



The Interpretation of Gender Verses According to Imam Al-Tabarī and Asma Barlas: A Comparative Study

Siti Aminah,^{1*} Jajang A. Rohmana²

¹²Sunan Gunung Djati State Islamic University, Bandung, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author, email: sityamnah150599@mail.com

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Abstract: This study discusses the differences in interpretation of gender verses in Islam based on the interpretation of Jāmi' al-Bayān by Imam al-Ṭabarī and Believing Women in Islam by Asma Barlas. The main focus of this study is the analysis of Qs. An-Nisā' [4]: 1 on the creation of women, Qs. An-Nisā' [4]: 3 on polygamy, and Qs. An-Nisā' [4]: 34 on male leadership and nushuz. This study uses the muqāran (comparative) interpretation method and Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic theory to understand the differences in their perspectives in interpreting gender verses. The results of the study show that al-Ṭabarī uses the bi al-ma'thur interpretation approach based on history and traditional understanding, so that his interpretation tends to be textual and maintains patriarchal norms in gender relations. In contrast, Asma Barlas criticized the approach by using critical hermeneutics to interpret the Qur'an as a book that upholds gender equality and rejects interpretations that support the patriarchal system. Analysis using Gadamer's Fusion of Horizons theory shows that these differences in interpretation are influenced by historical, social, and epistemological factors. Al-Ṭabarī lived in a society that still had a strong patriarchal system, while Asma Barlas interpreted gender verses in a modern academic context with the influence of feminism and critical studies of religious texts. This study concludes that gender interpretation in Islam should not only adhere to a textual approach but also consider social, cultural, and historical aspects to be more relevant to the values of justice and equality in Islam. This study is expected to contribute to the development of gender interpretation studies in Islam and provide new insights into a more inclusive approach to interpreting the Qur'an.

Keywords: Asma Barlas; Gadamer's hermeneutics; Gender interpretation; Imam al-Ṭabarī; muqāran interpretation.

Introduction

The background is the accusations of Western scholars regarding the issue of gender equality in the teachings of the Islamic religion brought by the Prophet Muhammad. H.A.R. Gibb's subordination of women in Islamic teachings has become an easy target for criticizing and cornering Islamic teachings (Gibb, 1970). The wrong representation of Islamic teachings is a bad image of the oppression of women's rights. Some of the criticisms levelled by Orientalists are towards aspects of Islamic law, such as polygamy, men being leaders, the command to wear the hijab, differences in inheritance rights between women and men, women coming into being from men's ribs, and so on.

One of the issues above that is often criticized by orientalists is the permissibility of harems or polygamy. This criticism refers to the word of Allah in Qs. An-Nisā' verse 3:

وَأِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تُقْسِطُوا فِي الْيَتَامَىٰ فَانكِحُوا مَا طَابَ لَكُمْ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ مَثَلَىٰ ثَلَاثٍ وَرُبْعٍ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا فَوَاحِدَةً
أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَلَّا تَعُولُوا

If you are worried that you will not be able to do justice to (the rights of) orphaned women (if you marry them), marry (other) women that you like: two, three, or four. However, if you are worried that you will not be able to do justice, (marry) just one person or a female slave that you have. This is closer to not committing injustice. (QS. An-Nisā'[2]: 3)

In the tafsir book, the verse above is the legal basis for Muslims that a Muslim man is allowed to have four wives. Although mufassir scholars have several different views, such as allowing a husband to have more than one wife, there are also those who allow marrying more than four women, then there are also those who do not allow polygamy unless under certain conditions (Al-Shabuni, 1981).

According to Western scholars, this is considered a weak point for Islamic teachings, even though, if seen from a different perspective, the values taught by Islam have a broader meaning and the historical context in which these laws were developed. The lack of in-depth understanding of Islamic history and the social context in which these teachings were developed presents a negative view for orientalist in their misrepresentation of Islamic teachings and gives rise to wrong interpretations, including regarding the role of women. The Eurocentric bias of Western scholars can lead to a distorted view of Islamic society and the position of women in it. This bias can result in portraying Islamic societies as oppressive and patriarchal, without considering the diversity of experiences and perspectives within Islamic culture.

In fact, if you look at historical facts when humans were still in the Jahiliyyah era, women's position was lower than an item. The position of women is very disadvantageous compared to the position of men. Before Islam came, women were just outcasts in society, hated and looked down upon. Women at that time were considered lower than goods; in fact, they no longer had a home to return to or a safe haven. They considered women to be the source of disaster and the basis of crime. This act of dehumanization of women has also accumulated in the pages of history (Musta'id, 2023).

Until then, Islam came to teach various kinds of correct living arrangements as well as the priority of respecting women, upholding humanity, as well as holding responsibilities and obligations. In various aspects of activities, such as in the political, social and religious fields, the Prophet Muhammad also often interacted directly with the women around him. The revolutionary attitude implemented by the Prophet was aimed at elevating the position of women as they should be.

However, the process of spreading Islamic teachings to provide a noble position for women seems to have reached a stagnant point. Specialized in the field of interpretation and its application in everyday life. Perhaps one of the factors causing ongoing inequality in society comes from the results of the interpretations of previous scholars (classical interpretations).

This accusation originated from a strong patriarchal culture and the dominance of male mufassir at that time, which is thought to have influenced the output of the mufassir's products. This accusation can be seen in the writings of classical commentators, which seem biased towards women; the lack of accommodating women's rights results in clear differences between men and women. Apart from that, interpretation products continue to develop to adapt to the times, customs, culture and politics around them, making classical interpretation no longer seem relevant to new problems that are emerging at this time (Mustaqim, 2008). Another cause is the method applied by classical commentators in studying the Al-Qur'an by ignoring the complex meaning and socio-historical aspects of the Al-Qur'an. The importance of historical context in studying the Qur'an is also useful for knowing more deeply which interpretation products are not conservative and which are conservative (Barlas, 2019).

In her writing, Asma Barlas quotes Cragg's words regarding Amina Wadud's statement, which explains that the interpretation products produced by male mufassir will always be influenced by the background and interests of the mufassir; they ignore the position of women and interpret verses based on their perspective. One example of a classic interpretation identified as a

product of patriarchy, according to Barlas, is the book "*Jāmi' al-Bayān 'An Ta'wil Ayi Al-Qur'an*" by al-Ṭabarī (Barlas, 2003).

As a female feminist interpreter, Asma Barlas believes that a female interpreter is more qualified to study the verses of the Qur'an relating to gender and reconstruct previous interpretations, in order to avoid the risk of continued patriarchal culture. Meanwhile, on the other hand, supporters of classical interpretation reject the reinterpretation carried out by Muslim feminist figures. According to this group, the methodology used by feminist figures can eliminate the validity of the meaning of the text of the Al-Qur'an verse itself.

Departing from the accusations and problems above, the author sees that discussions of gender issues still clash between the interpretations of classical ulama figures and Muslim feminists. Therefore, to find concrete results, the author will construct figures from each era to represent the results of interpretations related to gender issues. From several classical commentators and Muslim feminists, the author is interested in analyzing more deeply the results of the interpretation of Ibn Jarir Al-Ṭabarī in his book of tafsir *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'An Ta'wil Ayi Al-Qur'an* and Asma Barlas in her book *Believing Women in Islam*.

Apart from being called a tafsir that is steeped in patriarchal culture, *Tafsir Jāmi' al-Bayān 'An Ta'wil Ayi Al-Qur'an* is also the main reference for mufasssir scholars because it is rich in references to hadiths from early authorities (Thabathaba'i et al., 1987). Therefore, al-Ṭabarī's interpretation needs to be studied more deeply because it plays an important role in the spread of patriarchal culture, and gender equality is identified in its interpretation. Meanwhile, Asma Barlas is a popular figure among contemporary Muslim feminists from the West. She is a woman who has anti-patriarchal thoughts and is a Muslim feminist figure who is persistent in fighting for women's rights based on the interpretation of the Qur'an.

Then the author will limit the scope of research by only focusing on comparing several verses related to gender contained in Surah An-Nisā'. Among them are Qs. An-Nisā'[4]: 1 concerning the creation of women, Qs. An-Nisā'[4]: 3 concerning the law of polygamy, Qs. An-Nisā'[4]: 34 about leadership and nushuz. Furthermore, to mediate the results of the interpretation of the two figures, the author will use Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutical theory to produce final results that are concrete and relevant for today.

Results and Discussion

Understanding Gender

In English, the word 'Gender' means sex. Meanwhile, quoted from Webster's New World Dictionary, the differences in behavior and value aspects between men and women constitute the meaning of 'Gender'. In the women's studies encyclopedia book, it is said that 'Gender' is a culture that has developed in society as an attempt to differentiate between men and women in several aspects such as behavior, roles, emotional characteristics and mentality. Meanwhile, 'Gender' is cultural expectations for women and men, according to Hilary M. (cultural expectations for women and men). In line with the thoughts of Lindsey, who is a feminist figure, she says, "What a given society defines as masculine or feminine is a component of gender" (all defenses embedded in society regarding masculine differences are a basic component in the field of gender studies (Suhra, 2013).

Through the explanations above, it can be concluded that 'Gender' is a concept that was developed to identify changes in behavior, roles, emotional characteristics and mentality towards women or men caused by cultural and social influences. In other words, gender is not a fate that cannot be changed, but rather a form of engineering by society in the surrounding environment. Based on this context, gender and sex are components that have different meanings.

Sex or gender is an absolute biological difference between women and men. Meanwhile, gender is a form of characteristics of women and men which are formed through the surrounding community environment, for example, women are better known for their beauty and gentleness. So, it is clear that gender is a social and cultural interpretation of a person's biological differences. In essence, gender concentrates more on a person's psychological aspects, which are influenced by the social and cultural aspects of society. Thus, it needs to be emphasized that gender only focuses on aspects of a person's femininity or masculinity in certain cultures.

Muqaran Interpretation Method

There are many perspectives regarding the emergence of interpretation using this *muqaran* method, although this research has significance and scope. The majority of scholars are of the opinion that the *muqaran* technique in interpreting the Qur'an was used during the time of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. On the other hand, another view states that efforts to understand the Qur'an using *muqaran* techniques began during the time of the Companions and continued during the Tabi'in, Tabi' Tabi'in, and the present (Fitriatunnisa & Rafdi, 2024).

Etymologically, *muqaran* is an Arabic word, namely *qarana-yuqarinu-muqaranah*, which means to accompany or be involved in a debate between two entities, which involves comparison or comparison (Munawwir, 1997). *Muqaran* generally refers to a technique of reading the Al-Qur'an by comparing its verses with each other, as well as with the hadith and the mufassir's point of view. The *muqaran* interpretation approach is not a new concept in the realm of Al-Qur'an study and interpretation. This strategy, which relies on comparison as the main reference, is rarely used by interpreters. This approach juxtaposes hadith, verses and points of view from various mufassir with the aim of facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the Qur'an, which is not only based on the exegetical texts of the mufassir but can also include the tendencies, style, methodology and reasons for a mufassir interpreting the verse. In addition, there is a comparison between the mufassir and the other. This study of *muqaran* tafsir is considered important because of its comprehensive analysis and usefulness, as stated by Adh-Dhahabi in identifying anomalies or conflicts in a tafsir text (Adz-Dzahabi, 1986).

Comparison is the main characteristic of the comparative method; this is also the main difference from several other methods. The steps in applying the *muqaran* method are as follows: first, find and assemble a comparable newsroom. Second, compare with comparable newsrooms. Third, Analyze differences in variations between comparable newsrooms.

Gadamer's Theory of Hermeneutics

Gadamer's hermeneutics cannot be separated from Heidegger's hermeneutical perspective, this is because it is presented in an atmosphere of thinking related to the main points of Heidegger's philosophy. Gadamer's hermeneutical perspective seeks to set standards for understanding the nuances of his hermeneutical experience. Gadamer's Truth and Method (*Wahrheit und Methode*) includes philosophical hermeneutics, demonstrating its relevance not only to texts but also to all entities in the humanities and social sciences.

According to etymology, hermeneutics is a verb that comes from the Greek *hermeneuin*, which means to interpret, and then the noun *hermeneia*. In Heidegger's view, hermeneutics is rooted in the figure of the God Hermes, the intermediary of the Gods on Mount Olympus, whose role is to convey messages to mankind. Hermeneutics serves as a foundational discipline that focuses on the art of interpretation, especially when the meaning of a text requires explanation. Various languages suggest that when a text is unclear in its presentation, the practical application of hermeneutics becomes important to achieve an accurate and correct understanding of the text (Syamsuddin, 2017).

Hermeneutics can be understood as a scientific discipline that seeks to understand the meanings embedded in language or statements. Furthermore, a historical examination of hermeneutics reveals its relationship to significant methodological frameworks. Hermes is considered to represent individuals who are blind and lack knowledge (Hayatuddiniyah, 2021). People generally recognized that Hermes was responsible for conveying messages from the Gods, originating from Mount Olympus, and then interpreting them in a way that was accessible to the local population.

There are significant claims about Hermes and the figure of Prophet Idris acknowledged in the Qur'an. This point of view is acknowledged by various commentators and scholars, including Hossein Nasr who is a leading professor of Islamic thought. Prophet Idris is known in pesantren as a spinner or weaver. From the beginning, hermeneutics focused its explanation on ambiguous spoken and written language in order to improve understanding and remove the uncertainty of misinterpretation or confusion for readers and listeners. Hermeneutics then developed into a field of philosophy that focuses on the study of text interpretation, especially biblical texts, which come from a foreign context or a new situation for the reader.

Hermeneutics is an interpretive methodology which consists of four different stages: preconceptions (the reader's horizons), historical context (text horizons), fusion of horizons, and application. According to Gadamer's theory, understanding a work basically involves dialogue, where the author's world and the reader's world meet to produce fresh insights and reflections. Each context will achieve a synthesis that combines understanding and evaluation of the material. This is done to ensure the text is not dry or lacking (Raharjo, 2008).

Biography of al-Ṭabarī

Imam al-Ṭabarī's full name is Abu Ja'far Muhammad Ibn Jarir Ibn Kasir Ibn Ghalib al-Ṭabarī (Ath-Thabari, 1994). He was born in Amul, the capital of Thabaristan, in 839 AD/224 AH or 840 AD/225 AH. Because the previous calendar system at that time relied more on important events than numerical values, al-Ṭabarī's birth year did not have a specific point. An extraordinary scientist, al-Ṭabarī had reached the pinnacle of his profession in a number of scientific fields, including the study of fiqh, so that his views could be collected and appreciated in the Al-Jaririyah School. Al-Ṭabarī grew up in an environment that actively fostered his scientific career, so it is not surprising that he memorized the Qur'an at the age of 7. He once stated, "I memorized the Qur'an at the age of 7, took on the role of imam at the age of 8, and began compiling the Prophet's hadith at the age of 9 (Al-Thabari, 2007).

Al-Ṭabarī began his studies at the age of 12, namely in 236 Hijri, in Amil, his birthplace. Furthermore, he received scientific guidance from leading scholars in his birthplace city of Tabaristan, in accordance with the customary practices of his contemporaries. During this period, al-Ṭabarī traveled to many Islamic regions to seek knowledge (Al-Dzahabi, 1976). Al-Ṭabarī was raised by his father, al-Walid. He then moved to other cities including Rayy, Basrah, Kufah, Al-Ṭabarī was raised by his father, al-Walid, and later moved to other cities, including Rayy, Basrah, Kufah, Egypt, and Syria, to gain knowledge in his youth. His name became famous in society because of his scientific impact. In the city of Rayy, al-Ṭabarī studied hadith from Ibn Humaid, Abu Abdallah Muhammad bin Humaid al-Razi, and also from Al-Musanna bin Ibrahim Al-Ibili. and Egypt to gain knowledge in his youth. His name became famous in society because of his scientific impact. In the city of Rayy, al-Ṭabarī studied hadith from Ibn Humaid, Abu Abdallah Muhammad bin Humaid al-Razi, and also from Al-Musanna bin Ibrahim Al-Ibili.

Next, he continued to Baghdad with the aim of studying with Ahmad bin Hambal (164 to 241 H/780 to 855 AD), only to find out that he had died. He then diverted his journey to two prominent cities in the southern region of Baghdad, namely Basrah and Kufa, and stopped at Wasit, because it is an important route for study and research. Al-Ṭabarī studied in Basrah with Abu Al-Jawza' Ahmad bin Usman (246/860 AD), Muhammad bin Harasi (d. 248 H/862 AD), and Abu Al-As'as Ahmad bin Al-Miqdam (d. 253 H/867 AD). Although he studied a lot of tafsir from Kufah Hannad bin al-Sari (died 243 H/857 AD), he specifically studied under the guidance of Bisr bin Mu'az al-'Aqadi and Basrah Humaid bin Mas'adah (245 H/859-860 AD).

Al-Ṭabarī studied the Maliki School in Egypt and later became involved with the Shafi'i School, which he followed before establishing himself as a mujtahid receiving direct guidance under the disciple of Imam Shafi'i, namely al-Rabi al-Jizi. During his stay in Egypt, many experts gathered to evaluate his knowledge, thus making him famous. Waki' Ibn al-Jarah and Sufyan bin Uyainah were both teachers of al-Ṭabarī who motivated their Imam to compile his tafsir.

Baghdad became al-Ṭabarī's last residence, where he produced many works that are still very useful for Muslims today. Al-Ṭabarī died on Monday, 27 Shawwal 310 AH, corresponding to 17 February 923 AD, at the age of 85 years. Mahmud Syarif describes al-Ṭabarī's profile based on various sources he has, as follows: Al-Ṭabarī was a slender man, tall but sturdy, characterized by a thick beard. He always prioritizes health and appearance, resulting in high discipline as well as regular and maintained eating and hydration patterns. In terms of his theological understanding, al-Ṭabarī is in line with Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah. Meanwhile, the school of jurisprudence that he holds is the Al-Jaririyah school. Indeed, initially al-Ṭabarī adhered to the Shafi'i school of thought, but then carried out independent ijtihad in matters of jurisprudence, establishing his own school of thought known as Al-Jaririyah, which has many followers. According to Adz-Dzahabi, as quoted by Jauhar Azizy and Faizah Ali Syibromisi, he emphasized that al-Ṭabarī founded his own school of thought known as Al-Jaririyah; However, this school of thought did not last as long

as other schools of thought. This school of thought is similar to the Syafi'i school of thought in its theory of jurisprudence (Ali & Azizy, 2011).

Al-Ṭabarī is recognized in the scientific community for his diligent study of his discipline and his tenacity in expanding his knowledge. Therefore, he has mastered various areas of expertise. On the other hand, al-Ṭabarī succeeded in transcribing all the knowledge he had obtained into textual form. His publications cover various fields, including hadith, Arabic linguistics, tafsir science, monotheism, *ushul fiqh*, *fiqh*, and medicine (Islam, 1994). However, there is no definite evidence regarding the number of books written by At-Ṭabarī, because not all of his writings have survived to this day. It is estimated that many works on the dissolution of law coincided with the dissolution of his philosophical school. Among his writings are:

1. Book of *Ikhbar ar-Rasul al-Muluk*. or *Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk*,
2. *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'An Ta'wil Ayi Al-Qur'an* or what we also know as *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'An Tafsir Al-Qur'an*.
3. *Adab al-Manasik*,
4. *Ikhtilaf Ulama' al-Amsar fi Ahkam Syara'i al-Islam*,
5. *Tādhīb al-Āthār wa Tafsīr al-Thābit 'an Rasūlillāh min al-Ākhbār*, which al-Qathi named *Syarh al-Asar*. And there are many more of his books that the writer has not mentioned here.

Tafsir Jāmi' al-Bayān 'An Ta'wil Ayi Al-Qur'an

Imam al-Tabari wrote many works, including one book on tafsir. Tafsir Imam al-Ṭabarī is known by two titles which are available in various libraries: *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'An Ta'wil Ayi Al-Qur'an* and *Tafsir Jāmi' al-Bayān 'An Ta'wil Ayi Al-Qur'an* (At-Thabari, 2000). Al-Ṭabarī calls it *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'An Ta'wil Ayi Al-Qur'an*, which was compiled at the end of the third century and which he began teaching to his students in 283 to 290 Hijri. The second is *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'An Tafsir Ayi Al-Qur'an*, which is more famous among the general public. Each of the thirty juz in Tafsir al-Ṭabarī is included in a fairly large volume. The book of Imam al-Ṭabarī was first published at the age of sixty years (284 H/899 AD). In 1992, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'An Ta'wil Ayi Al-Qur'an* was published in Beirut by Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah. *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'An Ta'wil Ayi Al-Qur'an* was published in Beirut by Dar al-Fikr in 1995 and 1998. The release of Tafsir al-Ṭabarī afterwards provided a wealth of exegetical knowledge.

According to the exegete Ibn Jarir al-Ṭabarī, this is the first tafsir book among many works of tafsir from the early centuries, and is also the first tafsir of its time, so it became the earliest tafsir book known to the people, while many previous tafsir texts have been lost in the historical records of that time (Salimuddin, 1990). Sheikh al-Islam Taqi ad-Din Ahmad bin Taimiyah was once asked about the interpretation of the Sunnah and Al-Qur'an, which is superior. He then stated, "Among all existing interpretations, the interpretation of Muhammad bin Jarir al-Ṭabarī is the most authentic" (Ushama & Basri, 2000). According to the modern scholar of Al-Jazair, M. Arkoun, in his work *Various Readings of the Qur'an*, Imam al-Ṭabarī's interpretation has achieved unparalleled authority among Muslims and Islamic scholars. Al-Ṭabarī compiled an important work including 30 volumes, which included much of Akbar's collection, including traditions, narratives, news, and information covering three centuries in the Islamic Hijri calendar. This manuscript is an important work for historical scholarship; it has not been changed to become a monograph that reinforces the image of al-Tabari as a commentator who is "selfish" and indifferent to the accuracy of the narrative he presents.

The method of *tafsir bi al-ma'sur* used by Imam al-Ṭabarī is based on the words of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, his companions, the *tabi'in*, and *tabi' al-tabi'in*. Imam al-Ṭabarī formulated his interpretation using the *tahlili* method. To do this, he first provides an explanation of the terms in Arabic terminology, along with a framework of linguistic knowledge and (*i'rab*) if necessary. He would explain the importance of an issue if he could not find a historical reference in the hadith. He would further substantiate his interpretations with illustrative quotations from classical poetry and prose, which served as *shawahhid* and research instruments to ensure the accuracy of his understanding. To base his interpretation on the perspective of his contemporaries, the *tabi'in* and *tabi' al-tabi'in*, as well as the hadith they conveyed (*bi al-Ma'sur*), Imam al-Ṭabarī used more historical sources. All of this is important for controllers to understand how a word or sentence is

interpreted. In addressing certain legal issues, he followed the *istinbat* guidelines and proposed conditions for words that had vague *i'rab* (Yusuf, 2004).

Biography of Asma Barlas

Asma Barlas was born in Pakistan in 1950. Barlas married Ulises Ali, and they had a child named Demir Mikail (Barlas, 2019). Meanwhile, Iqbal and Anwar Barlas, Barlas' parents, currently live in Vancouver, Canada. Asma Barlas has two siblings and one brother. Both received love and attention from their parents, which facilitated their development into rational and mature individuals (Wasik, 2023). Asma Barlas was born in Pakistan and became the first female employee to work at the Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1976 during the Ziaul Haq military regime.

Barlas stated that his interest in studying Islam was shaped by his experiences in Pakistan, his original homeland until 1983, and in the United States, his current homeland. As is known, Pakistan is a country with a predominantly Muslim demographic, which includes 98% of the population. An event of particular interest to Barlas was the introduction of sharia as positive law in Pakistan by the dictatorship of Ziaul Haq. However, Ziaul Haq's dictatorship implemented Islamic law unfairly, resulting in a lowering of the status of women. This is characterized by examples such as equating the testimony of two women with the testimony of one man, as well as the inability to differentiate between rape and adultery, so that all these cases are subject to stoning, a practice that according to Barlas is never mentioned in the Qur'an. Therefore, Asma Barlas bravely criticized the government, which she considered very unfair towards women, but her criticism ultimately led to her expulsion from her homeland (Wasik, 2023).

Barlas was dismissed from his post at Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs after six years of service due to harsh criticism levelled by Barlas. The dismissal occurred for two main reasons: first, because Barlas called Ziaul Haq a "clown" in his diary. Second, Barlas claimed that "the judiciary in Pakistan ignores freedom and injustice" during a private dinner at the residence of the Pakistani ambassador to the Philippines, which took place after the fall of Bhutto in 1979. After losing his job, he became an assistant at The Muslim newspaper, a media outlet that criticized government policies in Islamabad between 1982-1983. In 1983, he left Pakistan and gained a political voice in the United States (Fauziyah, 2016).

Through the various professions that Barlas has undertaken, he has finally produced a variety of intellectual works which have been spread across several places. Apart from that, after studying his writings, it is clear that his scientific focus does not only cover women and Islam, but also includes international politics and various other interesting subjects. This indicates that Barlas had a relatively wide intellectual reach. Apart from writing books, Barlas is also active in writing conference papers and journals, all of which are published in English (Barlas, 2003). Among the books he has written are:

1. Believing Woman in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretation of the Qur'an (Austin TX: University of Texas, first printing 2002, revised edition, 2019).
2. Believing Woman in Islam: A Brief Introduction, with David R. Finn (Austin TX: University of Texas, 2019)
3. Texts, Sex and States: A Critique of North African Discourse on Islam (2000)
4. The Antinomies of "Feminism and Islam, 'The Limits of Marxist analysis (2003)
5. Women's and Feminist Readings of The Quran (2006), dll.

The background of the book Believing Women in Islam

Asma Barlas's 2002 book, "Believing Women in Islam Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an" discusses gender equality alongside an underlying epistemological hermeneutic methodological framework. The latest edition of this book was published in 2019. In 2005, Serambi Jakarta released the first edition of the book, which was translated into Indonesian with the title "How the Qur'an Liberates Women". As previously mentioned, the writing of Asma Barlas's two works was motivated by and aimed to challenge the assumptions and perceptions of Western society at large, and American society in particular, which perpetuates the belief that Islam is a patriarchal religion characterized by discriminatory relations and the supremacy of men over women. Although according to Barlas, many Muslims do not consistently obey or accept the teachings of the Qur'an.

Asma Barlas uses thematic interpretation to explain her framework regarding gender equality. The thematic method contrasts with the problem-solving approach. This problem was then linked to verses from the Qur'an. In this thematic interpretation paradigm, the interpreter concentrates on a problem to ensure the definition of the Qur'an (Al-Shadr, 1990). The methodology involves the collection of relevant verses, followed by thorough analysis, supported by data, facts, and rational arguments derived from the Qur'an, Sunnah, and logical reasoning.

The Qur'an is the basis for problems that arise in people's lives, as shown by Barlas' application of the thematic method. The selected problems are then analyzed using methods and tactics that are in accordance with the guidance outlined in the interpretive text. Barlas examines marriage in the Qur'an with a focus on verses relating to polygamy, divorce, inheritance and the household, as well as family obligations, especially those concerning the leadership responsibilities of children towards their parents. Although Barlas does not fully implement this thematic approach, he generally adheres to the method outlined previously. If examined carefully, the process of interpreting the verses of the Qur'an carried out by Barlas includes:

1. Explain the very fundamental vocabulary of a verse;
2. Interpret verses with other verses that are still on the same topic of discussion;
3. Explain the background of the verse in question;
4. Understanding the various opinions of interpretation experts about the verse in question; and
5. Placing the hermeneutic keys for reading the Qur'an in the character of divine ontology.

Through this explanation, Asma Barlas' typology of interpretation can be categorized as a rationalist feminist interpretation, because it is based on the principle that Allah is Most Just, indicating that Islam prioritizes upholding justice in all things. His application of a hermeneutic approach explains this clearly. This figure seems to use historical and hermeneutic perspectives simultaneously in studying Islamic explanations about the presence and status of women.

Application of Hans-Georg Gadamer's Hermeneutical Theory

1. Reader's Horizon

Readers have a role in producing meaning as a relationship between interpreter-reader. In empowering the reader's context, a construction of understanding emerges in understanding a text, which then, from this reading, gives rise to life experiences and current situations that demand re-reading of a text (Zaenudin, 2020). Of course, to gain a horizon (a horizon results from reading a text) means that one learns to go beyond what is near to see better within a larger whole and a true proposition (Gadamer, 1975).

a. Al-Ṭabarī's interpretation

Term Qs. An-Nisā'[4]: 1, in the lafadz 'من نفس واحدة' al-Ṭabarī clearly says that 'Prophet Adam' is the figure referred to in this lafadz. This is reinforced by al-Ṭabarī with narrations related to this statement. Al-Ṭabarī further explained in his commentary, that the reason Allah applied the lafadz واحدة after the lafadz نفس, was because نفس is a word that is categorized as mu'annats. Even though the meaning intended by the lafadz is 'from one man' (min rajulin wahid), by applying the lafadz واحدة the authenticity of the sentence is maintained. (al-Ṭabarī, 2001, p. 340) Furthermore, al-Ṭabarī interpreted the word al-zauzj from وخلق منها زوجها as his wife 'Eve'. This statement was strengthened by al-Ṭabarī by containing narrations that were in accordance with this statement. From some of the narrations listed by al-Ṭabarī, some of them say that Eve was formed from Adam's left rib when he was asleep, in order to calm Adam's soul (Al-Thabari, 2007).

Term Qs. An-Nisā'[4]: 3, in the lafadz meaning وَإِنْ جَفَنُمْ وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْبَيْتِ فَأَنْكِحُوا مَا طَابَ لَكُمْ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ al-Ṭabarī expressed a view which according to him is in accordance with the meaning of this verse. According to him, men should be afraid of not being able to behave fairly towards orphaned women and other women. Marry one to four women, according to whom they are incapable of committing arbitrary acts against these women. However, if they are worried about doing this, it is better for them to keep the slaves they own.

Term Qs. An-Nisā'[4]: 34, in the lafadz الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ means that men are leaders for their wives, they are obliged to guide and educate their wives in carrying out Allah's commands. This advantage is given by Allah to men because they have provided a dowry, living and other needs for their wives.

In this way, men serve as leaders for their wives, while also carrying out what Allah has commanded them to do regarding their wives' affairs (Al-Ṭabarī, 2007). Furthermore, نشوز means being arrogant towards your husband, often committing immoral acts, neglecting your obligations towards your husband, and turning into a bad heart. In al-Ṭabarī's interpretation, according to him, separate beds are not the right choice in interpreting this sentence. According to him, separating in bed only makes the wife feel happier, because she no longer likes her husband, avoids saying hello to him, moreover, Allah forbids his servants from not saying hello to each other for three days. Therefore, it is better for husbands to lock up or tie their wives using rope. And for wives who are still practicing nushuz, their husbands are allowed to hit them with light blows or blows that do not hurt and leave scars. In this case, al-Ṭabarī also included several narrations that were in accordance with his opinion.

b. Interpretation of Asma Barlas

Term Qs. An-Nisā'[4]: 1, Barlas believes that the word نفس does not refer to the spirit; rather, it is a single word that describes the meaning of self or person. According to Barlas, the idea that humans were created from one self is a way to integrate some of the Qur'anic epistemology from the verse that defines 'partner'. Therefore, the Qur'an states that men and women have an ontological relationship and cannot be separated. Barlas said, according to him, the epistemology of the Qur'an regarding 'couples' is that men and women were created with the aim of living side by side in an atmosphere of love and mutual acceptance of each other (Barlas, 2019).

Term Qs. An-Nisā'[4]: 3, Asma Barlas admits that divorce and the practice of polygamy in Islamic law are always associated with the concept of male dominance. As stated in the introduction, Asma Barlas seeks a different definition of the term 'polygamy', and not a superficial or general interpretation. Determining whether polygamy is permissible must depend on the socio-economic conditions of the parties involved. Barlas appears to tolerate polygamy, although Barlas tended to denounce polygamy as a feminist scholar; However, he admits that some urgent circumstances allow men to marry more than one woman according to this verse (Barlas, 2003).

Term Qs. An-Nisā'[4]: 34, The husband's right to beat his wife for disobeying her husband (nushuz) is one of the elements highlighted by Barlas because it is able to encourage understanding of patriarchy. He claims that by quoting the words of Aminah Wadud in the book Qur'an and woman, it shows that the word ضرب can also mean 'to set an example' apart from 'to beat'. Apart from that, Barlas quoted from Pitchkall's words that قوامون refers to "breadwinners" or those who are obliged to fulfill their basic needs. Therefore, Barlas interprets the premise of the verse as stating that men are required to support women with their financial capabilities, not given the privilege to lead as implied in the reading above.

2. Text Horizon (Pre-Comprehension)

Horizons is a certain perspective, including seeing a wide range from a certain point of view, including in understanding the text of the Qur'an. By considering the analysis of language and tradition, it is possible for a dialogue to occur or what Gadamer calls a hermeneutic circle because an adequate understanding of interpretive events will lead us to the essential process of understanding.

Term Qs. An-Nisā'[4]: 1, from a linguistic aspect it refers to the Lisan al-'Arab dictionary, lafadz نفس means spirit or soul, in the plural anfus. According to Abu Ishaq نفس there are two meanings, namely spirit and self. For example, 'kharajat lust so and so' means 'the soul of so and so comes out', or 'qatala so and so nafsahu wa ahlaka nafsahu' means 'someone kills himself and destroys himself'.

From a historical aspect, it is possible to argue that women and the history of great civilizations before the arrival of Islam were ignored. For example, in Ancient Greek civilization, women at that time did not have access to leave the palace. Especially women from lower classes, because they could be bought and sold. They enjoyed freedom at the peak of civilization, but because they were tied to sexuality, the freedom they were given benefited more from men. Meanwhile, from a contextual perspective, Abduh said that the reason Surah An-Nisā' was given this name was because it mentioned women and the laws that applied to them first. As a warning as well as a reminder of the law of kinship and matters related to it, such as marriage and inheritance, the verse in this letter begins by reminding humanity that they come from واحدة نفس. This is followed by references to kin

around the world and then explicit kinship (Nisa, 2024).

While seen from the views of some scholars, lafadz *نفس واحدة* means the following:

- a. Ibn Kasthir; is a reminder for his servants that Allah has shown his greatness by creating 'from one self', namely Adam. Then Allah created Eve as the partner of that one self (Maliki, 2018).
- b. Al-Qurthubi; means 'Prophet Adam AS'. Using *ha'* is because it follows the word *نفس* which is *mu'annats* (Al-Hifnawi & Utsman, 2008).
- c. Wahbah Zuhaili; means from one person, namely Adam. The word *نفس* refers to the meaning of soul and body (Az-Zuhaili & al Kattani, 2013).
- d. M. Quraish Shihab; means the creation of the father of the whole world, namely 'Adam AS' and his partner 'Eve' from the same kind. This is because according to him women are not part of men and there is no difference between them from a human perspective (Shihab, 2002).

Term Qs. An-Nisā'[4]: 3, linguistically refers to the Lisan al-'Arab dictionary, lafadz *العدل* means something that is upright in a straight soul, the opposite of *al-jawr* which means injustice or oppression. According to Ibn Manzur, *العدل* does not only mean justice in law, but also equality and balance that apply in all aspects of life.

There is also an explanation of the socio-historical context in Qs. An-Nisā' /4: 3 which attempts to link the practice of polygamy with unfair treatment of orphans. In the fourth year of the Hijri Islam suffered a major setback during the battle of Uhud, which led to the martyrdom of seventy adult men. Considering there were only 700 people around at the time, this figure is extremely high. Under existing circumstances, men ultimately become the backbone of the family. Seventy Muslim men were killed, leaving many women widowed and many children orphaned in families lacking financial support. As a result, many widows and orphans in Medina, who were considered to be the core of the emergence of Islamic authority, were ultimately neglected (Mustari, 2014).

Apart from that, tribalism remains the foundation of Arab society in social life, therefore this is not a problem. Because tribal heads are responsible and guarantee social security for their constituents, they will receive compensation. The evolution of the Hijaz into a commercial corridor between Yemen and Syria inadvertently caused Arab urban civilization to develop into a trading society, accompanied by detrimental consequences such as individualism, competition, and exploitation of the poor. In this case, Islam improves the situation at that time rather than going back to the past by prioritizing equality, brotherhood and justice.

Meanwhile, seen from the views of several scholars, the lafadz *العدل* means the following:

- a. Ibn Kathir; means an order not to marry more than one woman, because it is feared that injustice will happen to the other wives. The 'fair' referred to here is not in the category of feelings, because it does not belong to his authority. The 'fair' referred to in this verse is in the form of *zahir*, such as socializing and providing.
- b. Al-Qurthubi; means 'fair' in terms of feelings, such as love, as well as biological needs in distributing time to his wives.
- c. M. Quraish Shihab: in this verse Allah uses the words *تقسطوا* and *العدل* to emphasize the meaning of 'fair'. Apart from that, these two words also mean the pleasure of doing justice to two or three more people. What he means by fairness is towards oneself and towards others, so that there will be no unpleasantness towards any of them.

Term Qs. An-Nisā'[4]: 34, from a linguistic aspect it refers to the Lisan al-'Arab dictionary, lafadz *رجل* means 'man'. Meanwhile, the word *قوامون* is the plural form of the word *قوام*, which is taken from the word *قام*. This word is related to the command for prayer, for example it also uses the root word. The command in this verse does not mean offering prayers, but carrying them out perfectly, fulfilling all the requirements, harmony and His sunnah. A person who carries out tasks and/or what is expected of him is called *qaim*. If he carries out this task as perfectly as possible, continuously and repeatedly, he is named *قوامون* in line with the meaning of the word *ar-rijal* which means many men or husbands. This verse asks husbands to *قوام*, namely to lead, because in a household there must be a leader. Additionally, the word *(الضَرْب)* generally means to hit or strike. *Ḍaraba-Yadribu-Ḍarban*, verb meaning to hit, slap, or give a blow. *Ḍarrabahu* means hitting someone hard many times. Other meanings of the word *ضرب* are plugging, printing, ordering something to be made, and repetitive

movements (such as heartbeats and ocean waves).

Asbabun nuzul in Qs. An-Nisā' ayat 34 is the beginning to mention sharia regulations regarding men's rights and women's rights as well as family associations. Indeed, Allah has mentioned after the previous case because of the harmony of laws that return to family regulations, especially women's laws. So His words *الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ* are the origin of the overall law which branches out to the laws in the verses that follow, which is like the previous explanation. Apart from that, asbabun nuzul macro is the condition of Arab society at that time which includes social, cultural and economic conditions. Where the condition of women at that time was very worrying, they were always plagued by discriminatory behavior and violence by men as the holders of the highest levels of power at all levels. Women do not get a share of inheritance, they are even used as objects or items that are inherited. The birth of a girl child was a disgrace, so many were buried alive when they were just born. Apart from that, during her iddah period, a woman will be confined to a narrow room, not allowed to touch anything, let alone dress up, even if it is limited to combing her hair. In short, in Haifaa's view, women are seen as a thing, not a person) (Jawad, 1998).

Meanwhile, seen from several scholars' views, the lafadz *الرجال قوامون* and *واضربوهن* have the following meanings:

- a. Ibnu Katsir: means that men are leaders for their wives, they are obligated to protect, educate, and guide their wives from deviant actions. So that men have one degree advantage over women. While lafadz *واضربوهن* means to give a blow that does not leave a mark. This can be done if the advice given by the husband to his wife has no impact on the behavior of his wife who has performed nushuz
- b. Ibn Abbas: means that women should obey their husband's orders which encourage goodness, because men are their leaders. Therefore, women are encouraged to look after their wealth and do good for their husband's family. Meanwhile the lafadz *واضربوهن* means giving a blow that doesn't leave a wound. For wives who commit nushuz and do not give up after their husband gives advice and separates from bed, the husband is allowed to beat his wife (Thalhah, 2009).
- c. Al-Qurthubi: in the form of mubtada' and khabar, meaning people who defend and provide a living, as well as men who usually go to war or become judges, so they are called Qayyim or Qawwam. The word *قوام* is a form of hyperbole which means to strive, control and maintain seriously based on consideration. Meanwhile the lafadz *واضربوهن* means an educational blow, not a painful blow, does not break bones and does not cause injuries like punching and the like, because the aim is to improve, not anything else. This can be done if the husband has given advice and separated from his wife in bed
- d. M. Quraish Sihab: Quraish Shihab interprets this lafadz as a male 'husband' in general. Because this is a consideration with the next sentence 'because they (husbands) spend part of their wealth' on their wives. Meanwhile, *قوامون* means a leader who fulfills needs, provides attention, defends, maintains and develops

3. Fusion of Horizons

The fusion of horizons resulting from the fusion of the text (text horizons) and the reader's horizons (reader's horizons), if seen from the historical context (effective history) and pre-understanding will find new meanings from the two interpreters as follows:

- a. Qs. An-Nisā'[4]: 1, from socio-history, which describes women in the history of great civilizations before the arrival of Islam as ignored and subordinated by men. In the lafadz *نفس واحدة* al-Ṭabarī means 'from one self', with Adam. Then Allah created Eve as a partner formed from Adam's left rib, which was bent when he was asleep, in order to calm his soul and become a complement to him. Meanwhile, Barlas believes that the word *نفس* does not refer to the spirit; rather, it is a 'single word' that describes the meaning of self or person
- b. Qs. An-Nisā'[4]: 3, socio-historical context before Islam came, where the practice of unlimited polygamy occurred in various parts of the world. Apart from that, as narrated by Aisyah, there was a guardian of an orphan woman who wanted to marry the orphan woman because he was attracted by her beauty and wealth, but he was unable to provide the dowry that had been determined, so he was not allowed to marry the orphan woman. Through the context of *العدل*, al-Ṭabarī and the mufasssir interpret this verse as men should be afraid of not being able to

behave fairly towards orphaned women and other women. Meanwhile, according to Barlas, the basis of polygamy is not a privilege given to men, but rather a protection given to women.

- c. Qs. An-Nisā'[4]: 34, in the lafadz *الرجال قوامون لبايتهم* and *واضربوهن* examined from the history "a woman came to the Messenger of Allah and complained to him that her husband had slapped her. Al-Ṭabarī interprets it as men being leaders for their wives; they are obliged to guide and educate their wives in carrying out God's commands. Meanwhile, for wives who are still practicing *nushuz*, their husbands are allowed to hit them with light blows or blows that do not hurt and leave scars. Meanwhile, Barlas interprets the premise of the verse as stating that men are required to support women with their financial capabilities, not given the privilege to lead as implied in the reading above. Barlas points out that the word *ضرب*, apart from meaning 'to beat', can also mean 'to set an example'.

4. The Hermeneutical Relevance of Fusion of Horizons in Current Gender Verses

After explaining the term on gender Qur'anic verses in the interpretation of al-Ṭabarī and Asma Barlas, the relevance of gender Qur'anic verses in the present is explained as follows:

- a. Qs. An-Nisā'[4]: 1, the equality of human origins can be seen in this verse. Where the Al-Qur'an and Islam are present to raise the status of women, so that Islamic justice towards women is felt to this day. A woman can receive the highest possible education, political freedom, opinion and even other rights. So from the details of this verse, the author can draw the moral ideal or message that he wants to convey at this time, namely that a woman is allowed to express opinions, complaints and so on.
- b. Qs. An-Nisā'[4]: 3, there are formal legal and moral ideas in it. From a formal legal point of view, this verse is a limitation on having four wives, with the note that if the husband is afraid that he will not be able to treat several wives fairly, then he must marry only one wife (monogamy). Meanwhile, the moral idea or goal as an ideal that is expressed in this verse is monogamy. As an institution that exists today, polygamy is legally recognized, with guidelines stating that little by little the social environment has made it possible, and then monogamy may very well be introduced.
- c. Qs. An-Nisā'[4]: 34, from the explanation that has been explained previously, the meaning of *qawwam* is more inclined or tends towards the problem of men as leaders in the family. However, if we look at the present, women no longer only contribute in the domestic sphere but in all aspects, such as education, economics, social and politics. Apart from that, household matters, which were previously private matters and should not be regulated by the state, have been transferred to the public domain and are also regulated by law.

Conclusion

This research examines the differences in the interpretation of gender verses in the interpretation of al-Ṭabarī and Asma Barlas. The author will write down several main points that can be concluded, including: Differences in Methods and Approaches; Al-Ṭabarī uses a *tafsir bi al-ma'tsur* (history-based interpretation) approach which adheres to the hadith and opinions of previous scholars. His interpretation tends to be influenced by the dominant patriarchal culture of his time. Meanwhile, Asma Barlas uses a critical hermeneutic approach and contextual interpretation. He rejects gender-biased understandings and interprets the Qur'an as a text that liberates women.

Interpretation of Gender Verses; Qs. An-Nisā' [4]: 1, al-Ṭabarī refers to the hadith and opinions of classical scholars to understand the meaning of "نفس واحدة" which is interpreted as the Prophet Adam as the first human. "Zaujaha" is interpreted as Eve, who was created from the Prophet Adam. Meanwhile, Asma Barlas emphasized that men and women have ontological equality. Qs. An-Nisā' [4]: 3, al-Ṭabarī supports polygamy as a legal practice with conditions of justice not only for orphaned women, but also for all women. Meanwhile, Asma Barlas criticized the practice of polygamy and emphasized the need for equality and social justice, rejecting views that only justify polygamy without considering its impact on women. Qs. An-Nisā' [4]: 34, al-Ṭabarī emphasizes that men have greater authority and responsibility in the household, including enforcing discipline on their wives if necessary, including in the context of hitting as a last resort. Meanwhile, Asma Barlas rejects the interpretation that views men as leaders who have the right to control women unilaterally and emphasizes equality and justice in marriage relationships. He prefers an interpretation that does

not support violence and sees it as part of healthy and respectful communication.

With the Fusion of Horizons theory, this research shows that differences in gender interpretation do not only originate from the Al-Qur'an text itself, but also from the perspective of the interpreters and their cultural backgrounds. A more gender-equitable interpretation can be achieved by combining historical understanding with the current socio-cultural context.

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