



Gender Bias in Quranic Interpretation: An Epistemological Analysis of the Role of Interpreters and Social Structure

Pandy Pratama*

Michigan State University, East Lansing, United States, MI 48824

Email: pandypratama16@gmail.com

Ranjan Owen

Michigan State University, East Lansing, United States, MI 48824

Email: owenran@msu.edu

Samia Woodring

Michigan State University, East Lansing, United States, MI 48824

Email: woodring14@gmail.com

Emilie Abraham

Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, United States, PA 15213

Email: emiabraham@andrew.cmu.edu

Emily Gupta

Michigan State University, East Lansing, United States, MI 48824

Email: guptaem22@msu.edu

Article	Submitted	Revised	Accepted	Available Online
History	2026-01-02	2026-04-06	2026-04-16	2026-04-28

Abstract

Studies of Quranic interpretation have often reproduced hierarchical and androcentric interpretations of gender relations, particularly in the classical and some modern traditions, without adequate analysis of the epistemological framework, the interpreter's subject position, and the social structures surrounding the production of meaning. This gap demonstrates the limitations of the textual-normative approach, which tends to ignore the epistemological dimension of knowledge and power relations in the interpretive process. This study aims to critically analyze the sources, mechanisms, and patterns of gender bias in Quranic interpretation by examining the relationship among the epistemology of interpretation, the interpreter's subjectivity as an epistemic subject, and the patriarchal social structures that influence interpretive practices. This study uses a qualitative method grounded in literature reviews of representative feminist works, employing an epistemological-critical analysis to examine the assumptions underlying knowledge, scientific authority, and methodological legitimacy. The results of this study indicate that gender bias in interpretation does not originate from the Quranic text itself, but rather is a construction of knowledge shaped by androcentric epistemological assumptions, the interpreter's historical experience and social position, and patriarchal power relations that construct interpretive authority. These findings also reveal that the choice of interpretive methods, the hierarchy of scholarly authority, and the naturalization of certain interpretive traditions all play a significant role in systematically reproducing gender bias. This study

concludes that deconstructing gender bias in interpretation requires an interpretive epistemological framework that is reflective, contextual, and sensitive to gender justice as an important implication for the development of contemporary critical interpretation studies.

Keywords: Gender Bias; Epistemology of Interpretation; Subject of Interpretation; Social Structure; Critical Interpretation

Abstrak

Kajian tafsir Al-Quran selama ini kerap mereproduksi pemaknaan relasi gender yang hierarkis dan andro-sentris, terutama dalam tradisi tafsir klasik hingga sebagian tafsir modern, tanpa analisis memadai terhadap kerangka epistemologis, posisi subjek penafsir, dan struktur sosial yang melingkupi produksi makna. Kesenjangan ini menunjukkan keterbatasan pendekatan tekstual-normatif yang cenderung mengabaikan dimensi epistemologi pengetahuan dan relasi kuasa dalam proses penafsiran. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis secara kritis sumber, mekanisme, dan pola terbentuknya bias gender dalam tafsir Al-Quran melalui relasi antara epistemologi tafsir, subjektivitas penafsir sebagai subjek epistemik, dan struktur sosial patriarkal yang memengaruhi praksis penafsiran. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan terhadap karya-karya feminisme yang representatif, dengan pendekatan analisis epistemologis-kritis untuk menelaah asumsi pengetahuan, otoritas keilmuan, dan legitimasi metodologis yang digunakan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa bias gender dalam tafsir bukan berasal dari teks Al-Quran itu sendiri, melainkan merupakan konstruksi pengetahuan yang dibentuk oleh asumsi epistemologis andro-sentris, pengalaman historis dan posisi sosial penafsir, serta relasi kuasa patriarkal yang mengonstruksi otoritas tafsir. Temuan ini juga mengungkap bahwa pemilihan metode penafsiran, hierarki otoritas keilmuan, dan naturalisasi tradisi tafsir tertentu berperan signifikan dalam mereproduksi bias gender secara sistemik. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa dekonstruksi bias gender dalam tafsir menuntut kerangka epistemologi tafsir yang reflektif, kontekstual, dan sensitif terhadap keadilan gender sebagai implikasi penting bagi pengembangan studi tafsir kritis kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: Bias Gender; Epistemologi Tafsir; Subjek Penafsir; Struktur Sosial; Tafsir Kritis

Introduction

Discussions about gender bias in Quranic interpretation occupy a strategic position in contemporary Islamic discourse because interpretation is a product of knowledge that is inseparable from the epistemological assumptions, methodological frameworks, and social horizons of its interpreters (Saeed & Akbar, 2021). Gender bias in interpretation is understood as an interpretive tendency that systematically constructs hierarchical relations between men and women by selecting linguistic meanings, legitimizing authority, and imposing unequal normative implications (Fitriyah & Rahman, 2024). Quranic interpretation does not merely reflect the revealed text but rather results from a complex interaction among the text, the interpreting subject, and the surrounding social structures (Calis, 2022). This process of meaning production allows dominant values—including patriarchy—to be internalized into interpretation without always being explicitly expressed. When interpretation is used as a normative reference for social life, unconscious epistemological bias can reproduce gender inequality and obscure the

principle of justice at the core of the Quran's teachings (Arifinsyah, Dalimunthe, & Riza, 2025).

The phenomenon of gender inequality, which remains deeply rooted globally, reinforces the urgency of critically examining the role of interpretation as a religious authority. A United Nations Development Programme (2024) report shows that gender disparities persist in almost all countries, encompassing access to education, economics, and political participation, with women systematically disadvantaged. World Bank findings (2023) emphasize that cultural norms and exclusive religious interpretations often legitimize gender-based discrimination. This reality is directly relevant to Muslim societies, given that Quranic interpretation plays a central role in shaping social views on leadership, domestic authority, inheritance rights, witnessing, and marital relations (Ichwan et al., 2024). The dominance of masculine perspectives in mainstream classical interpretation and the influence of patriarchal social structures on the formation of scholarly authority often lead to religion being perceived as a source of justification for gender injustice (Nikmatullah, 2024). This situation demonstrates that the issue of gender bias in interpretation is not merely a normative theological problem, but rather an epistemic phenomenon closely intertwined with social dynamics and power relations.

Previous studies have made important contributions to identifying gender bias in Quranic interpretation, but they still face conceptual and methodological limitations. Hasan's (2023) research shows that gender bias is rooted in the dominance of male interpreters and a textual approach that does not fully consider the principle of Quranic justice. However, his analysis does not systematically examine the epistemological foundations of interpretation. Yuliharti et al. (2025) highlight the influence of post-Prophetic patriarchal politics on the reading of hadith and classical interpretations, although their study remains historical-descriptive. Čustović (2025) criticizes epistemological assumptions that place patriarchal authority as inherent in the text, but does not deeply link it to the social structure of the interpreters. Gilreath (2023) emphasizes the fallacy of equating biological differences with the legitimacy of social inequality, but his study is not specifically directed at the methodology of Quranic interpretation. Nasohah (2024) explores the relationship between family jurisprudence, interpretation, and patriarchal power, but her approach remains predominantly normative-juridical. These studies tend to focus on thematic and normative critiques. At the same time, an integrated epistemological analysis of the mechanisms that produce interpretive bias, involving scholarly authority, social structures, and the interpreter's knowledge framework, has not been examined. This limitation indicates a research gap that requires a critical epistemological approach to Quranic interpretation.

Based on this mapping, this study is designed to analyze how gender bias is formed in Quranic interpretation through the interaction among the interpreting subject, social structure, and the epistemological framework used, and to assess the

validity and objectivity of gender interpretation critically. This study aims to uncover the epistemic mechanisms underlying gender bias in interpretation and to formulate a more reflective, contextual, and just framework for interpretation analysis. The basic argument of this study rests on the assumption that without epistemological awareness, interpretation risks reproducing social inequality rather than realizing the Quranic value of justice. Expected contributions include strengthening the epistemology of critical interpretation, developing a more objective and inclusive methodology for the study of gender interpretation, and providing a theoretical foundation for a reading of the Quran that is responsive to the challenges of gender justice in contemporary Muslim society.

Method

This research employs a qualitative approach, grounded in a critical literature review, that positions epistemological analysis as the primary analytical framework for examining the construction of gender bias in Quranic interpretation. Epistemological analysis in this study is understood as a critical lens for examining the basic assumptions of knowledge, the authority of interpreters, and the social power relations that influence the process and outcomes of interpretation. The primary data sources are feminist works purposively selected based on authoritative, representative criteria and explicit discussions of gender and women's relations, taking into account variations across historical periods and trends of thought. Supporting sources include reputable scientific articles, previous research results, and international organization documents, used to a limited extent to strengthen the socio-epistemological context of interpretation. Data collection techniques are carried out through a systematic literature search, including the stages of searching, selecting relevance, academic evaluation of sources, and thematic data extraction related to indicators of gender bias. The collected data are analyzed in stages of data reduction and categorization, based on epistemological indicators such as normative assumptions, the interpreter's position, and the representation of power relations, as well as through critical interpretation through cross-source comparisons. The validity of the analysis is maintained through conceptual triangulation to assess the consistency, differences, and patterns of meaning reproduction in the interpretation, thereby producing an understanding that is argumentative, structured, and in line with the research objectives.

Results and Discussion

Gender Bias as a Product of Interpretive Epistemology

Gender bias in the tradition of Quranic interpretation is presented as a direct consequence of the epistemological framework that governs the production, validation, and stabilization of meaning. The epistemology of interpretation refers to a set of ontological assumptions regarding the nature of revealed texts, epistemic assumptions regarding the sources and criteria of truth, and methodological

procedures for determining valid meaning (Supena, 2024). The classical-to-early modern tradition of interpretation generally operates under the assumption of meaning stability, namely the belief that the meaning of verses is given, objective, and can be definitively determined through certain scientific tools (Ichwan, Ming, & Sya'roni, 2025). This assumption is not neutral but rather rooted in *bayānī* epistemology, which positions texts as closed entities of meaning (Mukminin et al., 2025). Its epistemological consequences are evident in the tendency to search for a single, claimed-to-be universal and normative meaning. Gender construction is then understood as a direct reflection of divine will, leaving no space for the problematization of social relations.

The hierarchy of knowledge sources serves as a primary epistemological mechanism that reinforces the stabilization of gender meaning. The Quran is positioned as the primary source. However, the meaning of gender-based verses is constructed through the mediation of hadith, the traditions of the Companions, and the consensus of scholars, which have been codified as interpretive authority (Zekkour & Imamuddin, 2024). The epistemic problem lies not in the existence of secondary sources, but rather in the absolutization of their authority as the key to determining meaning. The practices of *tarjīḥ* and *taqyīd* often place normative hadith on gender relations as the primary filter for interpreting verses, thereby reducing the Quran's dialogical meaning (Darzi, Ahmadvand, & Nushi, 2021). A clear example is seen in the interpretation of Quranic verse 4:34, where the concept of *qiwāmah* is framed through the hadith on male leadership, thereby foreclosing the possibility of an ethical-relational reading of the verse. This epistemic hierarchy establishes a subordinative relationship between sources that systematically directs meaning toward the legitimacy of asymmetrical gender roles, rather than treating it as a normative choice that can be rationally debated.

The interpretive reasoning model contributes to gender bias through the dominance of legally oriented, deductive-normative reasoning. This reasoning moves from established theological or *fiqh* principles to the confirmation of the meaning of particular verses (Calis, 2022). Within a *bayānī-fiqh*-oriented epistemological framework, verses function as normative legitimation rather than as a source of criticism of initial assumptions (Ma'rufi et al., 2024). The concept of male leadership or the division of domestic roles is often treated as an epistemic premise, and then gender-specific verses are read to affirm them. This pattern results in circular reasoning, as the reasoning's starting point predetermines the interpretive conclusion. Gender bias arises not from individual interpreter error but from an epistemic structure that precludes inductive and dialogical reading (Kusuma et al., 2026). A comparison with contemporary thematic interpretations shows that this bias pattern is specific to the deductive-normative model, not inherent to all interpretive methods.

The exegete's epistemic authority serves as a legitimizing mechanism that maintains the continuity of gender bias. Mastery of classical scientific disciplines such as Arabic, *uṣūl al-Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), and hadith is a prerequisite for validating meaning (Ichwan et al., 2025). This authority is epistemic, not merely social, because it defines the limits of scientifically recognized knowledge. Once a gendered interpretive consensus has been established, epistemic authority stabilizes meaning by delegitimizing alternative readings (Wadud, 2021). Interpretations that challenge gender hierarchies are often dismissed as unscientific due to perceived methodological violations, rather than for flawed arguments (Hasan et al., 2022). Analysis of epistemic authority shows that authority can reproduce bias without reflective awareness (Lassiter, 2019). The primary issue is not the exegete's competence, but rather epistemological assumptions about who has the right to determine meaning and the criteria for interpretive truth. Gender bias persists through mechanisms of scientific validation that appear objective but harbor certain normative preferences.

A conceptual analysis of the structure of interpretive reasoning identifies three systemic patterns of epistemological bias. Reductionism of meaning arises when gender verses are narrowed to the positive legal dimension without exploring the ethical objectives of the Quran. Normative asymmetry is evident in the establishment of gender role differences as ontological rather than normative constructs, born of a specific social context. Naturalization of meaning occurs when gender constructions are presented as ahistorical realities, due to the assumption of meaning's stability. These three patterns are not simply descriptions of feminist critique, but rather logical consequences of an epistemology of certainty that rejects the plurality of meaning. Each pattern is rooted in different epistemic assumptions, such as legal positivism, theological essentialism, and a meaning-objectivist view. The identification of these patterns demonstrates that gender bias is structural, not a methodological anomaly that can be corrected in part.

Managing textual ambiguity is crucial to reproducing gender bias. The Quran contains gender-based verses with a high degree of semantic ambiguity, opening up the possibility of multiple meanings. Classical exegetical epistemology views ambiguity as an epistemic problem that must be eliminated for the sake of legal certainty (Ibrahim, 2025). A deterministic approach eliminates tensions in meaning by selecting a single, final, normative interpretation (Li & Wong, 2024). This process is not a theological necessity, but rather an epistemological choice rooted in the paradigm of certainty. Critical hermeneutics demonstrates that ambiguity is a productive potential for ethical reflection rather than a threat to revelation (Domen, 2016). Gender bias is legitimized when a single normative meaning is naturalized as the sole interpretive truth. The epistemology of certainty transforms normative preferences into objective truth claims, thereby closing off space for critical correction of unequal gender relations.

Dialogue with contemporary epistemologies of interpretation makes it clear that gender bias is not an inherent characteristic of revelation, but rather a result of the construction of knowledge. The thinking of Fazlur Rahman (1980), Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (2004), and Amina Wadud (1999) suggests that meaning emerges through the interaction of text, context, and the interpreting subject. This framework rejects the stability of absolute meaning without denying the authority of the text. This comparison confirms that alternative epistemologies of interpretation can open up space for more reflective gender readings without compromising the integrity of revelation. Thus, gender bias can be understood as a product of specific epistemologies of interpretation, not an inevitable consequence of the Quran. This argument strengthens the claim that changes in gender interpretation require epistemological transformation, not simply normative revision or social adjustment.

The Role of Interpreters as Epistemic Subjects in the Production of Gender Bias

The interpreter is positioned as an active epistemic subject because the meaning of the interpretation arises from a reflective interaction between the text and the interpreter's consciousness, rather than a mechanical transfer of meaning. This consciousness forms a horizon of understanding consisting of conceptual pre-understanding, ontological assumptions about humans, and normative orientations toward the goals of sharia. This horizon functions as an epistemic selection mechanism that determines which aspects of the text are considered significant and the direction of interpretive reasoning taken (Junaidi et al., 2025). Ontological assumptions about gender relations, especially when understood as a natural hierarchy, lead the interpreter to prioritize literal meanings that support subordinate relations, while eliminating the possibility of relational meanings that emphasize reciprocity and justice (Wadud, 2021). This mechanism demonstrates a clear causal relationship between the interpreter's initial assumptions and the resulting interpretation. The focus of this analysis lies not on the general epistemological theory of interpretation, but rather on the interpreter's agency as the interpretive decision-maker who determines the final configuration of meaning.

The interpreter's epistemic agency is increasingly visible in how they position themselves within the scholarly tradition. The intellectual's position as the authoritative inheritor of tradition often leads interpreters to treat classical consensus as a final horizon that requires no reexamination (Indah et al., 2025). This attitude is not simply a matter of loyalty to tradition, but rather an epistemic decision that positions past authority as the primary source of validity for meaning. When this authority is presented as objective truth, the historical dimension and interpretive contingency are obscured. Gender bias is formed through the naturalization of certain interpretations as direct representations of the will of revelation, rather than as products of human reasoning (Tafkir, Hidayat, & Ayob, 2026). This analysis does not reject tradition as a source of knowledge, but critiques

the way claims of authority are used to close off space for epistemic reflection. Interpretive authority operates as an epistemic claim that determines what is worthy of belief, not merely as a social legitimacy.

The interpreter's methodological awareness plays a crucial role in reinforcing or challenging epistemic bias. Interpretation methods do not have autonomous power, but rather function through conscious choices regarding source hierarchies, argumentation strategies, and criteria for the validity of meaning (Alsaied, 2025). When methodological awareness is partial, methods tend to be used as instruments to confirm initial assumptions rather than as a means of critical examination (Saeed & Akbar, 2021). This practice is evident in drawing broad normative generalizations from particular verses without analyzing thematic coherence or ignoring the ethical dimensions inherent in the Quranic message. Indicators of methodological partiality can be identified through imbalanced use of sources, a reduction in the complexity of meaning, and the absence of reflection on the limits of interpretive inference. This assertion distinguishes the analysis of the interpreter's epistemic subject from the critique of general interpretive methodology, as the focus is on the interpreter's operational decisions as an epistemic actor.

Claims of objectivity in methods often serve as an epistemic veil that conceals the interpreter's subjective contributions. Objectivity is presented as an inherent property of the method, when in fact it is the result of an argumentative construction dependent on how the method is operated. When interpreters fail to distinguish between textual boundaries and their own interpretive contributions, the resulting interpretation is perceived as a direct representation of divine will (Motamayel, Ehteshami, & Hoseini, 2024). This categorical fallacy reinforces the normative power of gender-biased interpretations because criticism of them is perceived as a rejection of the sacred text itself. This analysis emphasizes that the primary problem lies not in the method as a scientific tool, but in the interpreter's reflective awareness in using it. By positioning the method as an object of epistemic reflection, the interpreter's position as a subject of knowledge becomes clearer, while also opening up space for correcting unverified claims of objectivity.

The legitimation stage of interpretation most explicitly demonstrates the interpreter's role as a producer of epistemic bias. Legitimacy operates through claims of truth, universality, and normative validity of the resulting interpretation (Masama & Abubakar, 2025). These claims are constructed through references to classical authority, methodological rhetoric, and the blurring of the interpreter's subjectivity. The distinction between epistemic legitimacy and normative legitimacy is crucial because bias becomes more resilient when epistemic truth claims are directly translated into normative obligations. When the interpreter's epistemic limitations are not recognized, certain gendered interpretations are treated as final truths immune to criticism (Darzi et al., 2021). This analysis asserts that interpretive

legitimacy results from the interpreter's epistemic decisions about the status of knowledge, rather than being an automatic consequence of the text or method.

The overall analysis shows that the interpreter acts as an active epistemic subject who determines the direction, boundaries, and legitimacy of gender interpretation. Gender bias does not emerge as a historical residue or a side effect of tradition, but rather as the result of epistemically structured interpretive decisions. Horizons of understanding, intellectual positions, methodological awareness, and legitimation strategies form a causal chain that systematically explains the production of bias. This sharpening strengthens the research's theoretical position by positioning interpretation as a knowledge practice that can be critically analyzed. Thus, criticism of gender bias is directed not at sacred texts, but rather at the interpreter's epistemic configuration as a subject of knowledge.

Social Structure and Power Relations in the Formation of Gender Interpretation

Social structures shape the material and symbolic conditions that enable interpretations to be produced, accepted, and legitimized as valid knowledge. Quranic interpretations do not develop in a neutral space, but rather operate within a configuration of social relations that define the boundaries of religious discourse that can be thought, spoken, and transmitted (Saeed & Akbar, 2021). Patriarchal structures function as a historical framework that organizes the distribution of gender roles, authority, and values through symbolic mechanisms embedded in social practices and religious institutions (Cremer, 2021). This framework produces a horizon of meaning that normalizes masculine dominance as religious rationality, thus allowing interpretations that affirm gender hierarchy to gain stronger epistemic legitimacy than egalitarian ones (Čustović, 2025). Power relations operate not through overt coercion, but through the internalization of norms that shape interpreters' interpretive preferences. Interpretation then functions as a symbolic instrument that reinforces established social relations, not simply as an attempt to uncover textual meaning (Ginting et al., 2023). This situation demonstrates that social structure plays an active role as an epistemic medium that filters the possible meanings of interpretation.

Patriarchal power operates through knowledge relations that limit what can be recognized as interpretive truth. From a power/knowledge perspective, the production of interpretations is tied to a regime of truth formed through the interaction of religious discourse, social norms, and symbolic authority (Andok, 2024). Gender interpretations develop along the logic of power reproduction, which operates through language, legal categories, and anthropological assumptions about the relationship between men and women (Darzi et al., 2021). Patriarchal structures are not monolithic, but rather layered and contextual, adapting to social change without losing their hegemonic function (Yang, 2020). This mechanism is evident in how interpretations construct women's domestic roles as normative provisions

presented as divine will rather than as historical products. These power relations shape hermeneutic preferences that direct interpreters to affirm the stability of the social order. Interpretations that have the potential to disrupt gender hierarchies are often positioned as methodological deviations or moral threats, thereby narrowing the interpretative space (Hasan et al., 2022).

Religious scholarly institutions play a central role in consolidating these power relations through mechanisms for producing and distributing interpretive knowledge. Scholarly authority is constructed through a system of recognition that links the legitimacy of interpretation to social position, the chain of transmission, and access to canonical sources (Maulana, Arifinsyah, & Husein, 2023). Religious education curricula, reference books, and the hierarchy of scholars serve as epistemic selection tools that normalize certain gender perspectives as standards of truth (Indah et al., 2025). The process of canonization of interpretation reinforces this mechanism because institutionalized interpretations acquire a status of objectivity and transhistoricity. Women's experiences are rarely recognized as legitimate sources of meaning because the structure of knowledge production assumes masculinity as an epistemically neutral position (Kusuma et al., 2025). This exclusion is not accidental but rather a consequence of institutional configurations that reproduce patriarchal authority. Gendered interpretation then appears as knowledge that is value-free yet deeply rooted in structured power relations.

Intra-institutional power relations also shape the boundaries of the critique of gendered interpretations. Interpretive authority is determined not only by intellectual capacity but also by the social standing that allows one to speak on behalf of religion. The system of diplomas, the chain of scholarly transmission, and the politics of the curriculum create a regime of truth that separates legitimate interpretations from those deemed marginal (Indah et al., 2025). This condition results in the systematic epistemic exclusion of the perspectives of women and other subordinate groups. Alternative interpretations often lose legitimacy not because of weak arguments, but because they do not align with prevailing authority structures. The production of interpretive knowledge operates within a space delimited by institutional norms, so hermeneutic innovation faces structural resistance. Power operates through mechanisms of symbolic recognition that determine who has the right to interpret and which interpretations are recognized as representing religious truth (Indah et al., 2025). Thus, gender bias in interpretation cannot be separated from the power relations inherent in the institutional structure of scholarship.

Social normalization reinforces the sustainability of gender interpretations by repeatedly internalizing values in everyday practice. Interpretations that position women as secondary subjects gain vitality because they align with dominant social relations (Surya et al., 2025). This process creates a circular relationship between interpretation and social practice, in which interpretation confers symbolic legitimacy on patriarchal structures, while these structures reinforce

interpretation's acceptance as religious truth. Normalization operates through a hegemonic mechanism that transforms gender-biased interpretations into religious common sense (Mahmoud, 2025). The boundaries between social construction and claims of religious normativity become blurred, so that gender bias is no longer recognized as a result of power relations. Criticism of gender interpretations is often perceived as a threat to the moral order because interpretations have become entwined with collective identity. This condition indicates that the power of interpretation lies not only in textual arguments but also in its role as a tool of social legitimacy.

The transmission of interpretive knowledge strengthens the stability of meaning through structured inheritance mechanisms. Teaching traditions, authoritative citations, and the repetition of interpretive narratives create interpretive continuity across generations. Each generation of interpreters operates within a knowledge space constrained by social and institutional norms, allowing gender bias to be reproduced without always being recognized as an ideological practice (Fitriyah & Rahman, 2024). Interpretation becomes a collective memory that shapes ways of thinking about gender and limits hermeneutic imagination. Social structures function as epistemic filters, excluding interpretive meanings compatible with dominant power relations. Interpretations that do not conform to this configuration tend to be eliminated through mechanisms of symbolic delegitimization. This process demonstrates that the stability of gender interpretation results from the work of social structures that continue to reproduce power relations through epistemic channels.

The epistemological dimension of gender interpretation becomes clear when social structures are understood as integral to the knowledge process. Claims of interpretive objectivity need to be read as social constructions produced through power relations, not as direct reflections of divine will. Awareness of this structural condition changes how interpretive authority is understood and opens space for criticism of the interpreter's assumed neutrality. Interpretation is no longer positioned as an individual product, but rather as a social artifact tied to a specific historical context. This approach allows for the identification of the mechanisms of power at work behind the legitimacy of gender interpretation. Structural critique does not aim to negate the text, but rather to reveal how social relations mediate the text. Gender interpretation should be understood as a field of epistemic contestation that reflects the tug-of-war among the text, the interpreter, and the power structures that frame it.

The dialectical relationship between social structure and interpretation suggests that interpretive change demands a broader epistemic transformation. Efforts to present a gender-just interpretation are not sufficient through methodological revision alone; they require dismantling the mechanisms of power that govern the production of religious knowledge. Social structures need to be read

as arenas where the meaning of interpretation is negotiated, defended, or challenged. Critical awareness of power relations enables a more reflective and socially responsible reading of interpretation. Quranic interpretation cannot be separated from the social conditions that gave rise to it, but it also has transformative potential when these relations are epistemologically recognized. Thus, structural analysis is a crucial prerequisite for understanding gender bias as a product of institutionalized knowledge, rather than as a theological inevitability.

Dialectics of Text, Interpreter, and Social Structure in Gender Interpretation

The normative-transcendent character of the Quran operates through the historical medium of human language, so that the text's universal authority is always realized through a process of interpretation bound by social and epistemic contexts. The linguistic structure of the Quran provides a broad spectrum of possible meanings, particularly in verses on gender relations that contain polysemy, social metaphors, and cultural references (Darzi et al., 2021). This spectrum forms a semantic field of possibility that is never realized neutrally. The activation of certain meanings occurs through an epistemic selection mechanism directly connected to the interpreter's social horizon. Meaning does not exist as a final entity, but rather as the result of a locked-in possibility that has been filtered through certain normative assumptions regarding the relationship between men and women (Tafkir et al., 2026). The text's position as a normative source is not lost, but undergoes historical articulation through a process that opens up space for contestation of meaning. Gender bias emerges when the field of possibilities is systemically stabilized through an epistemic framework that reflects the dominant social order, so that the text functions as normative legitimation for certain social constructions (Fitriyah & Rahman, 2024).

The interpreter occupies a central position as an epistemic mediator connecting normative texts with lived social reality. Interpretive activity is not limited to philological or methodological operations but involves fundamental presuppositions regarding authority, rationality, the body, and social hierarchy. These presuppositions are formed through long-term intellectual socialization within specific scholarly traditions and within the context of asymmetrical power relations (Saeed & Akbar, 2021). The interpreter's consciousness organizes the text's meaning through a logic perceived as objective, yet this logic is in fact the product of the internalization of specific social structures. Gender bias does not operate through distortive intent, but rather through the mechanism of social objectification of individual consciousness. The resulting interpretation is then presented as a normative reading, while the interpreter's underlying social position becomes invisible. This relationship demonstrates that the interpreter's subjectivity is both active and bounded, so that gender interpretation reflects both epistemic and social configurations simultaneously.

Social structures function as a macro framework that determines the horizon of textual legitimacy and the limits of interpretation's epistemic legitimacy. Power relations regulate the distribution of scholarly authority, determine which methodologies are considered legitimate, and select which voices receive institutional recognition (Indah et al., 2025). Patriarchal structures not only influence the content of interpretations but also shape the standards of objectivity and rationality used to assess their truth (Kusuma et al., 2026). Gendered interpretation operates as a symbolic medium that allows normative texts to resonate with established social orders. Through this mechanism, social constructions gain religious legitimacy, while the texts emerge as guarantors of their normativity. Structural determination does not operate mechanically, but rather through epistemic mediation that makes power relations appear natural. This analysis positions interpretation as an arena for the production of meaning imbued with symbolic interests, not merely a passive reflection of social structures.

The interaction between text, interpreter, and social structure forms a reciprocal and stable epistemological circulation. The text provides normative legitimacy, the interpreter provides epistemic rationalization, and the social structure provides a framework for symbolic legitimacy. All three operate simultaneously, forming an epistemic-normative feedback loop that stabilizes certain gender interpretations as objective truths. The resulting interpretations are then reused to reinforce the social structures that gave rise to them, creating a circularity that is difficult to break. This dialectical model demonstrates that gender bias does not originate from the dominance of a single element, but rather from the institutionalized co-production of meaning. This position goes beyond purely textual approaches and personal critiques of interpreters, positioning bias as a product of the systemic workings of knowledge. This conceptualization of epistemological circularity offers an analytical framework for understanding the persistence of gender bias in mainstream interpretive traditions.

The tension between the text's claim of universal normativity and the social construction of interpretation is a crucial node in this dialectic. The universal principles of justice and ethics contained in the Quran possess transhistorical capacity, but their actualization is often narrowed through readings rooted in dominant social structures. This tension is rarely recognized because the text's claim of normativity is often used to obscure the social dimension of interpretation. This process gives rise to a mechanism of naturalization, where historical interpretations are perceived as final and ahistorical. Naturalization blurs the boundaries between the text as a normative source and interpretation as an epistemic construct (Hanafi et al., 2022). As a result, the power relations underlying the production of interpretation become invisible, while gender bias emerges as the text's own normative intent. This analysis emphasizes that a critique of gender interpretation

demands an unpacking of the ideological mechanisms that operate through claims of normativity.

The mechanism of gender bias can be understood as a multi-layered process encompassing meaning selection, epistemic legitimation, and social institutionalization. Meaning selection occurs when interpreters activate certain semantic possibilities in accordance with their epistemic presuppositions. Epistemic legitimation occurs when this selection is framed through a methodology recognized as authoritative within the scholarly tradition. Social institutionalization occurs when interpretations are accepted, taught, and reproduced through educational mechanisms, fatwas, and public religious discourse. These three layers mutually support each other, forming a stable system of meaning production. This multi-layered model asserts that gender bias is systemic, not incidental. Its conceptual contribution lies in explaining how bias operates as an institutionalized knowledge structure, so that criticism of gender interpretation cannot stop at correcting interpretations but rather demands broader epistemological and institutional reflection.

This dialectical synthesis positions gender interpretation as the product of a dynamic interaction among an open normative text, a structured interpreting subject, and a social context marked by power relations. This approach rejects both textual reductionism and the personalization of bias, viewing the production of meaning as a complex socio-epistemic process. The theoretical position proposed suggests that religious meaning is shaped through the circulation of normative legitimacy, epistemic rationalization, and social stabilization. Gender bias emerges as a concrete expression of the tension between normative ideals and social reality, rather than as individual deviation. This formulation makes a significant contribution to the study of interpretation and gender by offering an analytical framework that explains the persistence of bias while opening up space for more reflective reading.

Conclusion

The dynamics of Quranic interpretation are shown not to occur neutrally but rather to be shaped by the epistemological interaction among the text, the interpretive methodological framework, the interpreter's position as an epistemic subject, and social structures that reproduce gender power relations. The findings of this study confirm that gender bias in interpretation is not merely the result of individual subjectivity or deviations from textual meaning, but is a systemic consequence of an epistemology of interpretation that absolutizes certain interpretive authority, places masculine experience as a universal norm, and naturalizes patriarchal assumptions in the reading of the text. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of critical interpretation epistemology by emphasizing the need to reconstruct the relationship among text, interpreter, and context through a reflective, dialogical, and gender-sensitive approach, while

enriching gender studies with textual-religious analysis grounded in epistemic criticism. Practically, these findings are relevant to the development of contemporary interpretation, interpretation education, and critical Islamic literacy that are more contextual, pluralistic, and epistemologically aware. The limitations of this research lie in its focus on written interpretation discourse analysis, the limited data corpus, and the dominance of qualitative-epistemological approaches, which limit empirical generalization. Future research is recommended to develop comparative studies across schools of thought and historical periods of interpretation, to integrate historical-sociological and empirical methods, and to deepen gender epistemology as a framework for analyzing Quranic interpretation.

Acknowledgments

—

Author Contribution Statement

PP contributed to the conceptualization, development of the research framework, primary analysis, and writing and final revision of the manuscript. RO was involved in data collection, initial data processing, and the literature review. SW contributed to the methodological analysis, data validation, and refinement of the conceptual argument. EA was involved in interpreting the results, developing the discussion, and editing the manuscript's substance. EG was involved in reference searches, source verification, and alignment of the writing format and style to academic standards. All authors participated in the final review and approved the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that this manuscript was prepared without any conflict of interest whatsoever. The entire research, analysis, and writing process was conducted independently, without any influence from third parties that could affect objectivity or scientific integrity. There are no financial, institutional, or personal relationships that could potentially bias the content and conclusions of this manuscript. All sources and references have been used transparently and in accordance with applicable academic principles.

AI Usage Statement

The author declares that the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in preparing this manuscript was limited to improving language quality, correcting grammar, and assisting with text formatting to make it more systematic and readable. All scientific content, including research results, findings, concepts, analyses, ideas, and conclusions, is entirely the result of the author's own thoughts and academic work. AI was not used to formulate ideas, interpret data, or develop scientific arguments. Responsibility for the accuracy of the content, scientific integrity, and originality of this manuscript rests entirely with the author.

Bibliography

- Abu Zayd, N. H. (2004). *Text, Authority, and Community: Essays in Quranic Hermeneutics*. Leiden: Brill.
- Alsaied, M. A. (2025). Interpretation of Religious Texts and Its Impact on Coexistence with Others. *Journal of Posthumanism*, 5(3), 1508–1528. <https://doi.org/10.63332/joph.v5i3.944>
- Andok, M. (2024). The Impact of Online Media on Religious Authority. *Religions*, 15(9), 1103. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15091103>
- Arifinsyah, Dalimunthe, M. A., & Riza, F. (2025). Islamic Theological Perspectives on Human Rights: Bridging the Gap between Faith and Universal Principles. *Pharos Journal of Theology*, 106(2), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.106.207>
- Bank, W. (2023). *Women, Business and the Law 2023*. Washington, DC. <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-1944-5>
- Calis, H. (2022). The Theoretical Foundations of Contextual Interpretation of the Qur'an in Islamic Theological Schools and Philosophical Sufism. *Religions*, 13(2), 188. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13020188>
- Cremer, D. J. (2021). Patriarchy, Religion, and Society. In *Exploring Gender at Work* (hal. 25–44). Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64319-5_2
- Čustović, A. (2025). Equal Before God but Not Equal Before His Law? Sharia Law and Women's Right to Interpretation in the Light of the Human Rights Debate. *Religions*, 16(3), 362. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16030362>
- Darzi, G., Ahmadvand, A., & Nushi, M. (2021). Revealing gender discourses in the qur'ān: An integrative, dynamic and complex approach. *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 77(4), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.6228>
- Domen, R. E. (2016). The Ethics of Ambiguity. *Academic Pathology*, 3, 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2374289516654712>
- Fitriyah, A., & Rahman, G. (2024). Reinterpreting Gender in the Qur'an: Realizing Inclusive Interpretation in the Modern Era. *An-Nisa Jurnal Kajian Perempuan dan Keislaman*, 17(2), 117–132. <https://doi.org/10.35719/annisa.v17i2.303>
- Gilreath, S. (2023). Gender Inequality and Biological Supremacy: A Sex Equality Analysis of Patrick Parkinson's "Neutral" Proposal. *Journal of Law and Religion*, 38(1), 46–54. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jlr.2022.60>
- Ginting, L. D. C. U., Nasution, V. A., Suhendar, A., Nasution, A. R., & Ramadhan, A. R. (2023). Women in the Public Sphere: Gender Equality in Islamic Theology. *Pharos Journal of Theology*, 105(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.10518>
- Hanafi, Y., Saefi, M., Diyana, T. N., Ikhsan, M. A., Faizin, N., Thoriquattyas, T., & Murtadho, N. (2022). Students' perspectives on religious moderation: A qualitative study into religious literacy processes. *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 78(1), 7638. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i1.7638>

- Hasan, A. (2023). Moving from Male-Centric Fallacies to Feminist Interpretive Authority. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 39(2), 91–93. <https://doi.org/10.2979/jfs.2023.a908304>
- Hasan, H., Jahar, A. S., Umar, N., & Abdullah, I. (2022). Polygamy: Uncovering the effect of patriarchal ideology on gender-biased interpretation. *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 78(4), a7970. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i4.7970>
- Ibrahim, M. (2025). The Usage of Interpretation Methodology of Ambiguous Verses in the Ancestors's Exegesis. *Islamiyyat*, 47(1), 245–257. <https://doi.org/10.17576/islamiyyat-2025-4701-20>
- Ichwan, M. N., Ming, D., & Sya'roni, M. (2025). Bridging Tradition and Modernity: Integrating Classical Interpretation and Modern Hermeneutics through Ijtihad in Qur'an Studies. *Pharos Journal of Theology*, 106(2), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.106.2021>
- Ichwan, M. N., Ulama'i, A. H. A., Masuwd, M. A., & Abdulghani, N. A. (2024). Sufism And Quranic Interpretation: Bridging Spirituality, Culture, and Political Discourse in Muslim Societies. *Ulumuna*, 28(2), 655–689. <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v28i2.1082>
- Indah, F., Choirunnisak, C., Yusman, Y., Arifin, F. M., & Ashani, S. (2025). Science, Power, and Legitimacy: The Political Role of Rulers in the Dynamics of the Development of Science in the Classical Islamic World (Abbasid–Andalusian). *Al-Qarawiyyin: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin*, 1(4), 273–287. <https://doi.org/10.64691/ywd7ca03>
- Junaidi, A., Amperawati, E. D., Dwianto, A., Putri, S. N., Rahmawati, R., & Sartono, S. (2025). The Role of Munasabah in Qur'anic Interpretation: Evolution, Practice, and Posthumanism Perspectives. *Journal of Posthumanism*, 5(1), 24–42. <https://doi.org/10.63332/joph.v5i1.920>
- Kusuma, S. H., Akhyar, K., Multazam, A., Imran, M., & Jamardi, S. (2026). Hadith and Women's Voices: A Critical Analysis of Amina Wadud's Methodology in Interpreting Gender Bias. *Arba: Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, 2(1), 52–68. <https://doi.org/10.64691/764cw175>
- Kusuma, Z., Handayani, S. A., Aslam, M., & Salleh, N. F. binti. (2025). The Intellectual Traces of Women in the Golden Age of Islam: From Science to Cosmopolitan Culture. *Al-Qarawiyyin: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin*, 1(4), 306–320. <https://doi.org/10.64691/dx657048>
- Lassiter, C. (2019). Sham Epistemic Authority and Implicit Racial Bias. *Social Epistemology*, 33(1), 42–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2018.1552995>
- Li, P. F. J., & Wong, Y. J. (2024). Beliefs in Free Will Versus Determinism: Search for Meaning Mediates the Life Scheme–Depressive Symptom Link. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 64(5), 940–953. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167820933719>
- Ma'rufi, A., Saifudin, Nisa', K., & Muhajir. (2024). Burhani Epistemology in The

- Scientific Development of Contemporary Pesantren. *Tafkir: Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Education*, 5(2), 301–314. <https://doi.org/10.31538/tijie.v5i2.937>
- Mahmoud, M. M. A. (2025). Gender Dynamics in Qur’anic Translation: Analyzing Male and Female Perspectives on Surat Al-Fatiha. *Traduction et Langues*, 24(1), 218–239. <https://doi.org/10.52919/translang.v24i01.1032>
- Masama, A. A., & Abubakar, A. B. (2025). Prerequisites before Interpretation: A Scholarly Examination of Qur’anic Exegetical Qualifications. *Middle East Journal of Islamic Studies and Culture*, 5(1), 55–62. <https://doi.org/10.36348/mejisc.2025.v05i01.007>
- Maulana, A. I., Arifinsyah, A., & Husein, M. (2023). Naẓariyyah al-Ma’rifah fī at-Tafsīr al-’Ilmi li al-Qurān al-Karīm. *ZAD Al-Mufasssir*, 5(1), 144–165. <https://doi.org/10.55759/zam.v5i1.69>
- Motamayel, M. A., Ehteshami, A. H., & Hoseini, S. H. (2024). Analysis of Life Events Based on Divine Will and Human Free Will from the Perspective of the Holy Qur’an. *Islamic Knowledge and Insight*, 2(1), 222–247. <https://doi.org/10.61838/iki.2.1.17>
- Mukminin, A., Hanun, A., Zainuddin, Mushtofa, L., & Wassalwa, A. (2025). Integration of Bayani, Burhani and Irfani Epistemologies in Arabic Language Learning in Islamic Boarding School-Based Colleges. *Asalibuna*, 9(1), 91–107. <https://doi.org/10.30762/asalibuna.v9i01.5292>
- Nasohah, Z. (2024). Dynamics of Islamic Family Law in Facing Current Challenges in Southeast Asia. *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam*, 8(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v8i1.16553>
- Nikmatullah, N. (2024). Male Ulama Reinterpretation of the Gender Hadith in Indonesian Socio Cultural Contexts. *Pharos Journal of Theology*, 105(2), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.105.213>
- Programme, U. N. D. (2024). *Human Development Report 2023/2024: Breaking the Gridlock—Reimagining Cooperation in a Polarized World*. New York. Retrieved from <https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2023-24>
- Rahman, F. (1980). *Major Themes of the Qur’an*. Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica.
- Saeed, A., & Akbar, A. (2021). Contextualist Approaches and the Interpretation of the Qur’ān. *Religions*, 12(7), 527. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12070527>
- Supena, I. (2024). Epistemology of Tafsīr, Ta’wīl, and Hermeneutics: Towards an Integrative Approach. *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, 14(1), 121–136. <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.141.08>
- Surya, I., Imran, M., . D., . R., Mariadi, A. M., & Ramadhani, I. A. (2025). Defending Women’s Right to Leadership in Islam: The Reconstruction of Mainstream Gender-Biased Qur’anic Exegesis of Leadership Verse. *Journal of Posthumanism*, 5(6), 3663–3675. <https://doi.org/10.63332/joph.v5i6.2501>
- Tafkir, M., Hidayat, Z., & Ayob, M. A. bin. (2026). Deconstructing Patriarchy in Islam: An Analysis of Asma Barlas’ Unreading Concept of the Patriarchal

- Interpretation of the Quran. *Arba: Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, 2(1), 20–34. <https://doi.org/10.64691/tqrng369>
- Wadud, A. (1999). *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading a Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspectives*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wadud, A. (2021). Reflections on Islamic Feminist Exegesis of the Qur'an. *Religions*, 12(7), 497. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12070497>
- Yang, Y. (2020). What's Hegemonic about Hegemonic Masculinity? Legitimation and Beyond. *Sociological Theory*, 38(4), 318–333. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0735275120960792>
- Yuliharti, Y., Agustiar, A., Hasbi, R., Efendi, A., & Alfiah, A. (2025). Reconstruction of Gender Interpretation in Misogynistic Hadiths: Implications for Islamic Education Reform. *Journal of Posthumanism*, 5(3), 1654–1666. <https://doi.org/10.63332/joph.v5i3.964>
- Zekkour, H., & Imamuddin, I. (2024). Methods of Understanding the Quran and Hadith from Ancient Times to Modern Times. *Journal of Education and Teacher Training Innovation*, 2(2), 102–109. <https://doi.org/10.61227/jetti.v2i2.112>