

A Critical Analysis of the Inconsistencies in Amina Wadud Gender Equality Movement in the Islamic World

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Abstract: Gender equality has long been a topic of discussion and debate. Amina Wadud, a pioneer of the gender equality movement, is controversial for initiating actions unprecedented for women. The author chooses Amina Wadud because she took unprecedented steps: becoming an imam for prayer and later a Khatib interpreting the Quran, deviating from the author's prior understanding. The issues examined include how Amina Wadud's equality movement emerged, why she initiated it, and the problems of the equality movement analyzed by her. This fieldwork involves experts researching gender issues and uses descriptive qualitative data, gathering words from observed individuals and actors. Information comes from primary and secondary sources, including Amina Wadud's books, *The Qur'an and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* and *Inside The Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam*, using the Maslaha approach. The analytical method is descriptive. The study shows that the movement, part of a series of worship activities, fundamentally contradicts the concept of Maqasid Sharia due to its potential to cause societal harm, distorting public perception of services rendered. Amina Wadud's thoughts in the present era are inadequate and irrelevant because her movement is local, focusing on defending religious freedom. As the movement spreads, gaps will emerge in areas where religious freedom is not respected. Inconsistency and insignificance of Amina Wadud's movement in modern times stem from numerous criticisms and rejections from Muslims and scholars. Her movement cannot be implemented in the general public, where the majority of Muslims are already highly intellectual.

Keywords: Gender Equality; Amina Wadud; Critical Analysis; Islamic World

1. Introduction

In the Encyclopedia of Women's Studies, gender is defined as a cultural concept aimed at creating differences in roles, behavior, ways of thinking, and emotional characteristics between men and women that develop in society. In another definition, gender can also be defined as socially and culturally constructed characteristics inherent in men and women. For example, women are seen as gentle, beautiful, emotional, or motherly, while men are seen as strong, rational, masculine, and powerful. ¹ In gender development, there are four ideas equating the women's movement with the men's movement. First, liberal feminism advocates social issues focusing on "equal opportunities and equal rights" for all without distinguishing between men and women. Furthermore, it views women as rational beings. Second, radical feminism means that women are oppressed due to physical differences between women and men, such as sexual relations. ² Because of the radical feminist movement, revolution must occur everywhere. Women must take action to change their lifestyles, experiences, and relationships with men. Third, Marxist feminism opposes the idea of radical feminism, viewing biology as the basis of gender differences, thus considering women's oppression as part of class oppression in production relations.

Women's issues are always linked to critiques of capitalists. Fourth, socialist feminism is a movement found in every social class. Although socialist revolutions do not always improve

¹ Dedi Junaidi, Muhammad Ong, and Syahlia, 'Metodologi Tafsir Amina Wadud Dalam Menafsirkan Al-Qur'an', *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 2 (2019): hal. 655.

² Sukri Abu Bakar and Muhammad Mutawali, 'Pandangan Amina Wadud Terhadap Perempuan Menjadi Imam Shalat Laki-Laki', *Schemata* 9, no. 1 (2020): hal. 16.

women's status, the understanding of socialist feminism in the 1970s was shaped by the tension between the need for feminist consciousness and the defense of Marxist materialism.³ Recently, there has been a strong movement advocating gender equality, known as gender equality, as mentioned by the author above. Amina Wadud, whose childhood name was Maria Teasley, is one of the most famous figures in the United States for her ideas promoting "gender equality." She relies on the Quran as her primary means to save women from Islamic conservatism. After that, Amina Wadud published a book on gender equality from the Quranic perspective. According to Charles Kurzman, Amina Wadud's study of women in the Quran, which she called "The Quran and Women, is based on the African-American experience and struggle for gender justice.

One of Amina Wadud's actions that inspired Muslims worldwide was promoting an unusual Friday prayer that women had not performed for 1,400 years. On March 18, 2005, she served as the Friday preacher leading the prayer at an Anglican Church in the Sundaram Tagore Gallery, 137 Greene Street, Manhattan, New York, USA. About 100 male and female congregants participated and "mingled." Due to her controversial activities, she returned to the Oxford Centre on October 17, 2008, as a pastor and prayer leader. Wadud led prayers at the Oxford Islamic Education Centre with diverse male and female congregations. According to the inviting party, liberal activists at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Education (MECO) said there is no prohibition in the Quran. Wadud delivered a short sermon before becoming the Friday prayer preacher. This sermon was the opening speech of the Islam and Feminism Conference at Wolfson College, Oxford.⁴

Moreover, Amina Wadud's movement spread to Indonesia. The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) responded to her movement by rejecting her actions based on fiqh arguments, fiqh principles, the Quran, and hadith. On June 21, 1426 H, or July 28, 2005, it was decided that women should not lead congregational prayers if there are men among the congregation. However, if women lead congregational prayers with female congregants, it is permissible. According to the schools of Al-Hadawiyah, Al-Hanafiyah, and Ash-Shafi'iyah, women should not lead men in prayer. In Al-Umm, Imam Shafi'i said, "A woman leading men in prayer is invalid. When a woman leads men, women, and boys in prayer, the prayer of the female congregants is valid, but the prayer of the male and boy congregants is invalid. This is because Allah SWT has made men leaders for women, and women cannot be protectors for others." In his book, Imam Ash-Shafi'i stated that there is no place for a woman to be an Imam in a gathering of men, whether adults or children. Imam Shafi'i's hadith and opinion above contradict Amina Wadud's actions. Her views reject the existing Maqasid Shariah, which aims to preserve life, intellect, religion, lineage, and property. Therefore, not adhering to these five principles is a major sin.⁵

This study aims to conduct a critical analysis of the inconsistencies in Amina Wadud's gender equality movement within the Islamic world by identifying and analyzing discrepancies in her approach to gender equality, both in the interpretation of Islamic texts and the application of these principles within social and cultural contexts. The research will also assess the impact of Wadud's movement on the understanding and practice of gender equality in Muslim communities and evaluate the extent to which her contributions are accepted or rejected in contemporary Islamic society. Additionally, the study will explore perspectives from scholars, activists, and practitioners to understand the challenges and controversies faced by Wadud's movement. By analyzing both historical and contemporary contexts and translating Wadud's theories into tangible policies and practices, this research aims to provide strategic recommendations that address inconsistencies in her approach and contribute significantly to gender reform in the Islamic world. The findings are expected to assist in creating a more inclusive and just Islamic society and to enhance the global discourse on gender and social justice within the Islamic context.

³ Kurdi, et.all, *Hermeneutika Alquran Dan Hadits* (Yogyakarta: eLSAQ Press, 2010), hal. 177-178.

⁴ Ahmad Baidowi, *Tafsir Feminis: Kajian Perempuan Dalam Alquran Dan Para Mufasir Kontemporer* (Bandung: Penerbit Nuansa, 2005), hal. 111.

⁵ Helfina Ariyanti, 'Peran Perempuan Dalam Alquran (Studi Epistemologi Penafsiran Amina Wadud Dan Zaitunah Subhan Terhadap Isu Gender)' (Tesis, Pascasarjana UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2016), hal. 32.

2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative research design to conduct a critical analysis of Amina Wadud's gender equality movement within the Islamic world, recognizing that the intricate nuances and complexities of her work are best explored through qualitative methods rather than quantitative ones. The qualitative approach allows for a deeper, more nuanced understanding of Wadud's impact and the surrounding discourse on gender equality in Islam. To build a solid foundation for this analysis, the research will include a thorough literature review, examining key sources such as Wadud's seminal works, including *"Qur'an and Woman"* and *"Inside the Gender Jihad,"* alongside a range of scholarly articles, books, and journals that explore her contributions and the broader feminist discourse in Islam. This comprehensive review will provide essential context, revealing the historical and contemporary landscapes of Wadud's movement and the diverse perspectives on her efforts. By evaluating existing research and contextual background, the study aims to establish a comprehensive framework for understanding the broader implications of Wadud's work.

Complementing the literature review, the study will employ content analysis to systematically scrutinize primary texts authored by Amina Wadud, as well as secondary sources that either critique or support her movement. This analytical approach involves identifying recurring themes, patterns, and potential inconsistencies within her arguments and methodologies, with particular attention given to her interpretation of Islamic texts, public statements, and actions. Additionally, in-depth interviews will be conducted with scholars, activists, and practitioners specializing in Islamic studies and gender studies to gather expert opinions on Wadud's contributions and the perceived inconsistencies within her movement. By synthesizing insights from the literature review, content analysis, and expert interviews, this study aims to provide a thorough and critical examination of the challenges and impacts of Amina Wadud's gender equality movement in the Islamic world, offering a well-rounded perspective on its effectiveness and the barriers it faces.

3. Analysis or Discussion

3.1. The Concept of Gender Equality

Islam highly values women, as evidenced by Quranic verses that clarify the important role of women in life and their role as a counterbalance to men. However, women are still oppressed and mistreated in society, particularly in Muslim communities. Amina Wadud from the United States is a feminist who, due to her cultural background, advocates for women's issues. Her research focuses on gender subjects and is centered on women. Amina is concerned with the social reality of Muslim women who often face subjugation and discrimination in highly patriarchal cultures. She believes that Islam honors the existence of women.⁶

In her book, Amina Wadud explains that women play a role as individuals. According to Wadud, the Quran treats men and women equally, as Allah mentions that "Every soul is responsible for what it has earned." As the verse suggests, responsibility is inherent and part of human life. Men and women must each have their responsibilities toward each other and Allah. Responsibility is closely related to duty. While responsibilities may or may not relate to rights, in this context, responsibility refers to duties. There is no inherent difference in individual capabilities between men and women, and their potential relationship with Allah is equal. Broadly, Islam can be divided into two parts: theoretical or doctrinal (known as Rukun Iman) and practical or actionable (the practices mandated for Muslims according to the Quran).⁷ These two aspects are referred to as faith and love. Wadud writes about three women mentioned in the Quran: the mother of Moses, Maryam, and Bilqis

⁶ M. Rusydi, 'Relasi Laki-Laki Dan Perempuan Dalam al-Qur'an Menurut Amina Wadud', *Miqot* XXXVII, no. 2 (2014): hal. 5-6.

⁷ Irsyadunnas, 'Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Gender Al Amina Wadud Perspektif Hermeneutika Gadamer', *Musawa* 14, no. 2 (2015): hal. 130-131.

(Queen of Sheba). This illustrates Wadud's attempt to explain the role of women through these figures.

The mother of Moses was deeply concerned, and Allah revealed guidance after hearing about Pharaoh's decree to bury all male babies alive. The story highlights that it is a woman's natural duty to conceive and nurture her child. Regarding gender equality, women are given the opportunity to work, just like men. However, the Quran emphasizes that women are created to be mothers, giving birth, and raising their children. Therefore, gender equality does not imply that a woman, particularly a mother, can easily neglect her primary role of nurturing and educating her children. In her story, Maryam experienced severe illness during the birth of her second child, and a messenger came with the message from Allah that she would give birth to a child. Maryam asked, "How can I be pregnant when no man has touched me, and I am not an adulteress?" The story reflects the obedience and piety of a servant who accepts Allah's decree. It illustrates that piety is not limited by gender; what differentiates individuals is their piety towards Allah. There is no evidence that one gender is superior to the other.⁸

Bilqis demonstrates how a woman can be a leader. The Quran praises Queen Bilqis for her wisdom and prudence in leadership. While some may disagree with female leadership, considering women unsuitable for leadership roles, Queen Bilqis's knowledge and intelligence made her a wise and capable leader. Amina Wadud seeks to explain that leadership is not exclusively a male domain; women with extensive knowledge and vision can also lead. Regarding gender equality in leadership positions, there is no justification for a woman to share family leadership with her husband. A man is expected to manage the household, representing the small realm of the family. More importantly than nobility is the functional responsibility and duty assigned to women by male leadership. Allah explains this in Surah An-Nisa 34. Theologically, Amina Wadud argues that while the Quran contains absolute and eternal truths when interpreted and presented through human thought, the truth of interpretations becomes relative due to the interpreter's situation. Wadud highlights male interpreters' biases against women and attempts to reinterpret Quranic verses, particularly those related to women.⁹

3.2. Patriarchal Influences in Islamic Interpretations

Amina Wadud is troubled by the plight of Muslim women due to the principles of Islamic justice. As a pure human agent, she began investigating the causes of this decline by studying Islamic teachings on women. She observed that most interpretations and legal findings in Islam were written by male scholars, who often held biased views. She argues that patriarchal culture has done much harm to women, such as replacing them, rejecting them as champions of the caliphate, and dismissing the principles of Quranic justice. Amina Wadud has fought to reinterpret these issues through a hermeneutical approach. Her concerns ultimately motivated her to write "The Quran and Women," a work that transformed the perception of Muslim women and stands out as an extraordinary intellectual project highlighting their thoughts and roles.¹⁰

According to Charles Kuzman's book on liberal Islamic discourse, Amina Wadud's study of women in the Quran, as presented in her book, is set against a historical context closely related to the struggles and experiences of African people. American women have fought for equality, and for years, the relationship between men and women in society has often shown patriarchal bias, leaving women feeling unjustly treated. Amina Wadud's fear of gender injustice in her society

⁸ Dr. Neelmani Jaysawal and Dr. Sudeshna Saha, 'FEMINISM, EDUCATION AND GENDER EQUITY-A REVIEW', *EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR)*, 21 February 2023, 241–46, <https://doi.org/10.36713/epra12444>.

⁹ Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), hal.7.

¹⁰ Muhammad Zawil Kiram, 'Feminism in Indonesia; A Study about Muslim Women and Gender Equality Movement', *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3644119>.

shaped her work, driven by an ideology of Quranic interpretation deemed biased by patriarchy.¹¹ She seeks to dismantle and reconstruct classical interpretive models shaped by patriarchal interests in her book.

In "The Quran and Women," Amina Wadud notes that men and women differ in sociocultural and biological anatomy. She states that despite these differences, the Quran recognizes that both men and women have distinct roles, both as individuals and as members of society. Rejecting the interpretations of past commentators, which she views as male-dominated and sexualized, Wadud adopts a more independent approach in her exegesis. However, she still uses the opinions of previous commentators for comparison and analysis, including Sayyid Qutb's "Fi Zilal Al-Quran" and Al-Zamakhshari's "Al-Kashaf." For translating the Quran, Wadud uses the noble Quran translated by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall and sometimes refers to "The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary" by A. Yusuf Ali.¹² Additionally, Fazlur Rahman's views on "neo-modernism" have greatly influenced Amina Wadud's thoughts on Quranic exegesis. Rahman's agreement with the holistic interpretive method chosen by Wadud, which emphasizes the normative aspects of Quranic teachings, is evident. Wadud employs Rahman's double hermeneutics theory to examine verses specifically addressing women, both individually and in relation to men. She agrees with Rahman's critique, emphasizing that patriarchal bias undermines women's place in Quranic exegesis.¹³

According to the double movement theory, antecedents are social and embrace actors because antecedents precede the actors themselves. To reveal the text's message objectively, interpreters must reject biases by prioritizing the text and examining its historical context. Rahman also believes that texts have their own contexts, and to interpret and understand a text, one must engage with the social environment in which it was created. Rahman did not use the literal meaning of the text but rather its moral values.¹⁴ Wadud notes that traditional interpretive methods fall short in addressing gender issues. She proposes works that shift the interpretive starting point based on the principles of tawhid (monotheism) contained in the Quran. Wadud suggests a monotheistic hermeneutics to highlight how the unity of the Quran encompasses all aspects, proposing a framework that involves systematic thinking to create coherence and accurately reflect the Quran's broad harmony.

According to Wadud, assumptions of gender inequality in some Quranic verses are based on errors in specific verses (khas) in relation to universal or general concepts (amm) and neglect the ethical principles required in the Quran, which are part of the value of tawhid. She argues that hermeneutics of tawhid should be guided by a common thread, meaning that any interpreter seeking to interpret a Quranic verse must face, although each reader is free to understand the text's meaning. Wadud rejects the idea that traditional interpretations are based on male perspectives and challenges interpretations from a female perspective. Her primary focus is on finding Muslim women's identity through Quranic exegesis, which she believes is biased toward men. Thus, she asserts that justice can only be reformulated in a way that supports equality between men and women. Wadud conducts a philosophical gender analysis in the Quran, highlighting its power to address the oversimplifications characterizing many conventional interpretations that suppress women's potential. She argues that amidst the complexities of civilization development, the Quran remains applicable to women. Wadud criticizes the longstanding limitations faced by women due to narrow perspectives. In relation to Quranic discourse and exegesis, her most significant contribution is her

¹¹ Maura Edmond, 'Enduring Inequalities: Fifty Years of Gender Equality Talk in the Media and Cultural Industries', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 26, no. 3 (June 2023): 428–45, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13675494221145307>.

¹² Sagnik Dutta, 'Becoming Equals: The Meaning and Practice of Gender Equality in an Islamic Feminist Movement in India', *Feminist Theory* 23, no. 4 (December 2022): 423–43, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14647001211023641>.

¹³ Rodrigo Rosa and Sara Clavero, 'Gender Equality in Higher Education and Research', *Journal of Gender Studies* 31, no. 1 (2 January 2022): 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2022.2007446>.

¹⁴ Amina Wadud, *Qur'an Menurut Perempuan: Meluruskan Bias Gender Dalam Tradisi Tafsir* (Jakarta: Serambi, 2001), hal. 14.

effort to show the theoretical and methodological connections between Quranic exegesis and the questions it raises. From this critique, Wadud proposes a conceptual framework, structure, methodology, and interpretation of the Quran. Key focuses include "what the Quran says, how the Quran says it, what the Quran means, and who says it."¹⁵

Since the Quran itself declares its universal nature for all believers, understanding the Quran from a specific cultural perspective—such as the early Islamic community under the pressure of the Prophet Muhammad—contradicts the Quran's universal goals. Therefore, Wadud's exegesis does not prioritize gender when it comes to interpreting Quranic verses. This approach aligns with the general directives of the Quran. If we consider the Quran as the word of God, we must recognize the limitations of language as a human communication tool. When discussing the language and interpretation of the Quran, one must consider how objective the interpreter is and how they address these issues. Without prior interpretation, the text remains silent and lifeless.¹⁶ Wadud argues that the root of gender disparity lies in the creation of men as described in the Quran. She seeks to highlight that the importance of "two" in the creation process is a crucial part of human creation, meaning both men and women contribute to creation and each has its advantages. Wadud rejects the myth that Eve was the cause of humanity's expulsion from paradise.

She asserts that Adam and Eve represent the first case where God warned them to avoid Satan's temptation. The Quran strives to eliminate differences between men and women or the meaning of gender differences, which helps society meet its needs and act justly. However, the Quran does not recommend any particular position or definition that describes the roles of each gender in any society. It does not specify tasks for both genders. Everyone has equal opportunities to actively participate in their duties.¹⁷ Wadud rejects the notion that God selected men as prophets and messengers because of their gender. Allah chose a man to deliver the message simply because he was effective. Wadud argues that to believe in the entirety of this scripture, one must understand the Quran's worldview and accept its purpose, body structure, and life. However, this commitment requires a broader and more global vision, not limited to local contexts, especially in a technologically advanced world.

Wadud departs from fundamental assumptions in discussing her deconstruction plan: that men and women are equal creations. She questions why there are differences in the application of the concept of "ubudiyyah" (servitude) and explains that societal habits in Muslim communities, which view men as holders of public power (religious, political, and social), indirectly alter Islam's meaning about women. Wadud claims that religion does not make women a secondary nature. Rather, it is the interpretation and application of the Quran influenced by patriarchal structures that have restricted women's freedoms in many ways.¹⁸ An example of Amina Wadud's actions is her role as an imam for Friday prayers attended by both men and women, and her work as a preacher. Her Friday sermon included the following "There is no verse in the Quran that says women cannot be imams. In the 7th century, the Prophet Muhammad allowed women to serve as imams in communities of men and women. The Prophet Muhammad appointed Umm Warqah to lead Friday prayers outside the city of Medina. As 21st-century Muslims, we have an important responsibility to increase the participation of both men and women. Women are not like ties, merely accessories. Men must treat women equally. We all move forward together in this Friday prayer. This phase shows that there are many possibilities in Islam."

¹⁵ Alexandra Avena Koenigsberger, 'Gender Equality in the Olympic Movement: Not a Simple Question, Not a Simple Answer', *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 44, no. 3 (2 September 2017): 329–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00948705.2017.1359616>.

¹⁶ Joane Nagel, 'Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21, no. 2 (January 1998): 242–69, <https://doi.org/10.1080/014198798330007>.

¹⁷ 'PEREMPUAN MUSLIM INDONESIA DAN GERAKAN KESETARAAN GENDER | Qibtiyah | JURNAL ISLAM INDONESIA', accessed 24 July 2024, <http://jiis.uinsby.ac.id/index.php/JIIs/article/view/46>.

¹⁸ Nayia Kamenou, 'Sexuality, Gender and the (Re)Making of Modernity and Nationhood in Cyprus', *Women's Studies International Forum* 74 (May 2019): 59–67, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2019.03.007>.

According to Wadud, using the method of tawhid exegesis, a systematic framework can be created to correlate and show the affinity influence according to the Quran and explain the dynamics between universal issues without leaving the Quran's background. Using language, text, grammar, and the structure of the Quran, Wadud continues to study and interpret Quranic texts, always affirming the supremacy of humanity. In this context, Wadud attempts to elucidate the Quran's meaning concerning the creation of men (the relationship between men and women and human degrees) and discusses gender equality.¹⁹ Wadud revisits the terms "nafs" and "zawj" often discussed among interpreters, starting with these two verses. She uses the term "nafs" broadly and technically, but the plural "nafs" translates as "self" and "soul." However, the term "nafs" is never used in the Quran to refer to living beings other than humans; technically, "nafs" refers to the origin of all humanity, although humans eventually proliferate and form various nations, tribes, races, and groups. In the creation story narrated in the Quran, Allah SWT never intended to create humanity with a specific gender and never refers to Adam as the first human.

3.3. Gender as a Social Construct and System of Power

Gender is a term used to distinguish between the physical, biological, and sociocultural characteristics of males and females. Gender refers to the processes that influence individuals. Sex is determined by genetic makeup, reproductive function, and anatomy (male-female), although culture can modify biological sex. Thus, in gender theory, the sexual system is treated as a space where biological sexuality becomes a product of human agency.²⁰ In a patriarchal society, the physiological states of men and women such as chromosomes, anatomy, and hormones are used to create distinct behaviors and identities, often categorized as "masculine" and "feminine." Gender roles are simplified to render women passive (attractive, obedient, responsive, sympathetic, always pleasant, friendly, and kind) or feminine (messy, aggressive, curious, knowledgeable, ambitious, cunning, responsible).

Gender differences between males and females, often referred to as gender distinctions, are deeply rooted in long-standing social and cultural constructions. Over time, societal frameworks have been established that bolster male empowerment while systematically subordinating females. This has led to the pervasive belief that such a patriarchal culture is inherently natural and inevitable. Consequently, the normality of a woman is often judged based on her adherence to behaviors and gender identities that align with these entrenched societal norms. Gender is therefore viewed not merely as a biological category but as a social construct shaped by cultural expectations and socialization processes. This understanding highlights how societal influences and cultural practices mold perceptions of gender roles and expectations.

In the context of gender theory, gender differences are perceived through an individual lens, given that traditional views typically categorize individuals strictly as either male or female, without accounting for those who embody both categories. This binary framework perpetuates a dichotomous understanding of gender, excluding the possibility of a more fluid or integrated perspective. However, the concept of androgyny emerges as a challenge to these rigid norms. It describes individuals who exhibit a combination of both feminine and masculine traits, thereby questioning and expanding beyond conventional gender classifications. By recognizing the existence of androgyny and other non-binary identities, we can better appreciate the complexity of gender and move toward a more inclusive understanding that transcends traditional dichotomies.

At the level of interpersonal relationships, gender is understood as an indication of stereotypes or class characteristics. For instance, feminine characteristics for women and masculine characteristics for men are used to instruct how a woman or man should behave in relation to the opposite sex. Therefore, men and women are expected to exhibit different signs over time in

¹⁹ Lailatul Huda and Dwi Susanto, 'Siti Walidah, Gender Equality and Modernist Islamic Women's Movement in Indonesia: A Critical History', *Islamica: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 18, no. 1 (1 September 2023): 28–49, <https://doi.org/10.15642/islamica.2023.18.1.28-49>.

²⁰ Heidy Isabel et al., 'The Gender Equality Movement in South Korea: The Semiotic Analysis of Blackpink Ddu-Du Ddu-Du', *Calathu: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 4, no. 1 (29 June 2022): 31–41, <https://doi.org/10.37715/calathu.v4i1.2457>.

everyday interactions. At the level of social structure, gender can be viewed as a system of power and power relations within many societies, as men and women have varying degrees of influence over government and society at large.²¹ In other words, gender can be seen as a system of social classification with broad implications for power and resources, such as job disparities between males and females.

4. The Relevance of Amina Wadud's Gender Equality Movement in the Modern Era

No matter how advanced a new academic paradigm may be in the modern era, it inevitably faces both pros and cons. Take, for instance, the practice of an Imam leading Friday prayers and delivering the Khutbah, a subject of considerable debate. Amina Wadud, a prominent scholar, asserts that this practice is consistent with the Quranic text and the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Her assertion is grounded in her scholarly interpretation of Islamic texts, aiming to align contemporary practices with the core principles of Islam. However, this stance has met with varying perspectives, reflecting a broader spectrum of interpretations and opinions within the Muslim community. The divergence of views highlights the complexities inherent in applying traditional religious practices to modern contexts, and the academic discussions surrounding such practices often reveal deep-seated differences in understanding and interpretation.²²

Amina Wadud's actions exemplify a remarkable level of courage and resolve. She has become known for her vocal advocacy regarding the status and treatment of women in Islam. By frequently addressing the subjugation of women and their marginalized status, Wadud challenges established norms and calls for a reevaluation of traditional interpretations of Quranic verses and Hadith. Her involvement in the feminist debate on gender equality, particularly from a human rights perspective, has spurred a significant movement among women to reexamine and reinterpret Islamic texts. This movement reflects a broader shift towards a more inclusive and equitable understanding of gender roles within Islam. Additionally, Wadud's efforts are situated within a local context where religious freedom is highly valued, allowing her to undertake bold actions that challenge conventional practices, such as leading prayers in mixed-gender congregations. Despite her pioneering efforts, she faces criticism and accusations of apostasy from some quarters, revealing the contentious nature of her work within the broader Islamic discourse.

From the discussion above, it is evident that the criticism of Amina Wadud's work holds limited significance in the current context. Her movement operates within a framework that highly values religious freedom and local autonomy, making it a pertinent example of how new interpretations can coexist with traditional practices. However, if such criticisms continue to gain momentum, they could lead to significant differences in worship practices and interpretations, especially as they relate to the perspectives of older scholars who adhere to more traditional viewpoints. The potential for divergence in worship practices underscores the challenges of integrating new scholarly approaches with established religious norms. This tension highlights the ongoing struggle between maintaining traditional practices and embracing new interpretations within the Islamic scholarly community.

One major reason why Amina Wadud's movement may struggle with effectiveness and relevance today is the substantial criticism and rejection it faces from both the broader Muslim community and academic circles. Her approach, while innovative, has not achieved widespread acceptance, particularly among educated Muslims who may perceive her interpretations as a challenge to

²¹ Frank Dobbin, Beth Simmons, and Geoffrey Garrett, 'The Global Diffusion of Public Policies: Social Construction, Coercion, Competition, or Learning?', *Annual Review of Sociology* 33, no. 1 (1 August 2007): 449–72, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.33.090106.142507>.

²² Nacima Ourahmoune and Hounaida El Jurdi, 'The March for Gender Equality of Algerian Women: The Struggle for Spatial and Historical Recognition', *Gender, Work & Organization* 31, no. 3 (May 2024): 1012–30, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13082>.

established norms and practices.²³ The resistance she encounters suggests that her reinterpretations have not sufficiently resonated with the majority of Muslims, who remain committed to traditional understandings of religious practices. Consequently, despite her bold and pioneering efforts, the majority of Muslims continue to resist the changes she advocates, leading to limited impact and acceptance of her work. This situation highlights the difficulties inherent in reconciling new academic paradigms with deeply rooted religious traditions, and the ongoing debate surrounding Amina Wadud's contributions reflects the broader challenges of navigating religious innovation in a contemporary context.

5. Conclusion

A critical analysis of Amina Wadud's gender equality movement in the Islamic world reveals a multifaceted and intricate interplay between her innovative reinterpretations of Quranic texts and the deeply entrenched patriarchal norms that pervade traditional Islamic scholarship. Wadud's hermeneutical approach, which emphasizes reexamining Quranic verses to unearth gender-equitable meanings, challenges centuries-old patriarchal biases and seeks to restore justice as originally intended in Islamic teachings. Her groundbreaking work, however, is not without its inconsistencies and criticisms. Critics argue that Wadud's selective focus on certain Quranic verses may overlook other interpretations that could also support gender equality within the established framework of Islamic jurisprudence. Additionally, her progressive ideas often face resistance in communities deeply rooted in traditional practices, where her approach is sometimes perceived as too radical or Western-influenced. This perception undermines the acceptance and implementation of her ideas, creating a significant barrier to change. Furthermore, the practical application of Wadud's theoretical frameworks remains a formidable challenge. While her intellectual contributions provide a compelling foundation for gender equality, translating these ideas into tangible societal changes requires overcoming deeply entrenched patriarchal systems that dominate legal, social, and religious structures in many Islamic countries. These barriers highlight the complexity of achieving gender justice in practice, despite the theoretical advancements made by Wadud's movement. The impact of Amina Wadud's gender equality movement, several strategic steps are necessary. First, engaging traditional scholars in inclusive dialogue can help contextualize Wadud's reinterpretations within the broader framework of Islamic jurisprudence. Second, grassroots advocacy is crucial for educating and empowering local Muslim communities, fostering change from within. Third, developing practical implementation strategies to translate Wadud's theories into tangible policies, such as legal reforms and educational initiatives, is essential. Finally, fostering cross-cultural understanding by emphasizing the principles of justice and equality in Islam can address perceptions of Western influence. With these steps, Wadud's movement can more effectively promote gender justice in the Islamic world and create a more inclusive and just society.

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