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# Collective Responsibility of Domestic Work in Muslim Households: A Feminist Interpretation and Critical Gender Critique Analysis

Muhammad Arif *[1], Muhammad Ichwan Firdaus[2], Dede Kurniawan[3]

[1,2] UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia
[3] Pesantren Aisyiyah Boarding School Bandung, Indonesia

* Corresponding Author, Email: aripkun88@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the relationship between husband and wife in the Qur'an from a feminist interpretive perspective, focusing on whether household chores constitute women's obligations or shared marital responsibilities. The study is motivated by certain classical interpretations, particularly of QS. an-Nisā' [4]:34 concerning the concept of *qiwāmah*, which tend to position women in subordinate and domestic roles. Such interpretations raise questions about their compatibility with the Qur'anic principles of justice and equality in contemporary society. This research employs a qualitative library research method, combining thematic Qur'anic interpretation (*tafsīr mawḍū'ī*) with critical gender analysis to reassess conventional understandings of marital roles. Its theoretical framework draws on the Islamic feminist perspectives of Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, and Siti Musdah Mulia, whose approaches emphasize gender equality, justice, and spiritual partnership between spouses. The findings indicate that the Qur'an provides a foundation for reciprocal and equitable marital relationships. QS. ar-Rūm [30]:21 highlights the principles of *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *raḥmah*, while QS. al-Baqarah [2]:187 illustrates the mutual relationship between husband and wife through the metaphor of garments for one another. These verses suggest that marriage should be understood as a partnership grounded in affection, protection, cooperation, and mutual responsibility. Consequently, household chores cannot automatically be regarded as women's inherent obligations but should be negotiated and fulfilled collectively according to the circumstances and capacities of both spouses. This feminist interpretation offers a contextual and liberating understanding of Qur'anic teachings, contributing to contemporary Islamic discourse on gender justice and promoting more balanced, harmonious, and equitable family relationships.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of gender equality in Islam is a theme that continues to receive attention in contemporary exegetical studies, particularly in discussions of husband-wife relations and the division of domestic labor. In classical exegesis, the interpretation of verses such as Q.S. an-Nisā' [4]:34 is generally based on the patriarchal social context of 7th-century Arab society, where men are positioned as leaders and women as those being led (Ismail

et al., 2024). This kind of reading gives rise to theological legitimacy for the unequal roles between men and women, especially in the context of household work which is often considered a natural obligation of women. The issue of gender inequality in the household, particularly related to the division of domestic labor, remains a fundamental problem in Indonesian Muslim society. Women's involvement in the public sector as workers or career women continues to increase, but this phenomenon creates a dual role burden that demands women to succeed in the public sphere while remaining fully responsible for domestic affairs (Harmanda & Sari, 2024). This role imbalance has proven to be a significant source of tension in marriages (Januari, 2023). In fact, the high divorce rate in Indonesia, which reached 516,334 cases in 2022, indicates structural problems in marital relations. Religious Court data shows that the percentage of divorces is dominated by divorce lawsuits (lawsuits filed by the wife), which average 65% of the total cases. Domestic conflict, triggered by various factors, including inequality in the division of household duties, is often the root of these divorces. Therefore, it is important to critique the theological legitimacy that supports rigid role division, especially through the interpretation of qiwāmah (Q.S. an-Nisā' [4]:34), and reinterpret the concept of husband-and-wife relations towards collective responsibility based on the principles of spiritual partnership and justice.

Amidst the complexity of household problems, the emergence of a feminist interpretation approach provides a breath of fresh air for modern interpretation studies. Feminist interpretation attempts to reread the text of the Qur'an from the perspective of gender equality and justice by rejecting patriarchal biased interpretations without rejecting the text of the Qur'an itself (Duderija, 2020). Figures such as Amina Wadud through Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective emphasize that the concept of qiwāmah in Q.S. an-Nisā' [4]: 34 is not a symbol of male superiority, but rather a contextual and dynamic functional responsibility (Wadud, 1999). Asma Barlas in Believing Women in Islam states that the Qur'an is not patriarchal, but has been "read patriarchally" by male interpreters for centuries (Barlas, 2019).

Furthermore, Fatima Mernissi, through Beyond the Veil, shows that classical readings are often influenced by patriarchal culture, not by the normative values of the Qur'an itself (Mernissi, 1987). In the local context, thinkers such as Siti Musdah Mulia and Nur Rofiah have also developed gender equality-based interpretations in Indonesia, emphasizing the importance of the principleʿadl (justice) and raḥmah (affection) in household relations (Mulia, 2004). Their view emphasizes that Islam places husband and wife in a position of equal spiritual and social partnership, not a hierarchical relationship.

Several previous studies with similar themes can be presented here to emphasize the position and novelty of this research. Begum, M.S.I., et al. (2024) - "Gender Equity in Muslim Family Law: Modern and Contemporary 'Ulamā's View". This article in the journal Al-Ahkam (Oktober 2024) examines the views of modern and contemporary scholars on gender equity in Muslim family law, distinguishing the concepts of "equality" (absolute equality) and "equity" (proportional justice). Using a narrative review method, this study analyzes the views of scholars on the rights of divorce, polygamy, testimony, and inheritance, with the conclusion that Islam emphasizes the principle of equity that recognizes biological and social differences while still upholding substantive justice, in addition to rejecting Western equality that equates men and women without distinction (Begum et al., 2024). This article focuses on the normative aspects of family law (divorce, polygamy, inheritance) but does not discuss several aspects, namely: First, it does not discuss the division of domestic labor as a practical issue. Second, it fails to integrate thematic interpretation analysis of verses on husband-wife relations. Third, it fails to link to empirical data such as divorce rates. Fourth, it fails to present a systematic comparison of classical and contemporary interpretations. Fifth, it fails to integrate Islamic feminist perspectives from figures such as Wadud or Barlas.

Another study by Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir (2019) - "Qira'ah Mubadalah: Progressive Interpretation for Gender Justice in Islam". Kodir's work develops the concept of Qira'ah Mubadalah as a progressive method of interpreting Islamic texts with the perspective of reciprocity between men and women. Mubadalah (reciprocity) emphasizes that men and women are equal partners in family relations, with five operational pillars: (1) shared responsibility (mitsāqan ghalī)ẓan), (2) husband-wife partnership (*zawj*), (3) proper association (*mu'āsharah bil ma'rūf*), (4) dialogue (*tashāwur*), and (5) reciprocal affection (*tahābub*). This concept has been applied in studies of husband-wife rights and obligations, childcare, and consideration of religious court decisions (Faqihuddin, 2019). Although progressive, the concept of *mubadalah* does not specifically discuss the concrete division of domestic labor with empirical data on women's double burden and its relationship to divorce rates. Then it does not integrate thematic interpretation analysis of several verses simultaneously, does not compare classical and contemporary interpretations in a comparative table format, does not integrate feminist economic perspectives on unpaid domestic work, and does not link to international Islamic feminist figures within a global analytical framework.

Meanwhile, research by Kiram (2025) - "Gendered Division of Domestic Labor: Indonesian Muslim Men's Perceptions, Participation and Experiences in Housework and Childcare" using mixed-methods (survey of 250

couples and interviews with 10 couples plus 2 imams/Islamic scholars) revealed significant gender disparities in domestic labor in Indonesian Muslim families. Data shows that women spend an average of 251.34 minutes on housework on weekdays, while men only spend 40.34 minutes. The study found that gender beliefs (gender ideology) greatly determine the distribution of tasks, and cultural-religious factors reinforce inequality by maintaining the division of gender-stereotyped roles where men are breadwinners and women are homemakers. This descriptive-empirical study has its shortcomings. First, it does not offer theological solutions or reinterpretation of religious texts. Second, it does not analyze in depth how the interpretation of Qur'anic verses (QS An-Nisa 4:34, QS Ar-Rum 30:21, QS Al-Baqarah 2:187) contributes to the social construction of an unfair division of labor. Third, it does not integrate feminist exegetical perspectives from Wadud, Barlas, or Kodir. Fourth, it does not link the findings to Indonesian divorce data nor does it provide a systematic comparative analysis of classical and contemporary interpretations.

From these studies, it appears that there are not many studies that simultaneously integrate thematic interpretation analysis of verses that indicate domestic obligations in household life (an-Nisā' [4]:34, ar-Rūm [30]:21, al-Baqarah [2]:187) with a critical gender analysis approach to see how the concept of relations and division of domestic labor can be interpreted in an egalitarian manner. This is where this study takes a position as a study that fills the theoretical and empirical gaps of previous studies, with a focus on domestic labor relations in Muslim households as a shared responsibility.

This research is a qualitative study using library research. The aim is to conduct an in-depth analysis of textual data. The main focus is on the symbolic meaning of Quranic verses and exegetical literature related to husband-wife relations. This study adopts a dual methodological framework, integrating a thematic exegetical approach (mawḍūʿī) with critical gender analysis. This approach was chosen because it examines the interpretation of normative values and meanings, thus requiring a critical analysis of primary and secondary Islamic source texts, while also being able to link the depth of the texts to the modern social context that is the reality of today's Muslims.

## 2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 2.1. Definition and Scope of Domestic Work

The examination of relevant Qur'anic verses reveals a consistent ethical orientation toward affirming the sanctity of human life and rejecting practices that result in the killing or dehumanization of women. This thematic pattern can be identified both in the Qur'anic condemnation of female infanticide during the pre-Islamic period and in the broader prohibition of unlawful killing. Although the historical circumstances addressed by the Qur'an differ from contemporary forms of gender-based violence, the underlying ethical problem remains comparable: the denial of women's fundamental right to life and their reduction to objects whose existence may be determined by patriarchal, economic, cultural, or social considerations. Therefore, the Qur'anic discourse on the protection of life provides an important conceptual foundation for examining modern femicide from an Islamic perspective (Lindstedt, 2023).

Domestic work (or housework) is a central issue in gender studies and family sociology, generally defined as any unpaid activity undertaken for the maintenance and well-being of family members and households (Addati, 2021). This activity is characterized primarily by being unpaid and unrecognized in national economic calculations, despite its high productive value for the sustainability of the social and economic systems of society (Glass, 2003). The scope of domestic work includes daily household chores (such as cleaning, cooking, and washing) as well as care work, namely caring for children, the elderly, and managing the emotional well-being of all family members.

Gender critique highlights that in patriarchal societies, domestic work is often constructed as a natural burden for women, resulting in double discrimination, especially for women who also have careers in the public sphere (Federici, 2020). This analysis is supported by findings by feminist economists who explain that restricting women to the domestic sector is a form of structural marginalization rooted in erroneous gender ideology (Fakih, 2008). Therefore, this study emphasizes the need for a theological paradigm shift, from an interpretation that legitimizes subordination to one that emphasizes spiritual partnership.

### 2.2. The Concept of Gender in Islam

In contemporary Islamic studies, gender is understood as a sociocultural construct referring to the roles, behaviors, responsibilities, and expectations that society assigns to men and women. This concept is distinguished from sex, which refers to biological characteristics. The distinction is important because many differences in domestic responsibilities are not necessarily determined by biological conditions but are shaped by cultural traditions, social institutions, and historically established power relations. Within Islamic theology, relationships

between human beings are fundamentally guided by the principles of justice (*'adālah*), reciprocity, and human dignity. These principles also apply to marital relationships and the distribution of responsibilities within the household. One significant Qur'anic foundation for this understanding is QS. al-Nisā' [4]:19, which instructs husbands to live together with their wives in kindness (*wa 'āshirūhunna bi al-ma'rūf*). This command establishes an ethical standard for marriage based on good treatment, mutual respect, and the recognition of each spouse's dignity (Kiram, 2026a).

Rather than legitimizing arbitrary authority, the verse emphasizes that marital relationships should be conducted through kindness and consideration of one another's rights and circumstances. Amina Wadud develops a gender-sensitive approach to Qur'anic interpretation by emphasizing the Qur'an's fundamental principles of justice, human equality, and moral responsibility. Through her hermeneutical method, she challenges patriarchal interpretations that privilege male authority while marginalizing women's experiences and contributions. For Wadud, Qur'anic interpretation should consider the textual context, the historical circumstances of revelation, and the broader ethical message of the Qur'an. This approach is particularly relevant to understanding *qiwāmah* in QS. al-Nisā' [4]:34. Rather than treating male leadership as an unconditional privilege or evidence of inherent superiority, *qiwāmah* can be examined in relation to the responsibilities associated with family maintenance and protection. Its interpretation, therefore, should not be separated from the principles of justice and accountability that govern human relationships (Boo, 2025).

From this perspective, the division of domestic labor should not automatically be regarded as a fixed obligation imposed exclusively on women. Household activities, including cooking, cleaning, childcare, and caring for family members, constitute important contributions to family well-being. Their distribution should take into account the circumstances, capacities, and mutual agreements of both spouses. Consequently, gender equality in the household does not necessarily require identical tasks but requires fairness in the recognition and fulfillment of responsibilities. By applying Wadud's gender-sensitive hermeneutics, marital relations can be understood as a partnership grounded in mutual respect, cooperation, and shared responsibility, rather than rigid gender hierarchies or unilateral authority (Wadud, 1999). Asma Barlas emphasized that the Qur'an does not contain misogynistic teachings, but that patriarchal readings lead to discrimination against women (Barlas, 2019). In line with these two, Fatima Mernissi, in Beyond the Veil, criticized the idea that Islam oppresses women, showing how classical interpretations are often influenced by male social contexts (Mernissi, 1987).

In Indonesia, Siti Musdah Mulia and Nur Rofiah expanded this analysis by linking it to the local socio-cultural context and championed an interpretation that frees women from the burden of exclusive domesticity (Predelli, 2004). The consensus among four Islamic feminist figures (including Wadud, Barlas, Mernissi, and Musdah Mulia) is that the Qur'an is egalitarian. However, there are differences in methodology in approaching the text. Textual/Hermeneutical Approach: Figures such as Aminah Wadud and Asma Barlas focus on the textual (hermeneutical) reinterpretation of the Qur'an to reveal its egalitarian message. Sociological/Critical Approach: Meanwhile, Fatima Mernissi and Musdah Mulia highlight and critique the patriarchal social structures underlying traditional interpretations. This view is diametrically opposed to classical interpretations of the concept of qiwāmah (the husband's leadership).

Classical commentators interpreted qiwāmah as functional male leadership grounded in financial responsibility and protectiveness, rather than biological superiority. Furthermore, conservative modernist thinkers such as Sayyid Qutb and Abu al-A'la al-Mawdudi emphasized the primary (primordial) role of men as heads of household, grounded in economic justification and moral protection. However, this conservative approach, which maintains rigid role differentiation, has been criticized by contemporary scholars for reinforcing patriarchal structures that are not considered fully relevant or adaptive to the modern socio-cultural context.

### 2.3. Husband and Wife Relations in the Qur'an

- QS An Nisa [4]: 34

اَلرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُوْنَ عَلَى النِّسَاۤءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللّٰهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلٰى بَعْضٍ وَّبِمَآ اَنْفَقُوْا مِنْ اَمْوَالِهِمْۗ فَالصّٰلِحٰتُ قٰنِتٰتٌ حٰفِظٰتٌ لِّلْغَيْبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ اللّٰهُۗ وَالّٰتِيْ تَخَافُوْنَ نُشُوْزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوْهُنَّ وَاهْجُرُوْهُنَّ فِى الْمَضَاجِعِ وَاضْرِبُوْهُنَّۚ فَاِنْ اَطَعْنَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْغُوْا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيْلًاۗ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ كَانَ عَلِيًّا كَبِيْرًا

*Men are responsible for women because Allah has made some of them excel others and because they spend of their wealth. Righteous women are obedient and guard themselves in their absence because Allah has*

*protected them. As for those women about whom you fear nushuz, advise them, leave them in their beds, and (if necessary) beat them (in a way that is not painful). But if they obey you, do not seek to cause them harm. Indeed, Allah is Most High, Most Great.*

According to Sayyid Qutb, QS An-Nisā' [4]:34 addresses the regulation of marital relations and the preservation of family stability through the implementation of divine guidance. In his interpretation, the verse establishes *qiwāmah* as a responsibility assigned to husbands, particularly in relation to family leadership, protection, and financial provision. Qutb understands this responsibility as closely connected to the husband's obligation to support and maintain the family. The verse also discusses procedures for addressing *nushūz*, commonly understood in this context as serious marital discord or a wife's persistent breach of marital obligations. These procedures include admonition (*wa'ẓ*), separation in the marital bed (*hajr*), and, as a final measure, *ḍarb*, which has traditionally been interpreted by some exegetes as a form of physical disciplinary action subject to limitations. In Qutb's reading, these measures are presented as a sequence intended to address marital conflict and prevent the breakdown of the family (Nuraida et al., 2026).

His interpretation also emphasizes the wife's responsibility to maintain marital commitments within the framework of the husband's *qiwāmah*. Nevertheless, this understanding requires careful consideration from a contemporary gender perspective. The association of male leadership with financial provision and protection may be interpreted as a functional responsibility rather than an unrestricted entitlement to exercise authority over women. Similarly, the discussion of *nushūz* should not be generalized to justify coercion, violence, or the unilateral control of wives. A critical reading must consider the Qur'an's broader ethical principles, including justice, compassion, mutual respect, and the prohibition of harm. Therefore, while Qutb's interpretation reflects a particular understanding of marital hierarchy and family responsibilities, it also provides an important starting point for examining how classical and modern interpretations of *qiwāmah* influence contemporary discussions about gender relations, domestic responsibilities, and equality within Muslim families.

- QS Ar Rum [30]: 21

وَمِنْ اٰيٰتِهٖٓ اَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِّنْ اَنْفُسِكُمْ اَزْوَاجًا لِّتَسْكُنُوْٓا اِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَّوَدَّةً وَّرَحْمَةً ۗاِنَّ فِيْ ذٰلِكَ لَاٰيٰتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَّتَفَكَّرُوْنَ

*Among His signs is that He created for you mates from yourselves, that you may find comfort in them, and He has placed love and compassion between you. Indeed, in this are signs for a people who give thought.*

QS Ar-Rūm [30]:21 highlights one of the signs of Allah's greatness through the creation of human pairs and the establishment of marriage as a meaningful relationship. The verse explains that Allah created spouses from among human beings themselves so that they may find tranquility (*sakinah*) in one another and established between them love (*mawaddah*) and compassion (*rahmah*). These three concepts provide an important foundation for understanding the spiritual, emotional, and ethical dimensions of marriage in Islam. *Sakinah* refers to the inner peace and sense of security that spouses experience through mutual presence, understanding, and support. It suggests that marriage should become a safe environment in which both partners can express themselves, develop their potential, and face life's challenges together. Meanwhile, *mawaddah* represents deep affection and love that encourage spouses to maintain intimacy, appreciation, and commitment throughout their shared lives. *Rahmah*, in turn, refers to compassion, empathy, and the willingness to care for one another, particularly during difficult circumstances (Fadhlullah, 2025).

Together, these values demonstrate that marriage is not merely a biological or legal union intended to preserve human reproduction. Rather, it is a spiritual and social partnership directed toward establishing a harmonious family life grounded in mutual respect, emotional security, and shared responsibility. From a gender perspective, the reciprocal character of these values challenges the assumption that maintaining family harmony is exclusively women's responsibility. Both husband and wife are responsible for cultivating tranquility, expressing affection, and demonstrating compassion through their everyday actions. This includes participating in household management, caring for family members, and supporting each other's personal and professional development according to their respective circumstances and capacities. Therefore, QS Ar-Rūm [30]:21 provides an ethical foundation for understanding marriage as a partnership in which love, compassion, and responsibility are cultivated mutually. The fulfillment of these principles requires cooperation rather than domination, enabling both spouses to build a family life that reflects the Qur'anic ideals of peace, dignity, and devotion to Allah.

- QS Al Baqarah [2]: 187

أُحِلَّ لَكُمْ لَيْلَةَ الصِّيَامِ الرَّفَثُ اِلٰى نِسَاۤىِٕكُمْۗ هُنَّ لِبَاسٌ لَّكُمْ وَاَنْتُمْ لِبَاسٌ لَّهُنَّۗ عَلِمَ اللّٰهُ اَنَّكُمْ كُنْتُمْ تَخْتَانُوْنَ اَنْفُسَكُمْ فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَعَفَا عَنْكُمْۚ فَالْـٰٔنَ بَاشِرُوْهُنَّ وَابْتَغُوْا مَا كَتَبَ اللّٰهُ لَكُمْۗ وَكُلُوْا وَاشْرَبُوْا حَتّٰى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمُ الْخَيْطُ الْاَبْيَضُ مِنَ الْخَيْطِ الْاَسْوَدِ مِنَ الْفَجْرِۖ ثُمَّ اَتِمُّوا الصِّيَامَ اِلَى الَّيْلِۚ وَلَا تُبَاشِرُوْهُنَّ وَاَنْتُمْ عٰكِفُوْنَۙ فِى الْمَسٰجِدِۗ تِلْكَ حُدُوْدُ اللّٰهِ فَلَا تَقْرَبُوْهَاۗ كَذٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللّٰهُ اٰيٰتِهٖ لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُوْنَ

*It is lawful for you to have intercourse with your wives on the night of the fast. They are your clothing and you are their clothing. Allah knows that you cannot restrain yourselves, but He accepts your repentance and forgives you. So have intercourse with them and seek what Allah has ordained for you. Eat and drink until the white thread becomes distinct to you from the black thread, which is the dawn. Then complete the fast until nightfall. But do not have intercourse with them while you are in seclusion in the mosque. These are the limits of Allah. So do not approach them. Thus does Allah make clear His verses to mankind so that they may become righteous.*

QS Al-Baqarah [2]:187 presents the relationship between husband and wife through a profound metaphor: *"hunna libāsun lakum wa antum libāsun lahunna,"* meaning "they (wives) are garments for you, and you are garments for them." Although this verse was revealed in the context of permitting marital intimacy during the nights of Ramadan, its message extends beyond the regulation of sexual relations. The metaphor of *libās* (garment) illustrates the mutual closeness, protection, and emotional security that should characterize married life. Just as clothing covers the body, protects it from external conditions, and provides comfort, spouses are expected to protect one another's dignity, preserve each other's honor, and provide emotional support. The reciprocal structure of the expression is particularly significant because it places husbands and wives in equivalent positions: each is a garment for the other. This mutuality challenges interpretations of marriage that emphasize unilateral authority or place one spouse in a permanently subordinate position (Subhani & Azmi, 2026).

Instead, the verse portrays marriage as a relationship of complementarity in which both partners have responsibilities toward one another. Within this framework, affection, compassion, respect, and cooperation become essential foundations of family life. The garment metaphor can also inform discussions of domestic responsibilities. If husband and wife are mutually responsible for protecting and supporting each other, household management should not automatically be assigned exclusively to women. Rather, domestic tasks can be understood as part of the shared responsibilities that sustain family well-being. Their distribution should consider each spouse's circumstances, capacities, and mutual agreement. Therefore, QS Al-Baqarah [2]:187 provides a Qur'anic foundation for understanding marriage as a reciprocal partnership grounded in intimacy, dignity, and shared responsibility, rather than domination or gender-based subordination.

### 2.4. Comparison of Classical and Contemporary Interpretations

Table 1 is a comparison of classical and contemporary interpretations of the verses QS An Nisa [4]: 34, QS Ar-Rūm [30]: 21, and QS Al-Baqarah [2]: 187

Table 1. comparison of classical and contemporary interpretations of the verses QS An Nisa [4]: 34, QS Ar-Rūm [30]: 21, and QS Al-Baqarah [2]: 187

| Verse | Classical Interpretation | Contemporary Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| An-Nisa 4:34 | Al-Thabari — reads *qawwamūn* as the position of leadership/responsibility of men over women (related to sustenance and education). Men are given advantages due to the provision of dowry and sustenance, and he explains the sequence of actions when the wife is *nushuz* (advice → separation of bed → *idribuhunna*, understood as a light blow without leaving a mark) (ath-Thabari, 2009). | Abdullah Saeed —through a contextualist approach, he distinguishes clearly between the instructional-legal aspect (technical rules tied to the socio-cultural context of 7th-century Arabia) and the ethical-moral aspect (eternal universal principles of justice and human dignity) (Saeed, 2014).<br>Amina Wadud—This verse establishes the principles of justice and reciprocity. Wadud |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Al-Qurtubī — the reasons for this verse are explained. Men have an advantage in intellectual and managerial capacity, so they are given the task of providing dowries and living expenses for women. It is also said that men have superior spiritual potential and a strong character, while women have a cool and cool (gentle) nature. The word Qawwam means taking care of something and arranging it based on consideration (al-Qurṭubī, 2009).<br>Ibn Kathīr — interprets the sequence of steps (advice → leaving the bed → light blow/reprimand according to some commentators), and emphasizes the traditional reading that links to the text of the hadith (Kathir, 2000). | views the concept of *qawwamun* as a functional and conditional role dependent on economic responsibility. She interprets *faddala* (excess) as a relative and specific potential. She then defines nushuz as the disruption of household harmony and firmly rejects the interpretation of idribuhunna as a command to physically hit. (*mu'asharah bil ma'ruf)* (Wadud, 1999).<br>M. Quraish Shihab — This verse is the basis of the husband's responsibility towards his wife, where men are called *qawwamuun* because of the obligation to provide material and non-material sustenance, as well as protect the family. Of course, the context is based on justice and compassion. Then *nushuz* as the wife's disobedience that harms the family, is overcome through gradual advice and is not intended to hurt (Kiram, 2026b). |
| Ar-**Rūm** 30:21 | Al-Tabarī — interprets the words *sakinah, mawaddah, rahmah* as signs of Allah's greatness regarding the purpose of marriage: tranquility, love, and affection that must be maintained by loving each other (ath-Thabari, 2009).<br>Al-Qurtubi — al Mawaddah is love and Rahmah is compassion (al-Qurṭubī, 2009).<br>Ibn Kathīr — reads the verse as an affirmation of the purpose of marriage: inner peace and affection (Kathir, 2000). | M. Quraish Shihab explains *sakinah/mawaddah/rahmah* as a sign of God's greatness in creating couples of the same type to achieve *sakinah* (peace of mind), *mawaddah* (love of ownership), and *rahmah* (protective affection). According to him, marriage aims to build household harmony as a verse for those who meditate (Kiram, 2026b). |
| Al-Baqarah 2:187 | Al-Tabarī— explains the context of *asbāb al-nuzūl* (the implementation of rukhsah at night in Ramadan): "they are a garment for you…" read as a metaphor for intimacy, protection, and covering up each other's faults (ath-Thabari, 2009),<br>Al-Qurtubi — explains the word libās as the "union" of husband and wife, called by protective clothing and the role of husband and wife in maintaining each other's honor (al-Qurṭubī, 2009).<br>Ibn Kathīr — emphasizes the context of leniency (permission to have intercourse at night while fasting) and the metaphorical reading that husband and wife complement/protect each other like clothes (Kathir, 2000). | M. Quraish Shihab — (Tafsir al-Mishbah): explains the function of *libās* (clothing) as a "covering" for a married couple. They cover each other's shortcomings. This also reflects the unavoidable aspects of adult life (intimate relationships). Husbands and wives must also protect each other in critical situations. In short, a married couple is a pair of beings who need each other (Kiram, 2026b). |

### 2.5. Female and Modernist Exegetes' Views on Domestic Roles.

Amina Wadud, in her influential work *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, offers a critical reinterpretation of Qur'anic verses frequently used to justify gender-based divisions of domestic responsibilities, particularly QS. an-Nisā' [4]:34. Through a gender-sensitive hermeneutical approach, Wadud emphasizes that Qur'anic interpretation should be grounded in the fundamental principles of justice, equality, and human dignity. She argues that interpretations placing men in positions of absolute superiority over women often reflect patriarchal assumptions rather than the universal ethical message of the Qur'an. Therefore,

the division of domestic roles should not automatically be regarded as a fixed or natural consequence of biological differences between men and women. In discussing the concept of *qiwāmah*, Wadud challenges the understanding that this term establishes unconditional male authority within marriage. Instead, she interprets it in relation to specific responsibilities, particularly financial provision and the social circumstances addressed by the verse. From this perspective, *qiwāmah* should be understood as a responsibility that entails accountability rather than a privilege that legitimizes domination. The relationship between husband and wife must consequently be evaluated through the principles of justice, reciprocity, and mutual respect.

Furthermore, Wadud's interpretation provides an important foundation for reconsidering women's participation in both domestic and public spheres. Women's involvement in employment, education, leadership, and community activities cannot be considered contrary to Islamic teachings merely because these activities extend beyond traditional domestic expectations. Similarly, household responsibilities should not be assigned exclusively to women based on culturally constructed gender assumptions. Instead, husbands and wives should negotiate their respective roles according to their abilities, circumstances, and shared commitments. Thus, Wadud's feminist interpretation encourages a more inclusive understanding of marital relationships in Islam. By distinguishing Qur'anic ethical principles from historically influenced patriarchal interpretations, her approach demonstrates that domestic labor should be understood as a shared responsibility. Ultimately, marital relationships should promote cooperation, compassion, and equitable participation, ensuring that neither spouse experiences unjust burdens or unequal treatment within family life (Wadud, 1999).

Meanwhile, Asma Barlas, in her book "Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an," rejects the view that the Qur'an confines women to the domestic sphere. She interprets the Qur'anic texts through a monotheistic approach, in which there should be no domination of one human being over another, including the domination of men over women. Barlas emphasizes that verses such as QS Al-Ahzab [33]:33 ("and stay in your houses") must be understood in their historical and social context, not as an absolute prohibition on women's public roles. For Barlas, women's domestic roles in the Qur'an are functional and constitute moral choices, not structural limitations. Women have the same spiritual and social rights as men in the public sphere (Barlas, 2019).

As a prominent modernist Islamic exegete, Muhammad Abduh interpreted women's domestic roles through the principles of social reform, rationality, and the objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*). His approach emphasized that Qur'anic teachings should be understood in accordance with their ethical purposes and changing social circumstances. In discussing gender relations, particularly QS. an-Nisā' [4]:34, Abduh's reformist perspective provides a basis for questioning interpretations that establish male superiority and restrict women to domestic responsibilities. Rather than treating differences in marital functions as justification for inequality, his approach highlights the importance of justice, mutual obligations, and the welfare of the family. Abduh recognized the significance of family organization and the responsibilities associated with maintaining household stability. However, the recognition of different responsibilities should not be interpreted as evidence that women possess an inferior social or intellectual position. His broader educational and social reform agenda emphasized the importance of women's intellectual development and their participation in societal progress (Sa`diah et al., 2025). Women, therefore, should have opportunities to pursue education, exercise their rights, manage property, and contribute to public life. These rights demonstrate that women's existence cannot be confined exclusively to household activities.

Furthermore, Abduh's reformist understanding encourages a contextual reading of religious texts by considering the social conditions in which particular verses were revealed and their broader moral objectives. From this perspective, domestic responsibilities should be evaluated according to fairness, family welfare, and the capabilities of both spouses. The household should function as a cooperative institution in which husbands and wives contribute to its sustainability through mutual support and shared accountability. Consequently, Abduh's modernist approach offers an important foundation for examining gender relations in contemporary Muslim families. His emphasis on rational interpretation, education, and social reform supports the argument that women's domestic roles should not become instruments of social limitation. Instead, marriage should provide opportunities for cooperation, dignity, and equitable participation in both family and community life (Junaidi, 2021).

### 2.6. Patriarchal Culture and the Internalization of Women's Roles

In the context of household labor distribution, patriarchal culture represents a dominant structural factor shaping women's domestic responsibilities. Patriarchy is a social system that positions men as primary holders of power and authority in both public and private spheres. Consequently, women are frequently associated with domestic activities, while men are socially constructed as primary breadwinners. This division is not solely

influenced by gender-biased religious interpretations but is also reinforced through cultural norms, social expectations, and intergenerational practices. Within patriarchal structures, domestic work is often perceived as a natural feminine obligation rather than a shared responsibility between spouses. Moreover, such work remains largely unrecognized as an economic contribution, despite its significant productive and social value in sustaining family welfare and community life. Therefore, challenging patriarchal assumptions is essential to promoting gender equality and a more equitable distribution of household responsibilities (Walby, 1990).

The internalization of women's roles within a patriarchal system takes place through gender socialization, which begins in childhood and continues throughout an individual's life. From an early age, women are often taught to be gentle, obedient, nurturing, and responsible for maintaining the household, while men are encouraged to be strong, independent, dominant, and capable of making decisions. These differences are reinforced through family practices, educational institutions, religious teachings, and broader cultural traditions. As a result, individuals gradually accept gender-based divisions of labor as normal and unquestionable. This process produces what is commonly referred to as gender ideology, namely a system of beliefs that perceives differences between men's and women's social roles as natural consequences of biological distinctions rather than products of historical, social, and cultural constructions.

Nevertheless, the internalization of patriarchal values does not necessarily reflect the fundamental teachings of Islam. From an Islamic feminist perspective, scholars such as Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas critically examine interpretations of the Qur'an that have historically justified male dominance and women's subordination. Wadud emphasizes the importance of reading the Qur'an through its holistic ethical framework, particularly the principles of justice, equality, and reciprocal responsibility. Similarly, Barlas argues that patriarchal interpretations should not be confused with the Qur'an's divine message, since the text must be understood within its broader theological and moral context. Both perspectives challenge the assumption that women's primary responsibility is confined to domestic activities (Wijaya et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the Qur'anic principles of mutual cooperation and moral accountability provide an alternative foundation for understanding family relationships. Verses emphasizing marital affection, compassion, and reciprocity demonstrate that husbands and wives are partners who share responsibilities according to their circumstances and capacities. Therefore, domestic labor should not be treated as an inherently feminine obligation but as a shared responsibility negotiated within the family. Reconsidering gender socialization through Islamic feminist interpretation is essential to transforming patriarchal attitudes and promoting more equitable household relationships. Such transformation requires not only changes in individual awareness but also critical engagement with the cultural and institutional structures that reproduce gender inequality (Wadud, 1999). Thus, the division of household labor should be seen not as a biological destiny, but as the result of social negotiations that can change according to the context of the times, in order to create an equal and just husband-wife relationship (Fakih, 2008).

### 2.7. The Concept of Partnership in the Household According to Islam.

The concept of partnership in the household according to Islam is fundamentally grounded in the principles of deliberation (*shūrā*), love and compassion (*mawaddah wa raḥmah*), and mutuality (*mubādalah*) between husband and wife. Marriage is not intended to establish a hierarchical relationship in which one spouse possesses absolute authority over the other. Rather, it represents a spiritual, moral, and social partnership in which both individuals share responsibilities, support one another, and contribute to the establishment of a harmonious family. This understanding is reflected in QS. ar-Rūm [30]:21, which identifies *sakinah* (tranquility), *mawaddah* (love), and *raḥmah* (mercy and compassion) as essential foundations of marital life. These values should not merely be understood as emotional expressions but also as ethical principles that guide the distribution of responsibilities, joint decision-making, mutual respect, and the resolution of domestic conflicts. Furthermore, the Qur'anic metaphor in QS. al-Baqarah [2]:187, which describes husbands and wives as garments for one another, illustrates the reciprocal nature of marital relationships. In this context, garments symbolize protection, intimacy, dignity, and mutual comfort. Quraish Shihab interprets this metaphor as reflecting the complementary relationship between spouses, whereby each provides protection and emotional security for the other (Wahyu et al., 2023). Consequently, household responsibilities should be understood through the principle of reciprocity rather than rigid gender-based assignments. Both spouses have moral obligations to maintain the household and ensure the well-being of their family according to their respective circumstances and capacities.

Similarly, Amina Wadud offers a critical reinterpretation of *qiwāmah* in QS. an-Nisā' [4]:34, arguing that this concept should not be used to justify male superiority or unconditional authority over women. Instead, *qiwāmah* must be understood in relation to responsibility, material contribution, and the ethical obligations required to maintain family welfare. Such an interpretation challenges patriarchal assumptions that automatically associate

domestic work with women's biological or religious obligations. It also emphasizes that authority within marriage should be accompanied by accountability, justice, and mutual consideration. In addition, the concept of *mubādalah*, developed by Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, provides a framework for understanding marital relationships through reciprocal rights and responsibilities. Through this perspective, religious teachings concerning family obligations should be interpreted inclusively, considering both husbands and wives as moral subjects. Therefore, domestic work, childcare, and emotional care should be negotiated and shared collaboratively rather than imposed exclusively upon women. Ultimately, Islamic household partnership promotes gender justice by positioning marriage as a relationship of cooperation, mutual protection, and shared responsibility, consistent with the Qur'anic vision of a compassionate and harmonious family (Wadud, 1999). Therefore, the concept of partnership in Islam positions the household as a collaborative space based on love, justice, and reciprocity, not the subordination of one party.

The conservative view that places women solely as domestic servants is rooted in long-standing patriarchal interpretations of religious texts and social traditions. In classical, gender-biased interpretations, verses such as Surah An-Nisa [4]:34 are often interpreted as justifying male leadership and domination over women, while women are placed in the domestic sphere as housekeepers and caregivers. Criticism of this view has emerged from contemporary commentators such as Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas, who assert that the Qur'an never stipulates the subordination of women as a theological requirement, but rather calls for equality and moral responsibility between husband and wife. The conservative view is considered to fail to distinguish between the universal values of the Qur'an and the local and historical norms of 7th-century Arab culture. Therefore, maintaining the domestic role as the sole identity of women means limiting the human and spiritual potential guaranteed by Islam itself.

Furthermore, gender critiques of conservative views also point out that the gender division of labor is often unfair because it ignores modern social and economic realities. Mansour Fakih argues that limiting women to domestic work is a form of structural marginalization that hinders women's access to resources, education, and public decision-making (Fakih, 2008). In the context of the modern Muslim family, a reinterpretation of women's roles is necessary to ensure that the values of *mawaddah wa raḥmah* are realized equally. Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, through the *Qira'ah Mubadalah* approach, offers an interpretive framework that views all commands in the Qur'an as interconnected, so that both men and women have equal moral and social responsibilities within the family and society. Therefore, criticism of gender conservatism is not an attempt to oppose Islamic teachings, but rather an attempt to restore the original meaning of the Qur'an as a book of universal justice and humanity.

### *2.8.* The Contribution of Gender Interpretation to the Reconceptualization of the Division of Labor in the Domestic Space Towards Egalitarian Relations

Gender interpretation in Islam plays a crucial role as an intellectual and theological movement challenging traditional ways of understanding sacred texts biased toward men. This approach aims to restore the spirit of justice and reciprocity at the heart of the Quranic teachings, rejecting literal readings that justify women's subordination. Through contextual hermeneutics, gender interpretation highlights that many verses used as a basis for inequality actually speak of an ethics of responsibility and balance in social relationships, rather than of the power of one party (Duderija, 2020). Therefore, equality-based reinterpretation is not simply a discourse of religious feminism, but a step toward renewing Islamic thought toward a more relevant understanding of universal human values (Ali, 2016).

In social practice, gender interpretation has had a concrete impact on the reform of family law, education, and contemporary Islamic social discourse. Within a substantive justice framework, women's domestic and public roles are now seen as part of a shared responsibility that can be negotiated based on ability rather than gender. This view has also encouraged the emergence of more gender-equitable policies across various Muslim countries, including women's rights in education, employment, and public participation. By expanding the meaning of verses on family and leadership, gender interpretation builds a new paradigm that Islam not only regulates social structures but also instills ethical values to eradicate gender hierarchies inherited from patriarchal culture.

Furthermore, this equality-based interpretation enriches modern Islamic discourse by shifting the starting point of interpretation from masculine authority to a participatory and empathetic approach. This approach combines the social rationality and spirituality of the Quran, allowing Islamic teachings to address issues of social justice, education, and gender relations contextually. Therefore, the contribution of gender interpretation to Islamic social reform lies in its ability to revive the values of mercy and justice as fundamental principles in building an equal and inclusive society, without compromising the theological foundations of Islam.

## 3. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the relationship between husband and wife in the Qur'an is a spiritual and social partnership based on the principles of justice, compassion, and mutuality. Classical interpretations of verses such as QS. an-Nisā' [4]:34 often position men as absolute leaders and women as subordinates, due to the influence of the patriarchal context of 7th-century Arabia. However, such readings do not fully reflect the Qur'an's moral message, which emphasizes human equality before God. Feminist interpretations developed by figures such as Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, and Fatima Mernissi offer a new reading of the patriarchal bias within the tafsir tradition. They interpret *qiwāmah* as a functional responsibility that is both contextual and ethical. This gender-hermeneutic approach allows the Qur'an to be read with attention to linguistic and social aspects, as well as to the goal of universal justice (*maqāsid al-sharī'ah*). Analysis of QS. ar-Rūm [30]:21 and QS. al-Baqarah [2]:187 shows that the Qur'an presents *sakinah, mawaddah*, and *rahmah* as the basis for family relationships. Husbands and wives are described as "clothes" for each other a metaphor that symbolizes protection, closeness, reciprocity, and moral equality. Therefore, household chores should be a shared responsibility agreed upon through principles of justice and deliberation, rather than imposed on women as if it were their nature. The views of contemporary Muslim feminists such as Siti Musdah Mulia, Nur Rofiah, and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir reinforce the idea that Islam teaches a true partnership (*mubādalah*) between men and women. This gender-based interpretation does not necessarily reject the sacred texts, but rather requires a new reading of them. They also firmly reject oppressive interpretations, although the number of classical interpretations of this kind is relatively small. Thus, Islam truly affirms universal justice that honors men and women equally. The ideal husband-wife relationship according to the Quran is a collaborative one that reflects the values of mercy and justice, as well as mutual assistance and goodwill. This emphasis, of course, is placed on equality between husband and wife, without oppressing either party. Ultimately, domestic work is a shared moral responsibility to create a peaceful, just, and civilized family.

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