

Gender Justice and Liberation in the Interpretation of the Qur'an: A New Reading of Q.S. 4: 34

Keadilan Gender dan Pembebasan dalam Penafsiran Al-Qur'an: Sebuah Pembacaan Baru atas Q.S. 4: 34

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Abstract

This article explores the reinterpretation of Qur'an 4:34 through a comparative analysis of two contemporary Islamic hermeneutical models: Fazlur Rahman's ethical-historical "double movement" and Farid Esack's liberationist approach. This article aims to respond to the continued misuse of this verse to justify patriarchal authority and domestic violence, particularly in Muslim-majority societies. Using qualitative textual analysis, this study examines the socio-historical context of the verse and its ethical implications, as understood by Rahman, along with Esack's emphasis on social justice, victim-centered exegesis, and advocacy for the *mustad'afin* (the oppressed). This research highlights how both scholars reject literalist readings and advocate for justice-centered interpretations that align with the Qur'anic values of compassion (*rahmah*) and justice (*'adl*). Rahman's methodology provides a historical reconstruction that invalidates wife beating in a modern context, while Esack's liberation theology redefines *nushūz* and centers Qur'anic exegesis on the dignity of marginalized individuals. The synthesis of their models has been shown to support reform in Islamic education, gender-inclusive curricula, and anti-violence legal policies. These findings underscore that integrating ethical and liberation paradigms can produce a

dynamic and socially responsive hermeneutics of the Qur'an. This approach contributes to contemporary Islamic scholarship by offering a theological foundation for gender justice and promoting interpretations that are contextually grounded and ethically empowering.

Keyword: *Gender Justice, Liberation, Interpretation of the Qur'an, Q.S. 4: 34*

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengeksplorasi reinterpretasi Al-Qur'an surat 4:34 melalui analisis komparatif atas dua model hermeneutika Islam kontemporer: "gerakan ganda" (*double movement*) etis-historis Fazlur Rahman dan pendekatan liberasionis Farid Esack. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menanggapi penyalahgunaan ayat tersebut yang terus-menerus untuk membenarkan otoritas patriarki dan kekerasan dalam rumah tangga, khususnya di dalam masyarakat mayoritas Muslim. Dengan memanfaatkan analisis tekstual kualitatif, studi ini mengkaji konteks sosio-historis ayat tersebut dan implikasi etisnya, sebagaimana dipahami oleh Rahman, bersama dengan penekanan Esack pada keadilan sosial, eksegesis yang berpusat pada korban, dan advokasi bagi kaum *mustad'afin* (kaum tertindas). Penelitian ini menyoroti bagaimana kedua sarjana tersebut menolak pembacaan literalis dan mengadvokasi interpretasi yang berpusat pada keadilan yang selaras dengan nilai-nilai Al-Qur'an tentang kasih sayang (rahmah) dan keadilan ('adl). Metode Rahman menyediakan rekonstruksi sejarah yang membantalkan validitas pemukulan istri dalam konteks modern, sementara teologi pembebasan Esack mendefinisikan ulang *nushūz* dan memusatkan eksegesis Al-Qur'an pada martabat individu yang terpinggirkan. Sintesis dari model-model mereka terbukti mendukung reformasi dalam pendidikan Islam, kurikulum inklusif gender, dan kebijakan hukum anti-kekerasan. Temuan-temuan ini menggarisbawahi bahwa mengintegrasikan paradigma etis dan pembebasan dapat menghasilkan hermeneutika Al-Qur'an yang dinamis dan responsif secara sosial. Pendekatan ini berkontribusi pada kesarjanaan Islam kontemporer dengan menawarkan landasan teologis bagi keadilan gender dan mempromosikan interpretasi yang berjangkar secara kontekstual dan memberdayakan secara etis.

Kata kunci: *Keadilan Gender, Pembebasan, Tafsir Al-Qur'an, Q.S. 4: 34*

Introduction

The interpretation of Qur'an Surah An-Nisa [4]:34 has long been a contentious issue in contemporary Islamic scholarship, particularly regarding its intersection with gender justice and domestic violence. This verse, often quoted to justify male authority (*qawwāmūn*) and the disciplinary act of *wadribuhunna* (traditionally translated as "beat them"), is frequently instrumentalized in religious contexts to normalize patriarchal control. In many Muslim-majority societies, including Indonesia, this textualist understanding contributes to the persistence of domestic violence, creating a stark gap between Islamic ethical ideals of compassion (*rahmah*) and justice (*'adl*) and the lived reality of women. Data from the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) highlights that incidents of domestic violence remain alarmingly high, underscoring the urgency of addressing how religious texts are understood and practiced in society.¹

In the realm of exegesis, a dichotomy exists between classical and contemporary approaches. Traditional exegetes such as al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir historically upheld a hierarchical gender model based on the socio-cultural conditions of their time, viewing men's leadership as an inherent divine mandate. Conversely, modern reformist scholarship challenges this static reading by adopting feminist

¹ Based on real-time data from SIMFONI-PPA KemenPPPA as of December 11, 2025, national violence figures reached 29,995 cases, dominated by 25,644 female victims and 6,340 male victims; data trends indicate the highest prevalence in sexual violence as well as domestic violence, with adolescents (aged 13–17) as the most vulnerable demographic. See: <https://kekerasan.kemenpppa.go.id/ringkasan>.

and ethical-political lenses to reexamine disputed verses.² Contemporary hermeneutics urges interpreters to distinguish between the historical context of revelation and the eternal moral values contained therein, aiming to align Qur'anic interpretation with contemporary standards of human rights.³ Critics argue that classical interpretations often fail to account for the evolving nature of social structures, whereas dynamic reinterpretations must prioritize *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (the objectives of Islamic law), specifically human dignity and welfare.⁴ Despite this intellectual momentum, literalist interpretations that legitimize violence in cases of *nushūz* (disobedience) continue to dominate grassroots discourse, perpetuating norms that contradict the Qur'an's broader ethical framework.⁵

Although numerous studies have explored gender-equitable interpretations, there is a critical need for a methodology that not only reconstructs history but also explicitly centers the victim in the interpretive process. This study fills this gap by synthesizing two distinct yet complementary hermeneutical models: Fazlur Rahman's

² Masoumeh R. Goudarzi, "Advancing Women's Social and Political Rights Through a Reinterpretation of Islamic Law: Ayatollah Jannaati's View of Female Political Authority in Shiite Islam," *Digest of Middle East Studies* 34, no. 1 (2025).

³ R. Goudarzi, "Advancing Women's Social and Political Rights Through a Reinterpretation of Islamic Law: Ayatollah Jannaati's View of Female Political Authority in Shiite Islam," *Digest of Middle East Studies* 34, no. 1 (2025).

⁴ ana Kusmana, "The Quran and Family Concept in Modern Southeast Asia: Case Study of Indonesia and Malaysia," *El Harakah Jurnal Budaya Islam* 24, no. 1 (2022): 85–108. Hamza R'boul, "Alternative Theorizing of Multicultural Education: An Islamic Perspective on Interculturality and Social Justice," *Journal for Multicultural Education* 15, no. 2 (2021): 213–24.

⁵ Hamdan Ladiku and Akhmad R. B. Zaman, "Examining Domestic Violence From the Lens of Islamic Law: A Maqasid Analysis," *Ulul Albab Jurnal Studi Dan Penelitian Hukum Islam* 6, no. 2 (2024): 152.

ethical-historical “double movement” and Farid Esack’s liberation theology. While Rahman’s approach provides the methodological rigor to strip away historical contingencies and invalidate the permissibility of violence, Esack’s framework offers a political theology that places the *mustad’afīn* (the oppressed) at the center of meaning-making. By integrating these paradigms, this research aims to offer a robust theological foundation for gender justice that transcends mere apologetics, contributing to tangible reforms in Islamic education and family law that are both religiously authentic and socially transformative.

Method

This study employs a qualitative library research design using a comparative hermeneutic approach. The primary objective is to analyze the reinterpretation of Q.S. An-Nisā’ [4]:34 through the perspectives of two prominent contemporary Muslim thinkers, Fazlur Rahman and Farid Esack. This comparative framework was chosen to explore how two distinct hermeneutical paradigms—historical-contextual analysis and liberation theology—address the critical issues of gender inequality and the theological justification of domestic violence.

The primary data sources were selected using purposive sampling to capture the paradigm shift from pre-modern to contemporary exegesis. For the classical tradition, the study relies on *Jāmi’ al-Bayān* by Al-Tabari and *Tafsir al-Qur’ān al-‘Azim* by Ibn Kathir. These texts were chosen as they represent the canonical, authoritative interpretations that have historically shaped the mainstream understanding of gender hierarchies in the Muslim world. For the contemporary perspective, the study analyzes the authoritative works of Fazlur Rahman and Farid Esack. These two figures were specifically selected because they

offer systematic methodological alternatives: Rahman provides an ethical-historical reconstruction of the text, while Esack offers a sociopolitical approach centered on the *mustad'afīn* (oppressed), allowing for a comprehensive critique of patriarchal readings. Secondary data were gathered from relevant academic literature and analyzed using close reading techniques to identify the key concepts and theological assumptions of each figure.

Data analysis was conducted through a systematic three-stage process: descriptive, thematic, and comparative. First, the study descriptively reconstructed Rahman's "Double Movement" theory and Esack's liberation hermeneutics. Second, a thematic analysis was applied to examine their specific interpretations of the concept of *qiwāmah* (leadership) and the controversial command *wadribūhunna*. Finally, a comparative synthesis was performed to identify points of convergence and divergence. Crucially, this synthesis is evaluated using *Maqāsid al-Shari'ah* not merely as a supplementary reference, but as a primary analytical tool for ethical validity. This framework functions as a filter to test whether the reinterpretations align with the higher objectives of Islamic law—specifically the preservation of life and dignity—ensuring that the findings consistently uphold the Qur'anic values of justice (*'adl*) and compassion (*rahmah*) for contemporary legal and educational reform.

Result and Discussion

Interpretation of QS. An-Nisā' [4]:34

The QS. An-Nisā' [4]:34 has become a central point in the discourse on gender relations and domestic authority in Islam, mainly because this verse places men as *qawwām* (leaders) over

women. In classical interpretation traditions, the concept of *qiwāmah* is often understood within a hierarchical framework, placing men in a superior position and reducing women to objects of obedience. This framework then has implications for the meaning of *nusyūz* and the phrase *wadhribūhunna*, which is often translated as “beat them,” and is used as normative legitimization for the practice of disciplining wives, even domestic violence. This kind of interpretive construction is not neutral, but rather arises from certain theological and social assumptions that place the husband-wife relationship within a structure of one-sided control. As criticized by contemporary thinkers such as Zaitunah Subhan, this logic of interpretation not only places women in a subordinate position, but also ignores the values of justice, reciprocity, and respect for human dignity, which are fundamental principles in Qur'anic ethics.⁶ Therefore, interpretations that use this verse to legitimize violence are ethically untenable and demand a critical, contextual re-reading oriented toward the principles of gender equality and the protection of women.

The emergence of this hierarchical understanding cannot be separated from the authority of classical interpretations that have taken root in the Muslim community and helped shape the way gender relations are understood. To understand the root of this problem, it is important to note that the majority of classical interpretations were compiled in the context of a patriarchal society. As a form of interpretation, *tafsir* is closely dependent on the temporal conditions surrounding both the reader and the

⁶ Zaitunah subhan, *Tafsir Kebencian: Studi Bias Gender dalam Tafsir Al-Qur'an*, (Yogyakarta: LkiS, 1999): 102.

interpreter.⁷ Within a hermeneutic framework, interpretations never exist in a vacuum; they reflect and reproduce the values of their time.⁸ Therefore, the main problem with classical interpretations is not their scientific authority, but their tendency to naturalize gender inequality as a normative religious imperative. This point has become the focus of criticism by contemporary interpreters, especially Muslim feminists, who seek to deconstruct the relationship between text, patriarchal context, and the production of religious meaning. This verse states that:

الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَّبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ
فَالصِّلَاحُتُ قَنِيتُ حُفِظْتُ لِلْغَيْبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ اللَّهُ وَالَّتِي تَخَافُونَ نُشُورُهُنَّ فَعَظُوهُنَّ
وَاهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَاضْرِبُوهُنَّ فَإِنْ أَطَعْنَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَيِّلًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ
كَانَ عَلَيْهَا كَيْرًا

“Men are the leaders (*qawwām*) of women. Men (husbands) are responsible for women (wives) because Allah has made some of them (men) superior to others (women) and because they (men) spend some of their wealth. Righteous women are those who are obedient (to Allah) and guard themselves when (their husbands) are absent because Allah has guarded (them). As for those women from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them, leave them alone in bed, and (if necessary) strike them (in a way that does not cause

⁷ Sahiron Syamsuddin, *et.al.*, *Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an Madzhab Yogyakarta*, Yogyakarta: Penerbit Islamika, 2003, hal. 99.

⁸ Musdah Mulia, *Ensiklopedia Muslimah Reformis (Pokok-Pokok Pemikiran untuk Interpretasi dan Aksi)*, Penerbit Baca: Tangerang Selatan, 2020, hal. 629.

pain). However, if they obey you, do not seek ways to harm them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted and Great."

In interpreting this verse, Ibn Kathīr emphasized that men have a position as leaders and guides for women, including providing guidance when they are considered to have strayed. This position, according to him, is because men have superiority, both in terms of intellect, leadership, and economic responsibility such as dowry and livelihood,⁹ so that gender relations are understood by Ibn Kathīr as a hierarchical relationship with men as moral and social authorities. This view is reinforced by al-Qurthubī, who associates *qiwāmah* with traits considered inherent in men, such as decisiveness, strength, and the ability to organize, while women are positioned as the weaker party in need of guidance. It is these inherent differences that form the basis of male leadership over women.¹⁰ The interpretations of these two exegetes represent the patriarchal paradigm of the classical era, which used biological differences as the basis for social and moral hierarchy. In the modern context, this assumption is difficult to maintain, given that empirical reality shows that intellectual, moral, and leadership capacities are not determined by gender. Thus, this classical interpretation needs to be read critically and historically so as not to reduce the message of justice in the Qur'an to a legitimization of pre-modern culture.

This verse also contains an important discussion concerning disciplinary measures toward wives who are considered to have committed *nushūz*, or disobedience toward

⁹ Isma'il ibn 'Umar Ibnu Katsir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim*. Riyadh: Dar Thayyibah li an-Nasyr wa t-Tawzī', juz 2, 1999, hal. 292.

¹⁰ Abu 'Abdillah Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Anshari Al-Qurthubi, *Al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an*, juz 6, Beirut: Mu'assasah ar-Risalah, 2006, hal. 280.

their husbands. In this context, the term *wadhribūhunna* has frequently drawn attention, as it has traditionally been translated as “beat them.” The verse states:

“.....Pious women are those who are obedient (to Allah) and guard themselves when (their husbands) are absent because Allah has guarded (them). As for those women from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them, leave them alone in bed, and (if necessary) strike them (in a way that does not cause pain). However, if they obey you, do not seek ways to harm them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted and Great.”

Classical exegetes such as al-Thabarī and Ibn Kathīr generally understood the term as referring to a light physical act permitted as a last resort within a disciplinary framework directed at wives.¹¹ However, the dominance of this literal interpretation overlooks the linguistic fact that the term *daraba* is highly polysemous, encompassing a wide range of meanings, such as to separate, to set forth a parable, or to travel.¹² Reducing *dharaba* solely to the act of physical striking reflects an interpretive tendency that aligns with male-centered structures of authority. Consequently, a more comprehensive semantic

¹¹Al-Ṭabarī interprets the stages of addressing *nushūz* as beginning with admonition, followed by confinement in the home, and finally, light, non-injurious striking (*darb ghayr al-mubarrīḥ*) as a disciplinary measure to ensure the wife returns to her obligations. See: Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy al-Qur’ān*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd al-Muhsin al-Turkī (Cairo: Dār Hajar, 1422 AH), 6:110. Similarly, Ibn Kathīr explains that striking is applicable only after admonition and separation in bed, provided that the striking causes no harm. See: Ismā’īl ibn ‘Umar ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Aẓīm*, annot. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1419 AH), 2:258.

¹²Aḥmad ibn Fāris ibn Zakariyyā, *Ma’jam Maqāyīs al-Lughah*, ed. ‘Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1969–1972), 3:343–344.

and ethical analysis becomes imperative, particularly in light of Qur'anic values such as *rahmah* (compassion), *'adl* (justice), and the protection of women as a vulnerable party. Such a rereading does not constitute a rejection of the exegetical tradition; rather, it represents a critical effort to ensure that the Qur'an's normative message is not diminished by patriarchal assumptions that are no longer relevant.

Fazlur Rahman's Double Movement

Fazlur Rahman's hermeneutical approach is grounded in the assumption that the Qur'an is divine revelation revealed within a specific historical context while simultaneously conveying a universal moral vision. Therefore, the Qur'anic text cannot be understood in an ahistorical or purely literal manner; rather, it must be read by examining the social, cultural, and concrete problems of seventh-century Arabian society that formed the backdrop of revelation. Rahman conceives of revelation as a dynamic and progressive process, in which the Qur'an's legal provisions function as historical instruments for realizing more fundamental ethical objectives, such as justice, public welfare, and the protection of human dignity. This approach does not seek to abolish Qur'anic norms but rather to distinguish between legal regulations shaped by particular social contexts and the universal moral values embedded in the Qur'an. Accordingly, Fazlur Rahman's critique of specific legal rulings should not be understood as a normative rejection, but as a limitation of their application to their original historical context. This framework is methodologically articulated through the concept of *double movement*: an interpretive movement from the contemporary context back to the context of revelation in order to grasp the original meaning of the text,

followed by a return to the present context to formulate relevant universal ethical principles.¹³ Thus, for Fazlur Rahman, the Qur'an is best understood as a project of social ethics that calls for contextual and responsible interpretation, rather than as a normative text that freezes past social structures.

The first movement in the *double movement* method involves examining the socio-historical context in which a verse was revealed in order to grasp the original meaning of the Qur'anic statement by tracing the historical situations and social problems that prompted its revelation as a response to particular social realities.¹⁴ In the context of seventh-century Arabia, gender relations were shaped by male dominance in both economic and physical spheres, and social norms were largely constructed around these conditions. Fazlur Rahman understands QS.4:34 as a restrictive legal intervention aimed at curbing arbitrary violence, rather than as a permanent ruling that legitimizes violence. Within this framework, *qiwāmah* is not interpreted as a theological justification for male superiority, but as a reflection of the social and economic responsibilities assigned to men within the societal structure of the time. Similarly, the stages prescribed for addressing *nushūz*—namely admonition, separation in bed, and, finally, a non-injurious physical gesture—are understood as mechanisms designed to limit violence rather than to endorse it. Accordingly, the purpose of this verse is to respond to the specific social

¹³ Amalia, Dian Risky, Wiwied Pratiwi, Muhamad Agus Mushodiq, Muhammad Saifullah, and Tuti Nur Khotimah. "Hermeneutika Perspektif Gadamer dan Fazlur Rahman." *Al-Fathin: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra Arab* 3, no. 02 (2020), 190-191.

¹⁴ Edi Hermanto, "Implementasi Teori Tafsir Gerak Ganda Fazlur Rahman Pada Buku Ajar Al-Qur'an Dan Hadist." *Jurnal An-Nida: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* Vol. 41 No. 1 2017, hal. 36.

conditions of the seventh century, and its instructions function as restrictive measures rather than as the establishment of violence as a permanent ethical norm.

The second movement, according to Fazlur Rahman, aims to actualize the Qur'an's moral values and universal principles within the context of contemporary interpretation.¹⁵ Accordingly, the reading of QS.4:34 involves extracting its core moral values—such as justice, compassion, and responsibility (*qiwāmah*)—and applying them to present-day life. In the modern context, *nushūz* is no longer understood solely as a wife's disobedience, but as a relational problem that may arise from either party within a marital relationship. Consequently, its resolution should be pursued through dialogue, equality, and peaceful conflict resolution, free from violence. Rahman emphasizes that what ultimately matters is not the specific legal formulation of the rule, but the broader ethical message it conveys. In this light, *qiwāmah* today signifies shared moral leadership between husband and wife, grounded in human dignity, mutual respect, and nonviolent approaches to resolving conflict. Through this approach, the interpretation of the verse is directed toward fostering a harmonious family life free from violence.

Table 1: Rahman's Double Movement Applied to Q.S. 4:34

Movement	Focus	Interpretation of <i>wadribūhunna</i>
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¹⁵ Edi Hermanto, "Implementasi Teori Tafsir Gerak Ganda Fazlur Rahman Pada Buku Ajar Al-Qur'an Dan Hadist." ..., hal. 36.

First Movement	Historical context (7th century Arabia)	Restrictive legal measures to limit violence within patriarchal structures
Second Movement	Reapplication of contemporary ethics	The moral principles of nonviolence and shared dignity override literal interpretations.

Rahman's reconstruction ultimately produces ethical guidelines such as mutual respect, justice, and compassion. These values realign the verse with the spirit of the Qur'an and support a gender-equitable interpretation of marriage and family law today.

Farid Esack's Liberation Hermeneutics

Farid Esack was born in 1959 in Wynberg, Cape Town, into an oppressed Muslim community under apartheid. His experience as a minority and his involvement in the anti-apartheid movement from a young age shaped his theological orientation toward social justice.¹⁶ Farid Esack's interpretive methodology differs in tone and emphasis, rooted in liberation theology and social justice activism. Esack reads Qur'an 4:34 through the lens of the *mustad'afīn*, those who are systematically marginalized or oppressed. In the context of domestic violence, women often occupy this position. Therefore, any reading of the verse that appears to legitimize

¹⁶ Soleh, Achmad Khudori, and Erik Sabti Rahmawati. *Kerjasama umat beragama dalam Al Quran perspektif hermeneutika Farid Esack*. (Malang: UIN-Maliki Press, 2011): 52.

coercion or violence, according to Esack, fundamentally contradicts the ethical core of the Qur'an.

Esack's approach highlights how patriarchal interpretations function as a form of "hermeneutic violence," in which religious texts are used to uphold oppressive structures. He even describes such readings as a form of "*syirik*," or associating partners with God, placing one's cultural biases and ego above God's universal commands for justice and compassion. Esack emphasizes the real-life consequences of interpretation, especially for women who suffer domestic violence. His reinterpretation expands the concept of *nushūz*. Traditionally understood as a wife's disobedience, Esack argues that a husband's violence is a more terrible form of *nushūz*. The Qur'an, in his view, must be read in favor of the victim, not the perpetrator. Therefore, *wadribūhunna* should be read not as divine permission, but as a cultural accommodation aimed at harm reduction in a violent society. Esack's hermeneutics ultimately transforms the verse into a moral indictment of violence. He asserts that valid exegesis must empower victims and restore their agency and dignity. Therefore, his work contributes to what can be called "practical liberation theology," transforming the interpretation of the Qur'an into a tool for social reform and advocacy.

A New Reading of Q.S. 4: 34 Through the Hermeneutics of Fazlur Rahman and Farid Esack

Fazlur Rahman and Farid Esack's hermeneutical models show points of convergence as well as important differences that enrich the interpretation of the Qur'an, especially with regard to Q.S. An-Nisā' [4]:34. Both reject literal and patriarchal

readings, emphasizing that the interpretation of Qur'anic verses must be in line with its fundamental ethical values, especially justice and compassion. Thus, the text is not understood as legitimizing domination, but rather as a moral guide for just human relations.

The main point of convergence between Rahman and Esack lies in their commitment to contextual interpretation. Rahman emphasizes the importance of returning to the historical context of the revelation to discover moral principles that can then be applied in contemporary situations. Meanwhile, Esack also pays great attention to the current context, but with a stronger emphasis on power relations and ongoing structural injustice. While Rahman's approach is rooted in an ethical-intellectual tradition that encourages gradual and normative change, Esack's approach is more practical and political, with the aim of providing real defense and change for oppressed groups.

Table 2: Rahman and Esack's Comparative Review of Q.S. 4:34

Criteria	Fazlur Rahman	Farid Esack
Hermeneutic Model	Double Movement	Liberation Hermeneutics
Focus	Historical context & moral universality	The dynamics of power & social justice
Interpretation of <i>wadribūhunna</i>	Conditional restraint	Ethical refusal; calling for victim-

		centered empowerment
Application	Theological reform & reinterpretation of family law	Social advocacy, resistance against structural oppression

Fazlur Rahman's ethical-historical hermeneutics and Farid Esack's liberationist framework offer transformative opportunities to rethink the interpretation of QS.4:34 and its application in the realms of education, law, and social policy. By integrating Rahman's contextual analysis with Esack's justice-oriented praxis, Islamic scholarship can transcend static legalism and foster an interpretive ethos that is responsive to the lived experiences of marginalized groups, particularly women affected by domestic violence. This section discusses the implications of the study's findings for Islamic education, legal reform, policy development, and future research in Islamic hermeneutics.

Reforming Islamic Education and Family Law Findings indicate that incorporating Rahman and Esack's framework into Islamic education can substantially enrich the pedagogical approach to Qur'anic studies. Rahman's emphasis on the socio-historical context makes it possible to view Islamic texts not as something frozen in the seventh century, but as part of a dynamic moral discourse intended to evolve with changing realities. Meanwhile, Esack's liberation hermeneutics introduces an ethical imperative to align interpretation with the

experiences and needs of the *mustad'afīn*. Moos and Syekh¹⁷ argue that incorporating these diverse perspectives promotes a curriculum that fosters critical engagement and social responsiveness. This is in line with Rozy et al.,¹⁸ who emphasize the importance of a justice-centered curriculum in changing gender norms embedded in classical exegesis.

In the context of family law reform, the application of Rahman's dual movement theory empowers legal experts to distinguish between historically contingent legal provisions and the eternal ethical values of the Qur'an. This approach supports a re-evaluation of rulings that have legitimized violence or gender inequality, including those rooted in a literal interpretation of Q.S. 4:34. As suggested by Anwar *et al.*¹⁹, engaging in *ijtihad* informed by contemporary realities allows Islamic legal scholarship to evolve in ways that uphold fidelity to scripture and gender equality. Esack's model further encourages legal systems to place victims of domestic violence at the center of interpretation and legislation, advocating for policies that explicitly reject coercion and promote dignity.

Strengthening an Inclusive Gender Interpretation Curriculum Building on these pedagogical implications, integrating Rahman and Esack's methodologies into the interpretation curriculum in Islamic higher education offers a strategic way to dismantle patriarchal norms in Islamic

¹⁷ Maternal Identity and Muslim Ethics: South African Women's Experiences," *Religions* 15, no. 8 (2024): 927.

¹⁸ The Hermeneutics Influence on Feminist Exegesis: A Case Study on Amina Wadud," *Qist Journal of Quran and Tafseer Studies* 2, no. 3 (2023): 369–81.

¹⁹ Gender aproach in Islamic Views," *Asian Journal of Social and Humanities* 1, no. 05 (2023): 192–200.

scholarship. Rahemtulla²⁰ and Arafah²¹ have shown that a gender-inclusive curriculum that challenges traditionalist readings of controversial verses such as Q.S. 4:34 not only deepens scientific rigor but also provides intellectual tools for advocacy and reform. In this context, we are encouraged to critique biased interpretations and propose alternative readings based on the universal values of the Qur'an. Such a curriculum must prioritize the empowerment of marginalized voices. Esack's insistence on bringing the mustad'afin to the center of interpretive discourse challenges the exclusionary tendencies of classical scholarship. Rozy et al. and Anwar et al. emphasize that highlighting the experiences of women who suffer under patriarchal interpretations can transform interpretations of the Qur'an into a means of healing and ethical restoration. This shift from an authoritative mode of scholarship to an empathetic mode is consistent with the Qur'an's intrinsic call for justice and compassion.

Policy Formulation and Prevention of Domestic Violence

Perhaps the most pressing implication of this study is its contribution to the formulation of policies aimed at preventing domestic violence. Justice-centered hermeneutics repositions Q.S. 4:34 not as a license for patriarchal authority but as a site for ethical reflection on gender relations. Reinterpreting controversial phrases such as *wadribūhunna* through Rahman's historical contextualization and Esack's victim-centered lens provides a theological basis for rejecting domestic violence in all its forms. Akbar²² argues that textual reinterpretation must

²⁰ "The Future of Islamic Liberation Theology."

²¹ "The Hermeunetic Concept of the Qur'an Muhammad Shahru'r," *Eduvest - Journal of Universal Studies* 3, no. 2 (2023): 404–15.

²² "Fazlur Rahman's Influence on Contemporary Islamic Thought."

precede and inform legal reform, especially when scriptural authority is used to justify harmful practices. Sarnoto et al.²³ echo this view, suggesting that Islamic legal reform must move beyond mere apologetics and incorporate a comprehensive ethical recalibration of legal doctrine. By emphasizing *rahmah* and *'adl*, this hermeneutics empowers policymakers to enact laws that protect all individuals regardless of gender, marital status, or social class.

Community-based education is another vital pillar. Boiro & Einarsdóttir²⁴ show that equipping religious leaders, educators, and social workers with gender-sensitive interpretive tools significantly reduces social acceptance of domestic violence. When justice-centered readings are embedded in sermons, school curricula, and family counseling programs, they gradually reshape the ethical landscape of Muslim communities. Moreover, aligning interpretations of the Qur'an with international human rights standards does not dilute Islamic identity; rather, it affirms the moral alignment of the Qur'an with universal values of justice and dignity. Karman et al.²⁵ assert that Islamic teachings and global human rights need not be mutually exclusive. A hermeneutics that recognizes this harmony can contribute to domestic policies that uphold gender equality without alienating religious constituents.

²³ "Liberating and Enlightening Education on Qur'anic Perspective," *Jurnal Kajian Peradaban Islam* 5, no. 2 (2022): 136–40.

²⁴ "Begging for Knowledge in Senegal: Conflicting Understandings and Interests of the Dominant Anti-Trafficking Approach and Quranic Education," *Social Sciences* 13, no. 6 (2024): 288.

²⁵ "The Design for Emancipatory Quran Interpretation Learning to Deradicalize Students' Quran Understanding," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 2 (2021): 165–80.

Theoretical Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although Rahman and Esack's combined hermeneutics offer an interesting alternative to patriarchal readings, they are not without limitations. As noted by Akbar,²⁶ the complexity of the Qur'anic text precludes a single interpretation. The diversity of literary forms, rhetorical styles, and legal registers in the Qur'an demands a variety of complementary approaches. Future research should explore how justice-centered hermeneutics can integrate with other interpretive traditions, including philosophical, mystical, and linguistic frameworks, to achieve a more holistic exegesis.

In addition, the persistence of traditionalist opposition presents socio-political obstacles. Sarnoto et al.²⁷ observe that many religious institutions remain resistant to reformist ideas, citing concerns over theological authenticity and communal cohesion. Constructive engagement strategies—such as dialogical forums, collaborative training modules, and inter-school/school-of-thought partnerships—should be explored to foster shared ownership of reforms and mitigate polarization. Empirical research is also important. While this study primarily refers to textual analysis, future studies should assess the practical outcomes of applying justice-centered hermeneutics in real-world settings. Case studies of successful legal, educational, or communal reforms inspired by Rahman and Esack's model would offer critical insights into the viability and adaptability of this framework. Comparative research across regions and legal schools of thought could further illuminate

²⁶ "Portrait of Contextual Tafsir in Indonesia: A Study of Systematic Literature Review," *Mushaf Jurnal Tafsir Berwawasan Keindonesiaan* 2, no. 1 (2022): 1–48.

²⁷ "Liberating and Enlightening Education on Qur'anic Perspective."

how this methodology works under different socio-cultural conditions.

Finally, extending hermeneutical inquiry to other contested verses—such as those discussing inheritance, polygamy, or male guardianship—will test the versatility of this approach. Such research will contribute to the development of a consistent value-based methodology for engaging ethically with the entire corpus of the Qur'an. This discussion has demonstrated that the integration of Fazlur Rahman and Farid Esack's interpretive models offers profound insights and practical tools for confronting patriarchal biases in Islamic texts and institutions. Their synthesis not only enables a more compassionate reading of Qur'an 4:34, but also provides a moral compass for transforming education, law, and policy in Muslim societies. While challenges remain, the justice-centered hermeneutics outlined here point to an inevitable and hopeful direction for Islamic scholarship committed to dignity, equality, and nonviolence. Through ongoing critical engagement and community collaboration, this interpretive vision can inspire intellectual renewal and social justice in diverse Muslim contexts.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the integration of Fazlur Rahman's ethical-historical hermeneutics and Farid Esack's liberation-oriented exegesis offers a transformative framework for reinterpreting Qur'an 4:34. Both models reject patriarchal literalism and prioritize the Qur'an's higher ethical goals, especially justice ('adl) and compassion (rahmah).

Rahman's dual movement facilitates a contextual analysis that distinguishes between time-bound social norms and universal moral values. Esack's liberation hermeneutics, on the other hand, centers the voices of the *mustad'afīn*—those marginalized by traditional interpretations—and reclaims the Qur'an as a tool for social justice.

These findings emphasize that these interpretive models can inform Islamic educational reform, promote gender-inclusive hermeneutical methodologies, and support anti-violence legal frameworks rooted in Qur'anic ethics. They also provide theological legitimacy for domestic violence prevention policies that are consistent with both Islamic teachings and universal human rights. This synthesis contributes to the development of gender-sensitive Islamic scholarship and affirms that ethical and liberating readings are not only academically rigorous but also socially necessary. Future research should explore how this justice-centered hermeneutics can be applied to other disputed verses of the Qur'an beyond Q.S. 4:34, such as those concerning inheritance, polygamy, or guardianship. Such studies will help build a coherent and actionable paradigm for interpreting the Qur'an that upholds equality, dignity, and non-violence in diverse Muslim societies.

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