

## ***FEMINIST INTERPRETATIONS OF MISOGYNISTIC QUR'AN AND HADITH: STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING FEMINISM IN INDONESIA AND MALAYSIA***

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### **Abstract**

This paper discusses the discourse of interpretation of the Qur'an and misogynistic hadith by feminist activists in Indonesia and Malaysia as a strategy in promoting feminism in their respective countries. For this reason, the discussion focuses on interpretation methods, production of feminist interpretations, and dissemination of feminist interpretation. The study is qualitative research in which data is taken through interviews, observations, and documentation. The results of the study show that 1) The interpretation of the Qur'anic texts and hadith is done by seeing them as open and constantly developing texts. It means that texts could respond and interact with modern knowledge such as gender, law, and human rights. 2) The feminist approach to the Qur'an and hadith involves misogynistic challenges including marginalization, stereotypes, subordination, and violence against women. It also looks at the multiple roles of women and their subordination 3) Feminist interpretation is socialized by feminist activists from Islamic boarding schools and university backgrounds. They took part in discussions and wrote about feminism in magazines and social media. They also participate in women's organizations that advocate women protection and campaign for women's rights including the hazards of polygamy. This study shows that power relations within organizations have a significant impact on the interpretation of religious texts. This interpretation was then used to motivate women activists to promote feminism.

**Keywords:** Feminism Activists, Indonesia-Malaysia, Misogynistic Qur'an-Hadith.

### ***Abstrak***

*Tulisan ini mendiskusikan wacana penafsiran al-Qur'an dan hadis misoginis oleh para aktivis feminisme di Indonesia dan Malaysia sebagai strategi dalam mempromosikan feminisme di negara masing-masing. Untuk itu, pembahasan akan terfokus pada metode penafsiran, produksi tafsir feminis, dan diseminasi penafsiran feminisme. Kajian bersifat lapangan dengan mengambil data melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Teknik analisis data melalui reduksi, penyajian, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah feminisme. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa 1) Penafsiran teks-teks al-Qur'an dan hadis dilakukan dengan melihatnya sebagai sesuatu yang terbuka dan terus berkembang. Artinya teks harus terus berinteraksi dengan pengetahuan modern seperti gender, hukum, dan hak asasi manusia. Hal ini membuat teks lebih mudah dipahami. 2) Pendekatan feminis terhadap Al-Qur'an dan hadits melibatkan tantangan misoginis termasuk marjinalisasi, stereotip, dan kekerasan terhadap perempuan. Pendekatan ini juga melihat peran ganda perempuan dan subordinasi mereka. 3) Tafsir feminis disosialisasikan oleh para aktivis feminis yang berlatar belakang pesantren dan universitas. Mereka ikut serta dalam diskusi dan menulis tentang feminisme di majalah dan media sosial. Mereka juga ikut serta dalam organisasi perempuan yang mengkampanyekan hak-hak perempuan termasuk bahaya poligami dan mengadvokasi lembaga Pemerintah untuk melindungi perempuan. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa relasi kuasa dalam organisasi memiliki dampak yang signifikan terhadap penafsiran teks-teks agama. Interpretasi ini kemudian digunakan untuk memotivasi para aktivis perempuan untuk mempromosikan feminisme.*

**Keywords:** *Aktivis Feminisme, Indonesia-Malaysia, Al-Qur'an-Hadis Misoginis.*

## Introduction

In recent decades, a feminist movement has emerged within Islamic thought that critiques traditional interpretations of religious texts that are considered misogynistic. Islamic feminism activists have highlighted that interpretations that are dominated by patriarchal views often ignore women's rights and roles in society. They contend that numerous interpretations employed to justify gender inequality fail to align with the core tenets of Islamic teachings, which espouse principles of justice, equality, and human dignity.<sup>1</sup>

This critique arises from an awareness of the historical context in which religious texts were revealed and how that context influences interpretation. For instance, numerous verses of the Qur'an and hadiths were revealed in the context of the 7th-century Arab society, which was characterized by a patriarchal social structure.<sup>2</sup> Feminism activists contend that a fair interpretation must consider the historical context in which religious texts were revealed and adapt it to modern values of human rights and gender equality. The argument is put forth that reinterpretation of religious texts with a more inclusive and gender-just perspective is not only possible but also in line with the original spirit of Islam, which emphasizes justice and equality. Consequently, feminist activists' critique of Qur'anic and hadith interpretations deemed misogynistic aimed to initiate a discourse on the potential for religious texts to be reinterpreted in a manner that reflects broader values of justice and equality in contemporary society. The objective is to develop interpretive approaches that respect the integrity of sacred texts and

ensure that Islamic teachings can be applied relatively in modern life.<sup>3</sup>

The Muslim feminist movement in Indonesia and Malaysia has been carried out by various activists and organizations that seek to reinterpret religious texts in a manner that is more in line with the principles of feminism. Piernella stated that the women's movement emerged due to the internalization of the understanding of religious texts in the culture of a patriarchal society. There is a prevalent gender bias in the interpretation of verses from the Qur'an, hadith texts, and fiqh narratives, often influenced by local culture, particularly in matters related to women's bodies. Piernella proposes deconstructing the primary interpretations of al-Qur'an and hadith texts, adapted to contemporary needs and contexts to promote emancipation.<sup>4</sup>

Calls for a reconsideration of the interpretation of the Qur'an and hadith texts, which have been criticized for their gender bias, have led to diverse views on the position of women among feminist activists. It is necessary to discuss strategies to reinterpret the verses in the Qur'an and hadith texts. Masdar F. Mas'udi, Rosalia Sciortino, and Lies Marcoes concluded that alternative interpretations of Islamic texts are essential for women in Islamic boarding schools to understand their rights. Their research focused on the Indonesian Association of Islamic Boarding Schools and Community Development (P3M11).<sup>5</sup>

This paper examines the discourse of interpreting the misogynistic Qur'an and Hadith by feminist activists in Indonesia and Malaysia

<sup>1</sup> Fakhru Lazuardi dan Lilly Suzana Binti Haji Shamsu, "Gender and Feminism in an Islamic Perspective," *FOCUS* 5, no. 1 (5 April 2024): 26, doi:10.26593/focus.v5i1.7659.

<sup>2</sup> Jamhari Jamhari dan Ismatu Ropi, *Citra Perempuan dalam Islam: Pandangan Ormas Keagamaan* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Rikza Muqtada, "Kritik Nalar Hadis Misoginis," *Musāwa Jurnal Studi Gender dan Islam* 13, no. 2 (3 Desember 2014): 87, doi:10.14421/musawa.2014.132.87-98; Faqihuddin Abdul Qodir, *Perempuan (Bukan) Sumber Fitnah*

*Mengaji Ulang Hadis dengan Metode Mubadalah*, 1 ed. (Bandung: Afkaruna.id, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Piernella Van Doorn-Harder, "Controlling the Body: Muslim Feminists Debating Women's Rights in Indonesia: Muslim Feminism in Indonesia," *Religion Compass* 2, no. 6 (November 2008): 1021, doi:10.1111/j.1749-8171.2008.00105.x.

<sup>5</sup> Rosalia Sciortino, Lies Marcoes Natsir, dan Masdar F. Mas'udi, "Learning from Islam: Advocacy of Reproductive Rights in Indonesian Pesantren," *Reproductive Health Matters* 4, no. 8 (Januari 1996): 90, doi:10.1016/S0968-8080(96)90305-5.

as a strategy to promote feminism in their respective countries. Consequently, the discussion will focus on the method of interpretation, the production of feminist interpretations, and the dissemination of feminist interpretations.

### Feminist Activism in Patriarchal Culture in Indonesia and Malaysia

The social conditions experienced by women in different regions are different, especially in other countries. These social conditions are strongly influenced by the values prevailing in the society of that country. In this aspect, a region's culture also influences the social conditions of women in that area.<sup>6</sup> The differences in the social conditions of women in Indonesia and Malaysia have implications for the different mindsets and attitudes of women in the two countries.<sup>7</sup> Seeing the different conditions of social life, of course, women in these two countries have their way of solving the problems they face. The difference in the resolution women choose is usually based on their ideology, which is an extraordinary force in determining a decision, such as the freedom to express opinions.<sup>8</sup> The following is an excerpt from a literary dialogue that describes the social condition of women in Indonesia in making life decisions:

Many friends' marriages in their environment were initially sweet and romantic, then fell apart through violence and took their ways.<sup>9</sup>

The quote above illustrates that a woman has seen the unfavorable social conditions regarding marriage in her environment, which makes her think many times about deciding on marriage.

In the patriarchal culture in Java, for example, a tradition of customary confinement

limits women's movements and activities. When she entered adulthood, she had to be secluded and then forced to marry a man she did not know before. He should not refuse, let alone complain about his parents' choices. Women are naturally at home, doing domestic work, starting from serving their husbands, giving birth, and raising their children. It is the image of a Javanese woman. Javanese women are referred to as *wanita*, an acronym for *wani ditoto*, which means they have to be able to cook and take care of the household. Their powers are only around the kitchen area, wells, and mattresses. All of that should be done by Javanese women. If one of the elements cannot be fulfilled, it will get a negative stigma, inappropriate, and even gossip.

Women in Malaysia also experience patriarchal conditions. Events that occur in her life will affect women's mindset. The following quote illustrates how the principles of women in Malaysia are greatly influenced by the social conditions surrounding them.

I love Islam. I feel the warmth here. Once, I believe Tuan country even more so. The woman is with the headscarf. The man protects. The mosque is serene. Eat Halal. The country's commendable morals justifying Islam are breathing everywhere.<sup>10</sup>

The description of the condition of women in Malaysia confirms that women must conform to their nature, even though they participate in activities in the public space. According to Nadra, head of the ISWAJ UTHM Malaysia Investigation, Documentation, and Publishing Department, women legally work in the public sector. However, they still have to pay attention to their natural rights. The struggle of women to improve their social status sometimes

<sup>6</sup> Lia Sukmawati, Bani Sudardi, dan Dwi Susanto, "Perempuan Sasak dalam Novel Sri Rinjani Karya Eva Nourma: Kajian Feminisme," *Haluan Sastra Budaya* 1, no. 2 (9 Januari 2018): 179, doi:10.20961/hsb.v1i2.15194.

<sup>7</sup> Devihari Fitriya Ningsih dan Eggy Fajar Andalas, "Perbandingan Kehidupan Sosial Perempuan Indonesia dan Malaysia pada Kumer Perempuan, Cinta dan Kehidupan," *TONIL: Jurnal Kajian Sastra, Teater dan Sinema* 18, no. 2 (13 September 2021): 93, doi:10.24821/tnl.v18i2.5730.

<sup>8</sup> Yasnur Asri, "Refleksi Ideologi Wanita Minangkabau dalam Novel Negeri Perempuan Karya Wisran Hadi," *Humaniora* 25, no. 1 (1 Februari 2013): 71, doi:https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.1814.

<sup>9</sup> Sunan Kaen dan S.M. Zakir, "Perempuan, Cinta dan Kehidupan: Kumpulan Cerpen Indonesia-Malaysia" (Jakarta: Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2019), 31, http://obor.or.id/index.php?route=product/product&product\_id=886.

<sup>10</sup> Ibi Sunan Kaen dan S.M. Zakir, "Perempuan, Cinta dan Kehidupan: Kumpulan Cerpen Indonesia-Malaysia".

makes them forget their nature. It is afraid that the female figure will fall into arrogance because she feels she has a higher position than just being a housewife.<sup>11</sup> This situation triggered movements advocating for women's rights, known as feminist activism.

The emergence of various feminist activism, whether by secular feminism, Muslim feminism, or Islamic feminism, has been sparked by this global phenomenon that seems to discredit women's position.<sup>12</sup> Women's organizations in Indonesia, such as Fatayat, Muslimat, Aisyiyah, and KUPI (Indonesian Women's Ulema Congress), still have to fight against arbitrary polygamy, underage marriages, and unregistered marriages. However, Institut Ahli Hadith Wal Jamaah (ISWAJ) members at Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) view women based on religious teachings. Women are considered to hold a noble position as long as they adhere to Islamic teachings. They can also have strategic positions in various institutions in Malaysia, including the UTHM campus, demonstrating their ability to participate in public spaces. Therefore, it is unethical to hinder women's natural rights.<sup>13</sup>

The attitudes towards women in Indonesia and Malaysia demonstrate the dynamic nature of feminism. Discussions on feminist activism in these countries have become a discipline in studying the genealogy of feminism, the discourse of feminism in religion, and the movements of activists, both individually and

collectively. Several studies have been conducted on feminist activism. Pieterella van Doorn-Harder highlighted the activism of Muslim women to strengthen women's fundamental rights based on Islamic teachings. This presence provides a new power for Muslim women to become agents of change, slowly changing the paradigm of women's positions.<sup>14</sup>

It is important to note that feminist activism, or the women's movement as a concept, needs to be clearly defined. Its role has been widely contested, and its meaning depends on the context in which it is used. In various kinds of literature, feminist activism has generally been used to refer to organized feminist movements in which women organize to challenge and change gender relations that subordinate women to men. In other cases, a broader conception of the women's movement has been used to refer to the organization of women as women, understood as distinct and specific constituencies, to bring about changes in the political and economic status quo that may not always focus on unequal gender relations in society.<sup>15</sup>

Regarding advocating for women's rights with religious and cultural traditions in Southeast Asia, there are reports of women's organizations in Indonesia that have used Islam as a framework to counter the proposed subordination of women to men in the name of Islam.<sup>16</sup> There are also several accounts in the literature on women's rights in Malaysia highlighting the adoption of an Islamic framework by local faith-based women's organizations, known as Sisters in Islam (SIS), as

<sup>11</sup> Nur Zainatul Nadra, The Position of Women in Malaysia, direct interview, 8 September 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Azza M. Karam, "Background and Theoretical Considerations," dalam *Women, Islamisms and the State: Contemporary Feminisms in Egypt*, ed. oleh Azza M. Karam (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1998), 9–14, doi:10.1057/9780230371590\_1.

<sup>13</sup> Nadra, The Position of Women in Malaysia; Nur Zainatul Nadra Zainol et al., "Third Gender from Islamic Law and Its Impacts towards Muslim Culture in Malaysia," *NeuroQuantology* 20, no. 1 (1 April 2022): 192, doi:10.14704/nq.2022.20.1.NQ22073.

<sup>14</sup> Pieterella van Doorn-Harder, *Women Shaping Islam: Reading the Qu'ran in Indonesia* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 50.

<sup>15</sup> Myra Marx Ferree dan Carol McClurg Mueller, "Feminism and the Women's Movement: A Global Perspective," dalam *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. oleh David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, dan Hanspeter Kriesi (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), 578, doi:10.1002/9780470999103.ch25.

<sup>16</sup> Susan Blackburn, "Feminism and the Women's Movement in the World's Largest Islamic Nation," in *Women's movements in Asia: feminisms and transnational activism*, ed. oleh Mina Roces dan Louise P. Edwards (Milton et al. ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2010).



part of an integrated advocacy strategy to advance the equality of Muslim women vis a vis men Muslim.<sup>17</sup> However, less attention has been paid to how violence against women is handled in non-Muslim communities in Malaysia and the advocacy strategies of local secular women's organizations.

The subordination of women has become a worldwide phenomenon. As part of the global community, Indonesia has also been affected by what is happening in other parts of the worldwide community. Feminism has been embraced by some Indonesian people, especially those who have learned from Western countries. When they return to Indonesia, they use their knowledge to change the position of women. Feminism in Indonesia can be categorized into two categories: secular feminists. Even though most of them are Muslim, they do not necessarily know much about Islamic teachings. Hence, their feminist movement uses secular laws and conventions, both national and international, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). They are mostly affiliated with urban, secular institutions such as the University of Indonesia or Western educational institutions abroad. Economically, they belong to the upper-middle class but have yet to gain experience in receiving education in Islamic institutions such as Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, or Islamic tertiary institutions. Second, Muslim feminists have used Islamic sources, such as the Qur'an and hadith, in fighting for gender equality. Most are alums of Islamic institutions such as the Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) or Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) with a *pesantren* background. Most of them come from rural areas with middle to lower-economic backgrounds.

In the context of Muslim feminism, there are two responses from Muslim activists in

Indonesia: first, Muslims who accept and adopt Muslim feminism for academic and feminist activism. Second, those who reject and oppose the publication of the Muslim feminist movement with Islamic publications. This second group supports the complementary roles of men and women, in which women are housewives and mothers whose main task is to serve their husbands and raise children, while men are the breadwinners for the family. For the second group, women can still participate in the public sphere if they remember their natural obligations to the family. In Indonesia, these Islamic feminists include Muslim activists of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) or members of Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS) who oppose gender equality.

The patriarchal culture and religious arguments put forward to weaken women's rights are very prominent in the Malay-Muslim community in Malaysia. It is well-known in public discourse, especially since Malaysia is a Muslim-majority country. The fact that Islamic sharia is institutionalized with a separate Islamic law, which specifically regulates the lives of Muslim women in Malaysia, directly impacts new ways of violence against women, both for Muslim women and non-Muslim women. The emergence of religious fundamentalist forces, particularly Islamic fundamentalism, in Malaysia was noted by all the interviewees of this study as a real challenge to the local women's movement.

Islamic fundamentalism is a new challenge that emerges occasionally and has become a persistent difficulty for the local women's movement. In the past, state agencies such as the Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM) and the Jabatan Agama Islam Selangor (JAIS), the religious authorities responsible for regulating and overseeing normative Islamic discourse and practice, were not influential or

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<sup>17</sup> Azza Basarudin, *Humanizing the Sacred: Sisters in Islam and the Struggle for Gender Justice in Malaysia* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016); Leila Hessini, "Reclaiming and Reframing Sexual Rights in Muslim-Majority Contexts: The Role of Individual and Collective Movements in Shifting Patriarchal Discourse and Practice" 22, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 69–

80; Norani Othman, "Muslim Women and the Challenge of Islamic Fundamentalism/Extremism: An Overview of Southeast Asian Muslim Women's Struggle for Human Rights and Gender Equality," *Women's Studies International Forum*, Islam, Gender and Human Rights, 29, no. 4 (1 Juli 2006): 339–53, doi:10.1016/j.wsif.2006.05.008.

powerful. However, JAKIM and JAIS have become practical tools for institutionalizing Islam, which is state-sanctioned, tends towards a patriarchal interpretation of religion, and has become increasingly fundamentalist in recent years. This development has severe consequences for Muslim women as they are under the arbitrary supervision of the state-recognized patriarchal religious authority under the pretext of being moral guardians and defenders of Islam.

"As Muslim women, we are told by religious leaders, preachers, and even religious institutions like JAKIM that Muslim women's rights are different from human rights and women's rights in CEDAW. We are told that in Islam, men must lead. Women cannot lead the prayer because a man's prayer will not be counted if a woman leads it. Women cannot become prime ministers unless there is a deliberation (consensus-based decision-making process) in which other men are involved. We are told that our body is not our own; it is God's right. If we don't cover our nakedness, our father will suffer. There was no critical discussion. We are told this, and we should only accept and follow."<sup>18</sup>

Women's rights activists also lament that drafting laws on violence against women has become more complicated due to recent changes requiring that all civil laws follow Islam. The difficulties posed by JAKIM's high position and rising Islamic fundamentalism in the current political climate can perhaps be summarised by the following statement by Lily when asked about the rise of religious conservatism:

"I sometimes wonder if we are lobbying for the Domestic Violence Act today, are we going to pass or not." In addition, the various gaps in the Sharia law system, including the lack of female Sharia judges and lawyers, are difficult to resolve given the issue's sensitivity, as Sharia law is often considered perfect divine law, which cannot be changed rather than changed. Religious law is made based on human interpretation."

"Every time women come and approach us, especially through our helpline, they are the ones being taken advantage of in the Sharia Courts. It is tough for them even to access information such as how to get a divorce. Even the ustadz there will say, 'You go home, and you are patient. The law is excellent on paper, but judges do not consider women's experiences regarding implementation. Sharia lawyers are just as bad; they are biased, and they charge exorbitant fees.'<sup>19</sup>

This is very detrimental because Muslim women are left vulnerable to violence.

"If I was raped by my husband, I cannot go to a civil court and demand protection. I would have to go to a Sharia court, and they would say that my husband has the right to do so and that marital rape is not a thing. This is very sad. As a Muslim woman in this country, I do not have the same rights as other women."<sup>20</sup>

It also highlights the importance of women's rights activists and groups like Sisters in Islam working to advance the social position of Muslim women vis-a-vis Muslim men within an Islamic framework, especially as Islam is institutionalized in the country. Sisters in Islam, a local women's organization known for its movement to advocate for gender equality in Islam, has received a lot of reactions and criticism from various Malay-Muslim communities for being accused of opposing patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an and Islamic law, including from Islamic groups, conservatives such as Solidaritas Muslim Malaysia (ISMA). To this day, Sisters in Islam are still engaged in a court battle against JAIS, which has issued a religious decree declaring Sisters in Islam a deviant group. Therefore, Islam as a religion is a critical dimension of the problem of patriarchal public mindsets and attitudes, which are still a severe challenge to the women's movement in Malaysia.

In conclusion, feminist activism in the patriarchal cultures of Indonesia and Malaysia reveals significant challenges and varying

<sup>18</sup> Lili, Peran Perempuan dalam Perpolitikan di Malaysia, Email, 2022.

<sup>19</sup> Amirah, Peran Perempuan dalam Perpolitikan di Malaysia, Email, 2022; Barbara, Peran Perempuan dalam Perpolitikan di Malaysia, Email, 2022.

<sup>20</sup> Farah, Peran Perempuan dalam Perpolitikan di Malaysia, Email, 2022.

responses rooted in societal, cultural, and religious contexts. The patriarchal norms in both countries shape women's social conditions, mindsets, and approaches to addressing their issues, often influenced by deep-seated cultural and religious values. Strengthening the capacity of women's organizations, fostering inclusive dialogues, and advocating for legal reforms that protect women's rights across all spheres of life remain imperative. The resilience and adaptability of feminist activism in these patriarchal cultures offer hope for gradual yet significant progress in achieving gender equality.

### **Feminist Interpretation of Qur'an and Hadith to Advocate for Women's Rights in Indonesia and Malaysia**

Feminist theory, as a tool for women to fight for their rights, is closely related to racial class conflict, especially gender conflict. The epistemology of this theory is to explore understanding and knowledge based on women's experiences. Shulamit Reinhart mentions that feminist theory explores missing information about specific and general women. It seeks to identify the omission and erasure of information about feminist activities. Reinhart suggests that one of how feminist criticism uses cultural artifacts, in this context, the interpretation and reading of scripture, is to examine women individually and in groups, the relationship between women and men, the relationship between women themselves, the intersection of racial identity, gender, class, age and the institutions, personalities, and views that shape women's lives.<sup>21</sup>

Feminist critique is capable of mobilizing women in social resistance. The women's movement aims to fight for their rights, which have been marginalized, subordinated, and degraded by the dominant patriarchal culture.

They are fighting for the balance and interrelation of the sexes.

The increase in feminist activism is motivated by a sense of social concern, particularly regarding the well-being of other women. Those who share this concern come together to form autonomous organizations, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to combat the limitations, discrimination, marginalization, and subordination that women face due to patriarchal structural inequality.<sup>22</sup> Feminist activism exists as an alternative to advocating for women's interests, which still need to be accommodated. The factors contributing to these issues are complex and varied, resulting in a diversity of methodologies and actions employed by feminist activists. This diversity is reflected in the issues they fight for, the perspectives they use, and the agendas, approaches, and strategies they implement.<sup>23</sup>

Muslim feminist activists promote feminism by reinterpreting Islamic thought and offering new perspectives on the Qur'an and Hadith. They argue that it is not Islam that oppresses women, but rather the interpretations of the Qur'an and hadith that are influenced by patriarchal cultural practices and values. To address this, Amina Wadud (W. 1999) proposed a new theory for interpreting the misogynistic verses of the Qur'an and hadith texts. Her interpretation of the Qur'an and prophetic teachings on women's issues has gained popularity among young Muslim feminists in Indonesia and Malaysia due to its fresh perspective. Wadud emphasizes the importance of analyzing all texts containing references to women, either separately or with men, using traditional methods. It involves considering the context, thematic intertextuality, language similarities, syntactic structures used, the main

<sup>21</sup> Shulamit Reinharz, *Metode-metode Feminis dalam Penelitian Sosial*, trans. oleh Lisabona Rahman dan Bambang J. Agung (Jakarta: Woman Reseach Institute, 2005), 213–14.

<sup>22</sup> Ahmad Arif Widiyanto, "Aktivisme, Filantropi Sosial dan Pemberdayaan Perempuan di Yogyakarta: Studi terhadap Dinamika Aktivisme Yayasan Sahabat Ibu

dalam Pemberdayaan Perempuan di Yogyakarta," *Sosiologi Reflektif* 12, no. 2 (April 2018): 195.

<sup>23</sup> Ariel Heryanto dan Sumit K. Mandal, ed., *Menggugat Otoriterisme di Asia Tenggara: Perbandingan dan Pertautan antara Indonesia dan Malaysia* (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2004), 298.



principles of the text, and the context of the weltanschauung or worldview.<sup>24</sup>

Misogynistic, in this context, are texts taken from the Qur'an and Hadith where interpretation can discredit one of the parties, in which women are often the object. When rereading misogynistic verses of the Qur'an and hadith, it is necessary to take into account several understanding tendencies. Alimatul Qibtiyah categorizes feminist interpreters into three groups: textual-conservative, semi-textual-moderate, and contextual-progressive. The textualist and contextual groups conflict, while the semi-textual group is more flexible. However, the semi-textual and contextual groups tend to adopt Muslim feminist views.<sup>25</sup> If this misogynist is related to the study of religious texts, the spiritual dimension is vital. Reinterpreting and re-understanding religious texts, such as the Qur'an and hadith, is always an exciting part of the discussion by the women ulama.<sup>26</sup> The texts of Qur'an and Hadith are done by positioning the texts as an open and living corpus so that the text can continue to dialogue and synergize with modern knowledge such as gender, law, and human rights. In this way, the understanding of the text becomes more dynamic.

For feminism activists in Indonesia and Malaysia, five problems often arise in the discourse of feminism, namely the marginalization of women, stereotypes against women, violence against women, the multiple roles of women, and the subordination of women.

#### a. Marginalisation of Women.

Specifically, women experience marginalization, which is more due to the construction of gender in society. For example, women are considered domestic

beings with a role as housekeepers, so they become economically dependent on men. Islam is a religion that defends and elevates women. The position of women towards men is equal/equal in worship and the right to reward. Islam came to break down the patriarchal culture, which is deeply rooted in society. Unfortunately, the understanding of most Muslims influenced by patriarchal culture brings women back to the time of ignorance, which was dominated and seen as inferior to men.

The only verse often used as a reference for the subordination of women's creation is QS. Al-Nisa' [4]: 1. Faqihuddin Abdul Qodir mentioned that when reading this verse using the *muhkam-mutasyabih* and *qath'i-zhanny* methods, there is absolutely no statement explaining the creation of women from men. The word *al-nas* means human beings in general, male and female. Although linguistically, the pronoun *kum* (meaning all of you) is a male form, it is general and refers to the previous word, *al-nas*, of human beings in general. It means Allah created all humankind, not only men.<sup>27</sup>

Nasaruddin Umar also said that the word 'rib' is not in the Qur'an. The image of a woman is created from the bone on the left bottom and is crooked to implement the negative image of women.<sup>28</sup> The story of women being created from a rib comes from a hadith. The rib myth also has a socio-psychological effect on society. Women are narrated as the subordination of men, which in the end is given the impression of being the second creation and the second sex, resulting in women constantly being marginalized within the family and society. The hadith, which states that women were

<sup>24</sup> Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 5.

<sup>25</sup> Alimatul Qibtiyah, "Mapping of Muslims' Understandings on Gender Issues in Islam at Six Universities in Yogyakarta, Indonesia," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 56, no. 2 (21 Mei 2019): 305, doi:10.14421/ajis.2018.562.305-340.

<sup>26</sup> Muqtada, "Kritik Nalar Hadis Misoginis," 87.

<sup>27</sup> Faqihuddin Abdul Qodir, *Qiro'ah Mubadalah Tafsir Progresif untuk Keadilan Gender dalam Islam*, ed. oleh Rusdianto, 1 ed. (Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2019), 235.

<sup>28</sup> Nasaruddin Umar, *Memahami Al-Qur'an di Masa Post-Truth* (Jakarta: Gramedia Widiasarana, 2021), 247.

created from a man's rib, is valid, but this hadith must remain open to criticism based on the text's historical context.

Abu Huraira said: The Prophet Pbuh noted: "he who believes in Allah and the last day should not harm his neighbor; and take my advice regarding good treatment of women, for they were created from a rib. Furthermore, the upper part of the rib is the most crooked. If you attempt to straighten it, you will break it; if you leave it alone, it will remain crooked. So, take my advice regarding good treatment of women."<sup>29</sup>

The hadith text does not talk about the creation of women at all. Faqihuddin Abdul Qodir said the hadith must be understood figuratively (*majaz*). The text of the hadith does not mention that Eve, as a human being, was not created from Adam's rib. The statement that women were created from a rib is not factual, contradicts reality, and the Qur'an. The fact is that all humans are created through the process of reproduction.

A meaning contrary to the Qur'an texts, facts of reality, or reason must be understood as symbolic. This symbolic meaning is very correlative because, at the beginning and the end of the hadith text, there is an emphasis on the norm to do good to women. The symbolic meaning in question is the condition of a woman who is stiff and stubborn, so a strategy is needed in communicating. Thus, what is being questioned by the hadith is not the creation of women from a man's rib but the allegory of the character of women/wives. This symbolic meaning is also under the context of the sentence structure in the context of the hadith. This meaning is also supported by other narrations from similar hadith texts, which state that women are like ribs, not created from ribs.<sup>30</sup>

#### b. Stereotypes Against Women.

Patriarchal society has the notion that the main task of women is to serve their

husbands/families. This perspective shows the existence of stereotypes in social caste. As a result, women's education, duties, and work/career are considered unimportant or secondary in household affairs. Nina Nurmila said that, in general, Indonesian women are constructed to be good wives and mothers. Wives serve husbands; mothers take care of children and complete household chores. Women are seen as lower because of the construction that the wife is serving. Islam is a progressive religion that defends and elevates women. However, the understanding of most Muslims influenced by patriarchal culture brings women back to the time of ignorance. That is, they are seen as lower than men.<sup>31</sup>

In a patriarchal society, socio-culturally women have been educated to be obedient, as reflected in the expression "*swargo nunut neroko katut*" (heaven follows, hell also follows). Husband and wife relations like this make the husband's position very strong, while the wife's position is weak. Under these conditions, the command for wives to obey their husbands was echoed more, while orders for husbands to be responsible for their wives were barely voiced. This further weakens women's position in front of their husbands, and they are socially weak. Such conditions often place the husband as ruler over his wife. If this happens, the wife's position is very vulnerable and has the potential to lead to acts of violence.

The portraits of women from the past, coupled with the developing religious doctrines, did not provide equal and fair space for women. Women are always portrayed as subordinate beings and second-class. Women, after adulthood, must be in seclusion so that their space is limited. Ahsin Sakho believes women should be freed; they can enter any profession like men and become formal leaders, such as politicians,

<sup>29</sup> Ibn al-Hajaj al-Nisaburi> Muslim, *S}ah}i>h} Muslim*, ed. oleh Ibn Muhammad al-Faryabi Nadhar, 1 ed., vol. 7 (Dar al-Taibah, 2006), 401 Hadith number 2671.

<sup>30</sup> Qodir, *Perempuan (Bukan) Sumber Fitnah Mengaji Ulang Hadis dengan Metode Mubadalah*, 62–63.

<sup>31</sup> Nina Nurmila, ed., *Menjadi Feminis Muslim* (Bandung: Afkaruna, 2022), 12.

doctors, engineers, writers, business consultants, etc. There is no single religious text that limits their work. Regarding political rights, women are also given the freedom to express opinions. Women are on par with men in doing good deeds, such as prayer, zakat, fasting, and other social charity, including *jihad fi sabilillah* on the battlefield, even though they are in the back row.<sup>32</sup>

### c. Violence Against Women.

Domestic violence is defined as an activity that harms at least one of the parties in the family. The case that often appears in domestic violence is polygamy. Polygamy is included in the category of violence that hurts the psychological condition of one party, especially the wife. In the public space, there is propaganda that women who accept polygamy will be promised heaven; on the other hand, refusing polygamy is considered to have violated the provisions of the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. Women, like men, have the right to be in a healthy and happy marriage. If marriage causes a woman to experience evil, let alone violence, then she has the right to file for divorce.<sup>33</sup>

In the *Mubadalah* perspective, polygamy is not a solution in husband and wife relations but a problem that often brings bad luck. This view is under the argumentation of the difficulty of creating justice in polygamy (QS. an-Nisa [4]: 129; QS. an-Nisa [4]: 128) and the emergence of divorce (QS. an-Nisa [4]: 130). This means that polygamy is a crucial problem in a married husband's relationship, so the Qur'an warns against doing justice and even emphasizes that monogamy is a safe way (*adna*) from the possibility of committing injustice (*alla ta'uluu*) (QS. an-Nisa' [4] 3). Scholars provide several strict conditions in

polygamous marriages, thus closing the opportunity to practice polygamy. Rejecting polygamy is not necessarily against the Prophet. Rejecting polygamy is an act of the Qur'an (QS. an-Nisa [4]: 3; QS. an-Nisa [4] 128, 129, and 130).<sup>34</sup>

Although many feminist activists oppose polygamy by deconstructing the interpretation of verses of the Qur'an, several Muslim women still accept polygamy with a series of experiences. For example, Ermawati Hasan responds to polygamy as follows:

"Polygamous marriage is a solution where the number of women and men is unequal; there are more women than men. The rise of adultery causes social chaos. The husband's sexual needs are very high. The marriage bond is not ownership; marriage (husband and wife) is a partner inviting each other to heaven. Nevertheless, there are conditions for women who want to be polygamous, not just any woman. Of course, a good woman, after marriage, does not control her husband, his property, and wealth. The second wife must do good to the first wife and her children.

Waliko Yahya, who has experience growing up in a family where his parents were polygamous:

"My father has two wives. My mother refused and was against it. The more my mother opposed it, the more my father's attitude showed his responsibility as the head of the household. His affection does not diminish, and he can act pretty. Even my father did all the work related to the domestic role. When my father was sick, his two wives took care of him. At the end of his death, he asked to be accompanied by his two wives until the end of his life. So, for me, polygamy is not a problem. Polygamy is a universal solution because the condition of each man is different. There is a man whom one day cannot afford it if he does not meet his wife. Of course, polygamy must follow what was practiced by the Apostle. Men who want to be polygamous must be financially capable, able to act fair, and understand religious knowledge.

<sup>32</sup> Muhammad Ahsin Sakho, *Perempuan dan al-Qur'an membincang Wanita dalam Terang Kitabullah*, 1 ed. (Jakarta: Qaf Media Kreativa, 2019), 38.

<sup>33</sup> Qodir, *Perempuan (Bukan) Sumber Fitnah Mengaji Ulang Hadis dengan Metode Mubadalah*, 224.

<sup>34</sup> Qodir, *Qiro'ah Mubadalah Tafsir Progresif untuk Keadilan Gender dalam Islam*, 421.

Like a religious figure spreads his wings in preaching, having more than one wife is not a problem.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, Syakila, as a lecturer at PPUK UTHM Malaysia stated:

"He is one of those who accept polygamous marriages. In the Qur'an, there are indeed verses that mention polygamy, but in practice, polygamy must be by what was exemplified by the Prophet. Men must be capable of material things and be able to be fair."<sup>36</sup>

Those who allow polygamy understand that justice that cannot be realized is immaterial, while material justice can be realized and carried out. Material justice is implied in QS. Al-Nisa' [4]: 3 by using the term *qisth*. In contrast, immaterial justice is emphasized in QS. Al-Nisa' [4]: 129 uses the term *'adil*. If that is the interpretation, polygamy is only justified to materially capable people who can act pretty to divide and distribute it.

#### d. The Dual Role of Women.

In society, there is an opinion that women are caring and diligent and are not suitable to be the head of the household. So that all domestic or household work becomes their responsibility. Even though women work outside the home, whether because of the implications (consequences) of the education they receive (career) or the need for family income, women are still required to carry out household work and are even required to prioritize household work. Ermawati commented on the dual roles of women:

"Women are indeed given the freedom to work in the public space, but about the domestic space, they work together. Domestic work is not a woman's nature. In the family, the husband and wife must have each other doing domestic tasks so that they should not be borne only by the wife. Men also have to be able to carry out domestic

roles so that the burden on women is not too heavy."<sup>37</sup>

Based on Waliko Yahya's experience, he grew up in a family that is aware of the role of women. His father does all tasks related to domestic space. Such as cooking, washing clothes, and shopping at the market.

"Women must be involved in the public sphere by honing their potential because men cannot explain problems related to women. Like how to purify after menstruation, women must explain these problems. Therefore, there must be mutuality so that women do not experience multiple roles related to domestic work. Domestic space is not a woman's job. There must be mutuality in a husband and wife relationship; men and women both carry out this role. One thing that men cannot replace is giving birth and breastfeeding."<sup>38</sup>

Nur Mahmudah, Head of the Center for Gender and Child Studies (PSGA) at IAIN Kudus, also responds to the dual roles of women in the household:

"Women who work in public spaces must receive system support from their families. Family members need to have the same understanding that domestic space is not a woman's job. Domestic space is a joint work. In household relations, whoever, both husband and wife, has free time and opportunities. They are the ones who do it. When women do domestic work, it's not solely because of women's duties, but because of their love and affection for their husbands and families."<sup>39</sup>

In a society like women who work as factory employees, their burden is cumbersome with the multiple roles that they have to do. Household chores must be carried by themselves, especially if the woman has to work to meet the family's needs with a mediocre income. On the other hand, working in the domestic space with a gender bias view is considered synonymous with women's natural tasks, so this

<sup>35</sup> Waliko Yahya, Pernikahan Poligami, Phone, Oktober 2022.

<sup>36</sup> Syakila, Pernikahan Poligami, direct interview, 6 September 2022.

<sup>37</sup> Ermawati Hasan, Pernikahan Poligami, Phone, Oktober 2022.

<sup>38</sup> Yahya, Pernikahan Poligami.

<sup>39</sup> Nur Mahmudah, Perempuan dan Gender, direct interview, Oktober 2022.



profession is often valued lower than other jobs.

#### e. Subordination of Women.

Subordination is an attitude of lowering the social position/status of one gender/gender. The assumption that women are irrational or emotional causes women to be kept away from the world of politics and unable to appear as leaders. As a result, women's position are seen insignificant and lower than men. In patriarchal culture, women are considered *konco wingking* who must obey men. There is one verse often used as legitimacy for male hegemony as a leader for women, namely QS. An-Nisa' [4]: 34. This verse, by some traditional interpreters, is interpreted in a patriarchal lens, namely, men are leaders for women. This interpretation creates a gap between men's and women's positions in the social sphere.

Zaitunah Subhan (1999) commented on QS. Al-Nisa' [4]: 34 does not refer to male leadership normatively but contextual verses about economic functions. That is, the superiority of men will be reduced if they cannot support their families. The word *al-rijal* is the plural of *al-rajul* or *al-rijl* (feet), so the word *al-rijal* means those who walk or work outside the home to earn an income; those inside the house are called *al-nisa'*. Therefore, sociologically, anyone active in the public sphere is called *al-rijal*, and anyone at home is called *al-nisa'* regardless of whether he is biologically male or female.<sup>40</sup>

Nina Nurmila argues about the interpretation of the verse from the perspective of gender justice. She considers that those who have the right to be leaders are those who meet the requirements of *rijal* (traits that are usually possessed by men, such as being firm and brave) and *qawwam*,

namely having advantages over their partner, both in terms of education or income level, as well as spending part of their wealth for their family. Anyone, male or female, who meets these criteria can become a leader. A person who is born as a *dzakar* (male sex) does not automatically become a *rijal* because *rijal* is an adjective that means someone who has specific criteria.

In conclusion, feminist interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith in Indonesia and Malaysia offer a transformative approach to understanding and advocating for women's rights. By challenging patriarchal readings and promoting gender equality, these interpretations align religious teachings with contemporary values of justice and equality. The efforts of feminist activists in these countries highlight the potential for religious texts to be reinterpreted in ways that support women's empowerment and challenge systemic gender biases.

#### Strategies of Disseminating Feminist Interpretations

Feminist activists in Indonesia and Malaysia employ various strategies to disseminate feminist interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith to advocate for women's rights. These strategies aim to challenge patriarchal norms, promote gender equality, and ensure that interpretations of Islamic texts reflect contemporary understandings of justice and equality. They utilize a multi-interdisciplinary approach to disseminate feminist interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith. Through education in Islamic campus or *Pesantren*, media engagement such as *YouTube* or the other social media, legal advocacy, community mobilization, academic research, and public speaking (*dakwah*), they strive to challenge patriarchal norms and promote gender equality within Islamic teachings. These strategies raise awareness and create tangible changes in how religious texts are understood and applied in contemporary society.

<sup>40</sup> Zaitunah Subhan dan M. Imam Aziz, *Tafsir Kebencian: Studi Bias Jender dalam Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: LKiS Pelangi Aksara, 1999), 177-80.



The activities of feminist activists in Indonesia and Malaysia teach and write both in the form of books and articles to promote gender equality. Along with technology development, ideas, and thoughts are also voiced through social media. The existence of social media is used as a means to voice equality and justice for women. Among them are *YouTube*, *Facebook*, and *Instagram*. For example, the *Instagram* account (IG) *mubadalah.id*, with 39.9 thousand followers, Islamic Gender Justice Study (KGI) taught by Nur Rofi'ah, Postgraduate lecturer at the Higher Education Al-Qur'an Sciences (PTIQ) Jakarta with 7,824 thousand followers. Sisters In Islam Malaysia, with 3,746 thousand followers, fight for equality, justice, freedom, and women's dignity. *Awwammalaysia* is an independent feminist non-profit organization committed to fighting for equality in Malaysia, with 8,337k followers.

The actions of feminist activists from both countries, have similarities in propagating and fighting for equality and justice for women. Propaganda is carried out individually or collectively through an organization. In this context, many names speak loudly about the feminist movement through their works, such as books, journals or social media accounts. Among these figures are Badriyah Fayumi, Nur Rofi'ah,<sup>41</sup> Nina Nurmila,<sup>42</sup> Musdah Mulia,<sup>43</sup> and Zainah Anwar.<sup>44</sup> The feminist movement is also carried out collectively by Muslim women's organizations such as KUPI, Muslimat NU, Fatayat, Aisyiyah Muhammadiyah, KORPRI, and SIS.

Even though many articles discuss the movement of feminist activism in Southeast

Asia, there are still counter-narratives against it. The counter-narrative against feminism is propagated through scientific articles published in international journals, as was done by Karimuddin Nasution and Mohd Faizulamri Mohd Saad, who said that the primary mission of Muslim feminists is to equalize men and women in all respects. To fulfill this mission, they put the basic principles of gender equality taken from the Qur'an and hadith, and then they will interpret them textually. If it conflicts with verses that position men and women differently, they will usually deny it because it contradicts the principle of gender equality. Feminists make the verses of the Qur'an the principle of gender equality. Unfortunately, these verses need to be more implemented.<sup>45</sup>

Nur Zainatul Nadra Zainol, ISWAJ UTHM said that recently, groups of people demanded to open the door to *ijtihad* by prioritizing reason over the Qur'an and al-Hadith. These people do not want to be called people who reject religion but hide behind the idea of reviewing religion. One of them is a feminist who fights for women's rights. Feminists think several laws in the Qur'an and hadith oppress and discriminate against women. That is why Muslim feminists are fighting to defend Muslim women. According to Zainol, the feminist movement must be scrutinized and taken seriously because the idea of gender equality does not come from Islam. Thus, *ijtihad* ideas that place rationality on the al-Qur'an and al-Hadith, as propagated by feminists, must be controlled so as not to influence the thinking of Muslims.<sup>46</sup>

They also play an active role in collective movements within women's organizations,

<sup>41</sup> Nur Rofiah, *Nalar Kritis Muslimah Refleksi Atas Keperempuanan Kemanusiaan dan keislaman*, 3 ed. (Bandung: Afkaruna.id, 2021).

<sup>42</sup> Nina Nurmila, "The Influence of Global Muslim Feminism on Indonesian Muslim Feminist Discourse," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 49, no. 1 (29 Juni 2011): 33, doi:10.14421/ajis.2011.491.33-64.

<sup>43</sup> Siti Musdah Mulia, *Perempuan dan Politik* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2005); Siti Musdah Mulia, Saparinah Sadli, dan Djohan Effendi, *Muslimah Reformis: Perempuan Pembaharu Keagamaan*, 1 ed. (Bandung: Mizan, 2005).

<sup>44</sup> Zainah Anwar, "What Islam, Whose Islam? Sisters in Islam and the Struggle for Women's Rights," dalam *The Politics of Multiculturalism*, ed. oleh Robert W. Hefner (University of Hawaii Press, 2017), 229, doi:10.1515/9780824864965-010.

<sup>45</sup> Karimuddin Nasution dan Mohd Faizulamri Mohd Saad, "Analysis of Feminist Principles in The Da'wah Agenda of Gender Equality," *International Journal of Media and Communication Research* 1, no. 2 (30 Juli 2020): 14, doi:10.25299/ijmcr.v1i2.5269.

<sup>46</sup> Nur Zainatul Nadra Binti Zainol, "Study on Gender Equality: Overview the Reality of Muslim Feminist

which have various programs aimed at fighting for women's rights. These include counseling on the dangers of polygamy and advocating for constitutional efforts to establish the Ministry of Women's Empowerment as a government agency to oversee women. Despite facing opposition, these women's activism continues to thrive and adapt to new challenges and platforms, ensuring their message of equality and justice reaches a broader audience and influences societal change. Through their relentless efforts, these activists challenge existing patriarchal structures and pave the way for future generations to enjoy a more equitable and just society.

In conclusion, feminist activists in Indonesia and Malaysia employ various strategies to disseminate feminist interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith in their advocacy for women's rights. These strategies challenge patriarchal norms, promote gender equality, and align interpretations of Islamic texts with contemporary notions of justice and equality. By leveraging educational platforms, media, legal advocacy, community mobilization, academic research, and public speaking, these activists strive to create tangible changes in the understanding and application of religious texts. They are also actively involved in teaching and writing, utilizing social media to amplify their messages and engage with a broader audience. Prominent figures and organizations from both countries collaborate in their efforts, further strengthening the movement.

## Conclusion

The discussion concludes that, firstly the interpretation of al-Qur'an-hadith texts is made by seeing them as a living corpus or open text that can be understood in modern knowledge, such as gender, law, and human rights. This makes the text more dynamic. Secondly, Feminist interpretation focuses on deconstructing misogynistic Qur'an and hadiths related to women's marginalization, stereotypes, violence,

multiple roles, and subordination. Thirdly, individual feminist activists with *pesantren* and university backgrounds disseminate feminist interpretation. They take part in discussions and write about feminism in magazines and on social media. They also participate in women's organizations and campaigns to improve women's rights. This paper shows that how power is shared in the organization affects how religious texts are understood. These understandings then motivate activists to promote feminism.

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## FEMINIST INTREPRETATIONS OF MYSOGYNISTIC QUR'AN AND HADITH:

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