



### The Concept of *Qiwāmah* in the Perspective of Feminist Activists Amina Wadud and Zainab al-Ghazali

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#### Article History:

Received: May 7, 2024

Accepted: May 19, 2024

#### DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.62032/aijgh.v1i1.31>

**Abstract:** The debate on the leadership roles of men and women (*qiwāmah*) in Islam is often associated with different interpretations of religious texts. This article aims to uncover and compare the concept of "*qiwāmah*" through the interpretation of Surah al-Nisa': 34 from the perspective of two female feminist figures, Amina Wadud and Zainab al-Ghazali, who have different backgrounds. The qualitative comparative method is used in this research, using library research techniques for data collection. This study analyzes data related to their interpretations and views of the Quranic text through their various works, identifying similarities and differences in the interpretation of the Quran. The findings of this study show that there are different interpretations of the meaning of "*qiwāmah*". Wadud argues that "*qiwāmah*" signifies relative leadership based on "capability", where anyone capable, regardless of gender, is entitled to lead others. In contrast, Zainab views leadership based on "responsibility", where men are providers for women, reflecting an equal role between the two. In conclusion, both scholars support gender justice and equality, rejecting the notion that the concept of leadership in the Quran is reserved for men due to physical or rational creation factors, and thus opposing domination where the strong can oppress the weak.

**Keywords:** *Qiwāmah; Amina Wadud; Zainab al-Ghazali; Feminist Interpretation; Gender*

#### INTRODUCTION

The concept of gender equality is a controversial topic that has evolved significantly since the late 18th century, particularly within the context of Islam. The demand for gender



justice has been a persistent discussion, reflecting deep-seated beliefs about women being "less intelligent" and "sources of temptation." Such beliefs limit women's roles both in family and public spheres, influenced by an incomplete understanding of religious texts that exhibit gender bias, where patriarchal doctrines remain deeply rooted within the social culture.

Issues of sexism in advocating for women's rights have evolved. In Indonesia, the disparity in relationships between men and women is evidenced by the massive movements for women's empowerment across various sectors. Gender considerations—meaning both men and women—must be seriously regarded in all policy decisions. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2023, Indonesia's Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) remained unchanged from the previous year at 0.697 points. This survey is based on four dimensions of achievement: education, health and survival, economic participation and opportunity, and political empowerment (World Economic Forum, 2023).

The empowerment of women has been documented since the time of Prophet Muhammad when the simpler social structures allowed for numerous inspirational women to set a precedent for the community post-Prophet. Islam has historically honored women just as it has men, with evidence showing women in early Islam approached the Prophet, supported, struggled alongside, and preached, participating in religious, educational, social, and economic activities (Lubis et al., 2022). Notable figures like the Prophet's wives—Khadijah, known as a wealthy merchant, and Aishah, known for narrating Hadiths—illustrate that Islam has always valued women based on their capabilities, unlike the cultures and civilizations before it, such as the Greeks, Romans, pre-Islamic Arabs, and Indians, who viewed women as subordinate and incapable of holding honor and dignity.

The empowerment activities were supported by the emergence of the feminist movement, which fundamentally assumes that women are oppressed and face injustice. Feminists continue to campaign for women's rights, justice, and equality, believing that society still prioritizes men over women, thus making women susceptible to injustice and violence, including the dual roles they often play within households. Feminism fundamentally stands on the principle of individual freedom, shielded by human rights, where women are not bound by anything, free to determine their roles in society (Maram et al., 2023).

As it developed, Feminism gave rise to various strands, including Secular Feminism, shaped by discourses including secular nationalism, Islamic modernism, humanitarianism or human rights, and democracy. Islamic Feminism, in contrast, is expressed through a discourse rooted in religion, with the Quran as its central text. Secularism emerged in contexts where religion, state, and society are interlinked, while Islamism arose when secular ideas were already entrenched (Badran, 2005). The issue of women's leadership in domestic and public spheres continues to be debated within Islam, as indicated in the Quran, Surah An-Nisa: 34. Feminist scholars strive to produce feminist interpretations of this verse, using various approaches they believe can mediate disparities and equate women's status with that of men.

This research analyzes the thoughts of two well-known Islamic Feminist figures, interpreting Surah An-Nisa':34. Amina Wadud seeks to reconstruct old thoughts and the hegemony of patriarchy, interpreting gender-biased verses in line with the fundamental principles of Islam, while Zainab Al-Ghazali, an Egyptian feminist and preacher, strives to integrate feminism with nationalism, demanding women's rights as outlined in the Quran. Various studies have explored the meaning of women's leadership in Islam using multiple methods and perspectives, including the work by Mitha Mahdalena Efendi titled "Reinterpretation of the word Qiwamah in the Quran Surah An-Nisa': 34 from a Contextual

Approach by Abdullah Saeed," which interprets the verse as implying an "equal relationship" between men and women, not barring women from leadership (Efendi, 2020). Aspandi discusses religious texts biased against women through a Hermeneutic approach, highlighting the importance of reconsidering the social conditions of the community when interpreting Quranic texts to address contemporary issues (Aspandi, 2018).

No previous research has compared the perspectives of these two feminist figures; thus, it is vital to reassess the concept of *qiwāmah* as outlined in Surah An-Nisa':34 by comparing the thoughts of two women with differing ideologies—Amina Wadud, a liberal, and Zainab al-Ghazali, an Egyptian Islamic feminist with a fundamental ideology as a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. Through this paper, the researcher hopes that all Islamic feminism advocates and general readers can fully understand how each figure advocates for freedom and equality by reinterpreting Surah An-Nisa': 34 using specific approaches, particularly focusing on Amina Wadud and Zainab al-Ghazali as study subjects in this article.

## **METHOD**

This research is qualitative. Qualitative research is used to direct understanding and exploration of phenomena by collecting and analyzing data that is not numerical. (Nassaji, 2020) There are several stages that qualitative researchers must go through, namely, 1) the description or orientation stage, briefly describing all the information and data obtained by the researcher, 2) the reduction stage, by carrying out the process of summarizing the data and information to focus on the problem being studied; 3) the selection stage, by describing in detail and carrying out in-depth analysis of the focus of the problem that is the object of research (Fiantika et al., 2022). This research applies a descriptive-comparative method, namely a descriptive research approach that compares two or more situations, activities, or other elements that are similar or almost similar (Djiwandono & Yulianto, 2023). In this case, the researcher compares the interpretations made by Amina Wadud and Zainab al-Ghazali of Surah al-Nisa': 34.

The data source for this research was obtained through a literature study. Literature study is carried out as a stage in the research process by collecting library sources, gaining in-depth understanding, and studying theories contained in various literature that are relevant to the research (Adlini et al., 2022). In this case, the researcher examines various secondary and primary literature sources regarding the two figures, Amina Wadud and Zainab al-Ghazali, as research objects. The researcher collects and identifies various data sources, such as books, national and international journal articles, reports, theses, websites, and other sources related to the research object. Using several keywords, *qiwāmah*, Amina Wadud, Zainab al-Ghazali, gender equality, and women's leadership. The data collection technique in this research involves reading, taking notes, comparing, and then describing important points related to the research topic.

The data analysis technique in this research uses the Miles and Huberman perspective. This technique involves three main steps, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions (Thalib, 2022). In this stage, the researcher will collect various literature sources that are relevant to the topic, and then the data collected will be reduced by identifying and selecting the most relevant and significant information for the research. After the data has been reduced, the researcher will explain it by presenting the information in a structured and organized form. The final stage is to conclude the results of the data analysis.

## **Finding and Discussion**

In the mid-nineteenth century, the resurgence movement began to manifest in the Islamic world. One segment of this wave of enthusiasm included Muslim women, who, increasingly aware of their isolated and marginalized positions within families and society, vehemently demanded the right to conduct their *ijtihad* (independent reasoning). The initiation of ideas about feminism was propelled by Muslim women, predominantly from the middle and upper classes who had access to education and research. Among these was 'Aishah Abd al-Rahmān, an Arabic literature professor in Egypt who later spearheaded theological protests in Morocco. In her work, she advocated for a contextual interpretation of the Quran and emphasized its timeless ethical and spiritual values. Nadhirah Zain al-Dīn (1908) critiqued the Quran for its oversight of women's living conditions, alongside 'Aishah al-Taymuriyyah from Egypt, Zainab Fawwaz from Lebanon, Raquiya Sakhawat and Nazar Sajjad Haydar from South Asia, who collectively contributed to a critical reevaluation of women's circumstances (Tatari, 2013).

This movement was driven by several motivations to confront traditional Islamic sources as a form of critical reflection on these matters. This included their notion of a just God who desires equitable conditions for both men and women. The belief is that a text cannot be fully understood without considering its original context and the predominantly male interpreters who have historically influenced its patriarchal interpretations. In this regard, they proposed a hermeneutical reading, critiquing the texts and the outcomes of their interpretations. This effort was a crucial attempt to improve the social conditions of Muslim women by questioning religious texts and theological arguments, redefining and broadening gender-fair hermeneutics. The fundamental idea was to demonstrate women's contributions by re-reading historical sources to reshape perspectives on the past and open up new possibilities for the future.

## **Amina Wadud Background**

Amina Wadud, a controversial feminist figure, has faced significant criticism from the global Muslim community for her efforts in advocating for gender equality through contextual interpretations of religious texts. Her axiological stance was vividly demonstrated on March 18, 2005, when she served as both the preacher and leader of a Friday prayer held in an Anglican church in Manhattan, New York, with a congregation consisting of both men and women. This event provoked reactions from the global Islamic community, with prominent scholars such as Muhammad Sayyid al-Ṭantawi, Sheikh of Al-Azhar in Egypt, and Yusuf al-Qaradawi criticizing and condemning her actions as un-Islamic and innovative (Aspandi, 2018).

Originally an Orthodox Christian named Maria Teasley, Amina Wadud converted to Islam in 1972. Born on September 25, 1952, in Bethesda, Maryland, USA, she comes from an African-American Barber heritage, with a father who was a Methodist minister and a mother of Arab Muslim slave descent. Growing up with five brothers and one sister in a country conscious of justice, she found the notion that God could be linked to oppression to be foreign. "As a preacher, my father taught me to understand the close relationship between freedom and faith, God and truth," she states. By embracing Islam, she hoped to find significant guidance and avoid the religious and social marginalization experienced by African-American women due to their race (Arsal et al., 2020).

From 1970 to 1975, she pursued a Bachelor of Science degree at the University of Pennsylvania and continued her postgraduate studies in Near Eastern Studies, earning a MA and later a Ph.D. in Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Michigan in 1988. Her interest in Islamic studies led her to Egypt, where she furthered her education in Arabic at the American University in Cairo. She also studied Philosophy at Al-Azhar University and Quranic exegesis at Cairo University, completing her dissertation titled "The Quran and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective" in 1992, a work considered provocative and containing religious sentiments, leading to its ban in several countries, including the United Arab Emirates (Amaliatulwalidain, 2015).

Wadud spent much of her time on feminist and intellectual activities, moving to Libya in 1975. During her two-year stay, she faced Islamic practices that fueled her struggle, where she began to develop critical ideas to defend the rights of marginalized women. As a young, poor, black Muslim woman, she found honor and security in being accepted unconditionally by the community. There, she began forming organizations and building networks for Muslim women.

Her specialization in Islamic studies continued to receive support from her peers, and she was frequently invited as a guest lecturer at various universities, including the University of Pennsylvania (1970-1975), the University of Michigan, and the American University in Cairo (1981-1982), and Harvard Divinity School (1997-1998). After completing her educational journey, in 1992 Wadud was appointed Professor at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in Islamic Studies, Gender, and the Quran, attending numerous seminars organized by the American Academy of Religion (RAA) on various Islamic and gender themes.

Despite being a convert, Amina Wadud diligently pursued Islamic studies, conducting several research projects examining Quranic texts she believed were related to feminism, and continually advocating for women's rights to hold leadership positions in the Muslim community. According to Syahiron Syamsuddin, Wadud's attraction to Islam began with her admiration for the concept of justice implemented in Islamic teachings. However, she believed that the values of justice brought by Islam had not been fully assimilated into human life (Amirpur & Ormsby, 2015).

Her major works include "Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective," first published by Oxford University Press, New York in 1999, and "Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam," published in 2006 by Oneworld Publication. According to Charles Kurzman, cited by Aspandi, historically, Wadud's "Quran and Woman" emerged from the resistance of African-American women demanding gender justice, as well as her circumstances as an African-American Muslim (Kurzman et al., 2015).

### **Zainab al-Ghazali Background**

Zainab al-Ghazali (1917-2005), an influential Egyptian reformist, was known for her pioneering role in integrating feminist interpretations into the exegesis of the Quran, becoming the first woman to interpret the Quran in its entirety. Besides advocating for women's rights, she was also a fundamentalist affiliated with the prominent Egyptian organization, the Muslim Brotherhood.

Born into a noble family with religious prominence, her father was an Al-Azhar scholar. Her lineage traced back to the Caliph Umar bin Khattab on her father's side and to al-Hasan bin Fatimah bint Muhammad on her mother's side. From an early age, her father played a

significant role in shaping her strong personality and leadership qualities, fostering her to uphold Islamic traditions (Herri, 2019).

After her father died in 1928, al-Ghazali moved to Cairo with her mother and older brother, Sa'duddin al-Ghazali. Despite financial and familial challenges, her passion for learning was undeterred, supported by her eldest brother who provided her with Islamic books, including works by Aisha al-Taimuriya that discussed women's issues.

Al-Ghazali's intellectual journey was marked by her attendance at royal schools where she studied under distinguished Al-Azhar scholars such as Sheikh Muhammad Sulaiman al-Najjar and others, allowing her to bridge religious and modern knowledge. Her emergence in Egyptian society coincided with a time of significant tension for Arab women and the nation at large. The involvement of women in the 1919 Wafd Revolution, which led to Egypt's independence from British colonial rule, marked a shift in social norms concerning women's roles in public life. The feminist awareness that emerged among Egypt's elite was a reaction to the oppression and conquest of Muslim women, used as a pretext for colonial dominance (Lewis, n.d.).

During the Egyptian "*nahḍah*" or renaissance, two streams of feminist thought emerged: "Westernization" advocates and "Islamization" proponents, each viewing the other as adversaries. The former criticized Islam as a root of women's oppression, while the latter argued that women's marginalization stemmed from a lack of religious knowledge in society.

Inspired by her father's legacy as a national military figure, the young al-Ghazali began her activist career by joining the Egyptian Feminist Union, founded by Huda Sha'arawi in 1920. This movement, oriented towards Western cultural influences, contrasted sharply with the prevailing attitudes in Egypt at the time. Al-Ghazali became a significant figure within this organization, often speaking at events advocating for women's rights and freedoms (Al-Ayya, 2022).

Sha'arawi recognized al-Ghazali's potential and resilience and had planned for her to study in France as her successor in leading the Egyptian women's movement. However, adhering to her late father's wishes, al-Ghazali declined the opportunity the day before her departure, choosing to remain in Egypt.

Through her involvement in the Egyptian Feminist Union, al-Ghazali vigorously promoted women's rights through freedom. She believed her approach was correct and did not violate Islamic law. Her activism brought her into contact with her Al-Azhar teachers, notably Sheikh Muhammad al-Najjar, who helped her reassess her views.

Thomas Philip in his book "Feminism and Nationalist Politics in Egypt" discusses how the vision of anti-patriarchal feminism shifted towards anti-colonialism, blending feminist and nationalist goals. This unity was evident when Arab activists and Egyptian women rallied together in large anti-British demonstrations.

After realizing the disconnect between Huda Sha'arawi's movements and traditional Islam, al-Ghazali resigned from the Egyptian Feminist Union in 1936 and founded her organization, the Association of Muslim Ladies "al-Sayyidat al-Muslimat." This movement echoed a return to comprehensive Islamic teachings, advocating for equitable rights for both men and women while challenging patriarchal systems grounded in Islamic tradition (al-Ghazali, n.d.)

In 1941, she joined the Muslim Brotherhood, aligning with Hasan al-Banna's vision of reinstating life aspects to the Quran and Sunnah and enforcing Islamic Sharia universally. The Brotherhood's emphasis on Islamic educational methods resonated with her, strengthening

her commitment even as political tensions in Egypt marginalized her ideological group, leading to the dissolution of the Brotherhood by the Egyptian government in 1948.

Al-Ghazali's transition in thought was supported by the socio-cultural context of post-colonial Egypt, seeking spiritual peace through the revitalization of Islamic teachings. Amid her activism, al-Ghazali was also a prolific writer on women's issues, with works such as " *Nahw Ba'thu Jadid, Mushkilat Shabab wa Fatayat, Gharizah al-Mar'ah, Asma' al-Husna and finally Nazharat fi Kitabillah* as her magnum opus, a Quranic exegesis written during her time in prison. Her dedication to Islamic advocacy established her as a formidable female preacher and a *mujahidah* in the path of Allah.

### **The Interpretation and Polemics of *Qiwamah***

The term *qiwamah* in the Quran refers to Surah al-Nisa': 34, which states:

الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ ۚ فَالصَّالِحَاتُ قَنِينَاتٌ حَفِظْنَ لِلْغَيْبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ اللَّهُ ۗ وَالَّذِي تَخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ وَاهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَاضْرِبُوهُنَّ ۚ فَإِنْ أَطَعْنَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا كَبِيرًا

Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband's] absence what Allah would have them guard. But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance - [first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them. But if they obey you [once more], seek no means against them. Indeed, Allah is ever Exalted and Grand.

Linguistically, the term "قَوَّامُونَ" is the plural form of "قَوَّامٌ," a hyperbolic form of "قَانِمٌ," rooted in "قيامٌ," signifying determination or "المحافظة والإصلاح" (maintenance and improvement). Ibnu Asyur in his exegesis "*al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*" describes "القَوَّام" as someone who enforces, oversees, and amends, deriving from "القيام" used metaphorically in the Quran to denote someone entrusted with specific responsibilities, attending to and managing them (Ibn 'Asyur, n.d.).

According to *Mu'jam al-Wasith*, *qawwām* refers to a leader in authority or economics, someone endowed with responsibility over an authority. Thus, the verse on *qiwamah* articulates the concept of leadership closely linked with the relationship between women and men. Men are perceived to have the authority to lead both in family and public domains for various reasons, while women's qualifications for leadership are often overlooked. Sayyid Qutb views *qiwamah* as a foundational relationship within the family, hence, he confines the interpretation of al-Nisa': 34 to the bonds between husbands and wives.

Interpretations of this verse vary among scholars: some advocate for a contextual understanding to maintain the Quran's relevance in contemporary times, while others uphold traditional interpretations. Al-Tabari posits that men should lead women in all matters concerning their relations with people and with Allah, educating them in daily life and guiding their duties towards Allah. This is because men are endowed with superior qualities, provide dowry, and fulfill the needs of their wives (Syakir, n.d.).

Ibnu Katsir states that women should not lead, citing men's preferential status, which includes prophethood and kingship being exclusive to men. Wahbah al-Zuhayli argues that men lead women for two reasons: first, due to the physical aspect of being a more perfect

creation with greater sensory and cognitive strengths and more stable emotions; second, due to the role of providing for the wife, such as giving a bridal gift.

The interpretations by al-Thabari, Ibnu Katsir, and Wahbah al-Zuhaili suggest a disparity in viewing the relationship between men and women, with men granted a superior position and women confined to specific roles. This perspective has been a barrier to women achieving equality and realizing their ambitions, despite the Quran's foundational mission of justice among humans, distinguishing only by piety. Islam's teachings, intended as a mercy to all, honor both men and women equally, irrespective of religion, race, tribe, or status.

This understanding remains a point of contention, especially among feminist activists, who question whether such views are still relevant today. In an era of advancing education and various competencies that women possess—sometimes exceeding those of men—feminists argue for reconstructing traditional Islamic interpretations closely tied to patriarchal systems, which they see as detrimental and perpetuating women's subordination under the guise of religious pretexts.

### **Interpretation of *Qiwāmah* Verse According to Amina Wadud**

Muhammad al-Ghazali, in his book "*Kayfa Nata'āmal ma'a al-Qur'ān*," discusses the immutable nature of the Quran, asserting that the foundational issues it addresses remain constant, though the contexts they encounter may vary. The Quran revealed in the early first century of the Hijra with reasons for revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) specific to the challenges faced by the early Islamic community, does not limit its role as a guide in Islamic teachings. Its perpetuity implies that the Quran can address all forms of issues and remains relevant across all times and circumstances. It is crucial to emphasize first, the aspect of social life that the text of the Quran in ancient times was about human life which will continue to change and develop. Second, the aspect of applying the Quran, where the texts are not applied to just one issue. The reasons for *asbāb al-nuzūl* become the main basis for addressing other issues not explicitly mentioned in the Quran's text (Al-Ghazali, 2005).

While the text's religious truth is eternal, the truth derived from its reading is relative and tentative. This product is a dialectic between the interpreter and the text, open to criticism and reconstruction if it does not align with contemporary needs. As emphasized by Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid (Abu Zaid, 2014), the relationship between intellect, text, and reality should be dialectical, leading to various methods of interpreting religious texts, as practiced by Amina Wadud (Aspandi, 2018).

Wadud firmly believes that if the view of the Quran is perfectly understood, Islam can become a driving force for empowering women. She categorizes the methods of Quranic interpretation generally into three parts: traditional, reactive, and holistic approaches. The traditional interpretation treats the Quran universally with specific aims, such as law, history, grammar, or rhetoric. This approach, she argues, is atomistic or partial, isolating certain parts from others and interpreting the Quran from a generalized perspective. Furthermore, traditional interpretation has been dominated by men, hence women's experiences are interpreted through a male perspective (Jawad, 2003, p. 115).

The reactive approach is a reaction from modern scholars to the Quran and Islam, using religious texts as sources of obstacles faced by women and justifications for their responses. This approach is deemed unsuccessful because it fails to distinguish between interpretive products and the Quranic text itself. This idea often originates from rational feminists without



a comprehensive analysis of the Quran, leading them to believe and justify that women's subordinate position aligns with Quranic stipulations.

The holistic interpretation of the Quran is the third approach that integrates issues of social, moral, economic, and political modernity, including women's issues. Wadud finds this method most suitable because its methodology clearly defines areas requiring in-depth study, which seems almost impossible otherwise (Wadud, 1995).

In her Quranic interpretation efforts, Wadud's initiation is based on Fazlur Rahman's conceptual approach method (Wadud, 2006, p. 7), where every Quranic text revealed at a specific time and situation carries an implicit message not historically confined. An interpreter must understand the implications of Quranic expressions at the time of revelation to find accurate meanings. Her theoretical idea, termed "Hermeneutics of Tawhid," views the oneness of God as the foundation of justice and equality, with the basic assumption that the creation of men and women is equal.

She argues that the concept of Tawhid encompasses theological and ethical values; Tawhid recognizes the oneness of a transcendent God. Ethically, Tawhid relates to various social and political relations, emphasizing the unity of the community and acknowledging equality before a single creator. Wadud considers Tawhid as the theological basis for establishing reciprocal relations between men and women. Patriarchal systems that privilege men are seen as contrary to the values of Tawhid, implying that women's relationship with God should go through men, which should not be the case. Vertical relations occur only between humans and God, while the relations between men and women are horizontal, involving cooperation and reciprocity.

The hermeneutical method addresses three main aspects: *first*, covering the context in which the verses were revealed; *second*, the grammatical composition of the revealed texts; and *third*, the worldview of the text. By presenting the method of interpreting the *al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān*, Wadud performs analysis in philology, hermeneutics, and contextualization of verses, focusing on language structures that have multiple meanings to comprehensively understand texts about women and to reexamine the background, perceptions, and conditions (Wadud, 1999).

In interpreting Surah an-Nisa:34, Wadud approaches it with historical contextualization, revealing the essential meaning of the word *qawwāmūn* (قوامون) by examining various sources and opinions she finds. In the context of male-female relations, this verse clearly states that men are responsible for, lead, educate, and protect women physically and morally because they possess advantages over others. The superiority of men here stems from several assumptions they believe to be by the verse's intentions, such as men having wealth, superiority in thinking, strength, and resilience. Regarding the use of *faddala* (favoring), Wadud believes that its application in the Quran is not absolute for men as traditionally explained by mufasssirs; the mentioned superiority is relative and functional as long as the concerned individuals possess the qualities mentioned in the Quran. She explains that the Quran does not divide work between men and women, establish a uniform order in every social system, or disregard natural differences in society, but rather emphasizes the need for variation and encourages social order to determine functional differences among individuals (Jawad, 2003).

The use of the word "bi" in the phrase (بما أنفقوا) indicates that the meaning before "bi" is determined based on what is explained after "bi". This produces the meaning from (الرجال قوامون على النساء) that men are responsible for women if they meet the two conditions explained next,

i.e., proving their superiority, and being able to financially support and maintain women. Thus, the meaning initiated by Wadud is "men are leaders of women (based on) what Allah has favored some of them over others and (based on) the wealth they spend on women". In other words, anyone who possesses these two advantages, whether male or female, is entitled to be a leader over the others because the current social reality shows a balance of responsibility that changes when men are unable to provide for women

This method helps Wadud mediate traditional interpretations that emphasize that men are preferred over women due to considerations in the general interpretation of this verse. If this were indeed the case, the verse would read: "They (masculine plural) are preferred over them (feminine plural)" without including the word "*ba'd*" (some) between "*ba'd*" (others) (Wadud, 1999). She contextualizes the use of the word "*ba'd*" (some) according to the reality occurring in society without implications for a specific gender, i.e., not all men are superior to all women in everything, some women are superior to some men in some things and some men are superior to some women in some things, so whatever is ordained by Allah will be relative and not always absolute (Nurkumala, 2022).

Wadud expands the meaning of the verse and applies it to the general public society, a family formed from the marriage of a man and a woman plays a crucial role and forms the basis for building society. Leadership (*qiwāmah*) is not limited to physical and material capabilities as mentioned above, this stance should be applied broadly in other areas, including spiritual, intellectual, moral, and psychological fields. According to her, the extraordinary gift given to humans by Allah is reason, thus humans should maximize the role of reason in freedom of thought, controlling attitudes, and rejecting all forms of injustice, oppression, and patriarchy in the name of anything, including religion. Maximizing the function of humans as caliphs on earth is the theological basis underlying Wadud's thinking; men and women must together create peace and preserve social order, including maximizing the role and participation of women in leadership as she demonstrated in her action as an imam in Friday prayers (Amaliatulwalidain, 2015).

### **Interpretation of *Qiwāmah* Verse According to Zainab al-Ghazali**

Zainab al-Ghazali is considered a complement to Islamic patriarchal feminism by Ta'lat al-Harb, basing the characteristic of her thought on anti-Western narratives. Zainab affirms this expression in her memoir titled *Ayyām min Hayāti*, striving for gender equality between men and women that she believes is granted by Islam, not through Western secularization. Zainab al-Ghazali rejects the notion that Islamic teachings oppress women, denying the humiliation experienced by women in some Muslim societies as practices that violate the principles of Islam, instead, Islam provides true freedom for women (Uthman, 2010).

The Islamic feminist discourse brought by Zainab is heavily influenced by Qutb, much of her work conveys the importance of gender equality as important as equality in other relationships in society in general. This aims to convey three main thoughts of Qutb, first, that Islam values equality between men and women, second, that this equality is bound by certain circumstances and not always applicable, and third, to counterattack the West because in reality, they are the ones who seize the respected rights of women. Sayyid Qutb supports the inequality between men and women with the reason of physical, psychological, and rational differences that are naturally created differently. This assumption becomes a large gap in Zainab's thinking, according to her Qutb makes a mistake by trying to frame Islamic Feminism based on the stipulations of Western feminism, and must be avoided by her (Lewis, n.d.).

In addition to Huda Sha'rawi who believes in secular feminism, and Sayyid Qutub mentioned above has greatly influenced al-Ghazali in the development of her discourse, one thing that is no less important influences her spirituality, namely modern Egyptian Sufism with its various ideals that were flourishing in Egypt at the beginning of the 20th century. Where Sufi orders have shifted and are no longer a social force and an alternative source as before, surrendering to God and serving fully to the leadership of the order is no longer to the leader of the state or kingdom. Likewise with Zainab, proven by her devotion to the spiritual leader namely Hasan al-Banna, considering him as a holy figure and an exception to himself from the norms of traditional Islam and state rules. Her work "Return of Pharaoh" reveals her extreme devotion and her decision to submit to al-Banna's wishes as a spiritual guide, leading her to join the Ikhwān Muslimīn group (al-Ghazali, n.d.).

Zainab believes that feminist goals can be achieved through Islam is only a continuation of Islamic theory. If all the problems that occur in society can be solved by returning to Islam, so with women will also get their rights and honors through Islamization. She voiced the empowerment of women and the nation in Islam, committed to Islamic traditions while other feminists, campaigned for women's rights and human rights in the language of secularism and democracy, emphasizing Western superiority. She also provides advisory solutions for Muslim women to avoid the adverse effects of Western feminism that she summarizes in her conservative, nationalist, feminist, and spiritual thoughts. Zainab has always been consistent in voicing three main points of her thinking about the role of women in society, first, Muslim women as a fundamental factor in determining the success of society, second, women must fulfill their obligations and responsibilities in Islamic da'wah, third, they must fight against the remnants of Western imperialism. These three things are listed in various works and her thoughts (Lewis, n.d., p. 28).

In striving for all her beliefs and ideas to restore the purity of Islamic teachings, Zainab al-Ghazali writes her magnum opus in the form of a complete interpretation of the Quran entitled *Nadharāt fī kitāb Allāh*, this book reflects Zainab's knowledge, experiences she went through as a woman with a sense of responsibility for the da'wah mandate. This work has a reformative tendency, encouraging Muslims to make the Quran a guide towards progress, defending and inviting women to move and hold firmly to the verses of the Quran. In interpreting the verses of the Quran Zainab is supported by elements of tafsīr *bi al-ma'thūr*, using Quranic verses, Hadith of the Prophet saw and explanations of the companions to explain the meaning of other Quranic verses. The style of her interpretive thought is *al-adabī wa al-ijtima'ī* targeting social issues that occurred in Egypt at that time (Rochmad & Khaled, 2020).

Abd al-Hay al-Farmawī in the introduction to the book *Nadharāt fī kitāb Allāh* emphasizes that the work focuses on discussions about the practical aspects of social Islam as follows, *First*, forming individual Muslims specifically based on a good and comprehensive understanding of religious beliefs, committed and applying it in action. *Second*, building a Muslim family based on Islamic moral values, so that affection is established among family members. *Third*, building the Islamic nation in general where individual components and families are formed based on the previous foundations.

Regarding Surah al-Nisa': 34 Zainab al-Ghazali argues that this verse is a divine decree that leadership in the family is given to men, however, this does not mean prohibiting women from leading and being responsible for the family as long as the purpose is for the common good. She interprets the word *qiwāmah* (القوامة) as responsibility (المسئولية), the basis of leadership

is responsibility, men as providers for wives and children, and responsible for cooperating in household affairs by making the Quran and Sunnah as the basis. This means that the responsibility is not only for provision but also for protection and treating women well, the role of men in public should not ignore cooperation in household affairs (Al-Jubaili, 1994, p. 297). Even the role of men is considered double, active in the public sphere to support their family, and responsible for helping their wives's duties at home.

Zainab does not prohibit the role of women in the public sphere, according to her, women are even required to actively participate in Islamic da'wah movements provided they do not ignore their main role as household managers. Women should prioritize domestic matters before finally playing an active role in society. Unlike general mufassirs, Zainab strives to uphold equality by clearly distinguishing the roles of women and men proportionally with mutual respect and appreciation for each other. Because *qiwāmah* in Islam is not just a term to glorify men, but an important rule that underlies the legal and family relations between women and men, as the right of protection for women, not because of the physical or rational superiority of men.

Considering Zainab's thoughts that emphasize the importance of community life. The family is the first educator of the Muslim ummah, and women as leaders in the house responsible for their husbands and children, therefore women must have good spiritual abilities. The responsibility of men here is as a form of role equality between the two, meeting all their needs materially and energetically as well as maintaining their honor, ultimately creating a sense of security and tranquility for women. In her interpretation, she said:

Islam wants married couples to build a beautiful flower field in a garden rich in gifts to make anyone who enjoys its fragrance happy, that's how a household in Islam. That's the role of men in the family to succeed in fostering happiness in his family, so that the household becomes calm, and society becomes advanced. That's the equality meant in the understanding of the Quran.

In her interview with Cooke, although Zainab upholds the domestic sphere as the main role of women, she believes that women can hold government positions in Islam except for the president, Islam does not naturally prohibit women from being in public spaces and limited only to the domestic area, women can also take over maximally in jihad including playing an important role in the Islamic movement and public political space (Uthman, 2010, p. 74). Zainab depicts an Islamic way of life for Muslim women through marriage, raising children, and education as well as being active in preaching in public space, calling on them to be free from the shackles of misconceptions of Islam. Women should not be marginalized in society, their role as the foundation of the entire civilization must be recognized and appreciated as educators of the future Muslim generation, therefore they must be religious, and civilized and get their rights in education to ensure that the foundation they build will produce a strong society.

In reality, the ideals pursued by Zainab al-Ghazali are Islamization and the establishment of an Islamic state, with which women will find themselves in their naturalness namely educating generations including men, who are aware of the importance of da'wah jihad exceeding other commands. With her example, she emphasizes that women must actively apply their obligations to God and the state to achieve individual rights (Cooke, 1995).

From the explanation above Amina Wadud and Zainab al-Ghazali agree to create equality between men and women in the household and public. Both look back at religious texts and apply the teachings brought by the Quran to the maximum by grounding justice as the main basis of the religion of Islam. But there are stark differences between the two in the process of epistemology they carry out and also in the resulting of axiology.

Amina Wadud seeks a new perspective in interpreting the Quran through contextual hermeneutic methods, advocating that the leadership (*qiwāmah*) referred to should be based on "capability" and not reserved exclusively for men. She argues that leadership is relative and functional for anyone deemed capable, regardless of gender, believing that humans are God's creation and tasked with maximizing their role as stewards on Earth to preserve goodness and oppose all forms of oppression. This stance is also influenced by Wadud's background as an African-American Muslim convert.

In contrast, Zainab al-Ghazali's conservative and Islamist interpretation views leadership (*qiwāmah*) as based on "responsibility," where men are designated as providers and collaborators within the family based on Islamic principles. She views the family as the foundation of society, emphasizing that women as educators must have access to their rights in education. Zainab's ultimate goal is an Islamic life applying Islam in all aspects of life, adhering to the comprehensive Islamic principles as believed by the Muslim Brotherhood. She also fully supports women's active participation in the public sphere, provided they have fulfilled their domestic responsibilities.

Although the freedom aimed by both is different in application, Wadud tends to want freedom by reinterpreting the Quran as a reinforcement of her argument, using the texts as a means to voice her ideas. While Zainab tends to make the Quran the ultimate goal and guide of life rules, according to her all problems will be resolved by returning to the Quran, the equality referred to is cooperation that is established between men and women by mutually supporting and appreciating each other's roles.

## CONCLUSION

In exploring the concept of *qiwāmah*, Amina Wadud and Zainab al-Ghazali present distinct yet complementary feminist perspectives that challenge traditional gender roles within the Muslim community. Both activists contest the interpretation that Islamic teachings inherently support unjust practices or reinforce hierarchical societal structures. They advocate for the empowerment of women, emphasizing the need for a reinterpretation of Islamic texts to promote gender equality.

Amina Wadud's approach is rooted in a contextual hermeneutic method, seeking to redefine *qiwāmah* based on "capability" rather than gender. She argues that leadership should be functional and relative, accessible to anyone capable, irrespective of their gender. Wadud believes that the Quranic teachings aim to uplift marginalized groups, including women, and that every human is entrusted by God to act as steward on Earth, fostering goodness and opposing oppression. Her views are shaped by her background as an African-American Muslim convert, emphasizing the necessity for a progressive interpretation of Islamic texts that aligns with contemporary understandings of gender equality. Conversely, Zainab al-Ghazali adopts a more conservative stance, interpreting *qiwāmah* through the lens of "responsibility". She maintains that men are designated as providers and collaborators within the family, following Islamic principles. Zainab al-Ghazali underscores the importance of the family as the cornerstone of society and insists that women must have access to education to

fulfill their roles as educators. Her perspective is deeply influenced by her affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood, which advocates for an Islamic life that adheres strictly to Islamic principles. Nonetheless, she supports women's active participation in the public sphere, as long as they have met their domestic obligations. Together, Wadud and Zainab al-Ghazali contribute to reshaping the discourse on women's roles in Islam. Their efforts encourage a dynamic and evolving interpretation of Islamic texts, balancing adherence to faith with the necessity for progressive changes in societal roles for women. Through their advocacy, they highlight the importance of contextualizing traditional texts to foster gender equality and justice in contemporary Muslim societies.

The findings of this study suggest significant implications for the development of Quranic interpretation. First, the adoption of contextual hermeneutics, as advocated by Wadud, can inspire a broader acceptance of interpretive methods that consider historical and social contexts, leading to more dynamic and relevant understandings of the Quran. Second, by challenging traditional roles, both Wadud and al-Ghazali's perspectives can encourage a re-examination of other Quranic passages that have been historically interpreted in ways that limit women's roles. Third, the integration of diverse perspectives underscores the importance of incorporating varied experiences within Quranic interpretation, leading to richer and more comprehensive insights that reflect the diversity of the Muslim community. Ultimately, this research hopes to foster a more equitable and just interpretation of Islamic texts, creating an environment where both men and women can fulfill their potential as equal stewards on Earth.

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