

## The Principles of Farid Esack's Liberation Hermeneutics and Their Implications for the Interpretation of Qur`anic Verses on Male Leadership

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**Abstract.** This research is driven by the polemics over the interpretation of the Qur`anic verses on male leadership that are often used as a basis for legitimizing patriarchy, especially QS. al-Baqarah [2]:228 and QS. an-Nisa [4]:34. The focus of this research is to analyze the two verses through Farid Esack's liberation hermeneutics approach to see their relevance to the issue of gender justice. In the digital age, patriarchal narratives are increasingly easy and quick to spread in the digital space, thus requiring the presence of strong and transformative theological counter narratives. The method used is a qualitative approach based on literature study with tafsir *maudhu'i*, which collects relevant verses, traces the historical context, and interprets their meaning based on Farid Esack's hermeneutical principles, which he calls the six keys to hermeneutics: *taqwa*, *tawhid*, *al-nās*, *al-mustad'afin*, *qist wa 'adl*, and *jihad*. Findings indicate that *darajah* is more accurately understood as a legal and social burden rather than an ontological superiority, while *qawwām* refers to the mandate of financial and ethical responsibility in the domestic sphere, rather than inherent male authority in the public domain. This finding rejects patriarchal interpretations that perpetuate toxic masculinity and opens space for women's leadership in the social sphere. Thus, the application of liberation hermeneutics within the framework of *maudhu'i* tafsir results in an egalitarian reinterpretation of the text, which has implications for strengthening gender justice, equality, and the protection of vulnerable groups in Muslim society.

**Keywords:** Farid Esack, Hermeneutics, Male Leadership.

### 1. Introduction

The problem of interpreting verses of the Qur`an about male leadership, particularly in relation to Q.S. an -Nisa [4]: 34 and Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 228, which are often used as scapegoats for narratives of the absolute superiority of men over women, have become one of the controversial issues in contemporary Islamic gender discourse, causing multidimensional impacts on the social life of Muslim communities. Rigid interpretations of the concepts of *darajah* and *qawwām* not only give rise to systematic resistance to female leadership in the public sphere, but also contribute to the legitimization of domestic violence, including the phenomenon of marital rape, which is

justified in the name of the husband's religious authority (Rohmah et al., 2025). Furthermore, the construction of masculinity resulting from this interpretation also creates a psychological burden in the form of toxic masculinity among Muslim men (Maulidina & Mubarak, 2025), which manifests itself in the demand to always be dominant, thereby inhibiting their ability to express emotions and causing various psychological problems. The root of this problem can be traced back to the classical interpretation tradition that was born and developed within a patriarchal social structure, where the ontological supremacy of men was considered an unquestionable divine decree, which then developed into a culture justified in the name of religion.

This is in line with what Nur Arfiyah Febriani said, that language influences readers, their thoughts, and ultimately influences the culture of society (Febriani, 2025). The development of digital technology has facilitated the widespread dissemination of patriarchal narratives in the digital space. On the other hand, the response in the form of anti-patriarchal narratives that emerge as a reaction are often trapped in counterproductive extremes, demeaning the role and dignity of men. In fact, the concept of gender equality in Islamic theology is not based on the subordination of one gender to another, but on the principles of complementarity and proportional justice. This polarization highlights the urgency of developing transformative theological narratives that not only reject patriarchal domination but also avoid destructive radical feminism as a middle ground that integrates the values of justice, substantial equality, and respect for the unique nature and roles of each gender.

After conducting a comprehensive review of the existing literature, the researcher found a significant research gap regarding the application of Farid Esack's hermeneutics in the study of verses on male leadership. Although Esack's liberation hermeneutics approach has been used in various contexts, such as the interpretation of slavery verses (Nuzulanisa, 2023), the value of *tawhid* (Rahmatulloh, 2020), justice during the *'iddah* (Saputra, 2022), and the prevention of sexual violence (Renci et al., 2024), there has been no study that specifically applies it to reinterpret verses about male leadership. Instead, previous studies related to gender-based leadership, such as the works of (Salam & Maulidiyah, 2024), (Asdin, 2022), and (Mumayyizah & Redjosari, 2023), tend to still use a textual approach or gender analysis that is separate from the liberation paradigm. Studies on the concepts of *darajah* and *qawwām* have also not integrated Esack's hermeneutical framework, although they have been analyzed through the Ma'na Cum Maghza approach (Nabila et al., 2023) and Barthes' semiotics (Umami, 2021).

This study aims to fill this gap by offering three innovations: first, the application of Farid Esack's multidimensional hermeneutical approach in examining verses on male leadership; second, the integration of structural analysis of the patriarchal system that influences traditional interpretations; and third, the use of a liberation paradigm based on social and gender justice, which is characteristic of Esack but has not yet been applied to this topic. Thus, this study not only contributes methodologically to the development of Qur'anic interpretation, but also has practical relevance in promoting gender justice in leadership structures through inclusive and transformative interpretations in contemporary Muslim societies, particularly in Indonesia.

To highlight the significance of this novelty, it is necessary to revisit the interpretative legacy that has shaped perceptions of male leadership. According to Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (2002), *darajah* is understood as the husband's position of leadership within the household, which is necessary for stability rather than as a legitimization of men's absolute superiority, since such leadership is constrained by Divine justice that punishes the abuse of power. Nevertheless, he interprets Q.S. an-Nisa

[4]:34 as a factual decree grounded in men's physical and intellectual advantage and financial responsibility, although he concedes that women may sometimes be more intelligent. Such cases, however, are considered exceptions, and a singular leadership structure is deemed necessary to prevent dualism of authority. Al-Qurṭubi (2012) interprets *darajah* as a degree, where the additional degree granted to men over women derives from their reason and capacity to provide financial support, pay blood money, inherit, and participate in jihad. Wahbah al-Zuhaili (2013) understands it as a social necessity, reflected in the division of roles: the public sphere for men and the domestic sphere for women. Al-alusi (n.d.), on the other hand, interprets male authority as absolute, akin to that of a ruler, affirming men's superiority through the exclusivity of prophethood, leadership, divorce rights, and inheritance. To support his interpretation of Q.S an-Nisa [4]:34, Ibn Kathir (2002) references Q.S al-Baqarah [2]: 228 and the ḥadīth stating that no people will prosper if led by a woman, portraying men as leaders, heads of the household, guardians, and educators. Taken together, these diverse exegetical perspectives reveal an almost consistent pattern: men are positioned as the central figures of household leadership with legitimacy drawn from *shari'ah*, nature, or social necessity, albeit with variations in the degree of authority and its legal implications.

The general purpose of this study is to address two fundamental questions: first, how Farid Esack's principles of liberation hermeneutics, rooted in his lived experience of resisting oppression in South Africa, can be applied in interpreting Qur'anic verses; and second, how the interpretation of verses concerning male leadership might appear when analyzed through Esack's principles of what he terms "key-hermeneutics." The first question is significant because it uncovers the historical, social, and ideological contexts that gave rise to Esack's interpretive paradigm, which is grounded in his struggle against apartheid and his commitment to social justice. The second question, meanwhile, seeks to examine the extent to which these hermeneutical principles, namely, siding with the oppressed, emphasizing justice, and employing a contextual and liberative reading, can provide a more egalitarian and emancipatory reinterpretation of the verses on *darajah* and *qawwām*. Thus, this study is not only descriptive of Esack's thought but also applicative in testing its relevance and contribution to the renewal of Qur'anic interpretation, particularly in responding to issues of gender and leadership in contemporary Muslim societies.

## 2. Method

This study uses a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach and literature review. This method was chosen to understand social phenomena in depth through the analysis of non-numerical data (Fiantika et al., 2022), in this case, texts and the thoughts of key figures. Specifically, this study applies the tafsir *mawdu'i* (thematic) method, which focuses on collecting and analyzing Qur'anic verses related to a particular theme in order to produce a comprehensive and non-partial understanding (Shihab, 2013). The primary analytical framework of this research is Farid Esack's liberation hermeneutics, with particular emphasis on his principles of "key hermeneutics," which serve to ensure that interpretation remains within the framework of Islamic law (*shari'ah*).

This study employs Farid Esack's Qur'an, Liberation, & Pluralism as its primary theoretical source to reinterpret Q.S an-Nisa [4]: 34 and Q.S al-Baqarah [2]: 228 through the lens of gender justice, while remaining faithful to Islamic teachings. Classical and contemporary tafsir serve as secondary references for comparison. Data were gathered

through library research and organized thematically to map Esack's ideas in relation to the selected verses. Using a descriptive-analytical method, the study first outlines Esack's thought and then applies principle liberation hermeneutics to the verses, aiming to demonstrate how principles of justice can inform contemporary Qur'anic interpretation.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 The Fundamental Principles of Farid Esack's Liberation Hermeneutics

The first two keys, *taqwa* (piety) and *tawhid* (monotheism), serve to establish the moral and doctrinal criteria for examining the other keys. They also function as a theological lens through which the Qur'an is read, both in general and in more specific ways. Although these two keys may appear purely theological, they are formulated and understood within a particular historical-political context and presented as such. The next two keys, *al-nas* (humanity) and *al-mustad'afin* (the oppressed), determine the locus of interpretive activity. While all contexts accessible to the interpreter influence the interpretive outcome, the interpreter has the freedom to situate himself in different positions to arrive at particular forms of interpretation. The final two keys, *qist wa 'adl* (balance and justice) and *jihad*, represent the methods and ethos that generate and shape a contextual understanding of God's words within society.

##### 3.1.1. Taqwa

Taqwa comes from the root word *w-q-y*, which means to guard oneself, protect, or pay attention, and in the Qur'an it is understood as a moral awareness of dependence on God. The Qur'an associates *taqwa* with faith (Q.S Yunus [10]: 63; al-Naml [27]: 53; Fushshilat [41]: 18), the purpose of worship (Q.S al-Baqarah [2]: 21), and distinguishes it from temporary worldly orientation (Q.S an-Nisa [4]: 77; al-An'am [6]: 32; Yusuf [12]: 57). Furthermore, *taqwa* is also demonstrated through social interactions, such as sharing (Q.S. al-Lail [92]: 5), keeping promises (Q.S. Ali Imran [3]: 76; al-A'raf [7]: 52), and doing good deeds (Q.S. Ali Imran [3]: 172; an-Nisa [4]: 126; al-Ma'idah [5]: 93; an-Nahl [16]: 127). In liberation hermeneutics, *taqwa* is key to ensuring that interpretations of the Qur'an avoid theological obscurantism, political reactions, and subjective speculation, even if they originate from oppressed groups. *Taqwa* enables interpreters to maintain spiritual-ethical balance amid socio-political struggles that often force interpretations to be oriented toward pragmatic interests. Moreover, it places interpretation within a dialectic of personal and social transformation, while also serving as an antithesis to self-deception, which often cloaks personal interests or narrow ideologies under the guise of the people's struggle. Therefore, according to Esack, *taqwa* is not merely an intellectual exercise; it is the most significant hermeneutical key for minimizing the manipulation of the Qur'anic text. (Esack, 1997).

In practice, according to Farid Esack, the principle of *taqwa* requires interpreters to always question whether an interpretation reflects an awareness of God's presence and contributes to justice and liberation, or whether it perpetuates injustice. Although his idea is rooted in the classical tradition that views *taqwa* as protection from divine wrath (al-Jawziyyah, 1999) and the social commitment and moral guardianship of an individual (al-Qaradawi, 2000), Esack successfully reinterprets this concept from mere ritual *taqwa* to a socially and politically relevant principle. He argues that interpretations that do not side with spiritual justice are dangerous because they can damage a person's relationship with God. Esack's approach bridges the theory of reformist scholars with

real-world practice in a social context, offering a refreshing alternative to traditional interpretations that are often trapped in technical-linguistic debates without considering their social impact.

However, Esack's approach is not without criticism. First, his strong emphasis on the socio-political dimension risks obscuring the spiritual-individual essence of *taqwa*. Second, the expansion of the meaning of *taqwa* as a hermeneutical principle to liberate marginalized groups may be considered too far from its conventional use in the Qur`an and hadith, potentially distancing readers from the literal meaning of the text. Third, epistemologically, this approach raises the problem of relativism, as there is no objective standard for assessing whether an interpretation is truly "pious." Fourth, the strong influence of the anti-apartheid context in South Africa on his ideas raises questions about the universality of the concept outside of situations of systemic oppression. These questions are important for testing the relevance of Esack's thinking and guarding it from overly narrow interpretations.

Despite criticism, Esack's approach to *taqwa* as a principle of interpretation has strong support. This approach successfully bridges the theories of reformist scholars with concrete evidence in a social context, demonstrating how *taqwa* can be a practical principle for combating injustice. Esack has succeeded in grounding *taqwa* from mere ritual to a socially and politically relevant principle, emphasizing that a commitment to justice is an integral part of *taqwa* itself. This approach also offers a hermeneutics that liberates from sterile technical-linguistic debates, focusing on ethical goals to produce meanings relevant to marginalized groups. His unique etymological exploration also opens up a protective spiritual dimension, where using sacred texts to oppress is considered dangerous to one's relationship with God, providing a strong spiritual foundation for his argument.

### 3.1.2. Tawhid

Many verses of the Qur`an directly or indirectly affirm the oneness of God, and *tawhid* is seen as the foundation, center, and ultimate goal of the Islamic tradition. This belief is rooted in the understanding that *tawhid* is not merely a theological doctrine, but the core of a comprehensive sociopolitical view. In the context of South Africa, *tawhid* has two specific applications: on an existential level, it rejects dualism that separates the spiritual and secular, the sacred and the profane, so that religion becomes a legitimate and important means of responding to political injustice; while on a sociopolitical level, *tawhid* opposes ethnic segregation, which is equated with shirk as its antithesis. As a hermeneutical principle, *tawhid* demands that philosophical, spiritual, legal, and political approaches to the Qur`an be viewed as part of a single unity, because no single approach can fully reveal divine messages. Thus, the hermeneutics of liberation of the Qur`an necessitates the rejection of shirk-based discourse that separates theology from social analysis, because theological understanding of a social, economic, or historical reality can only be obtained through direct involvement with it. The Islamic ideal, therefore, is a unified entity, committed to the One God and to the principle of wholeness (holism) (Esack, 1997).

*Tawhid* is a fundamental principle in Islam known as *aqidah* or the oneness of God, which should be the basis of every Muslim's attitude, actions, and mindset, as well as being implemented in behavior, morality, vision, and mindset in real (Rasyid, 1998). In classical Islamic studies, *tawhid* is understood as the purpose of life that guides

humans towards the pleasure of Allah SWT. and happiness in the hereafter, providing a solid spiritual foundation for worship, and revealing the true meaning behind every deed (Baali, 2009)). Esack expands the meaning of *tawhid* by emphasizing its socio-political implications. For Esack, recognition of the oneness of God must go hand in hand with recognition of the unity of humanity and rejection of all forms of discrimination and unjust hierarchy. He criticizes the reduction of *tawhid* to a mere theological doctrine without social consequences, and asserts that true *tawhid* demands active resistance to contemporary “false gods” such as racism, capitalism, patriarchy, and other ideologies that destroy humanity.

As a hermeneutical principle, *tawhid* directs the interpretation of the Qur`an to affirm the fundamental equality of all human beings, reject interpretations that perpetuate oppression, and encourage contextual readings of verses that appear to support hierarchy. Thus, *tawhid* is not only a vertical matter (the relationship between humans and God), but also a horizontal one (the relationship between humans), and therefore becomes a principle of liberation that has a direct impact on social reality. This framework can be applied to read patriarchy as a form of modern shirk because it places men in a position of “divinity” over women, as well as extreme capitalism as the “worship” of capital accumulation. In line with Eko Supriyadi (2003), the consequence of *tawhid* is fear only of Allah SWT. so that *tawhid* guarantees freedom and glorifies humans based on their closeness to Him. *Tawhid* leads to resistance against domination, discrimination, and injustice, while promoting justice, egalitarianism, solidarity, and liberation. Esack contributes by integrating Islamic theology and the struggle against injustice, making *tawhid* the foundation of resistance to discrimination and a bridge between faith and socio-political activism.

### 3.1.3. Al-Nas

The term *nas* in the Qur`an refers to humans in a collective social context, who are placed within the framework of *tawhid* as beings entrusted with divine authority (Q.S. al-Ahzab [33]: 72) and caliphs on earth. This position affirms that the role of humans is not only as material entities, but also as managers of life oriented towards divine goals placed within the framework of *tawhid* (Shari`ati, 1980, p. 86). Within the framework of hermeneutics, the function of humans gives rise to two important implications: the interpretation of the Qur`an must be in favor of the interests of the people (*al-nas*) and be shaped by the experiences and aspirations of the people, not the interests of the elite. However, this raises a theological question: are human interests identical to God’s interests, such that humanum becomes the measure of truth? *Tawhid* asserts that humans are not an autonomous measure; rather, humanum must submit to the principle of divinity. Thus, human experience is indeed an important medium for understanding revelation, but it must not be separated from the transcendent dimension (Esack, 1997)

Another issue arises from the openness of hermeneutics: the weakening of traditional authority poses the risk of relativism and desacralization of the text if interpretation is carried out arbitrarily without authoritative control. Therefore, the principle of humanity must be balanced with *tawhid* to avoid deviation. The tension between anthropocentrism and theocentrism is dialectical in nature, enriching interpretation. In line with Hasan Hanafi (1994), Qur`anic hermeneutics must include historical and transformative dimensions that respond to concrete challenges, not merely academic technicalities. The objectivity of hermeneutics can be measured

through consistency with the values of *tawhid*, historical awareness, inclusive communal consensus, commitment to social justice, and recognition of the plurality of interpretations as intellectual wealth. Interpretation of the Qur'an is never neutral because it always occurs within a specific social and cultural context. Therefore, objectivity lies in methodological honesty, openness to criticism, and a sustained commitment to realizing justice and human dignity in accordance with the guidance of the Qur'an.

#### 3.1.4. Mustadha'afin

In Farid Esack's hermeneutics, the concept of *mustadh'afin*, namely groups that are weakened, oppressed, and marginalized, becomes a central principle that demands explicit support for marginalized groups. This commitment stems from the message of the Qur'an and the prophetic mission, based on verses such as Q.S al-Qasas [28]:5-6 and the stories of prophets who consistently fought against oppression. Esack interprets *mustadh'afin* broadly to include the poor, racial minorities, women, and all those who experience discrimination. As a hermeneutical key, this principle shifts the locus of interpretation from the center of power to the oppressed, with two critical questions: how are verses understood from the perspective of those who are marginalized, and does interpretation contribute to liberation? Thus, interpretation is required to be not only textually accurate, but also socially transformative (Esack, 1997). This principle gives rise to a new, more contextual paradigm of interpretation, opening up criticism of interpretations that ignore the reality of injustice, while enabling the Qur'an to function as a source of justice in the face of contemporary issues such as racism, patriarchy, and poverty.

Nevertheless, this principle faces methodological challenges, particularly in the context of interpretive plurality and diverse groups' claims to oppressed status. This necessitates a continuous dialectic between text and social reality, as well as critical awareness of power relations that shape interpretation. Asma Barlas demonstrates that patriarchy in Islam emerged from the choices of classical jurists, not from the Qur'anic text itself (Barlas, 2019), thus gender-biased interpretations can be reconstructed through a *mustadh'afin* perspective. Although criticized as overly political and accused of sacrificing objectivity, Esack's hermeneutical strength lies precisely in his acknowledgment that interpretation is never value-free. This awareness enhances methodological transparency, social accountability, and reading ethics that emphasize responsibility toward the marginalized. Thus, *mustadh'afin* not only offers a new interpretive principle but also integrates academic and activist dimensions, thereby making Qur'anic studies an authentic instrument of liberation for creating a more just and humanistic society.

#### 3.1.5. 'Adl wa Qist

The concepts of *'adl* (justice) and *qist* (balance) constitute fundamental principles in Farid Esack's liberation hermeneutics. The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of upholding justice, even toward enemies (Q.S. al-Ma'idah [5]:8), and Esack understands this value not as an abstract concept, but as concrete praxis that forms the basis of cosmic order (Esack, 1997). In alignment with contemporary exegetes who emphasize freedom, humanity, justice, and equality (Mustaqim, 2010), Esack positions the principle of justice as the hermeneutical key: every interpretation must be measured by its contribution to

social justice. Interpretations that perpetuate injustice, despite being linguistically or historically valid, must be questioned because they contradict the primary function of scripture. For Esack, upholding justice constitutes the core message of the Qur`an and the objective of every interpretive process.

In contrast to classical approaches that tend to focus on ritual or theological aspects, Esack emphasizes that justice serves as the primary parameter for interpretive validity. He critiques interpretations that neglect the social dimension and affirms that the Qur`an consistently positions justice in opposition to oppression and lawlessness (Q.S Ali-Imran [3]:25; al-An`am [6]:160; Yunus [10]:47; al-Nahl [16]:111) (Esack, 1997). Through liberation hermeneutics, he shifts the parameter of truth from merely procedural to substantial namely, the extent to which interpretation contributes to the realization of social justice. Thus, Esack brings exegesis out of the academic ivory tower into the broader public sphere, establishing social justice as the primary criterion for every Qur'anic interpretation.

### 3.1.6. Jihad

Farid Esack formulates jihad not merely as “holy war,” but as a continuous struggle in upholding justice and liberating humanity from oppression. The essence of jihad lies in *juhd* (effort), encompassing intellectual resistance to socio-political action, with the objective of dismantling systems of oppression without replacing them with new forms of injustice (Esack, 1997). This perspective aligns with Muhammad Chirzin’s thought, which emphasizes jihad as *amar makruf nahi munkar*, as well as Sahiron Syamsuddin’s view of it as the elimination of oppression, preservation of religious freedom, and establishment of peace (Liansi & Al-Ayyubi, 2022, p. 12). The Qur`an itself employs the term jihad in various meanings, ranging from warfare (Q.S al-Nisa [4]:90; al-Taubah [9]:41) to spiritual struggle (Q.S al-Hajj [22]:78; al-Ankabut [29]:6), and even as coercion (Q.S al-Ankabut [29]:8; Luqman [31]:15). Throughout the narrative, jihad is coupled with goodness as a path toward truth. Verses such as Q.S al-Ra`d [13]:11 affirm the praxis dimension of jihad that social change demands human responsibility itself. Thus, jihad in Esack’s hermeneutics constitutes a praxis of justice integrated with epistemology, wherein theology follows praxis.

Within the framework of liberation hermeneutics, jihad becomes not only a theme of interpretation but also a methodological principle that demands Qur`anic interpretation to translate into concrete action against injustice. Esack rejects interpretations that remains confined to academic levels without social impact, and affirms jihad as the courage to challenge dogma and interpretations that perpetuate oppression, even when confronting dominant authority. This principle of jihad reconstructs its meaning from physical warfare toward comprehensive struggle for social justice. Significantly, jihad for Esack is not merely an object of interpretation, but also the interpretive framework itself, wherein interpreting the Qur`an constitutes part of the jihad to challenge interpretive domination that marginalizes the *mustadh`afin*. Through this principle, Esack bridges theory and practice, text and context, intellectual reflection and concrete action. Hermeneutical jihad encompasses readiness to face both intellectual and social risks in order to generate alternative readings that align with the ideals of justice, liberation, and the universal values of the Qur`an.

### 3.2. The Interpretation of Verses on Male Leadership Based on Farid Esack's Hermeneutical Principles and Their Implications

Farid Esack's hermeneutics of liberation offers a paradigm for interpreting the Qur'an that fundamentally challenges interpretations that perpetuate injustice and curtail the human rights of individuals and groups. This study focuses on gender issues, particularly in relation to the interpretation of Q.S al-Baqarah [2]:228 and Q.S an-Nisa [4]:34. Historically, these two verses have been used as theological justification for male superiority in domestic and social leadership, but Esack's hermeneutical approach produces a significantly different interpretation through the application of his six fundamental principles. This study argues that the application of the principles of *taqwa*, *tawhid*, *al-nas*, *mustadh'afin*, *'adl wa qist*, and *jihad* to these two verses not only produces a more egalitarian interpretation, but also one that is more consistent with the mission of liberation and social justice that is at the heart of the Qur'an's message and relevant to contemporary society.

The application of the principle of *taqwa* in the interpretation of these two verses requires intellectual honesty and critical awareness of interpretive biases that have become entrenched in the classical exegetical tradition. *Taqwa*, as defined by Esack, is not merely individual but a moral consciousness that frees the interpreter from theological obscurantism and the pragmatic interests of dominant groups. In Q.S al-Baqarah [2]:228, the phrase "*wa li al-rijāli 'alayhinna darajatun*" cannot be understood absolutely as the ontological superiority of men, but must be read in the context of the 7th-century Arab social system that placed men as the economic breadwinners of the family. This necessitates the recognition that when social structures undergo transformation, the interpretation of this *darajah* must also undergo recontextualization in order to remain in line with the principle of justice.

Similarly, in Q.S an-Nisa [4]:34, the term *qawwāmūn*, which is often translated as leader or ruler, must be understood through etymological analysis, which shows that the basic meaning of *qāma* is to stand tall or to maintain, not to dominate. The word *qawwām* itself has been interpreted by many exegetes as being responsible, ruling, leading, guarding, and protecting women (Zakiah & Nurfajriyani, 2023). This is based on the various advantages possessed by men, both physically and in terms of maturity of reasoning, logic, and courage, so that many heavy tasks are imposed on men. Meanwhile, women do not have such authority. Thus, the theological legitimacy of male superiority over women is established. In the book *Lisan al-Arab*, the word *qawwām* comes from the word *qāma- yaqāmu- qauman-wa qiyāman-wa qoumatan-wa qāmatan*, which means the opposite of the word *sit* (Manzur, 1990). The word *qawwām* also means to protect and do good or treat someone well. Meanwhile, the word *qawam* without *tasydid* on the *wawu* and the *alif* letter after it is interpreted as justice (*al-adlu*) (Manzur, 1990). Thus, through the principle of *taqwa*, it demands an interpretation that does not absolutize male authority, but rather understands it as a responsibility of maintenance in a specific historical context that can change along with social transformation.

The principle of *tawhid* in Esack's hermeneutics results in fundamental criticism of patriarchal interpretations that implicitly create modern forms of *shirk* through the absolutization of gender hierarchy. *Tawhid*, as the recognition of the oneness of Allah SWT. demands the rejection of all systems that place humans in a hierarchy based on biological characteristics such as gender, because this contradicts the principles of unity and equality of humanity before Allah SWT. Q.S al-Hujurat [49]: 13. In Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]:228, the principle of *tawhid* rejects readings that absolutize rank as permanent

superiority in all aspects of life, instead requiring interpretations that emphasize complementarity and fundamental justice between men and women, without transgressing the decrees of Allah SWT. Therefore, this verse must be understood as recognition of functional differentiation in a specific socio-economic context, not an ontological hierarchy that cannot be challenged. Esack honestly and openly acknowledges in his writing that there are differences between men and women, particularly in social and legal aspects. However, he firmly rejects these differences at the spiritual level and in terms of human values before God and humankind. This shows that the essential equality between men and women is maintained within the Islamic theological framework. In interpreting Q.S al-Baqarah [2]:228 and Q.S an-Nisa [4]:34, Esack does not outright reject the existence of male leadership, but he critically shifts the narrative (Esack, 2005).

Meanwhile, the application of *tawhid* to Q.S an-Nisa [4]:34 requires an understanding that the concept of *qawwām* is a form of leadership responsibility that includes economic dimensions as reflected in the phrase *bi mā anfaqū min amwālihim*. From a *tawhid* perspective, *qawwām* is not domination or oppression, but rather a leadership mandate that necessitates responsibility for protection (*himāyah*), provision (*nafaqah*), and wise guidance (*ri'āyah*). This understanding is further strengthened by the following series of verses that regulate the mechanism for resolving domestic conflicts through gradualistic stages: advice (*wa'z*), separation (*hajr*), and very limited physical action (*darb ghayru mubarrih*). These stages show that *qawwām* in Islam is not absolute power, but rather leadership that is bound by strict moral and ethical boundaries. Most significantly, the closing of the verse emphasizes “*fa lā tabghū ‘alayhinna sabīlā*” (do not seek ways to harm them) after reconciliation is achieved, which explicitly prohibits husbands from oppressing or harming their wives after the conflict is resolved. The principle of Allah’s justice (*‘adl*) in *tawhid* thus emphasizes that *qawwām* is leadership that is full of wisdom, compassion (*rahmah*), and clear boundaries, in which Allah SWT. as *al-‘Alīyy al-Kabīr* forbids all forms of oppression and tyranny towards one another, so that family harmony is achieved, reflecting the values of *tawhid* in real life.

The principle of *al-nas* in Esack’s hermeneutics requires a reading of the Qur’an that places collective human interests as the main parameter of interpretive validity, so that every interpretation must be tested through its impact on universal human welfare and dignity. From a historical perspective, it is important to recognize that Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]:228 and Q.S. an-Nisa [4]:34 were initially a social revolution that elevated the status of women from a much more subordinate position in pre-Islamic society. The Qur’an granted women fundamental rights such as inheritance rights, rights in divorce, and protection from violence, which were previously unknown in the *Jahiliyyah* Arab tradition. However, over time, the classical interpretations that were relevant and progressive for the context of the 7th century crystallized into rigid doctrines that were no longer responsive to the dynamics of human civilization.

Problems arise when classical interpretations and religious narratives born out of specific socio-historical contexts become entrenched in a patriarchal culture wrapped in the name of religion, without the truth being known by today’s society, thus creating a sacralization of human interpretations that should be contextualized. This process results in an inversion of the original emancipatory mission of the Qur’an: what was originally intended to free women from oppression is now used to legitimize it in a different context. This process results in an inversion of the original emancipatory mission of the Qur’an: what was originally intended to free women from oppression is

now used to legitimize it in a different context. Furthermore, this rigid gender construction not only harms women, but also creates a psychological burden for men in the form of toxic masculinity, which forces them to always appear dominant, suppress their emotions, and be the sole breadwinner without considering individual capacities and personal preferences.

In Q.S al-Baqarah [2]:228, the principle of *al-nas* requires critical evaluation of how interpretations of *darajah* have contributed to the marginalization of women in various aspects of social, economic, and political life. Through the lens of *al-nas*, we not only question the textual meaning, but also interrogate the social consequences of these interpretations: has the interpretation of *darajah* as male superiority resulted in a more just and prosperous social structure for all members of society, or has it created a system of discrimination that harms half of the human population while trapping men in gender stereotypes that limit their full human potential?

The complexity of the contemporary era, with its transformations in economic, educational, and political structures, demands a new interpretation capable of responding to challenges never faced by classical societies. As women have become significant economic contributors, gained equal access to education, and actively participated in the public sphere, interpretations of *qawwām* that remain fixated on the classical patriarchal model have become irrelevant and even counterproductive. The principle of *al-nas* in this case requires a reinterpretation that can accommodate the reality that family responsibilities can now be shared more equally between men and women, in accordance with their capacities, competencies, and mutual agreement, while remaining within the corridor of universal Qur'anic values. Furthermore, the principle of *al-nas* integrates an intersectional perspective that recognizes that the experiences of Muslim women are not homogeneous, but are influenced by variables such as social class, ethnicity, education, and geographical context. An interpretation that truly serves *al-nas* must be able to provide space for the diversity of Muslim women's experiences, from migrant workers to academics, from women in conflict zones to those living in prosperity, thereby producing a theological framework that is inclusive and responsive to the complexity of contemporary human reality.

The principle of *mustadh'afin* also requires critical analysis of how the epistemological power structure in the tradition of interpretation has systematically excluded women's voices and experiences from the interpretation process. For centuries, the authority to interpret the Qur'an has been dominated by male scholars from a certain social class who have no direct experience of the reality of women's subordination, resulting in biased interpretations that are insensitive to the discriminatory impact of such interpretations. The *mustadh'afin* perspective demands the democratization of hermeneutics by providing space for Muslim women's voices as interpretive subjects who have theological legitimacy to speak about their own religious and biological experiences.

In Q.S al-Baqarah [2]:228, the principle of *mustadh'afin* reveals how the interpretation of *darajah* as male superiority has been used to justify various forms of structural discrimination against women, ranging from restrictions on access to education to marginalization in public spaces. When this verse is read from the perspective of women who have experienced divorce and loss of economic access, *darajah* can instead be understood as temporary compensation in a system that does not yet provide full economic independence for women. This interpretation is not only more

historically contextual, but also provides a theological basis for efforts to empower women economically as part of Islam's mission of justice.

Similarly, in Q.S an-Nisa [4]:34, the principle of *mustadh'afin* requires an interpretation that places the experiences of victims of domestic violence at the center. This verse is often interpreted as affirming violence against wives, and has also been used to justify the legalization of beating wives as a form of discipline. This verse is also considered a claim of patriarchy in Islamic culture, where Islam weakens and discriminates against women. Women are considered to be in a position below men. This misunderstanding occurs when someone only understands the verse textually and disregards other explanations (Pamungkas & Janitra, 2024). From the perspective of victims as *mustadh'afin*, this verse can be understood in the context of a gradation of conflict resolution that prioritizes the preservation of family harmony, not a license for violence. An interpretation that truly serves the *mustadh'afin* will result in more effective protection mechanisms for women who experience domestic violence.

More fundamentally, the principle of *mustadh'afin* demands recognition that the subordination of women in religious interpretations not only harms women individually, but also creates structural poverty and social marginalization that impacts the welfare of families and society as a whole. When half the population cannot optimally actualize their potential because they are constrained by discriminatory religious interpretations, this results in massive economic and social losses for the entire Muslim community. From this perspective, women's empowerment is not only a matter of gender justice, but also a theological imperative to achieve the comprehensive welfare of the *mustadh'afin*, including children, the elderly, and other vulnerable groups who often depend on women's economic and social contributions in families and communities.

The principle of *'adl wa qist* serves as the main parameter of validity in Esack's hermeneutics, whereby every interpretation must be measured by its contribution to the creation of social justice, particularly in relation to gender. The application of justice to Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]:228 shows that textual and rigid interpretations that absolutize male superiority fail to meet the standards of justice because they perpetuate structural injustice against women and also men. A just interpretation must emphasize fundamental equality while acknowledging contextual functional differentiation that can change with social transformation and the biological differences between women and men. Justice demands that *darajah* be understood as additional responsibilities in certain sociological, legal, and economic matters, not permanent advantages that free men from accountability or grant them absolute authority, but also not meaning to restrain women from actualizing themselves. Similarly, in Q.S. an-Nisa [4]:34, justice requires that the concept of *qawwām* be understood as a responsible partnership based on the principle of complementarity, not hierarchical domination that ignores women's autonomy and dignity. Justice demands that authority in the household be based on competence, contribution, and democratic consensus, not on gender alone. A fair interpretation must take into account the contemporary reality in which women have equal access to education, the economy, and social participation.

The principle of jihad as a continuous struggle against injustice requires interpreters to dare to challenge interpretations or understandings that perpetuate gender oppression, but this does not mean a total rejection of Islamic intellectual heritage. Hermeneutic jihad is a selective process that appreciates progressive elements in the tradition of interpretation while deconstructing aspects that are gender biased.

The application of hermeneutic jihad to Q.S al-Baqarah [2]:228 and an-Nisa [4]:34 includes deconstructing the concepts of *darajah* and *qawwām*, which have undergone patriarchal absolutization, while revitalizing interpretations that emphasize responsibility and protection rather than domination. This requires the courage to acknowledge that some interpretations that have been sacralized are actually products of a specific historical context that is no longer relevant to contemporary reality. This approach is transformative in that it activates the emancipatory potential that has existed in the intellectual heritage of Islam but has been buried by the dominance of patriarchal cultural interpretations. Hermeneutic jihad functions not only as a method of interpretation, but also as a praxis of liberation that integrates academic and activist dimensions in the struggle to challenge interpretive domination that silences the voices of the *mustadh'afin*. Thus, the principle of jihad utilizes methodological diversity in Islamic tradition to create interpretations that are more inclusive and responsive to contemporary demands for gender justice, while maintaining theological legitimacy through an Islamic intellectual heritage that supports the struggle for justice.

The synthesis of Esack's application of the six principles of hermeneutics to Q.S al-Baqarah [2]:228 and an-Nisa [4]:34 results in a fundamental transformation in the understanding of the concept of male leadership from a hierarchical model of domination to a model of responsible partnership. This transformation is based on four main pillars: historical contextualization, which recognizes that both verses must be understood in the context of the socio-economic structure of 7th century Arabia; the distinction between functional differentiation and ontological hierarchy, in which *darajah* and *qawwām* refer to role differentiation based on a specific context, not permanent superiority; a partnership model that emphasizes *qawwām* as a shared responsibility based on contribution and competence; and the imperative of social transformation that requires the adaptation of the application of the concept of *qawwām* in line with changes in the socio-economic structure. Esack's hermeneutics prove that the Qur`an, when interpreted with an awareness of liberation and a commitment to justice, not only does not contradict the principle of gender justice, but rather becomes a source of theological legitimacy for social transformation towards a more just and egalitarian society without sacrificing the spirituality and fundamental values of Islam.

Table 1 : Table of Application of the 6 Principles of Esack in Q.S al-Baqarah [2]:228 and Q.S an-Nisa [4]:34

Hermeneutika Principle	Aplikation to Q.S al-Baqarah [2]: 228	Aplication to Q.S an-Nisa [4]: 34	Implication
<i>Taqwa</i>	Reading <i>darajah</i> contextual responsibility, not ontological superiority	Uderstanding <i>qawwām</i> as ethical mandate with spiritual accountability	Rejects absolutist patriarchal interpretation
<i>Tawhid</i>	Opposes gender hierarchy as form of shirk	Leadership as partnership under divine unity	Affirms fundamental equality
<i>Mustadh'afin</i>	forms of protection for women who do not yet have	From the perspective of victims as mustadh'afin, this verse	Domocratizes hermenutics

	economic independence	must be understood in the context of conflict resolution that prioritizes the preservation of family harmony, not as a license for violence. An interpretation that truly serves the mustadh'afin will result in more effective protection	
Al-Nas	Centers human welfare and dignity	Questioning interpretations that are detrimental to half of humanity	Demands contextual re-reading
'Adl wa Qist	<i>Darajah</i> as additional burden, not privilege	<i>Qawwām</i> based on contribution, not gender alone	Structural justice framework
Jihad	Challenges patriarchal sacralization	Deconstructs toxic masculinity	Praxis of liberation

Table 2: Comparative Analysis: Classical Vs Liberation Hermeneutics Interpretation

Aspect	Classical Patriarchal Interpretation	Esack's Liberation Hermeneutics	Shift Understanding
Q.S al-Baqarah [2]: 228	Permanent ontological male superiority	legal-economic responsibility	From hierarchy to functional differentiation
Q.S an-Nisa [4]: 34	Absolute male and leadership	Conditional maintenance responsibility	From domination to partnership
Scope of Application	All spheres (domestic + public)	Domestic sphere only (7th-century context)	Women's public leadership not addressed
Basis of Authority	Gender/biology (immutable)	Contribution/competence (contextual)	From essentialism to situational ethics
Impact on Women	Systematic subordination	Empowerment and protection	From oppression to liberation
Impact on Men	Toxic masculinity (dominance obligation)	Responsible partnership	From burden to balanced role

Theological Foundation	Divine decree (static)	Divine justice (dynamic)	From literalism to contextual reading
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#### 4. Conclusion

This study successfully answers two main questions in this research. First, how can Farid Esack's principles of liberation hermeneutics, rooted in his life experiences fighting oppression in South Africa, be applied in interpreting verses of the Qur'an? Farid Esack's six principles of liberation hermeneutics (*taqwa*, *tawhid*, *al-nas*, *mustadh'afin*, *'adl wa qist*, and *jihad*) have been proven to be systematically applicable in interpreting the Qur'an through a methodology that integrates critical awareness, commitment to social justice, and explicit alignment with marginalized groups. Second, how are the results of interpreting verses about male leadership when analyzed using Esack's hermeneutical principles, which he refers to as key hermeneutics? This study successfully proves that Farid Esack's liberation hermeneutics can transform the interpretation of verses on male leadership from legitimizing patriarchal domination to an egalitarian partnership model that liberates both women and men.

The application of six key-hermeneutical principles to Q.S al-Baqarah [2]:228 and Q.S an-Nisa [4]:34 yields significant findings: the phrase *darajah* denotes not ontological superiority but rather contextual functional differentiation within the domestic sphere, while *qawwām* etymologically signifies maintenance rather than domination. Another crucial finding demonstrates that neither verse addresses women's leadership in the public domain, thereby rendering interpretations that prohibit women from assuming political or professional leadership positions as textually unfounded extensifications. More significantly, this research rejects the absolutization of male leadership as an immutable religious obligation whose violation constitutes sin, as such conceptualization contradicts the principle of *tauhid* (monotheism) that repudiates the sacralization of human authority. This interpretive transformation demonstrates that the Qur'an, when approached through liberationist hermeneutics, actually opposes rigid gender constructions that generate toxic masculinity a system that not only oppresses women but simultaneously ensnares men within expectations of dominance, emotional suppression, and sole breadwinning responsibilities that compromise their psychological well-being.

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