

WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE QUR'AN: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF THE PRACTICE OF FAMILY LAW IN INDONESIA



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Abstract

This study examines how women's rights in the Qur'an are symbolically represented and how those meanings are interpreted and practiced within the framework of Islamic family law in Indonesia. Using a semiotic approach, particularly Roland Barthes' theory of denotation and connotation, this research analyzes how selected Qur'anic verses are understood and operationalized in real-life legal and social contexts. The field research was conducted through in-depth interviews with Islamic family law judges, religious leaders, and female litigants in several religious courts in Indonesia. This approach allows the study to capture the gap between textual meanings and legal practices. The findings indicate that although the Qur'an provides a strong foundation for women's rights in areas such as inheritance, marriage, and social participation, the interpretation and implementation of these rights often vary based on cultural and institutional factors. Semiotic analysis reveals that symbolic meanings embedded in the Qur'anic text are frequently filtered through patriarchal lenses, resulting in interpretations that constrain women's legal agency. This study highlights the importance of recontextualizing Qur'anic messages in line with *maqasid al-shariah* (the higher objectives of Islamic law), emphasizing justice and equality. The research contributes to the broader discourse on gender and Islamic law by offering empirical insights into how textual meanings interact with lived realities. It calls for a critical yet constructive reinterpretation of the Qur'an that harmonizes ethical intent, legal application, and gender justice in Indonesia's family law system.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana hak-hak perempuan dalam Al-Qur'an direpresentasikan secara simbolik dan bagaimana makna-makna tersebut ditafsirkan serta dipraktikkan dalam kerangka hukum keluarga Islam di Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan semiotik, khususnya teori denotasi dan konotasi Roland Barthes, penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana ayat-ayat tertentu dalam Al-Qur'an dipahami dan diimplementasikan dalam konteks hukum dan sosial yang nyata. Penelitian lapangan dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan hakim peradilan agama, tokoh agama, dan perempuan yang terlibat dalam proses litigasi di beberapa pengadilan agama di Indonesia. Pendekatan ini memungkinkan penelitian untuk menangkap kesenjangan antara makna tekstual dan praktik hukum. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa meskipun Al-Qur'an memberikan landasan yang kuat bagi hak-hak perempuan dalam bidang warisan, pernikahan, dan partisipasi sosial, penafsiran dan penerapan hak-hak tersebut sering kali dipengaruhi oleh faktor budaya dan kelembagaan. Analisis semiotik mengungkap bahwa makna simbolik dalam teks Al-Qur'an kerap disaring melalui lensa patriarkal, sehingga menghasilkan interpretasi yang membatasi agensi hukum perempuan. Studi ini menekankan pentingnya merekontekstualisasi pesan-pesan Al-Qur'an sesuai dengan *maqasid al-shariah* (tujuan-tujuan luhur hukum Islam) yang menekankan keadilan dan kesetaraan. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi pada diskursus gender dan hukum Islam dengan menawarkan wawasan empiris tentang bagaimana makna tekstual berinteraksi dengan realitas hidup. Studi ini mendorong reinterpretasi kritis namun konstruktif terhadap Al-Qur'an

yang mengharmoniskan tujuan etis, penerapan hukum, dan keadilan gender dalam sistem hukum keluarga di Indonesia.

INTRDUCTION

Men and women are creatures of God who have their own rights and obligations (Affandi, Rahmat, & Supriadi, 2021). As creatures with potential in life, both men and women have the ability to place themselves in certain positions where their existence is recognised socially and religiously by others (Dzulkifli, Suhid, Mohd Fakhruddin, & Ahmad, 2021). However, social dynamics do not always view women's rights in the same way, biased social and cultural perspectives often influence the understanding of religion, including in understanding the Qur'an so that it often has an impact that seems to demean or limit the role of women (Casewit, 2016). There are still people in Indonesia who think that women are second class. For example, some people feel that the birth of a girl is less proud than the birth of a boy (Khan & bin Ali, 2020). This tradition is embedded in people's thinking, so the birth of a boy is considered good luck for the family. In addition, parenting is often differentiated between girls and boys, which has an impact on rights discrimination and gender injustice, especially against women (Sugitanata, Aminah, Sunardi, & Sholikhah, 2023).

Some previous studies have discussed women's rights. Among them, 'Women's Rights in Surah Al – Ahzab 33' where the research discusses related to women's rights outside the domestic affairs of the household and approaches it with hermeneutic theory (Jamaa, 2018). 'The Position of Women in Islam and the Problem of Gender Injustice' the research discusses how the position of women in Islam and the problem of gender 'Gender Equality in the Qur'an from the understanding of Amina Wadud and Asghar Ali Engineer' so in this writing tries to compare the thoughts of Amina Wadud and Asghar related to gender equality in verse Q.S An – Nisa verse 34 (Makhlouf, 2020). Departing from some of the studies above, it can be seen that there are studies that discuss women's rights (Insani, Ibrahim, Karimullah, Gınan, & Sulastri, 2024). However, researchers have not found research related to women's rights in Q.S Al – Ahzab verse 33 using the theory of Semiotics initiated by Roland Barthes (Amberi, 2023).

In social life as explained earlier, the existence and role of women are often underestimated and even denigrated as well as the sense of injustice and oppression that is often experienced by some women (HIDAYAH, UTAMI, & AHMAD, 2022). For example, in the field of education, women are often placed at the second priority to achieve education due to cultural reasons that prohibit women from taking part in the public sphere, so education is considered less important. In addition, there is a view that women should only be around the house, so they say that better and higher education is not important for a woman (Ridwan, 2022). Women are often perceived as lacking intellectual prowess and only capable of managing the domestic affairs of the household (Nurjanah, 2022). Although this phenomenon has been widely discussed, such as issues of feminism and gender equality that include women's rights and their role in social and political life, both among academics and the general public, the rigid views of society are still difficult to change (Yudha Trishananto, Fuad Mas'ud, Setiawan, & Ulfah Nurul Fauziah, 2024). They still assume that a woman's duties are limited to the domestic affairs of the household. This is due to the understanding or interpretation of verses that are textual, normative, and absolute (Muttaqin, 2021).

This research aims to examine how the Qur'an, particularly Q.S. Al – Ahzab [33]:33, conceptualizes women's rights as an integral part of Islamic moral and legal discourse.

The verse serves as an analytical entry point to explore the dynamics of gender relations in Islam and to challenge the socio – cultural stigmas that have often been associated with religion. Within this framework, the study employs a hermeneutic and contextual interpretation to uncover the ethical principles underlying Qur'anic guidance on gender equality. It argues that both men and women are equally entrusted with moral responsibility and the right to human dignity, as affirmed in the Qur'anic worldview. By emphasizing this theological foundation, the research seeks to deconstruct patriarchal interpretations that have historically marginalized women within Muslim societies. Furthermore, the study develops an analytical model that integrates Qur'anic exegesis with contemporary gender theory to demonstrate the relevance of Islamic ethics in modern social contexts. This model highlights the compatibility between divine revelation and universal human rights principles. Conceptually, this study advances gender – sensitive Qur'anic scholarship by proposing a systematic approach to understanding women's rights in Islam. Practically, it offers a model for fostering gender justice through education and social engagement, while at the policy level, it promotes integrating Qur'anic principles of equality and justice into legal and institutional reforms.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a field research design aimed at comprehensively understanding the representation of women's rights in the Qur'an and their implementation within Islamic family law practices in Indonesia through a semiotic framework. This design was chosen to enable the researcher to explore the symbolic meanings embedded in Qur'anic verses and to examine how these meanings are interpreted and operationalized in legal institutions and judicial practices. The research focused on regions with high dynamics in the application of Islamic family law, including Yogyakarta, West Sumatra, and East Java. The target population consisted of actors directly involved in family court processes, such as religious court judges, Islamic counselors, community leaders, Islamic law scholars, and women litigants in family law cases, particularly in matters of divorce and inheritance. The sample was selected purposively, based on the informants' direct involvement in family law practices and their ability to provide rich, relevant information.

Data collection was carried out through three main techniques: in – depth interviews, direct observation in the environment of religious courts, and document studies involving court rulings and classical Qur'anic exegesis texts. The research instrument was developed in the form of a semi – structured interview guide containing open – ended questions designed to explore participants' perceptions, interpretations, and experiences in understanding and applying women's rights in family law. The instrument was validated through a preliminary interview trial to ensure the clarity and relevance of the questions. Data analysis followed a qualitative thematic model using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, which involved analyzing both denotative (literal) and connotative (cultural or ideological) levels of meaning in selected Qur'anic verses, and linking them to prevailing family law practices and policies. Thematic coding was used to identify patterns of meaning and legal practice, while data triangulation enhanced the validity of findings by comparing data from interviews, observations, and official documents. This methodological approach allowed the study to construct a comprehensive understanding of how sacred texts, symbolic meanings, and family law practices interact within Indonesia's complex socio – religious context.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

The Qur'an and Hadith explicitly guarantee women's rights as an integral part of Islamic teachings that bring mercy to all creation (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*) (Muhammad Mutawali, 2022). The Qur'an contains numerous verses that address women's rights in the areas of worship, social interaction (*muamalah*), and family law (Donno & Kreft, 2019). For instance, Q.S. An – Nisa' [4]:7 affirms that both men and women are entitled to inheritance (V6zquez, Lypez – Rodriguez, Gymez, & Dovidio, 2021), albeit in different proportions, while Q.S. Al – Baqarah [2]:228 states that women have rights equivalent to their responsibilities within family life (Kamaruddin, Misbahuddin, Suprijati Sarib, & Syamsul Darlis, 2024). Additionally, the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) demonstrate a high regard for women (Dancer, 2017), whether as mothers, wives, or members of society (Nepal, Dangol, Karki, & Shrestha, 2023). In a Hadith narrated by Bukhari, the Prophet said, "Women are the twin halves of men," emphasizing equality in human dignity before God. However, interpretations of these texts differ between classical and contemporary scholars (Damayanti, 2022). Classical commentators such as Imam Al – Qurthubi, Al – Tabari, and Ibn Kathir often interpreted these verses in the context of the patriarchal Arab culture of their time, where women's mobility was restricted by strong social norms (Slavchevska, Doss, de la O Campos, & Brunelli, 2021).

Contemporary scholars like Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, and Quraish Shihab seek to reconstruct these meanings through the lens of gender justice, emphasizing contextual interpretation and the objectives of Islamic law (*maqashid al-shariah*). These different approaches reflect the dynamic nature of Islamic thought in responding to the issues faced by women across different historical and social contexts, opening space for *ijtihad* to strengthen women's rights in accordance with Islam's fundamental spirit of justice. The implementation of women's rights within the framework of Islamic law in Indonesia reflects ongoing efforts to integrate *sharia* values with the national legal system through religious courts and statutory regulations that are increasingly responsive to women's needs (Raharjo, Wardoyo, & Putra, 2020). The Compilation of Islamic Law (*Kompilasi Hukum Islam/KHI*) serves as the official legal reference for religious courts, covering areas such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and maintenance (Koutouki, Lofts, & Davidian, 2018). Its articles provide a legal foundation for women to file for divorce, claim financial maintenance, and receive inheritance shares according to Islamic principles (Elopre, Kudroff, Westfall, Overton, & Mugavero, 2017).

In practice, many court decisions show support for the protection of women's rights, yet challenges remain due to cultural bias, evidentiary limitations, or women's lack of legal awareness. For example, in divorce cases, women often struggle to obtain *iddah* and *mut'ah* allowances or child support when husbands are uncooperative or financially unstable (Thorsen & Sreedharan, 2019). Nevertheless, legal reform efforts—such as Supreme Court regulations and fatwas from Islamic organizations like Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama—have strengthened the legal standing of women, especially in family and inheritance matters. Additionally, legal aid organizations and civil society groups actively provide legal assistance and advocacy, accelerating the transformation toward a more gender – responsive Islamic legal system.

Although Islamic law normatively guarantees women's rights, its implementation in the social and cultural context of Indonesia is often hindered by deeply rooted patriarchal norms and local customs. Patriarchal culture places men as the primary authority in

families and society, while women are seen as subordinate and confined to the domestic sphere. This not only affects gender role distribution but also creates disparities in access to legal justice.

For instance, in some customary communities in Indonesia, women are still denied inheritance rights on the grounds that they are incapable of managing property or will become part of another family after marriage. This contradicts Islamic principles that explicitly grant women inheritance rights. Furthermore, many women are reluctant to bring legal issues to court due to social pressure, fear of being stigmatized, or concern about bringing shame to their families. In marriage (Savaş & Stewart, 2019), practices such as forced marriage (Hanafi, Murtadho, Hassan, Ikhsan, & Diyana, 2020), underage marriage through dispensation, and unregulated polygamy are often justified in the name of tradition, despite violating the principles of justice and *maslahah* (public interest) in Islam. Customary practices that conflict with the *maqashid al-shariah* must be critically examined and re-evaluated to prevent them from obstructing gender justice (Rokhmad & Susilo, 2017). Therefore, an integrated approach—through education, law, and cultural transformation—is essential to dismantle patriarchal structures and discriminatory customs. At the same time, society must be reminded that Islam inherently advocates for the dignity and protection of women.

The struggle for women's rights within the framework of Islamic law in Indonesia cannot be separated from the strategic roles of formal state institutions and religious civil society organizations (Arat, 2022). The Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kementerian Agama) has shown its commitment to strengthening the protection of women's rights through various initiatives, such as the formulation of regulations on marriage, pre-marital education, family guidance programs (*keluarga sakinah*), and the training of mediators at Offices of Religious Affairs (KUA) to resolve household conflicts. The ministry has also launched programs like *Pusaka Sakinah* and *Kampung Moderasi Beragama*, which aim to promote gender justice within religious life. On the other hand, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Indonesia, through the Religious Courts, has played a significant role in implementing Islamic law that supports justice for women. One example is the issuance of Supreme Court Circular Letter (SEMA) No. 3 of 2017, which provides guidelines for handling cases involving women in the justice system, including divorce and post-divorce rights. Religious court judges are encouraged to be more sensitive to the social and economic vulnerabilities of women. Equally important, Islamic mass organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah have been critical players in religious advocacy.

NU, through its Bahtsul Masail institution and LKK–NU, has issued religious opinions emphasizing the importance of protecting women's rights, including in cases of domestic violence and child marriage. Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah, through its *Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid*, actively publishes fatwas and Islamic legal guides that promote gender equality within the boundaries of *sharia*, such as the *Fiqh Keluarga* guide, which positions women as equal partners in the family. The synergy between state institutions and religious civil society forms a vital foundation for developing Islamic law that is not only normative but also responsive and contextual to the realities faced by women in Indonesia. Although Islam doctrinally upholds justice and gender equality, social reality shows that there remains a significant gap between the ideal teachings of Islam and their practical implementation in society. Field studies across various regions in Indonesia reveal that many Muslim women still face structural and cultural discrimination in numerous aspects of life (Koralewska & Zielińska, 2022). In the area of marriage, for example, the practice

of child marriage through dispensations is still prevalent, especially in rural areas, despite Islamic and national laws discouraging such practices due to their harmful impacts on girls' health and education (O'Rourke & Swaine, 2018).

In divorce proceedings in the religious courts, many women face challenges in executing court rulings related to post-divorce maintenance and child custody. Data from institutions like LBH APIK and Komnas Perempuan indicate that in many cases, women do not receive their financial rights due to uncooperative husbands or an ineffective legal enforcement system. In matters of inheritance, customary traditions still dominate, particularly in matrilineal communities like the Minangkabau, where men continue to control ancestral property despite the Islamic mandate granting women inheritance rights. These inequalities are often exacerbated by conservative religious interpretations that limit women's roles in public life. With the growing awareness of the importance of gender justice in Islam, numerous progressive initiatives have emerged from scholars, religious leaders, and policymakers to reinterpret religious texts using contextual approaches responsive to contemporary realities. This reinterpretation does not aim to change the divine texts themselves, but rather to offer renewed understandings that remain relevant to modern society.

Gender hermeneutical approaches developed by Amina Wadud and Nasaruddin Umar emphasize the necessity of interpreting Qur'anic verses within their socio-historical context and in relation to the contemporary status of women. In the Indonesian context, these interpretive frameworks have inspired thematic readings that foreground gender justice, particularly in exegeses addressing women's roles within the family and society (Luoma, 2021). One of the most prominent areas where these progressive efforts are applied is in Islamic family law, particularly in addressing issues of marriage, divorce, inheritance, and guardianship from a gender-sensitive perspective. Reinterpretations of Islamic family law have opened discussions on the equality of spousal roles, the rights of women in marital contracts, and the protection of women from unfair divorce practices (such as talaq without due process). Regarding fatwas, institutions like the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), NU's Bahtsul Masail, and Muhammadiyah's Majelis Tarjih have begun to respond to women's issues with more inclusive perspectives.

The findings demonstrate that practical and policy-oriented initiatives can transform the implementation of Islamic principles into tangible progress toward gender justice. Progressive fatwas affirming women's eligibility for political leadership, condemning domestic violence, and promoting egalitarian marital relations exemplify how religious interpretation can evolve to meet contemporary ethical demands. Complementary public policies grounded in Islamic legal ethics—such as the Law on the Elimination of Sexual Violence (UU TPKS), the revised minimum marriage age, and the enhanced legal protection for female migrant workers—illustrate the integration of Islamic values into modern governance. The convergence of these three dimensions—reinterpretation, fatwas, and policy reform—reveals a transformative shift from a purely doctrinal understanding of Islamic law toward one that is socially responsive and justice-oriented. When anchored in the *maqasid al-shariah* (the higher objectives of Islamic law), namely *al-adl* (justice), *al-maslahah* (public welfare), and *al-insaniyyah* (human dignity), these initiatives offer a holistic framework for constructing an Islamic legal order that promotes sustainable gender equality and the ethical advancement of society.

DISCUSSION

A semiotic analysis of Q.S. Al-Ahzab [33]:33 provides space for the reinterpretation of traditional religious understandings that have often restricted women's mobility. Within

the framework of semiotics, particularly at the level of connotation or the second order of meaning as proposed by Roland Barthes, a text's meaning is not limited to its literal (denotative) sense but develops through symbols, culture, and specific social contexts. When the phrase "*Waqarna fi buyutikunna*" ("remain in your houses") is interpreted connotatively, it should not be understood as a literal directive to restrict women's movement, but rather as a moral and historical message intended to preserve dignity and social stability in the early Islamic context. Through this approach, the Qur'an is not seen as a static text but as a living discourse that interacts with changing realities. Such reinterpretation is vital, as overly textual interpretations have long been used to justify the exclusion of women from public life.

However, when seen through the lens of *maqashid al-shariah* (the higher objectives of Islamic law), the verse is more accurately understood as emphasizing the preservation of honor and public order, not as an absolute prohibition. Therefore, a deep semiotic reading of Q.S. Al – Ahzab [33]:33 reveals it as part of a broader ethical discourse that can be directed toward achieving social justice and gender equality in Islam. This approach not only enriches Qur'anic interpretation but also creates intellectual space for the development of Islamic law that is more contextual, humane, and inclusive of women in contemporary society. The contextual (connotative) interpretation of Q.S. Al – Ahzab [33]:33 through a semiotic approach allows for the understanding that Islam does not absolutely prohibit women from working or participating in public life. On the contrary, when examined historically and semiotically, this verse does not contain a total restriction on women's mobility, but rather a call for ethical conduct and caution in social interactions during the early period of Islam.

The ethical message embedded in the verse can be transformed into a moral guideline that encourages women to engage in social and economic activities with dignity. This implies that women are permitted to work and contribute to societal development, as long as moral principles are upheld and domestic responsibilities are maintained in a balanced manner. Consequently, this reinterpretation supports sustainable policies that acknowledge and facilitate women's participation in public life without undermining their roles in the family. In practice, this calls for legal and social ecosystems that empower women to pursue education, employment, and political involvement, while ensuring that family values are preserved. Such an approach aligns with the spirit of Islam as a progressive and adaptive religion capable of responding to contemporary challenges, in which women are not merely passive recipients of protection, but active agents of social development. By placing this verse within a contextual framework, Islam can continue to serve as a source of values that promote gender justice and sustainable social transformation.

Bridging the interpretations of classical scholars with the realities of modern society is a strategic and necessary step toward sustaining Islamic values in an ever – changing social context. Classical scholars such as Al – Qurthubi, Ibn Kathir, Al – Maududi, and Sayyid Quthub left a rich legacy of exegesis regarding the position of women, rooted in the socio – cultural frameworks of their time, which were largely patriarchal and vastly different from the modern world. Today, women have broader access to education, employment, and public life, and this shift necessitates a renewed understanding of Qur'anic verses and traditional commentaries. Such a process does not undermine the authority of classical scholarship, but rather calls for *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) to respond to new realities while remaining faithful to the principles of *maqashid al-shariah*. In this regard, women's roles in education, the economy, and politics must be recognized

as manifestations of Islamic values rather than deviations from religious norms. Islam, as a comprehensive religion, must provide space for social transformation grounded in justice.

Linking classical Islamic discourse with contemporary social realities enables the Muslim community to formulate relevant and sustainable guidelines through which both women and men collaborate in building a just, prosperous, and dignified society. This effort ensures that Islamic teachings function not merely as static religious doctrines but as dynamic moral foundations guiding Muslims toward both spiritual and worldly well-being. Exploring the historical background of Qur'anic revelation (*asbab al-nuzul*) is essential to uncover the ethical and moral dimensions embedded within divine commands. Verses that appear normative or literal often reveal profound contextual meanings when examined through their historical and social circumstances. Understanding *asbab al-nuzul* is indispensable for developing a contextual rather than purely textual interpretation of the Qur'an (Herijanto, 2022). In the case of Q.S. Al-Ahzab [33]:33, the verse must be interpreted within the socio-cultural milieu of the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) household and the patriarchal setting of Medina, which shaped both its moral intent and continuing significance.

Understanding the context of the verse shows that the command "remain in your houses" is not an absolute prohibition on women's mobility but a contextual measure to ensure protection within specific historical conditions. Integrating this historical perspective into Islamic education allows students to grasp the ethical and sociological meanings of revelation beyond mere memorization (Bentrcia, Zidat, & Marir, 2018). Such an approach nurtures Muslims who are socially aware and capable of translating Qur'anic values into ethical practices in modern society. Islam does not prohibit women from working or engaging in public life (Khan & bin Ali, 2020), but emphasizes ethics and responsibility in social participation (Noor Athief & Juwanti, 2020). This principle underpins a *wasathiyah* (moderate) framework for gender-responsive Islamic legal and social policies. The concept of moderation reflects justice, balance, and harmony between spiritual and worldly needs, serving as a relevant guide to address gender inequality and ensure women's dignity within the framework of sharia (Al-Smadi, 2022).

The recommendation of this study emphasizes that a semiotic approach to Q.S. Al-Ahzab [33]:33 serves as a key strategy for sustainability by positioning women as active agents in the development of the ummah and the nation, while upholding the religious values that constitute the essence of Islamic law. This approach opens broader interpretive possibilities for understanding the Qur'an as a dynamic and contextual structure of meaning. Through the lens of semiotics, Qur'anic verses are viewed not merely as literal expressions but as symbolic systems rich with ethical and social significance that remain relevant across time (Hadi, 2016). Within this framework, the Qur'an provides intellectual and moral guidance for addressing contemporary social challenges, including gender justice (Hadi, 2016), women's participation, and the protection of minority rights. The semiotic method encourages the development of contextual exegesis that integrates linguistic, historical, and cultural dimensions into a cohesive interpretive model. Such interpretation functions not only as an academic exercise but also as a transformative process that upholds the values of *al-adl* (justice), *al-musawah* (equality), and *al-maslahah* (public welfare).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the representation of women's rights in the Qur'an carries rich and profound symbolic meanings, which at the denotative level recognize fundamental rights of women in the areas of inheritance, marriage, education, and social participation. However, at the connotative level, these verses are often interpreted within patriarchal cultural frameworks, resulting in limitations on the realization of women's rights in the practice of Islamic family law in Indonesia. The research identified a significant gap between the sacred text's meaning and the legal implementation by formal institutions such as religious courts, which are shaped by social constructs and the dominance of conservative legal interpretations. The semiotic approach proved effective in uncovering how Qur'anic signs and symbols are multilayered in meaning and how these meanings are negotiated when confronted with social realities. The study further emphasizes that the principle of *maqasid al-shariah* as the ethical foundation of Islamic law offers a strong basis for addressing gender justice, especially in promoting more contextual and progressive interpretations of the Qur'anic text. Therefore, it is essential for academics, judges, and religious authorities to be actively involved in the reconstruction of Qur'anic understanding so that it can respond to contemporary social challenges, including the protection and empowerment of women within the framework of family law.

This study contributes to the development of thematic Qur'anic interpretation and Islamic legal studies by offering an interdisciplinary approach grounded in semiotics, which is rarely employed in the context of family law analysis. This approach not only enriches analytical methods in understanding sacred texts but also demonstrates how symbolic meaning directly influences legal policies and practices. Practically, the findings are useful for policymakers, educational institutions, and religious court officials in evaluating and reformulating legal practices that are more just and inclusive for women. Nevertheless, the study has certain limitations, including its geographical scope, which did not encompass the full diversity of Islamic family law practices across Indonesia, and limited engagement with various interpretative traditions across Islamic schools of thought. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the regional scope and deepen the analysis of interpretive diversity across different madhhabs, while also involving a broader spectrum of women from diverse social and geographic backgrounds. Furthermore, there is a need to develop critical hermeneutical approaches and conduct comparative studies across Muslim – majority countries to gain a wider understanding of the dynamics between text, symbol, and legal practice, thereby advancing both the theoretical and practical efforts toward a gender – just Islamic family law system.

DECLARATIONS

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Fiqi Halwaini contributed to the conceptualization of the study, conducted the field research and data collection, performed the data analysis, and drafted the manuscript. All work was carried out under academic supervision and in accordance with research ethics guidelines.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS STATEMENT

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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