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Beyond Patriarchal Readings: Reassessing Qiwwamah in Classical Qur'anic Exegesis

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Abstract

Studies on Q.S. al-Nisā' [4]:34 often conclude that classical Qur'anic exegesis reinforces patriarchal authority by positioning men as superior to women in family leadership. However, this view tends to overlook the diversity of interpretations within the classical tafsir tradition. This article re-examines classical interpretations of the phrase al-rijāl qawwāmūna 'alā al-nisā' by identifying progressive perspectives that have received limited scholarly attention. Using qualitative library research and a comparative hermeneutic approach, the study analyzes major classical tafsir works from the fourth to eighth centuries Hijri, including those of al-Ṭabarī, al-Māwardī, al-Rāzī, and Abū Ḥayyān. The findings show that classical tafsir is not a monolithic patriarchal tradition. Rather, it contains diverse understandings of qiwwamah that can be grouped into three progressive models. First, the mas'ūliyyah model emphasizes responsibility and care, portraying the husband as a guardian responsible for family welfare. Second, the niẓām model understands qiwwamah as a functional organizational arrangement rather than a sign of male superiority. Third, the qudrah model links qiwwamah to the capacity to provide protection and effective leadership, allowing role flexibility based on competence rather than biological sex. These interpretations indicate that egalitarian and non-hierarchical views of family relations were already present within parts of the classical exegetical tradition. This study challenges the assumption that classical tafsir uniformly legitimizes patriarchy and highlights the plurality of classical Islamic thought. It also demonstrates the relevance of classical interpretations for developing contextual and gender-sensitive readings of the Qur'an in contemporary Muslim societies.

Keywords: *Qiwwamah, Classical Tafsir, Gender Equality, Progressive Interpretation, Q.S. al-Nisā' [4]:34, Hermeneutics.*

INTRODUCTION:

Sūrah al-Nisā' [4]: 34¹ is considered by scholars to be the most controversial verse, as it addresses two important issues: first, the issue of qawwām or qiwwamah (male authority over women), followed by the issue of beating disobedient women (nusyūz).² The author views the issue of qawwām, expressed in the phrase al-rijāl qawwāmūna alā al-nisā', as more critical because it has the potential to be misinterpreted as justification for the permissibility of beating a disobedient wife. The explanation above demonstrates that the act of interpretation is not merely the application of a methodology for understanding the Qur'an; in practice, it can have implications for an individual's religious attitude.³ This verse is often

الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ فَالصَّالِحَاتُ قَانِتَاتٌ حَافِظَاتٌ لِّلْغَيْبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ اللَّهُ وَاللَّاتِي ۙ
تَخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ وَاهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَاضْرِبُوهُنَّ فَإِنْ أَطَعْنَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا كَبِيرًا (النساء: ٣٤)

²Yusuf Rahman, "Q.4:34 And Disciplining A Wife: Modern Indonesia Muslim Scholars' Interpretations Of The Qur'an," *Atlantis Press, ASSEHR*, Vol. 137 (2017): 156.

³Muhsin Mahfudz, "Implikasi Pemahaman Tafsir Al-Qur'an terhadap Sikap Keberagamaan," *Jurnal Tafseer*, Vol 4, Vol. 2 (2016): 122.

misunderstood as legitimising the position of men as superior to women.⁴ This interpretation has the potential to foster unfair attitudes and arbitrary actions by husbands toward their wives.⁵ This, of course, results in an unhealthy husband-wife relationship and prevents the family from fulfilling its purpose, as outlined in the Qur'an, as a source of tranquillity (*sakīnah*) for both husband and wife. Moreover, the interpretation of Surah al-Nisa' verse 34 that may fuel gender bias must be critically examined, as one of the Qur'an's central tenets is to promote values of equality and gender sensitivity.⁶

In addition to the misinterpretation of the verse *al-rijālu qawwāmūna 'ala al-nisā'*, it turns out that researchers and feminists often label classical exegesis as gender-biased. Anshori notes that al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi' al-Bayān* is frequently used as a basis for rejecting gender equality and as a reference to legitimise patriarchal lifestyles because, in that work, al-Ṭabarī merely compiled hadiths and narrations without verifying their validity.⁷

Amina Wadud attributes the gender-biased interpretation to the fact that most commentaries are written by men, which influences interpretations of specific verses and the general principles of the Qur'an.⁸ Afandi argues that gender bias in classical exegesis stems from the dominance of the *taḥlīlī* method, causing exegetes to rely heavily on textual meanings while neglecting other verses that could complement the explanation of the verse being interpreted, thereby resulting in a partial understanding.⁹ According to Nurani, the discriminatory views present in classical exegesis place women as second-class beings. This serves as evidence that the work of exegesis produces gender bias that subjugates women as weak, marginalised, and subordinate beings.¹⁰ In fact, according to Sya'rani, most classical exegetes use the verse *al-rijālu qawwāmūna 'ala al-nisā'* to legitimise male superiority in terms of honour and authority—take, for example, al-Zamakhshari.¹¹ Thus, if modern scholars assert the existence of gender bias in the interpretation of the verse *al-rijālu qawwāmūna 'ala al-nisā'*,¹²

⁴Abdus Somad, "Otoritas Laki-Laki Dan Perempuan: Studi Penafsiran Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed terhadap Qs. an-Nisa 4: 34," *Jurnal Alif Lam: Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities*. Vol. 3 No. 1 (2022): 2.

⁵Ada korelasi antara bias gender dengan kekerasan dalam rumah tangga. Jika bias gender terjadi di masyarakat, maka dapat diprediksi terjadi kekerasan dalam rumah tangga. Sebaliknya, jika tidak ada bias gender dalam masyarakat maka dapat diprediksi kekerasan dalam rumah tangga tidak akan terjadi atau dapat berkurang. Anugriaty Indah Asmarany, "Bias Gender Sebagai Prediktor Kekerasan dalam Rumah Tangga," *Jurnal Psikologi*, Vol. 35, No. 1(2008): 16.

⁶Yuyun Affandi, dkk., "Da'wah Qur'aniyah Based on Environmental Conversation: Revitalizing Spiritual Capital Ecotheology, Environmentally Friendly, Gender Responsive," *Pertanika Journal Social Sciences and Humanities*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (2022): 160.

⁷Anshori, "Penafsiran Ayat-ayat Jender dalam *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*," (Disertasi, Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2006, 1-2.

⁸Amina Wadud Muhsin, *Wanita di dalam Al-Qur'an*, terj. Yaziar Radianti, (Bandung: Pustaka, 1994), 126.

⁹Agus Afandi, "Bentuk-Bentuk Perilaku Bias Gender," *Lentera: Journal of Gender and Children Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2019): 11-12.

¹⁰Shinta Nurani, "Implikasi Tafsir Klasik terhadap Subordinasi Gender: Perempuan Sebagai Makhluk Kedua," *Munawar*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2015), 133.

¹¹Afifur Rochman Sya'rani, "A Hermeneutic Reading of Amina Wadud's and Mohammed Talbi's Interpretations of Q.4:34," *Subuf*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2016) : 195.

¹²Adis Duderija, "Understanding Patriarchal Interpretations of Q 4:34 the Light of Stanley Fish's "Interpretive Communities"," dalam *New Trend in Qur'anic Studies Text, Context, and Interpretation*, ed. Mun'im Sirry, (Atlanta: Lockwood Press, 2019), 177.

The researchers' assessment is not entirely accurate, because the term "gender" only emerged in the modern era—specifically in the late 19th and early 20th centuries,¹³—long after the period of classical exegesis; therefore, it is inappropriate to evaluate classical exegetical works using a gender bias framework that did not yet exist at that time. Nevertheless, the researchers' views mentioned above do have merit, as classical exegetes offer interpretations that imply the husband's superiority and authority over his wife. For instance, al-Zamakhshari (d. 538 AH) interpreted the term *qawwāmūna* as one who forbids and commands his wife, much like a ruler over his subjects.¹⁴ In addition, Ibn Kathir (d. 774 AH) interpreted the word *qawwām* as referring to a leader, judge, and educator in cases where a wife strays. This is because men are superior to women.¹⁵

The traditional interpretations of exegetes such as al-Zamakhshari and Ibn Kathir have the potential to give rise to gender bias or gender inequality. This seems to be what leads modern researchers to simplify the notion that gender bias stems from classical exegesis. However, this assumption is inaccurate, as there are progressive interpretations by classical exegetes whose views are relevant to the current context and can even support the realization of gender equality in male-female relationships, both within the family and in the broader social sphere. For example, al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH) interpreted the word *qawwām* as the husband's care for his wife and his attention to protecting her. This duty does not make the husband superior to his wife, as in other matters, husband and wife cooperate. Just as each partner possesses strengths that balance their partner's. The husband's position as a *qawwām* is a form of organization.¹⁶ There is also Abū Ḥayyān, who understood the word *al-rijāl* in the verse *al-rijālū qawwāmūna 'ala al-nisā'* not as referring to gender (men), but as referring to the character traits of the ability to care for and protect, and the ability to perform duties well. A man is called *rijāl* if he possesses these characteristics. As for the word *qawwām*, it means to manage and safeguard something.¹⁷

the study of the concept of *qawwām* by academics has largely focused on contextualizing its interpretation; for example, Faqih suggests that the term *rijāl* is not always exclusive to men, as in other verses where *rijāl* refers to those who are eager to purify themselves (QS. Al-Taubah: 108) or those committed to remembrance (QS. Al-Nūr: 37). If the word *rijāl* in this verse is understood to mean men, according to Faqih, it is merely an example, because in his view, women who purify themselves, engage in *dhikr*, and receive Allah's promise are included in the substance of these verses.¹⁸ Faqih does not present a progressive interpretation from among the classical exegetes. In agreement with Faqih are Nasaruddin Umar and Asma Barlas, who also focus on reinterpreting the verse *al-rijāl*

¹³Teori feminisme berupa pengakuan terhadap perempuan sebagai kelompok sosial yang tertindas merupakan prasyarat bagi perkembangan teori feminis. Gerakan perempuan tersebut terorganisir pada akhir abad 19 M dan awal abad 20 M. Muhammad Ismail, "Feminisme dalam Penafsiran Ayat Qiwamah Perspektif Riffat Hassan dan Amina Wadud," *Ibn Abbas Jurnal Ilmu Alquran dan Tafsir*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2023) : 35.

¹⁴Jār Allāh Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd bin 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kasyāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wuḥūb al-Ta'wīl*, Juz 2, (Riyāḍ: Maktabah al-Obekan, 1998), 67.

¹⁵Imād al-Dīn Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl bin Kaṣīr al-Dimasyqī, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, juz 4, (Kairo: Mu'assasah Qurṭubah, 2000), 20.

¹⁶Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafatih al-Ghaib*, juz 10, (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāṡ al-'Arabī, 1420 H), 90.

¹⁷Muḥammad bin Yūsuf bin 'Alī bin Yūsuf bin Ḥayyan al-Andalusī, *Tafsīr al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, juz 3, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 1993), 248-249.

¹⁸Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, *Qira'ah Mubadalah Tafsir Progresif untuk Keadilan Gender dalam Islam*, (Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2019), 380-381.

qawwāmūna ‘ala al-nisā’. Umar suggests that al-rijāl does not merely refer to biological sex but emphasizes specific qualities and capacities.¹⁹ As for Barlas, she interprets qawwām as a protector and provider, not as the head of the household as understood in Western feudal culture.²⁰

Adis Duderija’s research differs from that of Faqih, Umar, and Barlas, as Duderija does not offer a contextual interpretation of Quranic Surah Al-Nisā: 34, but rather examines the patriarchal interpretations of the concept of qawwāmah by several classical, modern, and contemporary exegetes. According to Duderija, the emergence of patriarchal interpretations was caused by patriarchal culture and values that had become the prevailing view of society at that time; in fact, Duderija argues that such patriarchal interpretations will persist and be difficult to eradicate as long as patriarchal culture remains.²¹

This study aims to examine progressive classical exegesis as a critique of the gender-biased simplifications often directed at classical exegesis in general. The focus of this study is to explore the nature of the progressive classical interpretation of the verse *al-rijāl qawwāmūna ala al-nisā’* and the factors that influenced the emergence of such a progressive interpretation. This paper draws on library research consisting of four classical exegetical works spanning the 4th to 8th centuries AH,²² is *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān* by al-Ṭabarī (d.310 AH), *al-Nukat wa al-‘Uyūn* by al-Māwardī (d.450 AH), *Maḥāṣin al-Ghaib* by al-Rāzī (d.606 AH) and *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* by Abū Ḥayyān (d.745 AH). These exegetical works are analysed using a descriptive-analytical method with an interpretive approach to understand the exegetes’ interpretations,²³ revealing the explicit and implicit meanings of the textual sources and elucidating the contexts in which those meanings emerged. A comparative approach is also employed to demonstrate the existence of progressive classical interpretations. In the interpretive process, Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutic approach is employed to reveal how the actual results of the interpretation of the verse al-rijāl qawwāmūna ‘ala al-nisā’ in classical exegetical works from the 4th to 8th centuries AH were influenced by the fusion of the exegetes’ horizons with the socio-cultural context prevailing at that time.

DISCUSSION

Classical Exegesis: Feminist and Scholarly Criticism and the Prospects for a “Progressive” Label

The term “tafsir” encompasses three dimensions of meaning. First, tafsir is a discipline that integrates other fields of knowledge, thereby enabling one to uncover the meaning of the Qur’an. Second, as an activity, namely the act of interpreting the meaning of the Qur’an. Third, it is a product that explains the meaning of the Qur’an as the result of

¹⁹Nasaruddin Umar, *Argumen Kesetaraan Gender Perspektif al-Qur’an*, (Jakarta: Dian Rakyat, 2010), 133.

²⁰Asma Barlas, *Cara Qur’an Membebaskan Perempuan*, terj. R. Cecep Lukman Yasin, (Jakarta: Serambi, 2005), 324.

²¹Adis Duderija, “Understanding Patriarchal Interpretations of Q 4:34 the Light of Stanley Fish’s “Interpretive Communities”,” dalam *New Trend in Qur’anic Studies Text, Context, and Interpretation*, ed. Mun’im Sirry, (Atlanta: Lockwood Press, 2019), 191.

²²Secara periodik kesejarahan kitab tafsir, abad IV-XIV H masuk dalam masa klasik (III-VIII H), pertengahan (IX-XII H) dan modern (XIII-XIV H). Isa HA Salam dan Rifqi Muhammad Fathi, “Pemetaan Kajian Tafsir Al-Qur’an pada Program Pascasarjana UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta dan UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta: Analisis Sitiran Pengarang yang Disitir Disertasi Mahasiswa tahun 2005-2010,” (Laporan Penelitian Kolektif, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2011), 16.

²³Anton Bakker dan Achmad Charis Zubair, *Metodologi Penelitian Filsafat* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1990), 63.

interpretation, whether in the form of legal rulings or wisdom.²⁴ These three dimensions of the meaning of tafsir are summarised in al-Zarkasyī's definition: tafsir is the science of understanding and explaining the meaning of Allah's words revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, which yields legal rulings and wisdom. To achieve this, one requires knowledge of linguistics, grammar (naḥw), morphology (ṣaraf), rhetoric (bayān), the principles of jurisprudence (uṣūl fiqh), recitation (qirā'āt), the reasons for revelation (asbāb al-nuzūl), as well as abrogating and abrogated verses (nāsikh and mansūkh).²⁵ Al-Zarqānī describes tafsir by focusing on its dimension as an activity. According to al-Zarqānī, tafsir is an effort to uncover the meaning intended by Allah by referring to the meaning/guidance of the Qur'anic text to the best of the exegete's ability (bi qadri al-ṭāqah al-basyariyah). In al-Zarqānī's definition, the process of revealing the meaning of the Qur'an is evident through reference to the text's literal meaning and the exegete's capabilities.²⁶

Historically, the period of tafsir is divided into the classical period (3rd–8th AH), the medieval period (9th–12th AH), and the modern period (13th–14th AH).²⁷ According to al-Zahabī's classification of tafsir's development, the classical period corresponds to the second through fourth phases of its codification. The second phase began with the codification of tafsir as a separate genre from hadith literature. Following the ṭabi'in, scholars emerged who authored tafsir works, explaining verses one by one in the order of the mushaf; these included Ibn Mājah, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, Abū Bakr ibn al-Munzīr al-Naisābūrī, Ibn Abi Hatīm, al-Hakīm, Ibn Mardawaih, and Ibn Hibban. Ibn Jarir al-Tabari is best known for his tafsir book *Jamī' al-Bayān*.²⁸

Al-Tabari's tafsir is evidence of the second phase in the codification of tafsir, which presents exegesis separately from hadith collections. In this phase, the composition of tafsir resembled that of hadith in its inclusion of isnads tracing back to the Ṭabi'in, the Companions, and the Prophet Muhammad.²⁹ The third phase still focused on the sources of the narrations, but the inclusion of the isnad differed from the second phase, as it was condensed. It was here that ambiguity arose between authentic and inauthentic narrations; forgery in exegesis also occurred during this phase.³⁰

²⁴ Tafsir, as a process, can be understood as a creative endeavour to interpret the Qur'an continually, given the complexity of the issues and challenges faced in every era. Meanwhile, tafsir as a product is the result of the exegete's creativity in interpreting the Qur'an. Agus Salim Hasanudin dan Eni Zulaiha, "Hakikat Tafsir Menurut Para Mufasir," *Jurnal Iman dan Spiritual*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2022): 208.

²⁵ Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad bin 'Abdullāh al-Zarkasyī, *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān*, juz 1 (Kairo: Maktabah Dār al-Turāṣ, t.t.), 13.

²⁶ Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Azīm al-Zarqānī, *Manābil al-'Irḡān fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān*, juz 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1995), 6.

²⁷ Isa HA Salam dan Rifqi Muhammad Fathi, "Pemetaan Kajian Tafsir Al-Qur'an pada Program Pascasarjana UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta dan UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta: Analisis Sitiran Pengarang yang Disitir Disertasi Mahasiswa tahun 2005-2010," (Laporan Penelitian Kolektif, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2011), 16.

²⁸ Muḥammad Ḥusain al-Zahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, juz 1, (Kairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1976), 105. Al-Zarqānī, *Manābil al-'Irḡān fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān*, juz 2, 25.

²⁹ Al-Zahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, juz 1, 105.

³⁰ Al-Zahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, juz 1, 107. Early exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī provided complete chains of transmission, as they were still following the hadith tradition. Subsequent generations of exegetes summarised the isnad; in fact, in modern exegeses such as those by al-Marāghī, Quraish Shihab, and others, the Companions are directly mentioned, or even the Prophet alone. This is a necessary consequence for conveying the verse's meaning effectively, making it easy

The emergence of references to sources of thought marks the fourth phase. Exegesis no longer relies solely on hadith, but rather on a synthesis of hadith and thought, linguistic principles, and the doctrines of specific schools of thought and theology. This phase occurred during the Abbasid era and continues to the present³¹ Thus, the classical period marks the early emergence of independent exegetical works, which were dominated by hadith-based sources of interpretation (*bi al-ma'sūr*). Nevertheless, during the classical period, there were also exegetical works that employed sources of reasoning (*ijtihad*)/(*bi al-ra'yi*). The medieval period is a continuation of the classical period, characterized by a relative continuity of exegetical works based on both *bi al-ma'sūr* and *bi al-ra'yi*. The modern period, on the other hand, is characterized by a renewal of exegetical thought, with sources of *ra'yi* dominating its exegetical works. Nevertheless, exegetical works based on transmitted sources are still found. The modern period is often compared to the classical period.

The classical interpretation is characterized by the dominance of certain political, doctrinal, ideological, and scholarly perspectives, so that the Qur'an is often used to legitimize those tendencies.³² Classical interpretation is more repetitive, merely restating the opinions of previous exegetes, and thus falls far short of the purpose for which the Qur'an was revealed—as guidance for humanity.³³ Conversely, the modern era is characterized by contextual interpretation³⁴ and emphasizes practical, solution-oriented thinking in response to the problems faced by modern society.³⁵ Classical interpretation also tends to be textualist and does not utilise approaches beyond those inherited from Islamic tradition.³⁶

The description above gives the impression that classical exegesis is static and less interesting than modern exegesis; indeed, the medieval period seems to have been overlooked, lacking any defining characteristic. In reality, however, the classical period is a crucial era in the history of exegesis, as it was during this period that many exegetical works were produced that are still studied today and serve as references in exegetical scholarship. Classical exegesis also plays an important role in modern interpretive discourse, as classical interpretations have become the subject of interpretive debates in the modern era. Classical exegesis constitutes an intellectual tradition that captures the historical context of that era.³⁷

The depreciation of the role of classical exegesis stems from its being examined objectively within its own context rather than through the lens of modernity; consequently,

to read and understand without the need to cite the *isnad*. Therefore, the reality of this abridgement of the *isnad*—which carries the risk of including weak or even fabricated narrations—serves as a motivation for readers of *tafsir* to be more critical and to master the methodology of *tafsir* criticism, one aspect of which involves employing the tools of hadith criticism. In this way, the quality of the narrations cited in the *tafsir* can be easily assessed.

³¹Al-Žahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, juz 1, 108.

³²Abdul Mustaqim, *Dinamika Sejarah Tafsir Al-Qur'an Studi Aliran-aliran dari Periode Klasik, Pertengahan, Hingga Modern-Kontemporer*, (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Adab Press, 2012), 99.

³³Mustaqim, *Dinamika Sejarah Tafsir Al-Qur'an*, 159-160.

³⁴Mustaqim, *Dinamika Sejarah Tafsir Al-Qur'an*, 165.

³⁵Hanna Salsabila, "Spesifikasi Tafsir dari Masa Sahabat hingga Masa Modern," *Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu Ushuluddin*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2023): 243.

³⁶Ahmad Zaenuri, "Classical and Modern Exegesis Styles: The Evolution of The Development Exegesis Styles From Classical and Modern Periods," *Jurnal At-Tibyan: Jurnal Ilmu Alqur'an dan Tafsir*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (2023): 20. Amer Ali, "A Brief Review of Classical and Modern *Tafsir* Trend and the Role of Modern *Tafsir* in Contemporary Islamic Thought," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 3, No 2 (2018): 42.

³⁷Elyatus Sholihah dan Abd. Kahar, "The Significance of Traditional Exegesis in Modern Quranic Sciences (Critical Analysis)," *International Conference on Islamic Studies (ICoIS)*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2023): 44.

it is treated merely as supporting evidence rather than as the central focus.³⁸ For example, when examining classical interpretations of verses on gender and comparing them to current modern conditions, there will be many negative assessments and accusations of gender bias. As noted in the assessments of Amina Wadud, Anshori, Nurani, and Afandi mentioned in the introduction. Therefore, it is not surprising that classical exegesis is currently not widely sought after as a reference in discussions of gender-related verses.

Scholars' partial assessment of classical exegesis, as mentioned above, has weakened its position and led it to appear at odds with current trends in progressive thought, thereby rendering the attribution of progressive characteristics to classical exegesis contradictory. Moreover, the term "progressive" is generally used to describe the characteristics of contemporary thinkers. In the context of Qur'anic studies, progressive thought, or progressive exegesis, is always associated with the work of contemporary Qur'anic scholars, such as Asma Barlas, Abdullah Saeed, Shahrur, and others.³⁹

The term "progressive" is not inherently limited to the modern or contemporary era, as the definition of the word "progressive" points to a way of thinking that is open, fresh, inclusive, and responsive to humanitarian issues,⁴⁰ characteristics of thought that emphasise the creation of social justice, gender equality, pluralism, the defence of the oppressed, and the upholding of humanistic values.⁴¹ Therefore, classical exegesis can also be termed "progressive classical exegesis" if the exegete's intellectual output aligns with social justice and gender equality and upholds humanistic values. This is the central idea of this paper: to present a progressive classical exegesis in order to reveal another side of classical exegesis that has rarely been studied. This serves as an antithesis to the partial assessments and generalisations of classical exegesis as a source of gender-biased interpretation, as claimed by feminists and scholars such as Wadud, Anshori, Nurani, and Afandi.

Interpreting the Concept of Classical Exegetes Regarding the Verse *al-Rijālu Qawwāmūna 'alā Al-Nisā'*

From Gadamer's hermeneutical perspective, understanding never arises from a neutral reading of a text, but is always influenced by historically effected consciousness (historical consciousness shaped by tradition). Therefore, the differences in interpretations of the phrase *al-rijālu qawwāmūna 'alā al-nisā'* among the commentators cannot be understood solely as linguistic differences, but also as a reflection of the social, political, and intellectual horizons surrounding each commentator. With this approach, the concept of *qiwāmah* is not viewed as a single, static meaning, but rather as the product of a dialogue between the Qur'an's text and the historical experiences of its interpreters.

Regarding the verse *al-rijālu qawwāmūna 'alā al-nisā'*, it is important to begin with the historical context of its revelation. It is narrated that once a man from the Ansar came to the

³⁸Alif Jabal Kurdi, "Tafsir dan Ta'wil pada Karya-karya Tafsir Abad Pertengahan (4-10 H): Konsepsi, Implikasi Metodologis dan *Trajektori*," (Tesis Universitas PTIQ Jakarta, 2024): 32.

³⁹Maizuddin, Maizuddin, and Zulihafrani Zulihafrani. "PROGRESIVE QUR'ANIC STUDIES IN INDONESIAN STATE ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION (2014-2019): IMPLEMENTATION AND DEVELOPMENT". *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 22, no. 1 (January 30, 2021): 115. <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.2021.2201-06>

⁴⁰Rabbany T, Al-Faiz M, and Indal Abror. "TAFSIR PROGRESIF ATAS KISAH-KISAH DALAM AL-QUR'AN KARYA EKO PRASETYO". *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 19, no. 1 (January 23, 2018): 85. <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.2018.1901-05>

⁴¹Maizuddin, Maizuddin, and Zulihafrani Zulihafrani. "PROGRESIVE QUR'ANIC STUDIES IN INDONESIAN STATE ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION (2014-2019): IMPLEMENTATION AND DEVELOPMENT", 115.

Prophet with his wife. The wife complained to the Prophet about her husband having slapped her. The Prophet then told the woman she could retaliate against her husband (qisas), but when Surah an-Nisa' verse 34 was revealed, she returned home without carrying out qisas against her husband.⁴²

The word *qawwām* literally means a group or community and a strong stance or ideal.⁴³ It refers to a group of men and women, though sometimes the word *qawwām* is used specifically to refer to a group of men. In addition to these two meanings, the word *qawwām* is also interpreted figuratively as one who bears responsibility for and manages affairs, particularly when referring to men and women. For example, when it is said *qāma al-rajulu al-mar'ata*, it means that the man bears responsibility for and manages the woman's affairs.⁴⁴

According to al-Iṣḥānī, the word *qawwām* in the Qur'an can mean taking care of someone by compulsion (bi taskhīr) or by offering a choice (bi ikhtiyār). The management referred to in the verse *al-rijālu qawwāmūna 'alā al-nisā'* is a form of management that involves granting choice.⁴⁵ The word *qawwām* has been the focus of study among exegetes, and from this various views have emerged regarding the position and nature of a husband's leadership over his wife. Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310) and al-Māwardī (d. 450 AH) interpreted the word *qawwām* as *ahlu fi ta'dīb wa ākbidu fi mā yajibu 'alā nisā'* meaning one who is qualified to manage, educate, and take responsibility for his wife, both in matters related to Allah and in matters related to the husband himself.⁴⁶

Interpreting *al-rijālu qawwāmūna 'alā al-nisā'*, al-Ṭabarī and al-Māwardī proposed the idea of the husband's role as the guardian of his wife. Different from al-Baghawī (d. 516 AH), who interprets the word *qawwām* by emphasizing the authority of men/husbands to educate, manage, and provide for the welfare of women/wives (*musallaṭūn bi maṣlaḥah wa tadbīr wa ta'dīb*).⁴⁷ Al-Baghawī's interpretation points to the husband's authority over his wife, which extends not only to educating and taking responsibility for her, but also to managing her and providing for her well-being. This differs from al-Ṭabarī and al-Māwardī, who emphasize the husband's responsibility.

Al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538 AH), who was a contemporary of al-Baghawī in the 6th century AH, interpreted the word *qawwāmūna* as *āmīr wa nāhī ka yaqūmu al-wulāh 'alā ra'iyah*, that is, one who forbids and commands his wife, like a ruler over his people (*āmīr wa nāhī ka yaqūmu al-wulāh 'alā ra'iyah*).⁴⁸ Al-Zamakhshari's interpretation is in line with al-Baghawī's, which emphasises the husband's authority over his wife; indeed, al-Zamakhshari emphasises the husband's commands and prohibitions as binding, just as a leader's are over his people.

⁴²Jalāl al-Dīn Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl fī Asbāb al-Nuṣūl*, (Beirut: Muassasah al-Kutub al-Ṣaqāfiyah, 2002), 76.

⁴³Abī al-Ḥusain Aḥmad bin Fāris bin Zakariyā, *Mu'jam Maqāyis al-Lughah*, Juz 5, (Beirut: Dār al-Jil, 1991), 43.

⁴⁴Sayyid Muḥammad Murtaḍā al-Zabidī, *Taj al-'Arūs min Jawābir al-Qāmūs*, juz 33, (Kuwait: al-Turāṡ al-'Arabī, 2000), 305, 308.

⁴⁵Abī al-Qāsim al-Ḥusain bin Muḥammad al-Rāghib al-Iṣḥānī, *al-Mufradāt fī Gharib Al-Qur'an*, (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah t.t.), 416.

⁴⁶Abū Ja'far Muḥammad bin Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Ay Al-Qur'an*, juz 6, (Kairo: Dār Hajar, 2001), 687. Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī bin Muḥammad bin Ḥabīb al-Māwardī al-Baṣrī, *Al-Nukat wa al-'Uyūn*, juz 1, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, t.t.), 480.

⁴⁷Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥusain bin Mas'ūd al-Baghawī, *Ma'ālim al-Tanẓīl*, juz 2, (Riyāḍ: Dār al-Ṭaybah, 1989), 207.

⁴⁸Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kaṣāf*, juz 2, 67.

(d. 542 AH) interpreted the word *qawwām* as indicating that the husband cares for and protects his wife earnestly, and exercises full authority according to his own will (*istibdād bi al-naẓri wa ḥifẓi bi al-ijtihād*).⁴⁹ Ibnu ‘Aṭīyah interpretation has a positive aspect in that it emphasises serious care for the wife, but it also has a negative aspect because it seems to permit the husband’s arbitrary behaviour toward his wife.

Al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH) interpreted the word *qawwām* as *kaifiyyah al-naẓmi la faḍla battah*, that is, a form of organization in which there is absolutely no intention to elevate the husband above the wife. This is because each partner possesses strengths that balance their spouse's.⁵⁰ Al-Rāzī’s interpretation indicates an egalitarian relationship between husband and wife, in contrast to the interpretations of Ibn ‘Aṭīyah, al-Zamakhsharī, and al-Baghawī, which emphasize the husband’s superiority over the wife.

(d. 685 AH) interpretation, which is the same as al-Zamakhsharī’s, describes the husband’s authority over his wife as that of a ruler over his subjects (*yaqūmu al-wulāh ‘ala ra’iyah*).⁵¹ Meanwhile, al-Qurṭubī (d. 671 AH) agrees with Ibn ‘Aṭīyah, who emphasizes the protection of the wife accompanied by control according to the husband’s will; indeed, according to al-Qurṭubī, the husband may regulate the woman and forbid her from leaving the house (*istibdād bi al-naẓri wa ḥifẓi bi al-ijtihād wa tadbīr al-imsāk fi baitiha wa man ‘i ‘an burūz*). Nevertheless, al-Qurṭubī explains that this authority applies only as long as the husband can provide for his wife. If the husband is unable to provide for her, then he has no right to control his wife, and she may seek a divorce.⁵²

Al-Qurṭubī’s interpretation goes beyond that of Ibn ‘Aṭīyah, as it explains that a husband’s authority can be forfeited if he is unable to provide for his wife. Nevertheless, al-Qurṭubī’s interpretation can still be used to legitimise arbitrary actions by husbands who are capable of providing for their wives. Al-Nasafī (d. 710 AH) understood *qawwām* in the sense of *amīr wa nābi ka yaqūmu al-wulāh ‘ala ra’iyah*, meaning the husband’s position as one who has the right to command and forbid women, just as a ruler does over his subjects.⁵³ This differs from Abū Ḥayyān (d.745 AH) who interpreted the word *al-rijāl* not as referring to gender, but to the quality of *rijūlah*, that is, the character of being able to safeguard and protect, and the strength to perform tasks well. A man is called *rijāl* if he possesses these qualities. As for the word *qawwām* it means to manage and safeguard something.⁵⁴ This interpretation by Abū Ḥayyān is original, as previous exegetes had not expressed it.

interpretation suggests an open husband-wife relationship, since the responsibility for care and protection lies not solely with the male (gender), but with the skills and abilities possessed by an individual. Thus, it is open to women (wives) to serve as *qawwām* for their husbands. Unfortunately, however, in later times, the opinion of Ibn Kaṣīr (d. 774 AH)

⁴⁹Al-Qāḍī Abū Muḥammad bin ‘Abd al-Ḥaq bin Ghālib bin ‘Aṭīyah al-Andalusī, *al-Muḥarrar al-Wajīz fi Tafsīr al-Kitāb al-‘Aẓīz*, juz 2, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 2001), 47.

⁵⁰Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghaib*, juz 10, (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāṡ al-‘Arabī, 1420 H), 90.

⁵¹Abū al-Khair ‘Abdullāh bin Umar bin Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Baiḍāwī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Ta’wīl*, juz 2, (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāṡ al-‘Arabī, t.t.), 27.

⁵²Abū ‘Abdillāh Muḥammad bin Aḥmad bin Abī Bakar al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi‘ li Aḥkām Al-Qur’ān wa al-Mubayyin lima Taḍammanahu min al-Sunnah wa Āy al-Furqān*, juz 6, (Beirut: Muassasah al-Risālah, 2006), 278.

⁵³Abū al-Barakāt ‘Abdullah bin Aḥmad bin Maḥmūd al-Nasafī, *Madārik al-Tanzīl wa Ḥaqā’iq al-Ta’wīl*, juz 1, (Beirut: Dār al-Kalam al-Ṭayyib, 1998), 354.

⁵⁴Muḥammad bin Yūsuf bin ‘Alī bin Yūsuf bin Ḥayyan al-Andalusī, *Tafsīr al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, juz 3, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 1993), 248-249.

emerged, interpreting the word *qawwām* as *ra'is*, *ḥakim*, *mu'addib*, *afḍal min al-nisā'* (leader, judge, and educator when the wife deviates, as well as the superior and better status of men compared to women).⁵⁵ Ibn Kathir's interpretation is the first to affirm the husband as the leader in the marital relationship, and also to affirm the superiority of men over women.

There are five known interpretations of the word *qawwām*. First, the meaning that emphasises the husband's role in educating his wife and taking responsibility for her (*ablu fī ta'dīb wa ākhibu fī mā yajibu 'ala nisā'*). This interpretation carries a positive connotation because it does not emphasise the husband's status, but rather his role and responsibility toward his wife. Al-Ṭabarī and al-Māwardī expressed this interpretation. Second, the meaning as *āmīr wa nābī ka yaqūmu al-wulāh 'ala ra'iyah* which refers to the husband's binding authority over his wife in various forms, ranging from educating, forbidding, and commanding his wife. This interpretation was expressed by the majority of classical exegetes, namely al-Baghawī, al-Zamakhsharī, Ibn 'Aṭīyah, al-Baidāwī, al-Qurṭubī, and al-Nasafī.

The third interpretation, as explained by Ibn Kathir, is *ḥakim*, *mu'addib*, *afḍal min al-nisā'* which affirms the husband's position as the judge and leader of his wife, accompanied by an assertion of the husband's superiority and the wife's inferiority. This interpretation reinforces the husband's position as the leader of his wife and grants him full authority over her. Al-Rāzī expresses the fourth meaning as *kaifīyah al-naẓmī la faḍla battah*, that is, an egalitarian form of organization, because both husband and wife have equal positions; the provision of maintenance is not the basis for the husband's superiority over his wife, but rather a form of the husband's responsibility toward his wife. The fifth interpretation is a form of open leadership that allows both husband and wife to act as *qawwām*; this is based on Abū Ḥayyān's interpretation of the word *rijāl* as *rujūlah*, meaning not gender but the ability to provide protection and work effectively.

The Progressive Interpretation Model of al-Ṭabarī, al-Māwardī, al-Rāzī, and Abū Ḥayyān

Progressive means oriented toward progress and improvement.⁵⁶ Progressive Islam offers an open, inclusive, and responsive approach to contextual interpretation of the text, addressing human concerns and emphasising the establishment of social justice, gender equality, and religious pluralism.⁵⁷ Thus, progressive classical interpretation refers to the work of classical exegetes that is not strictly textual, is more advanced than other classical interpretations, and is responsive to humanitarian issues, thereby remaining relevant to the current context.

According to Abdullah Saeed, there are ten characteristics of progressive thought (the progressive *ijtihādists*), contemporary Muslim thinkers who master the classical Islamic treasures and seek to reinterpret religious understanding using modern scientific methodology to address the needs of contemporary Muslim society.⁵⁸ According to Saeed, progressive thought has the characteristic of being open in reinterpreting or re-applying the principles of Islamic law and values, believing in gender equality in accordance with Islam,

⁵⁵Imād al-Dīn Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl bin Kaṣīr al-Dimasyqī, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, juz 4, (Kairo: Mu'assasah Qurṭubah, 2000), 20.

⁵⁶Tim Redaksi, *Tesaurus Bahasa Indonesia Pusat Bahasa*, (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, t.t.), 387.

⁵⁷Al-Faiz M. Rabbany T dan Indal Abror, "Tafsir Progresif atas Kisah-Kisah dalam Al-Qur'an Karya Eko Prasetyo," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadis*, Vol 19, No. 1 (2018): 86.

⁵⁸Abdullah Saeed, *Islamic Thought: An Introduction*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 150. Anik Faridah, "Trend Pemikiran Islam Progresif (Telaah atas Pemikiran Abdullah Saeed)," *Al-Mabsut Jurnal Studi Islam dan Sosial*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2013): 4.

the universality of religions that must be protected constitutionally, the equality of humans and their rights, beauty, art, architecture, poetry, or music are part of the Islamic tradition, supporting freedom of religious opinion and association, showing compassion for all living creatures, the need to respect the rights of others, being moderate and anti-violence in solving problems, prioritizing convenience, discussions related to the role of religion in the public sphere.⁵⁹

The progressive interpretation with its distinctive characteristics, as explained by Abdullah Saeed, can be seen, for example, in the interpretation of al-Ṭabarī, who pioneered the interpretation of qawwām by pointing to the husband's responsibility and management of his wife's obligations, not the husband's position that is superior to his wife. The interpretation of qawwām that emphasises the husband's authority only emerged two centuries after al-Ṭabarī, namely in the 6th century AH, as expressed by al-Zamakhshari. Then, in the 8th century AH, the interpretation of the husband's superiority was further strengthened by Ibn Kašīr's interpretation. This illustrates that classical interpretation is not entirely static and contains gender bias.

Al-Rāzī, as a 7th-century AH commentator, also introduced an interpretation of the word qawwām that had not existed before. According to al-Rāzī, qawwām as an organisation does not at all imply the superiority of a husband over his wife, because although a husband provides for his wife, in reality, the husband-wife relationship is complementary. Al-Rāzī's interpretation embodies the principle of equal relations through mutual respect and cooperation. It can be considered progressive, given that it aligns with the principle of gender equality recognised in contemporary times.

While al-Rāzī still understood qawwām as a male/husband's role, Abū Ḥayyān, an 8th-century AH exegete, understood qawwām as an open leadership role in which both husband and wife could serve as qawwām. This is because Abū Ḥayyān interpreted the word al-rijāl not as a man, but as the ability to provide protection and the ability to work well. Abū Ḥayyān's interpretation made the husband-wife relationship open, allowing the wife to serve as qawwām.

Abu Ḥayyān's interpretation can be said to be the most progressive, because it interprets the word al-rijāl not as a man; this is the key to the exchange of roles between husband and wife in family relations, which means it is a real solution to building gender equality in the family. The explanation above shows that in the classical interpretation of the verse al-rijāl qawwāmūna' ala al-nisā', three forms of progressive interpretation are found. First, the interpretation that emphasizes the husband's responsibility and care for his wife, or the term mas'ūliyah, was expressed by al-Ṭabarī and al-Māwardī. Second, the interpretation that emphasizes the form of organization and does not show the husband's superiority over his wife, called niẓām, was expressed by al-Rāzī. Lastly, the interpretation that emphasises the concept of qudrah, namely the capacity to protect and work well, so that it is possible for an exchange of roles between husband and wife, was expressed by Abū Ḥayyān.

The interpretation of al-Ṭabarī and al-Māwardī embodies the value of gender equality because, by emphasizing the role and responsibilities of the husband, the husband can avoid arbitrary actions against his wife and make the wife have access, control, participation in the

⁵⁹Report on A Conference Organised By The Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS) 7th-8th March 2006 Marina Mandarin Singapore, Progressive Islam and The State in Contemporary Muslim Societies, (Nanyang Avenue, Singapore: Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Nanyang Technological University, 2006), 5. Aminudin, "Pemikiran Abdullah Saeed tentang Muslim Progresif Sebagai Jalan Alternatif Tantangan Era Modern," *Rusydiah Jurnal Pemikiran Islam*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2021): 57.

decision-making process, and receive benefits in the family. The interpretations of Abū Ḥayyān and al-Rāzī can serve as the foundation and spirit of gender equality in family leadership. Because this interpretation makes relations within the family dynamic and egalitarian, which is very appropriate in preventing gender injustice in the form of subordination, violence, marginalisation, and excessive burdens. The interpretations of Abū Ḥayyān and al-Rāzī also reflect the equality of husband and wife in the family. There is no impression of dominance-subordination, and superiority-inferiority, which can ultimately realize gender justice in the family in the form of access, participation, control and benefits.

In addition, the classical progressive interpretation of the husband's responsibilities, organisational forms, and the capacity to provide protection and work well can be alternative patterns of husband-wife relations, as each household has different conditions and cannot be forced to be the same. Thus, the existence of three forms of classical progressive interpretation can serve as an alternative that suits the conditions and needs of each family. This shows the urgency of a classical progressive interpretation in the contemporary context.

Factors that Shape the Progressive Classical Interpretation

The interpretations of al-Ṭabarī, al-Māwardī, Abū Ḥayyān, and al-Rāzī demonstrate that progressive interpretations have existed since the classical period, though not in the majority. Thus, progressive interpretation is not only the property of modern and contemporary interpretations. In fact, the progressive interpretations expressed by modern commentators are rooted in those of classical commentators. This is proof that classical interpretations are not static and not all classical commentators interpret the verse *al-rījālu qawwāmūna ‘ala al-nisā’* with gender bias. Thus, Amina Wadud, Anshori, Nurani and Afandi's negative assessment of classical commentators cannot be used as a general assessment of all classical commentaries.

The use of the *taḥlīlī* method of interpretation by classical commentators, the majority of whom were male, and whose sources of interpretation were narrated, did not always align with the emergence of gender-biased interpretations. It is evident that al-Ṭabarī, al-Māwardī, Abū Ḥayyān, and al-Rāzī, male commentators who used the *taḥlīlī* method and also narrated sources, interpreted the verses on family leadership in a progressive manner, in line with the spirit of gender equality.

Internal Factors: The Scholarly Basis of the Exegete and the Source of Interpretation

Two internal factors support the birth of progressive interpretation among classical commentators. The first is the scholarly factor of the exegetes. Abū Ḥayyān is known as an Arabic exegete. Iyāzī⁶⁰ and al-Ziriklī⁶¹ describe Abū Ḥayyān as a scholar who is very skilled in interpretation, hadith, language, literature, and history. Al-Ziriklī wrote Abū Ḥayyān name as *al-naḥwī* (Abū Ḥayyān al-Naḥwī).

According to al-Ḥāḥabī, Abū Ḥayyān expertise in the science of *naḥwu* and *ṣaraf* is beyond doubt. Abū Ḥayyān devoted his life to this science so that in his time no one was more proficient in linguistics than Abū Ḥayyān. This linguistic science plays a major role in explaining the *tafsir* and *hadith* given by Abū Ḥayyān. Therefore, it is very natural when interpreting the verse *al-rījālu qawwāmūna ‘ala al-nisā*, Abū Ḥayyān paid attention to the

⁶⁰Sayyid Muḥammad ‘Alī Iyāzī, *al-Mufasssirūn Ḥayātuhum wa Manbātuhum*, juz 1, (Teheran: Muassasah al-Ṭabā‘ah wa al-Nasyr li Wizārah al-Ṣaqāfah wa al-Irsyād al-Islāmī, 1386 H), 269.

⁶¹Khair al-Dīn al-Ziriklī, *Qamus Tarājim*, juz 7, (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilmi li al-Malāyīn, 2002), 152.

meaning of the word *rijāl* by revealing other meanings of the word *rijāl* in the form of work skills and the ability to provide protection, not as a gender (male). This interpretation is not found among other classical commentators, because they understand the word *rijāl* in its generally known meaning.

Abu Ḥayyān's interpretation of the word *rijāl* also shows that he is an interpreter who understands the history of a word's meaning in earlier narrations, including hadiths. There is one hadith that discusses *al-rajulah*, namely, women who resemble the characteristics of men; for example, 'Ā'isyah *Rajulah al-ra'yi*, which means 'Ā'isyah has knowledge like men, and that is not a bad thing.⁶² This narration shows that in the past, including in the hadith, the word *rajul* was also used to describe women.

The second internal factor that shapes the progressiveness of the classical interpretation of the word *qawwām* is the use of interpretative sources, such as *ra'yu* (thoughts) of interpreters, based on the knowledge they have mastered. Al-Rāzī was known as an interpreter and theologian (*mutakalim*) in his time, mastering many sciences and writing Islamic books across various fields, so that he became a reference in interpretation, logic, language, philosophy, and literature. Many people from various regions came to study with al-Rāzī.⁶³

Al-Rāzī's expertise in various sciences enabled him to interpret the word *qawwām* as a form of organisation rather than as indicating a position of men above women. Al-Rāzī's interpretation is not based on narration. It appears to be the result of his reflection on the reality of husband-wife relations in the family, which require responsibility and mutual assistance to achieve the common goals of husband and wife.

The source of interpretation also influenced al-Ṭabarī's interpretation of the word *qawwām*. It is known that al-Ṭabarī interpreted the word *qawwām* as referring to the husband's role in caring for and taking responsibility for his wife. This seems to be supported by al-Ṭabarī's mastery of the Prophet's hadiths, because al-Ṭabarī's lifetime was still very close to the tradition of narration, as evidenced by the writing of al-Ṭabarī's book, which follows the style of writing hadith in mentioning its *sanad*. On the other hand, al-Ṭabarī is also known as an interpreter, historian, hadith expert, and *mujtahid*.⁶⁴

As is known, many hadiths explain the role of a husband towards his wife. Among them is the Prophet's hadith, which motivates doing good to his wife because the best person is the one who treats his wife best, and the Prophet is the best among you to his wives.⁶⁵ Another hadith also tells of a time when a companion asked 'Aisha about what the Prophet did at home. 'Aisha explained that the Prophet used to help his wife with the work at home. When *salat* time came, the Prophet went to *salat*.⁶⁶

⁶²Alī bin Sulṭān Muḥammad al-Qārī, *Mirqāt al-Mafātīḥ Syarḥ Misykāt al-Maṣābiḥ*, juz 7, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2002), 2836.

⁶³Al-Ḥabībī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, juz 1, 206. Muḥammad Hādī Ma'rifah, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn fī Ṣaḥībi al-Qaṣīb*, juz 2, (Masyhad: al-Jāmi'ah al-Raḍawiyah li al-'Ulūm al-Isāmīyah, 1426 H), 872.

⁶⁴Iyāzī, *al-Mufasssīrūn Ḥayātuhum wa Manbātuhum*, juz 2, 216. Ma'rifah, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, juz 2, 379.

عَنْ عَائِشَةَ، قَالَتْ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: خَيْرُكُمْ خَيْرُكُمْ لِأَهْلِهِ وَأَنَا خَيْرُكُمْ لِأَهْلِي... (رواه الترمذي)

Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad bin 'Īsā bin Saurah al-Tirmizī, *Sunan al-Tirmizī*, juz 5, (Kairo: Maktabah wa Maṭba'ah Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1975), 709.

عَنِ الْأَسْوَدِ، قَالَ: سَأَلْتُ عَائِشَةَ، مَا كَانَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَصْنَعُ فِي أَهْلِهِ؟ قَالَتْ: كَانَ فِي مَهْنَةِ أَهْلِهِ، فَإِذَا خَضَعَتِ الصَّلَاةُ قَامَ إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ (رواه البخاري)

The explanation above shows that al-Ṭabarī's interpretation of the word *qawwām* as the husband's responsibility for educating and taking care of his wife is substantially in line with the Prophet's hadiths. Al-Ṭabarī's interpretation seems to serve as a reference for al-Māwardī, since, in terms of wording, al-Māwardī's interpretation is the same as al-Ṭabarī's. In addition to the reference to the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, al-Ṭabarī and al-Māwardī use the narrations of the *tabi'in* as a source for interpreting the word *qawwām*, thereby giving rise to the meaning of the husband's management of his wife, namely, educating her and taking responsibility for her. This interpretation is because al-Ṭabarī refers to the history of a *tabi'in* who was also a *mufasir* named al-Suddī (d. 128 H),⁶⁷ as seen in al-Ṭabarī's explanation that al-Suddī said *ya'kebudūna 'alā aidibinna wa yu'addibuhunna*,⁶⁸ which means that men/husbands take on the obligations of women/wives and educate them (women/wives).

External Factors: Cultural, Social and Historical Construction of the Exegete

In addition to the two internal factors of the interpreter (scientific expertise and sources of interpretation), there are also external factors that support the progressiveness of the interpretation of classical exegetes, namely the social and cultural conditions surrounding the interpreter. For example, al-Ṭabarī and al-Māwardī lived during the reign of the Abbasid dynasty. The Abbasid dynasty existed between 132-656 H / 750-1258 AD, with a reign of around five centuries, with the centre of government in the city of Baghdad, Iraq. Before the establishment of the Abbasid government, three cities emerged as the axis of struggle and centres of activity in establishing the Abbasid dynasty: Humainah, Kufa, and Khurasan.⁶⁹

During the Abbasid dynasty, Islamic civilization experienced very rapid progress. The country's wealth was abundant, the people's welfare was very high, many scientific figures emerged across various fields, and the codification and systematization of Islamic sciences made the Banī Abbasid dynasty known as the golden age of Islam.⁷⁰ When power transitioned from the Umayyad to the Abbasid dynasty, the geographical area of Islamic power stretched from east to west, covering Egypt, Sudan, Syria, the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, Persia, and China. Therefore, this condition led to intensive interactions between regions, allowing the assimilation of culture and civilization.⁷¹

One of the social and cultural contexts of the Abbasid period was the policy of government officials who did not favour Arabs as an upper class. All citizens had equal opportunities to achieve certain classes. Even an enslaved woman could become the wife of

Abi 'Abdillāh Muḥammad bin Isma'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, juz 8, (Damaskus: Dār al-Ṭauq al-Najāh, 1442 H), 18.

⁶⁷Nama lengkapnya Ismā'īl bin 'Abd al-Raḥmān bin Abī Karīmah Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥijāzī al-Kūfī al-A'war al-Suddī al-Imām al-Mufasssir. Beberapa gurunya dari kalangan sahabat adalah Anas bin Mālik dan Ibnu 'Abbās. Syams al-Dīn Muḥammad bin Aḥmad 'Uṣmān al-Zahabī, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubalā'*, juz 5, (Beirūt: Muassasah al-Risālah, 1982) 264.

⁶⁸حدثنا محمد بن الحسين قال، حدثنا أحمد بن الفضل قال، حدثنا أسباط، عن السدي: الرجال قوامون على النساء، قال: يأخذون على أيديهن ويؤذبنهن

al-Ṭabarī, *Jamī' al-Bayān*, juz 6, 688.

⁶⁹Sintia Aprianty, "Refleksi Awal Terbentuknya Dinasti Abbasiyah," *Tanjak: Jurnal Sejarah dan Peradaban Islam*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2022): 175.

⁷⁰Siti Syaidariyah Hasibuan, "Perkembangan Islam Zaman Keemasan Bani Abbasiyah (650 M-1250 M)," *Edu-Religia: Jurnal Kajian Pendidikan Islam dan Keagamaan*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (2021): 373.

⁷¹A. Najli Aminullah, "Dinasti Abbasiyah, Politik, Peradaban dan Intelektual," *Geneologi PAI Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2016): 19.

a caliph or vizier. Therefore, the social order during the Abbasid period was dynamic, based on ability rather than power. Anyone with the ability could attain a high social status.⁷²

Al-Ṭabarī was recorded as having been born in Thabaristan Iran,⁷³ which at that time was an Abbasid territory. In addition, al-Ṭabarī studied in various Abbasid territories, namely Thabaristan, Syria, and Iraq, until he arrived in Baghdad, where he settled and spread his knowledge, dying there, which was the centre of the Abbasid government.⁷⁴ Al-Māwardī was born in Basrah during the golden age of the Abbasid dynasty. He studied in his homeland, Basrah, then went to Baghdad and lived there. Al-Māwardī settled in Baghdad, taught interpretation and hadith, and served as a judge in various cities.⁷⁵

Based on the data above, it is clear that the social conditions during the reign of the Abbasids, which were based on ability rather than power, were encountered by al-Ṭabarī and al-Māwardī, so that their interpretation of the verse on family leadership did not lead to a position of superiority of the husband over his wife, but rather emphasized the role or function of the husband as the person responsible for the education and needs of the wife.

Not only the social and cultural systems of the Abbasid period, but also the golden age of scientific development during the Abbasid period, supported al-Rāzī in producing an egalitarian interpretation of the verse on family leadership, considering al-Rāzī's presence in the Iranian region, which was also included in the important area of the Abbasid government. The advancement of science at that time had given rise to intellectual figures among women. One of them was Fatimah bint Muhammad al-Fihri, who played a major role in rebuilding the Jami' al-Qarawiyyin mosque in Fez, Morocco. This mosque later became one of the most important and oldest universities in Islam, all of whose funds were donated by Fatimah.⁷⁶ The existence and role of female figures in the golden age of knowledge seems to have inspired the interpretation of the verse on family leadership by al-Rāzī, so that al-Rāzī understood the word *qawwām* as a form of organization, and emphasized the absence of superiority of husband over wife, because in the household, husband and wife have their respective advantages and complement each other.

The progress of civilisation and science also emerged in Spain during the Umayyad II dynasty, which was divided into six periods (711-1492 AD). In the golden age of Islamic Spain, it also gave birth to many intellectuals, not only men, but also women. One of them was Umm al-Hasan bint Abi Ja'far, and her sister, al-Hafizh, was also a Spanish Islamic medical expert.⁷⁷ Abū Ḥayyān was a Granada-born interpreter who lived during the golden age of the Umayyad II dynasty in Spain, undertaking scientific journeys to Andalusia, Africa, Alexandria, Egypt, and the Hijaz.⁷⁸ Therefore, of course, Abū Ḥayyān felt the atmosphere of the development of science and witnessed the breadth of the intellectual level of female and male figures. It was this experience that apparently led Abū Ḥayyān to define the word *rijāl* as a characteristic, namely the ability to work and provide protection, rather than a gender (male). Thus, the just interpretations found in classical commentaries are supported by the scholarship of the commentators, the sources of interpretation used, and the socio-cultural background surrounding the commentators.

⁷²Isna Zakiya Nurul Muftaza dan Muhammad Ilham Aziz, "Kelas Sosial dalam Masyarakat Islam Periode Klasik (dari Masa Khulafaur Rasyidin hingga Abbasiyah)," *Jurnal Sejarah Islam*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2023): 90-91.

⁷³Iyāzī, *al-Mufasssirūn Ḥayātuhum wa Manbātuhum*, juz 2, 216.

⁷⁴Ma'rifah, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssirūn*, juz 2, 738.

⁷⁵Ma'rifah, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssirūn*, juz 2, 763.

⁷⁶Syamsul Huda, dkk., *Feminisme dalam Peradaban Islam*, (Surabaya: Pena Cendekia, 2019), 185.

⁷⁷Huda, dkk., *Feminisme dalam Peradaban Islam*, 153, 159.

⁷⁸Iyāzī, *al-Mufasssirūn Ḥayātuhum wa Manbātuhum*, juz 1, 269.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the interpretation of Q.S. al-Nisā' [4]:34 in the classical exegetical treasury cannot be reduced to the assumption that all pre-modern commentators uniformly legitimize male superiority over women. Through an analysis of the interpretations of al-Ṭabarī, al-Māwardī, al-Rāzī, and Abū Ḥayyān, this study finds that the concept of *qiwāmah* is constructed through various horizons of understanding that give rise to three progressive interpretative models, namely *mas'ūliyyah*, *nizām*, and *qudrah*. The *mas'ūliyyah* model positions *qiwāmah* as a moral and social responsibility to ensure family welfare; the *nizām* model understands it as a mechanism for regulating family relations that is functional, not as a legitimation of domination by one party; while the *qudrah* model emphasizes the capacity, competence, and ability to carry out the functions of protection and family management. These findings indicate that the classical exegetical tradition actually contains intellectual plurality that allows for a more egalitarian reading of gender relations, thereby challenging the view that positions classical exegesis as a wholly patriarchal corpus. Using Gadamer's hermeneutic perspective, this study also shows that variations in the meaning of *qiwāmah* cannot be separated from the historical background, scientific orientation, and horizon of understanding of each exegete, thereby making exegesis a dynamic dialogue between text and context. The main contribution of this study lies in developing a typology of progressive interpretations in classical exegesis that has not received adequate attention in gender studies and Qur'anic exegesis. This typology shows that the ideas of responsibility, partnership, and capacity have had epistemological roots in the Islamic exegetical tradition long before the emergence of modern gender equality discourse. Therefore, the development of a contextual and gender-sensitive interpretation of the Qur'an does not have to be done through a break with the classical tradition, but can be built through a critical reading of the diversity of interpretations that have developed within it, thus opening a wider space for dialogue between the intellectual heritage of Islam and the needs of contemporary Muslim society.

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