

Ideological Contestation on the Production of Gender Exegesis within Institutional Quranic Interpretation in Indonesia

Kontestasi Ideologis atas Produksi Tafsir Gender dalam Tafsir Institusional di Indonesia

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Abstract

The interpretation of women's roles in institutional Quranic exegesis in Indonesia is shaped by various factors, including ideological conflicts, social and cultural frameworks, and the influence of political authorities overseeing these interpretations. These influences may lead to a subjective rather than an objective understanding of religious texts. Therefore, it becomes crucial to investigate the ideological forces shaping these interpretations. This research utilizes a descriptive-analytical method based on Michel Foucault's theory of power relations to examine the ideological underpinnings of Quranic exegesis. The study explores how societal and state ideologies impact the interpretation of women's leadership in institutional Quranic exegesis, specifically in the Thematic Quranic Exegesis produced by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs. The findings reveal that interpretations are shaped by perceptions of gender roles, societal beliefs about women's capacities, patriarchal cultural norms, and political motivations. Significantly, the exegesis in question was formulated in the context of the 2009 presidential election, where both male and female candidates were competing. The study concludes that such interpretations are deeply intertwined with social contexts and political ideologies, particularly regarding gender-related issues. The research's main contribution is its analysis of the ideological and societal structures influencing gender-focused Quranic interpretations in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Quranic exegesis; Ideological contestation; Power-knowledge relations; Women's leadership.*

Abstrak

Isu edisi kritis Al-Qur'an kembali digaungkan setelah sebelumnya gagal diwujudkan oleh Bergstresser (w. 1351 H/1933 M), Jeffery (w. 1378 H/1959 M), Pretzl (w. 1360 H/1941 M), yang didukung oleh Fischer (w. 1369 H/1949 M), Baumstark (w. 1368 H/1948M), Ritter (w. 1391 H/1971 M) and Kahle (w. 1384 H/1964 M). Dalam konferensi Universitas Notre Dame pada bulan April 2005, Gabriel Said Reynolds menawarkan konsep *Menuju Bacaan Baru Al-Qur'an* yang mengkaji penelitian kritis terhadap teks Al-Qur'an sebagai keberlanjutan dari upaya Jeffery dan bergstresser setelah ditemukan berbagai manuskrip sebagai bahan penelitian Al-Qur'an. Cendekiawan muslim yang juga menggunakan istilah Al-Qur'an Edisi Kritis adalah Taufik Adnan Amal. Dengan menggunakan penelitian kualitatif pendekatan historis, penulis mengkaji gagasan Al-Qur'an Edisi Kritis (QEK) versi Bergstresser, Jeffery dan Pretzl dengan versi Taufik Adnan Amal untuk mengetahui apakah keduanya sama ataukah berbeda. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga bertujuan untuk menjawab kemungkinan adanya Al-Qur'an Edisi Kritis masa kini yang dimaksudkan keduanya. Meski menggunakan istilah yang sama, QEK keduanya tidak hanya memiliki persamaan, tetapi juga memiliki perbedaan. Perbedaan yang paling mencolok adalah bahwa revisionis bertujuan untuk menampilkan beberapa alternatif *qirā'at* Al-Qur'an sedangkan Taufik Adnan Amal menghendaki satu bacaan yang terbaik. Adapun kemungkinan



terjadinya teknis *ikhtiyâr* pada masa kini untuk memunculkan QEK harus mempertimbangkan banyak hal dan mengikuti syarat-syarat yang berlaku. Salah satunya jika masih dimungkinkan terdapat bacaan *maqbul* di luar sepuluh. Qari yang melakukan *ikhtiyâr* juga harus memiliki sanad tersambung hingga Rasulullah saw.

Kata kunci: *Tafsir; Kontestasi ideologis; Relasi kuasa-pengetahuan; Kepemimpinan perempuan.*

Introduction

Cultural products such as subjective individual interests, social, political and intellectual backgrounds all interact and have had an impact on Quranic exegesis.¹ Taji Farouki, notes how contemporary exegetes interpret the Qur'an utilizing methodological approaches typically affected by their ideological and social circumstances.² As other prior scholars have suggested, Mahmoud Ayoub asserts that various ideologies could possibly have a substantial impact on how the Quran is interpreted. The broader worldviews of the exegetes are extensively reflected in the interpretation, for example, in interpretations inspired by reformism, Sufism, or fundamentalism. Based on this notion, Quranic exegesis serves dual purpose of advancing certain ideological and social goals in addition to being an intellectual process.³ Furthermore, Patricia Crone discloses how theological schools in the Abbasid era, such as the Mu'tazilite school, exerted significant influence on the exegetical works of that period.⁴ Moreover, connection between secular nationalism and Islamism⁵ including feminism and modernity⁶ relatively influence the Quranic interpretation. This indicates that Quranic exegesis is not merely an interpretation of religious text; rather a reflection of complex ideological, social, and political narratives.⁷ In general, the work of Quranic interpretation reflects the exegetes' cultural

1 Muhammad Ahmad Ibrahim AlJahsh, "Influence Of Cultural Context On Qur'anic Translation: Analyzing Social Justice Interpretations In Sura An-Nisâ' Verse 58," *Ma'âlim al-Qur'ân wa al-Sunnah* 19, no. 2 (2023): 366–387.

2 Suha Taji Farouki, *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 5.

3 Ayoub Mahmoud, *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters*, Volume 1. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1984), 4.

4 Patricia Crone, *Islamic Reformism and the Secular State: The Mu'tazila in the Early Abbasid Caliphate* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2008), 78.

5 Ismail Albayrak and Hakan Coruh, eds., *New Approaches to Qur'anic Hermeneutics in the Muslim World*, Special Is. (Basel, Switzerland: Religions, 2023), 1–166.

6 M. A. Muqtedar Khan, "Islam as Identity: After a Century of Islamic Revivalism", in *Islam and Good Governance: A Political Philosophy of Ihsan* (Newark, USA: SpringerLink, 2019), 43–76.

7 Johanna Pink, *Tradition and Ideology in Contemporary Sunnite Qur'anic Exegesis: Qur'anic Commentaries from the Arab World, Turkey and Indonesia and Their Interpretation of Q 5:51*, *Welt Des Islams*, vol. 50, 2010, 3–59.

subjectivity besides meant to promote specific agendas toward society.⁸

Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, naturally contributes to the production of Quranic exegeses, both from individual citizens⁹ and government institutions¹⁰, the latter known as institutional exegesis. However, if we reflect on the results of research conducted by Fadhli Lukman entitled *Conflicting Interests in the Creation of a State-Authorised Translation: Comparing the Saudi and Indonesian Editions of the Qur'ān and its Translations*, the journey of Qur'ānic translation in Indonesia reflects the complex dynamics between state power, political interests, and religious discourse. Beginning in 1960 as an official state project, the Qur'ān translation (QT) became an arena for contestation of various interests. Initially, the QT was an attempt by the Indonesian government to accommodate Muslim interests and promote the national language. It reflected a strategy of state power to control religious discourse through the production of official knowledge. However, the translation process was also influenced by Indonesia's deep-rooted Sunni exegetical tradition. Thus, the journey of Qur'ānic translation in Indonesia through the QT illustrates how power is produced and reproduced through the practices of translation, interpretation and dissemination of sacred texts, involving complex negotiations between local and global interests, as well as between state authority and religious authority. This can certainly also happen with institutional interpretations produced by the Indonesian government.¹¹ Borrowing Foucault's terminology¹², the interests of those in power sometimes unconsciously infiltrate the process of Quranic interpretation or exegesis. On one hand, the Indonesian Government's agenda in producing Quranic exegetical works demonstrates its role in disseminating Islamic values to society.¹³ On the other hand, this agenda also represents an effort to regulate the social conduct of Indonesian Muslims pertaining to national political affairs, as well as to maintain the accuracy of religious textual understanding and prevent any form of misuse.¹⁴

8 Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 103.

9 H Helmiati, "The Development of Quranic Exegesis In Indonesia: A General Typology," *Asia-Pacific Journal on Religion and Society* 2, no. 1 (2018): 29–38.

10 Aqdi Rofiq Asnawi, Syukron Affani, and Zaenatul Hakamah, "Scientific Qur'anic Exegesis in Indonesia," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 6, no. 4 (2021): 25–46.

11 Fadhli Lukman, "Conflicting Interests in the Creation of a State-Authorised Translation: Comparing the Saudi and Indonesian Editions of Al-Qur'an Dan Terjemahnya," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 26, no. 1 (2024): 38–62.

12 M Foucault, *Kekuasaan/Pengetahuan* (Brighton: UK: Harvester Press, 1980).

13 H. M Federspiel, *Kajian Al-Qur'an Di Indonesia Dari Mahmud Yunus Hingga Quraish Shibab* (Bandung: Mizan, 1996), 143.

14 Tim Penyusun, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Tematik : Kedudukan Dan Peran Perempuan, Departemen Agama RI*,

The involvement of the Indonesian Government in the compilation of Quranic exegetical works raises issues and questions related to various interests.¹⁵ This involvement indicates a power relationship between the Indonesian Government and the resulting exegesis, particularly the Thematic Quranic Exegesis of Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs on the position and role of women.¹⁶ The gender themes can be understood as a form of recognition of women's existence as human beings and as a medium for propagating the importance of gender equality in social, economic, educational, and health spheres in this modern era, as written in the introductory chapter of the thematic exegesis. But on the other hand, there are efforts to control women's rights in leadership, especially state leadership. As written in the interpretation when interpreting QS. Al-Naml: 23-24:

“penulis berpendapat bahwa dilihat dari tugas dan tanggungjawabnya yang sangat besar, kepala negara atau kepala daerah tidak sepatutnya diberikan kepada kaum perempuan. Seorang kepala negara/kepala daerah harus tahu betul permasalahan yang dihadapi oleh masyarakat dan bangsanya. Ia harus sering melakukan inkognito, memeriksa kondisi dan keadaan masyarakatnya, walaupun dilakukan malam hari.”¹⁷

This could be due to the strong patriarchal culture in Indonesia. Patriarchal culture still thrives in Indonesian society, despite efforts to fight for gender equality.¹⁸ This culture can be found in various aspects of life, from the economy, education, politics, to the law. As a result, various social problems arise that shackle women's freedom and violate the rights that women should have.¹⁹ This reality affirms the potential influence of the ideology of those in power, in this case, the Indonesian government, on exegetical products in Indonesia, especially the thematic interpretations produced by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia.

This research examines how gender equality and power-knowledge relations are constructed in the book “Thematic Quranic Exegesis of Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs on The Position and Role of Women” produced by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Using descriptive-analytic method with Michel Foucault's

2009, 9.

15 Dede Rodin et al., “The State and the Holy Quran: Politics of the Quran Translation By the Ministry of Religious Affairs,” *Ilmu Ushuluddin* 8, no. 1 (2021): 57–80.

16 Tim Penyusun, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Tematik : Kedudukan Dan Peran Perempuan*, 1–410.

17 Ibid., 71.

18 I Aidar Idrus, A Anurlia, and S Fadiyah, “Analysis of the Impact of Patriarchal Culture on the Role of Women in Politics and Governance,” *JSIP: Jurnal Studi Ilmu Pemerintahan* 04, no. 1 (2023): 2023.

19 Ade Irma Sakina and Dessy Hasanah Siti A., “Menyoroti Budaya Patriarki Di Indonesia,” *Share : Social Work Journal* 7, no. 1 (2017): 71.

knowledge power relations approach, this research tries to answer how power produces knowledge, discourse and subjects in an effort to control each individual. This research aims to describe the tafsir discourse that is constructed as a norm or principle in attitudes and behaviors that are considered capable of equalizing the relations between men and women in various forms and contexts. At the same time, this research also tries to show the influence of the ruler's ideology on the resulting tafsir products.

Government Influence on Quranic Exegesis and Translation

The history of the development of Quranic exegesis and translation production by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia reflects the government's efforts to provide Indonesians with a comprehensive and accessible understanding of the Quran.²⁰ This journey dates back to the beginning of independence, with an initial focus on translating the Quran into Indonesian.²¹ The project was part of the government's efforts to fulfill the spiritual needs of the people while strengthening national identity through language.²² The project also involved a team of exegetes, scholars, and academics from various scholarly backgrounds.²³ The main outcome of the project was the publication of "*Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*", a comprehensive work that included a translation and complete tafsir of the Quran. This work has since become an important reference for Indonesians in their efforts to understand their holy book.

In the Quranic exegesis and translation production project by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, several government interests can be identified. One of the main interests is the government's effort to provide a comprehensive and accessible understanding of the Quran for the Indonesian people.²⁴ This aligns with the government's role in providing public services, including in religious

20 Fadhli Lukman, *The Official Indonesian Qur'an Translation: The History and Politics of Al-Qur'an Dan Terjemahnya*, *The Official Indonesian Qur'an Translation: The History and Politics of Al-Qur'an Dan Terjemahnya*, 2022, 11.

21 Hamam Faizin, "Sejarah Dan Karakteristik Al-Qur'an Dan Terjemahnya Kementerian Agama RI," *Subuf* 14, no. 2 (2021): 283–311.

22 Muhammad Esa Prasastia Amnesti, "KARAKTERISTIK PENAFSIRAN AL-QUR'AN DAN TAFSIRNYA KARYA TIM KEMENTERIAN AGAMA REPUBLIK INDONESIA (Characteristics of The Qur'an Interpretation and Their Team Work of The Ministry of Religion of The Republic of Indonesia) Muhammad Esa Prasastia Amnesti" 1, no. 2 (2021): 97.

23 *Ibid.*, 99–100.

24 Lukman, "Conflicting Interests in the Creation of a State-Authorised Translation: Comparing the Saudi and Indonesian Editions of Al-Qur'an Dan Terjemahnya."

aspects.²⁵ The project also reflects the government's effort to maintain socio-religious stability by providing moderate and inclusive interpretations. By balancing various interpretive perspectives in the Islamic tradition, the government seeks to reduce potential conflicts that may arise from differences in interpretation. Additionally, this project can be seen as part of the government's strategy in controlling religious discourse in Indonesia.²⁶ As expressed by Islah Gusmian, by producing official tafsir, the government plays a role in shaping religious understanding that is in line with national interests.²⁷

The government's interest in the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Quranic exegesis project can also be seen in several concrete aspects. One striking example is how this official exegesis is used to strengthen state ideology and maintain socio-political stability. According to Moch Nur Ichwan in his article 'State, Scripture, and Politics: The Official Translation of the Quran in Indonesia' (2009), the Ministry of Religious Affairs' interpretation of the Quran often reflects government policy and state ideology.²⁸ For example, this can be seen in the interpretation of Surah Al-Maidah verse 51, which is often the subject of political debate in Indonesia. The Ministry of Religious Affairs' interpretations tend to provide moderate and contextualized interpretations, avoiding interpretations that could trigger political or social conflict.²⁹ This shows how official interpretations are used as instruments to maintain socio-political stability.

Furthermore, the choice of words and terms in the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Quranic translations and exegesis also reflects government interests. For instance, the use of the term 'musyawarah' in translating the word 'shura' in the Quran is in line with the concept of Pancasila democracy promoted by the Indonesian government.³⁰ In the context of national development, official exegesis is also often used to support government programs. For example, in the interpretation of verses relating to the environment, the Ministry of Religious Affairs' tafsir tends to emphasize the importance of nature conservation, which aligns with the government's

25 Meri Enita Puspita Sari, "PERAN PEMERINTAH DALAM PENYEDIAAN AKSES PELAYANAN PUBLIK" 2, no. 1 (2018): 1–12.

26 Achmad Yafik Mursyid, "KEBIJAKAN POLITIK DALAM TAFSIR NEGARA : STUDI ATAS AYAT-AYAT FIQH DALAM TAFSIR," *Al-Bayan: Jurnal Studi Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir* 6, no. 2 (2021): 117–128.

27 Islah Gusmian, *Tafsir Al-Quran Dan Kekuasaan Di Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Salwa, 2021), 272.

28 Moch Nur Ichwan, "Negara, Kitab Suci Dan Politik: Terjemah Resmi Al-Qur'an Di Indonesia," in *SADUR: Sejarah Terjemahan Di Indonesia Dan Malaysia*, ed. Henri Chambert Loir (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2009), 417–433.

29 Departemen Agama RI, *Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsirnya* (Jakarta: Widya Cahaya, 2011), vols. 2, 423–428.

30 *Ibid.*, vols. 25, 17.

sustainable development policy.³¹ However, it is important to note that despite the government's interest in this project, efforts to maintain objectivity and openness to different perspectives of tafsir were made. This is reflected in the periodic revisions and updates made to the official tafsir, as well as the involvement of various experts and scholars in the drafting process.³²

Thus, it can be concluded that the government's interest in the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Quranic exegesis project is a complex phenomenon. On one hand, the project reflects the government's efforts to provide a moderate and contextualized understanding of the Quran for Indonesian society. On the other hand, the project can also be seen as an instrument to strengthen state ideology and maintain socio-political stability. The balance between these two aspects continues to be a challenge in the development of Quranic exegesis in Indonesia.

Empowering Women: Insights from Thematic Quranic Exegesis by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs

The Thematic Quran Exegesis of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia is a tafsir using the thematic method produced by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. The writing of this exegesis involves a team consisting of experts in exegesis, hadith, and various Islamic disciplines who have competence in their fields. The team is chaired by Dr. H. Muchlis M Hanafi, MA, and supported by the Minister of Religious Affairs as the supervisor, as well as Prof. Dr. H. Quraish Shihab, MA, Prof. Dr. H. Nasaruddin Umar, MA, Prof. Dr. H. Didin Hafidhuddin, MSc, and Dr. H. Ahsin Sakho Muhammad, MA.³³ This thematic exegesis method is considered more relevant and practical in facing the challenges of the times because it can present the teachings of the Quran with a systematic approach that is easily understood by the wider community. The thematic exegesis approach focuses on collecting verses related to a particular theme, then analyzing them in a broader social and cultural context.³⁴

One of the themes raised is 'The Position and Role of Women,' which was published in 2009 and covers 405 pages. In this theme, the exegesis explores how the Quran views the position of women and their contribution in various aspects of life, both in the realm of family and society.³⁵ The process of preparing this exegesis

31 Ibid., vols. 7, 513.

32 Ibid., vols. 1, xx.

33 Tim Penyusun, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Tematik : Kedudukan Dan Peran Perempuan*, xix-xx.

34 Ibid., xxii.

35 Ibid., xviii.

begins with determining the problem to be discussed, collecting relevant verses, and compiling them based on the historical context and *asbab nuzul* (the cause of the verse's revelation). Additionally, the interpretation is complemented by the study of *hadith* and the views of scholars to provide a more comprehensive understanding.³⁶ Thus, this exegesis not only serves as reading material but also as a guide for Muslims to understand the rights and roles of women in accordance with the teachings of the Quran.

The purpose of this thematic exegesis is to improve people's understanding of women's rights in Islam, empower women, and promote gender equality.³⁷ With a better understanding, women are expected to participate more actively in social and economic life, in accordance with the values taught in the Quran. Overall, the writing and production of thematic Quranic exegesis by the Ministry of Religious Affairs is an important step in providing relevant and applicable Islamic literature, which can answer the challenges of the times and promote equitable social development.

Building Gender Equality in Thematic Quranic Exegesis by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs

1. Equality in Work Rights and Occupational Protections

Regarding the right to work, the Thematic Quranic Exegesis, through the theme "Women and Employment", constructs a knowledge that women have the same opportunities as men to improve the economy. There is no prohibition for women to work even though they are supported by men, even if the absence of male members or if there are male members who are unable to meet the family's primary needs, is a strong reason for women to be more productive in meeting their daily needs.³⁸ Every individual, both women and men, must be freed from poverty and pushed towards economic independence.³⁹ In this context, higher education is essential in improving women's economy. Given that so far, low education is suspected to be a factor causing economic inequality between women and men.⁴⁰

Regarding labour rights, Thematic Quranic Exegesis builds knowledge that women have equal rights to men to enter various professions according to their expertise; even if they are capable and meet the criteria as top leaders, they may become prime ministers or heads of state. Because, in essence, the Islamic religion

³⁶ Ibid., xxx.

³⁷ Ibid., 1–2.

³⁸ Ibid., 138.

³⁹ Ibid., 139.

⁴⁰ R.A Wienclaw, *Gender Roles and Equality* (California: Salem Press, 2011), 129.

does not hinder them as long as they still pay attention to the laws or regulations Islam has established in their duties. However, the involvement of women in the world of work does not necessarily separate them from family matters. Women must not neglect their household affairs and duties, women must obtain permission or approval from their husbands, and the work does not bring negative things to themselves and their religion.⁴¹

The construction built on, on the one hand, does provide access for women to actualize themselves with a career. However, on the other hand, women are also burdened with two responsibilities at once (family and work) in seizing opportunities, and at the same time, according to Subhan, they are required to look after harmony in living life at home and work.⁴²

Thematic Quranic Exegesis builds a discourse that links working women with higher education, economic independence, and talent development. In this context, there has been a shift in the mindset that previously placed women only as mothers with the task of raising children and managing the household shifted to a mindset that places women as breadwinners.

2. *Equality of Economic Autonomy Rights*

Property rights are highly regarded in Islam. Thematic Quranic Exegesis builds the view that women have 2 (two) ownership rights: private ownership (individual) and collective ownership. Private ownership is all ownership rights of women obtained from inheritance from their families who inherit (QS. an-Nisa'[4]: 11), the results of efforts for his work, and unique gifts, such as dowry (dowry) (QS. an-Nisa'[4]: 4). Meanwhile, collective or joint ownership, namely ownership between the wife and her husband, which is obtained during the marriage.⁴³ According to the Engineer, as understood by Rohmaniyah, women benefit more because they have more property rights than men.⁴⁴ Domination can even happen the other way around; women dominate men because of their property ownership.⁴⁵

Thematic Quranic Exegesis with the discourse on economic empowerment builds knowledge about the legitimacy of the Qur'an for women to obtain economic rights that cannot be violated by men, including rights to dowry, inheritance rights, maintenance rights, and rights to cooperate. Power relations are behind the discourse

41 Tim Penyusun, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Tematik : Kedudukan Dan Peran Perempuan*, 47-73.

42 Z. Subhan, *Tafsir Kebencian: Studi Bias Gender Dalam Tafsir Al-Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1999), 164.

43 Tim Penyusun, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Tematik : Kedudukan Dan Peran Perempuan*, 258-276.

44 I Rohmaniyah, *Konstruksi Patriarki Dalam Tafsir Agama: Sebuah Jalan Panjang* (Yogyakarta: Diandra Pustaka Indonesia, 2014), 118.

45 S. R. Dzuhayatin, *Rezim Gender Muhammadiyah: Kontestasi Gender, Identitas, Dan Eksistensi* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2015), 135.

on women's economic empowerment. This relationship, borrowing Foucault's opinion, has created a disciplinary mechanism that directs men and women towards productivity.⁴⁶ This case can be seen from the directives on the interpretation that "men and women should be equally encouraged to be economically independent so that Muslim families do not easily fall into poverty and then are driven to disbelief".⁴⁷ This case, of course, necessitates a shift in knowledge in the division of the role of earning a living which was previously in the hands of men but with the discourse that has emerged causing a shift in the knowledge of the role of earning a living is on both sides, both men and women. In Foucault's view, as revealed by Mudhoffir, knowledge experiences a shift from one form of knowledge to another, which is authoritative at a particular time as a discourse regime.⁴⁸

3. *Equality of Rights in Higher Education*

Regarding the right to education, the Thematic Quranic Exegesis builds the view that women are entitled to priority rights to higher education amidst the tendency of society to ignore this right.⁴⁹ The low number of women who occupy strategic positions in public policy-making and the need for female professionals are strong reasons why women have the right to higher education, even from the cradle to the end of their lives.⁵⁰

Thematic Quranic Exegesis builds views based on Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 30-31 that for the success of the task of the human caliphate on earth, it is not only a monopoly for men but also for women. Allah SWT bestows the potential for men and women to know and understand everything beneficial to their lives.⁵¹

Higher education can determine the mindset, attitude and behaviour of women. Through higher education, women are expected to respond more to environmental situations.⁵² Likewise, according to Jawad, women can develop their intellect, broaden their views, cultivate their talents, utilize their potential to benefit themselves and their society and play an active role in various fields of social, economic and political development.⁵³

46 M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (England: Penguin Books, 1977), 141.

47 Tim Penyusun, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Tematik : Kedudukan Dan Peran Perempuan*, 136.

48 Abdil Mughis Mudhoffir, "Teori Kekuasaan Michel Foucault: Tantangan Bagi Sosiologi Politik, *MASYARAKAT: Jurnal Sosiologi* 18, no. 1 (2013): 181.

49 Tim Penyusun, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Tematik : Kedudukan Dan Peran Perempuan*, 262.

50 H. A Jawad, *The Rights of Women in Islam: An Authentic Approach* (New York: ST. Martin's Press, INC, 1998), 20.

51 Tim Penyusun, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Tematik : Kedudukan Dan Peran Perempuan*, 21-25.

52 S. M Mulia, *Muslimah Reformis: Perempuan Pembaru Keagamaan* (Bandung: Mizan, 2005), 240.

53 Jawad, *The Rights of Women in Islam: An Authentic Approach*, 20-21.

4. *Equality of Rights to a Healthy Life*

Equal rights to a healthy life can be traced through equal reproductive rights, equal rights to exercise and equal rights to dress.⁵⁴ Reproduction is essential for men and women to maintain the continuity of human life.⁵⁵ Thematic Quranic Exegesis builds a view of equality of reproductive health rights for all sexes. Women's health must be prioritized based on its primary function to preserve human life through reproduction. Women's health must be protected in a legal way, namely by marriage, as an effort to protect women's reproductive organs from sexual relations outside of marriage. Women also have the right to protect themselves from genitals that may be infected with the virus due to free sexual intercourse.⁵⁶

Interpreting the Thematic Quranic Exegesis also builds knowledge about reproductive health rights for women. Women have the right to receive social security for the fulfilment of women's primary needs such as pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding; destitute women; women have the right to have access to know the ins and outs of women's health and how to take care of it; women have the right to easy access to reach experts, adequate birthing facilities and infrastructure, especially if there are abnormalities in the womb; women are entitled to leave for pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding for women, especially for those who are the economic support of the family.⁵⁷

Interpretation of the Thematic Quranic Exegesis shows its contribution to fighting for reproductive health rights. In this context, this interpretation becomes an instrument for conveying reproductive health rights, especially for women, which are sometimes neglected. On the other hand, the discourse on equality of reproductive health rights that was built has become a counter ideology for the condition of women tangled up in the problem of gender discrimination.⁵⁸

Thematic Quranic Exegesis gives authority to women so that they can equalize themselves with men in paying attention to the condition of their reproductive function so that they are not ignored.⁵⁹ In this context, concrete solutions are

54 Amanda McMahan, Sarah Vines, and Keenan Jones, "Equitable Access to Health: Integrating Reproductive Rights, Physical Activity, and Dress Freedom," *Journal of Health Equity* 1, no. 2 (2018): 25–38.

55 Sarah Combellick-Bidney, "Reproductive Rights as Human Rights: Stories from Advocates in Brazil, India and South Africa," *The International Journal of Human Rights* 21, no. 7 (2017): 800–822.

56 Tim Penyusun, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Tematik : Kedudukan Dan Peran Perempuan*, 191–192.

57 Ibid., 203.

58 Rosalind P. Petchesky, "Gender Equality and Reproductive Health: The Role of Social Movements," *Reproductive Health Matters* 13, no. 25 (2005): 13–22.

59 Tim Penyusun, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Tematik : Kedudukan Dan Peran Perempuan*, 203.

discussed by maximizing women's empowerment in the health sector. From here, health equality gave birth to views on the importance of health for men and women. Health equality also can create the effect of power demanding other health facilities, supporting the reproductive health rights of men and women.⁶⁰

Sports significantly contribute to the body's health to stay healthy and fit for both men and women. Thematic Quranic Exegesis builds the view that women and men have the same opportunity to be active in sports regardless of the branch. Nevertheless, religious norms related to the sportswear worn and the type of sport one is interested in must still be considered when engaging in sports.⁶¹

5. *Equality of Leadership Rights*

The interpretation of women's leadership often clashes with the interpretation of Q.S. an-Nisa'[4]: 34. In interpreting this verse, most classical scholars often provide interpretations that place women in a lower position than men. According to Syamsuddin, an obvious interpretation of gender bias, for example, is found in the interpretation of Ibn Katsir, which places men at the peak of superiority so that leaders, officials, judges, educators and the degree of prophethood are only possessed by men.⁶²

Al-Tabari criticizes that male leadership over women is not absolute because it only applies as long as Allah orders it. The primacy of men over women is also functional because it is caused by the livelihood and work done by husbands for their wives.⁶³ Al-Qurthubi said even more firmly that if the husband cannot provide for the woman, then he has no right to family leadership, and the wife has the right to demand an annulment of the marriage because the purpose of marriage is deemed incapable of being achieved.⁶⁴

In this context, the Thematic Quranic Exegesis agrees with the opinion of Jawad Mugmiyah in Tafsir al-Kasyif, which emphasizes that the verse does not create differences that women consider to be lower than men but only addresses men as husbands and women. Women as wives are the pillars of life; neither can live without the other, and both complement each other. This verse is only intended for the husband's leadership, leading his wife. Not to be a leader in general and not

60 Mulia, *Muslimah Reformis: Perempuan Pembaru Keagamaan*, 236.

61 Tim Penyusun, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Tematik: Kedudukan Dan Peran Perempuan*, 150.

62 Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Tafsir Studies* (Yogyakarta: eLSAQ Press, 2009), 52.

63 Muhammad bin Jarir bin Yazid Abu Ja'far At-Thabari, *Jami'ul Bayan Fi Takwilil-Qur'an* (Riyadh: Mu'assasah al-Risalah, 2000), 59.

64 Abu 'Abdillah Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Anshariyyi Al-Qurthubi, *Al-Jami' Li Ahkam Al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikri, 1999), 161.

to be a dictatorial ruler.⁶⁵ In fact, there are women who have succeeded in becoming leaders in general such as pesantren and so on.⁶⁶

Thematic Quranic Exegesis constructs interpretations that give rise to knowledge about women's leadership as heads of state can work well if the government system is based on deliberation, wherein carrying out their duties as leaders are assisted by experts in their respective fields (ministers), and supported by advanced tools.⁶⁷ This understanding is in line with Mulia's view, which emphasizes that women's involvement in politics is not intended to bring down, degrade, or seize power from men's hands, but rather so that they can become men's equal partners.⁶⁸ In this context, slowly, the mufassir, with the product of his interpretation, will establish himself in the name of scholarship so that the compelled subject (*mufassir*) seems to have disappeared behind the scientific criteria; all that remains is the belief that what is supported, defended, and obeyed is not the mufassir or the product: interpretation but the teachings of the Qur'an or religious teachings.⁶⁹

Thematic Quranic Exegesis also constructs interpretation by regulating patterns of interaction in society. Gender relations between women and men are built equally in carrying out their social tasks, namely helping each other, complementing each other, helping each other, and synergizing with one another in order to achieve shared prosperity. In this context, it will be seen how the built discourse plays an essential role in regulating people's lifestyles.

Thematic Quranic Exegesis constructs a pattern of women's leadership by regulating the pattern of women's leadership in society and determining in which areas women's leadership should be applied. In this context, this interpretation can marginalize gender roles in society.⁷⁰ From this point of view, according to Foucault's perspective, interpretation has usable power that can regulate the pattern of women's leadership in society according to their natural abilities.⁷¹

Thematic Quranic Exegesis conducts disciplinary and normalization in the form of directing women's attitudes and behaviour. If understood from the editorial interpretation, the disciplinary aims to increase the productivity of women's role in

65 Tim Penyusun, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Tematik : Kedudukan Dan Peran Perempuan*, 192–200.

66 Ummiyatul Labibah, Imam Taufiq, and Yasir Alimi, "Living Qur'an of Pesantren Women: A Manifestation of Surat An-Nisa 34 in A Woman Leadership Role of Nyai Munjidah Wahab," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 23, no. 1 (2022): 89–110.

67 Tim Penyusun, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Tematik : Kedudukan Dan Peran Perempuan*, 113.

68 Mulia, *Muslimah Reformis: Perempuan Pembaru Keagamaan*, 275.

69 Christina Siwi Handayani, *Subyek Yang Dikekang* (Jakarta: Komunitas Salihara, 2013), 10–11.

70 Tim Penyusun, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Tematik : Kedudukan Dan Peran Perempuan*, 46.

71 M. Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), 51.

the social field as men. This case can be found when interpreting QS.at-Taubah [9]: 71.

“.....dalam tugas sosial kemasyarakatan (amar makruf nahi munkar) kaum perempuan dan laki- laki harus saling membantu, saling melengkapi dan saling ber-*ta’awun* (tolong-menolong), serta bersinergi antara satu dengan yang lainnya. Bersinergi dan ber-*ta’awun* dalam membangun masyarakat yang sejahtera atas dasar nilai-nilai ajaran Islam, dalam berbagai bidang kehidupan, seperti sosial ekonomi, pendidikan, budaya dan lain sebagainya”.⁷²

Thematic Quranic Exegesis also directs gender behaviour and restrictions when women are active in public spaces, so it becomes self-control for women in conditions of gender non-conscious compliance. Interests are present in it and build various relationships to regulate, direct, and position women to be equal to men. In this context, according to the author, the mufassir is between two positions, first the mufassir is directed to be in line with the will and interests of the state in realizing a safe, peaceful and peaceful Indonesia, as recorded in the Speech of the Minister of Religion and the Research and Development and Training Agency of the Indonesian Ministry of Religion on the Publishing of Thematic Quranic Exegesis;⁷³ and Second, the *Mufassir*, consciously or not—to borrow Foucault’s term—has been dominated, hegemony, controlled by a discourse on the Government’s agenda, henceforth the mufassir also through his interpretive discourse has dominated, hegemony, controlled and directed the political behaviour of each individual to comply with the product of his interpretation.

Gender Dynamics in Indonesia’s Thematic Quranic Exegesis and Its Government Influence

The Thematic Quranic Exegesis, compiled by the exegesis team of the Institute for Qur’anic Manuscript Authentication, Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, presents gender-related themes including women’s empowerment, and women’s positions and roles.⁷⁴ These themes demonstrate the government’s particular attention to gender equality in Indonesia through Qur’anic exegesis. Examples of this are evident in the exegetes’ normalization of male-female relations concerning social ethics and dress codes. This is illustrated in interpretations that provide specific guidelines on the boundaries of interaction between men and

72 Tim Penyusun, *Tafsir Al-Qur’an Tematik : Kedudukan Dan Peran Perempuan*, 69.

73 Ibid., xi-xv.

74 Ibid., xviii.

omen in public spaces, such as the exegesis of Q.S. Al-Ahzab:59⁷⁵ regarding hijab which is interpreted not only as physical covering but also as social ethics, and the interpretation of Q.S. An-Nur:31 concerning aurat (intimate parts), which is construed not merely as body parts to be covered, but also as a symbol of dignity to be preserved by both men and women.⁷⁶ This reveals the government's control over Muslim life to align with Indonesia's development goals, while simultaneously serving as a form of panoptic control in guiding the understanding of religious texts by establishing standards deemed correct and proper, to prevent societal understanding from all forms of misuse and deviation. In this context, the most effective control is through the instrument of interpretive discourse constructed through religious institutions..⁷⁷ The Thematic Quranic Exegesis by the Institute for Qur'anic Manuscript Authentication can serve as the most effective instrument for constructing and normalizing the life of Indonesian Muslims.

The discourse of interpretation under the auspices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia has systematically marked the historical strategy of changing the relationship between power and knowledge. Power strategies give birth to a form of discourse that can regulate the relationship between power and society⁷⁸, such as prohibition and denial of behaviors deemed deviant, inconsistent with norms, not following nature, and other matters considered incapable of increasing productivity. In this context, power flows through every relationship and is inherent in the interpretation process itself. In such situations, exegetes are on the side that participates in the interpretation process to create discourse in accordance with the desires of its developers. Meanwhile, in Muslim society, both men and women become targets or victims who may benefit because the constructed gender equality discourse can elevate the position of one party that has not been treated equally, or conversely, be disadvantaged due to an interpretation process that does not champion egalitarianism in its exegesis.

The gender equality constructed in the Thematic Quranic Exegesis by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, as the entity possessing power in Indonesia, aims to ensure that Indonesian society follows or complies with it. Power is not entirely the property of the Government; rather, power is a strategy to control society through the interpretative discourse issued by the Ministry of

75 Ibid., 157.

76 Ibid., 161–162.

77 Handayani, *Subyek Yang Dikekang*, 16.

78 Isaac Ariail Reed, "Power: Relational, Discursive, and Performative Dimensions," *Sociological Theory* 31, no. 3 (2013): 193–218, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0735275113501792>.

Religious Affairs/Government of the Republic of Indonesia. Based on this, power and interpretative discourse are interrelated.⁷⁹ This discourse is regarded as scientific knowledge and subsequently viewed as essential truth after receiving legitimacy from the Government.

The interpretation of women's empowerment, position, and roles in the Thematic Quranic Exegesis demonstrates the magnitude of interests involved, both by the government as the authority and by the exegetes, while simultaneously, patriarchal culture has long been deeply rooted in Indonesian society.⁸⁰ This condition indicates that the institution of power (the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia) has a significant interest in regulating the life of Muslims to align with the Government's agenda in realizing a safe, peaceful, and prosperous Indonesia through religious teachings as articulated in the Thematic Quranic Exegesis. Various forms of rules and norms become strategic mechanisms in reinforcing the power of knowledge about the propriety of gender equality. With the established rules and norms, uniformity in societal behavior becomes more easily accessible while perpetuating norms and rules that are consciously perceived as religious teachings that must be practiced.⁸¹

Various power strategies are implemented to regulate societal life through interpretative knowledge. In this exegesis, for instance, the power-knowledge strategy produces truth by systematizing the female body, which is inseparable from biological and moral responsibilities. This biological responsibility is evident in the reinforcement of women's (wives') roles as biological partners of men (husbands), emphasizing the importance of harmonious and equal relationships in the household. In this interpretation, women are not only considered biological partners but also equal partners in building families and society. The exegesis highlights the complementary rights and responsibilities between husbands and wives, emphasizing the importance of cooperation and support in fulfilling their respective roles, as illustrated in the interpretation of Q.S. Al-Baqarah:187 regarding husband-wife relationships. This interpretation emphasizes the concept of *mu'asyarah bil ma'ruf* (good companionship) as the basis for equal and mutually respectful relations in the household.⁸² Conversely, moral responsibility is apparent in the systematization of the female body as the primary institution in the formation of a child's character, as found

79 Handayani, *Subyek Yang Dikekang*, 41.

80 Amina Wadud, "Reflections on Islamic Feminist Exegesis of the Qur'an," *Religions* 12, no. 7 (2021): 1–11.

81 Jaelyn L. Neo, "Dimensions of Religious Harmony as Constitutional Practice: Beyond State Control," in *German Law Journal*, vol. 20, 2019, 966–985.

82 Tim Penyusun, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Tematik : Kedudukan Dan Peran Perempuan*, 55.

in the interpretation of QS Luqman: 14-15.⁸³ This interpretation emphasizes that women, especially mothers, have a critical role in educating and shaping children's morality from an early age. Although women are allowed to participate in the public sphere, they are always burdened with biological and moral responsibilities under the pretext of producing superior (virtuous) generations. Through this systematization, organized power strategies have shaped the opinion of Indonesian women. It must be acknowledged, however, that this interpretation also regulates men (husbands) to be materially and morally responsible for creating harmonious families.

The gender construction in the Thematic Quranic Exegesis is produced through the interplay of interactions with religion, cultural nuances, and socio-economic and political conditions in Indonesia. The resulting construction involves issues of roles, status, and social relations, which then give rise to gender identities and roles that should be possessed by men and women in social relationships. These gender identities and roles can be observed in the norms, ethics, and values legitimized by the Thematic Quranic Exegesis. Several cases can be found in various interpretations that still discriminate against women's leadership and have even marginalized women by positioning men as more appropriate, knowledgeable, and ready to lead compared to women. In this context, power moves dynamically by creating unequal relations between men and women. Here, power is present in every difference to perpetuate the deeply rooted patriarchal dominance in Indonesia,[2] as exemplified in the following interpretation:

“ sesungguhnya akan lebih maslahat bagi suatu bangsa apabila kepala negara/kepala daerah seorang laki-laki yang adil, jujur, tegas, berpihak pada kepentingan masyarakat, visioner, memiliki keluasaan ilmu pengetahuan, sekaligus memiliki kesehatan jasmani yang utama Sehingga tugas dan kewajibannya sebagai pemimpin dapat dilaksanakan dengan baik dan optimal”⁸⁴

“Ayat ini bahkan seolah-olah menggambarkan ketidakberhasilan seorang raja perempuan (Ratu Bilqis) di dalam membangun nilai-nilai keimanan dan ketauhidan, dan tentu akan berdampak pada pembangunan di bidang sosial kemasyarakatan lainnya”⁸⁵

The two interpretations above demonstrate a dualism of thought in Qur'anic exegesis. On one hand, this interpretation provides equal opportunities and rights for women to work in any field, even to become top leaders. On the other hand, it also limits everything with contradictory statements. This exegesis exhibits ambivalence

83 Ibid., 207.

84 Ibid., 74.

85 Ibid., 71.

in its approach to gender issues. There appears to be an effort to interpret Qur'anic verses in a more inclusive and egalitarian manner. However, there remains a tendency to maintain deeply rooted patriarchal structures. The interpretation of women's leadership above opens opportunities for women to become leaders, but simultaneously continues to give preference to male leadership. Although this exegesis strives to be more progressive, there are still limitations in the perspective used. The gender analysis employed tends to be binary and heteronormative, failing to adequately consider the complexities of gender identity and sexuality in contemporary society. Indeed, the presence of this exegesis aims to promote gender equality, however, some interpretations still have the potential to reproduce inequality. For instance, the emphasis on women's domestic roles as mothers and wives, although balanced with recognition of public roles, may still perpetuate unequal gender role divisions.

Thus, the intellectual products of the exegetes are anchored in power-knowledge, which covertly shapes a textualist mindset as it only manages to produce interpretations that remain gender-biased. The concept of 'power-knowledge' proposed by Michel Foucault demonstrates that power and knowledge are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. In the context of Qur'anic interpretation, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia positions itself as an institution with religious authority in producing knowledge through the Thematic Quranic Exegesis. This knowledge is considered 'truth' because it originates from an official state institution. This interpretation provides legitimacy to government policies related to gender issues, and the interpretation of Qur'anic verses is used to support the national development agenda. Through this exegesis, the government can control the religious discourse on gender in society, and the resulting interpretations become standards considered 'correct' and 'good'. Ultimately, the application of these concepts in Qur'anic interpretation demonstrates how the interpretation of sacred texts is not merely a religious activity, but also a practice of power that shapes social reality. Exegesis becomes a tool to construct and normalize understandings of gender that align with the interests of those in power and specific socio-political conditions. This situation simultaneously affirms the influence of government ideology, through the exegetes, on the produced interpretative products.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the interpretation of women's leadership roles in institutional Quranic exegesis in Indonesia is deeply influenced by ideological factors. It shows how societal norms, patriarchal culture, and political motivations shape a gender-biased understanding of Quranic texts. Government institutions, particularly

the Thematic Quranic Exegesis by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, reflect these ideological forces. These interpretations advocate for gender equality in some areas but simultaneously reinforce traditional gender roles, especially in leadership. The research highlights that while women's leadership is acknowledged, it remains constrained by entrenched cultural and political biases.

The analysis reveals a tension between the push for gender equality and the persistence of patriarchal norms. The Thematic Quranic Exegesis recognizes the possibility of women in leadership roles but remains ambivalent, incorporating both modern egalitarian views and traditional patriarchal ideologies. This reflects the complex interaction of religion, culture, and politics in shaping views on women's roles in society. Additionally, the study illustrates how institutional exegesis can function as a tool for power structures, aligning religious interpretations with political agendas to maintain societal stability. Moreover, the constructed gender equality in this exegesis, while promoting women's rights to work, economic autonomy, and leadership, is still intertwined with power dynamics. The interpretations highlight men's roles as primary leaders and continue to prioritize women's responsibilities in the domestic sphere, demonstrating the persistence of discriminatory effects in gender-biased interpretations.

However, the study does not explore all aspects of ideological influence on Quranic exegesis. It leaves out the impact of individual exegetes' personal biases and the influence of global Islamic movements on local interpretations. Future research could examine the personal ideologies of exegetes or compare institutional interpretations across Muslim-majority countries. This study provides a foundation for further exploration of how power and ideology intersect with religious interpretation, particularly as these dynamics shift with evolving political or social conditions. Furthermore, it offers a critical lens to understand the balance between promoting gender equality and preserving traditional values within state-sanctioned religious texts, which will be essential for future discourse on religious interpretations in the modern era.

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Authors' contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Material preparation, data collection and analysis were performed by Bambang Husni Nugroho, Ahmad Mustaniruddin and Ahmad Taufik. The first draft of the manuscript was written by Bambang Husni Nugroho and all authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript

Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Conflicts of Interest

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