

Ḥūr and Qur'anic Beauty beyond Patriarchal Dualism in a Khalifah–Mizān Reading

Ḥūr dan Keindahan Qur'ani Melampaui Dualisme Patriarkal dalam Pembacaan Khalifah–Mizān

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Abstract

Despite extensive debates on ḥūr in Qur'anic exegesis, the imagery of paradise is still frequently read through patriarchal assumptions that reduce female figures to sensual reward and obscure the Qur'an's ethical and ecological horizon. This article aims to critique patriarchal readings of ḥūr as feminized paradisiacal reward and to propose a khalifah–mizān-guided eco-tafsir that reorients Qur'anic “beauty” toward gender and ecological justice. The study uses qualitative, text-based research through comparative hermeneutical tafsir analysis of Qur'anic passages on ḥūr and related ethical principles (khalifah and mizān), employing lexical–semantic analysis, close reading, and cross-tafsir comparison. The findings show that patriarchal interpretations are sustained by an androcentric dualism that separates humans from nature and legitimizes domination, whereas a khalifah–mizān framework enables a relational reading that affirms women's subjectivity and shifts beauty away from commodification toward ecological intimacy. Overall, this approach offers a text-grounded pathway for reading paradise imagery as an ethical horizon that integrates gender justice with ecological responsibility.

Keywords: Houris, ecofeminism, hermeneutic, patriarchy, Qur'anic exegesis

Abstrak

Meski perdebatan tentang ḥūr dalam tradisi tafsir al-Qur'an cukup luas, imaji surga masih kerap dibaca melalui asumsi patriarkal yang mereduksi figur perempuan menjadi ganjaran sensual serta menutupi horizon etis dan ekologis al-Qur'an. Artikel ini bertujuan mengkritik pembacaan patriarkal atas ḥūr sebagai ganjaran surga yang terfeminisasi dan menawarkan eco-tafsir berlandaskan khalifah–mizān untuk mengarahkan ulang makna “keindahan” Qur'ani menuju keadilan gender dan ekologis. Penelitian ini bersifat kualitatif berbasis teks melalui analisis tafsir hermeneutik-komparatif atas ayat-ayat tentang ḥūr dan prinsip etis terkait (khalifah dan mizān) dengan analisis leksikal–semantik, pembacaan dekat (*close reading*), dan perbandingan lintas-tafsir. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa tafsir patriarkal ditopang oleh dualisme androsentris yang memisahkan manusia dari alam dan melegitimasi dominasi, sedangkan kerangka khalifah–mizān memungkinkan pembacaan relasional yang menegaskan subjektivitas perempuan dan menggeser keindahan dari komodifikasi menuju keintiman ekologis. Secara umum, pendekatan ini menawarkan jalur pembacaan berbasis teks untuk memahami imaji surga sebagai horizon etis yang mengintegrasikan keadilan gender dengan tanggung jawab ekologis.

Kata Kunci: Bidadari, ekofeminisme, hermeneutika, patriarki, tafsir Al-Quran



Introduction

The verses about the houris *ḥūr'in* in the interpretation of the Quran are often read through a patriarchal lens that objectifies women and separates them from nature.¹ Women share the same fate as nature, namely, being made objects of men. One interpretation of the Quran by one of the tabi'in, Mujahid bin Jabar, interprets *ḥūr'in* as a woman who is very beautiful and makes hot when looked at.² The word *ḥūr'in* is also interpreted as a very beautiful woman who arouses desire. Another interpretation by at-Thobari and al-Qurtubi describes them as very white-skinned women,³ Imam Qurtubi adding that their calves are visible from under their clothes.⁴ In the meaning of other words such as *karwākib* in surah al-Naba' (78:33), is interpreted by Ibn Abbas as "A woman with big breasts."⁵ Then, in the context of the word, other interpretations, such as those by Ibn Kathīr, al-Rāzī,⁶ and al-Ālūsī,⁷ also emphasize physical sensuality, depicting women with plump, firm, and prominent bodies. This interpretation displays a symbol of female physical sensuality. Even in contemporary interpretations, such as Hamka⁸ and Quraish Shihab,⁹ this word is still associated with the image of a plump female body, thus reinforcing the patriarchal paradigm that women are a heavenly gift for pious men, on par with the pleasures of nature, rivers, gardens, and the fruits of paradise.

This interpretation of the issue of patriarchy is considered by feminists to be gender biased and less relevant to the current context.¹⁰ In this aspect, the female body not only perpetuates the gender hierarchy and makes women the second sex,¹¹ but also ignores the ecological dimensions inherent in the Quranic concept of paradise, such as rivers, trees, and natural fertility. Amina Wadud strongly criticized classical

- 1 Muchammad Fariz Maulana Akbar and Muhammad Rijal Maulana, "Konsep Bidadari Dalam Al-Qur'an: Perspektif Mufasir Feminis," *Jurnal Iman dan Spiritualitas* 3, no. 1 (February 10, 2023): 27–32, <https://journal.uinsgd.ac.id/index.php/jis/article/view/21804>.
- 2 Mujahid bin Jabr, *Tafsir Mujahid* (Mesir: Dar al-Fikr, 1989).
- 3 Abu Ja'far Al-Thabari, *Jāmi' Al-Bayān Fi Ta'wil Al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Muassasatu al-risalah, 1420).
- 4 Syamsu al-dīn Al-Quthubī, *Al-Jāmi' Li Ahkām Al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar alKutub al-Mishriyah, 1964).
- 5 Ismā'il Ibn 'Umar Ibn. Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qurān Al-'Azīm*. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1419).
- 6 Muhammad Ibn 'Umar al- Fakhr al- Razi, *Mafātiḥ Al-Ghaib* (Beirut: Ihyā alTurāth al-'Arabī., 1420).
- 7 Al-Sayyid Maḥmūd al-. Ālūsī, *Rūḥ Al-Ma'āni Fi Tafsir Al-Qurān Al-'Azīm Wa AlSab' Al-Mathānī*. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah., 1415).
- 8 *Tafsir Al Azhar* (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1981).
- 9 *Tafsir Al-Misbah Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*. (Jakarta: Lentera Hati., 2002).
- 10 Ziaul Huq Qutubudidn, "The Concept of Hur in Islam Rewards of the Righteous Persons in the Hereafter. BJIT: Bangladesh Journal of Integrated Thoughts," 2016.
- 11 Kerwanto, "Visualisasi Wanita Dalam Al-Qur'an: Pendekatan Tafsir Sufi Terhadap Kosakata Al-Hūr (Bidadari)," *Esoterik: Jurnal Akhlak dan Tasawuf* 8, no. 2 (2022).

understandings and interpretations that subordinate women to men¹² because the approach used is still partial, which causes errors in conceptualizing women, as if heaven is only for men.¹³

Ecofeminism acts as a critical approach that links the oppression of nature with the oppression of women, both of which occur due to the dominance of the patriarchal system.¹⁴ This movement highlights that the roots of the ecological crisis and gender inequality stem from the same structures of domination, which are also reflected in the way humans interpret religious texts in a biased and non-contextual manner.¹⁵ Therefore, efforts are needed to reread the verses of the Quran holistically and ethically, that is, not only gender-just, but also supports the preservation of nature and human values.

Feminist engagement with the Qur'an has developed through sustained efforts to reread the sacred text in order to uncover dimensions of gender equality and justice obscured by classical patriarchal interpretations. Amina Wadud¹⁶, in *Qur'an and Woman*, and Asma Barlas in "Believing Women" in Islam, argue that a Qur'anic methodology grounded in justice and *tawhīd* necessitates non-patriarchal readings of verses concerning women.¹⁷ Their contributions gave rise to the paradigm of feminist Qur'anic hermeneutics, which was subsequently refined by Hidayatullah, who examined the limitations of early feminist interpretations, and by Mir-Hosseini,¹⁸ who expanded feminist hermeneutics into the domain of Islamic law and gender equality. Within this framework, the Qur'an is approached not merely as a legal text but as an ethical discourse continually engaging with human social and ecological contexts. This study adopts an eco-tafsir approach, in which Qur'anic verses are examined through the lenses of Vandana Shiva's ecofeminism and Amina Wadud's gender-sensitive tafsir.

12 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 (July 31, 2018): 167–186, <http://ejournal.iainmadura.ac.id/index.php/alihkam/article/view/1467>.

13 Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Inggris: Oxford University Press; 2nd edition, 1999).

14 Nancy R. Howel, Marry Mellor, and Greeta Gaard, *Ekofeminisme: Arah Baru Dan Apa Yang Perlu Kita Ketahui* (Yogyakarta: Odise Publishing, 2022).

15 Muassomah Muassomah et al., "Femininity and Masculinity in Arabic Words: Gender Marking in Muslim Cosmology," *Langkawi: Journal of The Association for Arabic and English* 7, no. 2 (2021): 182.; Bakar "Women on The Text According To Amina Wadud Muhsin in Qur'an and Women."

16 Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*.

17 Asma Barlas, *Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Amerika: University of Texas Press, 2002).

18 Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Muslim Legal Tradition and the Challenge of Gender Equality* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2015).

Feminist approaches to the sacred text have also made significant contributions to rereading gender representations within Islamic eschatological imagery. Studies by Lange¹⁹ and Rustomji²⁰ demonstrate that narratives of paradise and ḥūr ‘īn have often been received within specific socio-historical contexts that reinforce asymmetric gender constructions. Through the lens of feminist hermeneutics, as further developed by Kecia Ali,²¹ eschatological verses can be reinterpreted as ethical and spiritual metaphors rather than merely sensual depictions, foregrounding existential equality before God. Accordingly, the Qur’anic concept of paradise may be understood as a symbolic space of justice encompassing both gender and ecological dimensions.

Over the past two decades, environmental ethics in Islam has become increasingly prominent in modern Islamic discourse. Scholars such as Dien,²² Foltz,²³ and Khalid²⁴ have demonstrated how the concepts of *khilāfah* and *amānah* function as normative foundations for Islamic environmental ethics. Seyyed Hossein Nasr²⁵ has argued that the contemporary ecological crisis is rooted in a deeper spiritual crisis of modernity that has desacralized nature.

The intersection of Islamic feminism and ecological ethics is grounded in ecofeminist theory. Gaard²⁶ and Shiva²⁷ contend that the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature originate from the same patriarchal paradigm. Studies by Lange²⁸ and Rustomji²⁹ demonstrate that narratives of paradise and ḥūr ‘īn have often

19 Christian Lange, *Locating Hell in Islamic Traditions* (Boston: Brill, 2015).

20 Nerina Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire: Heaven and Hell in Islamic Culture* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2008).

21 Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur’an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006).

22 Mawil Y Izzi Deen, “Islamic Environmental Ethics, Law, and Society,” in *This Sacred Earth* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 158–167.

23 Richard C Foltz, “Does Nature Have Historical Agency? World History, Environmental History, and How Historians Can Help Save the Planet,” *The History Teacher* 37, no. 1 (2003): 9–28.

24 Fazlun Khalid, “Islam and the Environment – Ethics and Practice an Assessment,” *Religion Compass* 4, no. 11 (November 5, 2010): 707–716, <https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1749-8171.2010.00249.x>.

25 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Encounter of Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2009).

26 Greta Gaard, *Ecofeminism Ethics And Action* (Amerika Serikat: Temple University Press, 1993).; Wildana Wargadinata, Iffat Maimunah, and Rohmani Nur Indah, “Eco-Religious Approach to Deforestation by Indonesian Istighosah Community,” *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 19, no. 56 (2020): 166–178.

27 Vandana Shiva, *Monocultures of the Mind: Perspectives on Biodiversity and Biotechnology* (London: Zed Books, 1993).

28 Lange, *Locating Hell in Islamic Traditions*.

29 Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire: Heaven and Hell in Islamic Culture*.

been received within specific socio-historical contexts that reinforce asymmetric gender constructions. Through the lens of feminist hermeneutics, as further developed by Kecia Ali, eschatological verses can be reinterpreted as ethical and spiritual metaphors rather than merely sensual depictions, foregrounding existential equality before God. This perspective resonates within Islamic thought through the work of Syem,³⁰ who develops the concept of Islamic ecofeminism as a synthesis of Qur'anic hermeneutics and ecological ethics. Islamic ecofeminism views gender justice and ecological sustainability not as separate concerns, but as interconnected dimensions of Islam's ethical mission to uphold cosmic justice (*al-'adl al-ka'wmi*). Thus, the integration of feminist tafsir, ecological hermeneutics, and Islamic ethics affirms that gender-sensitive rereadings of the Qur'an also open pathways toward a more comprehensive eco-theological consciousness.

Feminist engagement with the Qur'an has developed through sustained efforts to reread the sacred text to recover dimensions of gender equality and justice long obscured by classical patriarchal interpretations, as reflected in the study by Himmah et al.³¹ Wadud, and Barlas, argue that a Qur'anic methodology grounded in justice and tawhīd necessitates non-patriarchal readings of verses concerning women.³² Their contributions gave rise to the paradigm of feminist Qur'anic hermeneutics, which was subsequently refined by Hidayatullah, who examined the limitations of early feminist interpretations.³³ Mir-Hosseini, who expanded feminist hermeneutics into the domain of Islamic law and gender equality. Within this framework, the Qur'an is approached not merely as a legal text but as an ethical discourse continually engaging with human social and ecological contexts.³⁴ This study adopts an eco-tafsir approach, in which Qur'anic verses are examined through the lenses of Vandana Shiva's ecofeminism and Amina Wadud's gender sensitive tafsir.

Vandana Shiva, an ecofeminist figure in India, stated that the oppression of women and the destruction of nature originate from capitalism and patriarchy, which commodify life.³⁵ Shiva introduces the concept of monoculture of thought, a system of knowledge that narrows diversity into one exploitative narrative. Ecofeminist

30 Md Abu Sayem, "Islam and Environmental Ethics," *Islamic Studies* 60, no. 2 (2021): 157–172.

31 Himmah Aliyah et al., "Tafsir Tauhid Dalam Surat Al-Ikhlās Dan Perannya Sebagai Kerangka Hirarkis Dalam Kesenjangan Gender," *SUHUF: Jurnal Pengkajian Al-Qur'an dan Budaya* 18, no. 1 (2025).

32 Gisela Webb and Amina Wadud, "Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective," *Journal of Law and Religion* 15, no. 1/2 (2000): 519; Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).

33 Aysha A. Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

34 Mir-Hosseini, *Muslim Legal Tradition and the Challenge of Gender Equality*.

35 Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1988).

Shiva argues that the oppression of women and the destruction of nature stem from capitalism and patriarchy, which commodify life. Shiva introduces the concept of monoculture of thought, a system of knowledge that narrows diversity into a single, exploitative narrative. This concept highlights two things: (1) the reduction of nature to resources and women to objects whose rights are taken away; (2) a similar patriarchy towards nature and women, who are only seen from their domestic roles, bodily functions, or aesthetics, rather than as spiritual or social subjects.³⁶ This thought can be compared to the context of the Qur'an, where, in Amina Wadud's view, heaven is often interpreted androcentrically as a fantasy of believing men alone, which is juxtaposed with the beauty of heaven.³⁷ This kind of interpretation reflects a monoculture that diminishes the spiritual meaning of heaven.

Several previous studies have shown the connection between ecofeminism and Islamic teachings in the Qur'an and Hadith. Istianah and Khusniyyah,³⁸ and Hidayati,³⁹ highlighted the relationship between women and the environment, emphasizing that protecting and preserving nature is a collective responsibility that is not limited by gender.⁴⁰ Women even have a spiritual and ecological closeness to nature that aligns with Islamic values. Meanwhile, Nurani⁴¹ developed an ecological interpretation based on feminine values, which promotes environmental awareness through a hermeneutical approach to ecological verses. This model emphasizes the importance of a just reciprocal relationship between humans, God (*ḥabl ma'a Allāh*), fellow humans (*ḥabl ma'a al-nās*), oneself (*ḥabl ma'a nafsih*), and nature (*ḥabl ma'a al-kawn*), without discrimination based on gender.⁴² Furthermore, Febriani⁴³ found that the Qur'an signals gender identity through the concept of biological pairing, the use of gender terms and pronouns, and the balance of feminine and masculine characters in humans.⁴⁴ This shows that human intellectual, emotional, and social potential is not limited by gender stereotypes, but rather reflects a balance that is also

36 Shiva, *Monocultures of the Mind: Perspectives on Biodiversity and Biotechnology*.

37 Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*.

38 "Relasi Perempuan Dan Alam Dalam Konservasi Lingkungan Perspektif Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis," *Musāwā Jurnal Studi Gender dan Islam* 23, no. 2 (December 29, 2024): 222–235,

39 "Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Pelestarian Lingkungan Perspektif Al-Qur'an," *Tafakkur* 1, no. 2 (2021).

40 Istianah and Khusniyah, "Relasi Perempuan Dan Alam Dalam Konservasi Lingkungan Perspektif Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis"; Hidayati, "Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Pelestarian Lingkungan Perspektif Al-Qur'an."

41 "Hermeneutika Qur'an Ekofeminis: Upaya Mewujudkan Etika Ekologi Al-Qur'an Yang Berwawasan Gender," *RELIGIA* 20, no. 1 (May 28, 2017): 19

42 Ibid.

43 "Wawasan Gender Dalam Ekologi Alam Dan Manusia Perspektif Al-Quran," *ULUL ALBAB Jurnal Studi Islam* 16, no. 2 (December 30, 2015): 131,

44 Ibid.

reflected in natural ecology. Aliyah et al. argue that *tauhid* in Surah al-Ikhlās embodies egalitarian and anti-hierarchical values that challenge patriarchal domination. Using the Living Qur'an approach and Amina Wadud's gender hermeneutics, their study positions divine unity as an ethical foundation for gender-just social relations.⁴⁵

This research offers novelty by critiquing patriarchal interpretations of verses about houris and nature using Vandana Shiva's ecofeminist approach and Aminan Wadud's feminist hermeneutics. This approach has not been found in previous research. Istinah & Khusniyah's research,⁴⁶ and Nurani's⁴⁷ focus on the general relationship between women, nature or feminine hermeneutics and Hidayati's research⁴⁸ has highlighted the spiritual-ecological relationship between women and nature as a collective responsibility without gender bias. Febriari⁴⁹ identified the balance of feminine-masculine characters in the Qur'an, previous research has not touched on specific criticism of the patriarchal interpretation of the verses about the houris and nature as a locus of reproductive exploitation.

While previous research focused on the general relationship between gender and nature or biological identity, this research critiques classical interpretations that position houris (heavenly gifts) thus further strengthening the exploitation of women and nature. The research aims to: (1) dialogue the feminist hermeneutic theory of Amina Wadud and ecofeminist Vandana Shiva on the patriarchal interpretation of houris in the Quran; and (2) reconstruct the concept of beauty with the principles of caliph and *mizan* in the Quran that bridge gender justice and ecology. This research not only complements the Islamic ecofeminist discourse, but also provides a new theological foundation for the anti-patriarchal and environmental movement in the Muslim community.

This study employs a qualitative text-based research design⁵⁰ grounded in comparative and hermeneutical tafsīr analysis. This approach is adopted because the object of inquiry consists of Qur'anic verses and their exegetical traditions, which are examined interpretively to investigate relations of meaning, discourse, and gender construction within both the text and its interpretations. The primary corpus includes verses that narrate the figure of the ḥūr and gender relations in the

45 Himmah Aliyah et al., "The Tauhid Interpretation in Surah Al-Ikhlās and Its Role as a Hierarchical Framework in Gender Equality," *SUHUF* 18, no. 1 (June 27, 2025): 107–125.

46 "Relasi Perempuan Dan Alam Dalam Konservasi Lingkungan Perspektif Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis."

47 "Hermeneutika Qur'an Ekofeminis: Upaya Mewujudkan Etika Ekologi Al-Qur'an Yang Berwawasan Gender."

48 "Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Pelestarian Lingkungan Perspektif Al-Qur'an."

49 "Wawasan Gender Dalam Ekologi Alam Dan Manusia Perspektif Al-Quran."

50 Thobby Wakarmamu, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*, Eureka Media Aksara (Eureka Media Aksara, 2022).

context of paradisiacal reward, namely surah Ar-Rahmān (55:56–58), Ad-Dukhon (44: 54), At-Thur (52: 20), Al-Waqiah (56: 22), Ar-Rahmān (55: 72), Al-Waqi'ah (56: 34–36), Ar- An-Naba' (78: 33), al-Baqarah (2: 25), Āli 'Imrān (3: 15), and an-Nisā' (4: 57). In addition, the study examines supporting verses that emphasize principles of cosmic balance, khilāfah, and gender relations in worldly life, including Al-Baqarah (2: 30), Al-An'am (6: 165), Ar-Rahmān (55: 7–9), at-Thur (52: 20), ad-Dukhan (44: 54), ar-Rahmān (55: 72), Maryam (19: 16–26), An-Naml (27: 23–24), Luqman (31: 14), an-Nisā (4: 7), and An-Nūr (24: 31). The selection of this corpus is based on its centrality within classical and contemporary discourses on the ḥūr and the necessity of a relational reading grounded in the principle of cosmic balance as a foundation for ecofeminist critique.

This research draws upon both classical and contemporary tafsīr corpora, including Jāmi' al-Bayān by al-Ṭabarī, Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān by al-Qurṭubī, Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm by Ibn Kathīr, Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī by al-Ālūsī, Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective by Amina Wadud, Tafsīr Al-Misbah by Quraish Shihab, as well as other relevant modern tafsīr literature. The analysis focuses on key lexical units *ḥūr 'in*, *qāṣirāt al-ṭarf*, *ka-annahunna al-yāqūt wa al-marjān*, Qur'anic rhetorical devices, and the positioning of gendered subjects within both the text and its interpretations. Analytical procedures include lexical semantic analysis based on classical Arabic dictionaries, close reading of the verses, cross-tafsīr comparison, mapping patterns of objectification and monocultural meaning, ecofeminist critique through Vandana Shiva's concept of monoculture of mind, and critical synthesis toward an alternative tafsīr that is more relational, gender-just, and ecologically oriented. Research trustworthiness is ensured through source triangulation, critical engagement with interpretive differences, and procedural transparency. The study is limited to written tafsīr corpora and therefore employs qualitative text analysis and comparative tafsīr rather than manuscript-based philological criticism.

Integration of Ecofeminism and Feminist Hermeneutics: The Perspectives of Vandana Shiva and Amina Wadud

Ecofeminism presents a significant innovation in environmental ethics by expanding the scope of ethics from human-to-human relations to the relationship between humans and the entire cosmos, and using a feminist perspective to unravel the link between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature. Ecofeminists develop an ethics of care, emphasizing the interdependence of moral responsibility and all living beings, rather than domination and control. Ecofeminism

can also be understood in terms of environmental issues directly impacting women.⁵¹ Some feminists argue that women have a strategic role in building a new ecological paradigm because of their closeness to nature and caring nature, ability to build non-violent communities, and higher ecological sensitivity than men.

Vandana Shiva, an ecofeminist figure from India, views ecofeminism as a critique of views that separate humans from their social, historical, and ecological relations. In this perspective, humans are understood through their concrete relationships with one another and with the natural world. Shiva developed two concepts: First, scientific patriarchy, formed from the awareness that the patriarchal capitalist system not only oppresses women but also exploits nature destructively. Women and nature are reduced to mere objects of exploitation for the sake of capital accumulation. Shiva emphasized that environmental damage directly impacts women, so they have a strategic role in building a sustainable ecological paradigm that is evident in the daily lives of women who work side by side with nature, such as managing soil fertility, utilizing waste sustainably, and regulating water for agricultural and family needs, all of which contribute to efforts to overcome the environmental crisis.⁵² However, this role is often marginalized by patriarchal development projects that actually threaten the preservation of nature and the survival of women.

Second, the monoculture of thought refers to the dominance of masculine-destructive logic in modern development, which has led to a single way of thinking and overshadowed local biodiversity and culture. This monoculture of thought is evident in modern agricultural practices, which prioritize a single type of superior crop, the use of industrial fertilizers and seeds, and the neglect of local knowledge, particularly among farmers, especially women, who have long maintained ecosystem sustainability. This mindset is consistent with development policies that view nature solely as a resource for economic gain. Ecofeminism, within this framework, serves as a critical tool for dismantling these power relations and constructing a counter narrative based on the concrete experiences of women, particularly rural women, who are directly impacted by ecological and social marginalization.

This research also utilizes the feminist hermeneutics of Amina Wadud, a Muslim scholar from the United States, to interpret the Quran. Feminist hermeneutics is an approach to analyzing the Quran that is grounded in the principles of justice and gender equality, taking into account the contemporary social context and the scientific principles of interpretation. This approach aims to critique and reconstruct the interpretation of verses that have been understood with a gender bias, aligning

51 Howel, Mellor, and Gaard, *Ecofeminisme: Arab Baru Dan Apa Yang Perlu Kita Ketahui*.

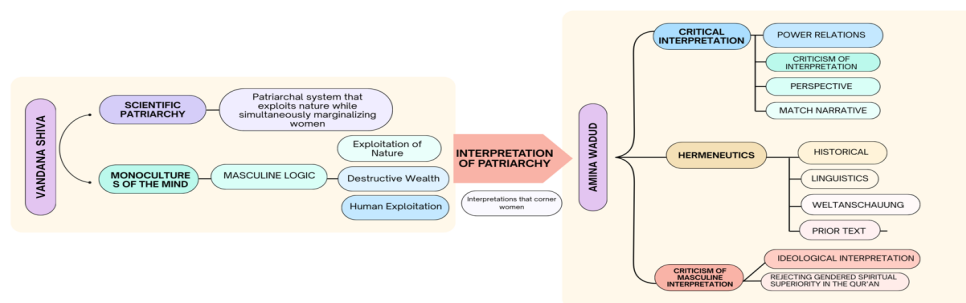
52 Shiva, *Staying Allive Women, Ecology and Survival in India*.

them with the values of justice espoused by the Quran.

Wadud developed four main steps in interpreting the Qur'an, namely: (1) analysis of the *asbab al-nuzul* to understand the historical context in which the verses were revealed; (2) linguistic analysis of the structure and meaning of the text; and (3) *welstanchaung* analysis, namely the worldview of the Qur'an; and (4) analysis of the prior text, namely the background of the interpreter. Through this approach, feminist hermeneutics allows for the depatriarchalization of Qur'anic interpretation and the dehumanization of women in Qur'anic interpretation.⁵³

The concepts of Vandana Shiva's ecofeminism and Amina Wadud's feminist hermeneutics are relevant to combine because they both critique patriarchal domination, which gives rise to unequal power relations. Shiva's ecofeminism dismantles the destructive masculine logic that oppresses nature and women, while Wadud's feminist hermeneutics offers a reading of the Qur'an based on monotheism and gender justice. The integration of these two approaches allows for interpretations that are sensitive to both gender justice and ecological awareness. The following is a diagram of the integration of Vandana Shiva's ecofeminism and Amina Wadud's feminist hermeneutics:

Chart 1. Conceptual Relationship between the Thoughts of Vandana Shiva and Amina Wadud



Source: processed by the researcher

The following researcher presents Vandana Shiva's ecofeminist analysis and Amina Wadud's feminist hermeneutics in interpreting verses about houris in the Qur'an:

Interpretation of the Verse of the Houris and the Exploitation of

Women-Nature

Dualism of Humans, Nature and Objectification of Women

The dualism of man and nature refers to the hierarchical separation between humans as subjects of power and nature as objects to be exploited. In a patriarchal context, this dualism is reinforced by anthropocentric values that place humans, especially men, at the center of the universe. Meanwhile, the objectification of women is the process of reducing women to objects that are valued not based on their agency, but rather on their physical worth or reproductive role. In the context of interpreting religious texts, this form of objectification is reflected in the representation of heavenly houris (*hūr 'in*) as “rewards” for pious men, where women are depicted in terms of male satisfaction, rather than as equal spiritual subjects.

The following verses of the Qur'an that describe houris reflect the dualistic relationship between humans and nature, and contain indications of objectification of women.

The dualistic relationship between humans and nature, and indicates the existence of forms of objectification of women in several verses of the Qur'an, such as in Surah Ar-Rahman (55:56-58), Ad-Dukhon: (44: 54), At-Thur (52: 20), Al-Waqiah (56: 22), Ar-Rahman (55: 72), Al-Waqi'ah (56: 34-36), Ar- An-Naba' (78: 33), al-Baqarah (2: 25), Āli 'Imrān (3: 15), and an-Nisā' (4: 57). This table also shows that patriarchal interpretations not only build gender hierarchies, but also produce a dualism of humans and nature that is in line with ecofeminist and gender critiques of the logic of exploitation and objectification. The explanation of each verse is presented as follows:

First, the separation of subject and object in classical interpretations tends to create an understanding in which men are positioned as subjects entitled to enjoy heaven and its contents, while women, especially in the form of houris, are depicted as objects of pleasure. The representation of houris in the Qur'an, as mentioned in Surah Ar-Rahman (55: 56-58):

“In both ‘Gardens’ will be maidens of modest gaze, who no human or jinn has ever touched before. Then which of your Lord’s favours will you both deny? Those ‘maidens’ will be ‘as elegant’ as rubies and coral.”

Also found in Surah Ad-Dukhan (44: 54):

“So it will be. And We will pair them to maidens with gorgeous eyes.”

Also found in At-Thur (52: 20):

“They will be reclining on thrones, ‘neatly’ lined up ‘facing each other’.
And We will pair them to maidens with gorgeous eyes.”

Also found in Al-Waqiah: (56: 22):

“And ‘they will have’ maidens with gorgeous eyes.”

Also found in Ar-Rahman: (55: 72)

“They will be ‘ maidens with gorgeous eyes, reserved in pavilions.”

The term ḥūr appears in four Qur’anic passages: Surah Ad-Dukhān (44:54), At-Ṭūr (52:20), Al-Wāqī‘ah (56:22), and Ar-Raḥmān (55:72).⁵⁴ Three of these verses employ the expression ḥūr ‘īn, while one uses ḥūr maqṣūrāt. From a linguistic perspective, classical lexicographers such as al-Zabīdī⁵⁵ and Ibn Manẓūr⁵⁶ explain that ḥūr is the plural of both aḥwar (masculine) and ḥawrā’ (feminine), derived from the root ḥa-wa-ra, which denotes the striking contrast between the whiteness of the sclera and the blackness of the iris.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the word *maqṣūrāt* comes from *qāf, ṣād, rā* which lexically refers to two meanings: (1) inaccessibility, and (2) al-ḥabs, which means to hold or to confine.⁵⁸ From this explanation, it can be concluded that the phrase *ḥūr ‘īn* is gender-neutral. Quraish Shihab also uses this argument.⁵⁹ Ibn Manẓūr further notes that this root may also extend to bodily whiteness more generally. The accompanying term ‘īn, as recorded by Ibn Fāris⁶⁰ and Ibn Manẓūr, signifies (wide-eyed) and was commonly used to describe cattle due to their large eyes.

In line with Amina Wadud’s hermeneutical approach, this linguistic analysis underscores the importance of distinguishing between grammatical meaning and interpretive projection.⁶¹ At the level of language, the term *ḥūr* does not intrinsically encode gender hierarchy or sexual availability. Al-Rāzī’s commentary on QS reinforces this reading.⁶² At-Ṭūr (52:20), as cited by Muhammad Ali, where ‘īn is interpreted symbolically as indicating inner richness and spiritual depth rather than merely physical beauty.⁶³ From this perspective, the Qur’anic diction itself allows for

54 Alamī Zādiḥ Faiddullah Bin Musa Al Ḥusaini Al Muqdisiy, *Faṭḥur Raḥmān Liṭālib Āyatil Qur’an* (Lebanon: Dār al kitab al’ilmīyah, 2005).

55 Murtadho Az Zabidi, *Tajul ‘Arus Min Jawahiril Qomus Jilid 1-2* (Beirut: DKI (Dar al Kutub al Ilmiyah), n.d.).

56 Ibnu Mazhūr, *Lisan Al-A’rab* (Bairut: Dār Shadir, 2010).

57 Ibid.

58 Aḥmad Ibn Fāris Al-Qazwīnī, *Mu’jam Maqāyis Al-Lughab* (Lebanon: Dar al-Jil, 1999).

59 Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur’an*.

60 Al-Qazwīnī, *Mu’jam Maqāyis Al-Lughab*.

61 Wadud, *Qur’an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective*.

62 Razi, *Mafātih Al-Ghaib*.

63 Ziaul Huq Qutubudidn, “The Concept of Hur in Islam: Rewards of the Righteous Persons in the Hereafter,” *Bangladesh Journal of Integrated Thoughts* 10, no. 14 (2014).

a gender-inclusive and non-objectifying interpretation.

However, classical tafsīr traditions often move beyond linguistic neutrality toward aesthetic and gendered elaboration in their interpretation of QS. Ar-Raḥmān (55:56–58), Ibn Kathīr emphasizes the physical beauty and perpetual purity of the houris,⁶⁴ while Ibn ‘Āshūr explicitly identifies them as female beings possessing perfect outer and inner beauty.⁶⁵ Metaphors such as *yāqūt* and *marjān* are further aestheticized in the works of al-Nawawī al-Jāwī⁶⁶ and al-Bayḍāwī,⁶⁷ who describe the houris through vivid imagery of radiant whiteness, translucence, and gemstone-like bodies.

From an ecofeminist Vandana Shiva, this exegetical shift reflects what Shiva terms a “monoculture of the mind,” in which interpretive diversity is reduced to a single dominant gaze that privileges male desire and aesthetic consumption.⁶⁸ The feminization and objectification of *hūr* parallel the treatment of nature as a passive and exploitable resource, valued primarily for its capacity to provide pleasure. The micro-claim advanced here is that while the Qur’anic language of *hūr* permits an inclusive and relational reading, dominant classical tafsīr reconfigures this linguistic openness into a gendered and consumptive cosmology, thereby reinforcing both patriarchal and anthropocentric modes of interpretation.

Second, the passive exploitation of nature, in this case, is depicted not only as a pleasure but also contains passive symbols that reflect the pattern of exploitative relations between nature and women. This representation is mentioned in Surah Al-Waqi’ah (56:34–36):

“and elevated furnishings. Indeed, We will have perfectly created their mates, making them virgins.”

In Surah An-Naba’ (78: 33) it is stated:

“and full-bosomed maidens of equal age.”

In surah al-Baqarah (2: 25) it is stated:

“Give good news “O Prophet” to those who believe and do good that they will have Gardens under which rivers flow. Whenever provided with fruit, they will say, “This is what we were given before,” for they will be served fruit that looks similar ‘but tastes different’. They will have pure spouses, and they will be there forever.”

64 Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qurān Al-‘Azīm*.

65 Ibn ‘Āsyūr, *Tabrīr Wa Tanwīr* (Tunisia: Dar Tunisiyyah, 1984).

66 Muhammad Nawawi Al-Bantani, *Tafsīr Al-Munir Marah* (Bandung: Sinar Baru Algensindo, 2017).

67 *Tafsīr Al Baidhawī (Anwarut Tanzil Wa Asrar At Takwil)* (Beirut: Darul Ihyā’ lit Turats Sumber, 1418).

68 Shiva, *Monocultures of the Mind: Perspectives on Biodiversity and Biotechnology*.

In surah Āli ‘Imrān (3: 15):

“.....those mindful “of Allah” will have Gardens with their Lord under which rivers flow, to stay there forever, and pure spouses,¹ along with Allah’s pleasure.” And Allah is All-Seeing of ‘His’ servants.”

And also stated in surah an-Nisā’ (4: 57):

“As for those who believe and do good, We will admit them into Gardens under which rivers flow, to stay there for ever and ever. There they will have pure spouses,¹ and We will place them under a vast shade.”

The verses describing the pleasures of Paradise for *aṣḥāb al-yamīn* portray comfort, companionship, and purity, including beds and partners described as virginal, affectionate, and of equal age in Al-Wāqī‘ah (56:34-36). The classical interpretation outlined by Ibn Kathīr⁶⁹ and Al-Baidhawī,⁷⁰ these verses are predominantly read literally and androcentrically: men are positioned as the primary recipients of reward, while women represented through the imagery of houris are framed almost exclusively in terms of virginity and physical beauty, with no reference to moral agency or spiritual subjectivity.

Applying Amina Wadud’s hermeneutical framework, this reading warrants critical reassessment at the linguistic level. The Qur’anic term *azwāj*, as found in Madaniyah verses such as al-Baqarah (2:25), Āli ‘Imrān (3:15), and an-Nisā’ (4:57), is lexically gender-inclusive. Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī defines *zauj* as any relational pair, irrespective of gender,⁷¹ while Ibn Manẓūr emphasizes its contextual relativity: it denotes “partner” rather than a fixed male and female hierarchy. Likewise, the term *muṭabharah*, in the form of ism *maf‘ūl*, highlights divine agency in purification, extending beyond physical cleanliness to ethical and spiritual integrity.⁷² From Wadud’s perspective, this linguistic structure undermines interpretations that reduce women to corporeal objects and instead opens space for reciprocal, morally grounded companionship.

However, classical exegetes often foreground the term *abkārā* (virgins) in al-Wāqī‘ah (56:36), as seen in Ibn Kathīr⁷³ commentary, thereby narrowing the semantic field to female bodily status. This selective emphasis reflects a broader interpretive pattern in which women are valued primarily through physical availability, positioning

69 Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qurān Al-‘Azīm*.

70 Al-Baidhawī, *Tafsīr Al-Baidhawī (Anwarut Tanzil Wa Asrar At Takwil)*.

71 Abi al-Qāsim al-Husayn ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Mufaḍḍal al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī, *Al-Mufradāt Fī Ghariib Al-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, n.d.).

72 Mazhūr, *Lisan Al-‘Arab*.

73 Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qurān Al-‘Azīm*.

them as passive objects of pleasure rather than ethical subjects.

From an ecofeminist Vandana Shiva, this representational logic mirrors an anthropocentric worldview that treats both women and nature as consumable entities. Paradise is depicted as a site of unrestrained enjoyment, beds, food, and companions, divorced from ethical reciprocity or ecological responsibility. Such a monoculture of the mind Shiva's term normalizes domination by framing pleasure, control, and consumption as unquestioned ideals.

At the level of discussion, this representational pattern can be situated within broader gender ethics in Islamic interpretive traditions. The researcher presents An-Nisa (4:34) as an illustrative example of a Qur'anic verse addressing gender relations within the framework of social ethics, but this is not part of the main exegetical corpus of this study. Classical interpretations, such as those of al-Zamakhsharī, often emphasize *qiwāmah* as male authority.⁷⁴ Amina Wadud challenges this reading by arguing that *qiwāmah* is grounded in the husband's obligation to provide financial support, rather than in any inherent physical or intellectual superiority of men.⁷⁵ Accordingly, she maintains that the verse does not legitimize male dominance but articulates a framework of contextual responsibility, thereby questioning patriarchal assumptions embedded in many classical interpretations. Read alongside eschatological portrayals of *hūr' in*, these interpretations reveal a shared discursive horizon that reinforces an androcentric worldview. From an ecofeminist perspective, this worldview legitimizes both gender hierarchy and the instrumentalization of nature through the concentration of authority within male-centered frameworks.

***Khalīfah* and *Mizān* as Foundations for an Ecofeminist Reinterpretation of Beauty in the Qur'an**

The principles of *khalīfah* (guardian of the earth) and *mizan* (balance) in the Quran serve as the foundation for an ecofeminist reinterpretation to dismantle the objectification of women and offer a holistic concept of beauty that harmonizes spirituality, gender justice, and ecology. The following is a summary of the discussion in table form:

74 Abu al-Qasim Jarullah Al-Zamakhshari and Mahmūd Ibn'Umar, *Al-Kasysyaf 'an Haqaiq Al-Tanzil Wa Uyun Al-Aqawil Fi Wujub Al-Ta'Wil*, Juz I. Beirut: Dār Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyyah, vol. 1415 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1977); A. Jannah, "Konsep Qiwamah Dalam Al-Qur'an (Studi Komparatif Tafsir Al-Kasyaf Karya Al-Zamakhshari Dan Quran and Women Karya Amina Wadud)" (UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, 2022).

75 Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam*, A Oneworld paperback original (Oneworld Publications, 2006).

Table 1. Khalifah, Mizan as Ecofeminist Reinterpretation of Beauty in the Qur'an

No	Ecofeminist Principles in the Qur'an	Concept	Distribution of Verses
1	The Principle of the <i>Khalifah</i>	Same role as <i>Khalifah</i>	Surah Al-Baqarah (2: 30) and Al-An'am (6: 165)
		The same role in protecting nature and the environment	
2	The Principle of the <i>Mizān</i>	Ecological balance	Surah Ar-Rahmān (55: 7–9)
3	Ecofeminist Critique	Perfection of faith and morals	Surah at-Thur (52: 20), ad-Dukhan (44: 54), ar-Rahmān (55: 72), Maryam (19: 16–26), An-Naml (27: 23–24), Luqman (31: 14), an-Nisa (4: 7), An-Nūr (24: 31).
		Intelligence and mental strength	
		Tenderness and affection	
		Independence and equality	
		Simplicity of appearance	

Analysis of table 1 above is as follows:

The Principle of the Khalifah: Ecological Role and Responsibility Justice

In surah Al-Baqarah (2: 30), the term caliph contains the meaning of human responsibility to prosper and protect the earth.

First, the same role as *khalifah* (leader) on earth:

“Remember” when your Lord said to the angels, “I am going to place a successive ‘human’ authority on earth.” They asked ‘Allah’, “Will You place in it someone who will spread corruption there and shed blood while we glorify Your praises and proclaim Your holiness?” Allah responded, “I know what you do not know.”

In another verse it is stated in surah Al-An'am (6: 165):

“He is the One Who has placed you as successors on earth and elevated some of you in rank over others, so He may test you with what He has given you. Surely your Lord is swift in punishment, but He is certainly All-Forgiving, Most Merciful.”

The word “khalifah” in the two verses above does not refer to a particular gender or ethnic group. According to Aṭ-Ṭabari⁷⁶ and Ibn Kathīr,⁷⁷ Men and women have the same function as caliphs, who are accountable for their duties as caliphs on

76 Muhammad bin Jarīr Aṭ-Ṭabari, *Jāmi' Al-Bayān Fi Tā'wil Al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar alFikr, 1978).

77 Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qurān Al-'Azīm*.

earth, just as they are accountable as servants of God. Amina Wadud⁷⁸ emphasizes that the term *khalīfah* in the verse is gender-neutral, encompassing all humanity, both men and women. For Wadud, the caliphate is a universal moral, spiritual, and ecological mandate, not a gender-dominant one. Therefore, reading this verse patriarchally deviates from the essential principle of divine justice in Islam.⁷⁹

Second, the same role in protecting nature and the environment in In Surah Al-A'raf (7: 56):

“Do not spread corruption in the land after it has been set in order.
And call upon Him with hope and fear. Indeed, Allah’s mercy is always
close to the good-doers.”

Interpretation of Quraish Shihab⁸⁰ and Ar-Razi⁸¹ In Surah Al-A'raf (7: 56) shows the meaning of the prohibition against causing damage on earth, where doing damage is one of the things that goes beyond the limits. The universe was not created by Allah SWT in a harmonious state, and helped meet the needs of creatures. Allah SWT has created nature and the universe in a good state, and commanded his servants to maintain and repair it. Abu Muzhaffar As-Sam'ani, quoting Ad-Dhahak, stated that damaging the earth includes actions such as blocking the flow of water, cutting down fruit-bearing trees, and destroying gold and silver coins, all of which are contrary to wisdom and disrupt the balance and order of nature.⁸² In the ecofeminist context, this principle contains the important meaning that both men and women have equal responsibility in preserving nature. When this principle is interpreted fairly and holistically, then the relationship between humans and nature is not exploitative, but rather a reciprocal relationship that is ecologically and gender-just.

The Principle of Mīzān: Balance between Humans, Gender, and Nature

The principle of *mīzān* (balance) in the Qur'an, as mentioned in Surah Ar-Rahmān (55: 7-9), is an important foundation in understanding the relationship between humans, nature, and gender justice.

“As for the sky, He raised it ‘high’, and set the balance of justice, so
that you do not defraud the scales. Weigh with justice, and do not
give short measure.”

78 *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective.*

79 Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (Islam in the Twenty-First Century) (London: Oneworld Publications, 2006); Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective.*

80 M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002).

81 Razi, *Mafatih Al-Ghaib.*

82 Abi Mudhoffar, *Tafsir As Samani Sam'ani* (Lebanon: Dar al Kutb al Ilmiyah, 2010).

Allah created the heavens and established the *mizan*, then commanded humans not to harm them. This demonstrates that balance is a cosmic principle that must be maintained in both ecological and social contexts. In an ecological context, *mizan* reflects the harmony between living things, land, water, and air. Overexploitation of nature and environmental damage violate this principle.

Ecofeminist Critique: Rejecting Aesthetic Reduction and Upholding Female Subjectivity

In religious interpretation texts, there is too much emphasis on the physical appearance of women, especially in the context of verses about houris.

The verses that emphasize the physical appearance of the houris are as follows:

Contained in the letter at-Thur (52: 20), namely:

“They will be reclining on thrones, “neatly” lined up “facing each other.” And We will pair them to maidens with gorgeous eyes.”

In another verse it is stated in surah ad-Dukhan (44: 54):

“So it will be. And We will pair them to maidens with gorgeous eyes.”

In another verse it is stated in surah ar-Rahmān (55: 72)

“They will be maidens with gorgeous eyes, reserved in pavilions.”

Aṭ-Ṭabari interprets the term “*hūr ‘in*” found in surah ad-Dukhān (44: 54), at-Ṭur (52: 20), al-Wāqī’ah (56: 22), and ar-Rahmān (55: 72), as a woman who has clean white eyes. The word *hūr* is the plural of *haurā* which means white, clean skin, has curvy eyes with very beautiful eyeballs.⁸³ Likewise according to al-Qurṭubī with the addition of other hadiths in his interpretation.⁸⁴ Meanwhile, the word *‘in* is the plural form of *‘ainā*, meaning a woman with wide eyes. Aṭ-Ṭabari, when interpreting the word *hūr ‘in*, compiled many narrations that support his opinion or provide other information, such as the statement that the houris were pious women in this world and were created from *Za’faran* (turmeric). There is also a narration from Mujāhid, that later those who enter Paradise will be married to houris with white eyes, whose calves are visible under the clothes they wear. In fact, people can see their faces from behind their hearts because their skin is clean and thin.⁸⁵

The above interpretation is rejected by Amina Wadud, explaining that the term *hūrun ‘in* is merely a motivator to attract patriarchal pagan Arab society to accept the truth. The expression *hūrun ‘in* must be understood as a metaphorical reference to

83 Aṭ-Ṭabari, *Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fi Ta’wil Al-Qur’ān*.

84 Abū ‘Abdillāh Muḥammad bin Aḥmad Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi’ Abkam Al-Qur’ān (Tafsir AlQurṭubi)* (Kairo: Dār al-Kitāb, 1964).

85 Aṭ-Ṭabari, *Jāmi’ Al-Bayān Fi Ta’wil Al-Qur’ān*.

heavenly pleasures because; first, the specific image of a partner in Heaven presented in the Qur'an is similar to what the Arabs dreamed of and desired at that time. Therefore, it would be hard to believe that the Qur'an intended to make the white-skinned woman with dark eyes *hūrun'in* the sole example of a universal symbol of beauty for all mankind. If this symbol were accepted absolutely as the image of the ideal woman, it would mean imposing certain cultural values on all readers of the Qur'an.⁸⁶

The aesthetic definition of women is not solely based on their physical appearance and productivity, but rather on several factors:

First, the perfection of faith, morals, and reason. The figure of Lady Maryam in Surah Maryam (19:16-26) reflects the ideal construction of women in Islam, who excel not only in spiritual and moral aspects, but also in intellectual rationality. When faced with a critical situation visited by the angel Jibril in the form of a strange man, Maryam displayed a rational and controlled response. She did not react emotionally, but instead immediately sought protection from Allah and delivered an ethical warning.

Wahbah al-Zuhayli emphasized that Maryam's actions reflected clarity of thought. She "took a gentle approach, based on reason, piety, and wisdom," indicating that her request for protection arose from intellectual awareness, not merely instinctive fear.⁸⁷ This proves that Maryam was a rational, courageous, and intellectually gifted figure, while maintaining her purity and moral integrity.

Second, her political acumen and wise leadership. The figure of Queen Balqis in Surah An-Naml (27:23-35) depicts a female leader who was not only intelligent but also strategic in responding to political threats. Upon receiving a letter from Prophet Solomon, she did not act reactively, but instead prioritized deliberation and a thorough analysis of the situation. Her decision to send gifts was not merely a compromise, but a diplomatic strategy to test Solomon's leadership character whether he was a prophet or a conquering king.⁸⁸ According to Ibn 'Abbās's interpretation, Balqis's sharp intuition is evident in her political conclusion: if Solomon accepts the gift, then he is an ordinary king; if he refuses, then he is a true prophet. This strategy demonstrates that women's intelligence in the Qur'an is not limited to the individual or spiritual dimension, but also encompasses public leadership capacity, strategic

86 Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam*.

87 Wahbah Al-Zuhayli, *Tafsir Al-Wasit Li Al-Qur'an Al-Karim* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Mu'āṣir., 1469).

88 Muhammad Intiḥa'ul Fudhola', "PARTISIPASI POLITIK PEREMPUAN (STUDI KRITIS TERHADAP HAK KARIR POLITIK PEREMPUAN PERSPEKTIF WAḤBAH AZ-ZUHAILI)," *Syariah: Journal of Fiqh Studies* 1, no. 1 (June 29, 2023): 21-42.

policy, and the nobility of political vision.⁸⁹

Third, tenderness and compassion. Islam not only values women's intelligence and mental strength, but also glorifies their tenderness and compassion, as reflected in Surah Luqman (31:14), which describes a mother's struggles during pregnancy and breastfeeding. This verse demonstrates that a mother's role is extremely noble and imbued with emotional strength that is no less important than physical or intellectual strength. From the perspective of the Quran, the ideal woman is a loving, caring figure for her family, and the guardian of domestic harmony. The tenderness of women is not a weakness, but rather a form of extraordinary strength recognized and glorified by Islamic teachings.

Fourth, economic and social independence. The Quran explicitly recognizes women's economic rights through the inheritance provisions in Surah al-Nisa' (4:7), which grant women the same rights to family property as men. This acknowledges women's role as active subjects in social and economic life and reflects the Quran's commitment to gender justice. This aspect of independence is also reflected in Surah al-Qaṣaṣ (28:23), where the two daughters of the Prophet Shu'aib appear to be herding livestock because their father is aging. They demonstrate social responsibility while upholding values of politeness in the public sphere. This story emphasizes that Islam does not limit women's roles to the domestic sphere but rather allows them to actively contribute to public life with dignity.⁹⁰

Fifth, modesty of appearance. The importance of modesty in appearance for women from the perspective of the Qur'an, particularly in Surah An-Nur (24:31). In this verse, women are commanded to guard their modesty and dress modestly as a form of obedience to Allah. The intended modesty extends beyond clothing to daily attitudes and behavior. Thus, the ideal woman according to Islam is one who maintains her honor and dignity by maintaining moderation in her appearance and demonstrating spiritual awareness through a calm, polite, and dignified demeanor. This value emphasizes that beauty in Islam is determined more by piety and personal integrity, rather than solely physical appearance.

A more detailed explanation regarding the analysis of the verse, divided into three main figures of speech: *Tasybih* (parable), *Kināyah* (allusion), and an emphasis on Ethical Qualities (*Khayrāt*), is applied to transform the narrative from sexual objectification to a symbol of purity. A literal understanding of the description of Paradise has been criticized for reinforcing the betrayal of women by reducing the

89 Al-Zuhayli, *Tafsir Al-Wasit Li Al-Qur'an Al-Karim*.

90 Fudhola, "PARTISIPASI POLITIK PEREMPUAN (STUDI KRITIS TERHADAP HAK KARIR POLITIK PEREMPUAN PERSPEKTIF WAHBAH AZ-ZUHAILI)."

divine promise to objectification.⁹¹ Therefore, a rhetorical reading that emphasizes depth of meaning is essential to validating an Ecofeminist reading.

This step begins with the *tasybīh* metaphor, which is used to define value, not appearance. The most powerful metaphor is found in Surah Al-Raḥmān (55:58), where the heavenly couple is described as *ka-annahunna al-yāqūt wa al-marjān*. This analogy with jewels aims to symbolize their priceless intrinsic value. The value of Yakut and Marjan stems from their integrity, rarity, and protection from all impurities, not from their potential for exploitation.⁹² According to the *Bayān* perspective, *Tasybīh* is used to emphasize beauty that transcends the capabilities of human physical description.

The *Tasybīh* pattern using the word *maknūn* is contained in Surah Aṣ-Ṣaffāt (37:49), which uses the diction *baīḍun maknūn*. The metaphor of a *maknūn* egg symbolizes purity and protection from external intervention. The same concept is found in the diction *lu'lu'un maknūn*. Regarding this allusion, Sayyid Qutb explicitly asserted that the imagery is a *Kināyah* of values beyond the physical, stating that it contains sensitive and psychological meanings that are subtle in the ḥūr.⁹³ This interpretation decisively shifts the meaning of *Tasybīh* from the material realm to the psychic and spiritual realm.

The next rhetorical *Kināyah* is the *qāṣirāt al-ṭarf* (limiting one's vision) in Surah Ṣād (38:52). Rhetorically, this is the *Kināyah* for inner fidelity, purity of soul, and self-respect consciously chosen by a partner in Paradise.⁹⁴ This allusion suggests that the couple are spiritual subjects possessing moral control and rejects the interpretation of ḥūr as a passive object. This allusion to purity is reinforced by Surah Al-Raḥmān (55:74), *lam yaṭmishunn...* ('They had never been touched by humans or jinn). The figurative use of the verb to touch serves to emphasize the purity of the heavenly couple.⁹⁵ The goal is to demonstrate that the couple was created in a state of perfection (pureness), free from any defects, weaknesses, or blemishes associated with worldly existence.

The analysis of *balāghah* culminates in the diction of Surah Al-Raḥmān (55:70), *khayrāt ḥisān*. Qatādah interprets *khayrāt ḥisān* as moral goodness (*al-akhlāq*

91 Febi Komala Dewi and Iklilah Muzayyanah Dini Fajriyah, "The Myth of Bidadari and the Betrayal of Women: Reading Gender in Islamic Sermons through Barthes' Semiotics," *Muwazah* 17, no. 1 (July 21, 2025): 154–173.

92 Syafa'attus Shilma, "Bidadari Dalam Al-Qur'an (Perspektif Mufassir Indonesia)" (UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2017).

93 Sayyid Qutub, *Tafsir Fi Zbilalil Quran* (Beirut: Darul Ushul Ilmiyyah, 2019).

94 Hamka, *Tafsir Al Azhar*.

95 Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*.

al-ḥasanah), emphasizing ethical qualities. This interpretation is significantly more relevant than those that describe *khayrāt* as beautiful virgins, as attributed to Abū Ṣāliḥ. Qatādah's interpretation is based on the principle of *tarjih tafsir*, which states: "Using the meaning of Allah's words based on the dominant style of the Qur'an and in accordance with customary usage is preferable to deviating from it." Because the word *khayrāt* is generally oriented towards moral rather than visual goodness in Qur'anic diction, the ethical meaning is more in line with the *tarjih* principle above. The emphasis on ethical quality indicates that the reward of heaven is ethical perfection.

Conclusion

This research shows that patriarchal interpretations of Quranic verses about houris have contributed to the objectification of women and the exploitation of nature. The first research question provides two answers: (1) patriarchal interpretations arise from the hierarchical dualism between humans, nature, and the monoculture of thought in androcentric interpretations, thus triggering exploitation, where men are positioned as subjects of power and women and nature as objects of pleasure. Representations of houris in surah Ar-Rahman (55:56-58), Ad-Dukhon: (44: 54), At-Thur (52: 20), Al-Waqiah (56: 22), Ar-Rahman (55: 72), Al-Waqi'ah (56: 34-36), Ar- An-Naba' (78: 33), al-Baqarah (2: 25), Āli 'Imrān (3: 15), and an-Nisā' (4: 57), among others, emphasize the physicality and sanctity of women's bodies alone, while ignoring their spiritual, social, and intellectual dimensions; and (2) the principles of *khalifah* and *mīzān* in Quran surah Al-Baqarah (2: 30), Al-An'am (6: 165), Ar-Rahmān (55: 7-9), at-Thur (52: 20), ad-Dukhan (44: 54), ar-Rahmān (55: 72), Maryam (19: 16-26), An-Naml (27: 23-24), Luqman (31: 14), an-Nisā (4: 7), and An-Nūr (24: 31), provide a perspective on ecological and gender justice through ecofeminist critique that rejects aesthetic reduction and affirms women's subjectivity.

As an alternative to patriarchal interpretations, the Qur'anic ecofeminist approach offers a new paradigm, basing its interpretation on the principles of *khalifah* and *mīzān*. It also describes the aesthetic significance of women, not solely based on their bodies, beauty, and domestic roles, but also on aspects of the perfection of faith and morals, intelligence and mental strength, gentleness and compassion, independence and equality, and modesty of appearance. With this approach, women and nature are positioned as equal spiritual and ecological subjects, each with an active role in maintaining the balance of life. This ecofeminist reinterpretation paves the way for dismantling exploitative symbolism of women and nature and building a more just, equal, and sustainable relationship.

This research still has several shortcomings, such as the lack of presentation of Qur'anic verses related to houris and environmental criticism, and the limited references from recent articles. In the future, this study could be expanded by examining other verses that describe the relationship between humans, nature, and gender more comprehensively, and involving interdisciplinary approaches from gender studies, the environment, and contemporary Islamic philosophy.

Supplementary Materials

Acknowledgements

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Authors' contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Material preparation, data collection and analysis were performed by Habil Abyad, Intihaul Fudhola, Arif Al Anang and Yolan Hardika Pratama. The first draft of the manuscript was written by Habil Abyad and all authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript

Conflicts of Interest

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