

Autonomy of Daughters and the Dynamics of Patriarchal Power Relations in the Family: An Analysis of Husein Muhammad's Gender Thought

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Abstract

The phenomenon of restrictions on girls' autonomy within families in Indonesia—from prohibitions on continuing their education, strict controls on social activities, to the practice of child marriage—demonstrates that patriarchy remains powerful in the domestic sphere. Various reports by UNICEF, UN Women, and media outlets show that these restrictions have long-term impacts on girls' education, mental health, and even their economic future. In the context of Muslim societies, this issue is further complicated by its frequent legitimization through culture and religious interpretations. This study aims to fill a gap in the literature that has not yet connected the issue of girls' autonomy with the gender thinking of Husein Muhammad, a prominent figure in Indonesian Islamic feminism. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach and content analysis of Husein Muhammad's works, this study explores how patriarchal structures operate within families and how Husein's theological-progressive approach offers empowerment strategies through education, reinterpretation of religious texts, and the formation of egalitarian families. The research findings indicate that restrictions on girls do not have a strong normative basis in Islam, but rather are the result of gender-biased social constructions. Husein Muhammad's thinking provides a theoretical and practical framework for developing a more just, dialogical, and non-hierarchical model of the Islamic family, thus enabling girls to grow as autonomous subjects within the family and society.

Keywords: patriarchy, daughters' autonomy, husein muhammad, islamic feminism, egalitarian family, religious reinterpretation

Introduction

In Indonesia, cases of parental restrictions on girls within the family room are increasingly coming to the public, both through the mass media and reports from child protection agencies. Phenomena such as prohibitions on girls' higher education, child marriage legitimized by family authorities, and strict controls on girls' social activities demonstrate that patriarchy remains powerful at the domestic

level.¹ These facts confirm that the family, which should be a safe and nurturing space for children, can instead become an arena for repression of young women's autonomy. This situation presents an urgent need to examine how power relations within the family influence the development of girls' rights and freedoms.

The issue of girls' autonomy has also become an increasingly trending topic in global gender discourse, particularly as public awareness of systemic gender-based injustices grows. Reports by UNICEF and UN Women show that restricting girls' autonomy within the family has long-term impacts on their education, mental health, social participation, and economic future.² In the context of Muslim societies, including Indonesia, this issue is further complicated by its often entangled cultural legitimacy and religious interpretation. Therefore, research on girls' autonomy in patriarchal families not only follows academic trends but also addresses increasingly pressing social problems.

Although a number of studies have discussed patriarchy, gender relations, and power dynamics within the family, studies that specifically link girls' autonomy to Husein Muhammad's gender thinking are still very limited. The literature on patriarchy emphasizes male dominance in social structures,³ while studies of women's empowerment focus on women's ability to make decisions independently.⁴ On the other hand, Islamic feminist literature such as the works of Asma Barlas and Musdah Mulia have provided important critiques of the misogynistic bias in religious interpretation.⁵ However, there is little research that places the thoughts of Husein Muhammad—a significant representative of Indonesian Islamic feminism—in direct dialogue with the issue of girls' autonomy at the family level. This is where this paper's position and contribution become relevant.

Based on these literature gaps, this study aims to: (1) analyze the concept of girls' autonomy in the context of patriarchal families; (2) identify the forms of patriarchal power relations operating within families; and (3) explore Husein Muhammad's thoughts on strategies for empowering girls through religious reinterpretation and social transformation. Thus, this paper seeks to answer the main questions: *How can Husein Muhammad's gender thinking be used to understand and develop girls' autonomy in patriarchal family dynamics?* This research is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions in formulating a more just and egalitarian family model, especially for girls who are often the first victims of domestic patriarchal structures.

¹ Komnas Perempuan, *CATAHU 2023: Kekerasan Berbasis Gender dalam Rumah Tangga* (Jakarta, 2023), 15-18.

² UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children* (New York: UNICEF, 2021), 44.

³ Sylvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 45.

⁴ Naila Kaber, *Gender, Labour, and Rights* (London: Routledge, 2016), 32.

⁵ Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 2-5

The study of girls' autonomy in patriarchal families cannot be separated from basic theories regarding power relations and gender construction. One of the main references is the patriarchal framework developed by Sylvia Walby. Walby defines patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices that place men in a dominant position and exploit women.⁶ Within the family, patriarchy is manifested through the gender-based division of labor, men's control over women's mobility, and restrictions on women's access to resources. This perspective is important for understanding how girls experience restrictions from an early age, because the family is the first institution where gender ideology is inherited.⁷

Another relevant literature is the concept of "gender empowerment" in development studies developed by Naila Kabeer. Kabeer explains that women's empowerment occurs when they gain the ability to make life choices that were previously unavailable to them.⁸ In the context of girls, empowerment means not only providing access to education, but also creating a family environment that allows them to make decisions independently. Kabeer emphasizes that the ability to act (agency) will be difficult to develop if patriarchal norms in the family continue to limit young women's space for movement. Therefore, this framework is important for analyzing how girls' autonomy can be built through social and cultural interventions at the family level.⁹

In the context of Muslim societies, the interpretation of religious texts plays a central role in gender relations. Asma Barlas is one of the leading thinkers offering a non-patriarchal reading of the Quran. In her work, Barlas critiques the use of religious texts as justification for the subordination of women.¹⁰ She demonstrates that patriarchy is not an Islamic teaching, but rather the result of gender-biased historical interpretations. This progressive reading is important to relate to the study of the family, as many restrictions on girls are framed as religious teachings. Thus, alternative readings such as those developed by Barlas open up conceptual space to challenge the religious legitimacy of patriarchal practices within the family.¹¹

In Indonesia, Islamic feminist thought has developed through various figures, one of whom is Musdah Mulia. Mulia emphasized that gender inequality within the family is often reinforced by religious interpretations produced by masculine clerical structures.¹² She offered the principles of justice, equality, and sisterhood as an Islamic ethical framework that should form the basis of family

⁶ Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy*, 20-21.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁸ Naila Kabeer, *Gender, Labour, and Rights* (London: Routledge, 2016), 32.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁰ Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹² Musdah Mulia, *Indonesian Muslim Women and Human Rights*, (Jakarta: Yayasan Abad Demokrasi, 2015), h. 44.

relations. According to her, girls have full rights to protection, education, and participation in family decision-making. Musdah Mulia's thoughts are relevant as comparative literature in this study, especially to see how Islamic feminist ideas in Indonesia interact in building an egalitarian family paradigm.¹³

Husein Muhammad's thoughts are the core literature in this research. In his various works, such as *Women's Fiqh And Islam is a Women-Friendly Religion* Husein rejects religious interpretations that grant absolute authority to men within the family.¹⁴ He criticizes patriarchal structures that restrict women, including girls, through rules that limit their freedom of movement. Husein emphasizes the importance of gender education, critical awareness, and the reinterpretation of religious texts to change power relations within the family. Husein's approach, which uses the perspective of *maqāṣid shari'ah* (Islamic moral goals), provides a strong theological basis for defending girls' rights. Furthermore, he emphasizes that the family should be a space for growing autonomy, not a space of repression.¹⁵

The literature on the relationship between patriarchy, girls, and religious interpretation demonstrates that this issue is multidimensional—involving social, cultural, and religious structures. Islamic feminist studies provide an important framework for understanding how religious texts can be interpreted more justly and humanely. Meanwhile, patriarchal theory provides insight into the mechanisms of power that influence family practices. By combining literature from both fields, this study positions Husein Muhammad's thought as a conceptual bridge that can offer alternatives to patriarchal practices within the family through theological, social, and ethical approaches. This approach allows for a more comprehensive reading of how girls' autonomy can be constructed within the context of Indonesian Muslim families.¹¹

Methods

The material object of this research is the concept of girls' autonomy and patriarchal power relations within the family as reflected in the works of Husein Muhammad. The research analysis unit includes the ideas, arguments, and theological approaches used by Husein Muhammad in discussing gender relations, especially in the context of the family. Thus, this research focuses on the analysis of texts and normative ideas that conceptually explain how girls' autonomy is understood and promoted within the framework of Islamic feminism.¹⁶

¹³ Ibid.,77

¹⁴ Husein Muhammad, *Islam Agama Ramah Perempuan* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2006), 38-40.

¹⁵ Husein Muhammad, *Fiqh Perempuan*,(Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2009), 12-13.

¹⁶ Lexy J. Moleong, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2018), 147.

This research is a library research using a qualitative research design with a descriptive-analytical approach. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for exploring the meaning, construction of ideas, and the structure of arguments contained in the works of a figure's thoughts.¹⁷ Qualitative analysis allows the research to examine in depth the themes that appear in the text, including ideas about patriarchy, girls' rights, and the concept of empowerment. Through this design, the research not only presents the thoughts of Husein Muhammad, but also examines the logical relationship between these concepts in the context of the contemporary Muslim family.¹⁸

The research data sources come from two main groups: primary and secondary sources. Primary sources consist of Husein Muhammad's works that directly address issues of women, gender, and family, such as *Women's Fiqh And Islam is a Women-Friendly Religion*. Secondary sources include books, journal articles, and previous research discussing patriarchal theory, Islamic feminism, and gender studies in general. This diversity of sources allows researchers to conduct theoretical triangulation to examine the consistency and relevance of Husein Muhammad's thinking within broader academic discourse.

The data collection process was conducted through library research. This stage included identifying, selecting, and classifying documents relevant to the research focus. Each text was carefully read to identify issues, key arguments, and the theoretical framework used. The research also enriched the data by reading other academic studies addressing similar themes to enable a more comprehensive analysis. This approach is appropriate for this type of research, which focuses on the study of the thinking of prominent figures, where a wealth of literature is a crucial element in the data interpretation process.¹⁹

Data analysis was carried out using content analysis techniques (*content analysis*) through three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. In the data reduction stage, information from various sources is categorized according to themes such as patriarchy, girls' autonomy, gender equality, and empowerment strategies. The data presentation stage is carried out by systematically organizing the information to facilitate the interpretation process. In the final stage, the researcher draws conclusions based on patterns, themes, and relationships between concepts to understand how Husein Muhammad's thinking contributes to the concept of girls' autonomy in patriarchal families.²⁰

¹⁷ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2013), 42.

¹⁸ Ibid., 68-70

¹⁹ Zed Mestika, *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan* (Jakarta: UI Press, 2014), 39.

²⁰ Matthew B. Miles & A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis* (London: Sage, 1994), 12-15.

Results

Husein Muhammad positions the family as the primary locus of power relations that determine the position of girls. He believes that one of the roots of injustice against girls is the patriarchal structure that dominates the family and positions men as the sole decision-makers.²¹ Patriarchy, for Husein, is not simply biological male domination, but a social system constructed through interpretations of religion, customs, and culture passed down through generations. He asserts that many patriarchal practices are justified using religious arguments that are not actually normative but rather the result of masculine-biased interpretations.²²

In his analysis, he views that patriarchy works through three layers of structure: normative-theological, socio-cultural, and psychological.²³ At the normative-theological level, many interpretations of classical Islamic jurisprudence place men as the absolute leaders of the family, thus treating daughters as those who must always be "protected" and "controlled." According to Husein, this construction stems not from authentic Islamic teachings, but from a gender-biased historical reading.²⁴

It is this uncritical reading of the text that keeps girls confined to a restrictive domestic space. Husein highlights that the perpetuation of patriarchy often robs girls of the opportunity to express their opinions, choose their education, pursue careers, and even determine their own futures. This contradicts Islamic principles that emphasize justice, respect for human dignity, and spiritual equality between men and women (QS.*Al-Hujurat* [49]:13).

At the socio-cultural level, Husein found that patriarchal practices operate more subtly yet very effectively. In Javanese culture and traditional Islamic boarding schools, for example, girls are often positioned as the moral bearers of the family, so their behavior is more closely monitored than that of boys.²⁵ This surveillance is often accompanied by restrictions on mobility and control over educational choices. Husein believes that this practice is not merely a tradition, but rather a form of internalization of patriarchal ideology that views women as a source of temptation and therefore needs to be controlled. He criticizes this notion as a cultural legacy no longer relevant to Islamic principles of justice.²⁶

On a psychological level, Husein observed that girls often grow up with low self-esteem due to receiving messages that belittle their abilities from an early age. Messages such as "women are weak," "women shouldn't be loud," or "family

²¹ Ibid., 14.

²² Ibid., 25-16.

²³ Husein Muhammad, *Fiqh Perempuan: Refleksi Kiai tentang Tafsir Perempuan* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2009), 11-12.

²⁴ Ibid., 14-16.

²⁵ Ibid., 37.

²⁶ Ibid., 42-44.

decisions are in the father's hands" create a self-image that limits girls' ability to develop personal autonomy.²⁷ Husein emphasized that this psychological injustice is a form of symbolic violence that must be eliminated through critical education, both for parents and the girls themselves.²⁸

The research results also show that Husein Muhammad's thoughts on girls' autonomy are centered on three main strategies: transformative education, reinterpretation of religious texts, and the formation of egalitarian family relations, as explained below:

Education as an Empowerment Strategy

For Husein Muhammad, education is a key pillar in liberating girls from the structural constraints of patriarchy. He emphasized that gender inequality often persists due to a lack of family knowledge about the values of equality in Islam.²⁹ Husein quoted QS.*al-'Alaq*[96]:10-5 as a normative basis that Islam requires all humans, both men and women, to acquire knowledge.

Families that provide equal education for girls will strengthen their ability to make life choices, become agents of change, and negotiate power relations with greater confidence. Therefore, for Husein, education is not merely a social tool, but a theological instrument for actualizing the Islamic vision of *rahmatan lil alamin* (blessing for all the worlds).

Reinterpretation of Religious Texts

One of Husein Muhammad's important contributions was his reinterpretation of Quranic verses often used to justify male dominance. He emphasized that the Quran positions men and women as moral subjects, both possessing reason, will, and ethical responsibility (QS.*An-Nahl* [16]:97).

Husein criticized the use of QS.*An-Nisa* [4]:34 partially. According to him, this verse cannot be interpreted as legitimizing that men have absolute authority over women. He emphasized that the verse is related to *social context* and should not be used to limit the rights of women, especially girls.³⁰

On many occasions, Husein also interpreted the Prophet's hadith "*al-nisā' shaqā'iq al-rijāl*" (women are the siblings of men) as a theological basis that women have an equal position and rights in the family and society. Thus, theoretically, Husein places the autonomy of girls as part of Islam's moral mission to honor human beings without discrimination.

²⁷ Musdah Mulia, *Indonesian Muslim Women and Human Rights* (Jakarta: Yayasan Abad Demokrasi, 2015), 51.

²⁸ Husein Muhammad, *Fiqh Perempuan*, 28.

²⁹ Husein Muhammad, *Islam Agama Ramah Perempuan*, 55.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Social Transformation of the Family: From Hierarchical Relations to Egalitarian Relations

Husein Muhammad emphasized that structural change in the family must begin with a transformation of consciousness. He offered an egalitarian family model that is not based on a power hierarchy, but on the principle of *deliberation* (QS. *Ash-Shūrā* [42]:38), *mercy*, And *'adl*.

In an egalitarian family structure, girls are treated as full subjects whose voices are respected. Male authority is not understood as superiority, but as an ethical responsibility to be exercised fairly. Husein also encouraged the reinterpretation of family jurisprudence to be more responsive to social realities and women's life experiences, so that Islamic family law would no longer be a tool for legitimizing male domination.³¹

Synthesis: Contribution of Husein's Thoughts to the Progressive Islamic Family Model

The research findings show that Husein Muhammad's thinking provides both a theoretical and practical framework for building a more inclusive and just Islamic family. He goes beyond simply criticizing patriarchy and offers a holistic approach: theological reinterpretation, equal education, structural empowerment, and the development of an egalitarian family culture.

His thinking demonstrates that girls' autonomy is not merely a modern social demand, but part of Islamic teachings, which emphasize the principles of justice, freedom, and equal human dignity. Thus, Husein Muhammad's ideas significantly contributed to the transformation of Indonesian Muslim families from a hierarchical-patriarchal model to an egalitarian one that humanizes girls from an early age.

Discussion

A reading of Husein Muhammad's thoughts on girls' autonomy shows that he has a position that aligns with the theory of modern patriarchy as put forward by Sylvia Walby. Walby understands patriarchy as a social system that operates through various interconnected structures, including the family, the state, and culture.³² This perspective is clearly evident in Husein's critique of family culture that places men as the center of authority and women as the controlled party. In Walby's framework, the family is one of the most powerful sites in producing gender inequality, and this is evident in Husein's critique of the restrictions on girls' movements in the name of honor, obedience, and paternal authority. Husein views these practices not as Islamic doctrine, but as social products of patriarchy, thus requiring reinterpretation and transformation.³³

³¹ Husein Muhammad, *Fiqh Perempuan*, 83–84.

³² Sylvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy*, 20–22.

³³ Husein Muhammad, *Islam Agama Ramah Perempuan*, 44.

Viewed through Naila Kabeer's gender empowerment theory, Husein Muhammad also emphasizes that independence—especially for girls—depends on access to resources, decision-making skills, and agency. Husein rejects the view that positions girls solely as recipients of family decisions. Through reinterpreting texts, he asserts that Islam teaches equality in terms of honor, moral responsibility, and access to knowledge. In line with Kabeer, Husein states that education is the most effective means of overcoming the reproduction of patriarchy at home, because education shapes girls' abilities to choose their own life paths and negotiate power relations within the family.

Asma Barlas's analysis of Islamic feminism aligns with Husein Muhammad's approach to textual deconstruction. Barlas critiques patriarchal readings of the Quran that justify male domination, instead demonstrating that the Islamic sacred text is anti-patriarchal.⁵ Husein's thinking is closely aligned with this, particularly in his discussion of verses often used to justify women's subordination, such as QS. An-Nisa' [4]:34. He rejects textual interpretations that position men as "rulers," preferring contextual interpretations that emphasize moral mandates, not absolute power. Thus, Husein's thinking not only corrects the bias of classical interpretations, but also opens up new epistemological space for girls' autonomy through a liberating hermeneutic approach.

Husein's approach can also be read through the perspective of Musdah Mulia's ethical-egalitarian feminism, which centers the values of equality, justice, and welfare as fundamental principles of Islam. Musdah emphasizes that relationships within the family must be built on the basis of *deliberation*, not domination.³⁴ This idea is parallel to Husein's view that the relationship between parents and daughters should not be commanding, but rather dialogical. Husein rejects asymmetrical relationship structures because he believes that every human being has equal dignity before God, as stated in QS. Al-Hujurāt [49]:13 regarding human equality. Thus, Husein's position reinforces the idea that the family should be a space of equality, not a patriarchal institution that produces gender inequality.³⁵ Furthermore, Husein's thoughts can be read as a form of criticism of *gender essentialism*, namely the assumption that women are naturally weaker, passive, or emotional. This view is widely rejected in contemporary feminism, including by Judith Lorber, who asserts that gender differences are more a social construction than a biological one.³⁶ Husein states that many assumptions about the “nature of women” are actually the result of patriarchal culture that was then legitimized as religious teachings. Thus, Husein deconstructs gender essentialism by showing that

³⁴ Musdah Mulia, *Indonesian Muslim Women and Human Rights*, 54.

³⁵ Husein Muhammad, *Fiqh Perempuan*, 22.

³⁶ Judith Lorber, *Gender Inequality: Feminist Theories and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 110.

the Qur'an does not limit the role of women—including girls—in the public or domestic sphere. This view further strengthens the idea that the limitations on women are a product of history, not theology.³⁷

From the overall feminist theory used in this analysis, it appears that Husein Muhammad's thinking is not only aligned with the framework of Islamic feminism but can also be understood as a bridge between global feminist theory and the Indonesian Islamic context. She combines critical reading of classical texts, social analysis, and Islamic ethical values to produce a framework capable of challenging patriarchal structures within the family. Thus, Husein's contribution is not only normative-theological but also strategic-practical in promoting the creation of girls' autonomy and more egalitarian family relations. This integrative approach makes Husein's thinking relevant to the development of gender justice theory and practice in contemporary Muslim societies.¹¹

Conclusion

The most important finding of this study demonstrates that what was previously believed to be a "religious provision" regarding the position of girls in the family is in fact largely a patriarchal social construct legitimized through gender-biased interpretations. It turns out that the structure of male authority considered normal within the family has no absolute normative basis in Islam, but is instead a product of a masculinist historical reading insensitive to women's experiences. Thus, Husein Muhammad's thinking opens up new space for a more equitable religious reinterpretation, demonstrating that Islamic teachings actually support it.

Academically, this research makes an important contribution to the study of Islamic family law and Islamic feminism in Indonesia. First, it partially confirms previous findings regarding patriarchal bias in religious interpretation, while simultaneously challenging the assumption that gender hierarchy is a non-negotiable textual imperative. Second, it expands the study of Islamic feminism by presenting Husein Muhammad's perspective as an interpretive model that combines gender awareness, the *maqāsid* approach, and a critical reading of tradition. Third, it offers a new conceptual framework for understanding girls' autonomy through an integrative approach between theories of patriarchy, empowerment, and liberation theology. However, this research has limitations, primarily because it focuses solely on the analysis of literature and the works of a single figure, thus failing to reflect variations in practice across regions and social levels. Further research could expand on these findings through more comprehensive fieldwork involving girls' lived experiences within the context of Indonesian Muslim families.

³⁷ Husein Muhammad, *Islam Agama Ramah Perempuan*, 49.

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