

ZAINAB AL-GHAZALI'S INTERPRETATION OF THE TERM QAWWAM IN SURAH AN-NISA VERSE 34 FROM A FEMINIST TAFSIR PERSPECTIVE

Widya Kartika, Uqbatul Khoir Rambe

Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara Medan
Jl. Willièm Iskandar Pasar V Medan Estate, Deli Serdang, Sumatera Utara
Email: widyakartikaiait@uinsu.ac.id, uqbatulkhoir@uinsu.ac.id

Abstrak: Isu kesetaraan gender dalam tafsir Al-Qur'an masih menjadi perdebatan, khususnya terkait ayat-ayat yang sering ditafsirkan mendukung superioritas laki-laki atas perempuan. Salah satu ayat yang paling banyak dipersoalkan adalah Al-Qur'an Surah an-Nisa ayat 34 pada lafadz qawwam, yang sering dimaknai sebagai legitimasi kepemimpinan laki-laki. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis penafsiran Zainab Al-Ghazali terhadap ayat tersebut dalam perspektif feminisme Islam. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode analisis isi (content analysis) terhadap sumber primer, yaitu Al-Qur'an Surah an-Nisa ayat 34 dan tafsir Nadzarat fi Kitabillah karya Zainab Al-Ghazali, serta sumber sekunder berupa artikel ilmiah yang relevan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Zainab menafsirkan qiwamah bukan sebagai bentuk dominasi, tetapi tanggung jawab moral dan sosial yang menekankan perlindungan, keadilan, dan kerja sama dalam rumah tangga. Ia juga menegaskan otoritas perempuan di ranah domestik serta tanggung jawab spiritual langsung kepada Allah. Implikasi penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap pengembangan wacana tafsir berkeadilan gender, yang dapat menjadi rujukan dalam studi feminisme Islam kontemporer dan mendorong praktik relasi keluarga Muslim yang lebih setara dan harmonis.

Kata Kunci: Tafsir Feminisme, Zainab Al-Ghazali, Qiwamah

Abstract: The issue of gender equality in the interpretation of the Qur'an remains a subject of debate, particularly in relation to verses that are often interpreted as supporting the superiority of men over women. One of the most controversial verses is Al-Qur'an Surah an-Nisa verse 34 in the phrase qawwam, which is often interpreted as legitimizing male leadership. This study aims to analyze Zainab Al-Ghazali's interpretation of this verse from an Islamic feminist perspective. This study uses a qualitative approach with content analysis of primary sources, namely the Qur'an Surah an-Nisa verse 34 and the interpretation Nadzarat fi Kitabillah by Zainab Al-Ghazali, as well as secondary sources in the form of relevant scientific articles. The results of the study indicate that Zainab interprets qiwamah not as a form of domination, but as a moral and social responsibility that emphasizes protection, justice, and cooperation in the household. She also affirms women's authority in the domestic sphere and their direct spiritual responsibility to Allah. The implications of this research contribute to the development of gender-just exegetical discourse, which can serve as a reference in contemporary Islamic feminist studies and promote more equitable and harmonious family relations among Muslims.

Keywords: Feminist Interpretation, Zainab Al-Ghazali, Qiwamah

INTRODUCTION

Studies related to the relationship between women and men have always been conducted extensively by social experts and Islamic scholars. Discussions on gender and leadership within the household are one of the topics examined, particularly in relation to the concept of *qawwam* as mentioned in the Qur'an, Surah an-Nisa' verse 34. This verse has been the subject of discussion across various perspectives throughout time, both classical and contemporary, leading to diverse interpretations based on the viewpoints of exegetes. This diversity of interpretations is rooted in the differing social, political, and cultural conditions that existed when the exegetes interpreted the phrase (Rizkya, R. et al., 2025).

If examined further, the interpretation of Quranic verses is dominated by male exegetes, including the concept of *qawwam*, which is interpreted as leader. Feminists reveal that this fact has led to gender-biased interpretations (Adytama, 2023). They disagree with the interpretations of classical male exegetes, who are considered to favor male superiority over women. These Muslim female scholars then sought to produce works that are considered more equitable in their view of the position of men and women in terms of gender, some of which include Amina Wadud's *Quran and Woman, Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, which explains that Surah An-Nisa verse 34 is often used to justify male dominance over women, she emphasizes that *qiwamah* is a form of responsibility of a husband toward his wife, not an assertion implying absolute and authoritarian power of

men (Wadud, 1999). Furthermore, Fatimah Mernissi's work titled "Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Inquiry" She explains that Islam is a religion that brought change for women. Women's rights to equality and inheritance have been clearly recognized in the Qur'an. This is not only of economic value but also has political and symbolic aspects because it challenges the patriarchal structure (Mernissi, 1991).

In addition to these names, another name emerged who wrote her work within the scope of Qur'anic exegesis in the contemporary era, namely Zainab al-Ghazali with her exegesis *Nazharat fi Kitabillah*. One of the interesting aspects of this exegesis is how Zainab al-Ghazali provides her pure interpretation as a woman of Allah's verses related to feminist issues in the Qur'an, including Surah an-Nisa verse 34, which is one of the verses that forms the basis of the problematic issue of patriarchy and gender equality. One example is the term *qawwam* in that verse, which has sparked academic debate among Muslim scholars, including women.

According to her, *qiwamah* is a form of responsibility, where men provide financial support and are also responsible for managing the household together. Thus, this emphasis can be understood as a strategy of resistance against the authoritarian patriarchal system (Al-Jubyali, 1994).

Therefore, this fact presents an intriguing issue and a crucial point for the author to explore and analyze how Zainab Al-Ghazali interprets the term *qawwam* based on Surah an-Nisa-Nisa verse 34. It is hoped that this research will contribute to a

better understanding of the implications of Zainab Al-Ghazali's interpretation of Surah an-Nisa verse 34 on the issue of feminism.

Theoretically, this study enriches the contemporary *tafsir* (exegesis) by presenting the perspective of a female *mufasssrah* (exegete), Zainab Al-Ghazali, who emphasizes gender justice and harmonious relations between men and women. Until now, interpretations of the concept of *qiwamah* in Al-Qur'an surah An-Nisa verse 34 have been dominated by male *mufasssrah* who interpret male leadership over women in a hierarchical and authoritative manner. By examining Zainab Al-Ghazali's thoughts, this study offers an alternative perspective that *qiwamah* is not a form of male superiority, but rather a social and moral responsibility that prioritizes mutual protection and well-being. This finding contributes to the development of feminist exegesis theory while strengthening the discourse on gender justice in Qur'anic studies, which has often been colored by patriarchal bias. (Lumanatul & Fauzi, 2025).

Practically, the results of this research have important implications for the social and family life of Muslims. By emphasizing the interpretation of *qiwamah* as a trust and responsibility, not domination, this research can serve as a reference for the formation of a balanced understanding of gender relations within the household. This is beneficial in developing gender-responsive Islamic education curricula, premarital counseling materials, and family empowerment programs oriented toward values of justice. Additionally, the findings of this research can be utilized by da'wah practitioners,

family counselors, and educational institutions to construct moderate and contextual interpretive narratives, thereby preventing the emergence of unfair practices based on biased interpretations.

The distinction of this research lies in its focus on Zainab Al-Ghazali's interpretation, which specifically discusses the concept of *qawwam* in Surah An-Nisa verse 34. This research not only explains the linguistic or normative meaning of *qiwamah* but also examines how Zainab Al-Ghazali, as a contemporary *mufasssrah*, provides an interpretation from a female perspective that brings gender justice values. This approach introduces a new dimension to feminist exegesis studies, as previous research on gender-related verses in the Qur'an has been dominated by male exegetes or comparative analyses between exegetes without emphasizing women's position as the primary subjects of exegesis.

This study differs significantly from previous studies. For example, Firdaus's (2024) study focused on Al-Tabari and Al-Razi's interpretations of the Qur'an Surah an-Nisa verses 1 and 34, which represent classical perspectives within the framework of traditional interpretation. This study does not highlight the perspectives of female exegetes or feminist issues in depth. Meanwhile, Lumanatul Latifah and Fauzi Fathur Rosi (2025) compare the domestic role of men in the interpretations of Imam al-Tabari and Zainab Al-Ghazali, but their focus is more on the domestic role of men in general, rather than a deep conceptual analysis of the term *qawwam* and its feminist implications.

Similarly, the research by Rizkya Rahman et al. (2025) examines the comparison of Zainab Al-Ghazali and Amina Wadud's thoughts on gender verses. This study is comparative across figures, so it does not provide a single focus on Zainab's interpretation of a particular concept. Meanwhile, Silviana (2024) examines the role of women in the household and public sphere based on Sayyid Qutb's interpretation, which differs in orientation because it does not raise the perspective of female mufassirah.

Thus, this study offers a more specific and in-depth examination of Zainab al-Ghazali's interpretation of *qawwam* and its relevance to contemporary feminist discourse. This singular focus provides a strong distinction by integrating linguistic, theological, and social aspects within a unified analytical framework that prioritizes gender justice. Furthermore, the study reinforces Zainab al-Ghazali's position as one of the pioneers of Islamic feminist exegesis while addressing a research gap that has been largely overlooked by previous studies.

In addition to providing distinction, this study also has a clear novelty objective. The novelty of this study lies in its in-depth exploration of Zainab Al-Ghazali's thoughts on the concept of *qawwam*, which is often the center of debate in Islamic gender discourse. While previous studies have primarily focused on comparisons between exegetes or normative analysis, this study instead centers on the construction of the meaning of *qiwamah* as formulated by Zainab, as well as how this concept can serve

as a foundation for interpreting gender relations in a contemporary social context.

This novelty is also reflected in the analysis, which not only describes Zainab's interpretation but also links it to the values of justice and equality that are in line with the principles of the Qur'an, while criticizing patriarchal interpretations that have developed in classical tradition. Thus, this research does not merely reproduce existing understandings but offers an alternative perspective that can support inclusive social transformation based on Islamic values. The primary objective of this novelty is to provide a theoretical foundation for the development of feminist exegesis in modern Islamic studies and to offer practical implications for gender education, da'wah, and Muslim family development to foster harmonious, just, and sharia-compliant relationships.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical nature that focuses on an in-depth examination of references relevant to the research topic. This approach was chosen because it is able to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied through contextual and in-depth interpretations. The research process involves document analysis that emphasizes critical examination of various written sources, both public and private, to uncover the meanings contained within them. Document analysis in this research context aims not only to identify explicit information but also to uncover implicit meanings, thereby providing a

deeper understanding of the concepts being studied. This approach is in line with the research objective, which is to examine the meaning of *qawwam* in Surah An-Nisa verse 34 through the perspective of Zainab Al-Ghazali, by connecting the understanding of the text with the social, historical, and intellectual context that underlies it.

Data collection for this study was carried out through library research, which involved searching for, identifying, and organizing relevant literary sources. The primary data source was the Qur'anic text, specifically Surah An-Nisa, verse 34, which served as the main focus of the research. Secondary data included *Tafsir Nazharat fii Kitabillah* by Zainab al-Ghazali, along with supporting literature such as classical and contemporary commentaries, academic books, and relevant scholarly journals. These sources were selected carefully, taking into account their credibility, relevance, and authority on the subject matter. All collected data was then systematically organized to facilitate the analytical process.

The data analysis process in this study was conducted through content analysis and thematic analysis to interpret the meaning contained in the documents. The analysis began with data reduction, which involved sorting information considered relevant to the research problem. Then, coding is done to group information into specific themes, such as the meaning of *qawwam*, Zainab Al-Ghazali's interpretation, and the views of other exegetes used as comparisons. After that, an interpretation is made that connects the data with the linguistic, historical, and social contexts so

that the resulting meaning is more comprehensive and in line with the research objectives. The final stage is drawing conclusions that are expected to provide clear answers to the research questions.

To ensure data validity, this study applies source triangulation techniques by comparing Zainab Al-Ghazali's interpretation with classical and contemporary interpretations to obtain a more objective and in-depth perspective. In addition, the analysis process is supported by an audit trail to ensure the traceability of research steps and peer review to minimize interpretation bias. The entire procedure is designed so that the research is not only descriptive but also contributes to a more contextual understanding of interpretation, especially in examining the concept of leadership in the family contained in the verses studied. Thus, the method applied is expected to produce findings that are not only academically valid but also relevant to the development of contemporary interpretation studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Zainab Al-Ghazali

Zainab binti Muhammad Ghazali Jubaili, known as Zainab Ghazali and hereafter referred to as Zainab, was born on January 2, 1917 (8 Rabiul Awal 1335 H) in Mit Ya'ish, Mit Ghamr, Dakahlia, Baherah Province, one of the regions in Egypt. Zainab is an Arab woman who traces her lineage through her father to the Companion Umar bin Khattab and through her mother to the Companion Hasan bin Ali. It is no surprise that both of her parents were prominent figures in their village. Her grandfather was a renowned cotton merchant, while her father was one of the graduates of

Al-Azhar University who also engaged in the cotton trade (Nurjanah, 2024).

Zainab was introduced to Islam by her father and taught the faith directly, with a deep love for religion instilled in her from a young age, so that she might one day become a preacher of Islam. From the portrait of Zainab's childhood, it can be seen how a father gave his daughter the opportunity to participate in preserving and spreading Islamic traditions. Empowering a daughter and giving her the same hope as her son (Rahman, 2025).

Zainab's father often took her with him to perform the dawn prayer at the mosque and attend religious study sessions with several scholars from Al-Azhar, as well as studying religion at a madrasah in her hometown. Zainab also received an education at a royal school. She studied religious sciences under the guidance of prominent scholars at Al-Azhar, including Sheikh Muhammad Al-Audan, Sheikh Muhammad Sulaiman An-Najjar, Sheikh Abdul Majid Al-Lubnan, and several other prominent figures from the oldest religious institution in Egypt (Herri, 2019).

In 1928 CE, her father passed away when she was only eleven years old. She and her mother then planned to move to Cairo to study there, following in the footsteps of her older sister. However, her eldest brother, Muhammad Ali, did not permit it. Her mother eventually instructed Zainab to obey her brother, as he had become the figure of a father in the family. Seeing Zainab's intelligence, her brother took the initiative to buy her some books, one of which was a book by Aisyah Temoriyah about women, most of whose contents Zainab had already memorized. She greatly enjoyed and immersed herself in

reading these books, but for her, it was not enough; she still had to continue her studies. Finally, she approached a school principal and shared her aspirations and challenges. The principal was proud of Zainab's perseverance and courage. He was already well-acquainted with her family circumstances and asked Zainab's older sister to enroll her in the school of her choice. Eventually, Zainab was able to fulfill her dream of continuing her education. (Nurjanah, 2024).

In 1937, Zainab founded the Moslem Ladies Association, an organization aimed at advocating for women's liberation within the framework of Islamic values. Zainab believed that oppression of women stemmed from a lack of understanding of Islam. Therefore, she offered a solution in the form of deepening women's understanding of the religion. The Moslem Ladies Association, which had obtained official permission from the Egyptian Ministry of Endowments, carried out various social and religious activities, including caring for orphans, preaching, building mosques, and other forms of social welfare.

In 1948, Zainab brought her organization to join the Muslim Brotherhood, a decision based on the similarity of mission and goals between the two organizations. Zainab even took an oath of allegiance before Hasan al Banna, promising to fight for the establishment of Islam.

Tensions between the Muslim Brotherhood and the government reached a peak in 1965 when Zainab was arrested on charges of involvement in Muslim Brotherhood activities deemed harmful to the state. She spent six years in detention, a period that was undoubtedly filled with

challenges and tests of her faith. In August 1971, after six years of detention, Zainab finally breathed the air of freedom again, with the government officially pardoning all her previous actions deemed harmful to the state.

Zainab has been married twice. In her first marriage, her husband wanted her to stay at home and not support her role in the public sphere, which led to conflicts and ultimately his decision to divorce her. In her second marriage, Zainab married a man named Muhammad Salim, who was deeply loyal and supportive of her role in public life. This was evident when Zainab was imprisoned; her husband remained actively involved in visiting her and waited faithfully for her release until he passed away six months later. (Rahman, 2025). Zainab passed away at the age of 88 on August 3, 2005. Her body was accompanied by thousands of people and prayed over at the Rabi'atul Adawiyyah Mosque. She left behind numerous memories from her activities in advancing the community. (Herri, 2019).

Zainab Al-Ghazali's Interpretation of Surah An-Nisa Verse 34

In the Quran, Surah An-Nisa verse 34, Allah states:

الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ ۚ فَالْصَّالِحَاتُ قَنِتَتْنَ حَافِظَاتٌ لِّلْغَيْبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ اللَّهُ ۚ وَالَّتِي تَخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ ۚ فَعِظُوهُنَّ ۚ وَأَهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ

وَأَضْرِبُوهُنَّ ۚ فَإِنْ أَطَعْنَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْعُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا كَبِيرًا

Men are the leaders of women because Allah has made some of them (men) superior to others (women), and because they (men) spend some of their wealth. Therefore, the righteous women are those who are obedient to Allah and guard their chastity when their husbands are absent, because Allah has guarded them. As for those women from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them, and separate from them in bed, and strike them. But if they obey you, then do not seek a way against them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted and Great.

The term قوام is the plural form of قوام, derived from the root word قام. The root قام is commonly used in the context of the command for prayer (ṣalāh). This command does not merely signify the act of performing prayer, but rather performing it in a complete and perfect manner, fulfilling all its conditions, pillars, and recommended practices. Consequently, a person who performs a duty properly or as expected is referred to as قائم, whereas one who performs it perfectly, consistently, and repeatedly is called قوام. The verse employs the plural form قوامون, which corresponds to the meaning of the word الرِّجَالُ, denoting a plurality of men. The term الرِّجَالُ is often translated as leader. However, upon closer examination, this translation does not fully capture the intended meaning, even though leadership is one of the aspects implied within it (Shihab, 2002).

Zainab Al-Ghazali in her commentary Nazharat fii Kitabillah explains that

fundamentally, this noble verse affirms men as protectors and guardians of women. However, this does not negate women's rights over their families or their role as daughters who manage family affairs to safeguard family interests and maintain its unity (Al-Jubyali, 1994).

The phrase *الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ* can be understood to mean that men are *qawwam* (guardians or maintainers) over women. Al-Ghazali interprets this as the right of leadership within the family, without negating the role of women as leaders in household matters. It is emphasized that *qiwāmah* represents a form of responsibility, in which men bear financial obligations and share accountability in managing the household together. From this emphasis, *qiwāmah* can be understood as a strategy of resistance against authoritarian patriarchal systems. From a feminist perspective, this interpretation demonstrates a deconstructive effort to challenge the notion of *qiwāmah* as a tool of oppression, replacing it with a just, symbiotic, and dignified relationship between husband and wife.

In her interpretation, Zainab Al-Ghazali emphasizes that the concept of male leadership over women is the embodiment of true justice ('ain al-'adl). She explains that behind the meaning of *qawwām* lies a divine hint that requires men to build good relations (*husn al-mu'amalah*) with women. This includes a willingness to provide the best service and to maintain the dignity and honor of women. The essence of leadership in the concept of *qiwamah*, according to Zainab, makes women a trust that is entrusted to men. Therefore, *qiwamah* cannot be interpreted as domination, hegemony, or

male supremacy over women. On the contrary, *qiwamah* is a form of leadership that contains a trust that must be accounted for before Allah (Al-Jubyali, 1994).

Furthermore, Zainab states that although men have *qiwamah*, women still have authority within the household. In her interpretation, it is written:

وَأَنْ لَهُمْ حَقُّ الْقِيَادَةِ فِي الْأُسْرَةِ . وَذَلِكَ لَا يَنْفِي وَلَايَةَ الْمَرْأَةِ فِي بَيْتِهَا ، وَكَوْنَهَا أُمِيرَةً تَتَصَرَّفُ فِي شَعْنُونِهَا ، لِحِفْظِ مَصَالِحِ الْأُسْرَةِ ، وَسَلَامَةِ وَحْدَتِهَا.

And that they have the right to lead in the family. This does not negate the authority of women over their homes, nor their role as daughters who manage family affairs to protect the interests of the family and maintain its integrity.

By referring to women as *أميرة* (a leader) within their homes, Zainab subtly affirms the authority of women in the domestic sphere—not as passive subordinates, but as active agents responsible for the sustainability of the family. This aligns with feminist values that advocate for the recognition of women's roles and contributions in areas often underestimated by patriarchal systems (Al-Jubyali, 1994).

Zainab's interpretation also indicates that women have a direct responsibility to Allah for their role in the family. In her interpretation, it is written that:

وهي محاسبة أمام الله على سلامة الزوج والأولاد

She is responsible before God for the well-being of her husband and children (Al-Jubyali, 1994).

This statement positions women as autonomous moral subjects, not merely executors of their husbands' commands. From a feminist perspective, this acknowledges

women's spiritual autonomy, which is often overlooked in religious patriarchal structures

In the discussion of *nushūz*, indicated by the phrase *وَالَّتِي تُخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ*, Zainab offers an implicit critique of domestic violence stemming from a wife's disobedience. She emphasizes, based on the Prophet's saying (*ولا يضرب إلا شراكم*) only the most wicked among you strike their wives, that violence is not an Islamic solution but rather a deviation from the true values of Islam. This directly intersects with feminist concerns regarding gender-based violence and underscores that an authentic understanding of Islam should categorically reject violence against women (Al-Jubyali, 1994).

Therefore, based on Zainab Al-Ghazali's interpretation of Surah an-Nisa verse 34, the author understands that she rejects forms of male domination that oppress women, affirms women's autonomy, emphasizes shared spiritual responsibility, and rejects violence against women as something contrary to Islamic values.

Implications of Zainab Al-Ghazali's Interpretation on Feminism

The implications of Zainab Al-Ghazali's interpretation of Surah an-Nisa verse 34 in Islamic feminism lie in her different view of gender equality. Zainab Al-Ghazali, a Muslim feminist figure, rejects the concept of gender equality promoted by Western feminism and instead emphasizes a proportional division of labor between men and women in accordance with Islamic teachings (Aziz, 2023). She argues that Islam has granted women sufficient rights and justice, both in the domestic and public

spheres, provided that women do not neglect their primary responsibilities within the family (Ahkam, 2023).

Based on her interpretation of Surah an-Nisa verse 34, the author believes that the implications of Zainab al-Ghazali's interpretation in the context of feminism are as follows:

1. Rejection of Gender Equality in the Western Context

Western feminism emerged from a historical context deeply rooted in secularization, liberalism, and rejection of religious authority in social life. This movement views gender equality as an identity that must be fully realized, demanding equal rights and roles between men and women in nearly all aspects of life, both in the domestic and public spheres. This concept emerged from the Western social context, which was marked by past experiences of discrimination against women, particularly in politics, economics, and education. However, this perspective often overlooks the biological and psychological differences between men and women. According to Hanim (2020), Western feminism builds a paradigm of identical equality, not equality that takes into account natural differences in roles.

Zainab al-Ghazali firmly rejects the Western notion of equality, considering it incompatible with Islamic values. For her, such a concept risks creating new forms of injustice by compelling women to bear dual responsibilities—both as household managers and as full-time breadwinners in the public sphere—thus draining their energy, emotions, and time. She emphasizes that identical

equality is not a guarantee of justice, as justice in Islam is grounded in the recognition of differences in roles and functions according to human nature (*fitrah*). Al-Ghazali views Islam as having positioned men and women proportionally, granting each balanced and complementary rights and obligations rather than fostering competition between them.

This analysis shows that Zainab Al-Ghazali's criticism is not merely normative but also structural. She highlights the social and psychological impacts of blindly adopting Western ideas of equality, including the loss of family harmony, increased role conflicts, and the erosion of spiritual values in gender relations. In Al-Ghazali's perspective, the application of Western feminism in Muslim societies has the potential to undermine the order established by Sharia law, as it shifts the value base from the divine to secular values. Therefore, his thinking emphasizes the need for a reconstruction of gender understanding that is not only oriented toward equality of rights but also guarantees a balance of roles in accordance with nature, so that true justice can be realized without denying the biological and spiritual identities of each party.

2. Proportional Division of Tasks

Zainab Al-Ghazali emphasizes that balance in the division of roles between men and women is a fundamental principle that must be upheld to create harmony within families and society. According to her, women have a strategic role as the primary educators of the next generation and managers of the household, but this does not negate their role in the public sphere. Zainab

asserts that women's involvement in society must be supported by a system that does not sacrifice family values and biological nature. This view is in line with Rahman et al. (2025), who emphasize the importance of complementary, rather than competitive, roles between men and women to prevent the domination of one party.

A deeper analysis of this view shows that Zainab does not simply reject Western-style equality, but builds a concept of balance (*al-tawazun*) oriented towards substantive justice. According to her, if this balance is ignored, what emerges is not emancipatory empowerment, but a double burden that marginalizes women. This is reinforced by Shihab (2007)'s view that Islam acknowledges the natural differences between men and women, but not as a reason for discrimination, rather as the basis for a proportional division of roles. In other words, the principle offered by Zainab rejects exploitation in the name of equality, while avoiding the marginalization of women's roles in the family.

Zainab's ideas are also relevant in the modern context, where the issue of equality is often interpreted identically without considering the natural dimension. The concept of role balance she offers emphasizes synergy between husband and wife so that there is no gap or domination. This underscores that justice in gender relations must be realized through recognition of complementary differences, not by eliminating them. With this approach, Zainab builds a paradigm that is not only aligned with Islamic values but also responsive to contemporary social challenges (Quthb, 2003).

3. The Active Role of Women in Public Life

Although Zainab Al-Ghazali emphasizes the importance of women's role in the family as the main pillar of generation formation, she does not close the door for women to contribute in the public sphere. According to her, women have social rights and responsibilities to engage in various sectors such as education, politics, and community activities, as long as such involvement does not interfere with their primary duties as educators and managers of the household (Rikza, 2021). This perspective demonstrates a balance between domestic commitments and public participation, which is a hallmark of Zainab's thinking in responding to modern challenges.

An analysis of this thinking reveals that Zainab rejects two extreme poles that have developed in the gender discourse: first, the conservative view that limits women's roles to the home; and second, the liberal idea that demands total equality between men and women without considering nature and responsibility. By prioritizing the family, Zainab seeks to preserve women's core role in building civilization through the education of children, without neglecting women's potential to make positive contributions to society. This is in line with the Islamic concept of *maslahah*, which emphasizes a balance between individual rights and social interests.

This view is further reinforced by contemporary Muslim thinkers such as Quraish Shihab (2019), who asserts that Islam never prohibits women from participating in public life as long as it aligns with sharia principles and does not undermine their domestic roles. Thus, Zainab

offers a proportional model of women's participation: active in society to uphold values of goodness while maintaining the family's foundational integrity. This concept is particularly relevant in the midst of globalization, which often blurs the boundaries between rights and obligations and disregards harmony in gender role distribution. (Silviana, 2024).

4. Criticism of the Influence of Western Culture

Feminism that developed in the West emerged from the social, political, and historical realities of Western society, which is steeped in secularization and liberalism. This movement advocates for equality between men and women, without considering the biological, psychological, and social responsibilities inherent to each gender. However, when these concepts are adopted uncritically by Muslim societies without considering cultural context, religious values, and social structures, they often lead to cultural resistance and even negative consequences for women themselves (Maulana Khidrir, 2025). Rather than liberating, the application of Western feminism in societies with a strong religious value foundation can create identity conflicts, trigger role crises, and impose double standards on women who are expected to perform exactly the same roles as men (Katsir, 2000).

Zainab Al-Ghazali asserts that the unfiltered influence of Western culture poses a serious threat to Islamic values, particularly within the family. According to her, imitating Western patterns of thought and lifestyle not only blurs women's roles within

the family but also erodes the spiritual values that form the foundation of Muslim society. Zainab strongly criticizes the view that glorifies unlimited freedom, as this has the potential to lead women into economic exploitation and excessive workloads. For her, true freedom must be within the framework of sharia, so as not to cause inequality and social decay.

Zainab's call for Muslim women not to be trapped in imitating Western lifestyles is an effort to build critical awareness of the influence of globalization, which often brings foreign ideologies without considering their compatibility with local values. She urges that women's empowerment remain grounded in Islamic principles, so that their role in public spaces progresses alongside the strengthening of their domestic roles, not the other way around. Thus, Zainab's serves as a sharp critique of the universality of Western feminism while offering an alternative rooted in values that are more contextual and harmonious.

5. Harmonization of Spousal Roles

Zainab al-Ghazali's interpretation emphasizes the importance of harmonizing the roles of husbands and wives in building a strong family. According to her, the family is not merely a biological institution, but the foundation of civilization that must be managed in a balanced manner. This harmony is reflected in the principles of mutual support, respect, and cooperation in order to achieve a common goal, namely the creation of a household that is *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah*. In Zainab's view, a husband's leadership is not a form of domination but a

responsibility to protect, provide for, and guide the family, while a wife's role in managing the household and educating the children is an invaluable contribution to building a quality generation (Maraghi, 2001).

This analysis shows that Zainab rejects imbalanced relationship models, whether male dominance that restricts women or Western-style equality that erases natural role differences. Instead, she emphasizes collaboration and mutuality, where differences in roles are understood as complementary, not as a source of injustice. Thus, Zainab's ideas are relevant in responding to modern challenges that often blur gender role boundaries. The harmony she offers not only creates justice within the family, but also serves as the foundation for the creation of a stable and moral society.

6. Impact on the Women's Movement

Zainab Al-Ghazali's thoughts have had a significant influence on the Islamic women's movement, including in Indonesia, where the majority of the population is Muslim. Her ideas offer an alternative paradigm for understanding women's roles based on Islamic values, which differs from Western feminism, which tends to demand identical equality. Zainab emphasizes that gender justice must be achieved through a balance of roles that align with natural inclinations, not through the elimination of biological and social differences. This perspective has inspired the emergence of a more contextual form of Islamic feminism—a movement that seeks to empower women without abandoning Islamic values and identity (Firdaus, 2024).

In Indonesia, Zainab's ideas are reflected in discourses about women being active in public spaces while still prioritizing the family. This movement encourages women to play a role in education, social affairs, and even politics, while maintaining family harmony as the foundation of civilization. Thus, Zainab's ideas provide both a normative and practical foundation for Muslim women's activism to avoid falling into the trap of imitating secular Western ideologies. Her thoughts are relevant as a response to the challenges of globalization, which often blur the lines between emancipation and exploitation.

Thus, the implications of Zainab al-Ghazali's interpretation of feminist discourse offer a unique and distinct perspective from Western feminist thought. Instead of emphasizing identical equality between men and women, Zainab prioritizes the concept of substantive justice through the proportional distribution of tasks according to each person's nature and capacity. She sees that justice does not mean eliminating differences, but rather placing roles according to nature in order to create a harmonious balance. In this case, women are still given space to play an active role in the public sphere—in education, social life, and politics—but still prioritize the family. This view reflects a moderate stance that does not confine women to the domestic sphere, but also does not allow them to be trapped in burdensome demands for equality.

Zainab also emphasizes her criticism of the influence of Western culture, which attempts to import feminist ideas into Muslim society. According to her, imitating the Western lifestyle has the potential to blur the

identity of Muslim women and destroy the values established by Sharia law. Therefore, she calls on Muslim women to develop critical awareness of globalization and to prioritize Islamic values in the process of self-empowerment.

Harmonizing the roles of husbands and wives is one of Zainab's core ideas, where gender relations are understood as mutually supportive cooperation, not competition. This perspective not only offers solutions to role conflicts within the family but also serves as a foundation for the creation of a stable and morally upright society. Within this framework, Zainab brings a fresh perspective to the Islamic feminist movement and becomes an important reference point for examining women's roles in a contextual manner, in line with Islamic values and the challenges of modernity.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, Zainab Al-Ghazali's interpretation of Surah An-Nisa verse 34 makes an important contribution to the discourse on Islamic feminism by offering a perspective that emphasizes gender justice based on Islamic values. She interprets the concept of *qiwamah* not as male domination over women, but as a responsibility that prioritizes protection, justice, and cooperation within the household. Zainab also asserts that women have authority in the domestic sphere and direct moral and spiritual responsibility to Allah, thereby rejecting the notion that women are merely executors of their husbands' commands. Her rejection of Western-style gender equality, which she considers to ignore natural

differences and tend to create new inequalities, strengthens her argument about the importance of a proportional division of roles between men and women. She also condemns domestic violence as a deviation from true Islamic values. Thus, Zainab's interpretation is not only a form of resistance against patriarchy from a perspective but also an inspiration for Muslim women's movements to build harmonious, fair, and dignified family relationships without having to emulate the secular patterns of Western feminism.

REFERENCES

- Adytama, M. F. (2023). Dinamika Makna Qawwam: Analisis Mufasir Perempuan terhadap Surah An-Nisa: 34. *Journal Kalimah*, 2(2), Article 2.
- Ahkam, R. (2023). Kesetaraan Gender dalam *Nazarat fi Kitabillah* Karya Zainab Al-Ghazali, <https://tanwir.id/kesetaraan-gender-dalam-nazarat-fi-kitabillah-karya-zainab-al-ghazali/>
- Al-Jubyali, Z. A.-G. (1994). *Nazharat fii Kitabillah* (Tafsir Al-Qur'an, Vol. 1). Daar Asy-Syuruq.
- Aziz, A. (2023, June 14). Zainab al-Ghazali: Tokoh Feminis Modern Berkebangsaan Mesir [Blog.spot]. *Tafsir Al-Qur'an.id*. <https://tafsiralquran.id/zainab-al-ghazali-tokoh-feminis-modern-berkebangsaan-mesir/>
- Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Firdaus, M. (2024). Analisis Kesetaraan dalam Al-Qur'an Surat An-Nisa' Ayat 1 dan 34 pada Penafsiran Al-Ṭabarī dan Al-Rāzī. *UIN Ar-Raniry*. <https://repository.ar-raniry.ac.id/id/eprint/38359/>
- Hanim, H. (2020). Peranan Wanita dalam Islam dan Feminisme Barat. *At-Tarbawi: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial dan Kebudayaan*, 7(2), 148–161. <https://doi.org/10.32505/tarbawi.v8i2.1846>
- Herri, S. H. (2019). *Zainab Al-Ghazali Tokoh Reformis Islam di Mesir (1917-2005)*. Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin.
- Katsīr, I. (2000). *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm* (Jilid I). Dār al-Fikr.
- Lumanatul Latifah, & Fauzi Fathur Rosi. (2025). The Domestic Role of Men in the Qur'an (Comparative Study of the Interpretation of Imam Al-Tabari and Zainab Al-Ghazali). *Al-Bunyan: Interdisciplinary Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies*, 2(2), 87–106. <https://doi.org/10.61166/bunyan.v2i2.19>
- Maulana Khidhir. (2025). Kontestasi Budaya Barat dan Dampaknya terhadap Perempuan: Analisis dari Perspektif Viktimologi. *Tarunalaw: Journal of Law and Syariah*, 3(01), 11–18. <https://doi.org/10.54298/tarunalaw.v3i01.229>
- Maraghi, S. A. M. (2001). *Tafsir al-Maraghi*. Dar al-Fikr.
- Mernissi, F. (1991). *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Mulyana, A., Vidiati, C., Danarahmanto, P. A., Agussalim, A., Apriani, W., & Fiansi. (2024). *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*. Widina Media Utama.
- Nurjanah. (2024). *Narasi Gender di Balik Hubungan Perbedaan Biologis dan Tafsir: Studi Komparatif Penafsiran Zainab Ghazali dan Sayyid Qutb* [Tesis]. Universitas PTIQ Jakarta.
- Quthb, S. (2003). *Tafsir Fi Zhilāl al-Qur'ān* (Jilid I). Dār al-Shurūq.
- Rahman, M. I. R. (2025). *Konsep Relasi Gender dalam Al-Qur'an: Studi Pemikiran Zainab Al Ghazali dan*

Amina Wadud [Tesis]. Universitas Islam Negeri SUSKA.

Rahman, M. I. R., Ismail, H., & Akbar, A. (2025). *Tafsir Feminis: Studi Komparatif Pemikiran Zainab Al-Ghazali dan Amina Wadud Terhadap Ayat-Ayat Gender*, 07(2).

Rikza, A. (2021, June 28). Kritik Terhadap Feminisme Islam Zainab Al-Ghazali Part III [Blog.spot]. *mubadalah.id*. <https://mubadalah.id/kritik-terhadap-feminisme-islam-zainab-al-ghazali-iii/>

Rizkya, R, M, Ismail, & Akbar, A. (2025). Feminist Tafsir: A Comparative Study of Zainab al-Ghazali and Amina Wadud's Thoughts on Gender Verses. *Khulasah: Islamic Studies Journal*, 7(2), 28–62.

Shihab, M. Q. (2002). *Tafsir Al-Misbah (Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an)* (Vol. 2). Lentera Hati.

Shihab, M. Q. (2007). *Wawasan Al-Qur'an: Tafsir Maudhui atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat*. Mizan.

Silviana, S. (2024). Peranan Perempuan dalam Rumah Tangga dan Ruang Publik dalam QS An-Nisa Ayat 34 (Studi Penafsiran Sayyid Quthb). *UIN Datokarama Palu*. <https://repository.uindatokarama.ac.id/id/eprint/4011/>

Wadud, A. (1999). *Quran and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. Oxford University Press.