

Feminist Exegesis: Tracing The History and Theological Foundations of Siti Musdah Mulia's Humanist Feminism

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Abstract

This article explores the theological foundations of Siti Musdah Mulia's gender equality thought amidst the dominance of patriarchal and androcentric religious interpretations. This research aims to address the academic gap in previous studies, which tend to be polarized on aspects of legal products (*fiqh*) and sociological impacts, while neglecting the philosophical-theological basis of Musdah's thinking. Employing a qualitative literature review method with a philosophical approach and a gender perspective, this research proposes the thesis that, for Musdah Mulia, patriarchy constitutes a serious theological flaw akin to veiled *shirk* (associating partners with God). The findings indicate that Musdah positions Tawhid (Divine Oneness) as the central analytical framework; the absolute acknowledgment of God's oneness logically necessitates the abolition of all forms of human enslavement and domination. Through a humanist-feminist approach, Musdah deconstructs gender-biased interpretations of crucial verses such as QS An-Nisa: 34, asserting that leadership (*qiwamah*) is a competency-based function, not a natural right of men, and firmly rejecting the legitimacy of domestic violence. This thought affirms that the struggle for gender equality is a manifestation of a Muslim's purification of faith (*aqidah*).

Keyword: *Feminisme Humanis, Taubid, Musdah Mulia*

INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an, as the *verbum Dei* (the word of God) revealed within a specific historical context, inherently carries a revolutionary spirit of liberation particularly in elevating the humanity of oppressed women within the pre-Islamic Arabian social structure. However, throughout the long journey of Islamic civilization, a troubling paradox has emerged. The egalitarian spirit contained within the sacred text (*nash*) has often been diluted when dialectically engaging with the socio-cultural realities of its interpreters, realities dominated by patriarchal structures. As noted by Abdullah Saeed, the dynamics of Qur'anic interpretation never occur in a vacuum; they are invariably intertwined with the ideological, political, and gender biases of the interpreting subject. (Saeed, 2006) As a result of the epistemological domination of men in classical Islamic scholarly tradition, the face of exegesis (*tafsir*) that has surfaced is often androcentric. Narratives of men's inherent superiority (*qanwamah*) have frequently been legitimized through atomistic readings of specific verses, such as Q. 4:34 (Surah An-Nisa'), which subsequently solidified into theological orthodoxy. This phenomenon has created an existential tension for modern Muslim women who hold faith in Islam as a religion of justice, yet are confronted with interpretative products that legitimize injustice.

In response to this unease, the academic discourse on gender relations in Islam has grown rapidly as an effort to reclaim interpretive authority. Within the global landscape, figures such as Fatima Mernissi and Amina Wadud have laid the groundwork for a critical feminist hermeneutics. Mernissi, for instance, applied historical criticism to misogynistic hadiths by deconstructing the psychological bias of their transmitters, (Mernissi, 1991) Amina Wadud

offered a *tawhīdīc* paradigm of interpretation, which reads Qur'anic verses holistically in order to affirm equality. (Wadud, 1999) Although this wave of thought offers a breath of fresh air, its reception in Indonesia often encounters an arduous path. Criticism of gender inequality is frequently suspected of being an infiltration of secular Western ideology, seen as threatening the purity of religious creed (*akidah*). It is within this tension between modernity's demands for equality and the resistance of conservatism that the thought of Siti Musdah Mulia occupies a strategic position. As an intellectual steeped in the tradition of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) yet possessing a modern academic perspective, Musdah argues that Tawhid (Divine Oneness) is the fundamental source of equality. She does so as a direct response to the view that equality is part of Western thought

Although the significance of Musdah Mulia is unquestionable, academic readings of her thought have thus far tended to be polarized, focusing on legal (*fiqh*) aspects and their social implications. This trend appears consistently, from earlier studies to the most recent research. In the previous decade, scholars such as Euis Nurlaelawati extensively highlighted Musdah's role in the controversy surrounding the Counter Legal Draft (CLD) of the Compilation of Islamic Law. (Nurlaelawati, 2010) This focus on the legal-formal aspect continues within scholarship up to the year 2024. For instance, Iqbal Sabirin (2024) in his critical analysis still positions Musdah's thought within the dialectic of conventional *fiqh*, specifically contrasting Musdah's views on polygamy with the opinions of the majority of scholars (*jumhur ulama*). (Sabirin, 2024) Similarly, Rofiq and Rodiah (2024), although they have compared Musdah Mulia with Amina Wadud, still concentrate the primary focus of their study on the implications of both figures' thought for reforming positive law in Indonesia. (Rofiq & Rodiah, 2024) Even in the most recent research, Nuraeni and Ariyanto (2025) still operate within the sociological domain, examining the impact of Musdah's interpretation of female leadership within the family head structure. (Nuraeni & Ariyanto, 2025)

The dominance of the aforementioned studies confirms that the discourse on Musdah Mulia remains preoccupied with the domains of legal products, public policy, and their sociological impact. This leaves a serious academic lacuna in research that focuses specifically on the philosophical-theological foundation underpinning her thought. It is this theological aspect that fundamentally distinguishes Musdah's brand of Humanist Feminism from secular feminism, yet it often escapes in-depth exploration, obscured by the clamor of legal debates.

Proceeding from this gap, this article aims to excavate the *ratio legis* (theological rationale) behind her ideas of equality. The primary focus of this study is to answer the question: what is the underlying principle of Siti Musdah Mulia's reasoning in interpreting Qur'anic verses concerning gender justice? This article proposes the thesis that within Musdah Mulia's Humanist Feminist paradigm, patriarchy is not merely a problem of social injustice, but a serious theological defect (veiled *shirk*). By placing Tawhid (Divine Oneness) at the center of analysis, this research seeks to affirm that advocating for gender equality is a logical consequence of a Muslim's purification of creed (*aqidah*).

METHODOLOGY

This research constitutes a qualitative study designed as library research. This methodological choice is made because the material object of the study is the ideas and thoughts of a figure, as articulated in textual literature, rather than observable societal behavior. Specifically, this study positions the thought of Siti Musdah Mulia as its formal object, aiming to dissect the structure of her theological reasoning. To achieve analytical depth, the research applies a philosophical approach and a gender perspective. The philosophical approach is used to trace the ontological basis of Musdah's thought namely,

the concept of *Tawhid* to its very roots, while the gender perspective is employed as an analytical lens to examine how this concept is operationalized in deconstructing patriarchal bias.

The primary data sources for this research are authoritative works written directly by Siti Musdah Mulia that contain her core ideas on Islam, women, and humanity. These primary texts include the book *Muslimah Reformis: Perempuan Pembaru Keagamaan* (2005), which outlines the foundational framework of her thought; *Indahnya Islam Menyuarakan Kesetaraan dan Keadilan Gender* (2014), which contains the application of her exegesis; and *Kemuliaan Perempuan dalam Islam* (2014). Additionally, secondary data is gathered from journals, dissertations, and relevant books by other scholars such as Amina Wadud and Fatima Mernissi, which function as corroborative evidence to situate Musdah's thought within the context of the global feminism discourse.

Data collection was conducted through close reading and thematic documentation. The author examined primary texts to inventory Musdah's key statements related to *Tawhid*, power relations, and humanity. Once the data was compiled, analysis was performed using the technique of Philosophical Content Analysis. This analytical process proceeds along three tracks: first, description, which objectively outlines Musdah's views; second, interpretation, which delves into the latent meaning behind the texts to uncover the causal relationship between *Tawhid* and gender equality; and third, synchronization, which reconnects the theological findings with the issue of patriarchal critique that is the focus of the research.

REASULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Genealogy of Feminist Exegesis: Global Dynamics and Contextualization in Indonesia

Before gender discourse touched the realm of Islamic theology, its conceptual framework was forged in the history of Western thought. These intellectual currents provided the initial vocabulary for the struggle for equality, which would later engage in dialogue with Islamic thought. Indonesian thinkers remain integral to this discussion, with figures such as Nasaruddin Umar and Faqihuddin Abdul Qodir, and, as the central focus of this article, Siti Musdah Mulia.

1. Philosophical Roots and Early Development of Global Feminism

At the end of the 18th century, amidst the European Enlightenment, Mary Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). This work was not merely a political pamphlet, but a philosophical treatise that challenged the prevailing definition of humanity in her time. Wollstonecraft's central argument revolved around reason and virtue. She rejected the Aristotelian assumption inherited by Europe that women were inherently more emotional and less rational than men. (Candra and Azani, 2025)

Wollstonecraft proposed the thesis that if women appeared intellectually inferior or frivolous, it was the result of social construction and an educational system deliberately designed to constrain them, not natural destiny. "Teach women to respect themselves," she wrote, "and they will cease to be slaves or playthings for men." The relevance of this thought in the genealogy of gender exegesis is crucial because it separates "biological nature" from "intellectual capacity." This is a precursor to the nature versus nurture debate that would later become highly relevant in the interpretation of *Qira'ah Mubadalah* (Reciprocal Reading), where biological differences should not serve as justification for differences in social roles or spiritual capacity. (Candra and Azani, 2025)

Wollstonecraft also emphasized that economic independence is a prerequisite for moral autonomy. A woman who is entirely financially dependent on her husband would find it difficult to develop authentic moral virtue, as her obedience stems from the need for

survival rather than from rational choice. This concept later resonates powerfully in discussions on *nafkah* (financial maintenance) and *qiwamah* (responsibility/leadership) in contemporary exegesis, where feminist exegetes demand a redefinition of family leadership based on capacity, not gender. (Candra and Azani, 2025)

Leaping to the mid-20th century, the French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex* (1949), brought gender analysis into the realm of existentialism. Her iconic statement, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," marked an epistemological turning point. De Beauvoir argued that throughout history, man has always positioned himself as the Subject (The Self/Absolute), while woman is defined as The Other. (Rohmawati dan Pandin, 2021) A woman is not defined based on her own being, but always in relation to a man (as a wife, mother, or daughter of someone). This concept of "The Other" provides a sharp analytical framework for Muslim scholars to dissect classical exegesis. In much classical *fiqh* literature, women are often discussed as legal objects (for example, in chapters on marriage or divorce) and are rarely addressed as equal moral subjects. De Beauvoir called upon women to reclaim their autonomy as free subjects (transcendence), refusing to be confined to immanence (being fixed solely by biological functions). It is this very spirit that was later adopted by Muslim feminists to become active subjects in interpreting God's verses, rejecting the notion of being forever interpreted solely by men. (Rohmawati dan Pandin, 2021)

The development of feminist theory reached a new analytical depth with the emergence of the concept of Intersectionality, introduced by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. Crenshaw critiqued mainstream (white) feminism and anti-racist movements (led by Black men) for failing to capture the specific experiences of Black women. (Bastia et.al., 2022) Intersectionality explains that discrimination does not operate through a single axis. A woman may experience oppression not only because she is a woman (sexism), but also due to her race (racism), economic class (classism), or other social statuses, all of which intersect and intertwine to create a unique experience of injustice. (Bastia et.al., 2022)

For the study of Islamic gender issues in Indonesia, this intersectional framework is vital and has been widely adopted by movements such as KUPI (Indonesian Women Ulama Congress). Muslim women in Indonesia contend not only with cultural patriarchy but also with inequitable economic structures, poverty, limited access to education, and biased religious interpretations. Intersectional analysis enables women ulama to view the injustices experienced by impoverished rural women, victims of child marriage, or migrant workers as the accumulation of various vulnerability factors. KUPI's religious edicts (*fatwa*) frequently employ this approach by examining the "layered vulnerabilities" experienced by victims of sexual violence. (Nadia, 2025)

2. Global Muslim Feminist Hermeneutics: Deconstructing Theological Patriarchy

Following the 1990s, the focus of the struggle for gender equality in the Muslim world shifted to the heart of religious authority: the interpretation of sacred texts. Muslim feminist scholars realized that as long as religious texts were interpreted through a misogynistic lens, women's liberation would never be complete. They developed new exegetical methodologies that combined classical Islamic sciences with modern hermeneutics.

The Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi, in her monumental work *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991), made a methodological breakthrough by employing historical criticism to challenge hadiths that marginalized women. Mernissi did not reject the authority of Hadith as a source of Islamic law, but she demanded more rigorous verification of the political context of its transmission. (Rahmatunnur et.al., 2023) Her analysis centers on the well-known (*mashhur*) hadith narrated by Abu Bakrah: "A people who entrust their affairs to a woman will never prosper." For centuries, this hadith has served as the definitive proof text to prohibit female political leadership in Islam. By tracing its historical context (*asbab al-nurud*), Mernissi uncovered the fact that Abu Bakrah narrated this hadith in the aftermath

of the Battle of the Camel (*Jamal*), where 'A'ishah (r.a.) led an army against 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. Mernissi argues that Abu Bakrah whose position was precarious and who had once been flogged by Caliph 'Umar for false testimony (*qazf*) used this hadith as political opportunism to align himself with the winning faction ('Ali) and safeguard his own life. (Rahmatunnur et.al., 2023)

Mernissi's analysis demonstrates that many seemingly misogynistic hadiths actually contradict the Qur'an's egalitarian spirit and the practice of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). These hadiths often reflect the cultural biases and political intrigues of male elites in early Islam. Mernissi's methodology teaches that hadith verification (*takehrij*) is insufficient if it only validates the chain of transmission (*sanad*); it must also employ sociological-historical analysis to critically examine the content (*matan*). (Rahmatunnur, et.al., 2023)

Riffat Hassan, a Pakistani-American theologian, directs her critique toward the ontological root of gender inequality: the myth of woman's creation. She identifies that the subordination of women is often justified by the theological belief that Eve was created from Adam's rib (the rib story). The patriarchal logic constructed is this: if woman was created *from* man and *for* man, then she is a derivative, secondary being. Hassan undertakes a meticulous rereading of the creation verses in the Qur'an. She asserts that the Qur'an never once mentions Eve being created from a rib. The terminology used by the Qur'an is *nafs wahidah* (a single soul/one essence) from which its mate (*zanjaba*) was created (Q. 4:1, 7:189). Both, man and woman, were created from the same essence, simultaneously and equally, before God. Hassan traces how the rib story entered the Islamic exegetical tradition through *Isra'iliyyat* (narratives sourced from Judeo-Christian traditions, particularly the Book of Genesis). By discarding this myth and returning to the authentic text of the Qur'an, Hassan dismantles the theological foundation used to justify female inferiority. The implication is profound: if men and women are equal in creation, then they must be equal in social, legal, and spiritual rights. (Najwah, 2021)

Amina Wadud offers a systematic hermeneutical framework through her book *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (1999). Her key concept is the "Hermeneutics of Tawhid." Wadud argues that Tawhid (the Oneness of God) carries radical social implications: since only God is the Most High and All-Powerful, no human being (male) may position himself as inherently superior or exercise absolute power over another human being (female). (Hanifah and Astutik, 2024) Wadud asserts that patriarchy is a form of social *shirk* (associating partners with God), because it attributes divine qualities (absolute authority, unconditional obedience) to men. In her methodology, Wadud emphasizes the importance of reading the Qur'an holistically (*weltanschauung*), not atomistically (verse by verse, stripped of context). She reinterprets crucial concepts such as *nushūz* (disobedience) and *qiwāmah* (responsibility).

For Wadud, the *qiwāmah* verse (Q. 4:34) does not grant men a privileged, inherent right, but rather establishes a conditional, functional responsibility. A man is a *qanwām* (maintainer/protector) *if* he possesses financial advantage and provides sustenance. If this condition changes for instance, if the wife becomes the primary breadwinner then the function of *qiwāmah* can shift or be shared. Wadud also insists on the validity of women's lived experience as a source of interpretation, rejecting the hegemonic male exegesis that has dominated the community's understanding for fourteen centuries. (Hanifah and Astutik, 2024)

3. Innovation in Nusantara Qur'anic Exegesis: Towards Reciprocal Justice

In Indonesia, the discourse on gender exegesis does not merely echo global feminist thought; rather, it gives rise to distinctive methodological innovations, blending the richness of the *pesantren* Islamic scholarly tradition with critical social analysis. Professor Nasaruddin Umar, an exegesis expert and the Minister of Religious Affairs, played a key role in grounding this discourse through his doctoral dissertation, *The Argument for Gender Equality:*

A Qur'anic Perspective (1999). Umar employs a semantic-linguistic approach to dissect gender terminology in the Qur'an.

His primary finding is that the Qur'an makes a clear distinction between the biological aspect (sex) and the social aspect (gender). For the biological aspect, the Qur'an uses the words *dżakar* (male) and *untsa* (female). In contrast, for social roles, it uses *rajul* (man/masculine) and *nisa* (woman/feminine). Umar demonstrates that in the dimensions of humanity and spirituality (as servants and vicegerents of God), the Qur'an consistently uses egalitarian language. The apparent inequalities in specific legal verses (such as inheritance 2:1 or testimony) are sociological responses to the conditions of 7th-century Arabian society, not eternal, universal principles. This work provides strong academic legitimacy for the gender equality movement in Indonesia, as it was written by a recognized religious authority. (Sakdiah, 2022)

The current pinnacle of the evolution of gender exegesis methodology in Indonesia is represented by Dr. Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir through the concept of *Qira'ah Mubadalah* (Reciprocal Reading). This method was systematically formulated in his book *Qira'ah Mubadalah: Tafsir Progresif untuk Keadilan Gender dalam Islam* (Qira'ah Mubadalah: A Progressive Exegesis for Gender Justice in Islam, 2019). *Qira'ah Mubadalah* is an interpretive method that positions men and women as equal subjects in receiving the message of the sacred text. Its core principle is reciprocity. If a text addresses men (using masculine pronouns, *dhampir mudżakkar*), its moral message also applies to women, and vice versa, unless there is specific evidence (*dalil*) that particularizes it. This method emerged to overcome the heavily gendered bias of the Arabic language, where the masculine form is often considered representative of the general. (Ramadani and Alwi, 2025)

Faqihuddin formulates three practical steps for applying this method:

a. Identifying the Core Principle (*Mabda'*):

The first step is to extract the universal moral principle from a text, looking beyond its literal wording. *Example:* In the hadith about "a wife prostrating to her husband," the principle is not subordination but rather the profound responsibility for mutual respect and maintaining household integrity.

b. Establishing Reciprocal Meaning:

Extending that principle to encompass both parties. If a husband has the right to respect, then a wife also has the right to respect. If a wife is forbidden from refusing her husband's request without a *şar'i* (religiously valid) reason, a husband is likewise forbidden from neglecting his wife's needs.

c. Connecting the Text to the Unmentioned Subject:

Explicitly including the gender absent from the literal text (typically women) as a legal subject. This is an affirmative step to ensure women are present within the legal consciousness of the *ummah* (community). (Ramadani and Alwi, 2025)

Through this method, texts that appear misogynistic are not discarded but are instead reinterpreted in a way that aligns with Islam's core principle of being *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a mercy to all worlds).

4. Indonesian Congress of Women Ulama (KUPI): Authority and Humanitarian Fatwas

The genealogy of Islamic feminist thought in Indonesia finds its most solid and institutionalized movement in the Indonesian Congress of Women Ulama (KUPI). The historic events of KUPI I (2017) in Cirebon and KUPI II (2022) in Jepara mark a new chapter where women have claimed authority as *ulama* and producers of *fatwa*. An Epistemological Shift in Religious Authority KUPI has undertaken a radical redefinition of the concept of *ulama*. An *alim* (religious scholar) is no longer the sole hegemony of men who master the classical yellow books (*kitab kuning*). KUPI asserts that women who possess scholarly capacity, moral integrity, and an awareness of gender justice are *ulama*.

Furthermore, KUPI incorporates women's experiences both biological (menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding) and social (injustice, violence) as authoritative sources of knowledge in formulating Islamic law. This is a concrete application of feminist epistemology that values *lived experience*. (Ma'ruf et.al., 2022)

In formulating religious positions and fatwas, KUPI employs a unique integrative approach, combining three pillars:

a. Religious Texts (Nash):

The Qur'an and Hadith, interpreted through the lens of *Mubadalah* (reciprocity) and substantive justice.

b. Constitution and Human Rights:

The 1945 Indonesian Constitution and relevant laws, regarded as the manifestation of the nation's solemn covenant (*mitsaqan ghalidzan*).

c. Empirical Reality (Waqi'):

Scientific data and the lived experiences of victims. (Suadi et.al., 2025)

This approach results in grounded, progressive, and victim-centered fatwas, distinguishing them from traditional edicts that often confine themselves to textual analysis alone.

Two fatwas issued by KUPI in 2017 became historic milestones for Islamic law in Indonesia: Fatwa on the Prohibition of Child Marriage. KUPI issued a decisive fatwa declaring child marriage *haram* (religiously forbidden), challenging conservative views that permitted it based on past practices. KUPI's argumentation was built upon the principle of rejecting *mafsadah* (harm or corruption). (Suadi et.al., 2025)

a) Empirical Evidence: Data demonstrates that child marriage leads to high maternal mortality rates, infant stunting, school dropout, and the perpetuation of poverty.

b) Jurisprudential Evidence: The fatwa employs the established legal maxims *dar'ul mafasid muqaddam 'ala jalbil mashalih* (preventing harm takes precedence over securing benefit) and *la dharara wa la dhirar* (there shall be no infliction of harm nor reciprocation of harm).

c) Conclusion: Since child marriage is proven to cause definitive harm (*mafsadah mubaqqaqah*), it is declared *haram* (religiously forbidden) for all parties (parents, guardians, marriage officials) who facilitate it. This fatwa served as crucial theological ammunition for the successful revision of Marriage Law No. 16 of 2019, which raised the legal marriage age for women to 19 years.

B. Musdah Mulia in the Discourse of Feminist Exegesis

Placing the value of humanity back at the core of religious teachings is the common thread that weaves through the entire feminist thought of Siti Musdah Mulia, an Indonesian progressive Muslim scholar who tirelessly advocates for gender justice. Through a critical hermeneutical approach that remains rooted in the principle of *tawhid* (divine oneness), Musdah deconstructs patriarchal interpretations that have long constrained women's roles, asserting that absolute submission is owed solely to God, and thus there should be no subordination among human beings.

1. Biography of Musdah Mulia: The Journey of a Reformist Muslim Woman Scholar

Siti Musdah Mulia, affectionately known as Musdah Mulia, is a prominent female Islamic scholar (*ulama*) born in Bone Regency, South Sulawesi, on March 3, 1958. She is the daughter of H. Mustamin Abdul Fatah and Hj. Buaidah Achmad. Although raised in a family environment that firmly upheld conservative traditions and values, the seeds of critical thinking and self-reliance were planted in her from an early age. This character is inseparable from the strong influence of her maternal lineage, particularly her mother and her grandmother, Hajjah Fatimah Nuhung.

Her grandmother, Hajjah Fatimah Nuhung (who passed away in 1995), was known as a resilient and progressive woman, ahead of her time. In an era when women's mobility was

still heavily restricted by social norms, she dared to undertake long journeys alone, traversing various cities and provinces across Indonesia. It was her grandmother's courage and open-mindedness that also broke tradition by sending Musdah's mother, Hj. Buaidah Achmad, to pursue education at a *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school). This step made Musdah's mother the first woman in their community to receive a *pesantren* education a significant precedent that would later shape Musdah's views on the importance of education for women. (Mulia, 2023)

Awareness of gender inequality grew in Musdah's mind from a young age. She witnessed the bitter reality around her, where women had severely limited access to education. Many women in her community could only attend school through the primary level and were often married off early due to the stigma that a woman's destiny was confined to the domestic sphere. This resentment became the fire that ignited her fighting spirit, driving her to dedicate her life to equality and women's empowerment through education and religious scholarship.

Musdah's intellectual journey began with her formal education at a public elementary school (SD Negeri) in Surabaya, which she completed in 1969. Her desire to deepen her religious knowledge led her to Pondok Pesantren As-Sa'diyah in Sengkang, South Sulawesi, where she studied until graduating in 1973. She then pursued higher education at the Faculty of Adab at IAIN Alauddin Makassar, earning her Bachelor's degree in Arabic Language and Literature in 1982. Her unflagging zeal for learning brought her to Jakarta to undertake a Master's program at IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah, which she completed in 1992 with a concentration in the History of Islamic Thought. **(Muslimah Reformis, 2025)** The pinnacle of her academic achievement was marked in 1997 when she successfully defended her dissertation and became the first woman to earn a Doctorate in Islamic Political Thought from IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. This choice of field was deliberate. Musdah consciously chose to specialize in Islamic Political Thought to gain a profound understanding of the relationship between Islamic teachings, political systems, and issues of justice particularly justice for women.

In her dissertation, Musdah examined the ideas of Husain Haikal, an Egyptian Muslim intellectual, regarding the concept of an Islamic state. She sought to investigate whether the concept of an Islamic state, often advocated by conservative groups, was relevant for implementation in Indonesia. Her unease with the political practices in Indonesia, which she perceived as corrupt and distant from moral values often serving only the interests of power drove her to explore political concepts aligned with the noble values of Islam, namely politics based on *tawhid* (divine oneness) and the welfare of the *ummah* (community).

Beyond her formal education, Musdah actively participated in various non-formal education programs and short courses on the international stage. She received a scholarship for Human Rights (HAM) education at Lund University, Sweden (2001), as well as leadership management training for women in Dhaka, Bangladesh (2002). These experiences further enriched her perspective in advocating for human rights and gender equality. (Mulia, 2014, p. 178) Musdah's career began as a lecturer at various universities. However, in 1985, she decided to join the civil service as a State Civil Apparatus (*Pegawai Negeri Sipil/PNS*) at the Center for Religious Literature Research (*Balai Penelitian Lektur Agama*) in Makassar, holding the position of research staff. She made this choice to ensure she still had the space and time for teaching a world she deeply loved. Her dedication and intellect led her to climb a brilliant career ladder all the way to the center of power in the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

History recorded her name once more in 1999 when Musdah was inaugurated as a Research Professor in Religious Literature within the Department of Religion. She became the first woman to hold this prestigious position in the Department of Religion an achievement that shattered the stigma that the world of research, especially within religious institutions, was

a male-dominated domain. Her courage in entering this sphere considered masculine proved that women possess equal intellectual capacity to become experts and leaders in the field of religion.

Musdah's reputation as a progressive Muslim woman scholar is recognized not only nationally but also internationally. She was once invited as a visiting professor at Wellesley College in Massachusetts, United States. Wellesley is a prestigious women's college that has produced many prominent global female figures. There, Musdah actively participated as a presenter for the Women's Service Project and gained invaluable insights into the importance of public service with a women's perspective. (Mulia, 2023, p. 77)

Her courage and commitment also took her to conflict zones. In February 2012, she was invited as a speaker in Afghanistan for a training session on Reproductive Health and Rights and a Regional Family Planning Conference supported by UNFPA. Her presence in Afghanistan a country known for severely restricting women's freedom of movement demonstrates how highly regarded her ideas and voice are in the global effort to advocate for women's rights in the Islamic world. (Mulia, 2023) In the realm of social activism, Musdah Mulia stands at the forefront of the struggle for pluralism, tolerance, and peace. Together with Indonesia's fourth President, KH. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), she co-founded the Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace (ICRP) in 2000. This organization was born from deep concern over the rising violence carried out in the name of religion and discrimination against minority groups. Through ICRP, Musdah strives to build inclusive interfaith dialogue spaces, promote peace, and advocate for freedom of religion and belief in Indonesia. (Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace (ICRP), 2025)

Her commitment to education and community empowerment continued with the establishment of the Mulia Raya Foundation in 2015, which she founded together with her husband. This foundation focuses on religious, civic, and humanitarian literacy education, particularly for the younger generation. It actively organizes various training programs, such as training for teachers and activists on preventing sexual violence in schools, and manages the *Muslimah Reformis* website as a public education tool to disseminate values of an inclusive and humanizing Islam. (Mulia, 2023, p. 628) As a prolific intellectual, Musdah has produced many phenomenal and provocative written works. One of her most monumental contributions is the *Ensiklopedia Muslimah Reformis* (Encyclopedia of the Reformist Muslimah, 2020). In this book, she introduces the concept of the "Reformist Muslimah" (*Muslimah Reformis*) as the identity of a Muslim woman who is not only religiously observant but also critically conscious, empowered, and actively engaged in social change.

Musdah emphasizes that Islam, through the concept of *Taubid* (Divine Oneness), is fundamentally a religion of liberation that rejects all forms of enslavement and discrimination. For her, *Taubid* teaches that only God is Almighty; therefore, no human being whether male or female may dominate or oppress another. This thought forms the theological foundation for her rejection of patriarchal culture, unjust polygamy, and domestic violence.

In addition to the *Ensiklopedia Muslimah Reformis*, Musdah has authored other books that have become important references, such as *Islam Menggugat Poligami* (2004), *Perempuan dan Politik* (2005), *Muslimah Sejati* (2011), and *Kemuliaan Perempuan dalam Islam* (2014). She also actively publishes in academic journals, addressing contemporary issues such as women's involvement in terrorism and the dynamics of feminism within Islamic organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama. (Mulia, 2013, p. 48) Musdah's path of struggle has not been smooth. Her progressive thinking has frequently sparked controversy and sharp criticism from conservative groups. She is often labeled a "liberal" figure perceived as deviating from religious teachings, particularly regarding her defense of minority rights and her views on radical gender equality.

One point of criticism concerns her perspective in the book *Islam Agama Rahmat bagi Semesta Alam*, where she is seen as validating certain sexual orientations as inherent, which has ignited heated theological debate. Another critic, Ahmad Sjafril, highlights Musdah's approach to interpreting the concept of disbelief (*kekafiran*), considering it overly broad and risky. (Sabili.id, 2025) Yet, Musdah faces all such criticism with steadfast conviction. She believes that differing interpretations are an inevitability and part of intellectual discourse. She remains consistent in voicing justice and humanity, holding firm to the belief that Islam is a religion of mercy for all creation, which must be translated into concrete advocacy for the oppressed.

Beyond her vocal and firm public persona, Musdah Mulia is a loving wife and mother. She married Prof. Dr. KH. Ahmad Thib Raya in 1984. They met when both were still students at UIN Alauddin Makassar. Their family life reflects the values of equality that Musdah champions. Her husband, also an academic and religious scholar, is a true life partner who fully supports Musdah's endeavors. In an interview, Ahmad Thib Raya shared that Musdah is a wife deeply attentive to her husband's well-being, and their relationship is based on a principle of reciprocity. They often discuss academic and social issues, respecting each other's differing opinions. It is this unwavering family support that serves as the primary fuel for Musdah to stand firm and voice truth even amid storms of criticism.

For her tireless dedication and struggle, Musdah Mulia has received numerous prestigious awards. These include the International Women of Courage Award from the United States Government in 2007, the Yap Thiam Hien Award in 2008 for her advocacy of human rights, and an award from the Indonesian Association for Social Sciences in 2013. (Mulia, 2014, p. 178) Musdah Mulia is not merely an academic; she is an embodiment of resistance against injustice and a torch of enlightenment for Muslim women in Indonesia.

2. Tauhid as the Foundation for Gender Justice and Equality

The word *Tauhid* originates from Arabic and is the verbal noun (*mashdar*) derived from the augmented trilateral past tense verb (*fi'il madhi tsulasi mazid*) وَحَدَّ - يُوحِدُ - تَوْحِيدًا (*wahhada - yuwahhidu - tauhiidan*), which means "to make one" or "to unify." Its meaning is to believe in the existence of the One and Only God, Allah SWT. Simply put, *Tauhid* is the conviction in the oneness of Allah. (Ahmad Warson Al-Munawwir, 1997, p. 470) Muhammad Abduh explains that *Tauhid* is the science which discusses: the existence of Allah; the attributes necessarily inherent in Him (*sifat al-wajib*), the attributes that may be ascribed to Him (*sifat al-ja'iz*), the attributes that must be negated from Him (*sifat al-mustabil*); as well as discussions concerning the Messengers of Allah and the affirmation of their prophethood. (Abduh, 1992, p. 3) According to Husein Afandi al-Jisr, *Tauhid* is the discipline concerned with establishing the tenets of the Islamic faith through definitive, evidentiary proofs (*dalil*). (Asmuni, 1993, p. 5) According to Ibn Khaldun, it is defined as the discipline containing rational arguments to defend articles of faith, employing intellectual proofs (*dalil-dalil pikiran*) and comprising refutations of those who deviate from the beliefs of *Ahl al-Sunnah* (the Sunni orthodoxy). (Hasbi, 2015, p. 2)

Ismail Raji al-Faruqi expanded the scope of Tawhid to encompass the dimensions of knowledge and civilization. Al-Faruqi defined Tawhid as a comprehensive worldview of reality, truth, the world, space and time, and human history, which includes the principles of duality, ideationality, theology, humanity's capacity to harness nature, and the responsibility of moral judgment. (Al-Faruqi and Lois, 2003)

a. According to al-Faruqi, the implications of Tawhid encompass:

- a. The Principle of Truth (Epistemology): Tawhid is the acknowledgment that Allah, as the Truth (al-Haq), exists and is One, which can be verified by human reason. This demands the unification of truth between divine revelation and rational evidence. (al-Faruqi, 1988, pp. 39–40)

b. The Principle of Metaphysics: Tawhid negates all other forces operating in the universe apart from the power of God. Natural law is the eternal, unchanging initiative of God, making Tawhid the antithesis of myth and the secularization of nature.

c. The Principle of Axiology & Ethics: Tawhid affirms that human beings are created for worship and service to God, and are required to demonstrate moral worth through their deeds.(Al-Faruqi & Lois, 2003, p. 119)

Musdah Mulia explicitly adopts a definition which explains that Tawhid is the absolute acknowledgment that only Allah SWT possesses absolute sovereignty, power, and majesty. The consequence of this principle is the rejection of all forms of oppression, enslavement, and human domination over other human beings. Musdah Mulia argues that the patriarchal culture which positions men as entitled to dominate women is an act contrary to Tawhid, as it creates earthly partners for God by claiming absolute authority.(Mulia, 2020, p. 25)

Musdah Mulia positions Tawhid as the primary foundation in constructing her theory of equality. Tawhid is a sharia teaching practiced and taught by the Prophet Muhammad to all humankind on earth. There are at least several key points emphasized by Musdah Mulia regarding this teaching of Tawhid, among others:

a. Tawhid as the primary foundation of life.(Mulia, 2020, pp. 25–27)

Tawhid is understood as the totality of submission to Allah, manifested through complete obedience to all His commands and the rejection of any form of association. This concept serves as the ontological foundation affirming that Allah is the sole absolute reality upon which all depends, as articulated in Surah Al-Ikhlās. This fundamental belief is not merely cognitive knowledge, but a transformative force that Prophet Muhammad SAW utilized to overhaul the structures of life from the ideological to the practical level, and to liberate humanity from fear of other creatures and the shackles of base desires.

Musdah corrects the understanding of pre-Islamic Jahiliyah Arab society, which in essence had acknowledged the existence of Allah as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. However, this belief was deemed flawed and did not lead them to the status of *Mukmin* (true believers) due to theological inconsistency, namely the worship of idols and extreme tribal fanaticism. Tawhid emerged as the antithesis to this jahiliyah structure, carrying a mission of liberation for the oppressed from exploitation, discrimination, and structural violence, toward a peaceful and harmonious social order.

Tawhid envisions a religious humanism that places human equality as a logical consequence of the Oneness of God. Since nothing besides Allah is worthy of deification, all forms of social stratification, and discrimination based on gender, race, or ethnicity become irrelevant and rejected. The vertical relationship with God (*hablum minallah*) automatically demands a horizontal respect for fellow human beings (*hablum minannas*). Therefore, the only variable that distinguishes a person's standing before God is the quality of their piety and spiritual achievements, not the primordial attributes attached to them biologically.

b. Tawhid as a teaching of human liberation.(Mulia, 2020, pp. 28–33)

Musdah Mulia explains that Tawhid is the antithesis of *taghut* anything worshipped, obeyed, or followed besides Allah, whether in the form of idols, human beings, or satanic forces. Obedience to *taghut* is considered the root of injustice that enslaves humanity. Therefore, the primary mission of Tawhid is to liberate people from servitude to fellow creatures and oppressive social structures. Islam, through the teaching of Tawhid, does not remain neutral toward social inequality; rather, it explicitly sides with the *mustadh'afin* (the vulnerable and oppressed), such as slaves, women, and minority groups.

It is clearly emphasized that Islam emerged to deconstruct unjust establishments (the status quo). What is considered stability or divine decree by dominant groups such as the caste system or patriarchy often constitutes a form of oppression for the weak. Tawhid dismantles claims of superiority of one group over another. The majority is forbidden from oppressing the minority; white races are not superior to black races; and men do not possess

absolute rights over women. Moreover, it is specifically stated that heterosexual groups must not look down upon other sexual orientations as abnormal or sinful, as such subservience to human judgment pollutes the purity of Tawhid, which demands equality before God.

In the context of gender relations, Tawhid functions to establish brotherhood between men and women, akin to siblings (referring to a Prophetic tradition), which implies equality, cooperation, and the elimination of domination. The historical narrative of Sayyidina Umar ibn al-Khattab is cited to demonstrate the radical transformation of the Islamic perspective, which granted full rights to women who were previously deemed worthless during the Jahiliyah era. Respect for human life, such as the prohibition of female infanticide, stands as fundamental and immediate evidence of this liberation.

c. Tawhid as the Safeguard of Justice. (Mulia, 2020, pp. 33–38)

Musdah asserts that the logical consequence of Tawhid is the establishment of the principle of justice (*al-'adalah*), which she elaborates specifically across four crucial domains. These are: First, justice within the domestic sphere (the family). Musdah highlights the family as an area vulnerable to hidden injustices, particularly against women. By referring to QS an-Nisa' [4]: 3 and 129, the text argues that the Qur'an proclaims monogamy as the most just form of marriage, while affirming the impossibility for humans to achieve absolute justice within polygamy. This places justice as the supreme principle above the practice of polygamy itself. Second, justice in the realm of law and decision-making. Tawhid demands radical objectivity, where justice must be upheld impartially, even if the decision is against oneself, close relatives, or family (QS an-Nisa' [4]: 135). Third, interpersonal and intergroup justice. The integrity of a person of Tawhid is tested when they must act justly towards individuals or groups they dislike. Feelings of hatred or animosity must not be variables that distort a just decision (QS Ali 'Imran [3]: 118). Fourth, justice for marginalized groups (orphans). Tawhid mandates the protection of orphans' rights, particularly female orphans, regarding the management of their wealth and social treatment. Practices that exploit them, such as marrying them without fulfilling their rights, are strongly condemned. Conversely, the social structure is tasked with empowering women and the most vulnerable to obtain equal rights.

d. Tawhid as a Teaching of Equality. (Mulia, 2020.)

Tawhid desacralizes oppressive social hierarchies. A king is not a god to his subjects, a wealthy person is not a god to the poor, and a husband is not a god to his wife. Therefore, fear and unconditional obedience to fellow human beings are considered deviations in creed that violate the purity of Tawhid. Tawhid transforms into an active force that dismantles barriers of discrimination and subordination. The Qur'an (QS Al-Hujurat: 13) affirms that the standard of human nobility is measured solely based on piety, not lineage, gender, or ethnicity. Both men and women hold an ontologically equal position as servants and stewards on earth (*khalifah fi al-ardh*). Both bear equal responsibility for realizing prosperity and upholding truth (*amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*) within a framework of supportive cooperation (QS At-Taubah: 71), aiming to establish a peaceful and just social order (*baladatun thayyibatun wa rabbun ghafur*).

This liberating Tawhid must be internalized through humanistic and transformative education. Tawhid does not merely transfer static dogma; rather, it aims to humanize individuals, fostering sensitivity (empathy) toward the oppressed and marginalized. This understanding is designed to cultivate intellectuals who are inclusive, tolerant, and pluralistic, capable of respecting human rights and bearing moral responsibility. Thus, Tawhid is no longer narrowly understood as mere theological knowledge about the attributes of God, but as an ethical foundation for combating structural injustice and building genuine human brotherhood.

3. Quranic Exegesis through Humanist-Feminist Theory

Interpretations produced by various groups often marginalize women. This is frequently observed in numerous exegesis (*tafsir*) works that read verses solely through a textualist lens. Musdah emphasizes and proposes that exegetes (*mufassir*) should adopt a gender-neutral stance, thereby also considering women's perspectives as living subjects. Musdah's proposal advocates for reading and reconstructing understanding through a more gender-sensitive lens, employing a humanist-feminist approach.

Humanist-feminist theory serves as a responsive approach to make the reading of religious texts (*nash*) more equitable. It places humanity within its full human context and treats gender as an integral part of that humanity without discrimination in any form. This is, of course, derived from the religious teaching that implies Islam is a mercy to all the worlds. Musdah outlines three main steps that should serve as guidelines in understanding religious texts:

- a. Identifying texts related to women. This is done to address popular texts often considered misogynistic.
- b. Studying Quranic texts and hadith in general to derive a liberating theological perspective free from patriarchal understanding.
- c. Examining texts that specifically discuss women. This begins by reading historical contexts from the past to the present, which have existed in patriarchal eras, in order to draw conclusions from the intersection of both (text and context). (Mulia, 2020, pp. 635–636)

4. Female Leadership

Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala has said:

الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ ۚ فَالصَّالِحَاتُ قَنَاطٌ حَافِظَاتٌ لِّلْغَيْبِ
بِمَا حَفِظَ اللَّهُ ۗ وَالَّتِي 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. An-Nisā' [4]:34

Fundamentally, men and women hold equal status as creatures of Allah. Both possess the same rights, opportunities, and potential to occupy positions of leadership. From the perspective of *Tanbih*, a servant's absolute obedience is solely directed to Allah Swt. Therefore, a woman's obedience to a man is not absolute in the manner of worship, as this could imply an act of *shirk* (associating partners with Allah). Islam does not consider gender a barrier to competence; anyone who possesses the qualifications and readiness, whether in the domestic or public sphere, has the right to become a leader. However, within the realm of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), scholars are polarized into two main views on this issue.

The first group of scholars argues that the right to leadership belongs exclusively to men, while women lack legitimacy to lead. This argument is based on a textual interpretation of QS An-Nisa [4]: 34 and QS Al-Baqarah [2]: 228. These verses are understood as evidence that men hold a degree of superiority and authority over women, whether as heads of households, rulers, judges (*qadhi*), or military commanders. Figures such as Al-Qurthubi and Wahbah al-Zuhaili assert that being male is one of the valid conditions for becoming the supreme leader (Imam/Khalifah). Even in the context of ritual worship, the majority

of *fuyaba* (jurists) restrict women's role to leading prayer only for congregations of women, not for men. (Mulia, 2020, p. 640)

The second group of scholars proposes a more inclusive perspective. They argue that the verses used by the first group as a foundation are actually concerned with domestic ethics, not political constitutions. Regarding QS An-Nisa [4]: 34, this group interprets the term *ar-rijal* not as "men" in a general, biological sense, but functionally as husbands. The leadership (*qanwam*) mentioned in this verse is not a natural right but a functional position contingent upon two conditions:

- a. Possession of a surplus or capability (*fadh*).
- b. The responsibility of providing financial support.

The implication is that leadership within the household is dynamic. If a wife possesses leadership capacity and sustains the family's economy when the husband is unable to meet these conditions, then the wife is entitled to be recognized as the leader. This concept affirms the equality of leadership rights between men and women, provided the conditions of competence are fulfilled.

Quranic evidence, the debate also involves the hadith narrated by Al-Bukhari from Abu Bakrah, which mentions the failure of a people who entrust their affairs to a woman. Scholars from the second group contend that this hadith cannot be used as evidence for an absolute prohibition. They view the hadith as case-specific (*kehusus*), representing the Prophet's (saw) response to the particular political circumstances of the Persian Empire when the daughter of Kisra ascended the throne amidst political turmoil. Therefore, this text is regarded as a localized historical record, not a universal legal principle that restricts women's rights for all times. (Mulia, 2020, pp. 642–644)

This interpretive approach to the aforementioned scriptural evidence serves as a crucial foundation for Musdah Mulia to advance her perspective on human freedom as fellow creations of God. Just as men have long enjoyed broad access to any sphere, women too should be equally capable and prepared to enter those same spaces. Through such a reading, a more humane and gender-sensitive impression emerges one that marginalizes no one in the shared experience of human life.

5. The Verse on Striking Wives (QS An-Nisa [4]: 34)

In contemporary exegetical discourse, the interpretation of QS An-Nisa [4]: 34, particularly the phrase *wa-dribuhunna*, often becomes a critical point of contention. A number of interpreters firmly reject the notion that this verse grants husbands a license for physical violence against their wives. Muhammad Abduh, a prominent reformist figure, asserted that striking one's wife is conduct contrary to civilization. According to him, the phrase *wa-dribuhunna* in this verse should not be understood literally as physical assault, but metaphorically as meaning to educate or impart a moral lesson.

Abduh maintained that a civilized man would not bear to hurt his partner. Even though certain classical juridical (*fiqh*) opinions may permit such an action, this permission is highly restrictive and applies only in emergency situations, not as a daily norm. The conditions stipulated by classical scholars are so stringent that they almost nullify the possibility of violence itself, including: not striking the face, not leaving any mark, not causing permanent injury, and using only a very light object such as a *miswak* stick or a handkerchief. If the strike causes injury, its status changes to forbidden (*haram*) and criminal. (Mulia, 2020, p. 685) A progressive perspective within Islamic jurisprudence, as articulated by Ibn Hazm, offers a radical view on the division of domestic roles. He argued that household duties such as cooking, washing, and childcare are not a wife's religious obligation (*shar'i* duty), but rather the husband's responsibility to provide, be it ready-to-eat meals or finished clothing. Furthermore, referencing QS At-Talaq [65]: 6 and Al-Baqarah [2]: 233, a mother holds the right to demand compensation for breastfeeding her own child.

This understanding is strongly reflected in the narrative of Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab. When a companion complained about his wife who often scolded him, Umar cited his own example of remaining silent and patient. Umar explained that his patience was a form of appreciation and empathy, because his wife had willingly undertaken strenuous tasks like cooking, washing, and raising children tasks which, in essence, were not her compulsory obligations. Umar's attitude affirms that the marital relationship must be built upon mutual tolerance, not the arrogance of authority. (Mulia, 2020, p. 688)

Fundamentally, Islam is rooted in the word *salima*, which means peace and well-being. Therefore, any form of violence is antithetical to the very spirit of Islam. The Qur'an describes marriage as *mitsaqan ghalizhan* (a solemn covenant) that necessitates *mawaddah wa rahmah* (love and mercy). The sexual and emotional relationship between husband and wife is viewed as a holistic form of worship, which cannot possibly coexist with physical intimidation. Hasan Al-Basri provided an ethical guideline for husbands: "If you love her, honor her. If you dislike her, do not wrong her." This principle is reinforced by the Prophet's (saw) hadith stating that the best of men are those who are best to their families. Furthermore, Islam places the position of the mother (a woman) as three times more deserving of honor than the father a clear indicator that violence against women is a serious violation of religious principles. Forgiving a spouse's faults is far nobler and closer to piety (*taqwa*) than physically punishing them. (Mulia, 2020, pp. 689–690)

Musdah's explanation posits that the interpretation permitting the striking of women is a form of inhumanity. An interpretation that leads to such a conclusion, and a comprehension that adopts it wholly and uncritically without proper contextualization, will result in a fatal error, perpetuating domination and patriarchy. Therefore, she advocates for a re-examination of how such textual evidences should be understood in full, adapted to their proper context.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion and analysis conducted, this article concludes several key points regarding the construction of Siti Musdah Mulia's theological reasoning on the issue of gender equality:

1. Tawhid as the Antithesis of Patriarchy: Musdah Mulia successfully reformulates the concept of Tawhid from merely a vertical article of faith into a liberating socio-ethical foundation. The principle of Tawhid affirms that absolute sovereignty belongs solely to God; therefore, any form of human domination over others including men's domination over women constitutes a form of associating partners with God (social *shirk*). In this paradigm, patriarchy is rejected not only because it is socially unjust, but because it fundamentally contradicts the principle of God's Oneness.
2. Reconstruction of Humanist-Feminist Exegesis: In her interpretive methodology, Musdah applies a humanist-feminist approach that places human values at the core of Islamic teachings. This is evident in two critical issues:
 - a. Leadership: Musdah reinterprets the concept of *qanwam* in QS An-Nisa: 34 as a conditional, functional role (based on competence and provision), not a biological privilege of men. Consequently, women possess equal rights and potential to be leaders in both domestic and public spheres.
 - b. Rejection of Violence: Musdah rejects a literalist reading of the text *wa-dribuhunna* (and strike them), arguing that Islam is a religion of mercy (*rahmat*) and peace (*salima*). Violence is considered antithetical to the spirit of Islam and the principle of marriage as a solemn covenant (*mitsaqan ghalizhan*).
3. Integration of Islamic and Humanist Principles: Musdah's thought bridges the gap between modern human rights demands and revealed texts. She demonstrates that the narrative of gender equality is not solely an infiltration of Western ideology, but a reclaiming of Islam's inherent egalitarian spirit, which has been obscured by historical and cultural

biases. A correctly understood Tawhid necessitates the establishment of justice for vulnerable groups (*mustadh'afin*), including women.

Overall, Siti Musdah Mulia offers a paradigm of inclusive religiosity where gender equality is positioned as a logical consequence of faith. Her vision affirms that to be a Muslim who truly upholds Tawhid automatically means to be a human being who is anti oppression and pro equality.

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