



Deconstructing Patriarchy in Islam: An Analysis of Asma Barlas' Unreading Concept of the Patriarchal Interpretation of the Quran

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Article	Submitted	Revised	Accepted	Available Online
History	2025-10-01	2026-01-03	2026-01-11	2026-01-21

Abstract

The dominance of patriarchal interpretation in the treasury of Quranic interpretation has historically shaped hierarchical gender relations and has had direct implications for the legitimacy of social inequality between men and women. Although studies on Islamic feminism and Asma Barlas's thoughts have developed, most research remains descriptive. It has not yet positioned the concept of unreading as a systematic epistemological critique of the objectivity claims of patriarchal interpretation. This article critically analyzes Asma Barlas's concept of unreading as a strategy for deconstructing patriarchal interpretations. It evaluates its implications for the renewal of a gender-just methodology in the interpretation of the Quran. This research employs a qualitative method based on literature studies, utilizing a critical hermeneutic approach and epistemological discourse analysis. It involves an in-depth review of Asma Barlas's primary works and a comparative analysis of classical and modern interpretations of key verses related to gender relations. The results of the study indicate that patriarchy in interpretation is built through three main patterns: first, a literalistic reading that affirms male superiority and removes the ethical context of the Quran; second, the limitation of women's roles in the public sphere through the naturalization of biological differences into normative hierarchies; and third, the reproduction of masculine religious authority that forecloses the possibility of a plurality of meanings. Barlas's concept of unreading serves as an epistemological critique that rejects the neutrality of such interpretations by affirming monotheism, justice, and equality as the normative hermeneutic principles of the Quran. In conclusion, the unreading approach not only destabilizes the hegemony of patriarchal interpretations but also provides an alternative methodological framework that significantly contributes to the development of a more egalitarian and inclusive Quranic interpretation in contemporary Islamic studies.

Keywords: Patriarchal Interpretation; Asma Barlas; Unreading; Deconstruction; Gender Equality

Abstrak

Dominasi tafsir patriarkal dalam khazanah penafsiran Al-Quran secara historis telah membentuk relasi gender yang hierarkis dan berimplikasi langsung pada legitimasi ketimpangan sosial antara laki-laki dan perempuan. Meskipun kajian tentang feminisme Islam dan pemikiran Asma Barlas telah berkembang, sebagian besar penelitian masih bersifat deskriptif dan belum menempatkan konsep *unreading* sebagai kritik epistemologis yang sistematis terhadap klaim objektivitas tafsir patriarkal. Artikel ini bertujuan menganalisis secara kritis konsep *unreading* Asma Barlas sebagai strategi dekonstruksi tafsir patriarkal sekaligus mengevaluasi implikasinya bagi pembaruan metodologi tafsir Al-Quran yang berkeadilan gender. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan dengan pendekatan hermeneutika kritis dan analisis wacana epistemologis, melalui telaah mendalam atas karya-karya utama Asma Barlas serta analisis komparatif terhadap tafsir klasik dan modern pada ayat-ayat kunci relasi gender. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa patriarki dalam tafsir terbangun melalui tiga pola utama: pertama, pembacaan literalistik yang meneguhkan superioritas laki-laki dan menanggalkan konteks etis Al-Quran; kedua, pembatasan peran perempuan di ruang publik melalui naturalisasi perbedaan biologis menjadi hierarki normatif; dan ketiga, reproduksi otoritas keagamaan maskulin yang menutup kemungkinan pluralitas makna. Konsep *unreading* Barlas berfungsi sebagai kritik epistemologis yang menolak netralitas tafsir tersebut dengan menegaskan tauhid, keadilan, dan kesetaraan sebagai prinsip hermeneutik normatif Al-Quran. Kesimpulannya, pendekatan *unreading* tidak hanya mendestabilisasi hegemoni tafsir patriarkal, tetapi juga menawarkan kerangka metodologis alternatif yang berkontribusi signifikan pada pengembangan tafsir Al-Quran yang lebih egaliter dan inklusif dalam studi Islam kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: Tafsir Patriarkal; Asma Barlas; *Unreading*; Dekonstruksi; Kesetaraan Gender

Introduction

The discourse on gender relations in Islam remains marked by epistemological tensions rooted in the tradition of Quranic interpretation, which developed within a patriarchal social structure (Harahap, Is, & Julaiha P, 2025). The history of interpretation shows that the production of Quranic meaning was predominantly shaped by the authority of male interpreters living within a social, political, and cultural context that positioned men as the normative subjects of religious knowledge (A. Hasan, 2023). This condition fosters an epistemology of interpretation that tends to normalize hierarchical gender relations, resulting in asymmetric understandings of Quranic verses on family leadership, moral authority, and male-female relations (Darzi, Ahmadvand, & Nushi, 2021). As a result, patriarchal interpretive constructions are often treated as if they were identical to the normative intent of the sacred text, rather than as the result of human interpretation bound by historical context and specific interests (H. Hasan et al., 2022).

This phenomenon has broad and measurable empirical implications for the lives of contemporary Muslim women. A 2022 United Nations report showed that gender-based inequality remains high in many Muslim-majority countries, particularly in access to education, political participation, and economic

opportunities, with religious legitimacy often used to justify these restrictions (Nations, 2023). Musawah's 2020 findings confirmed that inequality in Islamic family law—including practices of guardianship, divorce, and reproductive rights—is rooted in gender-biased religious interpretations legitimized through the authority of classical exegesis (Musawah, 2020). This fact demonstrates that Quranic interpretation does not cease to be a theological discourse but rather functions as a tool of normative legitimation that shapes legal, social, and political structures. Therefore, the problem of patriarchal interpretation becomes both an academic and a practical issue that directly impacts the lives of millions of Muslim women.

Awareness of these epistemological problems has given rise to various critical hermeneutic approaches in contemporary Islamic studies. Several Muslim scholars, such as Amina Wadud and Riffat Hassan, emphasize the importance of contextual reading and women's experiences as sources of knowledge in understanding the Quran (Khairuddin et al., 2024). However, Asma Barlas holds a distinctive position because she not only offers a reinterpretation of gender-based verses but also proposes the concept of unreading as a deconstructive strategy for the epistemological assumptions underlying patriarchal interpretations (Fitryansyah, 2024). Unreading is understood as a systematic effort to dismantle claims of interpretive authority in the name of the sacred text, by clearly distinguishing between the Quran as divine revelation based on the principles of monotheism and justice, and human interpretations that are historical, political, and prone to bias (Barlas, 2012).

Previous academic studies have shown significant attention to the critique of patriarchy in Islam, but remain analytically limited. Research by Hasan et al. (2022) asserts that the Quran does not condone gender hierarchy, but classical interpretations construct male dominance through specific normative constructs. Arabi and Mujahid (2024) demonstrate that the narrative of the creation of women in interpretations is often embedded with subordinative stereotypes that are not directly derived from the Quranic text. Nawafil and Suparwany (2021), through a historical study of hadith, assert that the legitimacy of patriarchy often rests on problematic hadith that are rarely critically reviewed. Al-Sharmani (2018) highlights the stagnation of Islamic family law due to the failure to distinguish between the authority of revealed texts and human interpretation. Resky (2024) emphasizes the principle of monotheism as the normative basis for gender equality in Quranic hermeneutics. However, most of these studies still focus on normative-ideological critique or thematic analysis of verses, without elaborating on unreading as a comprehensive epistemological method for deconstructing the foundations of patriarchal interpretation. This gap marks the novelty of this research.

This research focuses on three main issues: the working mechanism of Asma Barlas's concept of unreading in dismantling the epistemological structure of patriarchal interpretation; the contribution of unreading to the development of

contemporary Quranic interpretation methodology; and the theoretical and practical implications of this approach for the study of interpretation and gender in Islam. The research aims to analyze the epistemological basis of unreading, identify the deconstructive strategies used by Barlas in separating the revealed text from the patriarchal claims of interpretation, and assess its relevance as a methodological framework in the renewal of Islamic studies. The basic argument of this research rests on the assumption that patriarchal interpretation is not an authentic representation of the normative values of the Quran. Still, it is rather a product of socio-historical construction, institutionalized through scientific authority and symbolic power. Thus, this research is expected to contribute theoretically to strengthening the methodology of critical interpretation based on the epistemology of tauhid, and practically provide a conceptual foundation for the development of a more just discourse on family law and Islam.

Method

This research employs a qualitative method based on a literature study, with Asma Barlas's feminist hermeneutics serving as the primary analytical framework. Critical discourse analysis serves as an operational tool to explore power relations, epistemological assumptions, and patriarchal meaning constructions within the tradition of Quranic interpretation. Primary data consists of Asma Barlas's works, especially *Believing Women in Islam*, as well as several classical and contemporary commentaries purposively selected based on explicit criteria. Secondary data includes reputable journal articles, academic books, and methodological studies related to Quranic interpretation, gender, and hermeneutics. Data collection was conducted through a systematic literature search, comprising stages of text identification, selection based on relevance and academic credibility, mapping of verses and commentaries containing patriarchal constructions, and thematic coding of gender argumentation patterns. Data analysis was carried out through three integrated stages: the presentation of the literal meaning of the verses and their interpretation, the application of the concept of unreading by revealing theological and epistemological assumptions that perpetuate patriarchy, and the reconstruction of meaning by referring to the principles of justice, monotheism, and non-hierarchical authority in the Quran. The validity of the analysis was maintained through intertextual comparisons between interpretations, the consistent application of the hermeneutic framework, and critical dialogue with authoritative interpretation literature, resulting in an alternative interpretation framework that is argumentative and methodological.

Results and Discussion

Patriarchal Patterns in the Interpretation of the Quran

Patriarchy in Quranic interpretation is understood in this study as an epistemic construct that links religious authority, legal rationality, and social

legitimacy to masculinity, so that gender relations are read hierarchically. Within the framework of ideological interpretation and Islamic feminist criticism, interpretation is viewed not as a neutral representation of the text's meaning, but rather as a product of the interaction between the sacred text, the interpretive methodology, and the interpreter's socio-cultural context (Bakhshizadeh, 2023). The social structure that places men as the center of political, economic, and familial authority shapes the interpreter's horizon of understanding when interacting with the text (Ichwan, Ming, & Sya'roni, 2025). Consequently, the prevailing gender hierarchy in social reality is often projected into the meaning of the verses, so that interpretation functions not only as a medium for understanding revelation but also as a mechanism for reproducing established social values (Ismail, Firdaus, & Darmawijaya, 2024).

One of the most representative examples is the interpretation of the concept of *qiwamah* in the Quran 4:34. Classical commentaries, such as those by al-Ṭabarī (2001) and al-Qurṭubī (1964), interpret the phrase *al-Rijāl qawwāmūna 'alā al-Nisā'* (Men are the guardians of women) as legitimizing men's authority over women. This interpretation is built on the assumption of men's superiority in intellect, physical strength, and economic role. These assumptions are treated as objective and universal facts, rather than as sociohistorical constructs. As a result, *qiwamah* is reduced to a power relation, rather than understood as a contextual ethical responsibility. This pattern of reading demonstrates how a patriarchal epistemic framework shapes the direction of interpretation before the text itself is critically considered.

A similar pattern is also evident in the interpretation of verses related to inheritance, particularly Quran 4:11. Al-Ṭabarī (2001) explains that the superiority of men over women is linked to men's obligation to provide for their families and meet their needs. Ibn Kathīr (2004) explicitly links inheritance distribution to the structure of men's social roles as providers and breadwinners, which are considered normative provisions of sharia. This argument posits that economic distribution is a direct reflection of the division of social roles, which are assumed to be fixed and immutable. Thus, justice is understood formally and functionally, rather than substantively and contextually. This interpretation has the potential to reinforce women's economic subordination when social conditions change, but the interpretive framework remains intact without a critical evaluation of its underlying assumptions.

The interpretation of the verse on polygamy in the Quran 4:3 increasingly demonstrates patriarchal tendencies within the exegetical tradition. In *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, al-Jaṣṣāṣ (1992) emphasized the permissibility of polygamy as a legal concession for men, provided that justice is exercised. However, according to Kecia Ali (2016b), the focus of such interpretation is directed more towards the legitimacy of permission, while the requirement of justice is treated as a normative provision

that is not analyzed ethically and practically. As a result, justice is reduced to a formal requirement, rather than a strict moral principle. According to Amina Wadud (2006), this pattern reflects the patriarchal way in which interpretation prioritizes the interests of men as active legal subjects, while women are positioned as objects of relations who receive legal consequences.

Patriarchal tendencies are also evident in the interpretation of the verse on women's testimony in the Quran 2:282. Ibn Kathīr (2004) linked the stipulation that two female witnesses are equal to one male witness to the assumption of women's weaker memory. This assumption was later criticized by Fazlur Rahman (1982), who argued that such assumptions do not arise from strict textual analysis, but rather from psychological and social generalizations applicable to certain societies. Amina Wadud (1999) even added that, when these assumptions are treated as normative foundations, interpretation becomes a means of legitimizing gender stereotypes. Thus, the main problem is not with the Quranic verse itself, but with the way interpreters transform particular social experiences into theological provisions considered universal.

Contemporary interpretive efforts to present a more contextual reading have not entirely severed their ties to the patriarchal framework. Sayyid Quṭb (2004), for example, continues to emphasize male leadership over women by referring to the concept of *fiṭrah* (natural disposition) and biological differences. In this case, the concept of *fiṭrah* is treated as a static, normative category, rather than an open concept that can be reinterpreted in light of social changes. Despite using more apologetic and moral language, the gender-based division of roles is maintained, thus allowing patriarchy to emerge in a more subtle but no less effective form.

The dynamics of contemporary interpretation demonstrate an awareness of the problem of gender inequality, yet a strong attachment to classical traditions means that many readings maintain a hierarchical structure. Quranic interpretation, therefore, cannot be separated from the social context that shaped it. Patriarchal patterns in interpretation are the result of a complex interaction between the sacred text, the interpretive methodology, and the interpreter's social ideology. This finding confirms that the primary problem lies not with the Quran as a text, but rather with the epistemological framework of its reading, thus opening up space for the need for critical and alternative approaches in rereading religious texts.

The Concept of Unreading as Epistemological Critique

Unreading is not intended as a rejection of the Quran as a sacred text, but rather as an epistemological strategy to unravel layers of interpretation formed through social, political, and gender assumptions that are not inherent in the text itself (Ali, 2016a). Within the framework of Islamic feminist hermeneutics, unreading is clearly distinguished from mere reinterpretation or re-reading, because its primary focus is not on producing new meanings, but on dismantling

epistemic assumptions that have limited the possibilities of the Quran's meaning (Al-Sharmani, 2023).

The primary epistemological foundation of unreading lies in the concept of *tawhīd*, which Barlas interprets as the principle of ontological equality and the rejection of all forms of hierarchy that claim transcendental legitimacy (Barlas, 2012). *Tawhīd*, in this framework, is not reduced to a normative theological doctrine, but rather is positioned as an epistemic principle that rejects the delegation of divine authority to humans. Interpretations that justify male domination over women are seen as problematic not only because of their social implications, but also because epistemologically they position men as normative subjects entitled to regulate gender relations in the name of God's will (Čustović, 2025). This position is not a universal theological claim, but rather a unique epistemological construction of Barlas that distinguishes him from the classical theological tradition, which often separates *tawhīd* as a divine principle from hierarchical social structures.

To operationalize the principle of monotheism in reading the Quran, unreading relies on critical hermeneutics as a methodological tool. Critical hermeneutics, within Barlas's framework, highlights not only the historical context in which verses were revealed but also the epistemological context in which interpretations are formed, including assumptions about gender, the authority of the interpreter, and power relations in the production of religious knowledge (Barlas, 2001). Through this approach, claims of neutrality and objectivity in mainstream interpretations are treated as objects of critique, rather than as premises to be taken for granted. The Quran is understood as a text with the potential for plural meanings, while limitations on meaning often stem from specific social frameworks that are infiltrated into the interpretive process (Barlas, 2001).

The epistemological critique of unreading is specifically directed at the construction of traditional interpretive authority, which is often treated as a final truth. The dominance of male interpreters in the history of interpretation is not understood as a mere matter of identity, but rather as an epistemic condition that influences how texts are read and interpreted (Barlas, 2012). Unreading does not erase the historical value of classical interpretation, but rejects its treatment as a single normative standard that precludes the possibility of other readings (Ali, 2016a). In this context, what is often considered the epistemological stability of interpretation is actually the result of the repetition and social legitimization of certain frameworks of meaning, rather than an inevitable consequence of the Quranic text itself. Unreading works by disrupting this stability by exposing the biases and interests that accompany it (Barlas, 2012).

The epistemological implications of unreading extend beyond the realm of interpretive theory to encompass the relationship between the reader, the text, and religious authority, by clearly distinguishing between the Quran as a transcendent text and interpretation as a historical product. Unreading shifts the reader's position

from a passive recipient of interpretive authority to a critically engaged epistemic subject. This shift is not intended to relativize the truth of the text, but rather to reorganize the authority of knowledge so that a particular patriarchal framework does not monopolize it. Within Barlas's (2012), framework, this shift in epistemic relations opens up space for a more equitable reading without deviating from the horizon of Islamic faith.

Overall, unreading is a structured epistemological project, grounded in monotheism as a principle of equality, employing critical hermeneutics as a methodology, and directing its critique at the claims of patriarchal interpretation's normativity. This concept is not intended to negate the tradition of interpretation, but rather to uncover the ideological dimensions that have been disguised as transcendent truth. With this framework, unreading becomes a crucial theoretical basis for Asma Barlas's strategy of deconstructing patriarchal interpretations, while also bridging epistemological analysis with concrete discussions of gender relations in Quranic interpretation.

Asma Barlas' Deconstruction Strategy of Patriarchal Interpretation

The application of deconstructive strategies is clearly evident in Barlas's critique of the interpretation of Quran 4:34, particularly in relation to the concept of *qiwamah*. Patriarchal interpretations typically view the term *qawwāmūn* as legitimizing male leadership and the ontological superiority of men over women (Ismail et al., 2024). Barlas begins his deconstruction with a lexical analysis of the root word ق-و-م, which in Quranic usage refers to responsibility, maintenance, and sustainability, not hierarchical domination (Barlas, 2012). Furthermore, the context of the verse indicates a situational functional relationship, related to material responsibility and social protection within a particular societal structure (Barlas, 2012). Through unreading, Barlas demonstrates that patriarchal interpretations shift the meaning from ethical responsibility to ontological status, a shift that lacks a strong textual basis in the Quran.

The next deconstruction focuses on the cosmological narrative of creation, which is often used to justify a gender hierarchy. The classical exegetical tradition usually integrates the story of Eve's creation from Adam's rib into the interpretation of Quranic verses, even though this narrative has no explicit basis in the text (El-Ali, 2022). Through unreading, Barlas traces the source of this narrative as a legacy of extra-Quranic traditions that are then treated as if they were part of revelation. He asserts that Quranic verse 4:1 uses the term *nafs waḥidah* to refer to the origins of humanity, which linguistically and conceptually affirms the existential equality of men and women (Barlas, 2012). By unpacking the mechanisms by which patriarchal mythology enters interpretation, Barlas rejects the claim that women's subordination has a cosmological basis in the Quran.

The unreading strategy is also applied to the interpretation of Quran 2:228, particularly the phrase "*wa lil-rijāli 'alayhinna darajah*," which is often used as a

basis for male superiority. Patriarchal interpretations usually view *darajah* as a general moral and social superiority (Umami, 2021). Barlas (2012) critiques this generalization by situating the verse within discussions on *idah* (waiting) and post-divorce rights. Structural analysis of the verse reveals that *darajah* pertains to men's additional responsibility in ensuring procedural justice, rather than claims of ontological superiority (Barlas, 2012). Through unreading, Barlas demonstrates how patriarchal interpretations isolate a single phrase from its context to support a gender hierarchy that is inconsistent with the overall ethical message of the Quran.

A similar approach is used in critiques of the interpretation of Quranic verse 4:3 on polygyny. Dominant interpretations often emphasize the permissibility of polygyny as a male right, while the requirement of justice is treated as a normative formality (Nugroho et al., 2024). Barlas (2012) recontextualizes this verse by situating it within the framework of orphan protection and post-conflict social justice. He asserts that the requirement of justice is not a secondary addition, but rather the normative core of the verse, implicitly limiting the practice of polygyny. Thus, patriarchal interpretations are seen as shifting the ethical focus of the verse to perpetuate a social structure that benefits men. This deconstruction asserts that the legitimacy of polygyny in interpretations reflects more historical social interests than the normative intent of the Quran.

A reinterpretation of Quran 2:282 concerning women's testimony reveals the epistemological dimension of unreading more explicitly. Classical interpretations generally generalize the requirement of two female witnesses as evidence of women's rational inferiority (Siregar & Harahap, 2024). Barlas (2012) rejects this universalization by placing the verse within the administrative context of debt transactions in a society that limits women's economic participation. The difference in the number of witnesses is understood as a mechanism for mutual reminders in specific social conditions, not as an assessment of gender-based intellectual capacity. Through unreading, Barlas reveals how a temporary social description is transformed by patriarchal interpretation into a universal and discriminatory theological doctrine.

Overall, Asma Barlas's deconstruction strategy through unreading demonstrates methodological consistency in dismantling patriarchal interpretations at the levels of language, context, and epistemic authority. This process involves identifying patriarchal assumptions in the interpretation, tracing its ideological sources, conducting textual and historical analyses of the verses, and reconstructing their meanings in accordance with the Quranic principle of justice. Unreading does not claim to discover a single or essential meaning of the Quran, but rather opens up a reading space that liberates the text from the hegemonic claims of patriarchal interpretation. With this approach, Barlas contributes to the development of critical, reflective, and responsive interpretation studies addressing

issues of gender justice without relinquishing her commitment to the ethical authority of the Quran.

Implications of the Concept of Unreading for the Study of Interpretation and Gender

The methodological implication of Asma Barlas's concept of unreading lies in its ability to shift the focus of exegetical studies from the acceptance of established interpretive authority to a critical evaluation of the epistemological foundations of exegesis itself. Patriarchal patterns in Quranic exegesis do not originate from the text, but rather from interpretive layers shaped by social power relations and the interpreters' epistemic assumptions (H. Hasan et al., 2022). In this context, unreading serves as a methodological strategy to dismantle the naturalization of patriarchal exegesis by retracing the relationship between the text, the historical context, and the accompanying ideological interests. This implication positions unreading not merely as an alternative approach but as an internal critique of the workings of traditional exegetical epistemology, which tends to absolutize certain interpretative outcomes.

In the realm of contemporary exegetical theory, unreading expands hermeneutical discourse by incorporating the dimensions of power and gender as analytical variables that determine the process of meaning-making. While Fazlur Rahman's (1980) double movement approach emphasizes the dialectic between the historical context of revelation and universal ethical principles, unreading goes further by questioning how patriarchal structures in the history of exegesis can distort these moral principles. Thus, unreading does not negate Rahman's framework, but rather sharpens it through a critique of the interpreter's assumed neutrality. This theoretical implication enriches exegetical methodology by emphasizing that fidelity to the ethical spirit of the Quran demands a continuous evaluation of the epistemological tools used in interpreting the text.

The concept of unreading also has significant implications for the relationship between the text, the reader, and the interpretive tradition. Unlike classical hermeneutics, which tends to place tradition as the dominant horizon, unreading demands a critical openness from the reader to dialogue between the historical horizon of the text and contemporary social experiences, including those of women. Within this framework, Hans-Georg Gadamer's (1977) notion of the fusion of horizons acquires a new critical dimension, as the dialogue between horizons is no longer understood as a neutral process, but rather as an arena influenced by power relations. The academic implication is the methodological legitimacy of interpretive reading that is not bound by claims of a single meaning, but remains oriented towards ethical coherence and scientific responsibility.

In the study of interpretation and gender, unreading makes an epistemological contribution by shifting women's position from mere objects of interpretation to legitimate subjects of knowledge. Unlike feminist approaches to

interpretation, which emphasize the normative inclusion of women's experiences (Abdellatif & Haynes, 2025), unreading offers an epistemological mechanism for exploring how interpretive authority is formed and perpetuated. By dismantling the assumption that classical interpretation is objective and ahistorical, unreading opens up space for a more egalitarian reconstruction of interpretive authority. Its practical implications are evident in the development of thematic interpretation studies, interpretation education in academic institutions, and Islamic gender research that is more reflective of the position and role of the interpreter.

The unreading approach also strengthens the relevance of interdisciplinary methods in Quranic studies by systematically integrating critical hermeneutics and feminist theory. In line with Paul Ricoeur's (1970) notion of a hermeneutics of suspicion, unreading encourages readings that consciously examine structures of meaning that potentially conceal symbolic injustices. However, unlike radical deconstruction, which risks relativizing meaning, unreading remains rooted in a commitment to the Quranic text as a normative source. This methodological implication allows for the emergence of critical exegetical readings without being detached from theological responsibility.

Unreading's contribution to the revitalization of tafsir methodology also lies in its ability to reexamine authoritative claims built on patriarchal traditions. In this context, unreading aligns with Mohammed Arkoun's (2019) critique of Islamic reason, particularly in its rejection of the stasis of meaning and promotion of epistemological openness. However, unlike Arkoun's philosophically inclined approach, unreading offers a more applicable analytical tool for reading the Quranic text, particularly verses related to gender relations. Thus, its implications are not limited to correcting gender bias but encompass a broader renewal of *tafsir* methodology.

Criticisms of unreading that highlight the potential relativism of meaning underscore the importance of acknowledging the epistemological limitations of this approach. Concerns that a hermeneutics of suspicion could undermine the normative authority of the text necessitate addressing this by positioning unreading as a corrective strategy, rather than a total deconstruction. Within this framework, a balance between interpretive freedom and a commitment to the fundamental principles of the Quran becomes a methodological prerequisite. The practical implication is the need for clear academic standards in applying unreading, so that criticism of patriarchal interpretation remains within the bounds of responsible scholarship.

Efforts to reconcile unreading and the normative framework of Islam can be achieved through the *maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* approach. By making justice, welfare, and the protection of human dignity the goals of interpretation, *maqāṣid* serves as an epistemological controlling mechanism in the practice of unreading. This approach enables the integration of feminist criticism and Islamic tradition without

relinquishing the authority of the text. Its methodological implications are relevant for the development of exegesis curricula, religious policy, and the production of Islamic knowledge that is responsive to contemporary social challenges.

Overall, the implications of the concept of unreading for the study of *tafsīr* and gender lie in its ability to provide a critical, reflective, and ethically oriented hermeneutical framework. By responsibly linking the Quranic text to social reality, unreading enriches the horizon of *tafsīr* methodology while strengthening the discourse of gender equality in Islam. This contribution situates this article clearly within contemporary academic debates as a methodological proposition that not only corrects patriarchal bias but also fosters the development of *tafsīr* as a dynamic and contextual discipline.

Conclusion

Asma Barlas's concept of unreading serves as a critical hermeneutic framework that systematically dismantles the epistemological assumptions of patriarchal interpretation by rejecting claims of sole authority over the meaning of the Qur'an and affirming the principles of justice and gender equality as intrinsic values of the text. This finding positions unreading not merely as a normative discourse of Islamic feminism but as a methodological approach that broadens the horizons of contemporary interpretation through an ethical hermeneutics that links the relationship between the text, the interpreter, and the social context. Theoretically, this research enriches the study of interpretation by offering a model of interpretation deconstruction that differs from other Muslim feminist approaches, as it focuses on critiquing knowledge structures and the authority of interpretation. Practically, this framework is relevant for the development of interpretation education, discourse on Islamic family law, and the production of more inclusive religious discourse in Muslim societies. The limitations of this research lie in the literature approach that focuses on Asma Barlas's work without analyzing social reception or concrete application to gender-specific verses. Therefore, future research should focus on specific case studies of interpretation using the unreading approach, empirical research on the reception of non-patriarchal interpretations in Muslim communities, as well as comparative studies across hermeneutic methodologies to test the exploratory power and effectiveness of this approach in a contextual setting.

Acknowledgments

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Author Contribution Statement

MT contributed to the formulation of the research concept and design, development of the theoretical framework, coordination of the overall writing process, and correspondence with the journal management. ZH contributed to data collection and processing, as well as searching and analyzing literature sources, and

prepared the initial draft of the results and discussion sections. MA contributed to the critical analysis of the findings, refinement of the academic argumentation, integration between sections of the manuscript, and substantial review and revision to enhance analytical rigor and academic consistency.

Conflict of Interest

This manuscript was prepared without any conflict of interest, whether financial, personal, institutional, or academic, which could potentially influence the process of writing, analyzing, or presenting the research results.

AI Usage Statement

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) in this manuscript was limited to language enhancement, grammar correction, and formatting assistance. All results, findings, concepts, analyses, ideas, interpretations, and conclusions are solely the responsibility of the author and were not generated by AI.

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