

**GENDER INSIGHT IN THE PROCESS OF HUMAN CREATION
AL-QURAN PERSPECTIVE**
(Comparative Study of Thought Rasyid Ridha, Aminah Wadud and Riffat Hasan)

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Khairuddin

Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, Indonesia

khairuddin.72@uin-suska.ac.id

Perdamaian

Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, Indonesia

perdamaian@uin-suska.ac.id

Suhaimi

Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Al-Azhar Riau, Indonesia

abufarouqi@yahoo.com.my

Zaitun Abidin

Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Tarbiyah Al-Kifayah Riau

email.zaitunabidini201714@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: *This article examines the thoughts of a reforming Islamic figure who is a modern Muslim commentator and feminist figure regarding the origins of human creation, including what is contained therein, namely how the concept of gender has become a controversial topic among Islamic figures and Muslim feminists. Feminists claim that there is an element of discrimination against women in the interpretation of classical commentators where in every verse relating to gender, they seem to only elevate the status of men compared to women. However, in reality, Islam is not like that. Islam is a just religion, equalizing the status of men and women. With this discriminatory interpretation, feminists believe that it is necessary to reinterpret the verses of the Koran with a gender perspective, so that the concept of justice in Islam can be immediately revealed. The research method in this paper is a comparative method based on literature study. The results of this research will be able to reveal the concepts of nafs wahidah and zauj in surah al-Nisa verse 1 and al-Zumar (39): 6 which are key to the analysis of the gender problems faced.*

Keywords: *Gender Insights, Nafs Wahidah, Zauj*



A. Introduction

Nowadays, gender matters¹ often becomes a problem agenda among other global issues. This gender issue is a problem that seems to never end being discussed on various occasions, whether at local, national or international seminars. Basically, gender differences that give rise to injustice and even violence against women are a socio-cultural construct that was formed through a long process. However, because such socio-cultural constructions have become "customs" for a very long time, gender differences have now become a deeply rooted belief in the minds of each individual. Gender differences are considered a natural provision of God that cannot be changed.

Islam is considered partly responsible for gender inequality. Feminists in criticizing aspects of Islam position themselves with a view that is foreign to the Islamic worldview. They demand renewal using modern western standards, which means there is an abstract ideal that can be understood to overthrow the old order that is considered established.² However, the criticism they leveled is not at the source of Islamic teachings, namely the Al-Qur'an and Sunnah, but at the interpretation of the verses of the Al-Qur'an which are considered to be relative results.

As is known, there are two methods used in understanding and interpreting the Qur'an, namely the bil ma'tsur tafsir method and the bil ra'yi tafsir method with various approaches which are greatly influenced by various factors, such as social conditions and customs, educational background and certain tendencies of interpretive experts.³ The methods and approaches develop along with the development of science and changing times, so it is possible that methods with new approaches and paradigms will be born. For example, the emergence of the contextual interpretation method with a socio-historical approach introduced by Fazlurrahman and the interpretation method with a hermeneutic approach practiced by Amina Wadud. The differences in methods and approaches are what cause differences in understanding of the sources of Islamic teachings, namely the Al-Qur'an and Sunnah.

Muslim feminists realize that the discrimination that befalls women is the result of interpretations of the Qur'an that do not take into account matters relating to women's issues and interests. The Qur'an as the main source of religious teachings is always interpreted by Muslim men who are unwilling to carry out the task of defining the ontological, ideological,

¹Gender is the difference between men and women which is not based on biological factors, sex as a permanent nature of God, but a difference created through a long social and cultural process. See Lihat Mansour Fakhri, *Analisis Gender dan Transformasi Sosial* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1996) cet. 1, hal 8-9.

²Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam*, terj. Rahmani Astuti dan MS. Nasrullah (Bandung: Mizan, 1996). 152.

³Quraisy Shihab, *Membumikan Al-Qur'an* (Bandung: Mizan, 1992).

sociological and eschatological status of Muslim women.⁴ This was acknowledged by Amina Wadud in her book *Women in the Koran*, she said but it is said that an Islamic society whose rank is equal to what is contained in the Qur'an has not yet emerged. It is not the verses of the Qur'an that limit women, but the interpretation of this text is the cause, which is then treated as more important than the Qur'an itself.⁵

There are several studies that have been carried out related to this study, which can be a difference between ongoing research and previous research. Among the research that has been conducted include, Mutrofin, *Gender Equality in the Views of Amina Wadud and Riffat Hassan*. The research results show that the important point that can be taken from Amina Wadud's thoughts is that she wants to dismantle old thoughts or even myths caused by patriarchal biased interpretations through reconstructing her interpretive methodology. Because this is actually not in line with the basic principles and spirit of the Koran. The Qur'ân is actually very fair in placing men and women. It's just that this has become distorted by the existence of a patriarchal biased interpretation, which is further strengthened by a very patriarchal political system and society. Riffat Hassan believes that religious texts produced by scientists and classical religious experts have been proven to be influenced by patriarchal culture. This then led to the emergence of theological arguments which he extracted from the Koran as the main text of the Islamic religion which he called feminist theology.⁶ Then Umi Ema Habibah, et al. *Interpretation of Gender Verses in the Qur'an A Study of the Feminist Movement Paradigm Amina Wadud Muhsin*. The results of the research show that the implications of the interpretation carried out by Amina Wadud Muhsin include two things: 1) theological reconstruction, which builds a new paradigm regarding the concept of the creation of women; 2) social reconstruction, which builds a new paradigm regarding the concept of equal partnerships between men and women.⁷

Based on this reality, the author is interested in studying the position of women in the verses about human creation based on the views of gender scholars who are also interpretive scholars. So what is the reinterpretation of the verse about the creation of humans which contains gender elements? How do feminists and mufassir interpret the sentences nafs wahidah

⁴Fatimah Mernissi dan Riffat Hassan, *Setara di Hadapan Allah, Relasi Laki-laki dan Perempuan dalam Tradisi Islam Pasca Patriarkhi*, terj. Team LSPPA (Yogyakarta: LSPPA-Yayasan Prakarsa, 1995), hal. 70.

⁵Amina Wadud Muhsin, *Wanita di Dalam Al-Qur'an*, hal. xxii.

⁶Mutrofin Mutrofin, 'Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Pandangan Amina Wadud Dan Riffat Hassan', *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam*, 3.1 (2013), 234–66 <<https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2013.3.1.234-266>>.

⁷Umi Ema Habibah, Ahsin- Wijaya, and Lilik Rohmat Nurcholisho, 'Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Gender Dalam Al-Qur'an Telaah Terhadap Paradigma Gerakan Feminisme Amina Wadud Muhsin', *Al-Muntaha (Jurnal Kajian Tafsir Dan Studi Islam)*, 1.2 (2019), 49–65.

and za'uj in Qs. Al-Nisa'verse 1 and Al-Zumar verse 6? Specifically, the researcher aims to reveal how the interpretation of Muslim mufassir and feminists, in this case Amina Wadud, Riffat Hasan, is also supported by Rasyid Ridho's modern thinking about the QS. Al-Zumar verse 6 and Qs. Al-Nisa'verse 1 and other verses also contain gender elements.

B. Research Method

In this research, it is qualitative research using the Library Research method. The approach used is descriptive analysis. Using the right method can facilitate efforts to dig up the information needed to explain the data and provide the required information. Primary data in this research was taken from works written by Riffat Hasan, Amina Wadud and Rasyid as the main subjects in this research, as well as verses from QS. al-Nisa verse 1 and al-Zumar verse 6 as the main data in this research. Meanwhile, secondary data sources in research are obtained through books, articles, journals and writings related to the research being carried out. It is hoped that the results of this research will facilitate and open up understanding for contemporary readers regarding the position of women and men in the context of human creation as servants of God who both have the obligation to worship and do good in the universe.

C. Result And Discussion

Short biography

1. Rashid Rida

Rasyid Rida was Muhammad 'Abduh's closest student. He was born in 1865 in al-Qalamun, a village in Lebanon which is located not far from the city of Tripoli (Syria). According to information, he is from the descendants of Husain, the grandson of the Prophet. As a child, he studied at a traditional school in al-Qalamun to learn writing, arithmetic and reading the Koran. Then in 1882, he continued his studies at al-Madrasah al-Wataniah al-Islamiyyah (Islamic National School) in Tripoli which was founded by al-Shaykh Husain al-Jisr, an Islamic scholar who had been influenced by modern ideas. In this Madrasah, apart from Arabic, Turkish and French are also taught along with religious knowledge and also modern knowledge.

Rasyid Ridha then continued his studies at one of the religious schools in Tripoli. However, his relationship with al-Sheikh Hussein al-Jisr continued, in fact he was his mentor when he was young. When Muhammad 'Abduh was in exile in Beirut, he had a good opportunity to meet and dialogue with al-Afghani's main disciple. The reformist thoughts he

received from al-Shaykh Hussain al-Jisr and which were later expanded with the ideas of al-Afghani and Muhammad 'Abduh greatly influenced his soul. Several months later he began publishing the famous magazine, al-Manar.

Rasyid Ridha sees the need for a modern interpretation of the Koran. He always advised his teacher, Muhammad 'Abduh, to write modern tafsir. Due to constant pressure, 'Abduh finally agreed to give a lecture on the interpretation of the Koran at al-Azhar. The lectures began in 1899. The information given by his teacher, Rasyid Ridha, was recorded and then compiled in the form of a regular essay.

He then submitted what he wrote to the teacher for checking. After receiving approval, it was broadcast in al-Manar. Thus, what became known as Tafsir al-Manar was finally born.

2. Amina Wadud

Amina Wadud was born in Bethesda, Maryland, United States, on September 25 1952 and was named Mary Teasley. He lived in Malaysia from elementary school to high school. His father was a Methodist minister, while his mother was descended from Arab Muslim slaves. He is an Islamic feminist and is also a scholar who focuses on the field of Al-Qur'an interpretation. At first she was a non-Muslim, but in 1972 she converted to Islam and her name changed to Amina Wadud in 1974 as a sign that she had converted to Islam. He studied at the American University of Cairo followed by studying the Koran and tafsir at Cairo University, Egypt. After that Amina took a philosophy course at Al-Azhar University. He was contracted for 3 years as Assistant Professor at the International Islamic University Malaysia in the field of Al-Qur'an Studies in Malaysia since 1989. In 1992 he completed his dissertation Al-Qur'an and Women. In 1999, his dissertation was published as a book. After the publication of her first book, Amina was often invited to speak at various events. Then in 2006, Amina published another book entitled "Women's Reform in Islam".

3. Riffat Hasan

Riffat Hassan was born in Lahore, Pakistan, in 1943. Although the exact date is not known, Riffat was born into an upper-class Sayyid family, with five brothers and three sisters. She is a Muslim feminist. His father was a patriarch who was highly respected and liked because of his socialist spirit. His mother was the daughter of Hakim Ahmad Shuba, a prominent and creative poet, philanthropist and scientist.

Riffat Hassan studied elementary school at a mixed school in his city. Since childhood, Riffat has had a hobby of reading and writing. Since he was a teenager, he has often expressed his thoughts through poetry and sonatas which contain criticism of the socio-cultural conditions

of patriarchal society at that time. At the age of 17, Riffat admitted that she started her struggle as a feminist.

Riffat studied higher education in England, specifically at St Mary's College University of Durham, for three years graduating with honors in English literature and philosophy. Riffat Hassan has successfully obtained a Doctorate degree at the age of 24. Riffat Hassan is a feminist who is creative and productive in producing her works. All of Riffat Hassan's works are in the form of articles. It is from these works that Riffat Hassan is recognized by many circles as a feminist thinker who has made a major contribution to the feminist movement in Pakistan. Among his works, namely: (a) The Role and Responsibility of Women in Legal and Ritual Tradition of Islam, (b) Equal Before Allah Woman-man Equality in Islamic Tradition, (c) Feminist Theology and Women in the Muslim Word, (d) Jihad Fi Sabil Allah: A Muslim Woman's faith Journey from Struggle to Struggle to Struggle, (e) The Issue of Woman-man Equality in The Islamic Tradition, and (f) Muslim Woman and Post-Patriarchal Islam.

Interpretation of Muslim Mufassir and Feminists regarding the Origins of the Creation of Women

In feminist discourse, the fundamental issue and very important to discuss is the concept of the creation of women. Because the concept of equality and inequality between men and women is rooted in the origin of the creation of women. It is said that women were created from parts of men's bodies.⁸

In general, the dictum of the Qur'an states that human creation can be divided into four categories, namely (1) humans were created from soil (the case of Adam); (2) created from Adam's rib (Eve's case); (3); created through pregnancy without a father (Isa's case); (4) created through the reproductive process through the biological relationship between husband and wife (humans in general. There are no serious differences of opinion among the three forms of creation mentioned in points 1, 3 and 4, both among commentators and feminists. for the second mentioned, namely creation through Adam's rib, which in this case is Eve, is still debated today, especially for gender practitioners or feminists and gender sensitive people.⁹This difference is based on the interpretation of classical scholars towards gender-

⁸Viky Mazaya, 'KESETARAAN GENDER DALAM PERSPEKTIF SEJARAH ISLAM', *Sawwa: Jurnal Studi Gender*, 9.2 (2014), 323–44 <<https://doi.org/10.21580/sa.v9i2.639>>.

⁹Roswati Nurdin, 'Dekonstruksi Gender Perspektif Rasyid Ridha (Studi Analisis Ayat-Ayat Bias Gender Pada Kitab Tafsir Al-Manār)', *Tahkim*, Vol. XII.No. 02 (2016), p. 5.

biased religious literature. One of the sources used as a basis is QS. Al-Zumar verse 6 which reads:

خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَانزَلَ لَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَنْعَامِ ثَمَنِيَةَ أَزْوَاجٍ يَخْلُقْكُمْ فِي بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ خَلْقًا مِّنْ بَعْدِ خَلْقٍ فِي ظُلُمَاتٍ ثَلَاثٍ ذَلِكُمْ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَاتَىٰ تُصْرَفُونَ

He created you from one person (Adam) then from him He made your partner and He sent down eight pairs of livestock for you. He made you in your mother's belly event after event in three darknesses. The one who (does) this is Allah, your Lord, the Lord who owns the kingdom. There is no god but Him; then why are you turned away?

The focus of the discussion in this verse is lafaz **نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ** and **زَوْجَهَا** because that will be the knife of analysis to answer problems in the feminist world. QS. Al-Zumar verse 6 above is in line with QS. Al-Nisa'verse 1 which reads:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا

O people! Fear your Lord who created you from one person (Adam), and (Allah) created his partner (Eve) from (himself); and from both of them Allah produced many men and women. Fear Allah in Whose name you ask each other and (maintain) family relationships. Indeed, Allah always guards and watches over you.

In various interpretive literature, the issue of human creation has been widely discussed since the early period of Islam. Nafs wahidah interpreted as Eve being created from Adam's rib appears in various interpretive works from the end of the 1st century to the 2nd century H. Among them are the works of Ibn Abbas, Al-Farra', Mujahid, and the opinions of these commentators quoted by commentators of the 20th century. -3, such as At-Thabari, az-Zujaj, Ibn Abi Hatim, Ibn al-Munzir, and others. The tradition of quoting the thoughts of early mufassir continued until the 4th century and the following centuries, although in some works it was not stated that these were the opinions of early mufassir, but in terms of meaning, there was a similarity and recognition of the truth of these opinions. For example in the works of Al-Mawardi, Al-Sam'ani, Al-Zamakhshari, Ibnu Katsir, and other works. This data shows that the interpretation that says women were created from Adam's rib has been going on for a long time and is a single truth that is difficult to dispute.¹⁰

In contemporary times, the interpretive paradigm has changed. Now the world view in responding to the reality of social change is the assumption that the Qur'an is shalih kulli masa

¹⁰Zaitunah Subhan, 'GENDER DALAM TINJAUAN TAFSIR', *Kafa'ah: Journal of Gender Studies*, 2.1 (2012), 1–10 <<https://doi.org/10.15548/jk.v2i1.34>>.

wa makan. Rasyid Ridho's Tafsir Al-Manar is a work that is different from previous interpretations in that in his work, he deconstructs all mufassir thoughts from the first century to the Middle Ages. The view that nafs wahidah means Adam, for him is a wrong view. The scholars connote the nafs as something material (Adam). In fact, in various nafs literature, it has a non-material connotation, the same as jasar, spirit, hayah and so on. Therefore, he is more inclined to interpret nafs wahidah with spirit, namely the non-material element in humans with which God created humans and their partners.¹¹

Apart from Rasyid Ridho's views which are contrary to the views of classical mufassir, there are Muslim feminist opinions which are also contrary to the views of classical mufassir and at the same time support Rasyid Ridho's views. In surah Al-Zumar verse 6 and Al-Nisa'verse 1 above, the names Adam and Eve are not clearly stated, but are expressed with the words nafs wahidah and zaujaha. However, in general, mufassir believe that what is meant by nafs wahidah is Adam (male) and zaujaha is Eve (female). And what is causing controversy here is the process of Eve's creation which in this verse is expressed in the sentence **God bless you** Likewise in surah Al-Nisa'verse 1 which is expressed in sentences **وَأَخْلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا**. And the issue here is, was Eve created from the same earth as Adam or was she created from part of Adam's body? The key word for the controversial interpretation lies in the sentence **مِنْهَا**. Does this sentence mean that Eve was created from the same kind as Adam, or was created from Adam himself? This is the core difference between classical mufassir and Muslim feminists such as Riffat Hassan and Amina Wadud Muhsin.

Riffat Hassan specifically explained that the word nafs wahidah does not mean Adam and zauj does not automatically mean wife. Because the word nafs wahidah is still neutral, it can mean male or female. Likewise with the word zauj, in terms of terminology, zauj means a partner, whether male or female. Because according to him, the word zauj which means (wife) is only known among the Hijaz community while in other areas the word zaujah is used.¹²Therefore, Riffat Hassan concluded that Adam and Eve were created from the same substance and process, there is no difference between the two. So, it cannot be said that Eve was created from Adam's rib. As for the hadiths which say that Eve was created from Adam's rib, it is understood as figurative language in which a crooked rib is described as a female

¹¹Ichlasul Niat, 'Konsep Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Al-Qur'an (Perspektif Kitab Tafsir Al-Manar)' (unpublished diploma, UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten, 2023), p. 45 <[https:// repository.uinbanten.ac.id](https://repository.uinbanten.ac.id)> [accessed 2 January 2024].

¹²Fatimah Mernissi dan Riffat Hassan, *Setara di Hadapan Allah*, hal. 48.

characteristic. If the ribs are forced to straighten, they will break. Likewise with women. So, there is no more appropriate action to give to a woman than tenderness.¹³

Likewise, Amina Wadud examined the verse above by looking at it word by word. He said that the Koran does not explain that humans were created from men or show that the origin of humans is Adam. This can be seen from the words *nafs wahidah* and *zauj* which have neutral meanings, they can be male or female. In general, the word *zauj* in the Qur'an denotes a soul mate, partner, wife or group. And because of the limited information provided by the Qur'an about the creation of *zauj*, classical commentators finally ran to the Bible which stated that Eve was created from Adam's rib.¹⁴

There is no text in the Qur'an that definitely states that humans descended from Adam.¹⁵ As for those who say that women came from Adam's rib, this is an understanding that arises from ideas contained in the Old Testament which have penetrated into the hadiths so that they influence the understanding of Islam and commentators who say that Eve was created from Adam's rib do not refer to the verses of the Koran. but makes that understanding a means of interpreting the verse.¹⁶

The reality of inequality and injustice between women and men is indeed caused by certain ontological and theological assumptions such as Riffat Hasan's thesis or perhaps due to other factors outside of theology such as educational and sociocultural factors, which are then elevated to the religious area. (theological) so that it is stronger and unshakable. Regarding the existence of teachings accepted by Muslims, such as the opinions of classical mufassir, they must automatically be rejected. What Muslims reject is of course what is contrary to the Koran and Sunnah. In the case above, a new understanding and interpretation may be needed involving all aspects, especially through a critical historical study of the text itself, as well as the socio-cultural conditions surrounding the revelation of the teaching.

From the description above, we can see that classical mufassir and Muslim feminists have different opinions in interpreting *nafs wahidah*. Mufassir understands *nafs wahidah* as Adam so that Eve was created from him. Meanwhile, Muslim feminists understand *nafs wahidah* as one type so that Eve was created from the same substance and method as her. This feminist view is also pro-Rasyid Ridha's view. It turns out that this understanding has actually voiced

¹³Sri Haningsih, 'Pemikiran Riffat Hasan Tentang Feminisme Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Transformasi Sosial Islam', *Al-Mawarid: Jurnal Hukum Islam*, 13 (2005) <<https://journal.uin.ac.id/JHI/article/view/2811>> [accessed 2 January 2024].

¹⁴Amina Wadud Muhsin, *Wanita dalam Al-Qur'an*, hal. 25-27.

¹⁵Rasyid Ridha, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-Hakim Al-Mansyur bi Tafsir Al-Manar* (Kairo: Dar al-Manar. T,th), hal. 330.

¹⁶Ahlan Ahlan, 'REINTERPRETASI HADIS KEPEMIMPIN PEREMPUAN (KRITIK HERMENEUTIKA AMINA WADUD)', *Ushuluna: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin*, 8.1 (2022), 62-76.

the will of women who have been marginalized throughout history. Meanwhile, the classical interpretation is considered to be the basis of all forms of oppression against women because women are said to be second creatures and have a lower rank than men.

D. Conclusion

Based on the results of the explanation above, it can be concluded that classical mufassir have different opinions from contemporary mufassir and Muslim feminists in understanding the meaning of nafs wahidah. Classical mufassir understand it as Adam, while Muslim feminists and contemporary mufassir understand it as one type. So Adam and Eve were created from the same substance and process. This is also reinforced by Rasyid Ridha's explanation in his book which states that there is no text in the Qur'an which explains that the creation of humans came from Adam. The understanding that says women came from Adam's rib arises from ideas contained in the Old Testament which penetrate the hadiths so that they influence the understanding of Islam and the commentators who say that Eve was created from Adam's rib do not refer to the verses of the Koran but make that understanding a means of interpreting the verse. With this reinterpretation of the interpretation of this verse, we are able to voice the will of women which has so far been secondary due to the interpretation of classical commentators which tend to elevate the status of men.

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