

When a Haraki Exegete Interprets Gender: The Family Structure in Surah An-Nisā'/4:34 in the Tafsir *Fī Zhilāl Al-Qur'ān*

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ABSTRACT

QS. An-Nisa' [4]:34 is one of the most debated verses in gender studies because it contains the concepts of qiwāmah, al-faḍl, woman's piety (ṣāliḥāt), nusyūz, and waḍribūhunna, which are often viewed as legitimizing the subordination of women. On the other side, the development of gender studies in exegesis has produced various new interpretations that generally emphasize the social construction (nurture) aspect in understanding the relationship between men and women. This article aims to analyze how Sayyid Quthb constructs a gender narrative in his exegesis of QS. An-Nisa' [4]:34 and how this narrative challenges the common assumption that identifies male exegesis with patriarchy. This study is a literature review employing a qualitative approach and descriptive-analytical methods. The primary source of this study is Sayyid Quthb's Tafsir Fī Zhilāl al-Qur'ān, while secondary sources include gender studies, nature-versus-nurture theory, and contemporary exegetical studies. The results indicate that Quthb understands qiwāmah not as a form of male superiority over women, but rather as the responsibility for the protection, management, and maintenance of the family. His interpretation aligns more closely with the nature perspective, as it grounds the division of roles within the family in biological and psychological differences. However, Quthb does not fully dismiss the influence of social factors, so his approach cannot be categorized as rigid biological determinism. Based on these findings, this study concludes that the gender narrative in Quthb's exegesis is characterized by a protective-complementary model, a relationship that positions men and women as partners who mutually protect and complement one another based on their respective functions and responsibilities. This finding indicates that gender interpretation in modern Islam cannot always be understood through the binary opposition between patriarchy and egalitarianism but rather presents a reading style situated between these two poles.

Keywords: Sayyid Quthb; QS. An-Nisa' [4]:34; gender; Qiwāmah; family structure

INTRODUCTION

The assumption that male exegetes inherently reproduce patriarchal interpretations has become one of the dominant trends in contemporary gender studies and Al-Qur'anic exegesis. Various Muslim feminist readings view male-authored interpretive frameworks as being influenced by men's social experiences, thus resulting in the subordination of women in both domestic and public spheres (Muhsin, 1999, p. 2). This perspective has led to criticism of concepts such as *qiwāmah*, male leadership, and the division of gender roles within Muslim families. However, this trend often leads to the generalization that male exegetes are synonymous with oppressive and anti-women readings. In this context, Sayyid Quthb's interpretation of Al-Qur'anic Surah An-Nisa' [4]: 34 is worth discussing

because it shows the complexity of gender relations that cannot be fully mapped within the dichotomy of patriarchy and egalitarianism.

The analysis of Al-Qur'an 4:34 has an important position in Al-Qur'anic studies and exegesis because this verse is one of the main bases for discourse on male-female relations in Islam. This verse on *qiwamah* is not only debated within the domain of classical exegesis but has also become a contestation in contemporary Islamic thought, particularly regarding issues of family authority, domestic violence, and gender equality (Barlas, 2002; Hassan, 1995; Muhsin, 1999). In the development of modern exegetical studies, academic attention has been directed more toward feminist readings of this verse, such as those by Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, and Rifat Hasan. Meanwhile, studies of non-feminist exegetes are often simplistically positioned as representations of normative patriarchy. In fact, the dynamics of modern exegesis show that gender relations in exegesis are not always singular and linear.

Sayyid Quthb is one of the modern exegetes often associated with the Islamist movement and the *haraki* style of exegesis through his monumental work, *Fī Zilāl Al-Qur'ān* (Dimyathi, 2019, p. 420). As a figure often linked to Islamic fundamentalism, Quthb's thought is generally interpreted through political and ideological lenses. However, interpretations of his gender narrative remain relatively limited, particularly regarding how he understands the relationship between men and women within the Muslim family. Quthb's exegesis of Al-Qur'anic Surah An-Nisa' [4]: 34 actually demonstrates an approach that emphasizes responsibility, protection, and the distribution of social roles between men and women. This relationship shows a pattern that can be described as a protective-complementary narrative, that is a relationship that maintains the hierarchical structure of the family but is framed through moral responsibility and the protection of women.

On this basis, this article examines how Sayyid Quthb constructs a gender narrative in his interpretation of Al-Qur'anic Surah An-Nisa' [4]:34 and how this narrative challenges common assumptions regarding male-dominated patriarchal exegesis. This article aims to demonstrate that gender exegesis in modern Islam cannot always be understood through a binary opposition between patriarchy and egalitarianism. Using a thematic exegetical analysis of *Fī Zilāl Al-Qur'ān*, this article offers a new reading of Quthb's gender relations as a form of protective-complementary narrative in contemporary Al-Qur'anic exegesis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on Sayyid Quthb's exegesis over the past decade has remained dominated by discussions of the *haraki* (activist) approach in *Fī Zilāl Al-Qur'ān*, particularly regarding *qitāl*, *jihād*, Islamic politics, and radicalism (Ismail et al., 2020; Nafis, 2025). The prevalence of such interpretations indicates that academic attention to Quthb's exegesis remains largely focused on the political dimensions and Islamic social movements. Nevertheless, studies on gender in Quthb's exegesis have begun to emerge in recent years. However, these studies are generally still descriptive in nature, highlighting the position of women, family relations, and the division of

domestic roles without deeply examining the epistemological construction of gender narratives in his exegesis.

In the study of gender, a number of studies highlight the concept of equality between men and women in Quthb's interpretation. An article on the exegesis of QS. Al-Hujurat [49]: 13 demonstrates that Quthb recognises the spiritual equality of men and women, while still maintaining their distinct social roles (Subki et al., n.d.). Another study discusses how Quthb tried to protect women's dignity through Islamic moral principles and criticism of modern Western culture (Husna Husain, 2017). Another study also highlights Quthb's acceptance of career women, although he emphasizes that ideally women should remain at home (Mubarok et al., 2024). Similarly, regarding polygamy, another study explains that Quthb views polygamy merely as a social concession, while justice is difficult to achieve; thus, monogamy is more ethical and relevant to modern regulations and gender equality (Muslihun, 2025). In general, these studies indicate that Quthb does not reject the existence of women in the social space, but he maintains a role distribution based on human nature.

However, most previous research still positions Quthb's exegesis in binary terms as either patriarchal or moderate. Discussions of gender have focused primarily on family law and women's roles within domestic structures, without examining how concepts such as *fitrah*, protection, and responsibility shape specific patterns of gender relations in his exegesis. Consequently, the complexity of gender relations in Quthb's interpretation is often reduced merely to forms of women's subordination or the legitimization of Muslim family patriarchy. In fact, a reading of QS. An-Nisa' [4]: 34 shows that gender relations in Quthb's exegesis are constructed through patterns of protective responsibility and a distribution of social functions that are more complex than the masculine patriarchal stereotypes often attributed to *haraki exegetes*.

Contrary to previous research, this article examines how gender narratives in Quthb's exegesis of Surah An-Nisa'[4]:34 are constructed through the concepts of *qiwamah*, *fitrah*, and the distribution of social roles. This article argues that gender relations in Quthb's exegesis cannot be simplistically understood as either oppressive patriarchy or feminist egalitarianism, but rather form a protective-complementary relationship pattern within the modern Muslim family.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study is a library research project employing a qualitative approach. The research data were sourced through the examination and analysis of written sources relevant to the theme of gender relations in the Al-Qur'an and its exegesis. The primary source of this study is Tafsir *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān* by Sayyid Quthb, specifically the exegesis of QS. An-Nisa' [4]:34. Secondary sources include literature on gender theory, the nature-versus-nurture debate, feminist exegesis studies, and previous research related to Sayyid Quthb's thought and gender issues in exegetical studies.

This study employs a descriptive-analytical method. In the descriptive phase, the author outlines the development of gender concepts in feminist studies, the

debate between nature and nurture perspectives, and the incorporation of gender discourse into Al-Qur'anic exegesis. This framework is used to understand the various trends in gender-based readings emerging in contemporary exegetical studies.

Then, in the analysis phase, the author examines Sayyid Quthb's interpretation of Al-Qur'anic Surah An-Nisa' [4:34] by highlighting the key concepts contained there, such as *qiwāmah*, *al-faḍl*, woman's piety (*ṣāliḥāt*), *nusyūz*, and mechanisms for resolving domestic conflicts. This interpretation is then analyzed through the nature-and-nurture perspective to examine the foundational arguments Quthb employs in explaining the relationship between men and women within the family.

Through this approach, this study aims to analyze how Sayyid Quthb constructs a gender narrative in his exegesis of QS. An-Nisa' [4]:34 and how that narrative interacts with gender debates in contemporary exegetical studies. Thus, this study does not seek to judge the correctness or incorrectness of Quthb's interpretation, but rather to identify the model of gender relations constructed in his exegesis and to situate it within the landscape of the debate between readings that emphasize biological aspects (nature) and those that emphasize social construction (nurture).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Gender Narratives in Exegesis

In feminist studies, the term gender serves as a key concept for distinguishing between sex and gender. Sex is understood as the biological differences between men and women that are natural, whereas gender is understood as a social construct related to the roles, behaviors, culture, and psychology of both men and women (*GENDER Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster*, n.d.). Maggie Humm explains that sex refers to biological sex at birth, while gender consists of masculine and feminine attributes shaped by culture (Humm, 2007, pp. 177–178). Thus, masculine and feminine characteristics are not viewed as absolutely inherent to a specific sex but can be interchangeable according to societal social constructions.

In its development, the term gender has been expanded in meaning. Etymologically, the word gender comes from the Middle English 'gendre' and the Latin 'genus', both of which relate to a specific type or classification. In the 20th century, the term gender began to be used to refer to behavioral, cultural, and psychological characteristics attributed to men or women (*GENDER Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster*, n.d.). In modern feminist studies, the term is subsequently used to distinguish between biological and social aspects of human identity.

The debate about gender began to gain momentum in the 1960s and 1970s, when the terms 'sex' and 'gender' were used by psychiatrists and medical professionals in addressing issues related to transsexuality and intersex conditions. The concept was subsequently adopted by the feminist movement to challenge the view that all differences between men and women are determined solely by biological factors (Esplen & Jolly, 2006, pp. 2–4; Khuza'i, 2018, p. 32). Hilary M. Lips explains that since its introduction by Rhoda Unger in 1979, the term "sex" has been used to

refer to the biological aspects of men and women, while “gender” refers to social and cultural expectations regarding masculinity and femininity. Thus, in feminist studies, gender is understood as a social construct related to the access, roles, responsibilities, and relationships of both men and women in society. Because it is shaped by culture and the social environment, gender is viewed as something that can change and be exchanged, unlike sex, which is biological and natural (Lips, 1993, p. 4).

Therefore, in feminist studies, gender is understood as a social construct related to the access, roles, responsibilities, and relationships of both men and women in society (Dalimoenthe, 2020, p. 12). Because it is shaped by culture and the social environment, gender is viewed as something that can change and be exchanged, unlike sex, which is biological and natural.

In gender studies, biological differences between men and women are generally accepted as natural. However, the relationship of these biological differences to masculine and feminine traits remains a subject of debate. This debate has given rise to two major approaches in gender studies: nature and nurture.

The nature approach views differences between men and women as influenced by biological factors and natural characteristics inherent from birth. These biological differences then give rise to psychological tendencies as well as masculine and feminine attributes that are considered natural. From this perspective, differences between men and women are not understood as superiority on the part of one group, but rather as complementary diversity of functions in social life. This approach is often associated with theories of heredity and the ideas of figures such as Charles Darwin, Gregor Mendel, Carol Gilligan, and Alice Rossi (Megawangi, 1999, p. 101).

Contrary to this, the nurture approach views gender differences as largely shaped by social, cultural, environmental, and educational processes within society. From this perspective, masculine and feminine attributes are not considered entirely natural but are formed through continuous socialization processes within the family and social environment. Consequently, gender relations are seen as capable of changing according to the social and cultural context of a society. The nurture approach has developed through the thinking of figures in the humanities and feminism, such as Margaret Mead, Simone de Beauvoir, Ann Oakley, and Judith Butler, who emphasize that gender identity is the result of social construction and is not permanent (Khuza'i, 2018).

Differences in background and perspective between the nature and nurture approaches often lead to them being debated in gender studies. The nature approach tends to emphasize innate traits and inherent differences, while the nurture approach focuses more on the influence of the environment and social constructs in shaping gender relations.

Furthermore, the incorporation of gender discourse into the field of exegesis cannot be separated from the development of modernity and the growing criticism of patriarchal biases in religious interpretation. The Al-Qur'an and hadith have consequently become subjects of reinterpretation, as they are often considered to have been interpreted through a dominant male perspective. This gave rise to efforts

to present interpretations that are more sensitive to women's issues and gender relations. Such interpretations are known as feminist exegesis (Baidowi, 2012, p. 26).

In contemporary developments, Aysha A. Hidayatullah divides the development of Muslim feminist exegesis into two generations. The first generation is represented by figures such as Riffat Hassan, Azizah al-Hibri, and Amina Wadud, who emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as a response to increasing restrictions on Muslim women in various Islamic countries. Meanwhile, the second generation is represented by Sa'diyya Shaikh, Asma Barlas, and Kecia Ali, who emerged in the late 1990s with a more methodological, academic, and collaborative approach (Hidayatullah, 2014, pp. 6-7).

After discussing the concept of gender, the nature-versus-nurture approach, and how gender discourse has entered the exegetical discourse, it is important to note that gender readings in contemporary exegesis do not fully balance these two approaches. In many cases, modern gender readings are more dominated by the nurture approach, which views the relationship between men and women as a result of social construction that is changeable and interchangeable. Consequently, verses containing hierarchical relations between men and women are often understood solely as a product of Arab society at the time of the Al-Qur'an's revelation, rather than as part of a relational structure possessing certain innate dimensions.

One example is the interpretation of the concept of *qiwamah*. Some Muslim feminists understand that the position of men as *qawwām* in Surah al-Nisa' [4]: 34 is not a determination related to the nature of men and women, but rather a social construction born from the patriarchal cultural context of that time. Because it is understood as a social construct, the position of *qawwām* is viewed as interchangeable depending on social and economic conditions, as well as individual capacity (Muhsin, 1999). Thus, both men and women are considered equally capable of occupying the position of *qiwamah* within the family.

An Introduction to *Fī Zhilāl Al-Qurān* by Sayyid Qutb

The book *Fī Zhilāl Al-Qurān* is Sayyid Qutb's most monumental work of exegesis, born out of the intellectual, literary, and socio-political struggles he experienced. Qutb is known as an Egyptian writer, thinker, and intellectual who was educated at Madrasah Darul Ulum in Cairo, an educational institution that has produced many figures who have renewed Islamic thought in Egypt. Before entering Darul Ulum, he first attended elementary school in his hometown of Musyah, Asyut, and then continued his preparatory education in Cairo. In his intellectual journey, Qutb was greatly influenced by modern Arabic literature, particularly through his teacher, Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad, a renowned Egyptian writer and literary critic. Al-Aqqad's influence is evident in the literary style and approach Qutb employed in his works, including his exegesis. After completing his education, Qutb worked at the Egyptian Ministry of Education and was sent to the United States to observe the Western educational system (Khalidi, 1994, pp. 15-20). These intellectual and social experiences helped shape his perspective on Islam, modern society, and the Al-Qur'an. His interest in the Al-Qur'an deepened as he shifted from literary criticism to

Al-Qur'anic studies, eventually producing the exegesis *Fī Zhilāl Al-Qur'ān*, most of which was written while he was in prison.

As an exegete with a background in literature, Quthb presents his exegesis in poetic, beautiful language rich in artistic nuance. In the introduction to his exegesis, he repeatedly uses the phrase *Fī Zhilāl Al-Qur'ān* to describe the tranquility and peace of life under the guidance of the Al-Qur'an. This exegesis follows the order of the Uthmanic Mushaf, employing a systematic approach that includes explanations of the surah's name, its classification as Makkan or Madinan, the number of verses, the surah's main theme, the contextual connections between verses, the reasons for revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), and descriptive and thematic interpretations of the verses within a unified discussion.

In his exegesis, Quthb combines *tafsīr bi al-ma'tsūr* and *tafsīr bi al-ra'yi* by utilizing Al-Qur'anic verses, hadith, the sayings of the Companions and the Successors, as well as his own rational analysis. He is also highly selective regarding weak narrations and *israiliyyāt*. In addition to considering the socio-historical context of the revelation of verses, Quthb emphasizes linguistic, literary, and movement-oriented aspects in his exegesis. For this reason, scholars classify *Fī Zhilāl al-Qur'ān* as an *al-adabī al-ijtimā'ī* and *harakī* style of exegesis (Dimyathi, 2019), that is, an exegesis that not only showcases the literary beauty of the Al-Qur'an but also positions it as the spirit of social change and the revival of the Muslim ummah.

The Family Structure in Surah An-Nisa'/4:34 in Tafsir Fī Zhilāl Al-Qur'ān

Surah An-Nisa'/4:34 is one of the most discussed verses of the Al-Qur'an in contemporary gender discourse and exegesis. This verse is often at the center of debate because it contains several terms considered to have direct implications for the relationship between men and women in the household, such as the concepts of *qiwamah*, *al-faql*, woman's piety (*ṣāliḥāt*), *nusyūz*, and the phrase *waḍribūhunna*. In feminist readings, these terms are often viewed as legitimizing patriarchal structures, the subordination of women, and gender bias within the tradition of Islamic exegesis. On the other hand, some Muslim exegetes emphasize that this verse does not aim to oppress women, but rather to regulate family relations based on responsibility, protection, and the welfare of the household. Therefore, Surah An-Nisa'/4:34 is a crucial verse in the debate on gender, particularly in determining whether the relationship between men and women in Islam is hierarchical, egalitarian, or complementary.

الرَّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ ۚ فَالْصَّالِحَاتُ قَنَاطٌ حَافِظَاتٌ لِّلْغَيْبِ
بِمَا حَفِظَ اللَّهُ ۚ وَاللَّي تَخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ وَاهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَاضْرِبُوهُنَّ ۚ فَإِنْ أَطَعْنَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ
سَبِيلًا ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا كَبِيرًا ۝ ٣٤

Before Quthb explains the interpretation of Surah An-Nisa'/4:34, he first outlines the core message of the verse as a whole. According to Quthb, this verse serves as the opening verse for a group of verses that explain the rules of the family institution, the division of responsibilities, the assignment of duties and obligations, and the methods for resolving all family matters. Quthb briefly discusses several aspects of the family institution, how to build it, how to maintain it, and its general

purposes in Islam. First, human nature is to be created in pairs (Surah Az-Zariyat/51:49). Second, human beings in pairs are two parts of a single soul (Surah An-Nisa'/4:1). Third, these two parts come together, to bring peace to the soul, tranquility to the nerves, comfort to the body, and to procreate offspring (Surah Ar-Rum/30:21, Al-Baqarah/2:187, Al-Baqarah/2:233, At-Tahrim/66:6, and At-Tur/51:21). Fourth, the togetherness of these two parts holds an equal standing before Allah, the same honor, and the same rights (reward, wealth, inheritance, and freedom of the soul). (Qutb, 1412, pp. 648-649) These four points form the fundamental foundation of the family institution.

In explaining the phrase *وَالرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ*, Quthb states:

ويذكر من أسباب هذه القوامة: تفضيل الله للرجل بمقامات القوامة، وما تتطلبه من خصائص ودرية، وتكليف الرجل الإنفاق على المؤسسة. وبناء على إعطاء القوامة للرجل، يحدد كذلك اختصاصات هذه القوامة في صيانة المؤسسة من التفسخ وحمايتها من النزوات العارضة وطريقة علاج هذه النزوات - حين تعرض - في حدود مرسومة (Qutb, 1412)

It is mentioned that the reason for this *qiwāmah* is that Allah has given men the capacity to fulfill it, providing them with the necessary qualities, and because of the responsibility (bestowed by Allah) upon men to provide for their families. Based on the reason for giving *qiwāmah* to men, the specific role of *qiwāmah* for men is also defined: a man (husband) must protect his family from ruin and guard them against desires that provoke conflict. Steps to resolve the situation have also been explained for when signs of such desires approach predetermined limits.

From the above explanation, it can be concluded that in this verse, Allah has designated men as *qawwām* over women. This designation is based on the fact that men have indeed been granted superiority by Allah to serve as *qawwām*; they possess the necessary qualities; and they bear the responsibility of providing for the family. Quthb does not explain the meaning of *qawwām* as meant in this verse, whether it means leader, protector, guardian, or something else. Quthb merely explains that when a man is the *qawwām* of his family, he must also fulfill his role in safeguarding and protecting his family from ruin. From this explanation, the author observes that the meaning of *qawwām* as explained by Quthb encompasses the roles of family protector and financial provider.

According to Quthb, the family is a fundamental institution in human life, which is why the Al-Qur'an regulates it in detail. Men and women are viewed as partners created to complement one another in accordance with their respective natures and capabilities. The division of roles within the family is not intended to demonstrate the superiority of one party over the other, but rather as an expression of God's justice, which assigns responsibilities based on the abilities and roles prepared for each (Qutb, 1412).

Quthb explains that women have heavy biological roles, such as pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding. Not only is this burden heavy, but it is also extremely dangerous. This role is not easy because it is often undertaken without proper biological, psychological, and mental preparation on the part of the woman herself. Therefore, it is fair and reasonable for the responsibility of meeting the family's needs to be placed on men. Furthermore, men also have the role of protecting women,

especially as they carry out these demanding roles. All biological, mental, and psychological functions have been prepared by Allah for each individual to fulfill their roles effectively. In addition to these endowments, Allah has also endowed them with distinct temperaments to support the fulfillment of their respective roles. Women are endowed with gentleness, compassion, and emotional sensitivity, while men tend to be more rational and decisive in making decisions (Quṭb, 1412).

For Quthb, these differences in character and function are part of human nature and cannot be fully interchanged. The author views this explanation as Quthb's response to the growing feminist discourse in Egypt, which considers the position of *qawwām* to be interchangeable between men and women. Quthb argues that a complete role exchange is contrary to the biological and psychological predispositions that God has established for each sexual identity. Nevertheless, Quthb still acknowledges certain conditions that allow women to take on male roles, such as when a husband is unable to fulfill his responsibilities or abandons the family. However, in his view, women cannot completely shed the innate nature and inherent characteristics they possess as women.

Quthb also rejects the claim that the concept of *qiwāmah* constitutes discrimination against women. In his view, *qiwāmah* is not intended as domination, but rather as the responsibility to care for, manage, and protect the family. Designating men as *qawwām* does not negate the existence and rights of women within the household; rather, it requires men to treat their wives with care, support, and proper conduct. Quthb's view on *qiwāmah* aligns with al-Buṭī's opinion, which emphasizes that leadership within the family does not imply male superiority over women. Based on the hadith regarding the importance of appointing a leader during a journey, leadership is understood as a necessity for maintaining order and management, not as a form of domination. Therefore, the role of the *qawwām* is more related to responsibility and the ability to manage the family than to spiritual superiority before Allah (Buthi, 2023, pp. 96-97).

Next, Quthb explains the criteria for a woman's piety through two main qualities: *qānitāt* (obedience) and *hāfizhāt* (self-restraint). Quthb emphasizes that the term *qānitāt* differs from *thāi'āt*, even though both mean obedience. The word *qānitāt* indicates obedience that arises from awareness, inclination, love, and psychological tenderness, not obedience that is merely formal or forced. According to him, this attitude is the foundation for creating a family characterized by *sakinah* and *mawaddah*. Additionally, a woman's piety is also required to protect her honor and that of her household, whether she is with her husband or far away from him. Quthb emphasizes that the boundaries and prohibitions for women are not determined by the husband or societal traditions, but directly by Allah. These prohibitions are also unrelated to whether or not the husband approves (*riḍa*) of his wife's behavior, whether they are together or apart. Therefore, the measure of a woman's piety does not depend solely on her husband's judgment, but is related to Allah's provisions and protection of moral values within the household (Quṭb, 1412).

As for women who do not meet these criteria, they are referred to as *nusyūz* women. According to Quthb, *nusyūz* describes an attitude of defiance that begins to

appear in family relationships. In addressing this situation, Islam is seen as prioritizing preventive measures before family breakdown actually occurs. Therefore, the Al-Qur'an outlines several progressive steps that a husband must take as part of his efforts to preserve family unity. In the phrase *فَعِظُوهُنَّ وَاهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَاصْرَبُوهُنَّ*.

First, offering guidance. According to him, a man's role as a *qawwām* does not mean eliminating a woman's rights and freedom to manage her own affairs. A husband is still obligated to honor his wife and give her space to make decisions regarding her personal matters, as long as she is not driven by lust. Therefore, when signs of deviation emerge, the first step to take is to communicate and offer guidance in a respectful manner.

Second, sleeping apart. According to Quthb, this step is taken when guidance is no longer effective because the heart has been overcome by lust. Sleeping apart is understood as a more firm psychological warning without involving physical violence. In this context, the husband's ability to restrain his own impulses is seen as a form of self-control as well as a means of raising his wife's awareness.

Third, striking with a very soft blow that does not cause pain. Quthb emphasizes that this permission is not a justification for harming his wife, but rather a form of discipline as a last resort after previous steps have failed. He cites a hadith of the Prophet stating that the best of people are those who are best to their families, so the husband-wife relationship must still be built on love and respect.

Quthb emphasizes that these three steps are sequential (*tartīb*), not options that can be implemented immediately. A husband is not justified in using violence without first having seriously attempted guidance and the previous stages. Thus, Quthb interprets the sequence of solutions in this verse as a form of preventive action aimed at preserving family unity while continuing to honor women.

An Analysis of Sayyid Quthb's Interpretation from the Perspective of Nature and Nurture

Quthb's interpretation of Surah An-Nisa'/4:34 indicates that the relationship between men and women within the family is built upon the principle of a division of roles that aligns with their inherent natures. Within this framework, men are positioned as *qawwām* because they are considered to have the biological, psychological, and social capacity to shoulder the responsibilities of protecting and providing for the family. Meanwhile, women are seen as having biological and emotional tendencies that support their roles in pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, and fostering domestic harmony. Thus, Quthb does not interpret *qiwāmah* as legitimizing male superiority over women, but rather as a form of responsibility and stewardship of the family institution. This view demonstrates that, according to Quthb, gender relations within the family are functional, complementary, and characterized by a protective-complementary dynamic, rather than a relationship of domination and subordination.

When analyzed using a nature approach, Quthb's interpretation strongly emphasizes the biological nature of men and women. He views the differences in

character, psychological tendencies, and physical readiness between men and women as part of God's design, which serves specific social functions. From this perspective, men are seen as better able to perform protective and decision-making roles because they are considered to have more rational, strong, and decisive personalities. Contrarily, women are seen as having strengths in empathy, gentleness, and emotional sensitivity that support reproductive and caregiving functions. This perspective aligns with the nature theory, which argues that some differences in social roles stem from natural biological and psychological differences.

However, Quthb's interpretation cannot be fully understood as a rigid nature approach. In some of his explanations, he still acknowledges the existence of certain social conditions that allow women to take on roles that are generally performed by men, such as when a husband is unable to fulfill his responsibilities or when a woman becomes the head of the household. This acknowledgment indicates that Quthb still leaves room for the nurture aspect, although this space is not positioned as the primary foundation for the formation of gender relations. In other words, social factors are still acknowledged, but not to the extent of erasing the natural differences between men and women. At this point, Quthb appears to take a different position from some contemporary Muslim feminist interpretations that tend to understand *qiwāmah* entirely as an interchangeable social construct.

In modern Muslim feminist interpretations, the verse on *qiwāmah* is often interpreted through a nurture approach, based on the assumption that male leadership in the family arises from the patriarchal social structure of seventh-century Arab society, rather than being a permanent normative rule. Consequently, the role of *qawwām* is considered to be open to anyone possessing the necessary economic, intellectual, or social capacity, whether male or female (Muhsin, 1999). This interpretation came about as a critique of classical interpretations that were seen as legitimizing the subordination of women through religious authority. However, in some cases, an approach that overemphasizes the nurture dimension tends to overlook the biological and psychological factors that also influence the formation of human social relationships.

The author observes that Quthb's interpretation tends to frame the relationship between men and women as a protective-complementary relationship, that is, a relationship in which each party protects and complements the other based on their respective roles. From this perspective, *qiwāmah* is not interpreted as men's absolute power over women, but rather as a form of responsibility in safeguarding, managing, and meeting the family's needs. Therefore, the position of *qawwām* is nearer to the concept of social trust than a symbol of gender superiority. This protective-complementary understanding indicates that the division of roles within the family, according to Quthb, is built upon functions and responsibilities, not upon the oppression of women.

This analysis becomes clear when Quthb explains that men, as *qawwām*, are obligated to protect their families from destruction and ensure domestic harmony. When discussing *nusyūz*, Quthb also interprets the steps outlined in Surah An-Nisa'/4:34 as sequential stages (*tartīb*), not as options that can be freely chosen at the

husband's discretion. Therefore, resolution must begin with guidance, followed by separation of beds; if this still fails, only then should one proceed to the final, strictly limited stage after all previous efforts have reached a dead end. The emphasis on this sequence demonstrates that, according to Quthb, family relationships are built upon the principles of care, self-control, and moral responsibility. Thus, Quthb's interpretation is not entirely identical to authoritarian patriarchy, as is often alleged against traditional interpretations, but rather aligns more closely with a protective-complementary relationship pattern that emphasizes responsibility and protection.

The author also points out that, in Quthb's interpretation, the difference in roles between men and women is not always intended as a form of injustice. Justice is understood not as the complete equalization of all male and female functions, but rather as the assignment of responsibilities according to each individual's readiness and capabilities. Therefore, women are not looked down upon when performing reproductive and caregiving functions, as these functions are actually considered major responsibilities requiring protection and support from men. In this context, *qiwamah* is understood as a consequence of responsibility, not a privilege to dominate women. This perspective confirms the protective-complementary approach in Quthb's interpretation.

Nevertheless, Quthb's interpretation remains open to criticism, particularly when he overgeneralizes the characteristics of men and women based on certain biological assumptions. In modern social reality, not all men have the rational and protective characteristics assumed, and not all women have the same emotional or domestic tendencies. Such generalizations risk overlooking the diversity of women's experiences. Therefore, the protective-complementary approach in Quthb's interpretation must still be read contextually.

Thus, Quthb's interpretation of Surah An-Nisa'/4:34 can be understood as an interpretation that is closer to the nature-based approach while still acknowledging the role of certain social factors. He acknowledges the natural differences between men and women and uses them as the basis for the division of roles within the family, but at the same time continues to emphasize partnership, protection, and moral responsibility in these relationships. Therefore, Quthb's interpretation can be categorized as a protective-complementary approach situated between two extremes: a dominant patriarchy that oppresses women and absolute egalitarianism that erases all gender role differences.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Sayyid Quthb's interpretation of Al-Qur'anic Surah An-Nisa' [4]:34 is grounded in the concept of a division of roles based on the innate nature (*fiṭrah*) of men and women within the family institution. Quthb understands *qiwamah* not as a justification for male superiority over women, but rather as a trust involving protection, stewardship, and the fulfilment of family responsibilities. Within this framework, men are positioned as *qawwām* because they are considered to have the biological, psychological, and social readiness to carry out the functions of protection and provision, while women are seen as having tendencies

that support the functions of reproduction, caregiving, and the creation of domestic harmony. Thus, the gender relations constructed by Quthb emphasize aspects of responsibility and function rather than power relations.

An analysis using the nature-nurture approach shows that Quthb's interpretation tends to align more closely with the nature perspective. He bases the division of roles within the family on the biological and psychological differences between men and women. However, Quthb does not entirely dismiss social factors (nurture), as he acknowledges that certain conditions may allow women to take on roles typically performed by men. This position demonstrates that his interpretation does not stand at the extreme of absolute biological determinism, nor does it accept the idea that all gender relations are merely interchangeable social constructs.

Based on these findings, this study concludes that the gender narrative constructed by Quthb can be understood as a protective-complementary narrative, that is, a relationship that positions men and women as partners who protect and complement one another based on their respective roles and responsibilities. This finding also complicates the common assumption that often identifies male interpretation with a patriarchal system that is dominant and subordinates women. Although Quthb's interpretation maintains a certain hierarchical structure within the family, this hierarchy is understood as a means of responsibility and stewardship, not as a justification for oppression or domination. Therefore, this study demonstrates that gender interpretations in modern Islam cannot always be simply mapped into a binary opposition between patriarchy and egalitarianism. Between these two poles lies another interpretive approach that seeks to preserve gender role differences while emphasizing the principles of partnership, protection, and mutual responsibility within the family

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