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Rereading the Qur'an Text as Women's Liberation Perspective Asma Barlas

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Abstract

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This study examines Asma Barlas's thoughts on the rereading of the Qur'an text as a form of liberation of women from patriarchal interpretation. Using a descriptive qualitative approach and a literature review, this study examines Asma Barlas' main works, especially *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*, as well as secondary literature relevant to gender interpretation and Islamic feminism. The study's results show that Asma Barlas rejects the notion that the Qur'an is patriarchal. He emphasized that gender bias in interpretation is a historical and social product of male mufasir who live in a patriarchal system. Using historical and hermeneutic arguments, Barlas constructs an epistemology of egalitarianism rooted in the concept of monotheism, in which there is no hierarchy of power between men and women. His reinterpretation of verses such as Q.S. An-Nisa [4]:34 and Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]:228 affirms that the terms *qiwamah* and "male degree" do not confer legitimacy or superiority, but rather entail functional social responsibility. Thus, this study confirms that the Qur'an contains the values of justice and gender equality, which can serve as a theological foundation for women's liberation in contemporary Islam.

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Introduction

The interpretation of the Qur'an has often been criticized by several feminist thinkers, one of the prominent is Asma Barlas, who asserts that it is not the text itself that is patriarchal, but the human interpretation of it that often sides with men (Faizal Zaeni, 2022). For example, Barlas highlights that when readers interpret verses such as QS An-Nisa' 34 through a patriarchal lens, they confine women to the domestic realm. However, he argues that readers must reread the text and its historical context through an egalitarian lens to understand its true meaning. This research draws inspiration from Asma Barlas's thought, starting with the premise that the Qur'an can serve as a text for women's liberation when interpreted through a critical, anti-patriarchal hermeneutic framework.

Socially, in many Muslim contexts (including in Indonesia), there are still phenomena in which women in public, social, or religious spaces experience structural obstacles: for example, limited access to leadership, low representation in religious institutions, or interpretations of Qur'anic

verses that justify subordinate positions of women (Nafisah, 2022). This phenomenon is not only normative but also real in practice: the role of women as mosque administrators, as leaders of religious organizations, or in decision-making is still often seen as "extraordinary" or "outside the norm". In this context, the question arises: whether it is the text of the Qur'an itself that implies this subordination, or whether it is a patriarchal interpretation that hinders the potential liberation of women.

In the last decade, there has been an increasingly active discourse of *Islamic feminism* demanding the rereading of religious texts, including the Qur'an, in order to produce a gender-fair meaning. For example, in the article "Islamic Feminism: A Renewal of Thought on Gender in the Perspective of the Teachings of the Qur'an," it is found that contemporary thought movements emphasize contextual and historical approaches to the Qur'an to unravel gender-biased understandings (Rohmatallah et al., 2025). Likewise, the article "Visualization of Women in the Perspective of the Qur'an: Between Text and Context" shows that although the normative Qur'an contains the mission of justice, in the practice of classical interpretation, the position of women is often prioritized by men (Aziz, 2019). Thus, the idea that the Qur'an can be a 'liberating text' for women is not a utopian idealism, but a response to real phenomena in society.

In academic studies, several studies have highlighted the interpretation of gender and the role of women in Islam. For example, the article "Reinterpretation of the Qur'an text in Patriarchal Culture: An Epistemology Analysis of Egalitarian Feminist Epistemology Asma Barlas Yusdani" describes how classical interpretations still give rise to patriarchal bias and presents Barlas as an alternative (Januariansyah Arfaizar, 2022). "Asma Barlas's Thoughts on Gender and Communication in the Islamic Context" qualitatively analyzes Barlas' contribution to the interpretation of gender (Warsukhni, 2025). The last, "The Reception of the Childfree Principle in the Interpretation of the Qur'an: A Critical and Interpretive Study of Asma Barlas' Thought", examines how the childfree principle of the decision not to have children can be accepted or rejected in the perspective of the interpretation of the Qur'an through the thought of Asma Barlas. (Muhammad Abil Anam & Mayadina Rohmi Musrifoh, 2025).

In general, these studies are still at the descriptive-theoretical and thematic level, namely explaining the ideas, contributions, or relevance of Asma Barlas' thought, but have not systematically examined how the concept of rereading the Qur'an text offered by Barlas is operationalized in the analysis of key verses that are directly related to gender relations and women's liberation. This gap is the focus of a research paper entitled "*Rereading the Qur'an Text as the Liberation of Women from the Perspective of Asma Barlas*." This research offers novelty by shifting the focus from merely mapping thoughts to an applicative analysis, namely, directly tracing Barlas's rereading model of the Qur'anic text. With this approach, the research not only complements previous studies but also bridges the gap between theoretical discourse and the praxis of Qur'anic interpretation grounded in gender justice.

In addition, in contemporary dynamics, technology and social media are also reshaping religious and gender discourse. Muslim women now have greater access to study, discuss, and disseminate egalitarian interpretations of the Qur'an. This phenomenon presents opportunities for the Qur'an as a text for women's liberation, but also challenges such as conservative reactions, resistance to traditional interpretations, and polarization of opinions (Humaira et al., 2023).

Therefore, Asma Barlas highlights the importance of distinguishing between the holy text of the Qur'an as revelation and traditional interpretations formed in specific socio-political contexts. He argues that the patriarchal understanding of the Qur'an is more a product of the historical and

cultural context than the pure teachings of the text. With a critical hermeneutic approach, Barlas rejects the notion that the Qur'an is inherently subordinate to women and presents it as a document that upholds the principles of justice and gender equality (Wasik, 2023).

This research is important for opening new discussion spaces regarding the interpretation of gender in Islamic studies, especially in the context of women's liberation. Drawing on Asma Barlas' perspective, this study explores the textual and philosophical dimensions in the Qur'an that can support the gender liberation agenda (Adam, 2016). By using Asma Barlas' perspective as the main analytical framework, this study specifically aims to examine how the principles of monotheism, interpretive authority, and the criticism of patriarchal structures are operationalized in the rereading of Qur'anic verses on gender relations. The research focuses on tracing the textual and philosophical dimensions of the Qur'an in order to identify interpretive patterns that reject gender hierarchies and affirm moral-spiritual equality between men and women. This is also relevant in the context of a society that still faces various forms of discrimination and inequality against women, both in the social and religious spheres.

Theoretically, this research contributes to strengthening the study of critical interpretation by bridging Asma Barlas's thinking on Islamic feminism from the conceptual realm into a more applicable interpretive framework. This study enriches the treasures of gender interpretation methodology by showing how anti-patriarchal readings can be constructed argumentatively from within the Qur'an itself, rather than solely through the import of external discourse. Meanwhile, in practice, this research is expected to provide a normative and intellectual foundation for efforts to deconstruct discriminatory religious understandings, as well as serve as a reference for the development of a more gender-equitable Islamic discourse in the social and religious context of contemporary society.

Method

This research method employs a descriptive qualitative approach, specifically utilizing library research. The data collected are not numerical; instead, they are drawn from various articles and books published in previous studies on women's liberation. (Imanina, 2020). This approach was chosen because the research aims to comprehend the meaning and interpretation of the Qur'an from Asma Barlas's perspective, focusing on women's liberation, rather than quantifying the phenomenon. The data sources include primary data, specifically Asma Barlas's works, such as "Believing Women in Islam" and "Unreading Patriarchal Interpretation of The Qur'an." Secondary data comprises journals, articles, and documentation that discuss Islamic feminism and gender interpretation, particularly in relation to Q.S. 4:34 and Q.S. 2:228. The analyzed data reveals the relationship between theory and social reality, leading to a more concrete and relevant understanding. (Jumal Ahmad, 2018). The data is analyzed through three main stages. First, data reduction involved selecting and grouping verses of the Qur'an and Asma Barlas' ideas relevant to the issue of women's liberation. Second, the data were analyzed interpretively using Barlas's theoretical framework to examine the relationship between the meaning of the Qur'anic text and the social construction of gender. Third, the analysis is contextualized within social realities to assess the relevance and implications of rereading the Qur'an text in an effort to overcome gender inequality (Qomaruddin, 2024). In this way, the research is expected to show that the teachings of the Qur'an actually embody the values of justice and respect for women when read from an open and critical perspective. This approach is also an effort to bridge academic thinking and the real needs of the community in understanding religious texts more inclusively.

Findings

Portrait of Asma Barlas

Asma Barlas was born in Pakistan and in 1976 became the first woman to serve in the country's State Department. She is married to Ulises Ali and has a son named Demir Mikail. Her parents are Iqbal Barlas and Anwaa Barlas. Under Ziaul Haq's rule, she worked in the Pakistani diplomatic service. However, in 1983, she was forced to leave her homeland after the regime of the time expelled him. She then moved to America and settled there (Fajri, 2019).

She studied in Pakistan, earning a B.A. in English literature and philosophy, then pursued an M.A. in journalism. Afterwards, she moved to the United States for further study and completed her Ph.D. and M.A. in international studies at the University of Denver, Colorado. In the course of his career, she has led the Center for the Study of Race, Culture, and Ethnicity, served as Chair of the Department of Politics, and now teaches as a professor in the Department of Politics at Ithaca College (Anisa, 2025). She is known to be prolific in writing and has extensive intellectual interests, reflected in her many works and publications.

Asma Barlas has written several important books, demonstrating her active role in the intellectual world. Some of them are: *Democracy, Nationalism, and Communalism: The Colonial Legacy in South Asia; and Islam, Muslims, and the U.S.: Essays in Religion and Politics*. A work widely discussed in the study of Islam and women is *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*. The book was born in response to the notion in America that Islam was perceived to support gender inequality and place women in subjection to men. In 2019, this book was published in a revised version. The first edition was translated into Indonesian under the title How the Quran Liberates Women, published by Serambi in 2005 (Purnama, 2021).

In the same year, 2019, Asma Barlas and David Raeburn Finn also launched *Believing Women in Islam: A Brief Introduction*. Asma Barlas' two books above were born out of her drive to answer the perspective of Western society, especially in America, which often sees Islam as a religion that relies on patriarchal culture and creates unequal relations between men and women. This view, according to her, arises because many Muslims do not consistently follow or apply the teachings of the Qur'an (Januariansyah Arfaizar, 2022).

Asma Barlas said that her interest in Islamic studies arose from her life experiences in the two places that shaped her. First in Pakistan, where she grew up until 1983, then in the United States, which has been her home until now. Meanwhile, Pakistan is known as a country with a majority Muslim population. Her interest in Islamic issues grew when the Ziaul Haq regime implemented Islamization policies (Arfain et al., 2023). According to her, the policy actually strengthens gender bias, for example, the rule that equates two female witnesses with one male witness. This situation is exacerbated by the absence of separation between rape and adultery, both of which are punishable by stoning.

The Sharia rules applied in Pakistan at that time had a destructive impact on women. It is not only an issue discussed in a mere story; it is clearly evident in Asma Barlas's real case. She gave an example of the rape of a blind woman who was later pregnant. The victim was sentenced to stoning, while the perpetrator was released because the victim did not see her. This situation is what

prompted Asma Barlas to look for ways to overcome discrimination and injustice against women in Muslim society, one of which is through the rereading of the text of the Qur'an.

He also had a similar experience after moving to America. There, many Westerners consider Islam to be a religion that upholds patriarchal systems, supports gender hierarchies, and demands that women be submissive to men. Islam is often described as a foreign and deviant teaching. As a result, although he has had more legal space and personal freedoms than when he lived in Pakistan, it remains difficult for him to gain a positive view as a Muslim in America.

Based on this experience and the explanation in her work, she tried to answer two questions she formulated herself. First, whether the Qur'an teaches or permits inequality and oppression. Second, whether the Qur'an actually encourages or provides space for liberation (Fajri, 2019). From here, Asma wants to show that Islam has equal teachings and rejects the patriarchal mindset. She emphasized that, like other holy books, the Qur'an is polysemic, with many possible meanings. Therefore, the text is open to various readings and does not necessarily support a patriarchal interpretation merely by being read literally (Barlas, 2019).

Barlas emphasized that the view that men demean women does not come from the Qur'an, but from its interpreters. In line with Amina Wadud's thoughts, she sees that the relevant interpretations to be read now, especially related to gender issues, cannot be born without women's voices. One of the reasons for the emergence of discriminatory interpretations in the past is that all the mufassirs are male. According to him, men cannot fully understand women's problems. Therefore, women need to be directly involved in the interpretation process. In addition, to understand how Islam discusses women, Barlas uses two important approaches: the historical and the hermeneutical.

In his work, Barlas stated the importance of reinterpreting the scriptures: "*A reinterpretation of the Scripture is particularly important because the Qur'an's teachings provide Muslims with role models for both women and men. Since different readings of the Qur'an (and of other texts) can yield what are for women "fundamentally different Islams, "it becomes crucial for them" to reinvestigate the normative religious texts" and even to become specialists in the sacred text, as Fatima Mernissi (1986) urged*" (Barlas, 2019). From his explanation, it appears that Barlas encouraged a rereading of the Qur'an so that its teachings can be understood as a guideline for all Muslims without distinguishing between men and women. In this way, the possible meanings of the Qur'an can be explored rather than being stuck in a single interpretation.

Citing Ahmad Shadiq's idea, the change in perspective from the Qur'an as a revelation to the Qur'an as a text makes the position of the subject and object shift. In the beginning, humans like the Prophet Muhammad and other apostles were the recipients of revelation, while the scriptures served as divine messages that guided them to salvation. However, once the revelation is written into text, the scriptures become objects to be read, and humans become subjects who interpret them. It is at this point that the process of human objectification of the holy book arises. That is, the existence and sacred value of scripture are always related to the way humans respond to it. The relationship between the author and the text appears when the text serves as a means of carrying the message from the author to the reader. Therefore, the text remains in a relationship with the author, but at the same time it also has a stand-alone existence and is not entirely tied to its originator" (Shadiq, 2016).

Women's Liberation Perspective Asma Barlas on Q.S. Al-Baqarah verse 228 and Q.S. An-Nisa verse 34

The history of interpretation of the Qur'an has always moved with the social and cultural situation in which the mufasir lived. Because it was born of ijihad, the interpretation will be influenced by the context of the time, including the power dynamics between men and women during the period when the mufasir lived. In classical Islam, almost all mufasir were men, and they were in a patriarchal society. This social structure gives men greater authority, while women are more in the domestic space and have limited access to education and public spaces. This condition shapes how verses about women are understood. Verses about marriage, leadership, social rights, and dress codes are often understood through the lens of patriarchal values that position men as the dominant party and place women in a less equal position (Sholikhah, 2025).

One of the most apparent forms of gender bias in classical interpretation is the interpretation of Q.S. An-Nisa [4]: 34

الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَّبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ

Meaning: Men (husbands) are in charge of women (wives) because Allah has given some of them (men) more than others (women) and because they (men) have provided for some of their wealth.

Many classical scholars understood this verse as the basis for giving men full power to lead, regulate, and control women in various aspects of life. This interpretation is often taken for granted without considering the social context of the time, especially regarding economic responsibility and protection functions in the family structure at that time. Figures such as al-Tabari, al-Qurthubi, and Ibn Kathir, for example, considered that *qiwamah* is a right inherent in men. Their views are usually supported by ontological grounds that hold men to be superior in intellect, reasoning, and physical strength (Sholikhah, 2025).

Ath-Thabari lays the foundation of the hierarchy between men and women on economic-theological causality; leadership authority (*qiwamah*) is seen as a logical consequence of financial burdens (dowry and alimony). In his view, this "advantage" (*fadhilah*) gives the husband the executive right (*nafidzul amri*) to educate and control his wife, placing the woman in a subordinate position bound by the obligation of obedience (Ath-Thabari, 2000).

Ath-Thabari's argument was then expanded ontologically by Al-Qurtubi, who saw not only functional aspects but also inherent advantages. He asserts that men have greater intellectual capacity and strength of character, a claim validated by the classical theory of medical humor in which holds that the dominance of the hot-dry element in men symbolizes strength, in contrast to the cold-humid element in women. This natural superiority, according to Al-Qurtubi, legitimizes men's dominance in the public sphere (as judges and leaders) and grants absolute authority (*istibdad*) in the domestic realm, including the right to limit a wife's freedom of movement (Al-Qurtubi, 1964).

Ibn Kathir views male superiority as something essential and absolute (*dzatiyah*). Beyond mere economic or biological reasons, Ibn Kathir established the axiom that the male sex is indeed "better" (*khair*) and "more primary" (*afdal*). This conception is manifested through the use of the terminology of political power (*ra'is, hakim*) in defining the role of husbands. It is supported by the theological argument that women's exclusion from prophetic positions (*nubuwwah*) and from supreme power (*al-mulk al-a'zham*) is irrefutable evidence of their inherent subordination (Katsir, 1999).

Moving on to the contemporary era, there was a significant paradigm shift in which *Tafsir Al-Manar* began to deconstruct the classical understanding by limiting the scope of superiority. Although *Al-Manar* still establishes men as leaders (*qawwamun*) based on the superiority of fitrah and financial obligations, this interpretation emphasizes that these advantages are purely functional, not superiority in human values. *Al-Manar* emphasized that this leadership should be carried out within the framework of guidance and supervision (*irshād wa murāqaba*), and explicitly rejected the oppressive model of leadership (*qahr*), while acknowledging that this superiority applies to the gender in general (collective), not to the certainty of each male over each woman (Ridha, 1947).

This transformation of meaning is further deepened by M. Quraish Shihab in *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*, which shifts the narrative of leadership away from the meaning of 'ruler' to that of 'protection' and 'service'. He rejects the interpretation of *qawwamun* as a privilege to act arbitrarily, but instead associates it with the root word *qâma*, which correlates with *iqâmat as-salât* (establishing prayer), which means to perform the task of maintenance and construction completely. In Al-Mishbah's perspective, the *status of qawwam* requires the husband to fulfill needs, defend, and attend on an ongoing basis. Thus, contemporary interpretations collectively shift the meaning of superiority from an "absolute right to rule" to "the burden of heavy responsibility to serve and maintain the integrity of the family" (Shihab, 2021).

If traced from its history, this verse came down after a wife reported her husband's violent act to the Prophet (saw). In some narrations, the Prophet even allowed qisas as an equivalent recompense, citing QS Al-Maidah verse 45. The Prophet's attitude strongly supports the principle of equality. However, the continuation of the history explains that the society at that time was considered not ready to accept the idea of equality. Therefore, the verse on qawmah serves as an answer to the ongoing social situation (Fajri, 2019).

Barlas's view of the concept of *qiwamah* was greatly influenced by the thoughts of Fazlurrahman, Mernissi, Wadud, and Hassan. The main idea of Barlas, which is also in line with the opinions of Wadud, Azizzah al-Hibri, and Riffat Hassan, departs from the understanding of the language that *qawwâmîn* means the party that provides the necessities of life. From this, Barlas emphasizes that the verse does not address men's superiority but rather urges them to use their greater economic resources to meet women's financial needs (Barlas, 2019).

Barlas also emphasized in his work that the husband's role as a breadwinner does not automatically make him the household head. Although Muslims widely embrace this assumption, the Qur'an itself never uses such a term to refer to husband or father. According to Barlas, the idea of the head of household as we know it today is more influenced by Western feudal traditions and old patriarchal mindsets than by the teachings of the Qur'an (Barlas, 2019).

Asma Barlas also highlighted the part of the verse that is often understood as permissible for the husband to hit his wife, especially the word *dharaba*, which is considered by many Muslims to be a form of physical punishment. Following Amina Wadud's analysis, Barlas explained that this word has multiple meanings. In addition to meaning to hit, the word can also be interpreted as setting an example. Wadud added that *dharaba* is different from *darraba*, which means hitting hard or repeatedly. Therefore, Barlas argues that this verse must be understood as a rejection of the abusive treatment of the wife. He emphasized that beating is contrary to the Qur'an's value of equality in the Qur'an and the principle of marriage, which should be based on affection, peace, and harmony (Barlas, 2019).

Another verse that is often used as a justification for male superiority is Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]:228

وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

Meaning: The husbands have an advantage over them. Allah is Mighty, Wise.

In interpreting Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 228, there is a big difference between classical and modern mufasir regarding the meaning of male superiority. Classical mufasirs such as Al-Tabari, Al-Qurtubi, and Ibn Kathir understood this superiority literally. They relate it to men's positions as leaders, regulators, and interpreters in patriarchal societies, which, at the same time, gives them a broader sphere of power, including the right to impose talaq (Alfani et al., 2025).

In the classical interpretation landscape, the construction of the gender hierarchy in Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]:228 is built on an absolute, juridical foundation in superiority. The most emphatic view is represented by Ibn Kathir, who constructed male superiority beyond mere functional limitations. She interprets "degree" (*darajah*) as an inherent superiority that includes the ontological aspect (*fi al-khuluq*) as well as the structural aspect in which the husband holds the command authority that must be obeyed (*tha'at al-amr*). This hegemony extends across theological boundaries, affirming that male virtue applies eternally from the worldly order (*fi ad-dunya*) to the afterlife (*wa al-akhirah*) (Katsir, 1999).

In line with this, Al-Qurtubi strengthened this dominance by constructing a juridical-authoritative hierarchy. By appealing to the origin of events (*al-ashl*), he legitimizes the husband's complete control over his wife in matters of worship and social activities (*tasharruf*). This superiority is emphasized by the inequality of rights and obligations, where the husband's rights are more absolute, including unilateral rights in talaq and the fulfillment of non-reciprocal sexual needs (Al-Qurtubi, 1964).

Different from the others, Ath-Thabari offers a classical perspective that lays the foundation for moral-ethical supremacy. She interpreted "one degree" not just as the right to rule, but as an extra burden of responsibility for the husband to be nobler (*al-akhdzu bil-fadhl*). In this view, a man's superiority lies in his ability to forgive his wife's shortcomings (*shafhu*) without claiming her rights in full (Ath-Thabari, 2000).

Moving on to the contemporary era, there has been a significant paradigm shift in which interpretation has begun to reject absolute superiority in human values. *The Tafsir of Al-Manar* emphasizes the basic principle of equality of rights and obligations and rejects oppression. Although it still establishes "degrees" as leadership (*al-riyāsa*) and the management of benefits, the justification is functional, i.e., based on financial obligations and capacity, rather than essential. *Al-Manar* limited this authority by requiring that leadership be carried out in a *ma'ruf* manner, thereby containing a controlled, functional patriarchal element (Ridha, 1947).

This transformation of meaning is further deepened by M. Quraish Shihab in *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*, who defines *darajah* as a degree of managerial leadership rather than a license to act authoritatively. This advantage places the husband in charge and as the final decision-maker only if deliberation is deadlocked. Furthermore, *Al-Mishbah* emphasizes the moral aspect, interpreting this degree as a requirement for the husband to have "chest spaciousness" in protecting his wife (Shihab, 2021).

Figures such as Asma Barlas and Fazlur Rahman even went so far as to criticize the notion of absolute superiority. They encourage this verse to be read through the lens of gender equality, where such excellence is understood as a functional role shaped by culture, rather than a moral value set on a fixed basis (Alfani et al., 2025). Asma Barlas, in her book, discusses the subchapter on *divorce* and "degrees" of male privilege, arguing that the divorce rules in the Qur'an favor men. He

emphasized that the teachings of the Qur'an are essentially equal, emphasizing justice, compassion, and ethics for both parties, even when the relationship ends. Barlas pointed out that the Qur'an actually limited the forms of male domination that were prevalent in pre-Islamic times, such as by prohibiting the practice of divorce that harmed women, such as *zibar*, and by regulating the amount of *talaq*. In addition, the Qur'an gives men great financial responsibility, ranging from the obligation to provide shelter, provide sustenance during the iddah period, to give rewards if the ex-wife breastfeeds their child (Barlas, 2019).

Aspects	Classical Tafsir (Ath-Thabari, Al-Qurtubi, Ibn Kathir)	Modern/Contemporary Tafsir (Al-Manar, Quraish Shihab)	Perspectives of Asma Barlas
Context & Basic Paradigm	<p>Patriarchal & Ontological: Influenced by the social order in which men hold primary authority and women in the domestic realm. Consider male superiority to be an absolute natural, biological, and theological nature.</p>	<p>Functional & Reformist: Deconstructs classical understandings by limiting the scope of superiority and shifting the paradigm from "right to control" to "burden of responsibility".</p>	<p>Egalitarian & Liberation: Influenced by Muslim feminists (Wadud, Hassan). Rejecting the concept of feudal patriarchy and interpreting the sentence within the framework of full gender equality.</p>
The Meaning of Qiwanah (QS. An-Nisa: 34)	<p>Absolute Authority & Natural Rights:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Ath-Thabari: The consequence of the financial burden that gives the executive right (<i>nafidzul amri</i>) to control the wife. Al-Qurtubi: The legitimacy of public and domestic dominance (<i>istibdad</i>) based on intellectual superiority and the theory of medical humor (hot-dry vs cold-wet). Ibn Kathir: Men are better and more primitive in substance (<i>dzatijah</i>), as evidenced by the prophetic right. 	<p>Functional & Protection:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Al-Manar: Functional superiority (not human values) for guidance (<i>irshad</i>), resisting oppression (<i>qahr</i>). Quraish Shihab: Means protection and service (<i>iqamat as-salat</i>). It is not an arbitrary privilege, but a complete maintenance task. 	<p>Breadwinner (Financial):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Qawwanun</i> is defined as a "breadwinner" or a provider of needs, not as a provider of superiority. Rejecting the concept of "head of household" as a feudal culture, not the teachings of the Qur'an. Interpreting <i>dharaba</i> as "setting an example, not hitting."

The Meaning of Darajah & Talak (QS. Al-Baqarah: 228)	Absolute and Juridical Hierarchy:	Managerial & Responsibilities:	Procedural & Egalitarian:
	<p>1. Ath-Thabari: Moral-ethical supremacy; husband as the active subject of the "forgiver", the understandable subordinate wife.</p> <p>2. Al-Qurtubi: Juridical-authoritative hierarchy; the husband has complete control (unilateral talaq) and asymmetrical sexual rights.</p> <p>3. Ibn Kathir: Absolute hegemony from this world to the hereafter.</p>	<p>1. Al-Manar: Managerial leadership (<i>al-riyasa</i>) is function-based, rejects the superiority of essence, and must be <i>ma'ruf</i>.</p> <p>2. Quraish Shihab: Managerial degree as a <i>final decision maker</i> and the moral demands of "openness".</p>	<p>1. Rejecting the superiority of status/dignity.</p> <p>2. "One degree" is a specific procedural excess in divorce (right of reference) as a consequence of financial responsibility.</p> <p>3. Divorce demands high ethical standards and the husband's accountability.</p>

The historical trajectory of the interpretation of verses on gender relations shows an upward trajectory towards egalitarianism. This dynamic starts from the *paradigm of the Natural Hierarchy* in classical interpretation, which positions men as essentially nobler than women who are placed in subordinate positions. This thinking then evolved into a *Functional Hierarchy* in the modern era, which began to recognize spiritual equality while still maintaining functional male leadership.

The culmination of this evolution led to complete *egalitarianism* in the view of feminists such as Asma Barlas, who affirmed total equality in both the spiritual dimension and the social and domestic roles. This phenomenon implies that the substance of the Qur'an is actually egalitarian. At the same time, the diversity of interpretations that emerge from patriarchal bias to the spirit of liberation is a dynamic reflection of human interpretations bound by the context of their times.

Asma Barlas' Contribution to Feminist Interpretation

Through her work, including the book "*Believing Women in Islam*," Barlas highlights the way Muslims build religious knowledge, especially the patriarchal form of interpretation of the Qur'an. She is uncomfortable with her views being labeled Islamic feminism, unless the term is understood as a movement that upholds equality and social justice based on the teachings of the Qur'an, which defends the rights of all human beings in both the public and private spheres. In reinterpreting the Qur'an, especially its gender-related verses, Barlas employs a set of methods and principles aimed at affirming egalitarian values and rejecting patriarchal ideas in sacred texts. This approach is in line with efforts to liberate women from various forms of injustice (Wasik, 2023).

To realize his goal, Barlas relies on two types of arguments: historical and hermeneutical. Historical arguments are used to read how textual and sexual political elements developed in Muslim societies, including how these processes helped shape patriarchal interpretations.

Meanwhile, he uses hermeneutic arguments to trace what he calls the epistemological basis for egalitarian and antipatriarchal values in the Qur'an. The basis, according to him, lies in the way God reveals himself, which rejects the idea of father's or man's dominance (Wasik, 2023).

Asma Barlas's most significant contribution to hermeneutics is her efforts to expose gender bias in the interpretation of Islam through an egalitarian approach. Her ideas rested on three points. *First*, he rejected patriarchy because, according to her, the principle of Tawheed in the Qur'an naturally supports equality and does not allow room for male domination. *Second*, she acknowledges the biological differences between men and women, different from the idea of total equality promoted by liberal feminists. However, he emphasized that these differences do not lower the ethical or moral values of either party. *Third*, Barlas thinks that the family in the Qur'an is actually not built on a patriarchal system. The assumption that states the opposite arises due to a mistake in understanding the text without considering the context (Yusdani & Arfaizar, 2022).

To support his view, Barlas reinterprets several important verses, for example, by understanding *qawwamuna* as a breadwinner, not a leader, and viewing the verse on polygamy as an encouragement to protect orphans and uphold social justice, rather than as a general permission to have multiple wives. He encouraged the Qur'an to be read in the spirit of liberation from interpretations full of patriarchal interests. According to him, the gender inequality that emerges today does not come from the teachings of the Qur'an, but from patriarchal culture, interest bias, the global capitalist system, and discriminatory ways of reading the Qur'an due to the dominance of male interpretations throughout history (Yusdani & Arfaizar, 2022).

Conclusion

Asma Barlas' thinking emphasizes that the Qur'an basically carries a message of liberation for women. He rejected the notion that this holy book is patriarchal, and considered that gender inequality was born more from the way male *mufasir* read, who were influenced by patriarchal culture. Therefore, she invites Muslims to reread the Qur'an more fairly and reflectively, based on the principle of monotheism that places all humans equally before God. Through the reinterpretation of verses such as Q.S. An-Nisa [4]:34 and Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]:228, Barlas points out that the concept of *qiwamah* and the term "male degree" do not mean the moral superiority of men over women, but rather social responsibility related to a specific historical context.

Drawing on Asma Barlas's ideas, Barlas emphasized that the central message of the Qur'an is justice, reciprocity, and respect for human dignity, without distinction by gender. Her ideas opened up a more expansive theological space for the development of Islamic feminism while providing a new foundation for Muslims to interpret sacred texts in a more humanistic and relevant way to modern reality. Through his contributions, Barlas not only enriches academic discourse but also offers perspectives that can drive social and spiritual change towards a more equal and civilized life.

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