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JURNAL STUDI AGAMA-AGAMA

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Abstract

This study examines how the concept of gender equality is constructed in Amina Wadud's thought, with particular emphasis on a critical analysis of its epistemological foundations within contemporary Islamic studies. The primary objective of this research is to systematically identify the epistemological basis employed by Wadud in formulating her ideas on gender equality, while also critically evaluating the strengths and limitations of her approach within the evolving discourse of modern Islamic scholarship. This study employs a qualitative method through library research, involving an in-depth examination of Wadud's major works as well as relevant academic literature. The findings reveal that Wadud's framework is strongly grounded in the principle of tawhid as a fundamental theological basis, which affirms the ontological equality between men and women as creations of God. In addition, she adopts a contextual hermeneutical approach in interpreting the Qur'an, aimed at critiquing and deconstructing patriarchal biases embedded in classical exegetical traditions. From an epistemological perspective, this approach offers a more inclusive and representative standpoint, while also carrying a transformative dimension that encourages a more just and contextual reinterpretation of religious texts. However, this approach is not without criticism, particularly regarding the potential emergence of subjectivity in the interpretive process, which may affect the validity of its outcomes. Overall, this study contributes to enriching the discourse on gender equality in Islamic studies, particularly by emphasizing the importance of a critical, reflective, and contextual epistemological approach in understanding religious texts.

Keywords: gender equality, Amina Wadud, epistemology, hermeneutics, tawhid

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is one of the important issues in the development of contemporary Islamic thought. This issue concerns not only the social relations between men and women but also the ways in which religious knowledge is constructed, interpreted, and legitimized. In the context of Qur'anic interpretation, differences in the social

experiences of male and female interpreters have also attracted scholarly attention, as the interpretation of religious texts does not take place in a space entirely free from the social and historical backgrounds of the interpreters ¹. Therefore, discussions of gender equality in Islam should not be limited to questions concerning the status of men and women, but should also examine how a particular interpretation is grounded and acquires its authority.

This issue becomes particularly important when some interpretations of Qur'anic verses concerning women are considered to reflect persistent patriarchal tendencies. Such tendencies do not necessarily originate from the Qur'anic text itself but may be related to the social and cultural contexts, as well as the positionality of interpreters when engaging with the text. This raises an epistemological concern because interpretations are often treated as singular representations of religious meaning, even though their formation involves particular methodological choices and perspectives. This situation underscores the need to re-examine the relationship between text, context, the interpreter's experience, and the normative values of the Qur'an in shaping understandings of gender relations.

In the development of contemporary Islamic thought, Amina Wadud is one of the scholars who has given significant attention to this issue. Through a feminist hermeneutical approach, Wadud seeks to reread Qur'anic verses by taking into account women's experiences, historical context, and the Qur'an's broader ethical message ². She criticizes interpretive approaches that treat male experience as the primary standard for understanding the text and places the principle of tawhid at the theological foundation of human equality. Within this framework, gender equality is understood not merely as equality of roles but as recognition of the equal dignity of human beings before God and a rejection of subordinating relationships.

Wadud's thought has received considerable attention because it offers a way of reading the Qur'an that is more responsive to women's experiences. A number of studies have regarded Wadud's feminist hermeneutics as an important contribution to expanding the scope of Qur'anic interpretation and incorporating women's perspectives into Qur'anic studies ³. However, some studies have also raised critical concerns, particularly regarding the role of subjective experience in the interpretive process, the potential for interpreter subjectivity, and questions surrounding the methodological validity of the

¹ Zumrotus Sholikhah, "Rekonstruksi Gender Dalam Islam : Studi Kritis Atas Tafsir Tradisional Perspektif Feminisme," *IJUGS: Indonesian Journal Of Gender Studies* 6, no. 1 (2025): 48–67.

² Irma Riyani, "MUSLIM FEMINIST HERMENEUTICAL METHOD TO THE QUR'AN (Analytical Study to the Method of Amina Wadud)," *Ulumuna* 21, no. 2 (2017): 298–314, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.20414/ujs.v21i2.320>.

³ Abu Bakar, "Women on The Text According To Amina Wadud Muhsin in Qur'an and Women," *AL-IHKAM: Jurnal Hukum & Pranata Sosial* 13, no. 1 (2018): 167, <https://doi.org/10.19105/al-ihkam.v13i1.1467>.

approach employed ⁴. These differing assessments indicate that Wadud's thought should be examined not only in terms of the concept of gender equality that she proposes but also in terms of how knowledge and arguments concerning equality are constructed.

Previous studies on Amina Wadud have shown diverse tendencies. Rihlah Nur Aulia (2026) positions Wadud's feminist hermeneutics as an approach that provides space for women's experiences in understanding religious texts ⁵. Meanwhile, the study by Syakira Khofifa et al. (2026) draws attention to the possibility of subjectivity arising from the inclusion of the interpreter's personal experiences in the interpretive process ⁶. Yusdani's (2020) study examines the application of Wadud's thought to particular themes or Qur'anic verses ⁷, while Lina Nur Anisa (2025) situates feminist interpretation within the context of criticism of the dominance of patriarchal interpretations ⁸. These studies provide an important foundation for understanding Wadud's thought; however, each tends to emphasize the aspects of hermeneutics, interpretive themes, or critiques of subjectivity separately.

The previous studies indicate that the issue requiring further clarification is no longer merely what Wadud means by gender equality, but rather how the construction of knowledge underlying this idea is formed and justified. In particular, there is still a need for an analysis that brings together the relationship between the Qur'anic text, socio-historical context, the interpreter's experience, and the principle of tawhid in the construction of arguments for gender equality. In addition, the extent to which the hermeneutical framework employed by Wadud maintains methodological consistency has not yet received sufficient attention. Therefore, the research gap lies in the lack of an integrated analysis of the epistemological foundations and methodological evaluation involved in examining Wadud's construction of gender equality.

This study addresses this gap by positioning Amina Wadud's thought as an epistemological construction to be critically examined. The novelty of this research lies

⁴ Uswatun Hasanah Harahap and Zulkarnaen Zulkarnaen, "Hermeneutika Feminisme Dalam Tafsir Al-Qur'an: Kajian Metodologi Amina Wadud," *Alhamra Jurnal Studi Islam* 5, no. 1 (2024): 85, <https://doi.org/10.30595/ajsi.v5i1.20646>.

⁵ Rihlah Nur Aulia, "Menakar Kembali Pemikiran Feminisme Amina Wadud," *Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an* 7, no. 1 (2026): 45–62, <https://journal.unj.ac.id/unj/index.php/jsq/article/view/4731>.

⁶ Syakira Khofifa, Fauziah Amna Sipahutar, and Farid Adnir, "Perempuan Sebagai Subjek Penafsir: Epistemologi Tafsir Feminis Dalam Studi Al-Qur'an," *Nizamiyah: Jurnal Sains, Sosial Dan Multidisiplin* 2, no. 2 (2026): 201–17, <https://doi.org/10.64691/h0k7gr36>.

⁷ Yusdani and Januariansyah Arfaizar, "Re-Interpretasi Teks Al-Qur'an Dalam Budaya Patriarkhi: Telisik Epistemologi Feminis Egalitarianisme Asma Barlas Yusdani Universitas Islam Indonesia Yogyakarta," *Al-Abkam: Jurnal Pemikiran Hukum Islam* : Vol. 30, no. 2 (2020): 161–181, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.19109/jsq.v2i2.13955>.

⁸ Lina Nur Anisa, "Kritik Konstruksi Relasi Gender Dalam Keluarga Islam: Telaah Pemikiran Asma Barlas Dan Amina Wadud Muhsin," *YUDHISTIRA : Jurnal Yurisprudensi, Hukum Dan Peradilan* 2, no. 4 (2025): 41–52, <https://doi.org/10.59966/yudhistira.v2i4.1583>.

in bringing together three interrelated aspects: the construction of gender equality, the epistemological foundations underlying it, and the methodological consistency of the hermeneutical approach employed. The analysis not only assesses Wadud's contribution to creating space for interpretations that are more responsive to women's experiences but also examines the tensions that may arise between the interpreter's subjective experience, the authority of the Qur'anic text, the principle of tawhid, and the demands of methodological validity. This position enables the study to offer neither a purely appreciative nor a dismissive reading, but rather a critical-reflective assessment of the strengths and limitations of the construction of gender equality in Wadud's thought.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using the library research method to examine Amina Wadud's thought on gender equality in Qur'anic interpretation. This method was selected because the object of the study consists of ideas, arguments, and intellectual constructions found in various written sources. The analysis focuses on understanding the relationship between the Qur'anic text, socio-historical context, the interpreter's position, and the epistemological foundations underlying Amina Wadud's thought. In addition, a critical approach is employed to assess the consistency of the arguments and methodological foundations used in constructing the concept of gender equality ⁹.

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary sources ¹⁰. The primary sources are Amina Wadud's works, particularly *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, which serves as the main reference for examining her intellectual construction of gender relations and Qur'anic interpretation. Secondary sources include books, scholarly articles, and previous studies addressing Islamic feminism, gender interpretation, Amina Wadud's hermeneutics, and epistemological issues in Qur'anic interpretation. These sources were selected based on their relevance to the research focus and academic credibility. Data were collected through documentation by identifying, reading, and recording relevant information from both primary and secondary sources. The data obtained were then organized thematically according to issues related to the construction of gender equality, epistemological foundations, the relationship

⁹ Abdul Fattah Nasution, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: Cv. Harfa Creative, 2023), http://repository.uinsu.ac.id/19091/1/buku_metode_penelitian_kualitatif.Abdul_Fattah.pdf; Sarmini, Aminkun Imam Rafii, and Agung Dwi Bahtiar El Rizaq, *METODE PENELITIAN KUALITATIF* (jejak pustaka, 2021).

¹⁰ Zuchri Abdussamad, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif* (Makassar: CV. syakir Media Press, 2021), http://www.biblioteca.pucminas.br/teses/Educacao_PereiraAS_1.pdf%0Ahttp://www.anpocs.org.br/portal/publicacoes/rbcs_00_11/rbcs11_01.htm%0Ahttp://repositorio.ipea.gov.br/bitstream/11058/7845/1/td_2306.pdf%0Ahttps://direitofma2010.files.wordpress.com/2010/.

between text and context, the interpreter's experience, and the principle of tawhid in Amina Wadud's thought. This thematic organization facilitated the examination of the relationships among the main ideas identified in the research sources ¹¹.

Data analysis was conducted through content analysis and interpretive analysis. Content analysis was used to identify and categorize the concepts, arguments, and main themes found in Amina Wadud's works. Interpretive analysis was employed to understand the meanings and relationships among ideas within the context of Wadud's thought. The findings were then critically analyzed by considering epistemological and methodological aspects, particularly the sources of knowledge, the relationship between text, context, and interpreter, and the consistency of the arguments underlying the construction of gender equality. Through this approach, the study not only describes Amina Wadud's thought but also evaluates the epistemological and methodological strengths and limitations of the construction of gender equality that she proposes ¹²

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Reconstruction of Amina Wadud's Thought on Gender Equality

1. *Amina Wadud's Intellectual Position*

Amina Wadud is one of the contemporary Muslim thinkers who has devoted significant attention to issues concerning women through Qur'anic studies ¹³. She is known as a Muslim feminist intellectual who questions approaches to religious texts that, in her view, remain influenced by male-dominated experiences and social structures. Born Mary Teasley in 1952 in the United States, Wadud converted to Islam in 1972. This transition was followed by her academic pursuits in Islamic studies and Arabic, culminating in a doctoral degree from the University of Michigan. This background is important for understanding her intellectual position. Wadud's concern with gender does not stand apart from Qur'anic studies but emerged from the intersection of her experience as a Muslim woman, her academic education, and her concern about inequalities in religious interpretation.

The distinction between revelation and interpretation forms the basis of Wadud's critique of interpretive tendencies that treat male experience as a universal standard for

¹¹ Feny Rita Fiantika and Anita Maharani, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (Padang Sumatera Barat: PT. GLOBAL EKSEKUTIF TEKNOLOGI, 2022), https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Anita-Maharani/publication/359652702_Metodologi_Penelitian_Kualitatif/links/6246f08b21077329f2e8330b/Metodologi-Penelitian-Kualitatif.pdf.

¹² Umamatul Bahiyah and Septi Gumindari, *Metode Penelitian, General and Specific Research*, vol. 4, 2024, <https://adisampublisher.org/index.php/edu/article/view/744/784>.

¹³ Aziz Saepulrohman and Iwan Sopwandin, "Telaah Gender Dalam Islam Perspektif Amina Wadud," *Mazalat: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 5, no. 1 (2023): 58–71, <https://doi.org/10.64367/m-jpi.v5i1.8>.

all human beings. Since interpretation is a product of human activity, interpretive works may contain limitations and biases arising from the social environment of the interpreter. On this basis, women's experiences should not be excluded from the interpretive process. Such experiences can serve as a perspective for examining whether an understanding of a particular verse genuinely reflects the principle of justice embedded in the Qur'an's overall message. For Wadud, incorporating women's experiences does not mean replacing the authority of the text but rather broadening the perspective through which the message of revelation is understood. In this way, interpretation is expected to take into account the realities of groups that have historically been underrepresented in the production of religious knowledge.

This idea is developed through a reading of the Qur'an that considers the relationship between the text, historical context, and the interpreter's position. Wadud does not view a verse as something that can be understood independently of the Qur'an's overall message¹⁴. She seeks to examine the connections among verses while also considering the social conditions in which the revelation took place. Therefore, her approach does not stop at the linguistic meaning of a verse but seeks to identify the moral message underlying it. Historical context is used to understand the circumstances surrounding the revelation, while contemporary context is considered to assess the relevance of its message in the present. The relationship among these three elements is a central feature of Wadud's interpretive framework. Through this approach, she seeks to bring the meaning of the text into dialogue with the needs of society without abandoning the Qur'an as the primary source of interpretation.

Wadud's thought subsequently developed from the realm of Qur'anic interpretation toward a broader agenda of social transformation. She uses the term *gender jihad* to describe the struggle against gender injustice through the reinterpretation of religious sources and the transformation of social life¹⁵. This idea demonstrates that, for Wadud, interpretation has practical consequences. Interpretation is not merely an academic activity aimed at producing an understanding of the text but is also connected to how religious teachings are translated into social life. Therefore, interpretive outcomes have implications for social relations, the distribution of roles, and the position of women in religious life. This orientation connects Qur'anic studies with a broader agenda of social reform while also demonstrating that Wadud's thought encompasses both theoretical and practical dimensions.

¹⁴ Ai Syaripah and Ibnu Muhammad Yamudin Salaeh, "Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Al-Qur'an Ditinjau Dari Pemahaman Amina Wadud Dan Ashgar Ali Engineer," *Jurnal Iman Dan Spiritualitas* 2, no. 4 (2022): 575–84, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jis.v2i4.18974>.

¹⁵ Yahya Fathur Rozy, "The Hermeneutics Influence on Feminist Exegesis: A Case Study on Amina Wadud," *QiST: Journal of Quran and Tafseer Studies* 2, no. 3 (2023): 369–81, <https://doi.org/10.23917/qist.v2i3.2908>.

2. *Construction of Gender Equality in Amina Wadud's Thought*

Gender equality in Amina Wadud's thought is not constructed through a demand that men and women always perform identical roles. Its starting point is the equal dignity of human beings before Allah, which is then directed toward a critique of religious interpretations that provide theological legitimacy for the subordination of women¹⁶. Therefore, the concept of equality in Wadud's thought should be understood in terms of relationships, moral responsibility, and justice, rather than merely as equality of position in every sphere of life. Equality does not mean eliminating all biological or social differences, but rather ensuring that such differences are not used as a basis for constructing relationships in which one party is regarded as inherently superior to the other.

One of the important foundations employed by Wadud is the concept of *nafs wāḥidah* in Q.S. al-Nisā' [4]:1. The verse is understood as affirming that men and women originate from the same source of creation¹⁷. This reading provides an ontological foundation for human equality because both share the same origin of creation. Gender differences, therefore, cannot be used as a basis for establishing different levels of human worth. From this perspective, a person's value is not determined by biological identity but by their status as a human being who bears moral responsibility before Allah. This understanding serves as an initial basis for Wadud to question interpretations that position men as inherently superior to women.

This perspective is closely related to the way Wadud understands the relationship between men and women in social life. She does not equate equality with the elimination of all functional differences between the two. What she rejects is the transformation of certain differences into a hierarchical system in which men are positioned as the primary subjects, while women are placed as parties who are permanently under male control. Therefore, according to Wadud, gender relations are better understood in terms of ability, responsibility, social circumstances, and the principle of justice rather than biological sex alone. The distribution of roles may change according to circumstances and the needs of communal life. From this perspective, differences in function do not automatically produce inequality as long as they are not accompanied by claims of superiority or restrictions on women's dignity.

¹⁶ Ibrahim Hasan Ray, "A Critical Analysis of Amina Wadud's Feminist Hermeneutics in Qur'anic Interpretation," *Modern Islamic Studies and Sharia Research* 1, no. 2 (2025): 104–20, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30983/missr.v1i2.10355>.

¹⁷ Muhammad Nur and Wawan Susanto, "Analisis Semantik Lafadz Musytarak 'Nafsin Wāḥidah' Dalam QS. An-Nisā' [4]:1: Studi Komparatif Tafsir Al-Mizān Dan Tafsir Al-Azhar," *An-Nawa: Jurnal Studi Islam* 8, no. 1 (2026): 29–44, <https://doi.org/10.37758/nn4fmg29>

This construction is evident in Wadud's interpretation of the concept of *qiwāmah* in Q.S. al-Nisā' [4]:34. Wadud does not accept *qiwāmah* as evidence of absolute male leadership. Instead, she relates the concept to the responsibilities and conditions mentioned in the verse. Such an interpretation shifts *qiwāmah* from a concept of authority to one of responsibility. A man does not possess authority merely because he is a man, but because he bears certain responsibilities that must be fulfilled. Thus, *qiwāmah* cannot be understood as a privilege permanently attached to men. Rather, the concept should be interpreted in relation to responsibility, the ability to fulfill obligations, and the goal of establishing just family relationships.

Another important aspect is the way Wadud reads Qur'anic verses holistically. She rejects the use of a single verse as the basis for drawing general conclusions about the position of women without considering other verses that are thematically related. Therefore, the construction of equality is not derived from a single textual proof but from an interpretation of the Qur'an's overall message. The principles of justice, moral responsibility, and reciprocity are taken into consideration when determining the meaning of a verse. This approach prevents interpretation from being limited to the literal wording of a particular text and instead considers the relationships among verses and the broader moral message. For Wadud, such an approach is necessary to ensure that interpretations of gender-related verses do not produce inequality merely because one part of the text is separated from the Qur'an's overall content.

Women's experiences occupy an important position in this construction. Wadud argues that for centuries, women have more often been treated as objects of interpretation than as subjects who participate in shaping religious knowledge¹⁸. The inclusion of women's experiences is necessary so that the text is not continually read solely from a male perspective. In this sense, experience does not replace the text but constitutes one of the elements that helps interpreters identify issues that may remain unseen when the text is read exclusively from a single social position. Women's experiences can also reveal the actual impact of a particular interpretation on everyday life. By incorporating such experiences, Wadud seeks to broaden the space for dialogue between the text, social context, and the reader's position without undermining the Qur'an's status as the primary source of interpretation.

The principle of *tawhid* reinforces Wadud's overall construction, reflecting the broader Islamic understanding that *tawhid* carries a liberating impulse at both the individual and social levels.¹⁹ Wadud understands *tawhid* not merely as an affirmation

¹⁸ Amina Wadud, "Reflections on Islamic Feminist Exegesis of the Qur'an," *Religions* 12, no. 7 (2021): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12070497>.

¹⁹ Roni Ismail, "HAKIKAT MONOTEISME ISLAM (Kajian Atas Konsep Tauhid 'Laa Ilaaha Illallah')," *Religi* X, no. 2 (2014): 172–83, <https://doi.org/10.14421/rejusta.2014.1002-03>.

of the oneness of Allah but also as a basis for rejecting the deification of human beings by other human beings²⁰. If only Allah possesses absolute authority, then relationships among human beings should not be built upon claims of permanent superiority. From this perspective, gender equality acquires a theological foundation because all human beings occupy the same position as creatures before the Creator. The subordination of women should therefore be questioned when it produces relations of domination that undermine women's freedom, dignity, or moral responsibility. Thus, *tawhid* in Wadud's thought has social implications: the oneness of Allah provides a foundation for rejecting relational structures that grant absolute power to certain human beings over others.

Based on the foregoing discussion, Wadud's construction of equality can be summarized through four interrelated elements: equality of creation, equality of moral responsibility, mutual relationships, and a critique of structures of domination. Equality of creation provides an ontological basis for affirming that men and women possess equal human dignity. Equality of moral responsibility positions both as subjects who are accountable for their respective actions. Mutuality emphasizes reciprocity in social and family life, while the critique of domination is directed toward structures that turn differences into grounds for control. These four elements form an interconnected framework in Wadud's interpretation of gender-related verses. This framework also provides the basis for her effort to reinterpret relations between men and women in a more just manner.

3. *Epistemological and Methodological Foundations of Amina Wadud's Interpretation*

The discussion of epistemology needs to be distinguished from the discussion of the concept of equality. While the previous section explained what Amina Wadud means by equality, this section focuses on how she obtains, constructs, and justifies knowledge concerning equality. This distinction is important so that the discussion does not stop at the outcome of Wadud's thought but also reveals the foundations upon which that understanding is constructed. Thus, epistemology addresses questions concerning the sources of knowledge, the position of the interpreter, the role of experience, and the relationship between text and context. Methodology, meanwhile, concerns the approach used to read the Qur'an so that the concept of gender equality can be formulated systematically and contextually. This framework provides a more focused direction for the discussion.

Epistemologically, Wadud begins by distinguishing revelation from human understanding of revelation. The Qur'an is regarded as the normative source, while interpretation is understood as a human activity through which that source is understood

²⁰ Roni Ismail, *Menuju Muslim Rahmatan Lil'alam* (Yogyakarta: Suka Press, 2016).

²¹. This distinction has important consequences because an interpretation cannot automatically be equated with the Qur'anic text itself. Within this framework, errors, limitations, or biases in an interpretation cannot simply be attributed to revelation, as they may arise from the interpreter's perspective, social environment, or intellectual framework. This distinction also creates space for a critical evaluation of established interpretations and allows alternative readings of verses concerning women to emerge. Consequently, the space for critical evaluation becomes more open.

On this basis, Wadud places considerable emphasis on the position of the interpreter as a subject. The interpreter does not approach the text as a completely neutral observer, because every act of interpretation is influenced by gender, life experience, social environment, education, and the issues being confronted. Awareness of this position is necessary so that interpreters can recognize the assumptions they bring when engaging with the text. For Wadud, acknowledging the existence of a particular perspective does not mean rejecting the possibility of attaining a justifiable understanding ²². Rather, such awareness constitutes an initial step toward reducing unconscious bias. By recognizing the background that shapes an interpretation, interpreters can become more open to the possibility that established understandings may in fact have been shaped by particular social conditions.

At this point, women's experiences acquire an important epistemic status within Wadud's framework of thought. She does not intend to treat every woman's experience as an absolute truth or to replace the text with experience ²³. Rather, she challenges the assumption that men's experiences can automatically represent the experiences of all human beings. Women's experiences are needed as a corrective perspective to interpretations that have largely been shaped by men's experiences, interests, and perspectives. The inclusion of this perspective helps reveal aspects of women's lives that may have received insufficient attention in previous interpretations. Thus, experience functions to broaden the scope of interpretation and to reassess assumptions that have long been accepted without sufficiently questioning the social position of the interpreter who produced them.

²¹ Maelina Putri et al., "Tafsir Feminisme Perspektif Amina Wadud Al- Qur ' an Sebagai Sesuatu Yang Dinamis Dan Kontekstual , Sehingga Tafsir Tidak Bersifat Final," *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Filsafat* 3, no. 1 (2026): 40–50, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.61132/akhlak.v3i1.1584>.

²² Dwi Fidhayanti et al., "Rethinking Islamic Feminist Thought on Reinterpreting the Qur ' an : An Analysis of the Thoughts of Aminah Wadud , Fatima Mernissi , Asma Barlas , and Riffat Hassan Introduction In the Modern Context , the Debate on Women ' s Roles and Rights in Islam Has," *Tribakti: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman* 35, no. 1 (2024): 37–56, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.33367/tribakti.v35i1.4564>

²³ Salman Alfarisi and M. Khairul Arwani, "A Critical Analysis of the Inconsistencies in Amina Wadud Gender Equality Movement in the Islamic World," *Hakamain: Journal of Sharia and Law Studies* 3, no. 1 (2024): 37–47, <https://doi.org/10.57255/hakamain.v3i1.323>.

In addition to the position of the interpreter, historical context constitutes an important aspect of Wadud's approach to interpretation. Qur'anic verses were revealed within societies characterized by particular social structures, customs, power relations, and prevailing concerns²⁴. Therefore, understanding the historical background of a verse is necessary to identify the circumstances to which the revelation responded and the issues surrounding it. Context is not used to invalidate the text or to restrict its meaning solely to the past. Rather, context helps the interpreter understand the reasons, purposes, and moral direction underlying why a particular ruling emerged in a specific form. In this way, the relationship between the text and the society in which the revelation occurred can be understood more comprehensively, ensuring that the message contained within the text is not detached from the circumstances that shaped its emergence.

Methodologically, Wadud develops an interpretive approach that brings together text, context, and the interpreter²⁵. The text serves as the primary source of analysis, context provides information about the circumstances in which the revelation emerged, while the interpreter brings contemporary questions and experiences into the interpretive process. These three elements are not treated as separate components but as interconnected dimensions in the formation of an understanding of the verse. The text establishes the boundaries of interpretation, context helps clarify the background and direction of its message, while the interpreter determines the questions to be addressed in response to the needs of the present. Their interrelationship demonstrates that, for Wadud, interpretation is a dialogical activity rather than a mechanical transfer of textual meaning from the past into the present.

The reading of the text is conducted by paying attention to linguistic structure, the relationships among verses, and the thematic unity of the Qur'an. Verses concerning women are not treated as isolated statements but are read alongside other verses addressing related issues. Their meanings are then examined through the relationships among the texts and their consistency with the broader principles of the Qur'an. This way of reading forms the basis of Wadud's holistic approach. Such an approach is important because a verse may be given a particular emphasis when detached from the Qur'an's overall message. By reading verses comprehensively, Wadud seeks to avoid conclusions

²⁴ Muhammad Resky, "Holistic Hermeneutics of Qur'anic Verses: Reinterpreting for Achieving Gender Equality in Contemporary Islamic Society: Hermeneutika Holistik Terhadap Ayat-Ayat Al-Qur'an: Menafsirkan Ulang Untuk Mewujudkan Kesenjangan Gender Dalam Masyarakat Islam Kontemporer," *Aqwal: Journal of Qur'an and Hadis Studies* 5, no. 2 (2024): 176–91, <https://doi.org/10.28918/aqwal.v5i2.7365>.

²⁵ Muhammad Resky and Akmal Rizki Gunawan Hasibuan, "Issues on Gender Equality in the Qur'an Based on Amina Wadud's Hermeneutical Approach," *Besari: Journal of Social and Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (2024): 33–46, <https://doi.org/10.71155/besari.v2i1.108>.

based solely on particular fragments of the text while overlooking the broader moral message of the Qur'an²⁶.

At the next stage, historical context is used to examine the relationship between the message of a verse and the social conditions prevailing at the time of revelation. The interpreter needs to understand the issues underlying the revelation of the verse, the forms of social relations that existed, and the needs of the community that initially received the message. The message identified through this process is then reconsidered when applied to different circumstances. This is where the contextual dimension of Wadud's method becomes evident. The moral message of the verse is maintained, while its application may be reconsidered in light of changing circumstances. Thus, the contemporary context is not positioned as a substitute for the text but as a space for examining how the principles contained in the text can be realized fairly in social life.

Tawhid then functions as a normative orientation that binds the entire interpretive process. This principle provides a moral basis for rejecting interpretations that position certain human beings as absolutely superior to others. For Wadud, reading the Qur'an should not produce an understanding that legitimizes injustice, particularly when such an understanding contradicts the principle of justice embedded in the Qur'an's message²⁷. Therefore, tawhid is not merely a theological concept but also serves as an ethical basis for evaluating the consequences of an interpretation. This principle directs the interpreter to question structures of meaning that produce the subordination of women and to seek interpretations that are more consistent with human dignity and equality. In this sense, tawhid provides the fundamental point of departure for such a critique.

B. Critical Evaluation of Amina Wadud's Epistemology and Methodology

1. Epistemological Evaluation

The epistemological strength of Wadud's thought lies in her ability to distinguish between the Qur'an as revelation and interpretation as a product of human understanding. This distinction makes the exegetical tradition open to historical evaluation and critical examination. Interpretations that have long been regarded as established are no longer accepted merely because of their long-standing historical status; rather, they can be examined in terms of the assumptions, contexts, and social consequences underlying

²⁶ Ahmad Zabidi, "Metode Amina Wadud Dalam Penafsiran Alquran," *Jurnal AlwatziKhoebillah: Kajian Islam, Pendidikan, Ekonomi, Humaniora* 6, no. 2 (2022): 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.37567/alwatziKhoebillah.v6i2.224>.

²⁷ Rahmah Eka Saputri and Fitrawati, "Konstruksi Hermeneutika Feminis Amina Wadud: Sebuah Upaya Membangun Ulang Makna Ayat-Ayat Bias Gender," *Al-Ubudiyah: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Studi Islam* 5, no. 2 (2024): 211–20, <https://doi.org/10.55623/au.v5i2.365>.

them²⁸. However, acknowledging the involvement of the interpreter as a subject raises another issue. If interpretation is always influenced by the interpreter's position, criteria are needed to distinguish interpretations that can be justified from those that are excessively unconstrained. In this respect, Wadud's framework does not provide a verification system as explicit as Fazlur Rahman's *double movement* approach. Rahman more explicitly structures the interpretive process by moving from the historical situation toward general moral principles and then returning to the contemporary context.

A similar issue arises in the use of women's experiences as an epistemic source. Experience can indeed reveal forms of injustice that remain invisible within conventional readings. However, experiences are diverse and cannot always be generalized. Therefore, experience is more appropriately positioned as a source of questions and critical perspectives rather than as the sole evidence for the truth of an interpretation²⁹. This limitation does not mean that experience should be excluded from the interpretive process. Rather, Wadud's contribution lies in expanding the range of voices that can participate in the production of religious knowledge. The issue, however, is how such experiences can be brought into dialogue with linguistic analysis, historical context, exegetical traditions, and principles of reasoning that can be critically examined within the academic community.

A similar point can be observed in the principle of tawhid. Using tawhid as an ethical foundation provides normative consistency to Wadud's interpretation, but at the same time demonstrates that her interpretation does not begin from a completely neutral position. She already has a particular value horizon that is subsequently used to assess the possible meanings of the text. Philosophically, this condition does not in itself constitute a weakness; what is more important is the interpreter's openness in articulating the value assumptions being employed and demonstrating how those assumptions relate to the text. On this basis, Wadud's epistemology possesses considerable strength as a critical epistemology, but still requires further development as an epistemology of validation. It is highly effective in demonstrating that interpretations may contain biases, but it does not yet provide equally robust criteria for ensuring that alternative interpretations are free from the very problems of subjectivity that they seek to criticize.

²⁸ Nur Rofiq, "Gender, Faith, and Reform: A Narrative Review of Islamic Feminism and Public Policy," *Sinergi International Journal of Islamic Studies* 2, no. 2 (2024): 66–81, <https://doi.org/10.61194/ijis.v2i2.600>.

²⁹ Hafshah Kirana Mulyono, "PEREMPUAN SEBAGAI SUBJEK DAKWAH DALAM AL-QUR'AN: STUDI KOMPARATIF PENAFSIRAN AMINA WADUD DAN ABDULLAH SAEED Hafshah," *Jurnal Kajian Agama Dan Dakwah* 19, no. 2 (2026), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2238/yfgrze77>.

2. *Methodological Evaluation*

Methodologically, Wadud's approach has the advantage of not separating the text from its context and reader. A holistic reading helps prevent verses from being used in isolation, while attention to historical context provides space for understanding the reasons and circumstances underlying the revelation of a particular verse³⁰.

Its limitation emerges at the operational level. Although the principle of reading the text as a whole is clear, how the boundaries of this "whole" are to be determined is not always explained in sufficient detail. The interpreter still needs criteria for determining which verses are relevant, how relationships among verses should be established, which historical contexts should be prioritized, and what principles should be applied when multiple possible meanings emerge.

A similar issue can be observed in the process of contextualization. Connecting the Qur'anic message with contemporary concerns is a strength because it allows interpretation to remain relevant. However, the broader the scope of contextualization becomes, the greater the need for methodological control. Without clear boundaries, the contemporary context may become overly dominant, resulting in insufficient attention to the historical meaning of the text³¹.

The use of women's experiences also has two sides. On the one hand, it enriches interpretation and helps correct the limitations of perspectives that have historically been dominant. On the other hand, the considerable diversity of experiences requires a process of selection and reflection so that they are not immediately used as the basis for generalization. Therefore, experience should function as one element within the interpretive process rather than as the sole basis for determining meaning.

Compared with Fazlur Rahman, the main difference lies in the degree of procedural formulation. Rahman's *double movement* provides more explicit stages for moving from the historical context toward general principles and then applying those principles to contemporary situations. Wadud, by contrast, is more flexible in bringing together text, experience, context, and women's perspectives. This flexibility broadens the possibilities of interpretation but also makes her interpretive procedure more difficult to replicate.

Thus, the methodological issue in Wadud's approach does not lie in the use of context or experience itself, but rather in the lack of clearly defined mechanisms for regulating these two elements. This distinction is important. The critique is not intended to reject

³⁰ Muhammad Fauzi Noor, "A Feminist Interpretation of Qur'anic Texts By Amina Wadud and Zaitunah Subhan," *INTIHA: Islamic Education Journal* 1, no. 3 (2024): 144–56, <https://doi.org/10.58988/>

³¹ Mohammad Ainun Roriq and Ita Rodiah, "KESETARAAN GENDER DAN REFORMASI HUKUM: PEMIKIRAN AMINA WADUD DAN SITI MUSDAH MULIA DALAM KONTEKS INDONESIA," *Jurnal Harkat : Media Komunikasi Gender* 20, no. 2 (2024): 97–107, <https://doi.org/10.15408/harkat.v20i2.39206>.

feminist hermeneutics, but to demonstrate the need for methodological tools capable of maintaining a balance between interpretive openness and scholarly rigor.

3. *Critique of Wadud's Construction of Gender Equality*

After examining its epistemological and methodological foundations, a critique of Wadud's construction of equality can be directed toward the way these various elements produce her concept of equality. First, Wadud's construction of equality has a strong normative orientation. The principles of tawhid and justice already function as a horizon that guides the reading before the interpretation of gender-related verses takes place. This provides value consistency, but it also raises the question of whether the conclusion concerning equality is derived from the text or is partly predetermined by the normative framework adopted from the outset ³².

Second, the use of women's experiences has the potential to lead to generalization. There is no single women's experience that can represent all women. Therefore, the construction of equality needs to take social and cultural diversity into account so that it does not replace one form of universalism with another form of universalism that is equally limited ³³.

Third, the emphasis on mutuality may potentially simplify the variations in gender relations found in the Qur'an. Equality does not necessarily mean symmetry in every form of relationship. Just relationships may involve different distributions of responsibilities, provided that such differences are not used to establish superiority or subordination. Therefore, interpretations of differentiated roles need to be approached with greater caution so that criticism of patriarchy does not turn into an oversimplification of the complexity of the text.

Fourth, there is an issue concerning the relationship between universality and context. Wadud seeks to identify universal values such as justice and equality and then apply them to the concerns of modern society. This strategy is productive, but it requires a stronger explanation of how a particular value is established as universal and how its application can be distinguished from values arising from the interpreter's own social context ³⁴.

³² Afidatul Khasanah and Rajabbul Amin, "Childfree from the Perspective of Islamic Feminism: An Analysis of the Thoughts of Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas," *Al Qalam: Jurnal Ilmiah Keagamaan Dan Kemasyarakatan* 19, no. 6 (2025): 3532, <https://doi.org/10.35931/aq.v19i6.5657>.

³³ Imam Maksum et al., "Analyzing Domestic Violence in the Qur'an through Hermeneutics of H.G. Gadamer: Views of Amina Wadud," *Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education* 7, no. 2 (2023): 468, <https://doi.org/10.35723/ajie.v7i2.427>.

³⁴ Shabnam Faraji, "A Critical Examination of the Image of "Human" in the Feminist Thoughts of Amina Wadud," *Quarterly Journal* 17, no. 2 (2026): 415–49, <https://doi.org/https://www.doi.org/10.30465/scs.2025.50880.2960>.

These four issues demonstrate that Wadud's construction of equality has both strengths and limitations. Its strength lies in shifting attention from merely asking "what does the text say?" toward examining the relationship among text, interpretation, and social consequences. Its limitation lies in the need to clarify further the mechanisms that connect normative principles, experience, context, and textual evidence.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the construction of gender equality in Amina Wadud's thought is developed through the integration of the principle of tawhid, women's experiences, and a Qur'anic hermeneutical approach. Equality is not understood merely as the equal distribution of roles between men and women, but as substantive justice grounded in the universal values of the Qur'an. Through a reading that takes into account the text as a whole, social context, and women's experiences, Wadud critiques interpretations that place women in subordinate positions. This framework emphasizes ontological equality, mutuality in relationships, and ethical responsibility between men and women. Thus, Wadud's thought makes an important contribution to the development of a more inclusive and gender-responsive approach to Qur'anic interpretation.

From an epistemological and methodological perspective, Wadud's thought has both strengths and limitations. The recognition of women's experiences expands the sources of knowledge in Qur'anic interpretation and serves as a corrective to the dominance of men's experiences within the exegetical tradition. However, positioning experience as an important element in the construction of meaning also creates the possibility of subjectivity and interpretive relativity. Moreover, the relationship among text, context, and experience has not been formulated through a fully systematic interpretive procedure, which may result in different interpretations when the framework is applied to different issues. The normative tendency to make equality an orientation of interpretation also requires critical examination so that conclusions are not predetermined before the interpretive process takes place. Therefore, Wadud's thought is more appropriately regarded as an important contribution that remains open to further development and critical examination.

This study has limitations because it focuses on reconstructing Amina Wadud's thought through a literature-based study and does not examine it more extensively in comparison with other Muslim feminist thinkers or test it within a specific social context. These limitations provide opportunities for future research to develop comparative studies, particularly with Muslim feminist thinkers in the Indonesian context, as well as to examine the application of Wadud's epistemological and methodological framework to more specific gender-related issues. For the development of Qur'anic studies and

Islamic discourse, this study demonstrates the importance of bringing text, context, and experience into a balanced relationship so that gender interpretation is not only responsive to women's concerns but also grounded in a consistent methodological framework that can be academically justified. These findings may also serve as a consideration for the development of education, family law, and social policies oriented toward justice and equality.

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