



Postcolonial Feminism: Reinterpreting Religious Texts for Global Gender Justice

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Abstract: In the era of globalization, gender inequality continues to persist within religious traditions, often reinforced by patriarchal interpretations shaped by colonial legacies that hinder women's rights and broader efforts toward global justice. This paper explores how postcolonial feminism can reinterpret religious texts to challenge these norms and promote equitable gender relations. Using a qualitative interpretive design within a descriptive-comparative framework, the study analyzes key texts from the Qur'an, the Bible, and the Vedas through contextual exegesis, etymological analysis, and dialogical engagement with participants from South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East. The findings reveal that traditional patriarchal readings stem from socio-historical contexts rather than inherent textual mandates, with colonial influences intensifying hierarchical structures. Postcolonial feminist reinterpretations uncover egalitarian potentials, including shared responsibility in Qur'anic verses, ontological equality in Biblical creation narratives, and gender balance in Vedic symbolism. The study extends postcolonial feminist theory by integrating decolonial hermeneutics into scriptural analysis, offering a framework for reimagining gender agency within sacred texts. Practical strategies, such as workshops that empower marginalized voices, demonstrate a shift toward inclusive discourse, providing pathways for policy reform and community transformation in pursuit of gender justice.

Keywords: Decolonization; Gender Justice; Hermeneutics; Postcolonial Feminism; Religious Texts

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1. Introduction

In an increasingly connected era of globalization, gender inequality in religious traditions remains a persistent and pervasive issue in various parts of the world, often reinforcing patriarchal power structures that hinder the advancement of women's rights.¹ A recent report from Open Doors International in 2024 highlights that gender-based persecution in a religious context is still rampant, especially in unsafe areas, where women face double vulnerability due to religious and gender discrimination.² Meanwhile, a 2025 global survey by the Carnegie Endowment reveals a new struggle for gender rights and family values, with opposition from conservative religious groups growing stronger, and men tending to support traditional views more than women in the 30 countries surveyed.³ This phenomenon is not only seen in the West or the Middle East, but also in South Asia and Africa, where interpretations of sacred texts are often used to justify the subordination of women, thereby hindering global gender justice efforts.⁴

Postcolonial feminism offers a critical lens through which to reinterpret religious texts, aiming to address entrenched gender inequalities that persist across diverse global contexts.⁵ This framework challenges the intersections of colonialism, patriarchy, and religious orthodoxy, which have historically shaped interpretations of sacred texts to marginalize women and reinforce hierarchical power structures.⁶ By examining religious texts through a postcolonial feminist perspective, this study seeks to uncover how these texts can be reinterpreted to promote gender justice, particularly in societies where religious doctrines significantly influence cultural and legal norms.⁷ The urgency of this inquiry stems from the ongoing global struggle for gender equity, where religious interpretations often serve as both a tool of oppression and a potential source of empowerment.⁸ This article aims to explore how postcolonial feminist reinterpretations of religious texts can dismantle patriarchal readings and foster inclusive frameworks for gender justice, emphasizing the need to address the unique challenges faced by women in postcolonial societies.

The issue of gender justice in religious contexts is not new, but postcolonial feminism brings a nuanced perspective by highlighting the compounded effects of

¹ Diastama Anggita Ramadhan, "Affecting Factor for Muslim Women to Achieve Their Political Rights in Muslim Majority Country," *Administrative Law & Governance Journal* 3, no. 4 (2020): 617–27.

² Open Doors International, "INSECURITY: The 2024 Gender Report," *World Watch Research Gender Persecution Report* (Netherlands: World Watch Research (WWR), Open Doors International, 2024).

³ Saskia Brechenmacher, "The New Global Struggle Over Gender, Rights, and Family Values" (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2025), <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/06/the-new-global-struggle-over-gender-rights-and-family-values?lang=en>.

⁴ Brechenmacher.

⁵ Umme Al-wazedi, "Postcolonial Feminism," *Companion to Feminist Studies*, 2020, 155–73.

⁶ Melanie Judge, "Navigating Paradox: Towards a Conceptual Framework for Activism at the Intersection of Religion and Sexuality," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 76, no. 3 (2020).

⁷ Adel Musaylih Almuthaybiri, "Reimagining Feminism and Gender Relations in Saudi Arabia: A New Theoretical Framework," *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies* 6, no. 2 (2024): 117–36.

⁸ Kandi Kamala and G Kamalakar, "Gender Equality and Human Rights: A Contemporary Analysis," *Int. J. Political Sci* 10 (2024): 31–35.

colonial legacies and patriarchal traditions.⁹ Prior scholarship, including works by Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Gayatri Spivak, has critiqued Western feminist approaches for their universalizing tendencies, which frequently disregard the culturally and historically specific experiences of women in postcolonial settings.¹⁰ These contributions highlight the constraints of imposing homogenized feminist paradigms onto heterogeneous religious and cultural terrains. Likewise, scholars such as Saba Mahmood have examined how religious agency can empower women within their cultural paradigms, yet their analyses typically fall short of advancing implementable reinterpretations of religious texts.¹¹ The primary limitation of previous research resides in its fragmented orientation, either concentrating on feminist theology absent a postcolonial lens or engaging postcolonialism without substantive immersion in religious texts. What is conspicuously absent in this corpus is an integrated methodological framework that amalgamates postcolonial critique with rigorous textual exegesis to generate practical instruments for gender transformation; this study addresses that lacuna by synthesizing these components into a cohesive approach that not only deconstructs oppressive narratives but also reconstructs empowering ones. This study aims to bridge these gaps by applying postcolonial feminist theory with textual reinterpretation, thereby proposing an integrated novel paradigm for reframing religious narratives in the service of gender justice.

The objective of this research is to analyze how postcolonial feminist reinterpretations of religious texts can challenge patriarchal norms and promote equitable gender relations globally. By focusing on key religious texts from major world religions, such as the Quran, the Bible, and the Vedas, this study will examine how colonial and patriarchal influences have shaped traditional interpretations and explore alternative readings that prioritize gender inclusivity. The novelty of this approach lies in its dual emphasis on decolonizing religious interpretations and centering women's voices from marginalized communities, thereby addressing the limitations of previous scholarship. Through a comparative analysis of selected texts and case studies from postcolonial contexts, this article will highlight practical strategies for reinterpretation, such as contextual exegesis and dialogical engagement with local communities. The significance of this research lies in its potential to transform religious discourse, offering a pathway to empower women by aligning sacred texts with principles of global gender justice, thus contributing to broader social and cultural change.

The objectives of this research are centered on three primary aspects, formulated as follows: 1. To analyze and reframe gender narratives within major religious texts, thereby challenging traditional patriarchal interpretations and advancing more inclusive perspectives. 2. To examine the influence of colonial legacies on the formation of gender interpretations in religious texts, including how such influences perpetuate inequalities and afford opportunities for decolonization via alternative readings. 3. To develop practical strategies for textual reinterpretation

⁹ Máiréad Dunne et al., "Gender Symbolism and the Expression of Post-Colonial National and Religious Identities," *Social Identities* 26, no. 3 (2020): 376–87.

¹⁰ Pelagia Goulimari, "Feminist Theory" (Oxford University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.976>.

¹¹ Zainal Abidin Bagir, "Saba Mahmood: Non-Liberal Feminism and a Critique of Secularism," *Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies (ICRS) News*, 2021.

that are oriented toward gender justice, employing comparative and dialogical methodologies that engage marginalized communities to facilitate the global transformation of religious discourse.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative interpretive design with a descriptive-comparative framework. The interpretive approach was explicitly chosen because it enables a nuanced exploration of meanings, interpretations, and lived experiences within religious and cultural contexts, fully aligned with the principles of postcolonial feminist hermeneutic inquiry. This design is neither purely exploratory nor grounded in grounded theory; rather, it systematically describes and compares reinterpretations of sacred texts and their lived implications across diverse postcolonial settings, thereby enhancing methodological credibility and theoretical coherence.

The selection of the sacred, the Qur'an, the Bible, and the Vedas, was guided by three rigorous criteria: (1) a documented history of patriarchal interpretations used to justify gender subordination in postcolonial contexts; (2) frequent citation in religious discourses that regulate women's roles; and (3) inherent textual potential for egalitarian re-readings rooted in justice-oriented principles. Specific verses (e.g., QS an-Nisa: 34, 1 Timothy 2:12, Rigveda 10.85) were chosen accordingly and are fully detailed in the supplementary appendix to ensure transparency and replicability.

The three regions, South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East, were selected based on shared postcolonial legacies, religious diversity, and active gender-justice discourses within faith communities. Participant recruitment followed purposive sampling, targeting: (1) women aged 18–65 actively engaged in religious practice; (2) religious leaders open to gender dialogue; and (3) local feminist scholars with relevant publications. A total of 45 participants (15 per region) were interviewed using semi-structured protocols to capture context-specific insights and avoid Western-centric universalization.

Data were synthesized using cross-case narrative pattern analysis, which included: (1) coding participant narratives along the trajectory of oppression, resistance, and reinterpretation; (2) mapping recurring patterns across texts, colonial legacies, and female agency; and (3) conducting structured descriptive comparisons between regions. Findings are reported through coherent comparative narratives, preserving contextual richness and avoiding reductive abstraction.

3. Results

This study analyzes the reinterpretation of religious texts from a postcolonial feminist perspective to promote global gender justice. The key findings demonstrate that traditional interpretations of sacred texts, such as the Qur'an, the Bible, and the Vedas, have often been shaped by colonial and patriarchal narratives, which historically marginalized women.¹² The reinterpretation undertaken in this study

¹² Medakene Keltoum and Mesaitifa Akila, "Feminist Interpretive Strategies For Religious Texts And The Hazards Of Textual Bias," *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies* 20, no. 2 (2024): 1230–45, <https://www.jlls.org/index.php/jlls/article/view/5463>.

highlights the potential of these texts to support gender equality and women's empowerment, in contrast to the dominant conservative perspectives.¹³

3.1. Reframing Gender Narratives in Religious Texts

The overall pattern of the analysis indicates that patriarchal interpretations stem from socio-historical contexts rather than from the sacred texts themselves. This synthesis reveals a consistent theme across the examined materials: interpretations that reinforce gender hierarchies arise from cultural influences, such as colonial legacies and prevailing societal norms, rather than from intrinsic textual imperatives. For instance, translations and commentaries produced during the colonial era often amplified patriarchal biases to align with imperial power structures, thereby obscuring the egalitarian elements present in the original texts.¹⁴

This study conducts a textual analysis of religious scriptures, the Qur'an, the Bible, and the Vedas, to reframe gender narratives through a contextual approach grounded in postcolonial feminist principles. This methodology underscores the importance of interpreting texts within their historical, linguistic, and sociocultural frameworks to generate readings that are more inclusive and aligned with the values of justice and equality.¹⁵ Unlike traditional approaches that often adopt literal or ahistorical perspectives, this research applies *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* analysis to the Qur'an, contextual theological interpretation to the Bible, and etymological exegesis to the Vedas. The findings reveal that patriarchal narratives long associated with these texts can be critically challenged and reconstructed to reflect their inherent values of gender equality.¹⁶ For example, the examination of Qur'an 4:34 (*Surah An-Nisā'*) suggests that the traditional reading, which positions men as absolute leaders, may instead be understood as an invitation to shared responsibility within the household, guided by the *sharī'ah* objectives of justice (*al-'adl*) and welfare (*maṣlahah*).¹⁷ Social context, such as pre-Islamic Arabian patriarchal customs and later colonial influences that reinforced male authority in family laws, concretely shaped these interpretations by prioritizing hierarchical readings over equitable ones.

The study also finds that in the Bible, particularly in Genesis 1:27, the narrative of human creation as "male and female" in the "image of God" can be understood as an affirmation of ontological gender equality. Contextual theological analysis indicates that traditional patriarchal interpretations, which often emphasize women's

¹³ Etienne Lwamba et al., "Strengthening Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality in Fragile Contexts towards Peaceful and Inclusive Societies: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 18, no. 1 (2022): e1214, <https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1214>.

¹⁴ Fatimah Salma Az-Zahra and Ahmad Nurrohim, "Contemporary Interpretation Approach in the Culture of Patriarchal Analysis in Surah An-Nisa Verse 34: Literature Review," *Eduvest: Journal of Universal Studies* 4, no. 10 (2024), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.59188/eduvest.v4i10.43671>.

¹⁵ R Indira, "Beyond Patriarchal Narratives: A Comparative Feminist Analysis of Women's Spiritual Agency and Gender Roles in Two Major Indic Traditions: Buddhism and Hinduism," *Current Research Journal of History* 6, no. 6 (2025): 1–5, <https://inlibrary.uz/index.php/crjh/article/view/101300>.

¹⁶ Abdullah Affandi, M Mu'tashim Billah, and Muh. Syaifudin, "Maqāṣidī Exegesis: A Path for Promoting Gender Equality in Contemporary Islamic Discourse," *QOF: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 9, no. 1 (2025): 61–80, <https://doi.org/10.30762/qof.v9i1.2748>.

¹⁷ Asma Syahroni and Ahmad Nurrohim, "The Meaning of Qawwam in Q.S. An-Nisa: 34 (A Comparative Study of the Interpretations of Ibn Kathir and Al-Maraghi) ," *Hamalatul Qur'an: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an* (Surakarta, Indonesia: Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta , 2025).

subordination based on Genesis 2:18–24, overlook the broader theological context of divine equality.¹⁸ Social contexts, such as the patriarchal structures of ancient Near Eastern societies and the subsequent influence of Greco-Roman hierarchies during colonial periods, played a decisive role in shaping interpretations that subordinated women, for instance, in early church doctrines that restricted female participation. By situating these texts within the cultural and theological framework of ancient Jewish society, this study argues that the creation narrative fundamentally supports an egalitarian partnership between men and women. Similarly, in the Vedas, the concept of *Ardhanarishvara*, a deity embodying both masculine and feminine principles within a single form, emerges as a profound symbol of gender equilibrium and equality.¹⁹ However, traditional patriarchal interpretations often disregard this meaning, favoring gendered hierarchies. Etymological analysis of the Vedic texts reveals that this concept can be reappropriated to support inclusive narratives that resonate with contemporary contexts. In this regard, socio-historical factors, such as caste-based hierarchies and British colonial reinterpretations that reinforced male dominance within Hindu scriptures, played a decisive role in shaping patriarchal perspectives, thereby marginalizing feminine dimensions in both ritual and societal spheres.

These findings diverge from prior scholarship, particularly conservative theological studies that sustain literal patriarchal interpretations, by employing postcolonial frameworks to reveal overlooked egalitarian dimensions. This approach expands the scope of feminist theology while preserving the core integrity of the sacred texts. To elucidate these findings, the following table presents a comparative overview of traditional interpretations and postcolonial feminist reinterpretations for each text.

Table 1. Gender Interpretation in Religious Texts: Traditional vs. Postcolonial Feminist Reinterpretation.

Text	Traditional Interpretation	Postcolonial Feminist Reinterpretation
Qur'an (An-Nisa 4:34)	Men as leaders over women, responsible for maintenance and discipline. ²⁰	Leadership seen as justice, responsibility, not based on gender; rejects exclusive domestic roles for women and opens public sphere for equality. ²¹

¹⁸ Catur Sigit Purnomo and Kosma Manurung, “Mengulik Pemahaman Tentang Gender Menurut Kejadian 1:27 Sebagai Refleksi Teologi Pentakosta Tradisional Terhadap LGBT,” *TELEIOS: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Agama Kristen* 3, no. 2 (2023): 130–44, <https://doi.org/10.53674/teleios.v3i2.65>.

¹⁹ Harshita Srivastava, “The Impact of Gender Roles in the Representation of the Divine Feminine in Hinduism with Reference to Navadurga and Dasa Mahavidya,” *Brolly* 5, no. 2 (2024): 171–90.

²⁰ Samsul Ma'arif and Irfan Tamwif, “Educational Leadership in the Family Gender Equality Perspective in Surah An Nisa’verse 34,” *EDUCATIO: Journal of Education* 8, no. 1 (2023): 101–12.

²¹ Az-Zahra and Nurrohim, “Contemporary Interpretation Approach in the Culture of Patriarchal Analysis in Surah An-Nisa Verse 34: Literature Review.”

Text	Traditional Interpretation	Postcolonial Feminist Reinterpretation
Bible (Genesis 1:27)	Creation order used to justify women's subordination in patriarchal theology. ²²	Both male and female created in the image of God; implies ontological equality and rejects the notion that creation order implies hierarchy. ²³
Vedas (Ardhanari shvara)	Gender hierarchy with masculine dominance symbolized by Shiva-Parvati. ²⁴	Ardhanarishvara as symbol of gender balance and equality; recognizes "one is incomplete without the other" and supports mutual interdependence. ²⁵

Source: Data processed from various sources, 2025

In synthesizing the analyses across the Qur'an, Bible, and Vedas, a unified theme emerges: each text inherently supports gender equality when stripped of socio-historical patriarchal overlays. This cross-textual pattern underscores how colonial and cultural contexts have universally distorted interpretations, yet postcolonial feminist approaches consistently reveal shared principles of justice, interdependence, and ontological parity. These observed findings provide a foundation for exploring broader implications in subsequent sections.

3.2. The Role of Colonial Legacy in Shaping Gender Interpretations

This study demonstrates that colonial legacies played a pivotal role in reinforcing and intensifying patriarchal religious interpretations within postcolonial societies, particularly through the imposition of rigid gender norms during the colonial era. The findings underscore the interplay between colonial policies and pre-existing conservative religious interpretations, which together produced social structures that constrained women's roles.

a. Colonial Reinforcement of Patriarchal Structures

In the context of India, the British colonial administration introduced selective interpretations of family law based on the Manusmriti, reinforcing gender hierarchies while sidelining more egalitarian local traditions, such as matrilineal practices in certain communities.²⁶ In Nigeria, the research found that the introduction of Christian family law by British colonizers, which emphasized monogamous patriarchy, displaced traditional matrilineal inheritance systems in communities such as the Igbo. Additionally, colonial Dutch and British influences on sharia interpretations in northern Nigeria tended to reinforce women's subordination in matters of inheritance and land ownership. Qualitative data from focus groups in

²² Ma'arif and Tamwif, "Educational Leadership in the Family Gender Equality Perspective in Surah An Nisa'verse 34."

²³ Lionel Windsor, "Male and Female: Equality and Order in Genesis 1:27," *The Gospel Coalition Australia*, 2019.

²⁴ Om Spiritual Shop, "The Tale of Ardhanarishvara: The Union of Shiva and Parvati," *Om Spiritual Shop Blog* (Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India: Om Spiritual Shop, 2024).

²⁵ Exotic India Art Editorial Team, "Ardhanarishvara in Art and Philosophy," *Exotic India Art*, 2005.

²⁶ Ishita Banerjee-Dube, "Family Matters: Gender, Community and Personal Laws in India," in *Gender Perspectives in Private Law* (Springer, 2023), 43–61.

Nigeria revealed that 70% of respondents identified colonial legacies as a primary factor in shaping discriminatory gender norms, with key themes including the introduction of patriarchal family laws and the marginalization of more egalitarian local traditions.

b. Postcolonial Feminist Resistance and Reclamation

Postcolonial feminist activists, particularly those from the Dalit community in India, such as members of the All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch, have challenged these interpretations by advocating for a rereading of the *Manusmriti* that foregrounds social justice and equality.²⁷ One Dalit activist in a focus group stated, “The colonial legacy imposed an interpretation of the *Manusmriti* that suppressed women, but we are reclaiming this text to support our rights.” In Nigeria, Muslim women’s organizations such as the Federation of Muslim Women’s Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) have similarly sought to challenge these interpretations by drawing on more inclusive *shari’ah* principles, including justice (*al-’adl*) and equality. A FOMWAN interviewee remarked, “The *shari’ah* laws we inherited from the colonial era often made it difficult for women to access inheritance rights, but we now use *maqāsid al-shari’ah* to assert those rights.”²⁸ By referencing movements such as the All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch and FOMWAN, alongside qualitative data from interviews and focus groups, this study provides concrete evidence of how postcolonial feminism actively works to dismantle patriarchal norms embedded within religious and colonial legacies.

These findings diverge from previous scholarship, particularly studies focused exclusively on theological aspects, by extending the analysis to encompass the interplay between colonial policies and religious interpretations, thereby illuminating the socio-political dimensions often overlooked in traditional theological discourse. To further clarify the impact of colonial legacies, the following table presents findings from case studies in India and Nigeria, outlining the colonial norms imposed and the corresponding postcolonial feminist responses.

Table 2. Comparative Analysis of Colonial Norms, Gender Impacts, and Postcolonial Feminist Responses in India and Nigeria.

Region	Colonial Norm	Impact on Gender Interpretation	Postcolonial Feminist Response
India	Selective interpretation of Manusmriti by the British to strengthen patriarchal legality and consolidate	Reinforcement of patriarchal gender hierarchy in law and culture; restriction of	Reinterpretation and resistance by Dalit activists, e.g., All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch (AIDMAM), through advocacy movements for rights, anti-violence, and

²⁷ Jahnvi Andharia and ANANDI Collective, “The Dalit Women’s Movement in India: Dalit Mahila Samiti,” *Changing Their World: Concepts and Practices of Women’s Movements PU - AWID (Association for Women’s Rights in Development)* (Toronto, Canada: AWID, 2012).

²⁸ Chibuzo I Nwanguma, “Paul and Hard Work (2 Thessalonians 3:6-10): A Christian Approach to Social and Economic Development,” *UJAH: Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities* 18, no. 1 (2017): 200–215, <https://doi.org/10.4314/UJAH.V18I1.10>.

Region	Colonial Norm	Impact on Gender Interpretation	Postcolonial Feminist Response
	control over women.	women's mobility and inheritance rights. ²⁹	Dalit women's community leadership. ³⁰
Nigeria	Integration of Christian family law and colonial Sharia that sidelined matrilineal systems and women's inheritance rights; adoption of English common law that strengthened patriarchal hierarchy and reduced women's roles in inheritance and property.	Marginalization of matrilineal systems, restriction of inheritance rights, and institutionalization of gender subordination in family and law; discrimination in the implementation of Sharia and secular law for women. ³¹	Advocacy by Muslim women's organizations, such as FOMWAN, using a maqasid al-shari'ah approach to fight for gender justice and inheritance rights; educational and legal campaigns to strengthen women's position in Nigerian Muslim communities. ³²

Source: Data processed from various sources, 2025

These findings affirm that colonial legacies not only influenced religious interpretations but also shaped social structures that continue to constrain women in postcolonial societies, thereby theoretically underscoring the necessity of decolonial approaches within feminist theology to recover the egalitarian potentials inherent in sacred texts.

3.3. Textual Reinterpretation Strategies for Gender Justice

This study identifies three key strategies for textual reinterpretation aimed at advancing gender justice within a postcolonial feminist framework: etymological analysis, intertextual reading, and the empowerment of marginalized women's voices. These strategies were tested through a series of workshops held in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in 2024, involving 40 participants, including women activists, local religious scholars, and rural community members. The workshops employed methods such as group discussions, contextual hermeneutic training, and

²⁹ Heena Parveen and Aayush Bhardwaj, "Manusmriti and Women: A Critical Analysis of Gender Norms and Misconceptions," *The Academic International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 3, no. 21 (2025): 1016.

³⁰ All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch (AIDMAM), "All India Dalit Mahila Adhikar Manch (AIDMAM) - National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR)" (AIDMAM - NCDHR, 8/1, South Patel Nagar, Second Floor, New Delhi – 110008, India: National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), 2021).

³¹ Gabriel Omachi, "Colonial Laws and the Shaping of Gender and Sexuality Norms in Nigeria," *The Open University Law School Blog* (Faculty of Business and Law, The Open University, United Kingdom: The Open University, 2025).

³² Ayesha Imam, "Women, Muslim Laws and Human Rights in Nigeria," *Wilson Center Publications* (Washington, D.C.: The Wilson Center, 2011).

collaborative text analysis to help participants understand and apply these reinterpretation strategies.

A central activity involved the etymological analysis of the term *qawwamun* in Qur'an 4:34 (*An-Nisā'*), in which participants explored its historical and contextual meanings through the lens of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* principles. As a result, 60% of participants reported a significant shift in their perceptions of gender roles. One participant, a women's activist from a rural community, remarked, "I used to think the Qur'an supported male dominance, but understanding *qawwamun* as 'guardian' has empowered me to take an active role in my family and community."

Additionally, intertextual reading exercises connected Qur'anic narratives with local Javanese traditions, such as the egalitarian values reflected in the folklore of Dewi Sri. Furthermore, amplifying the voices of women from marginalized communities, including rural women and ethnic minorities-allowed participants to contribute directly to developing new interpretations that emphasize women's roles as active agents in religious and social life.³³

These findings diverge from prior scholarship, particularly Western feminist approaches that often overlook local cultural and religious nuances, by advancing contextually sensitive strategies attuned to the sociocultural and religious realities of postcolonial societies, thereby enhancing their applicability across diverse settings.

To illustrate the success of these strategies, the following table summarizes their application and impact based on data collected from the workshops:

Table 3. Strategies for Textual Reinterpretation and Their Impact

Strategy	Description	Workshop Application Example	Main Impact/Findings
Etymological Analysis	Etymological analysis to uncover original inclusive meanings; reinterpretation of religious terms to embrace gender justice. ³⁴	Study of the term "qawwamun" (<i>An-Nisa</i> 4:34) as "manager/guardian" instead of "male leader".	60% of participants experienced a shift in gender views and supported egalitarian partnerships.
Intertextual Reading	Comparing narratives from various traditions to support equality values; connecting	Linking the justice value in Galatians 3:28 (Bible) with the concept of justice based on <i>maqasid al-shari'ah</i> and Javanese folklore (Dewi Sri).	Increases cultural relevance and strengthens cross-religious justice narratives.

³³ Abdullah Hadani, Abu Bakar, and Abd. Kholid, "Intertextuality in Nusantara Qur'anic Exegesis: A Study of Tafsir Al-Itqān Fī Ma'āni Umm Al-Qur'ān by KH. Ahmad Haris Shadaqah," *TAFSE: Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.22373/tafse.v9i2.27033>.

³⁴ Mira Fauziah, "Reinterpretation of Gender-Biased Hadiths: A Contextual Approach Towards Gender Equality in Islam," *EL-SUNAN Journal of Hadith and Religious Studies* 2, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.22373/el-sunan.v2i2.5988>.

Strategy	Description	Workshop Application Example	Main Impact/Findings
	Quranic verses with local traditions. ³⁵		
Empowerment of Marginalized Voices	Providing space and interpretive authority to women from marginalized communities; ensuring interpretations align with local life experiences. ³⁶	Input from village women and activists in textual workshops in Yogyakarta.	Interpretations more applicable and accepted by society, strengthening women's agency in real terms.

Source: Data processed from various sources, 2025

These findings confirm that textual reinterpretation strategies grounded in postcolonial feminism make a practical contribution to transforming community attitudes toward gender issues through dialogic engagement with local contexts.

4. Discussion

This study advances postcolonial feminist scholarship by demonstrating how contextually attuned hermeneutics can dismantle entrenched patriarchal structures within religious texts, thereby fostering more equitable gender dynamics in postcolonial contexts. By synthesizing textual analysis, historical case studies, and participatory reinterpretation methods, the research not only interrogates the intersections of colonial legacies and religious authority but also proposes a replicable framework for emancipatory textual engagement.³⁷ This analytical pivot underscores the study's central contribution: bridging the gap between theoretical critique and praxis-oriented reform, thereby enabling religious narratives to function as catalysts for gender equity rather than as instruments of subjugation.

The reinterpretive strategies advanced in this study expand postcolonial feminist frameworks by embedding theological exegesis within culturally grounded dialogues, refining the universalist tendencies critiqued by Chandra Talpade Mohanty in *Feminism Without Borders*. While Mohanty deconstructs Western-imposed feminisms, this inquiry employs localized hermeneutic tools, such as *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* for Qur'anic interpretation and etymological readings of Vedic motifs, to reorient religious ontologies toward mutual accountability. It also

³⁵ Izzatul Ma'wa, Riqqotul Yumna, and Moh Nor Ichwan, "The Qur'an as a Guide to Creating Harmony in Multicultural Societies," *Aceh Anthropological Journal* 9, no. 1 (2025): 86–103.

³⁶ Tika Widiastuti et al., "Capturing the Barriers and Strategic Solutions for Women Empowerment: Delphy Analytical Network Process," *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity* 10, no. 3 (2024): 100345, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joitmc.2024.100345>.

³⁷ Wojdan Omran and Shumaila Yousafzai, "Decolonising Entrepreneurship: Navigating, Resisting and Redefining," *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship* [ahead of print] (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJGE-04-2024-0115>.

challenges Saba Mahmood's notion of agency as bounded by orthodoxy, proposing an agentic praxis that enables subaltern interpreters to subvert those confines, exemplified in activist reinterpretations of biblical *imago Dei* motifs.³⁸

In conversation with Gayatri Spivak's call to un-silence subaltern epistemologies, the study positions marginalized voices as co-architects of hermeneutic paradigms, dissolving the divide between feminist theology and postcolonial theory. Educationally, these frameworks nurture interpretive literacies within madrasas, seminaries, and interfaith curricula, preparing future exegetes to navigate pluralism beyond essentialist binaries.³⁹ Collectively, these extensions forge a hybridized paradigm in which postcolonial feminism evolves from a diagnostic framework into a generative methodology, synthesizing theological depth with decolonial urgency to reconceptualize gender as a site of continuous negotiation.

On the policy front, the study's insights call for a reevaluation of faith-informed juridical structures within postcolonial polities, advocating amendments that align scriptural exegesis with the principles of distributive justice.⁴⁰ For instance, employing *maqāsid*-oriented interpretations could catalyze reforms in inheritance statutes under *sharī'ah* or in codifications of marital equity within Hindu personal law, thereby eroding the colonial imprints that have entrenched patriarchal precedents.⁴¹ Such policy interventions necessitate strategic alliances between advocacy collectives, such as those advancing Dalit feminist epistemologies or Muslim women's federations, and legislative bodies, ensuring that decolonial hermeneutics inform statutory evolution without alienating established constituencies.

Socially, the dialogic modalities explored herein signal scalable pathways for community mobilization, wherein participatory forums recalibrate collective sensibilities toward gender reciprocity. By convening diverse stakeholders in contexts similar to those piloted across Southeast Asia, these initiatives can mitigate interpretive rigidity, fostering environments in which religious authority functions as a conduit for solidarity rather than division. This dual emphasis, pedagogical for long-term epistemic transformation and juridical for immediate structural reform, illuminates pathways through which feminist coalitions can operationalize textual agency, translating abstract ideals into lived equity.⁴²

While this inquiry yields robust interpretive insights, certain methodological constraints temper its generalizability. Primarily, the qualitative emphasis on interpretive depth, anchored in archival exegesis and select case vignettes, precludes causal inferences regarding attitudinal transformation, potentially conflating

³⁸ Madiha Mohsin Syeda, "A Postcolonial Feminist Study of a Muslim Teacher's Experiences in a Predominantly White University" (University of Miami, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.20457.10089>.

³⁹ Sabrina D MisirHiralall and Kate E Soules, *Religious Literacies in Educational Contexts: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Taylor & Francis, 2025).

⁴⁰ Samuel Yonas Deressa and Mary Sue Dreier, *Theology and Ethics for the Public Church: Mission in the 21st Century World*, ed. Samuel Yonas Deressa and Mary Sue Dreier (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.5771/9781978713246>.

⁴¹ Mbaye Lo, *Political Islam, Justice and Governance* (Palgrave Macmillan (Springer Nature), 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96328-0>.

⁴² R Vasanthan et al., "Bridging Social Norms Theory and Community Mobilisation: Pathways for Overcoming Gender Stereotypes in Women's Economic Empowerment Programmes," *Enterprise Development and Microfinance*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.3362/1755-1986.25-00009>.

endogenous cultural shifts with intervention effects.⁴³ Moreover, the tripartite textual corpus, spanning Abrahamic and Indic traditions, marginalizes non-majoritarian faiths, such as animist cosmologies or Confucian-inflected ethics, whose gender semiotics merit parallel scrutiny.⁴⁴ Geographically, the study's focus on South Asian, West African, and Southeast Asian contexts risks eliding variations in Latin American syncretisms or Middle Eastern laicisms, where the afterlives of colonialism manifest differently. Future research might address these lacunae through mixed-methods designs that incorporate longitudinal surveys to measure hermeneutic influence on policy adoption or communal cohesion.⁴⁵ Expanding the scope to underrepresented traditions, such as Sufi esoterica or indigenous oral theologies, could reveal novel decolonial vectors, while examining male complicity within interpretive regimes may further enrich intersectional analysis. Ultimately, these trajectories gesture toward a more capacious postcolonial feminist theology, one that not only deconstructs but dynamically reconstructs sacred canons as foundations for global gender emancipation.

5. Conclusion

This study advances postcolonial feminist scholarship by demonstrating how reinterpretations of religious texts can dismantle entrenched patriarchal structures, thereby contributing to a nuanced framework for gender equity across diverse sociocultural contexts. Through the analytical integration of textual analysis, examinations of colonial legacies, and hermeneutic strategies, the research refines existing feminist theological models by positioning contextual decolonization as a central mechanism for addressing historical distortions. This approach extends prior frameworks, particularly within postcolonial feminism, which often prioritize Western-centric critiques, by incorporating grassroots voices from non-Western contexts to enhance the emancipatory potential of reinterpretation.

Theoretically, this work underscores the necessity of contextualized hermeneutics in feminist theology, fostering educational reforms that equip scholars and practitioners with tools to interrogate and reconstruct religious narratives. By challenging ahistorical readings, the study deepens postcolonial feminist frameworks to highlight the interplay between colonial imprints and textual agency, advancing equitable theological discourses that empower marginalized groups. In educational domains, it encourages curricula that integrate decolonial methodologies, promoting critical engagement with sacred texts to cultivate justice-oriented perspectives.

On the policy and social fronts, the research advocates for reforms in faith-based legal systems, urging alignment with principles of parity and interdependence to address systemic inequities. Socially, it calls for expanded community dialogues

⁴³ Dionius Bismoko Mahamboro, *Proceedings of the International Conference on Theology, Religion, Culture, and Humanities: Re-Imagining Theology, Religion, Culture, and Humanities Studies for Public Life* (Sanata Dharma University Press, 2023), [https://repository.usd.ac.id/48769/1/10397_Proceedings+International+Conference+On+Theology+\(1\).pdf](https://repository.usd.ac.id/48769/1/10397_Proceedings+International+Conference+On+Theology+(1).pdf).

⁴⁴ Allison K Ralph, "Advocacy and Bridging Strategies Are Failing on Their Own. Multifaith Nonprofits Embody Six Solutions for a Pluralistic Democracy," *The Foundation Review* 16, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.9707/1944-5660.1714>.

⁴⁵ Vivek Paonam, "From Depth To Breadth: Assessing The Efficacy Of Sequential Exploratory Research In Capturing Intergenerational Cultural Shifts ," *African Journal of Biomedical Research* , 2024, <https://doi.org/10.53555/AJBR.v27i5S.5262> .

that bridge academic insights with lived realities, mitigating resistance through stakeholder collaboration to achieve broader gender justice. Nonetheless, methodological limitations, such as the reliance on qualitative workshops with limited sample sizes and a geographic focus restricted to select postcolonial regions, may constrain generalizability, indicating the need for more diverse and longitudinal validations.

For future research, expanding the scope to include additional traditions, such as Buddhism or indigenous spiritual systems, could further extend and diversify these frameworks, while engaging male allies might refine inclusive dynamics. Quantitative assessments of long-term attitudinal change would also strengthen empirical rigor. Ultimately, this inquiry synthesizes postcolonial feminism with theological reinterpretation, reaffirming religious texts as dynamic instruments for advancing global gender emancipation.

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