

Gender Equality in Surah An-Nisa' Verse 32 Through Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutical Analysis

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Abstract: This study aims to reveal the meaning of gender equality in Qur'anic Surah An-Nisā' verse 32 through Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical approach, particularly the concepts of distanciation, hermeneutics of suspicion, and appropriation. This research employs a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical library research design. Primary sources include Surah An-Nisā' verse 32, classical Qur'anic commentaries, contemporary tafsir works, and Paul Ricoeur's major writings. The analysis was conducted through three stages: structural-linguistic analysis, deconstruction of patriarchal bias, and reconstruction of emancipatory meaning. The findings demonstrate that the verse's grammatical structure employs parallel active forms, *iktasabū* and *iktasabna*, which position both men and women as equal active agents. Patriarchal tendencies found in classical interpretations are influenced by socio-cultural ideologies of the exegetes rather than by the Qur'anic text itself. Through Ricoeur's hermeneutics, the verse is understood as possessing a surplus of meaning that transcends its historical context and promotes justice, equality, and recognition of women's existence. This study confirms that Ricoeur's hermeneutics is highly relevant to contemporary Qur'anic interpretation, helping construct a more critical, humanistic, and emancipatory reading of gender issues.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Surah An-Nisā' Verse 32, Emancipation, Contemporary Tafsir.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap makna kesetaraan gender dalam QS. An-Nisā' ayat 32 melalui pendekatan hermeneutika Paul Ricoeur yang menitikberatkan pada distansiasi, hermeneutika kecurigaan, dan apropriasi makna. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan jenis library research serta pendekatan deskriptif-analitis. Sumber data primer berupa QS. An-Nisā' ayat 32, kitab tafsir klasik, karya tafsir kontemporer, dan pemikiran utama Paul Ricoeur. Analisis dilakukan melalui tiga tahapan, yaitu analisis linguistik-struktural, dekonstruksi bias patriarki, dan rekonstruksi makna emansipatoris. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa struktur gramatikal ayat menggunakan bentuk paralel aktif *iktasabū* dan *iktasabna* yang menempatkan laki-laki dan perempuan sebagai subjek aktif yang setara. Penafsiran klasik yang cenderung patriarkis terbukti dipengaruhi oleh konstruksi sosial dan ideologi budaya pada masa mufasir, bukan berasal dari struktur teks Al-Qur'an itu sendiri. Melalui pendekatan Ricoeur, ayat ini dipahami sebagai teks yang memiliki surplus makna dan mampu melampaui konteks historisnya untuk menghadirkan nilai keadilan, kesetaraan, dan pengakuan terhadap eksistensi perempuan. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa hermeneutika Ricoeur relevan digunakan dalam studi tafsir kontemporer guna

membangun pembacaan Al-Qur'an yang lebih humanis, kritis, dan emansipatoris terhadap isu gender.

Kata Kunci: Hermeneutika Paul Ricoeur, Kesetaraan Gender, QS. An-Nisā' 32, Emansipasi, Tafsir Kontemporer..

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Introduction

As technology continues to advance at a rapid pace, it has revolutionized the way people interact in social, cultural, and political spheres. Digital media serves as a strategic space for the public to exercise freedom of expression and advocate for issues related to inequality, exploitation, and harm caused by irresponsible individuals. This is also inextricably linked to the discourse on gender equality. Gender equality is a social construct defined by the roles assigned to men and women, which has sparked debates within cultural contexts (Mubarakh et al., 2025).

The concept of gender equality and its implementation still face a paradox, as the discourse has largely focused on career achievements in the public sphere. An excessive emphasis on professional orientation can narrow the range of choices for women who wish to fulfill their roles as homemakers without being perceived as neglecting their gender rights (Munaji, 2024). Therefore, it is crucial to emphasize that the essence of emancipation is not about imposing a specific lifestyle choice, let alone using it as a tool to suppress or marginalize women (Darlis, 2015). Rather, emancipation must be understood as an effort to open up the widest possible opportunities so that women can determine their life paths freely, equally, and diversely according to their individual preferences (Izad, 2018).

To this day, women are still often viewed through the lens of gender bias – the assumption that certain jobs are only suitable for men. Many believe that physical factors lead to women being perceived as weak, inferior, or even less worthy than men (Marlina et al., 2024). This mindset, which places men as the superior group, is what ultimately sparked the emergence of the emancipation movement. Such conditions also result in women frequently facing discrimination in various public spaces (Husna, 2021).

Islamic history demonstrates that the status and roles of women have evolved in accordance with the dominant culture of their time. During the pre-Islamic period and the early days of Islam, treatment of women varied depending on the prevailing social norms (Adinugraha, 2018). However, the advent of Islam brought fundamental changes by granting women equal standing with men and honoring

their existence. Islam holds women in high esteem in all aspects of life and affirms the fulfillment of their rights, as emphasized in the Qur'an (Azis, 2024).

Women have the same rights and opportunities as men to participate in the public sphere, including the workforce, without having to abandon their identity and natural role as women. Neither the Qur'an nor the hadith prohibit women from pursuing careers or appearing in public spaces, as implied in Qur'anic Surah an-Nisā' (4): 32 (Basid & Miskiyah, 2022).

Qur'anic Surah an-Nisā' verse 32 is one of the key texts in this debate. This verse states that "for men is a share of what they have earned, and for women is a share of what they have earned." Structurally, this verse employs a parallel construction that acknowledges the active agency of both genders through the use of the active present tense verb forms, *iktasabu* for men and *iktasabna* for women. However, most classical exegeses frame this verse within the context of inheritance distribution or a subordinate gender role hierarchy, without giving adequate attention to its structural-linguistic implications for the ontological equality of both genders (Baidowi, 2008; Sholikhah, 2025).

Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical thought is highly relevant to efforts to reconstruct the interpretation of the Quranic Surah An-Nisa' verse 32. Through the concepts of distancing and appropriation, Ricoeur emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between meanings trapped within specific ideological interests and meanings that are open to a more authentic and emancipatory understanding (Fitri, 2014). This principle can be applied to reading the Qur'anic text as a hermeneutical space with the potential to uphold justice, rather than merely as a legitimization of unequal power structures. Ricoeur's approach helps reveal whether the interpretation of a verse has undergone ideological distortion that systematically reinforces gender inequality, while simultaneously paving the way for a more liberating reading (Ricoeur, 1976).

The concept of hermeneutic appropriation in Paul Ricoeur's thought is a key element in reinterpreting this verse. Appropriation demands that the reader not merely accept established meanings but actively free oneself from the grip of interpretations distorted by specific ideological interests (Ricoeur, 1981). This entails recognizing how the internalization of patriarchal interpretations has shaped unbalanced family relationships through uncritical processes of meaning-making. By situating the verse within the framework of Ricoeur's hermeneutic arc – moving from naive understanding, through critical explanation, toward deeper understanding – the reading of the Qur'an is not merely normative but also transformative (Ricoeur, 1976). The aim is not to reject tradition, but to re-examine the structure of meaning so that the surplus of meaning contained in the text can be

fully revealed and aligned with the universal ethical values that are, in fact, upheld by the verses of the Qur'an (Ricoeur, 1992).

This is the research gap that this study aims to address. Although previous studies have applied various approaches in examining gender equality – such as the work by Saniasa et al., who explained that the Qur'an does not discriminate based on gender regarding acts of worship, responsibilities, and social contributions – The affirmation of the principles of justice and recognition of hard work forms the basis for equality in careers (Saniasa et al., 2025). Meanwhile, Rohmatul Izad argues that the relationship between men and women within the family is not merely based on mutual complementarity; women have the same rights as men regarding work, and women also have the same political rights as men (Izad, 2018).

Reviewing previous research, there is still no study that specifically applies Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical framework (distancing, hermeneutics of suspicion, and appropriation) in a systematic and step-by-step manner to the Quranic Surah An-Nisa' verse 32. Ricoeur's framework possesses methodological distinctiveness compared to existing Islamic hermeneutical approaches: it offers explicit and verifiable analytical procedures, ranging from the semantic autonomy of the text, the deconstruction of hidden ideologies, to the reconstruction of transformative meaning (Ricoeur, 1976). It is this methodological gap that constitutes the specific contribution of this study to the body of Qur'anic hermeneutics.

This study aims to uncover the meaning of gender equality in Surah An-Nisa' verse 32 through three stages of Ricoeur's hermeneutics: first, distancing the text from its historical context; second, deconstructing patriarchal biases through hermeneutics of suspicion; and third, reconstructing emancipatory meaning through hermeneutic appropriation. Thus, this study not only offers a new reading of a specific verse but also validates the utility of Western philosophical hermeneutics as a productive methodological tool in contemporary Qur'anic exegesis.

Method

This study is a qualitative research project employing a descriptive-analytical library research design. The approach used is philosophical hermeneutics, specifically Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic framework, which integrates textual analysis, ideological critique, and the reconstruction of emancipatory meaning. The selection of this approach is based on three epistemological considerations. First, Quranic Surah An-Nisa' verse 32 is a written text possessing semantic autonomy once separated from its original context, thus requiring a method capable of treating the text as an independent object of study. Second, the interpretive traditions surrounding this verse are laden with ideological content that necessitates critical deconstruction. Third, the gender issues that are the focus of this study are

contextual-transformative in nature, thus requiring a method capable of bridging the historical meaning of the text with its contemporary relevance.

The primary data sources for this study include: (1) the text of Quranic Surah An-Nisa' verse 32 and selected classical exegetical works based on their representation of interpretive schools and historical influence, namely Tafsir al-Tabari (Ibn Jarir al-Ṭabari, d. 310 AH) as a representation of tafsir bi al-ma'tsur, Tafsir al-Kashshaf (al-Zamakhshari, d. 538 AH) as a representative of tafsir bi al-ra'y with a linguistic approach; (2) contemporary exegesis selected for its relevance to gender studies, namely *Qur'an and Woman* by Amina Wadud (1999); as well as (3) the major works of Paul Ricoeur, namely *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (1976), *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (1981), and *Oneself as Another* (1992).

Secondary sources include scholarly journal articles and books relevant to the themes of gender, hermeneutics, and contemporary Islamic philosophy, selected based on thematic relevance, journal quality, and the recency of publication.

Data analysis was conducted through three interconnected stages of Ricoeurian hermeneutics:

The first stage is historical-linguistic analysis through distanciation. In this stage, the author identifies the grammatical structure of the verse autonomously, independent of the historical context of its revelation. The specific procedures include: (a) morphological analysis of the key terms *nasib*, *iktasabu*, and *iktasabna*; (b) identification of parallel constructions between the male and female clauses; and (c) mapping the usage of the root *k-s-b* throughout the Qur'an to establish an intertextual context. An operational example: the words *iktasabu* and *iktasabna* are both past tense verbs (*fi'il madi*) derived from the root *k-s-b* in the active form, which grammatically positions men and women as equal active agents (*fa'il*).

The second stage is ideological analysis through the hermeneutics of suspicion. In this stage, the author compares the interpretations of classical (al-Tabari and al-Zamakhshari) and contemporary exegetes to identify patterns of ideological distortion. The specific procedures include: (a) extracting the exegetes' explicit statements regarding the position of women in the verse; (b) identifying the pre-understandings brought by the exegetes based on their socio-historical backgrounds; and (c) analyzing the gap between the text's grammatical structure and the resulting interpretation.

The third stage is the reconstruction of emancipatory meaning through hermeneutic appropriation. In this stage, the author integrates the linguistic-grammatical findings from the first stage and the ideological deconstruction from the second stage to formulate a new interpretation grounded in Ricoeur's principle

of the surplus of meaning (surplus of meaning), relational equality, and values oriented toward justice and the common good (Ricoeur, 1976, 1981).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Structural-Linguistic Analysis

A morphological-grammatical analysis of the Arabic text of Surah An-Nisa', verse 32, yielded linguistic findings that explicitly and measurably support the argument for gender equality. The verse reads:

"*Wa lā tatamannaw mā faḍḍala Allāhu bihi ba'dakum 'alā ba'din lil-rijāli naṣībun mimmā iktasabū wa lil-nisā'i naṣībun mimmā iktasabna*"

Table 1 below summarizes the findings of the morphological-grammatical analysis of key words in the verse:

Keywords	Root Words	Grammatical Form	Basic Semantic Meaning	Gender Implications
Nasib	nasb	<i>isim masdar</i>	Acceptable portion/portion	Each gender has an equal portion
Iktasabu	kasb	<i>fi'il madi,</i> jamak muzakkar, Active	Active efforts undertaken	Men as active actors (<i>fa'il</i>)
Iktasabna	kasb	<i>fi'il madi,</i> jamak mu'annats, Active	Active efforts undertaken	Women as active actors (<i>fa'il</i>) who are equal

The key findings of the above analysis can be summarized as follows:

First, symmetrical parallel construction. This verse employs sentence structures that are grammatically parallel and symmetrical: (*lil-rijali nasibun mimma iktasabu*) and (*lil-nisa'i nasibun mimma iktasabna*). Both clauses have identical syntactic structures – *jar-majrur* (*lil-*) + *mubtada'* (*nasib*) + *silah ma'wsul* (*mimma* + *fi'il*). There are no structural differences indicating hierarchy.

Second, the use of equivalent active forms. The words *iktasabū* and *iktasabna* are both active past tense verbs derived from the root *kasb*. Unlike the passive forms (*uktusiba/uktusibn*), which would position the subject as the recipient, these active forms explicitly position men and women as active agents (*fa'il*) who act and strive.

Third, the repetition of *nasb* without qualification. The word *nasb* (portion) is repeated twice without a modifier distinguishing the quality or quantity between

the male and female portions. The absence of such a qualification grammatically indicates fundamental equality.

Fourth, intertextual analysis. An examination of the term *kasb* in 61 verses of the Qur'an reveals that the dominant meaning is "acquisition through active effort" in a moral-spiritual context (Q.S. al-Baqarah: 286, Q.S. al-An'ām: 70, Q.S. al-Kahfi: 58), without gender-based connotations (Hakim & Ridwan, 2023).

Distancing: Semantic Autonomy of the Text

Through the process of distancing in Ricoeur's hermeneutics, the text of QS. An-Nisā' verse 32 is treated as a self-contained semantic entity, independent of the historical-sociological context of its revelation. Ricoeur (1976) asserts that a written text undergoes 'emancipation' from the author's original intent; the text speaks to readers across eras through its internal structure, not through its original context (Ricoeur, 1976).

In the context of this verse, this distancing reveals that the dominant narrative linking the verse to the context of women's limited roles in 7th-century Arab society constitutes a context-bound reading, not one that follows the demands of the text's structure. The text's grammatical structure, as shown in Table 1, autonomously points toward the recognition of an equal, active role, transcending the sociological limitations of the past. The meaning of the text, according to Ricoeur (1976), does not lie behind the text (in its historical intent), but rather before the text – that is, in the projection of a new world that the text offers to contemporary readers (Ricoeur, 1976).

Discussion

Liberating the Meaning of Verse 32 from Its Historical Context

In Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics, a written text essentially undergoes a process of emancipation or liberation from the author's original intent and its primary constraints (Kasiahe & Kuntag, 2024). When we encounter Surah An-Nisa' verse 32, we are not merely reading a record of 7th-century Arab society steeped in a patriarchal system and social inequality (Basid & Miskiyah, 2022). Through a process that Ricoeur refers to as the autonomization of the text, this verse breaks free from the shackles of the space and time that gave birth to it, then transforms into an autonomous entity open to new interpretations (Wasim, 2020). Ricoeur's concept of the "surplus of meaning" (1976) asserts that an authentic text always contains a potential for meaning that transcends what was intended by its original context (Ricoeur, 1976). The surplus of meaning in verse 32 lies in its ability to speak to distributive justice across contexts: from inheritance rights in 7th-century Arab society to equality of opportunity in the public sphere in the contemporary era.

This liberation of meaning from its historical context is urgently needed because past cultural biases often distort the universal substance of the message

contained in the Qur'an. If we remain fixated on a rigid historical-positivist approach, Qur'anic Surah An-Nisa' verse 32 might be understood merely as a regulation of inheritance distribution or as a casuistic economic right for Arab men and women of that time. Ricoeur's hermeneutics overcomes this limitation by introducing the concept of *distanciation*—an existential distance intentionally created so that the text can speak to the present world (Sumaryono, 1999). This distance is not an obstacle but an epistemological prerequisite that enables the text to shift from what is "said" (what the text says) to what is "discussed" (what the text talks about). Through this distancing, the particular sociological claims of the past are eroded, leaving behind a far more fundamental and inclusive structure of meaning.

In his commentary, al-Tabari interprets the phrase "mimma iktasabu" as referring to masculine-oriented inheritance rights and ownership, while "mimma iktasabna" is restricted to the context of the dowry (*sadaq*) and maintenance received by women from men (Al-Tabari, 2000). In other words, al-Tabari indirectly transforms the active parallel construction into an active-passive asymmetry: men as the ones who strive, women as dependent recipients.

Al-Zamakhshari, in *al-Kashshaf*, although more linguistically sensitive, still frames the verse within a gender hierarchy by asserting that the "merit" (*faḍl*) mentioned at the beginning of the verse refers to the superiority of men in the context of household leadership (*qawwāmah*) (Al-Zamakhshari, 2009). The methodological shortcoming of al-Zamakhshari, according to Ricoeur's analysis, lies in an inappropriate intertextual reading: he imposes the interpretation of S. An-Nisa: 34 (regarding *qawwāmah*) onto the grammatical structure of verse 32, which, on its own, does not contain such a hierarchy (Baidowi, 2008).

In contrast to these two classical exegeses, Amina Wadud (1999) in **Qur'an and Woman** interprets verse 32 in a manner more consistent with linguistic findings: "The verse confirms that both men and women have a share of what they have earned, a clear statement of gender equity in the domain of individual effort and recompense." Wadud's reading aligns more closely with the text's grammatical structure, though she does not explicitly employ Ricoeur's hermeneutics (Wadud, 1999).

This systematic comparison confirms Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion: the patriarchal bias in classical exegesis does not stem from the text itself, but from the pre-understandings of the exegetes shaped by a patriarchal socio-cultural ecosystem. Ricoeur (1981) asserts that ideology operates by justifying the existing order through systematic distortions of meaning, and this is precisely what occurs in the classical exegetical tradition regarding verse 32 (Ricoeur, 1981).

Through this process of distancing, the internal structure of QS. An-Nisa' verse 32 begins to reveal its true meaning, which transcends gender particularities. The wording of the verse, which states that "for men there is a share of what they have earned, and for women there is a share of what they have earned," must be read beyond the material constraints of the feudal era. Ricoeur teaches that the meaning of a text does not lie behind the text – that is, in the mind of the historical subject or its social setting – but rather lies in front of the text (in front of the text). This meaning in front of the text points toward the projection of a new world offered by the text to modern readers. The world projected by this verse is an existential order that acknowledges the agency, independence, and ontological integrity of every individual regardless of gender.

Once the meaning of the verse is freed from historical determinism, we can see that the concept of equality it offers is substantive. The pre-Islamic and early Islamic historical context, which placed women on the margins of the socio-economic structure, is merely a starting point. Verse 32 of Surah An-Nisa' actually deconstructs the established social hierarchy of that era by introducing a concept of justice grounded in the existential. Confining this verse to the sociological context of the 7th century is tantamount to reducing a universal divine message to a mere legal verse that is biased. Ricoeur's hermeneutics helps us see that this text is laying the foundation for a justice that applies universally.

This liberation of meaning from its historical context necessitates what Ricoeur calls the "fusion of horizons." The text's horizon, carrying a message of justice, merges with the contemporary reader's horizon, which is focused on issues of gender equality and human rights. The patriarchal biases inherent in classical interpretations which were too bound by the context of their own era – begin to peel away methodologically. Readers no longer dictate the text based on past prejudices, and the text no longer binds readers to the limitations of the past. This verse does not speak of the biological equality of men and women, but rather of the recognition of each individual's active effort (*kasb*) as the basis for moral and social judgment. Ricoeur (1992) in **Oneself as Another** refers to this as the recognition of narrative identity, whereby every individual, regardless of gender, is acknowledged through their actions and efforts (Ricoeur, 1992).

However, this liberation of meaning from its historical context is not an act of wild, subjective, or aimless interpretation. Ricoeur bridges this with the concept of autonomization through structural analysis, meaning we must still understand the meaning of the Quranic Surah An-Nisa' verse 32 itself. Structurally, the phrasing used in the verse separates men's rights and women's rights within an equal sentence structure, indicating an existential balance. This textual structure inherently rejects all forms of subordination, even when the text is placed in a

sociological vacuum. The text's objectivity remains intact because gender justice is not imposed from the outside but is derived from the semantic potential inherent within the text itself.

Modern readers are guided to engage in a process of assimilation or transformative reading (appropriation). This process is not merely a cognitive activity aimed at understanding the text, but rather an existential event in which the reader allows themselves to be influenced by the world presented by the text (Zaprul Khan, 2016). When QS. An-Nisa' verse 32 is understood as a text projecting gender balance and equality, readers are guided to overhaul their thought structures, which may still be contaminated by patriarchal culture. Liberating the text from its history, in turn, will free modern humans from the shackles of discriminatory thinking. This autonomized sacred text functions as a critical mirror that dissects social injustice in the modern era.

Through this historical decontextualization, we can also see how this verse overcomes the limitations of human language in its time. The language used in revelatory texts certainly employs signifiers understood by its original audience, yet the signified of these texts leaps far beyond historical boundaries. Ricoeur's hermeneutics views language as a living metaphor, where the term "effort" or "kasb" in this verse must not be confined solely to the meaning of the 7th-century patriarchal system. In this digital and modern era, this "effort" has transformed into a representation of intellectuality, professionalism, and equal social-political contributions between men and women. The erasure of historical distance keeps this text alive and relevant, capable of speaking directly to contemporary issues without losing its sacred authority.

By applying Ricoeur's hermeneutics, we are actually interpreting the sacred text to avoid the dangers of anachronism and irrelevance often accused by conservative interpreters. Those who insist that religious texts must be understood strictly in accordance with the *asbabun nuzul* (reasons for the revelation of the verse) have, unwittingly, stifled the transformative nature of the revelation itself. QS. An-Nisa' verse 32 possesses a subversive power against injustice, and this subversive power can only be eliminated by severing its irrelevant historical context to give birth to a contextual meaning. This transformation from historical-particular meaning to philosophical-universal meaning is the core of textual emancipation. In this regard, hermeneutics is no longer merely a tool of interpretation, but a theological act of liberation for humanity, balance, and gender equality.

Dismantling Patriarchal Bias in Classical Interpretation

In Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics, interpretation does not always begin with blind obedience; rather, it often must start with a radical skepticism through the hermeneutics of suspicion. When we confront the classical interpretation of Quranic

Surah An-Nisa' verse 32, we are not dealing with the sacred text itself, but rather with a product of human thought shaped by its sociological context. Medieval interpretations often reflect acute patriarchal biases, where the economic independence and role of women guaranteed by the verse are frequently overshadowed by interpretive constraints. A hermeneutics of suspicion serves to uncover how androcentric (male-centered) interests have unconsciously manipulated the meaning of Quranic verses (Baidowi, 2008). Uncovering this bias is not an act of discarding the intellectual heritage of the past, but rather an effort to purify God's word from the cultural distortions of its interpreters.

Ricoeur teaches that language has a layered structure that allows for the manipulation of meaning by the dominant ideology. In the classical interpretation of the term *kasb* (effort or achievement) in Surah An-Nisa' verse 32, patriarchal bias operates by narrowing the semantic space—which is inherently inclusive—to one that is severely limited for women. Classical exegetes, living within a feudal ecosystem, tended to limit the meaning of women's "effort" solely to the domestic sphere or to secondary ownership that remains subordinate to men (Sholikhah, 2025). This semantic reduction methodologically separates the emancipatory power of the verse, which actually places the efforts of men and women on an equal footing. Through Ricoeur's critical analysis, we can see that this narrowing of meaning is a form of injustice imposed by patriarchal culture upon the text of the Qur'anic verse.

Patriarchal bias in classical exegesis often obscures the structure of the text to uphold the established gender power hierarchy in society. Verse 32, which employs a balanced structure in listing the rights of men and women without subordination, is often interpreted anachronistically through the lens of other verses that are understood hierarchically. Classical interpreters frequently bring the pre-understanding that men are the absolute leaders over women into their reading of this verse, so that women's economic independence is viewed as an anomaly or a form of subordination (Al-Faruq et al., 2023). Ricoeur's hermeneutics exposes this methodological fallacy by asserting that every text must be allowed to speak on behalf of its own structure before being linked to other grand narratives. This exposure lays bare how interpretive texts often function as tools of ideological legitimization for male dominance.

From this perspective, we must be able to distinguish between first-layer texts—which are pure revelation—and second-layer texts—which are products of interpretive institutions. Patriarchal bias solidifies when religious adherents equate the particular authority of classical exegesis with the universal authority of revelation. Ricoeur helps us break this impasse by offering the concept of decontextualization—that is, exposing the sociological background of classical exegetes to reveal the limitations of their humanity. When we realize that past

interpreters were conditioned by a society that treated women as objects, we can understand why their interpretation of verse 32 became so biased. This critical awareness dismantles the false sacralization of past interpretive products and paves the way for a more just reconstruction of meaning.

This dismantling of patriarchal bias also necessitates a deep analysis of the use of metaphors and symbols in classical exegetical language. Often, theological authority is used by exegetes to justify that men's superiority over women in terms of achievement is a natural will or divine order (Faturokhman et al., 2025). Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion reveals that this "natural" narrative is actually merely a social construct uncritically adopted into religious texts to maintain patriarchal dominance. By deconstructing these texts, we can restore the meaning of Quranic Surah An-Nisa' verse 32 to its ontological framework, which views achievement as the fruit of human potential.

However, Ricoeur cautions that hermeneutics of suspicion must not stop at the stage of deconstructing past meanings alone. Once patriarchal biases have been dismantled and overthrown, the next step is to engage in a hermeneutics of restoration. By dismantling the biased classical interpretations, not to discard the text, but to salvage the message of QS. An-Nisa' verse 32 that had been buried by the biases of the era – this restoration of meaning is achieved by re-reading the text through the lens of modern gender consciousness as a new, more inclusive framework. Through the dialectic between skepticism and restoration, the sacred text does not lose its sanctity; rather, it emerges more as a liberation of humanity (Anzaikha, 2025).

This process of dismantling bias is methodologically greatly aided by Ricoeur's concept of the text's distancing from both the author and the reader. If classical exegetical texts bind themselves to the patriarchal readers of the Middle Ages, contemporary hermeneutics severs that connection. We refuse to make the worldview of medieval society the final boundary for interpreting the Quranic Surah An-Nisa' verse 32 in the present day. This severance grants the text the freedom to engage in direct dialogue with modern readers committed to human rights (Sungkar, 2023). Thus, the collapse of the gender-biased dominance of classical exegesis opens the door to a new era of emancipatory interpretation.

Through the deconstruction of this patriarchal bias, readers are also invited to reflect on how religious institutions have been produced and reproduced throughout history. We observe that the historical reality is that the majority of classical exegetes were men living within a gender-biased socio-political elite circle. The absence of women's voices (the silenced voice) in the historical production of exegesis inherently results in a legal product. Ricoeur's hermeneutics provides the theoretical foundation for reintroducing these silenced voices into the modern

interpretive space. This gendered perspective acts as a critique of the interpretive inequalities that have persisted for centuries.

The philosophical impact of dismantling patriarchal bias is the emergence of an emancipatory and transformative model of exegetical epistemology. We no longer treat classical exegetical texts as static religious references, but rather as part of the dynamic history of human thought. Quran 4:32, in fact, serves as a tool of deconstruction to test the extent to which past interpretations have deviated from the principle of justice. Contemporary interpretation is required to be more radical than the interests of a discriminatory political or cultural status quo. At this point, the hermeneutics of suspicion has fundamentally transformed our perspective on religious authority.

Uncovering patriarchal biases in classical interpretations through Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics is an important theological purification that must be undertaken. We are not undermining the meaning contained in the Qur'an, but rather tearing down the cultural walls that humans have deliberately built around His words. Surah An-Nisa' verse 32 reemerges in the purity of its meaning as a guide for humanity that rejects all forms of gender-based marginalization.

Emancipation as the Horizon of Meaning

When a sacred text such as QS. An-Nisa' verse 32 has been liberated from the confines of its history; it does not immediately become a hollow or directionless entity. Through Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics, this historical void is immediately filled by what is termed the "horizon of meaning" – a new space of possibility offered by the text to its readers. This horizon of meaning no longer speaks of the economic constraints of 7th-century patriarchal society, but rather projects a vision of emancipation. Emancipation here is not understood narrowly as a contemporary socio-political movement, but as an ontological structure inherent within the text. Analyzing this verse implies a readiness to enter a space of human liberation from all forms of gender-based alienation.

Ricoeur asserts that the ultimate goal of interpretation is not to uncover the author's hidden psychological intentions, but to reveal "the world of the text." The world revealed by QS. An-Nisa' verse 32 is an existential order in which human emancipation serves as its guiding principle. By affirming the right to the fruits of one's labor for men and women equally, this text is dismantling the walls of subordination deeply rooted in human culture. This emancipatory horizon continues to advance alongside the development of human consciousness, serving as a reminder demanding the restructuring of unequal social structures. Emancipation is not something imposed from the outside onto the verse, but rather a horizon of meaning that radiates from within the text itself.

This horizon of emancipatory meaning operates by challenging and expanding the horizon of the modern reader, who is often still confined by the biases of the times. When we read the verse progressively, a creative clash occurs between the liberating text and a social reality that may still be discriminatory. This process compels the reader to engage in critical reflection on the institutions, laws, and cultural dogmas that have long perpetuated gender inequality. Sacred texts no longer function as tools to legitimize the status quo, but rather as a subversive force that challenges the comfort of patriarchal structures. Through the fusion of horizons, readers are guided to adopt the text's emancipatory vision as a guiding principle in reconstructing social justice.

Emancipation as a horizon of meaning necessitates a profound existential transformation within the reading subject. Ricoeur uses the term "appropriation," wherein the reader does not merely master the text's meaning but allows oneself to be mastered by the world the text offers (Almirzanah, 2011). When the subject understands that the Quranic Surah An-Nisa' verse 32 projects absolute autonomy for women, the dominant male ego is compelled to submit to and conform with that justice. Emancipation thus first materializes within the reader's hermeneutic consciousness before manifesting in social action.

This emancipatory horizon liberates the concept of equality from the constraints of a reductive notion of equality. Verse 32 does not state that men and women must be identical in every respect, but rather acknowledges the distinct "striving" (*kasb*) of each within an equal structure. The horizon of meaning created is an emancipation that values existential authenticity without sacrificing itself. Women do not need to adopt men's mode of being to have their existence recognized, and vice versa. Ricoeur's hermeneutics helps us see that this text projects a world rich in plurality, where honor is granted based on tangible contributions, not merely biological identity.

An important characteristic of the horizon of meaning is that it is always open, dynamic, and never ceases to define itself. The emancipation projected by Quranic Surah An-Nisa' verse 32 will continue to expand in meaning as new humanitarian challenges emerge in the future. While in classical times this verse was understood as the emancipation of men's property rights, today that horizon has expanded to include intellectual, political, and religious authority. As social structures shift into forms we cannot yet imagine today, this text will continue to offer a relevant horizon of freedom. It is this openness that keeps revelation ever fresh (*shalih likulli zaman wa makan*) because it never exhausts its emancipatory power.

However, to grasp this emancipatory horizon, we must traverse what Ricoeur calls "the long route" of linguistic analysis. We cannot jump directly to conclusions about emancipation without examining how the linguistic signs in this verse

function to produce that meaning (Ricoeur, 1976). Terms like “*nasib*” (bagian), consistently repeated for both genders, act as a structure guiding the reader toward a horizon of justice. This grammatical structure thwarts any attempt at gender-biased interpretation that seeks to impose a veiled subordination of women’s position. This rigorous structural analysis demonstrates that the horizon of emancipation is not a subjective fantasy of the reader, but an objective goal explicitly pointed to by the text.

Through the revelation of this horizon of meaning, QS. An-Nisa’ verse 32 transforms from a mere normative-legalistic text into a hermeneutic utopia. In Ricoeur’s thought, a utopia is not an empty fantasy that cannot be realized, but rather a radical critique of current reality aimed at opening space for a better future (Walraevens, 2023). The emancipatory horizon of this verse functions as a utopian force that dismantles ideologies hidden behind the cloak of religion or culture. It challenges the current sociological order by pointing to “what ought to be” based on the highest theological will. This hermeneutic utopia provides spiritual and intellectual energy for the equality movement to continue fighting for human rights (Fauzan et al., 2024).

It is particularly noteworthy that emancipation, as a horizon of meaning, ultimately reconciles the relationship between faith and critical rationality. Ricoeur’s approach demonstrates that being critical of the historical biases in past interpretations does not mean diminishing the sacredness of the Qur’an. On the contrary, it is this critical reading that liberates God’s word from the distortions of a corrupted humanity and restores it to its original function as a guide to liberation (Ricoeur, 1981).

The emancipatory horizon gives rise to a vibrant vision, a faith unafraid of the progress of the times because it constantly rediscovers itself. To be within the horizon of meaning of this verse is to experience an encounter with God who desires freedom and dignity for all His servants, regardless of gender. In line with the arguments of Wahid, Barsihannor, and Muhaemin (2025) that gender hermeneutics of the Qur’anic text must integrate linguistics with ethical commitment, Ricoeur’s approach demonstrates that critical reading does not contradict faith; on the contrary, an honest reading of the text’s structure constitutes the highest form of respect for revelation.

Emancipation as the horizon of meaning in Surah An-Nisa’ verse 32 transforms the entire landscape of gender exegesis methodology in Islamic studies. We no longer treat the text as a restrictive ancient artifact, but rather as a gateway to liberating existential possibilities. Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics has provided a solid conceptual bridge to channel the emancipatory energy of revelation into modern civilization.

Conclusion

This study reveals three main findings. First, an explicit linguistic-grammatical analysis demonstrates that the parallel construction of the active verbs *iktasabu* and *iktasabna* in Quranic Surah An-Nisa' verse 32 inherently positions men and women as equal active agents – a structural finding that has been obscured for centuries by classical exegetical readings. Second, through hermeneutics of suspicion, it was found that the patriarchal bias in the exegeses of al-Ṭabari and al-Zamakhshari does not originate from the text, but rather from the exegetes' ideological preconceptions, which import external gender hierarchies into a grammatical structure that is inherently egalitarian. Third, hermeneutic appropriation yields a reconstruction of meaning grounded in the principle of equality, cross-contextual surplus of meaning, and the reconciliation of faith with methodological criticism.

It is important to emphasize that the above claims apply within measurable limits: this study analyzes a single verse using a single hermeneutical framework. Claims regarding gender equality in the Qur'an as a whole require a more comprehensive and comparative analysis. This limitation is not a weakness but an epistemological boundary that must be maintained to ensure that conclusions remain academically accountable.

For further research, the following are recommended: (1) Expanding the analysis to other gender-related verses of the Qur'an (Q.S. al-Nisā': 34, Q.S. al-Baqarah: 228) using the same linguistic-grammatical procedures, so that findings can be compared and generalized more validly; (2) A systematic comparison between Ricoeur's hermeneutical framework and the Islamic hermeneutics of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd and Mohammad Shahrur, identifying their methodological similarities and epistemological-theological differences; (3) A reception study to map how the emancipatory reading of verse 32 is received by the contemporary Indonesian Muslim community, which will provide a sociological dimension to these hermeneutical findings.

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