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## Hermeneutics of Gender: A Comparative Study of Hermeneutical Models Amina Wadud and Farid Esack

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### Abstract

*The aim of this research is to compare the hermeneutical models of Amina Wadud and Farid Esack. Hermeneutics is known as a new interpretive model used by Muslim feminist scholars, to reinterpret verses of the Koran that are interpreted textually and with gender bias. This research is qualitative research with the type of library research. Then the data collected in document form was analyzed using descriptive-comparative figures against Amina Wadud's hermeneutical model. The results of the research show that there are similarities and differences between the two hermeneutics. One of the most obvious similarities is that they both belong to philosophical hermeneutics and the objectiveist cum subjectivist school. Even though there are also differences between the two, the hermeneutic offer made by Amina Wadud and Farid Esack is an attempt jihad gender in seeking justice and freeing women from the patriarchal cultural system caused by religious interpretations that are biased against women.*

**Keywords:** Hermeneutics, Jihad Gender, Farid Esack, Amina Wadud

### Introduction

Religious interpretations of women are often faced with adjacent views. One side of the Koran contains teachings of justice and equality, thus placing women in an equal position with men. The second view tends to be more loaded with patriarchal culture which is often used as a legitimate tool to reject gender equality. The reading of the Koran, which is often understood from a male perspective, gives rise to religious sentiments that are considered gender biased and tend to tradition culture with a patriarchal system. This understanding

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continues to perpetuate and even settles<sup>2</sup> and enters unconsciously into the thinking of Muslims, as if religion has allowed men to stand above women.

So what is wrong with Islamic teachings themselves? A further question is, does the widespread perpetuation of gender injustice in religion originate from the nature of the religion itself or does it instead originate from understanding, interpretation and religious thinking which is not impossible to be influenced by patriarchal traditions and culture? The issue of religious interpretation plays an important role in legitimizing what the actual relationship between men and women is. A critical study approach is needed to end bias and domination in religious interpretation.<sup>3</sup>

As time went by, Muslim feminist scholars emerged who were concerned with the problem of patriarchal interpretation of the Koran which places women in an inferior position and men in a superior position. They want a reinterpretation of the verses of the Koran which are often considered to be the "culprit" causing patriarchal culture to thrive in the internal discourse of Muslim understanding.<sup>4</sup> One of the things that happens is because the majority of classical Muslim exegetes interpret the verses of the Koran in a traditional, partial, ahistorical way and apply a literal reading method. So in the modern context, Muslim feminists try to offer several effective methodologies for reading the Koran contextually and historically to understand the concept of relationships between men and women.<sup>5</sup>

The aim of this research is to compare the academic offerings of two Muslim feminists regarding the method of reading the Koran through hermeneutics. A contextual approach that not only analyzes texts linguistically, but also pays attention to the cultural context of the interpreter. Although initially hermeneutics was a method of interpreting the holy Bible, it was widely adopted by Muslim thinkers to reinterpret verses of the Koran to make them relevant to their time. Therefore, hermeneutics as a discourse in the discourse of

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<sup>2</sup> Free Hearty, *Keadilan Jender: Perspektif Feminis Muslim dalam Sastra Timur Tengah* (Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2015), 2, <https://obor.or.id/keadila-jender-perspektif-feminis-muslim-dalam-sastra-timur-tengah>.

<sup>3</sup> Mansour Fakih, *Analisis gender & transformasi sosial* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1996), 130–34, <https://opac.perpusnas.go.id/DetailOpac.aspx?id=33374>.

<sup>4</sup> Nina Nurmila, "The influence of global Muslim feminism on Indonesian Muslim feminist discourse," *Al-Jami'ah: journal of Islamic studies* 49, no. 1 (2011): 33–64.

<sup>5</sup> Md Yousuf Ali, "A Contextual approach to the views of Muslim feminist interpretation of the Qur'an regarding women and their rights," *International Journal of Arts and Sciences* 3, no. 13 (2010): 313–31.

interpretation, is often linked to a new approach and an attempt to integrate Islamic sciences with social humanities.<sup>6</sup>

The two Muslim feminists who will be studied in this research are Amina Wadud Muhsin and Maulana Farid Esack. Perhaps Amina Wadud is one of the big figures in the world of Muslim feminism and gender justice who has become the subject of much study in her hermeneutical offerings. Almost many researchers have tried to compare Amina Wadud's hermeneutical concept with other Muslim feminist figures such as Irsyadunnas's research which compared it with Asghar Ali Engginer<sup>7</sup>, research by Fatimah Isyti Karimah, Dadan Rusmana, Yayan Rahtikawati who compared it with the interpretation of Zaitunah Subhan<sup>8</sup> and other figures. -other feminist figures. As for Farid Esack, people know him as a figure of pluralism *interfaith* with his offer of liberative hermeneutics, he talks a lot about the concept of liberation in the Koran and relations between religions. Research that examines Farid Esack's hermeneutics includes research by Muhammad Fatih<sup>9</sup> and Muhammad Abdul Rozak.<sup>10</sup> However, if we look deeper into his writings, he is actually a male Muslim feminist who also spoke out for gender justice towards women. Even in his writing entitled *The Gender Jihad*, she got a lot of inspiration from Amina Wadud in her fight for gender justice to oppose *the status quo*.<sup>11</sup> So far, researchers have not yet seen research on these two feminist figures who both have the concept of hermeneutics.

<sup>6</sup> Ali Akbar, *Contemporary Perspectives on Revelation and Qu'ranic Hermeneutics: An Analysis of Four Discourses* (Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Irsyadunnas, *Hermeneutika Feminisme dalam Pemikiran Tokoh Islam Kontemporer* (Yogyakarta: Calpulis, 2017), <https://web.syekhnujati.ac.id/perpustakaan/2019/08/10/hermeneutika-feminisme-dalam-pemikiran-tokoh-islam-islam-kontemporer/>.

<sup>8</sup> Fatimah Isyti Karimah, Dadan Rusmana, dan Yayan Rahtikawati, "Studi Komparasi Metodologi Penafsiran Amina Wadud Dan Zaitunah Subhan Dalam Masalah Perempuan," *HERMENEUTIK* 16 (t.t.): 45-66.

<sup>9</sup> Muhammad Fatih, "Pluralisme Agama dalam Al-Qur'an Telaah atas Penafsiran Farid Esack," *Progressa: Journal of Islamic Religious Instruction* 4, no. 1 (2020): 69-80.

<sup>10</sup> Muhammad Abdul Rozak, "Kontekstualisasi Penafsiran Ayat-Ayat Tentang Al-Mustaḍafin (Kajian Dengan Pendekatan Hermeneutika Farid Esack)," *Qaf: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir* 2, no. 2 (2017): 303-26.

<sup>11</sup> Farid Esack, *On Being a Muslim: Finding a Religious Path in the World Today* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 118-19.

## Method

This research uses a qualitative approach and is a literature review. Meanwhile, the analysis method used is descriptive-comparative character.<sup>12</sup> There are at least two problem formulations to answer the objectives of this research: *First*, what is the hermeneutical construction of Amina Wadud and Farid Esack as an approach to interpreting gender verses in the Koran? *Second*, what are the differences and similarities between Amina Wadud and Farid Esack's hermeneutical methods? These two questions will be answered with data originating from both documents and written works of the two figures.

### Amina Wadud's Biography and Hermeneutic Thought Background

Amina Wadud Muhsin is a strong Muslim woman who was born in the United States, precisely in a village called Bethesda. Born on September 25 1952, little Amina is a person who loves science, especially languages, which has led her to become one of the scholars who is famous for her ideas. Currently, he reportedly lives in Yogyakarta-Indonesia and is a guest lecturer at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. Before understanding the hermeneutic method developed by Amina Wadud, we must first know the assumptions of her thinking. Because, by delving into the origins of his thinking we will find out the background of the ideas he developed for his proposed approach.

*First*, sociological and cultural factors. This factor concerns social experiences within oneself that produce authentic thinking about one's ideas. Amina Wadud is a widow whose descendants of the Afro-American race in the community where she lives often experience discriminatory behavior and the proliferation of patriarchal culture towards women of that race. In an interview on WNYC radio in New York in 2006, she described her experiences as a Muslim wife and having become a woman.*single parent* approximately 30 years. Apart from that, the struggle for the existence of women at that time in America was intense against the subordination of women and fighting for justice rights for Muslim women.<sup>[12]</sup> These experiences became Amina Wadud's attention to seek and re-evaluate the extent of the position of women in Muslim<sup>13</sup> culture by

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<sup>12</sup> Abdul Mustaqim, "Model Penelitian Tokoh (Dalam Teori dan Aplikasi)," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Quran Dan Hadis* 1 (2014).

<sup>13</sup> Mutrofin Mutrofin, "Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Pandangan Amina Wadud Dan Riffat Hassan," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam* 3, no. 1 (2013): 234–66.

pointing to the Koran as the most authentic criterion in Islamic intellectual heritage.<sup>14</sup>

*Second*, educational and intellectual factors. Amina Wadud, as a scholar, has had sufficient education in the field of Al-Qur'an studies. His interest in the Koran began with a mushaf which was translated into English, so that became the main factor in converting to Islam at the age of 20. I converted to Islam with my heart and mind believing that divine justice can be achieved on this planet and throughout the universe. In an interview he said: "*Because becoming was my choice, intellectual research was the main thing that made me make the decision to become Muslim..*"

Not even two years after he converted to Islam, Wadud moved to Libya, a North African Arab country, for two years. There he found himself in the midst of a struggle for a more gender-egalitarian concept of Islamic identity and practice. Wadud began looking for the latest ideas and behavior that addressed the marginalization of women in the historical development of Islamic intellectual heritage and to empower women's Islamic awareness of the reality of complete human dignity as a divine right.<sup>15</sup>

Due to this realization, he tried to deepen his understanding of Islam by studying Arabic in a country where Arabic is spoken, namely Egypt.<sup>16</sup> After that he continued his studies at Michigan University and received a master's degree and Ph.D. And it was during his Ph.D. that he wrote a dissertation which became his work *great work* in the form of a book entitled *Qur'an and Women*. The figure of Amina Wadud herself reflects a woman who transcends the hierarchical walls that limit women from pursuing higher education.

Amina Wadud, an African-American woman, felt confused when she read traditional classical interpretations. According to him, traditional interpretations that offer an atomistic approach have given birth to a doctrinal ideology of interpreting the Koran that is biased towards women. Of course, there is a basis for thinking about why this field of study can continue to be developed, especially in the field of interpretation. According to him, the Qur'an must be kept alive even though its existence has lasted for 14 centuries, otherwise the

<sup>14</sup> Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (England: Oxford University Press, 1999), ix.

<sup>15</sup> Amina Wadud, "Inside the gender jihad: Women's reform in Islam," *Praktyka teoretyczna*, no. 08 (2013): 3.

<sup>16</sup> Taylor Hallet. *Amina Wadud Interview at Guilford College*. Youtube Channel The Guilfordian, 25 November 2014.

Qur'an will become a 'dead manuscript' and fail to carry out its stated purpose, namely to guide humanity—not limited by time and space.<sup>17</sup>

### Biography and Background of Farid Esack's Hermeneutical Thought

Farid Esack was a traditionally trained scholar who was also a successful academic at a modern university. He has written many famous works on Islam and is arguably the world's leading Islamic Liberation theologian. She was appointed as gender equality commissioner by Nelson Mandela. Through the organization, The Call of Islam, Esack played a leading role in the struggle against apartheid. He is an advocate of interfaith solidarity, fighting against all forms of injustice and has worked extensively to support HIV-infected Muslims. He is currently Head of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Johannesburg and is a professor at Harvard University. In 2018 he was awarded the Order of Luthuli (Silver), South Africa's highest civilian order for his contribution to scholarship and work for justice.<sup>18</sup>

He completed Darsi Nizami, a traditional Islamic theological studies program, at Madrasah/Karachi, Pakistan for eight years. Then he continued his studies and completed his PhD at the University of Birmingham until he was accepted to teach as a post-doctoral fellow on Biblical Hermeneutics at the Philosophische Theologische Hochschule, Sankt Georgen in Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany.<sup>19</sup>

Farid Esack was born in Bonteheuwel Wynberg, precisely on the outskirts of Cape Flats, which is a barren city in South Africa for people of color. Like what happened to Amina Wadud, she had to accept the political reality of Apartheid because of the territorial deed policy (*groups area act*) that marginalized black people. His initial struggles in life were quite heartbreaking, because he lived in very poor and deprived conditions. His family includes his mother's family *single parents*, because his father left his mother when he was three months old. The situation he experienced was a result of the imposition of apartheid laws which excluded black people, forcing him to live in dire poverty.<sup>20</sup>

For Esack, interpreters are ordinary people like humans in general who cannot be separated from the circumstances of their surrounding environment.

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<sup>17</sup> Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, xxii.

<sup>18</sup> Lihat, "Profil Farid Esack" <https://themuslim500.com/profiles/farid-esack/>

<sup>19</sup> Lihat, "Prof Farid Esack", <https://www.thepresidency.gov.za/national-orders/recipient/prof-farid-esack>

<sup>20</sup> Farid Esack dan Liberation Qur'an, "Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression," *Inggris: Oneworld Publications*, 1997, 2.

He was aware that Muslims during the time of the Prophet Muhammad brought the unique conditions of their time which had resulted in interpretations of the Koran in their time. However, Muslims today are faced with two things: reproducing the interpretations produced for previous generations (*salaf*) or critically and selectively reinterpret traditional interpretations as part of the task of reconstructing society.<sup>21</sup>

In the South African context, Farid Esack strongly feels that the system of injustice that shackles society is caused by religion being a legitimizing tool to anesthetize people's consciousness so that they do not realize that they are oppressed. Religious jargon seems to be an area of struggle for interpretation of the truth by the conflicting parties. Therefore, as an intellectual-activist and his responsibility as a believer who understands that doing theology is not just "dealing with" God<sup>22</sup>, Farid Esack tries to reinterpret the texts of the Koran as the most important part of Islamic theology. In other words, Farid Esack wants to dialogue and bridge how divine texts are then interpreted progressively in such a way that they become a driving force for the spirit of anti-oppression.<sup>23</sup>

### **Amina Wadud's Hermeneutical Construction and Model**

According to Amina Wadud, every interpretation reflects the meaning of the Koranic text by bringing it *prior text* (previous understanding which is influenced by the language and cultural atmosphere when the text is read). Therefore, the argument he presents in the interpretation of the Koran: "*No method of Qur'anic exegesis is fully objective. Each exegete makes some subjective choices. Some details of their interpretations reflect their subjective choices and not necessarily the intent of the text*". In essence, the interpretation process carried out by the interpreter is always subjective due to the influence of the history in which the context is interpreted.<sup>24</sup>

To explore gender-inclusive reading of the Koranic text, Wadud proposed several key terms or concepts. This effort was carried out to justify the legitimacy and authority for a paradigm shift in Islamic thought as a whole. Key terms and concepts were distilled by Wadud himself from readings involving women,

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<sup>21</sup> Esack dan Qur'an, 49.

<sup>22</sup> Ahmala Arifin, "Tafsir Pembebasan: Metode Interpretasi Profresif ala Farid Esack," *Yogyakarta: Aura Pustaka*, 2015, 21.

<sup>23</sup> Esack dan Qur'an, "Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression," 62-67.

<sup>24</sup> Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 1.

especially the basic themes of the Koran. He used this to change and reconstruct the understanding of human nature in Islam.<sup>25</sup>

However, before exploring these key terms and concepts, Wadud begins by redefining them by questioning the Islamic conception of evaluating gender which is directed at the need for extensive reform in Muslim thought and practice. The question Wadud asks is how are women treated in Islam? So the answer itself can be compared with the reality that occurs in women's own experiences.<sup>26</sup>

Key terms or concepts that *First* is *Monotheism* (oneness of God). Understanding monotheism is the basic term used by Islam to state that Islam does not oppress women. Tawheed is the operating principle of cosmic balance and harmony. It operates between the metaphysical and physical realities of the created universe, as well as within both. In the social and political realm, tawhid emphasizes the unity of all human creatures as equals under one creator, namely Allah SWT. *Second*, is *Caliph* (moral agent). Term *caliph* is the basis for the ethic of human dignity that is created in pairs (*groove*) and equally perfectly shows the gender inclusivity designed by the Koran. So in relation to gender and the dignity of women, the term caliph is defined as a trustee or moral agent who carries out the task of Allah SWT to uphold social justice as a representative of God's will. *Third* is *Ethics* or moral ethics. This term is the principle that underlies the claim that something is morally true or not. The Koran is used as a source of moral ethics for humans, but sometimes the resulting ethical interpretations actually conflict with each other. This is the importance of interpretation as a construction process to make sense of Islamic teachings.

*Fourth*, is *Piety* (moral awareness). The principle of this term is often defined as piety, moreover, according to Wadud taqwa as moral awareness in the guardian of Allah SWT. Taqwa is a human instinct to act freely, but the responsibility for this choice will be held accountable for all choices made. Taqwa is very important as a human moral attitude, both individuals and as members of society because it helps in activating the principle of monotheism, both as a matter of personal practice and as a basis for broader Islamic legal reform. *Fifth*, is justice. This principle is a universal nature and its manifestation is without space and time. Therefore, it must continue to be dialogued in a community that lives between men and women. *Sixth*, Sharia and Fiqh. This principle is the basis for distinguishing between sharia law *tsawabit* and which fiqh laws can still be reconstructed for human benefit. Because the meaning between sharia and fiqh

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<sup>25</sup> Wadud, "Inside the gender jihad: Women's reform in Islam," 14-54.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, page. 20

cannot be equated with revelation. Because the aim of fiqh it self is to differentiate and extract sharia legal rules from the Koran and Sunnah. And what often happens is that fiqh law, which often singles out women, seems as unchangeable as sharia law it self. *Seventh*, is strength or power (*power*). Relations of power and authority are often possessed by men to perpetuate their privileges over women. According to Wadud, this paradigm of power is moral bankruptcy and a form of greed or desire that always wants to control (*power over*). Meanwhile, gender-inclusive power is power in the dimension of not wanting women's power to be asserted over men (*power to*) and always consider relationship *sinterealationship* to women.

In general, the focus of the study carried out by Amina Wadud in her book is the study of linguistic or philological texts on gender terms in the Koran. The text of the Koran, which was revealed in the Peninsula in the 7th century, is related to the language used in certain contexts. Sometimes to understand this, the Qur'an uses key terms, each of which has a related meaning. Therefore, every term in Arabic that touches on gender must be studied based on language rules, syntactic structure and textual context so that the parameters of its meaning can be more ascertained.

Amina Wadud offers her approach and methodology, how women's understanding of the Koran can improve the interpretation process previously understood. Because, he saw interpretation products (*tafasir*) so far women according to the Koran are divided into three groups<sup>27</sup> and of these three types of interpretation models, what he developed was holistic interpretation. An interpretation that aims to interpret the Koran according to women's experiences without the stereotypes that have become the framework for men's interpretation.

To do this, Amina Wadud provides steps in her holistic interpretation methodology. First, the context in which the text was written. Second, the composition of the text in terms of grammar. Third, the text as a whole or finding the world view of the Koran (*Worldview*). If we compare, this method is almost the same as Fazlurrahman hermeneutics and thematic interpretation. In his introductory article, he admits that he was inspired by Fazlurrahman "double-movement" hermeneutical model as the basis for his hermeneutics. Indeed, the

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<sup>27</sup> The first group, traditional interpretations from both the classical and modern periods. These interpretations usually represent the ideological style of certain interpretations only. The second group is interpretations that were developed as a response to discrimination against women. The third group is the interpretation method developed by Amina Wadud. He calls it a holistic interpretation that considers all methods in the interpretation of the Koran. See: *Ibid.*, 2-3

influence of Fazlurrahman's thoughts inspired many scholars after him to be developed and improved by his followers.<sup>28</sup> With the main idea, catching *ideal moral* in the Qur'an is an effort to make the content of the verses of the Qur'an conform to how the original meaning of the text of the verse is reflected or brought into the current environment<sup>29</sup>

Next, to analyze the terms separately or together with men, they were analyzed using traditional methods *tafsir al-Qur'an bi al-Qur'an* (interpretation of the Koran with the Koran). The steps that Aminah Wadud takes to analyze verses like this in the Koran: *First*, according to the context. *Second*, according to the context of the discussion of the same topic in the Koran. Third, from the point of view of the same language and syntactic structure used elsewhere in the Koran. Fourth, from the perspective of Al-Qur'an principles. And fifth, according to context *world view* al-Qur'an or his world view.<sup>30</sup>

For example, the Qur'an sometimes mentions men and women together, such as men who believe and women who believe (the plural *mudzakkar salim* followed by the plural *mu'annas salim*), while on other occasions it uses the more general form which uses the plural *mudzakkar salim* like *Who are you trusting?* (O you who believe). According to Amina Wadud, every term that uses the masculine plural is intended to cover both men and women equally, unless the Qur'an does not mention that it specifically applies to men only.

Great attention to *what* which the Qur'an says, *How* the Koran says it, what it says *about* al-Qur'an dan *Who* says it, has been added with attention to what is *hasn't been said yet* became Amina Wadud's question on the question of throwing away words and her silence. To overcome this, it uses linguistic steps to analyze the strangeness of the Qur'an in the understanding of the arrangement of the language of the Qur'an which has double meaning (ambiguity).

Regarding this linguistic analysis, Amina Wadud also seems to adopt Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic theory to analyze key gendered words in the Koran. In semantics, words have their own basic meaning and separate relational meaning and their connotative meaning comes from the context in which the word is used. Therefore, even though certain words already had basic meanings

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<sup>28</sup> Ali Akbar, "Fazlur Rahman's Influence on Contemporary Islamic Thought," *The Muslim World* 110, no. 2 (2020): 129-53.

<sup>29</sup> Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 4.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 5

before the Qur'an was revealed, some of these words have different indications that are specific for use in the Qur'an.<sup>31</sup>

### Farid Esack's Hermeneutical Construction and Model

Farid Esack emphasized that the interpretation of the Koran must be contextualized. The meaning that an interpreter attaches to a text cannot be separated from the personal and environmental aspects of the interpreter. Therefore, there is no acceptable reason why the thoughts of one generation become hostage to the thoughts of another generation. The emergence of tafsir as a science in Islam is in itself evidence of the creativity of interpreters who remain inspired by the acceptance, expansion, and even rejection of the work of their predecessors.<sup>32</sup> Hence the importance of significance as expressed by Gadamer as an effort to understand the text in the present.<sup>33</sup>

Farid Esack's hermeneutic model was influenced by his criticism of the hermeneutic method initiated by Mohammed Arkoun and Fazlur Rahman. For him, Arkoun is a Muslim thinker who combines criticism with contemporary hermeneutical views. Arkoun emphasized the need to reconstruct the historical background of each text (Qur'an) or period and for greater consideration to be given to "the aesthetics of reception; how a discourse is received by listeners and readers". Meanwhile, Rahman emphasizes the emphasis that "the Qur'an is a divine answer to the social moral situation of Arabia during the time of the prophet."<sup>34</sup> Both Rahman and Arkoun have made major contributions to the methodology of interpreting and hermeneutics of the Koran, although Rahman's work does not handle the subject very sharply and has the impression of repeating Arkoun's writings from the last few years.<sup>35</sup>

In understanding texts, Farid Esack proposed three intrinsic elements in understanding a text. *First*, enter the mind of the author of the Koran, namely God. Indeed, understanding the thoughts intended by the author, let alone God, is a problematic matter. In the traditional Muslim tradition, this can be achieved through inspiration-institution with a methodology of piety combined with thought. For others, the Prophet Muhammad is the key agent of meaning creation. Muhammad is claimed to appear to interpreters through a vision, to

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11

<sup>32</sup> Esack dan Qur'an, "Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression," 62.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 54

<sup>34</sup> Farid Esack, *The Qur'an: a short introduction* (Oneworld, 2002), 197.

<sup>35</sup> Esack dan Qur'an, "Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression," 70.

clear up difficulties or indicate difficulties to the correct interpreter. But actually God or the Prophet Muhammad who enters the mind of the interpreter can be obtained through "pure thoughts"<sup>36</sup> *Second*, the interpreter always has a lot of burden when entering the interpretation process with a pre-understanding of the issues to which the text refers, as initial assumptions in his interpretation. Pre-understanding is a requirement for living in history. In itself, pre-understanding has no ethical value because it depends on accepting or rejecting its presence<sup>37</sup>

*Third*, interpretation cannot be separated from language, history and traditions in a certain time and space. Our involvement with the Koran is also in this prison (language, history, tradition). Because we cannot possibly separate ourselves from and place ourselves above language, culture and traditions. Esack quotes Tracy's opinion that every interpreter comes to a text with a complex history that we call tradition. There is no possibility of escaping tradition, just as there is no possibility of escaping history and language.<sup>38</sup>

Liberation theology gets its inspiration from the Koran and the struggle of the Prophets which involves interpreting the Koran into a transformative revelation in order to become a liberative force that takes sides and liberates the weak and oppressed.<sup>39</sup> Through this reflection, Farid Esack establishes hermeneutic keys that emerged from the South African struggle and is used as a tool for understanding the Koran, especially for a society characterized by oppression and inter-faith struggles for justice and freedom.<sup>40</sup>

There are six keys to the hermeneutics of the Qur'an which are grouped into three parts by Farid Esack showing how these keys are taken from the terms of the Qur'an as the basis of liberation theology. First, *piety* and *monotheism*, these two aspects are intended for the purpose of establishing moral and doctrinal criteria in testing other keys. Apart from that, these two keys are also used as a "theological lens" for reading the Koran in general and more specifically texts relating to followers of other religions.<sup>41</sup> *Piety* becomes the basis for the interpreter to pay attention to the voice of one's own conscience in the awareness of dependence on God, *piety* as a complement to continuing the Prophet's task of liberating transformation and controlling interpreters for urgent political

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-74

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-75

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 76

<sup>39</sup> Zakiyuddin Baidhaw, "Teologi Neo al-Ma'un: Manifesto Islam Menghadapi Globalisasi Kemiskinan Abad 21," *Jakarta: Civil Islamic Institute*, 2009, 146.

<sup>40</sup> Esack dan Qur'an, "Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression," 85.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 86

interests. Where as *monotheism* as a principle of approach to the Qur'an which must be seen comprehensively as components of one network, because no single approach can realize it completely.<sup>42</sup>

Second, *al-nash* (humans) and *al-mustad'afina in al-ardh* (oppressed people), intended to determine the location of interpretation activities. *Al-Nash*(humans) are the key to interpreting the Koran in a way that supports the interests of all humans and every human being has the same right to enter the text, there is no special legitimacy that can be touched by certain groups. The key to the oppressed is the need for interpreters to place themselves among the oppressed and in the struggle against that oppression. The interpreter becomes God's witness in carrying out re-readings that adhere firmly to the principles of liberation and justice.<sup>43</sup>

Third, *al-'adl* and *al-qisth* (sustainability and justice) and *jihad* (space), are intended to reflect the methods and ethos that produce and shape a contextual understanding of God's word in a society characterized by injustice. The Qur'an always demands upholding justice as the basis of social and political life and in situations of injustice the Qur'an is encouraged to become an ideological tool for a comprehensive rebellion against oppression in all its forms. The Qur'an views *jihad* as a way to uphold justice, and *praxis* as a way to obtain and understand the truth. *Jihad* as a hermeneutical key, assumes that human life is basically practical and theology will follow at the same times.<sup>44</sup>

### Comparative Analysis of Amina Wadud and Farid Esack's Hermeneutical Model

One of the aims of character study research according to Abdul Mustaqim is to explore the thoughts of characters in the form of ideas and the originality of their theories. Then, with a comparative analysis or comparison between the figures, you will critically find the similarities and differences in the thoughts of the two figures.

The similarities in the hermeneutical model of Amina Wadud and Farid Esack can be seen as follows:

*First*, the hermeneutics used both belong to the philosophical hermeneutics and the objectivist-cum-subjectivist school. In philosophical

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 95

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-100

<sup>44</sup> Esack dan Qur'an, "Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression," 101-11.

hermeneutics, the subject or reader is always tied to a particular historical tradition or social contest. According to Gadamer, philosophical hermeneutics holds that readers of texts always have prejudices or pre-understandings (*Vorverständnis*)<sup>45</sup> before interpreting. All understanding stems from prejudice and prejudice obtained through readers in tradition. Amina Wadud refers to this term as *prior text* namely background, perception and context of circumstances. Meanwhile, Farid Esack calls his term the interpreter carrying a lot of burden, namely the influence of the understanding that came before. Additionally philosophical hermeneutics offers new canons of interpretation or new methodological proposals to reform current hermeneutical practices, but instead seeks to describe what actually happens in each event of understanding. The author's subjective intention is an inadequate standard of interpretation because it is non-dialectical, while in understanding itself, it is basically a dialectical new meaning that is born from the ongoing interaction between the past and the past.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, Sahiron includes this philosophical hermeneutics into the objectiveist-cum-subjectivist school, namely one side of searching for the original or historical meaning of the text (subjectivist school), on the other hand developing the significance of the meaning into the current situation (objectist school). Sahiron also calls this flow the hermeneutics of balance (*balance hermeneutic*).<sup>47</sup>

*Second*, Amina Wadud and Farid Esack's hermeneutics both come from contemplation of the bitter experiences they have had and the realities they face. So both of them start from the same context, namely oppression, then try to dialogue in their context with the verses of the Koran and look for the context of the meaning behind why the verse was revealed. Therefore, in the hermeneutic model both are equally influenced and develop further from Fazlurrahman's hermeneutic theory *indouble movementnya*.

*Third*, the hermeneutics they promote is actually their academic effort in order *jihad gender*. Religious interpretations that tend to be textual and political seem to legitimize religion to discriminate against women. The sociological and mental oppression they received, then they reconciled the theological/spiritual dimensions of encouragement with practical action to reform gender injustice.

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<sup>45</sup> Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2004), 274.

<sup>46</sup> Linge, David E, *Hans-Georg Gadamer. Philosophical Hermeneutics* (California: University of California Press, 1976), vii.

<sup>47</sup> Syamsuddin, Sahiron, *Hermeneutika dan Pengembangan Ulumul Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Baitul Hikmah Press, 2017), 50.

*Fourth*, similarities in basic key concepts, namely *monotheism* and *piety* to understand other basic keys in understanding the text of the Koran. *Monotheism* used as the foundation of an intertwined, interrelated unity without dichotomy or differentiation. Whereas *piety* becomes the basis for interpretation, to raise moral awareness of God's call to change the moral order for the better.

*Fifth*, the similarity of their hermeneutical models can also be seen from the results of their hermeneutical work on gender themes in the Koran. For example, related to the theme of leadership concepts (*qiwamah*) which is based on "ability" then pious and obedient women (*As-Sasee wal Qanitah*) which refers to God's obedience.<sup>48</sup> The results of their application of hermeneutics show that they are not biased towards women.

The differences in the hermeneutical models of Amina Wadud and Farid Esack can be seen as follows:

*First*, Even though both of them were influenced and took Fazlurrahman's hermeneutics as the basic basis for their hermeneutics, they did not completely plagiarize Rahman's theory and combine it with the theories of other scholars. Like Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic theory which inspired Amina Wadud to reveal the relational meaning of gendered terms. Meanwhile, Farid Esack, although influenced and appreciative of Fazlurrahman theory, even criticized Rahman's theory, for example that his theory overestimated the focus on "*basic moral elan*" the Qur'an and ignores the structural aspects of injustice and<sup>49</sup> shows the importance of justice in a very lacking way. Apart from that, Farid Esack's hermeneutical theory was also influenced by Arkoun's historical-anthropological theory, to reduce the phenomenon of revelation in history and its relationship with believers so that it could be easily interpreted, which was initially more transcendent. Not to mention, he even criticized Arkoun's theory.<sup>50</sup>

*Second*, the way Amina Wadud and Farid Esack work or apply hermeneutics is slightly different but not too significant. Amina Wadud's hermeneutical analysis also uses semantic theory in analyzing the relational meaning of key gender words in Arabic. Apart from that, he also put forward key terms or concepts in understanding the gender-inclusive text of the Koran,

<sup>48</sup> Can be seen in The Seeds for Gender Justice in Islam And Gender Justice: Beyond Simplistic Apologia, <https://www.newageislam.com/islam-women-and-feminism/farid-esack/what-do-men-owe-to-women-islam-and-gender-justice-beyond-simplistic-apologia/d/98459>

<sup>49</sup> Esack dan Qur'an, "Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression," 64-65.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-68

where the difference lies in the concept *caliph*, *fiqh* and *sharia* law, as well as power and strength. Meanwhile, Farid Esack emphasizes the keys to hermeneutics in the Koran to read the context of oppression as a means of liberation. However, Farid Esack's hermeneutical key is different from the human key (*an-Nas*), oppressed (*mustadh'afun*) and jihad or practical action.

*Third*, Amina Wadud's hermeneutics is intended to reinterpret verses that have been interpreted biasedly to transform them into practical application of struggle in society.<sup>51</sup> Amina Wadud revealed that her reason for carrying out gender jihad was because the dignity given by Allah SWT to humans had been neglected and abused. He opposes religious interpretations that ignore the contributions and experiences of women as humans with intellectual capacities. However, it seems that the application of the hermeneutics proposed by Amina Wadud still tends to be in the sky and is in the cognitive realm. This can be seen, Amina Wadud did not explain the procedures if it was important to be directed at gender jihad. Because his hermeneutic project is aimed at reconstructing traditional-classical interpretations. This is different from Farid Esack, whose hermeneutics is procedurally aimed at the praxis of liberation from oppression and racial discrimination, including the marginalization of women. This is seen as the key to jihad in its hermeneutics.

## Conclusion

Hermeneutics as a method of interpreting the Koran has an important role in reconstructing gender-biased religious interpretations. Transcendent divine revelation is often used as a means of legitimation to perpetuate men's power over women. Even though the universal idea of the Koran (*welthanshauung*) places women and men equally, as equal entities before Allah SWT.

Amina Wadud and Farid Esack use hermeneutics as a model of interpretation, to reinterpret verses of the Koran that are considered gender biased. The contribution of thought in hermeneutics by the two of them can be said to be one form *jihad gender* to liberate women from patriarchal culture. The hermeneutics offered by Amina Wadud and Farid Esack both use philosophical hermeneutics with the flow of *objective cum subjective*. This can be seen from their starting from the interpreter's pre-understanding experience of the surrounding environmental context. Although Amina Wadud and Farid Esack's hermeneutics have differences in basic key concepts, these differences are not too significant. Because there are also several similarities between the concept of Amina Wadud's

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<sup>51</sup> Wadud, "Inside the gender jihad: Women's reform in Islam," 42.

key terms and Farid Esack's key hermeneutics, namely monotheism and taqwa as basic principles for interpreters understanding key verses of the Koran.

## Author Contributions

**An-Najmi Fikri R:** All writing was done by me from the methodology Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Project administration.

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