A FEMINIST INTERPRETATION OF QUR’ANIC TEXTS BY AMINA WADUD AND ZAITUNAH SUBHAN

Muhammad Fauzi Noor
Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta State Islamic University
muhammadfauzinoor.7@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Islam Rahmatan Lil Alamin is a genuine expression that underscores Islam’s transformative impact on societal systems during its emergence, particularly in addressing gender discrimination. Wadud and Subhan contribute significantly to contemporary Quranic exegesis by providing frameworks that align with Islam’s foundational ethos of justice and equality, addressing modern gender issues through scholarly reinterpretation of sacred texts. Their works highlight the dynamic interplay between historical context and contemporary application, fostering a deeper understanding of Islam’s teachings on gender relations.

The methodology of this research comprises a qualitative approach that integrates textual analysis of the Quran with critical discourse analysis of classical and contemporary interpretations. The primary sources include the Quran and Hadith, focusing on Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13 and other relevant verses. Secondary sources include classical tafsir (exegesis) by scholars such as Ibn Kathir and contemporary works by feminist scholars like Amina Wadud and Zaitunah Subhan. This study aims to rediscover the essence of Islamic teachings that liberate humanity from all forms of injustice and discrimination, while also offering constructive criticism of interpretations that do not align with Islam’s primary objectives. This research introduces a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach, highlighting the importance of revising classical interpretations to support gender equality in accordance with Islamic principles.

Keywords: Qur’anic Hermeneutics, Feminist Interpretation, Amina Wadud, Zaitunah Subhan

INTRODUCTION

Islam Rahmatan Lil Alaimin is a true expression. The reason is, the emergence of Islam among mankind had a major influence on all the systems that existed in society at that time. In the beginning, there was a form of discrimination based on gender differences. Women are considered very despicable creatures. The birth of a baby girl is considered a shame in a family, so quite a few babies are buried alive to avoid reproach and humiliation. The emergence of Islam eliminated all forms of injustice. In Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13 it is explained that there is no difference between men and women, both have the same freedom in terms of worship and social activities. Islam is the main reference that pays great attention to the concept of equality/sameness between human relations and relationships humans with God (Intan, 2022).

Gender inequality is still rooted in society (Sidiq & Erihadiana, 2022), the existence of marginality in the social (Hanafi & Amril, 2022), political and economic realms means that women will continue to suffer depend on men for their lives and are under the power of men (Hidayatulloh, 2023). As explained clearly by Manshur Faqih, marginality in these areas arises because of the assumption that women are irrational and emotional so they cannot become leaders. Apart from society's views which cause women's position to be inferior. The inclusion of gender discourse in Islam gave rise to criticism of classical interpretations carried out by Muslim feminists due to the discovery of gender bias. The problem of gender bias is not in accordance with the main goal of Islam which is to free humans from all forms of injustice and discrimination.
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(Alam, 2020; Sianturi et al., 2023). So when an understanding is found that is not in line with the main goals of Islam, Islamic intellectuals, especially Al-Quran researchers (mufassir) must re-examine the problem point.

Amina Wadud is one of the Western feminist commentators who tries to provide a new discourse in contemporary interpretation of the Qur’an (Ramadhan, 2024). She tries to gather women’s voices in every interpretation of the verses of the Qur’an. Likewise, Zaitunah Subhan is an Indonesian feminist interpreter who tries to fight for the image of women by providing a new perspective on verses from the Qur’an that talk about women. Both are. Contemporary commentators who have different backgrounds, but have the same object of study, namely gender equality. In general, contemporary commentators use thematic and hermeneutic methods to re-examine verses whose interpretation is not in accordance with Islam’s main objectives.

This research is conducted to explore the concept of Islam as “Rahmatan Lil Alamin” in the context of gender equality and social justice, focusing on the impact of Islam’s emergence in eliminating gender-based discrimination in society. The primary distinction of this research compared to previous studies lies in its holistic approach, which combines the analysis of Quranic texts with critiques of classical interpretations that are considered gender-biased. In this study, Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13 is used as a foundation to demonstrate that Islam emphasizes equality between men and women in worship and social activities. Additionally, this research examines the contributions of contemporary interpreters like Amina Wadud and Zaitunah Subhan, who strive to provide new perspectives on Quranic verses related to women. Using thematic and hermeneutic methods, this study aims to rediscover the essence of Islamic teachings that liberate humans from all forms of injustice and discrimination, while offering constructive criticism of interpretations that do not align with Islam’s primary goals. This research presents novelty by offering a comprehensive and multidisciplinary analysis, highlighting the importance of revising classical interpretations to support gender equality in accordance with Islamic principles.

**RESEARCH METHODS**

The methodology of this research comprises a qualitative approach that integrates textual analysis of the Quran with critical discourse analysis of classical and contemporary interpretations (Nasir, A., Shah, K., Sirodj, R. A., & Afgani, 2023). The primary sources include the Quran and Hadith, focusing on Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13 and other relevant verses. Secondary sources include classical tafsir (exegesis) by scholars such as Ibn Kathir and contemporary works by feminist scholars like Amina Wadud and Zaitunah Subhan. By comparing these sources, the study aims to identify and address instances of gender bias and to highlight interpretations that align with the principles of gender equality in Islam.

Data collection involves a thorough review of both primary and secondary sources. Primary data is obtained from the Quran and Hadith, analyzed using thematic analysis.
to identify recurring themes related to gender equality and social justice. Secondary data involves critical review of classical and contemporary tafsir, feminist literature, and academic articles on gender discourse in Islam. This dual approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the historical and contemporary perspectives on gender issues within Islamic teachings.

The analysis phase employs hermeneutic and thematic methods to interpret the data (Fadli, 2021). Hermeneutics is used to understand the deeper meanings and contexts of Quranic verses, while thematic analysis helps in categorizing and comparing themes across different interpretations. This combined method allows for a nuanced analysis of how gender equality is portrayed and understood in Islamic texts and interpretations. The findings are then contextualized within the broader framework of social justice and the concept of Islam as "Rahmatan Lil Alamin," aiming to provide actionable insights for addressing gender bias in contemporary Muslim societies. Here is a table summarizing the research on Amina Wadud’s perspective from her book “Re-reading The Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective” (Wadud, 1999).

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Re-reading The Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective by Amina Wadud

In this book, Amina Wadud firmly opposes the arrogance of men who demand more things from women than men. He also rejected narrow interpretations of Al-Qur’anic verses that ignored basic social principles regarding justice, issues and humanity. The research approach used by Amina Wadud is the Hermeneutics method. Hermeneutics shows the ability to reveal the past that the researcher did not understand and then bring it into the present. Hermeneutics activists have the assumption (basic assumption) that understanding with the general (former) methodology of Islamic sources and teachings is less relevant for the current context, so a contemporary understanding methodology is needed that can be used in studying the sources of Islamic teachings and can be used as a response to the current context. There are four steps that must be considered when using the hermeneutical method, namely as follows.

a) Interpreting based on etymological (language) meaning
b) Expressing an explanation of the second meaning that is understood by the interpreter of Qur'an, either adding to or replacing the first
c) Interpreting a text as an additional meaning with the understanding that texts also have various meanings.
d) Interpret a text by paying attention to the oricess of development of the text.
Meanwhile, the hermeneutics used by Amina Wadud is a method of interpreting holy books that is used to reach conclusions about meaning from a text. This method of interpretation relates to three aspects of the text, namely:

a) The context in which a text was written when connected to the Qur'an and the context in which the verse was revealed.

b) What are the grammatical components of the text (verse), how it is expressed and what it says.

c) What is the overall text (verse), its weltanshaaung or world view.

Amina Wadud revealed that interpretation has relative value so that it can give rise to a new formulation that differentiates between religion and religious thought. He also said that every interpretation has subjective value from the reflection of the commentators when studying a verse, so it is not there is a truly objective interpretation. This often makes readers trapped in distinguishing between interpretation and the text being interpreted. In the end, the truth of interpretation is often considered as something that corresponds (absolute truth) to the text, even though in the interpretation process there is a reduction.

Because Wadud’s way of thinking cannot be separated from Fazlur Rahman’s framework of thought. So he also used historical critical methods to examine the cultural background of a language and differentiate between normative and contextual elements. This method was adopted from figures who were able to strengthen their theory when discussing gender, which made Al-Quran researchers carry out cultural analysis behind the Arabic language as a revelation. From this method, it was concluded that Middle Eastern culture places men as more dominant than women.

He termed his theory of thinking when using a hermeneutical approach and historical critical methods with the name tafsir tawhid. An interpretation model that emphasizes the unity of the Qur'an in addressing all its parts (the unity of the Qur'an permeates all its parts). The aim of this interpretation is to show the dynamics between universal and particular aspects of the Qur'an. This model also emphasizes the study of each term based on language beliefs, syntactic and contextual structures, so that the meaning obtained is clearer.

Wadud's important contribution in relation to the discourse of the Qur’an and interpretation is an attempt to show the theoretical and methodological relationship between interpretation of the Qur'an and matters that raise questions of who and how in the perspective of Qur'anic hermeneutics. What he does aims to provide a theoretical basis based on the Qur'an for gender relations under the equal teachings and ethos of the Qur'an. He also has other interpretations that contain the experiences and needs of women.

**Study of Gender Bias in The Interpretation of Zaitunah Subhan’s works**

This interpretation was published in 1990, the year gender studies were very popular among intellectuals in the modern-contemporary era. There are three factors...
that make gender issues increasingly popular (Krijnen & Van Bauwel, 2021; Milestone & Meyer, 2020; Rudman & Glick, 2021; Wiesner-Hanks, 2021). Pertanya, the understanding of feminism in the West was brought in by scholars and also spread through mass media and literature. Second, the opening of employment opportunities that do not discriminate against women, namely by trusting in their abilities (skills), has the implication of a shift in the pattern of husband and wife relationships from traditional to contemporary patterns. Third, the emergence of female politicians in the world. Islam such as Pakistan, Russia, and Indonesia.

Zaitunah in interpreting the Qur’an uses the Maudhu’i method which is used as a tool for understanding the Qur’an because this method is considered to make it easier for Al-Quran researchers to answer all human problems through in-depth study of the verses of the Qur’an (Najihah & Safitri, 2022). Apart from that, interpretive activities carried out using the Mandhu’i method are a response to the problems faced by contemporary (modern) society, because this method can produce accurate emotional concepts from the Qur’an regarding the problems being discussed.

There are two forms of presentation in Tafsir Maudhui, namely first, presenting the messages of the Qur’an contained in the verses contained in one letter. Second, collect messages in various letters that are related to the theme being. Seeing this, Zaitunah chose to use the second form in presenting her interpretation, because she saw that using this method had the privilege of being able to resolve a problem more quickly. Steps taken by Zaitunah in her interpretation:

a) The method used in the research conducted by Zaitunah Subhan was to process data sources from books or scriptures. The main sources are several tafsir books by Indonesian commentators. Meanwhile, the secondary sources are books by Muslim feminists and other legal books and articles related to women. The literature on tafsir works by Indonesian scholars is the Qur’an and its tafsir, tafsir Qur’an Karim by Muhammad Yunus and Tafsir Al-Azhar by Hamka.

b) Manhaj tafsir used is tafsir bi al-rayi

Zaitunah refers to the interpretations of previous scholars as its main reference source. These works are the works of Indonesian mufasir, including the Qur’an and its Tafsir, Tafsir Al-Azhar by Hamka and Tafsir Qur’an Karim by Mahmud Yunus. The selection of these tafsirs was based on the Tafsir Qur’an Karim by Mahmud Yunus representing the second generation of tafsirs. Meanwhile, Tafsir Al-Azhar by Hamka represents third generation interpretations.

Analysis of Tafsir Methodology from a feminist perspective

The book "Qur'an and Woman: Re-reading The Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective" is included in the interpretations that developed in the 19th century because the background to which the book was written talks about a side of people’s lives that was rarely touched upon by previous Al-Quran researchers (Abdellah & Haridy, 2017; Nikolov, 2022). When examining Amina Wadud’s thoughts as expressed in her work, it
was found that the orientation of Amina Wadud's interpretations in the background of her writing was influenced by phenomena that oppressed her when she faced double oppression as an African-American woman. He was trapped in a space of racial and sexual discrimination in America, poor without privilege. Apart from that, social conditions such as capitalist logic and also patriarchal biased treatment of women mean that women do not get justice in society. He also rejects the previous interpretation of the Qur’anic verse which ignores the basic social principles of justice, feelings and humanity.

When talking about his methodology for interpreting the verses of the Qur’an contained in his book, his thinking is heavily influenced by the "neo-modernism" thoughts of Fazlur Rahman (Hidayah & Maghribi, 2022), especially those related to the style of interpretation of the Qur’an used by him (Agustono & Zain, 2023). Wadud hopes that by describing a holistic method in studying the verses of the Qur’an, you can get an interpretation of the Qur’an that has meaning and content that is in harmony with the context of modern life. He also revealed that the basic principles of the Qur’an are eternal so they are not limited to the historical revelation of the verse. He adopted Rahman’s method, namely the double movement method. The first step is to start with cases in the Qur’an to find the general principle. The second step, these general principles are used as a basic reference in determining weltamchauung from the Qur’an (social, economic justice and the principle of equality).

Wadud also conducted further studies on aspects of textual analysis of Al-Quran verses. He focuses on understanding the structure of the language of the Qur’an with double meaning. This aims to provide an overview of the purpose of a text. accompanied by the 'prior text' (perceptions, circumstances, background) of the person interpreting. The Qur’an about an object (Saidah, 2013). In his book it is stated that he offers a hermeneutical method for the Qur’an in its application involving three stages, namely (1) the context in which the text was written (if it is related to the Qur’an, then in what context was the revelation revealed), (2) paying attention to the composition of the text when it was written (how the text of the Qur’an expresses the message revealed in the text), and (3) the entire text includes a weltanschauung or world view. These three steps are the root of differences of opinion due to the emphasis on one step out of the three steps that should be present when studying a text.

The model of interpretation using meneutics that he promotes overcomes the disconnection with the Qur’an due to the forgetting of the original aspects of the verses used. Apart from that, previous efforts to study the Qur’an tended to confuse the works of scholars (previous and present) with the Qur’an. Therefore, Wadud expressed two important implications of the issue of women in the Qur’an, namely (1) He suggested that the relevance of the Qur’an must be maintained and interpreted continuously (continuously) and (2) The progress of civilization is reflected in the resources of women in society and recognition of the importance of women's resources.

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In studying the verses of the Qur’an that show women separately or together with men, they are analyzed using the traditional method of tafsir al-Qur’an bil Qur’an. However, the method he uses is specific, namely by analyzing each verse according to its context, according to the context of the discussion of topics contained in the Qur’an, both from a linguistic and syntactic point of view. The same is used in other verses besides the verse being studied, from the point of view of rejection of the Qur’an and also according to the context of weltanschauung or the world view of the Qur’an.

The book “Tafsir Hate: A Study of Gender Bias in the Interpretation of the Qur’an” by Zaitunah Subhan, an Indonesian feminist interpreter. This book was included in the Indonesian tafsir literature in the 1990s which specifically discussed women (Bastari, 2024). Referring to Islah Gusmian who revealed that the context social issues in Indonesia in the 1990s relied on two things, namely (1) the hermeneutical context, (2) writing tafsir as a response to what was happening in social society, there is an assumption that discussions about the nature of women at that time were still vague. Second, there was confusion in understanding the true meaning of nature the true meaning of woman's nature. Third, there is an understanding of equal partnerships between men and women in order to socialize government programs that have been launched since Pelita VI.

Zaitunah initiated a contextual interpretation method using a set of contemporary methods in analyzing verses from the Qur’an with gender nuances. This methodological construction tends to be based on a gender perspective, meaning that it looks at women’s issues within a theological framework that is based on equality, justice and mutual respect and respect for human rights without looking at gender differences, and also uses a socio-economic approach (Hasan, 2019). historically by looking at various cultural variables, nature, psychological aspects of the Arab people at the time the Qur’an was revealed and the text of the Qur’an. The analytical methods he uses are semantics and hermeneutics to describe the moral and cultural qualities of someone who studies the Qur’an. Zaitunah Subhan's interpretation of the text of the Qur’an departs from Maudhu’i exegetical method (Nursyahidah et al., 2024).

Zaitunah uses the maudbu’i method to examine verses that speak specifically about women (gender equality). He thinks this method can make it easier for Al-Quran researchers to respond to all problems. contemporary (modern) humans. This method can produce accurate emotional concepts from the Qur’an regarding the problems being studied by researchers. This is in line with Quraish Shihab's view of tafsir maudhu’i, a practical method of interpretation because it is directly related to a particular topic or problem being discussed by the Qur’an reviewer using verses from the Qur’an as support, then connecting it with various scientific disciplines such as munasabah, asbab an-nuzul and others. If this method is applied to Qur’anic texts, the issues and themes that are addressed are how the Qur’anic text is present in society,
then understood, interpreted, translated and dialogued in order to interpret social reality.

**Example of Feminist Interpretation**

“Men (husbands) are responsible for women (wives) because Allah has preferred some of them (men) over others (women) and because they (men) have spent part of their wealth. Pious women are those who are obedient (to Allah) and take care of themselves when (their husbands) are not around because Allah has taken care of (them). The women you are worried about will nusyuz, give them advice, leave them in bed (separate beds), and (if necessary,) beat them (in a way that is not painful). However, if they obey you, do not look for ways to trouble them. Indeed, Allah is Most High, Most Great” (RI, 2020).

From this verse there is the statement “ar-rijalu gowwamuna ‘ala an-nisa” which indicates that men are the leaders of women. The insertion of the word leader to men does not just happen, this insertion applies if the man (husband) is capable prove their advantages and support women (wives) in using their wealth. Amina applies this verse to society as a whole, not limited to just the scope of the family (husband and wife relationships), she does not apply this verse based on the inherent superiority of men over women or the superiority they provide. by Allah to men over women. He tends to use it in functional relationships between men and women.

Meanwhile, Zaitunah Subhan interprets that the verse explains the position of men as protectors, supporters, responsible persons or guarantors (in terms of providing support for their wives). He stated that the word leader is inappropriate when associated with the relationship between husband and wife in the household, because household duties must see both of them. Word usage leader is the use of the last words needed by the family when a dispute or resolution occurs in making a choice that is determined or decided. Leadership in the family is leadership that is based on deliberation, not based on arbitrariness.

The determination of men as leaders is based on the redaction of QS. An-Nisa 34 is a normative statement but a contextual statement. This is because, firstly, the Qur’an only says that men are gewwam, there is no indication that men are required to be leaders over women (Aziz et al., 2020). So that both men and women have the same opportunity to become leaders. Second, this is related to the reasons expressed in the text of the verse as justification for the superiority of men as leaders, including that men are given superiority by Allah over women. Rasyid Ridho said that it was because of litri and kisbi.

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CONCLUSION

In her book "Re-reading The Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective", Amina Wadud firmly opposes the arrogance of men who demand more from women than from men. She also rejects narrow interpretations of Qur’anic verses that ignore basic social principles regarding justice, issues, and humanity. Wadud employs the Hermeneutics method, which involves revealing past understandings that researchers did not comprehend and bringing them into the present. Hermeneutics assumes that traditional methodologies for understanding Islamic sources and teachings are less relevant in the current context, necessitating a contemporary understanding methodology to study Islamic teachings and respond to modern contexts. Wadud’s hermeneutical steps in interpreting the Qur’an include understanding the context in which a text was written, the grammatical components of the text, and the overall worldview conveyed by the text. She argues that every interpretation has subjective value influenced by the interpreter’s reflections, meaning there is no truly objective interpretation.

Wadud’s thinking is influenced by Fazlur Rahman’s framework, which uses historical-critical methods to examine the cultural background of language and differentiate between normative and contextual elements. Wadud refers to her model of interpretation as tafsir tawhid, emphasizing the unity of the Qur’an in addressing all its parts and highlighting the dynamics between the universal and particular aspects of the Qur’an. Wadud’s significant contribution to the discourse on the Qur’an and interpretation is her effort to show the theoretical and methodological relationship between Qur’anic interpretation and questions of identity and perspective within Qur’anic hermeneutics. Her goal is to provide a Qur’an-based theoretical foundation for gender relations that align with the Qur’an’s teachings on equality and justice.

She also employs traditional tafsir methods like al-Qur’an bil Qur’an with contextual, linguistic, and syntactic analysis to understand Qur’anic verses related to women. Wadud’s hermeneutical approach aims to maintain the relevance of the Qur’an and continuously interpret it, reflecting the progress of civilization through the recognition of women’s contributions in society. In a feminist interpretation of a Qur’anic verse, Wadud emphasizes the functional relationship between men and women, while Zaitunah Subhan highlights the importance of cooperation and shared responsibility within the household, rejecting unilateral male dominance. These interpretations reflect the view that both men and women have equal opportunities to be leaders, depending on specific contexts and conditions.

Future researchers interested in exploring Amina Wadud’s perspectives on Qur’anic interpretation and gender relations can build upon her hermeneutical approach by incorporating a few key considerations. Wadud’s rejection of male arrogance and narrow interpretations emphasizes the importance of addressing contemporary social principles, justice, and humanity in Qur’anic exegesis. Therefore,
researchers should continue to challenge traditional methodologies and seek more inclusive, equitable frameworks that resonate with modern societal values. It would be beneficial for future studies to delve deeper into the hermeneutics method Wadud employs, which aims to bring past understandings into the present context. Researchers should explore how this method can be further developed to address current issues faced by Muslim communities worldwide. By examining how traditional Islamic teachings can be reinterpreted to remain relevant and impactful in today's world, scholars can contribute to a more dynamic and progressive understanding of the Qur'an.

Moreover, investigating the influence of Fazlur Rahman's historical-critical framework on Wadud’s work can provide valuable insights. Researchers can analyze how differentiating between normative and contextual elements of the Qur'an can lead to more nuanced interpretations that uphold the principles of equality and justice. Additionally, applying Wadud’s tafsir tawhid model, which emphasizes the unity of the Qur'an and the interplay between its universal and particular aspects, can help scholars develop a more holistic approach to Qur'anic interpretation. Incorporating traditional tafsir methods like al-Qur'an bil Qur'an with contextual, linguistic, and syntactic analysis remains crucial. Future researchers should continue to explore how these methods can be adapted to highlight women’s contributions and roles in society, promoting gender equality in Islamic teachings. Furthermore, comparative studies involving other feminist interpreters, such as Zaitunah Subhan, can enrich the discourse by examining different perspectives on gender relations and leadership roles within the Muslim community. By doing so, researchers can provide a more comprehensive and diverse understanding of gender dynamics in Islam.

REFERENCE


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