doi.org/10.22373/equality.v10i2.25932>

⁶ Khairuddin, et al. "GENDER INSIGHT IN THE PROCESS OF HUMAN CREATION AL-QURAN PERSPECTIVE. (Comparative study Rasyid Ridha, Aminah Wadud, ada Riffat Hasan)." *Al-Risalah* (2024). <https://doi.org/10.34005/alrisalah.v15i1.3543>

apply universally (QS. al-Nahl [16]: 90) and (QS. al-Nahl [16]: 97)⁷. These values demand a re-reading of gender relations based on equal responsibility and respect for human rights. Socially, the Qur'an provides space for women to participate in the public and social spheres (QS. al-Ahzab [33]: 35), which shows that women's roles are not limited by gender, but are determined by their capacity and contribution to the common good.⁸

A number of contemporary Muslim scholars have attempted to reconstruct the view of women in the holy text. Asghar Ali Engineer asserts that a fair interpretation of women must be based on the principles of Islamic social justice.⁹ In Indonesia, Nasaruddin Umar developed an inclusive interpretation approach that affirms spiritual equality between men and women within the framework of tawhid.¹⁰ Nur Rofiah, through the concept of *true justice*, highlights the importance of understanding gender relations based on values of humanity that are just and oriented towards the common good, taking into account women's experiences.¹¹

Meanwhile, Faqihuddin Abdul Qodir offers the theory of *mubadalah* (reciprocity) as an approach to interpretation and fiqh that places men and women as equal partners in carrying out social and religious responsibilities.¹² KH. Husein Muhammad also made an

⁷ Fazira Miranda. "Eksistensi dan Posisi Perempuan Dalam Politik Kekuasaan: Perspektif Tafsir Qs. An-Nahl Ayat 97." *Menara Tebuireng : Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* (2025). <https://doi.org/10.33752/menaratebuireng.v20i2.8359>.

⁸ Lestari Dara Cinta Utami Ginting, Vivi Adryani Nasution, Aris Suhendar, Alya Rahma Nasution, and All Rizky Ramadhan. "Women in the Public Sphere: Gender Equality in Islamic Theology." *Pharos Journal of Theology* (2023). <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.10518>.

⁹ Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Qur'an, Women and Modern Society* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 2001), p. 45.

¹⁰ Nasaruddin Umar, *Argumen Kesetaraan Gender Perspektif Al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 2001), p. 78.

¹¹ Nur Rofiah, *Nalar Kritis Muslimah: Refleksi Muslimah atas Keperempuanan, Kemanusiaan, dan Keislaman* (Bandung: Afkaruna.id, 2020), p. 112.

¹² Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, *Qira'ah Mubadalah: Tafsir Progresif untuk Keadilan Gender dalam Islam* (Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2019), p. 63.

important contribution through his interpretation that favors gender justice, emphasizing that the values of the Qur'an contain a spirit of liberation and respect for the dignity of women. In addition, the Indonesian Women Ulema Congress (KUPI) has helped strengthen the discourse on gender justice based on religious texts by emphasizing the principles of benefit, justice, and equality in social and religious life. These ideas enrich a new epistemological framework for understanding women's humanity based on the principles of monotheism, justice, and benefit.¹³

However, there is still an urgent need to develop an epistemology of interpretation that is truly rooted in Qur'anic values without being trapped in the social biases of the past. This study offers an epistemological reconstruction approach that revisits the foundations of knowledge in understanding women based on three main dimensions: theological, moral, and social. This approach asserts that women's humanity is not merely a matter of rights, but part of Islam's theological mission to uphold justice and balance in human life.

This study not only seeks to reinterpret the text, but also proposes a new paradigm in Qur'anic studies that is transformative and inclusive. This paradigm is expected to restore women's position as full subjects in religious and social spaces, while also building a fair moral foundation for modern Muslim societies. Therefore, this study contributes to efforts to strengthen the epistemological foundations of Islam that humanize women in accordance with the Qur'an's vision of universal humanity.

Research Method

This study uses a thematic (maudhu'i) interpretation method with a contextual hermeneutic approach. The primary data consists of

¹³ Zuhrotu Sholikhah, "Rekonstruksi gender dalam Islam: Studi kritis atas tafsir tradisional perspektif feminism," *IJOUGS: International Journal of Umranic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2023): p. 22.

verses from the Qur'an related to human creation, social justice, and gender relations. The analysis was conducted by tracing the linguistic meaning, historical context (*asbab al-nuzul*), and contemporary relevance of the verses. This approach allows for an integrative reading of the text, context, and social reality.

Results and Discussion

Conceptual Study of Women in the Qur'an

Studies on women in the Qur'an have been the focus of Islamic exegetes and thinkers from classical to contemporary times. In the classical tradition, interpretations of verses about women were often framed by the strong patriarchal social and cultural structures of the time. For example, al-Tabari (d. 310 AH) in *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān* interpreted the verse "*al-rijāl qawwāmūna 'ala al-nisā'*" (QS. al-Nisā' [4]: 34) with an emphasis on male leadership associated with financial responsibility and physical strength. Although this interpretation is relevant in the context of medieval society, from a modern perspective, the interpretation of " " is often considered to reinforce gender hierarchy and obscure the principle of justice taught in the Qur'an.¹⁴

Similarly, Ibn Kathir (d. 774 AH) in *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm* interprets verses about women by referring to hadith and accounts of the companions, but remains within a social framework that places women as protected parties, not as active subjects. Meanwhile, al-Qurthubi (d. 671 AH) in *al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān* provides a legal approach to gender relations, focusing on rights and obligations in the household. These three exegetes show that classical exegesis has high historical value, but has not developed an epistemological perspective on gender justice.

¹⁴ Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1991), p. 99.

Changes began to appear in modern interpretations when Muslim thinkers began to associate the teachings of the Qur'an with universal human values. Two important figures in this phase were Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905) and Rashid Rida (1865–1935) through *Tafsīr al-Manār*. They asserted that Islam came to uphold social justice, including for women. Abduh rejected the view that women were created from a part of a man's body, because according to him, the Qur'an states that both came from one soul (nafs wāhidah).¹⁵ This assertion became the basis for the emergence of a new theological awareness that the relationship between men and women is one of mutuality, not domination.

In the context of contemporary thought, the interpretation of verses about women has evolved through a critical hermeneutic approach that emphasizes the importance of justice, equality, and benefit. Asghar Ali Engineer, in *The Rights of Women in Islam*, asserts that women's equality is not only a social demand but also a logical consequence of the principle of tawhid.¹⁶ According to him, all forms of discrimination against women contradict the concept of tawhid because they imply the superiority of some humans over others. He views the Qur'an as a text of liberation that demands a progressive reading in the context of modern society. This theological approach to liberation opens up space for reinterpreting the text within the framework of social and moral justice.

In the wider Islamic world, Riffat Hassan and Fatima Mernissi have also made important contributions to the discourse on the humanization of women. Hassan criticizes the theological myth that women were created inferior to men, asserting that this narrative has no basis in the Qur'an. Meanwhile, in *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1987),

¹⁵ Muhammad Abduh and Rasyid Ridha, *Tafsīr al-Manār* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, 1999), Volume 5, p. 205.

¹⁶ Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Qur'an, Women and Modern Society*, p. 89.

Mernissi critically examines the traditions of hadith and social history that limit women's mobility. These two thinkers expand the epistemological dimensions of interpretation by introducing historical and sociological analysis in understanding the text.

In the Indonesian context, a number of scholars have developed interpretations that are in line with the principle of full humanization of women. Nasaruddin Umar (1999), in his work *Argumen Kesetaraan Gender Perspektif Al-Qur'an (Arguments for Gender Equality from the Perspective of the Qur'an)*, explains that the verses of the Qur'an must be read integrally within the framework of tawhid and maslahah. He emphasizes that gender equality is part of Islam's humanitarian mission. KH. Husein Muhammad reinforces this argument by developing an interpretation based on social justice and partnership between men and women. Meanwhile, Nur Rofiah (2019), through the concept of true justice, emphasizes that gender relations must be based on equal humanity and respect for women's dignity. Meanwhile, Faqihuddin Abdul Qodir (2019) offers the theory of mubadalah (reciprocity) as an approach to interpretation and fiqh that places men and women as equal partners in social and religious responsibilities. This perspective rejects biased textual approaches and opens space for mutually empowering interpretations.

These studies show an epistemological shift from a hierarchical paradigm to a reciprocity paradigm. This shift marks the birth of serious efforts to restore the moral and theological spirit of the Qur'an, which places women as an integral part of universal humanity.¹⁷ In this context, epistemological reconstruction is not only a revision of the methods of interpretation, but also a repositioning of theological and

¹⁷ Ida Afidah. "Promoting Gender Equality and Empowerment: A Quranic and Hadith Perspective on Women's Roles in Islam." *Diroyah: Jurnal Studi Ilmu Hadis* (2023). <https://doi.org/10.15575/diroyah.v7i2.25177>.

moral thinking that is more in line with the basic values of the Qur'an: monotheism, justice, and benefit.

By reviewing the various views above, it can be concluded that both classical and modern literature play a role in shaping the understanding of women, but the contemporary approach demands a more fair, contextual, and humanistic reading. Therefore, this study seeks to continue this intellectual tradition by emphasizing the epistemological dimension rooted in the theological and moral values of the Qur'an, in order to construct an interpretive framework that fully humanizes women in modern social reality.

Theological Dimension: Humans and Equality Before God

The theology of the Qur'an places men and women on an equal footing before Allah as creatures created with the same will and purpose, namely to be *'abd Allah* (servants of Allah) and *khalifah fi al-ardh* (representatives of Allah on earth). This equality is emphasized in QS. al-Hujurat [49]: 13:

"O mankind! Indeed, We have created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous."

This verse emphasizes that human dignity is not determined by gender, race, or social status, but by the quality of piety. Thus, the Qur'an abolishes the patriarchal cosmological view that considers men to be more noble than women. QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 30 also emphasizes the concept of human stewardship on earth without distinguishing between genders, placing men and women as equal spiritual and social subjects in moral and civilizational responsibilities.

In classical interpretations, some exegetes such as al-Tabari or al-Qurtubi tend to interpret the text of the Qur'an in the context of 7th-century Arab patriarchal culture, which influences the way they interpret the relationship between men and women. However,

contemporary interpretations such as Nasaruddin Umar in *Argumen Kesetaraan Gender (Arguments for Gender Equality)* emphasize that this equality is ontological and epistemological, not symbolic.¹⁸ This means that women and men have equal rights as subjects of revelation and moral agents in understanding and implementing divine messages.

Theological reconstruction is necessary to dismantle interpretive biases born of patriarchal social structures. A theological approach based on *tawhid* (monotheism) is key. The principle of *tawhid* is not only the concept of the oneness of God, but also the foundation of human existential equality. If Allah is the only source of authority, then no human being has the right to dominate or oppress another human being on the basis of gender. Thus, the principle of *tawhid* also contains a social dimension that rejects all forms of gender hierarchy.¹⁹

In the perspective of Islamic feminist theology, as stated by Riffat Hassan and Asma Barlas, *tawhid* is the basis of gender justice because it eliminates all forms of human servitude to other humans. Women are not subordinate to men, but rather existential partners in God's project of humanity. In an epistemological context, this means that authority in understanding texts cannot be monopolized by one gender. Women have the same spiritual and intellectual capacity to understand revelation.

The principle of *divine nature* in the Qur'an also reinforces the view that all humans are created with the same divine potential (QS. ar-Rum [30]: 30). This spiritual equality is the basis for the epistemological reconstruction of liberating Islamic theology. This effort requires a rereading of texts that are often used to justify gender inequality, such as QS. an-Nisa [4]: 34, not in the spirit of domination, but in the context of mutual responsibility in family and social life.

¹⁸ Nasaruddin Umar, *Argumen Kesetaraan Gender Perspektif Al-Qur'a*, p. 145.

¹⁹ Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, *Qira'ah Mubadalah*, p. 134.

Thus, the theological dimension in the humanization of women is not only about normative equality, but also about epistemic liberation, restoring women as subjects in the process of understanding, interpreting, and actualizing the divine message in human history.

Moral Dimension: The Humanization of Women as Qur'anic Ethics

In the moral dimension, the Qur'an affirms the principles of justice (*'adl*) and goodness (*ihsan*) as the foundation of universal ethics. QS. an-Nahl [16]: 90 states:

"Indeed, Allah commands you to be just, to do good, and to give to relatives, and forbids immorality, wrongdoing, and hostility."

This verse emphasizes that justice and kindness are universal moral commands without gender discrimination. Thus, respect for women's dignity is not a result of modernity, but part of Qur'anic ethics that is inherent in Islamic teachings.

Qur'anic ethics are not only ritualistic but also social. A person's piety is not measured solely by individual worship but also by their attitude and behavior towards fellow human beings, especially towards groups that are vulnerable to injustice, including women. In this framework, *the humanization of women* is an integral part of *akhlaq karimah* (noble morals) taught by the Prophet Muhammad. The Messenger of Allah even emphasized in his hadith: "*The best of you are those who are best to their families, and I am the best to my family.*" (HR. Tirmidhi).

Progressive Islamic thinkers such as Asghar Ali Engineer see that Qur'anic morality must be read as *moral humanization*, that is, morality that humanizes humans.²⁰ This means that the Qur'an is not intended to limit the role of women, but rather to free them from oppressive social structures. Engineer emphasizes that many gender inequalities arise not because of Islamic teachings, but because of interpretations constructed within a patriarchal social context.

²⁰ Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Qur'an, Women and Modern Society*, p. 102.

Fatima Mernissi also highlights the importance of moral reinterpretation of hadith and normative texts that are often used to restrain women. She reminds us that Qur'anic morality should not be used as a tool to legitimize male domination, but rather as a basis for building ethical, mutually respectful, and egalitarian relationships.²¹

Thus, the humanization of women in the context of Qur'anic morality encompasses two aspects:

- a. Personal ethics, namely the recognition of the value and dignity of women as whole individuals; and
- b. Social ethics, namely the application of values of justice and compassion in social structures involving women.

Moral reconstruction in this context means making the Qur'an not only a legal guide, but also a source of living human values. Qur'anic ethics contain a spirit of liberation that does not limit women to domestic roles, but recognizes their contributions in the public sphere, education, economy, and leadership.

Social Dimension: Reconstruction of Gender Relations in the Qur'anic Perspective

The social dimension of the humanization of women in the Qur'an emphasizes the importance of building a just and equitable social structure. The Qur'an speaks extensively about social values that transcend biological and structural boundaries, including in the context of inheritance (QS. an-Nisa [4]: 7, 11–12), marriage (QS. ar-Rum [30]: 21), and leadership (QS. an-Nisa [4]: 34).

These verses are often a source of debate, because in classical readings they appear to place women in a subordinate position. However, a contextual and *maqashidi* (based on the objectives of Islamic law) approach to the Qur'an () teaches that the text must be understood in accordance with the social context and universal values of justice that are the objectives of the Sharia (*maqashid al-shari'ah*). In this context, a

²¹ Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite*, p. 156.

literal reading that maintains gender inequality contradicts the spirit of justice that is the essence of the Qur'an itself.

The theory of *Mubadalah* developed by Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir provides a new epistemological framework for understanding gender relations in Islam. *Mubadalah* (reciprocity) emphasizes that every teaching addressed to men also applies to women, unless there is explicit evidence to the contrary.²² With this approach, the verses of the Qur'an on rights, obligations, and social roles can be read from a reciprocal perspective, rather than a hierarchical one.

This Qur'anic social approach also contains the principles of *ta'awun* (cooperation), *rahmah* (compassion), and *musyawarah* (participation). In a just society, men and women must play a role together in building a just civilization. This principle is in line with the vision of Islam as *rahmatan lil-'alamin*, which guarantees the dignity of all human beings without discrimination.

In the contemporary context, social reconstruction of gender relations is part of a broader Islamic reform movement. Social interpretive approaches, such as *contextual interpretation* and *social-living interpretation of the Qur'an*, seek to restore the function of the Qur'an as a source of social transformation.²³ Women are no longer objects of policy or interpretation, but active subjects who help determine the direction of social change.

Thus, efforts to humanize women in Islam do not stop at normative equality, but continue to structural justice and equal social participation. Gender equality in Islam is not an imitation of Western values, but an articulation of Qur'anic values that affirm the dignity of humans as Allah's caliphs on earth.

²² Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, *Qira'ah Mubadalah*, p. 98.

²³ Nasaruddin Umar, *Argumen Kesetaraan Gender Perspektif Al-Qur'an*, p. 201.

Conclusion

The Qur'an emphasizes that women's humanity stems from the values of monotheism and universal justice. The epistemological reconstruction of this understanding opens up space for a more just, inclusive, and contextual interpretive paradigm. This study is expected to contribute to the development of a gender interpretive epistemology rooted in Qur'anic values and relevant to contemporary social challenges.

The effort to fully humanize women in the Qur'an is an epistemological process that involves the reconstruction of theological, moral, and social understandings. Theologically, women's equality stems from the principle of monotheism, which negates biological hierarchy. Morally, the values of justice and compassion form the basis of relational ethics. Socially, a contextual reading of the Qur'anic text opens up space for the transformation of patriarchal structures towards gender justice.

Thus, the Qur'an is not merely a normative text, but a revelation of liberation that continues to demand reinterpretation in accordance with universal human principles. The full humanization of women, in the Qur'anic view, is part of Islam's prophetic mission: to uphold justice, honor human dignity, and realize a civilized social life.

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