

## **WIVES' RIGHT TO PURSUE A CAREER IN ISLAMIC FEMINISM: AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF GENDER JUSTICE IN CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE**

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose** – This study compares the epistemologies of gender justice in the thoughts of Husein Muhammad and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, particularly in formulating the theological and ethical legitimacy of women's rights to pursue careers after marriage, and assessing the contributions of both their thoughts to the renewal of religious understanding in Indonesia.

**Methods** – This study used a comparative approach to the thoughts of Husein Muhammad and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir and comparative epistemology. Primary data were obtained from the works of these two figures. Secondary data were obtained from relevant sources. The data were analyzed through a critical reading of the epistemological approach, argumentation patterns, and normative implications of each thought.

**Findings** – The study found that both figures affirm women's right to a career as part of the principles of justice and reciprocity in Islam, but through different epistemological paths. Husein Muhammad emphasizes historical-epistemological criticism of patriarchal fiqh constructions, while Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir develops the *mubādalāh* methodology as an applicable relational ethic. These differences do not negate each other but rather enrich the plural and dynamic discourse of Islamic feminism. Both epistemologies have real transformative power when translated into family law discourse, public policy, and social practices in Indonesia, although their implementation still faces cultural resistance and regulatory structures that are not yet fully gender-responsive.

**Research contribution/limitations** – This research contributes to the provision of a theoretical and argumentative framework that can be used to formulate a discourse of moderate gender justice rooted in the Islamic intellectual tradition.

**Keywords:** *Islamic Feminism, Wives' Right to a Career, Mubādalāh, Epistemology of Gender Justice*

## Abstrak

**Tujuan** - Artikel ini bertujuan menganalisis komparatif epistemologi keadilan gender dalam pemikiran Husein Muhammad dan Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, khususnya dalam merumuskan legitimasi teologis dan etis hak perempuan untuk berkarier pasca-pernikahan, serta menilai kontribusi pemikiran keduanya bagi pembaruan pemahaman keagamaan di Indonesia.

**Metode** - Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan komparatif pemikiran tokoh dan perbandingan epistemologis Husein Muhammad dan Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir. Data primer diperoleh dari karya-karya kedua tokoh tersebut. Data sekunder berasal dari sumber yang relevan. Data dianalisis melalui pembacaan kritis terhadap cara kerja epistemologi, pola argumentasi, dan implikasi normatif dari masing-masing pemikiran.

**Temuan** - Penelitian menemukan bahwa kedua tokoh sama-sama menegaskan hak berkarier perempuan sebagai bagian dari prinsip keadilan dan kesalingan dalam Islam, namun melalui jalur epistemologis yang berbeda. Husein Muhammad menekankan kritik historis-epistemologis terhadap konstruksi fikih patriarkal, sedangkan Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir mengembangkan metodologi *mubādalāh* sebagai etika relasional yang aplikatif. Perbedaan ini tidak saling meniadakan, tetapi justru memperkaya wacana feminisme Islam yang plural dan dinamis. Kedua epistemologi ini memiliki daya transformatif yang nyata ketika diterjemahkan ke dalam wacana hukum keluarga, kebijakan publik, dan praktik sosial di Indonesia, meskipun implementasinya masih berhadapan dengan resistensi kultural dan struktur regulasi yang belum sepenuhnya responsif gender.

**Kontribusi/keterbatasan penelitian** - Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada penyediaan kerangka teoretis dan argumentatif yang dapat digunakan untuk merumuskan wacana keadilan gender yang moderat dan berakar pada tradisi intelektual Islam.

**Kata kunci:** *Feminisme Islam, Hak Berkarier Istri, Mubādalāh, Epistemologi Keadilan Gender.*

## INTRODUCTION

The issue of women's career rights after marriage has become a serious concern in global gender studies, especially in countries with Muslim-majority populations. Several studies have shown that although Muslim women are increasingly involved in the education and economic sectors, marital status often becomes a limiting factor for their participation in the public sphere (Rosyada et al., 2024). For example, studies in countries such as Egypt, Pakistan, Malaysia, and Saudi Arabia have shown that married women often face religious and cultural legitimacy that prioritizes domestic work, while professional activities are seen as a potential threat to family harmony (Dukhaykh & Bilimoria, 2021; Elbanna, 2025; Hussin et al., 2021; Waqar et al., 2021). In many cases, these restrictions

do not always take the form of explicit state regulations but rather operate through religious discourse, social norms, and interpretations of Islamic texts that emphasize male leadership and women's domestic obligations (Zikriati & Marhamah, 2022). This dynamic shows that the issue of women's career rights after marriage is not merely an economic issue but is closely related to gender constructs and the authority of religious interpretation in contemporary Muslim societies (Fitriyani & Musaddad, 2025).

Various studies on Islamic feminism emphasize that the main problem in this debate lies in the religious epistemology used to understand the relationship between husbands and wives (Ma'mun & Maliki, 2023). The normative-textual approach tends to interpret verses about male leadership and the obligation to

provide financial support as legitimizing a hierarchical division of roles, thereby placing women's public work as a conditional secondary choice (Saleh, 2022). In contrast, the Islamic feminist approach seeks to reinterpret religious texts by emphasizing the principles of justice, benefit, and reciprocity, as well as questioning patriarchal assumptions that have long been considered part of Islamic teachings. Thus, women's right to a career after marriage becomes an arena for epistemological debate between an essentialist view of gender and a contextual and relational approach to gender justice (Wahyu et al., 2023).

In the Indonesian context, Husein Muhammad offers a framework of Islamic feminism that departs from a fundamental critique of the tradition of gender-biased classical interpretations. He asserts that injustice against women, including restrictions on career rights after marriage, does not originate from Islamic teachings but from an interpretation process dominated by male experiences and interests (Gumiandari & Nafia, 2019). By placing women's life experiences as an important part of religious knowledge sources, Husein Muhammad developed an epistemology of gender justice that is emancipatory and critical of the established religious authority (Rahman, 2017). Within this framework, women's public work is understood as a moral and social right that does not conflict with Islamic values as long as it is oriented towards justice and benefit,

both for women themselves and for their families (Haque et al., 2022).

Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir developed an approach to Islamic feminism through the theory of *mubādalah*, namely, the principle of reciprocity in male–female relations (Hafis et al., 2025). Unlike approaches that depart from the structural criticism of classical interpretations, *mubādalah* focuses on how texts work and the ethical relations contained within them. Faqihuddin emphasizes that every Islamic teaching that contains commands or prohibitions for one gender is also reciprocally applicable to the other, unless there is evidence that explicitly distinguishes them (Gumiandari & Nafi'a, 2020). In the context of women's right to a career after marriage, the *mubādalah* approach rejects a rigid division of roles between the domestic and public spheres and asserts that family responsibilities must be understood as a shared obligation negotiated fairly (Novalia, 2024). This epistemology produces a relational and ethical framework of gender justice, emphasizing a balance of roles based on the principle of reciprocity rather than hierarchy (Rohman & Amin, 2025).

Although both depart from the framework of Islamic feminism and seek to assert religious legitimacy for women's right to a career after marriage, Husein Muhammad and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir show significant differences in their epistemological approaches. Husein Muhammad tends to emphasize criticism of patriarchal bias

in classical interpretive traditions and the importance of women's experiences as a source of religious knowledge, while Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir develops an interpretive framework through the principle of *mubādalāh*, which emphasizes reciprocity and ethical relations between men and women in understanding Islamic texts. This difference in methodological starting points shows that the construction of gender justice in Islamic feminism in Indonesia is not singular but rather built through a variety of epistemological approaches. Therefore, a comparative study of these two schools of thought is important to understand how theological and ethical legitimacy for women's career rights after marriage is formulated, as well as to assess the contribution of each approach to enriching the discourse on gender-equitable religious understanding in Indonesia.

Previous studies have discussed women's right to work from the perspectives of Islam and Islamic feminism, whether through religious interpretation, family jurisprudence, or social analysis of women's roles in the public sphere. However, most studies stop at the normative and affirmative levels, emphasizing that Islam supports women's right to work without examining in depth how differences in epistemological frameworks and modes of interpretation shape contemporary religious discourse in the social sphere (Rosyidah, 2023; Setiyanto, 2020; Srifyan

et al., 2023). In addition, studies on the thoughts of Indonesian Islamic feminist figures are generally conducted separately or are descriptive in nature; therefore, little research places differences in the epistemology of gender justice as the key to analysis in understanding the dynamics of religious discourse and its relevance to social attitudes and public policy (Gumiandari & Nafia, 2019; Hafis et al., 2025; Haque et al., 2022; Rohman & Amin, 2025). Departing from this gap, this study offers a novel approach by positioning women's right to a career after marriage as an arena for epistemological dialogue in contemporary Islamic feminism through a comparative analysis of the frameworks of Husein Muhammad and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir to show how different perspectives on gender justice contribute to the formation of religious discourse that has an impact beyond the normative realm.

Based on the mapping of the problem and research gap, this study aims to answer the main question of how the gender and epistemological frameworks of justice in Islamic feminism developed by Husein Muhammad and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir shape contemporary religious discourse on women's career rights after marriage and how these differing frameworks influence the positioning of this issue in domestic-public relations and its social legitimacy. This study comparatively analyzes the construction of gender justice offered by the two figures by placing women's

right to a career after marriage as an arena for epistemological dialogue in contemporary Indonesian Islamic feminism. Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of Islamic feminist studies by expanding the analysis from a mere normative comparison to an understanding of the dynamics of religious discourse and gender epistemology in shaping social views. Conceptually and practically, this study provides a relevant analytical framework for reading the relationship between progressive religious thought and the formation of more gender-equitable social attitudes and public policies, particularly in the context of women's career rights after marriage.

## **METHOD**

This comparative study examines Husein Muhammad and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir's thoughts on gender justice through a literature study design oriented towards discourse analysis and epistemological studies of figures' thoughts. The primary data for this research were obtained from the fundamental works of both figures, which directly contain their gender thought frameworks and methods of religious interpretation. Husein Muhammad's main works that were used as references include *"Fiqh Perempuan: Refleksi Kiai atas Wacana Agama dan Gender, Islam Agama Ramah Perempuan"*, as well as a number of his essays and conceptual writings on gender justice and criticism of

patriarchal interpretation. Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir's primary data include major works such as *"Qirā'ah Mubādalah," "60 Hadis Kesalingan,"* and *"Bangga Menjadi Perempuan,"* which explicitly develop the principle of mubādalah as an epistemological framework for reading religious texts and gender relations. Secondary data were obtained from books, scientific journal articles, proceedings, and previous research relevant to Islamic feminism, Islamic family law, gender studies, and contemporary religious discourse.

Data collection was conducted using documentary source analysis, which involved the identification, selection, and classification of bibliographic sources based on their relevance to women's career rights after marriage. Furthermore, the data were analyzed using interpretive discourse analysis and descriptive-comparative methods. In the first stage, each figure's thought construction was mapped by examining the key concepts, epistemological assumptions, and religious argumentation strategies used. The second stage entailed an interpretive analysis to understand the methodological context and gender justice framework underlying the two figures' views on domestic public relations and women's work. The third stage was a comparative analysis focused on differences in gender epistemology and its implications for shaping contemporary religious

discourse on women's career rights after marriage. The results of the analysis were then synthesized to formulate the theoretical contribution of the research in reading the dynamics of Islamic feminism and its relevance to social attitudes and public policies from a gender justice perspective.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **The Epistemological Framework of Islamic Feminism in the Thought of Husein Muhammad and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir**

In this study, Islamic feminism is not treated merely as a normative position on gender justice but as an epistemological framework that operates in the process of religious knowledge production. This stems from the awareness that understanding religious texts, particularly the Qur'an, hadith, and fiqh, is always mediated by certain assumptions, social contexts, and interpretive authorities. Thus, the issue of gender justice does not emerge as a neutral theological conclusion but rather as a result of how texts are read, selected, and given meaning in religious discourse. Within this framework, Islamic feminism positions religious sources as both an epistemic foundation and an object of criticism by tracing how patriarchal bias is formed, inherited, and naturalized through the tradition of interpretation (Wadud, 2021).

The epistemological approach of Islamic feminism is characterized by a shift in interpretation from the search for

normative legitimacy alone to a reading that links the text with social experience and broader ethical goals. Principles such as justice (*'adālah*), reciprocity (*mubādalah*), and public interest (*maṣlahah*) function not only as moral values but also as epistemic tools to test the authority of interpretation, dismantle assumptions about gender that are considered natural, and assess the social relevance of religious claims (Rehman, 2020). Through contextual interpretation and historical criticism, Islamic feminism produces religious knowledge that opens up space for negotiation between texts, social realities, and power relations within families and society (Falah et al., 2024).

In the context of women's right to a career after marriage, this epistemological framework allows for an analysis that does not stop at the question of "is it permissible or not," but explores how restrictions or legitimization of women's careers are constructed discursively. By placing texts and social practices in a dialogical relationship, Islamic feminism examines whether a prohibition or permission is rooted in normative arguments or patriarchal and contextual interpretive traditions (Anam, 2019). This framework also provides an analytical basis for reading the differences in the epistemology of Islamic feminist thinkers, including Husein Muhammad and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, in formulating gender justice, as well as assessing the implications of their

discourse on family practices and social regulation in Indonesia.

In the map of Indonesian Islamic feminism, Husein Muhammad can be read not only as a thinker who offers a gender-perspective religious view but also as an epistemological subject who reconstructs the way Islamic knowledge about women is produced and legitimized. Husein's position as a pesantren kiai and women's rights activist shapes his way of reading texts: women's social experiences are not placed as an "external reality" to religion but as an epistemic lens to test the authority of religious interpretation. From this perspective, gender inequality is understood not as a normative problem of Islamic teachings but as a result of the history of knowledge, namely, a process of interpretation shaped by patriarchal power relations and then naturalized as religious doctrine (Khasanah, 2019).

Epistemologically, Husein Muhammad builds his critique by asserting that *fiqh* is a product of human *ijtihad*, which is historical and contextual in nature, and not a final representation of God's will. Principles such as justice (*al-'adālah*) and equality (*al-musāwāh*) function in his framework of thinking not merely as normative values, but as evaluative criteria for assessing the validity of an interpretation. Using a critical hermeneutic approach, Husein reads religious texts by linking the historical context of the revelation, social structure

of early Muslim society, and political and cultural interests that influenced the formation of classical *fiqh*. Through this method, he shifts the center of authority from a literal reading of the text to the moral objectives of sharia (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*) as the epistemological horizon of interpretation (Hayati, 2024).

This epistemological framework allows Husein to position women as moral subjects in religious discourse. In his view, the restriction of women's roles in the domestic sphere does not arise from theological reasoning inherent in Islam but rather from the construction of knowledge that equates social tradition with religious provisions. Thus, women's public and economic activities, including work and careers, are read as expressions of moral agency and social contribution, not as deviations from nature (Maliki et al., 2023). This epistemology rejects the domestic-public dichotomy as a theological category and instead reads it as a cultural production that is open to review in accordance with the principle of public interest (Irsyadul et al., 2020).

On the issue of women's right to a career after marriage, Husein Muhammad's epistemology is evident in the shift from the question of "whether women are allowed to work" to "how power relations and interpretive authority shape these prohibitions or permissions." Husein interpreted the marital relationship as a space for ethical negotiation between two equal subjects, in which the division of roles is based on reciprocity, consent,

and mutual benefit. By re-reading family law texts through this framework, Husein shows that resistance to women's careers reflects social myths and patriarchal interpretive legacies rather than the normative will of Islam itself (Karimullah, 2022). Through this approach, Husein Muhammad's thinking contributed to the formation of contemporary religious discourse that affirms women's career rights as an integral part of gender justice in Muslim families.

Apart from Husein Muhammad, another Islamic thinker with a feminist style and approach is Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir. Unlike approaches that begin their critique from the history of the *fiqh* authority, Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir's Islamic feminist epistemology works by interrogating how texts produce meaningful relations. Through the concept of *mubādalah*, he poses a simple but radical epistemological question: "To whom is the ethical message of religious texts actually addressed?" This question shifts the focus from who has the right to interpret texts to how texts construct moral subjects and the social relations within them (Qonita & Ilyas, 2024).

The uniqueness of *mubādalah* epistemology lies in its focus on subject-subject relations rather than subject-object relations. Faqihuddin shows that many gender inequalities in Islamic family law arise not because the text affirms male domination, but because readings that epistemically place women as recipients of rules, rather than as

participants in the production of legal meaning. By reversing this logic, *mubādalah* functions as an epistemological mechanism to assess whether an interpretation truly reflects the principles of Islamic justice or merely perpetuates power relations that have been naturalized through religious language (Ihsaniyah, 2020).

Regarding women's right to a career after marriage, the epistemology of *mubādalah* does not ask first whether women are "allowed" to work, but rather how the ethical relationship between husbands and wives is constructed in religious texts and practices. By placing marriage as a partnership that binds economic, domestic, and social responsibilities, work is understood as a human activity subject to the principles of reciprocity and mutual benefit. The rejection of women's careers, in this framework, is not seen as a normative conclusion of Islamic teachings but as a result of a failure to read the text relationally and reciprocally (Imtihanah, 2020).

Thus, Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir's epistemological contribution does not lie in adding the discourse of gender equality to the text but in reconstructing the way the text itself is read and operated. If Husein Muhammad dismantles patriarchal authority in the tradition of interpretation through historical and ethical criticism, Faqihuddin rebuilds the epistemic foundations of text reading such that gender justice is present as a logical

consequence of the structure of meaning in Islam itself. The two ideas complement each other and open up a productive epistemological dialogue in contemporary religious discourse (Pralingga, 2023).

Although Husein Muhammad and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir share the same normative goal, namely, the enforcement of gender justice in Islam, this meeting point does not necessarily erase the differences in their epistemological approaches. In fact, these differences show that Islamic feminism is not a monolithic body of thought but a plural and dynamic discourse. Husein Muhammad works through a critique of the history of religious knowledge production, tracing how patriarchal interpretive authority and *fiqh* construction were formed, institutionalized, and passed down. His epistemology departs from an effort to dismantle established normative assumptions and then re-examine them through the principles of justice, humanity, and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*.

In contrast, Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir does not begin his critique from the history of authority or *fiqh* structures but rather from the logic of meaning relations in the text. Through *mubādalah* epistemology, he reconstructed the way religious texts shape moral subjects and social relations, emphasizing the principles of reciprocity and mutuality as the main epistemic mechanisms. As Husein Muhammad has highlighted, "*who*" has been speaking on behalf of the

text and with what assumptions, Faqihuddin asks "*how*" the text itself works in distributing rights, obligations, and authority between men and women.

This difference in epistemological approaches results in a complementary dynamic in the discourse on Islamic feminism. Husein Muhammad's historical-ethical critique opens up space for the delegitimization of patriarchal interpretations that are considered final, while Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir's relational approach provides an operational framework for constructing a gender-fair reading of texts from within their structural meaning. Thus, Islamic feminism does not stop at a single epistemological model but develops as a field of intellectual dialogue that allows various strategies of reading texts, traditions, and social realities to work simultaneously.

In the context of women's right to a career after marriage, this epistemological differentiation shows that the defense of women's rights can be built not only through criticism of unequal legal traditions but also through the reconstruction of how religious texts and relations are understood. It is this epistemological plurality that makes Islamic feminism a contemporary religious discourse that is adaptive, reflective, and open to the negotiation of meaning without losing its normative footing in the values of justice and benefit.

### **Husein Muhammad and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir's Views on Women's Right to a Career After Marriage**

The discussion of women's right to a career after marriage is an important aspect of contemporary Islamic feminist discourse, particularly in the thinking of Husein Muhammad and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir. Both believed that the dynamics of gender relations in Muslim families cannot be understood solely through a textual reading of religious teachings but must be analyzed in a broader social, historical, and ethical context. Women's right to develop themselves through professions or public activities is not only related to economic issues but also concerns autonomy, dignity, and the actualization of humanity (Chumayro et al., 2024). An analysis of the views of these two figures will provide a more in-depth picture of how egalitarian principles in Islam are translated into the practice of modern family life, as well as a basis for comparative analysis and social implications in the next section.

The theological basis used by Muhammad and Kodir in asserting women's right to a career is based on a reinterpretation of religious texts that emphasize spiritual and moral equality between men and women. Verses from the Qur'an, such as QS. An-Nahl: 97, form the basis for the idea that women's contributions, work, and good deeds are valued equally, without any reduction in value simply because of their gender.

The following is the text of Surah an-Nahl Verse 97:

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ  
فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيٰوةً طَيِّبَةًۭ وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُم بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا  
يَعْمَلُونَ ٩٧

Meaning: Whoever does good deeds, whether male or female, while being a believer, will certainly be given a good life and rewarded with a reward better than that which they have always done.

Faqihuddin emphasizes that the structure of the verse explicitly positions women as autonomous moral subjects, not domestic objects dependent on men, so that women's work, social contributions, and professionalism are directly legitimized by the sacred text without any gender-based restrictions (Kodir, 2019). Meanwhile, Husein Muhammad views this verse as part of a larger pattern in the Qur'an that affirms the nobility of human beings based on their piety, not on traditional roles or cultural constructs. According to him, the verse undermines the assumption that women have lower spiritual or social capacities because it affirms women's ability to achieve *hayâtan tayyibah* (a prosperous life) through the deeds they choose and do, including in the public sphere (Chandra, 2023). Together, their interpretations position QS. An-Nahl:97 as a normative declaration that equality is not a modern agenda imposed on the text but rather an inherent Qur'anic principle that opens up a wide space for the

recognition of women's rights to work, have careers, and contribute fully to society (Maliki & Sari, 2023).

This normative framework is reinforced by a philosophical foundation that places justice (*'adl*), reciprocity (*mubādalāh*), and *maslahah* as the main principles for understanding gender relations. Husein Muhammad highlights *karāmah insāniyyah* (human dignity) as the basis on which women have the same right to develop their potential as part of the mandate of the caliphate (Muhammad, 2022). Meanwhile, Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir emphasizes that all relationships within the family must be based on the principle of reciprocity, so that the division of roles between husbands and wives is not rigid, but rather the result of dialogue and cooperation based on each person's abilities and circumstances. Thus, work is not only understood as an economic activity but also as a form of self-actualization and social contribution that is part of the ethics of humanity in Islam.

Thus, working is a basic right of women, not a privilege granted by their husbands. Both reject the classical fiqh view that places the husband's permission as an absolute requirement for women to engage in public activities because this view is more a product of patriarchal culture than a normative principle of Islam. From Husein Muhammad's perspective, women still have full legal capacity (*ahliyyah al-adā'*) even after marriage; accordingly, their right to work cannot be restricted except

on the basis of clear harm. Meanwhile, Faqihuddin emphasized that the mechanism of asking for permission is merely a form of consultation within the household, not an instrument of subordination (Kodir, 2019). Within this framework, women's right to a career is understood as part of their dignity and autonomy as free individuals protected by the principles of Islam itself.

In Husein Muhammad's framework, women's right to a career after marriage is understood as part of basic human freedom that is not lost when a person enters the institution of marriage. Husein asserts that marriage should not be interpreted as a process of "taking authority" over women's bodies, life choices, or freedom of movement. For Husein, women still have full legal capacity (*ahliyyah*); accordingly, their right to work is on an equal footing with that of men. He rejects the view that places the husband's permission as an absolute requirement for women's activities in the public sphere because, according to him, the arguments cited to restrict women are more rooted in patriarchal sociocultural constructs than in normative Islamic principles. Husein also strengthened his argument by referring to the history of women during the time of the Prophet, such as Khadijah as a merchant and Rufaidah as a medical worker, showing that women's professional space is part of authentic Islamic tradition (Muhammad, 2021).

Meanwhile, Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir developed the argument for women's right to a career through the concept of mubadalah, which is the principle of reciprocity that places the husband–wife relationship as a reciprocal relationship, not a hierarchical one. Within this framework, work is understood not only as an individual right of women but also as a joint contribution to the welfare of the family and society. Faqihuddin emphasizes that all Islamic teachings regarding family relations must be read through the principle of reciprocity, so that commands or prohibitions in the text, when related to gender roles, should not be understood as applying only to women, but also to men on an equal footing. With this logic, women's obligation to “obey” or “stay at home” cannot be used as a reason to limit their careers because logically, men also have the same obligation to maintain the honor of the family. This perspective emphasizes that women's professional space is not a threat to the family structure but rather part of the manifestation of a fair household partnership (Kodir, 2019).

Both figures argue that women's involvement in the professional sphere is not only permissible but can actually be part of ethical Islamic practice. Husein sees that women's ability to contribute to education, health, the economy, and other public sectors is a moral mandate that is in line with *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, especially *hifz al-nafs*, *hifz al-'aql*, and *hifz al-māl*. Faqihuddin,

with his mubadalah approach, adds that women's work often provides emotional and financial support for their families, so restricting them has the potential to undermine the value of *maslahah*. These two approaches intersect at one key point: women's right to a career should not be positioned as a threat to the husband-wife relationship but rather as a form of self-actualization that remains within the framework of Islamic values that uphold reciprocity, justice, and respect for human dignity.

According to Muhammad and Kodir, the scope of women's right to a career includes all types of professions that do not conflict with basic human values and Islamic ethics. Both reject restrictions that define “certain fields” as the exclusive domain of men because, according to them, the division of public and domestic spaces is not a theological concept but a cultural construct that has changed throughout history. Husein Muhammad, for example, asserts that during the time of the Prophet, women were active in various strategic fields—trade, health, education, and social negotiations—so that modern professions such as doctors, lawyers, lecturers, bureaucrats, social activists, journalists, and private sector professionals are basically in line with the spirit of women's historical involvement (Mutimmah & Safiullah, 2022). Faqihuddin adds through his concept of mubadalah that all professions that can be done by men can, in principle, also be done by women,

except those that have objective restrictions related to safety or certain physical capacities according to sharia and rationality (Sani'atin, 2023). Within this framework, work is no longer understood as an activity that is "permitted as long as it does not interfere with the household," but rather as a legitimate right under Islam, as long as it is carried out within the framework of morality and mutuality between husband and wife.

While opening opportunities for women to work in all fields, these two figures continue to emphasize the importance of balancing family roles without positioning women as being morally more responsible for domestic affairs. Husein rejects the idea that women must prioritize the household, while men are free to prioritize their careers, because the ideal division of roles must be the result of a proportional agreement based on the abilities, conditions, and willingness of each partner (Nihayah & Wahidatunnisa, 2025). Similarly, Faqihuddin believes that housework, childcare, and emotional support are not "women's nature," but shared responsibilities; therefore, women's careers should not be positioned as a cause of family disharmony (Sholihati, 2023). From this position, both state that women have full rights over the income they earn without the obligation to hand it over or seek their husbands' approval to manage it. Women's economic independence is understood not only as an individual

right but also as an instrument of protection against structural vulnerability, both in the context of domestic injustice and in the broader social context.

Overall, the views of Husein Muhammad and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir show that women's right to a career after marriage has strong theological legitimacy in Islam, because it stems from the principles of spiritual equality, full legal capacity, and the mandate of humanity inherent in every individual regardless of gender. Both agree that the prohibition on women working does not have a strong sharia basis, because the verses or hadiths that are often used to justify restrictions are more a product of cultural interpretation that arose in a patriarchal social structure, rather than a representation of universal Islamic values. Basing their argument on the experiences of women during the time of the Prophet and the principle of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, both assert that women's mobility and participation in the public sphere can actually be part of goodness, benefit, and social contribution that is considered worship. Within this framework, women's careers are understood not as a threat to domestic harmony, but as part of self-actualization and social contribution in line with the basic values of Islam.

**Comparative Analysis of Common Ground, Differences, and Contributions: Building a Gender-**

## Equitable Understanding of Religion in the Contemporary Era

Both Husein Muhammad and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir share a strong common ground in terms of their theological and ethical orientations toward gender justice in Islam.

Both start from the belief that equality between men and women is a non-negotiable Qur'anic principle, and that patriarchal readings of religious texts reflect cultural constructs rather than the fundamental values of Islam itself. In their arguments, both figures consistently use *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* as a foundation to assert that women's rights, including the right to a career, must be understood in the context of public interest, strengthening human dignity, and respect for women's moral and spiritual capacities (Chakim & Habib, 2022). This similarity shows that both versions of Islamic feminism are not merely advocacy but also have a solid theological basis that is in line with the Islamic scholarly tradition.

In addition, both Husein and Faqihuddin view the husband–wife relationship as an equal partnership, not a hierarchical structure that places men at the center of decision-making. Both reject literal interpretations of verses or hadiths used to justify the subordination of women and emphasize the need for contextual readings that consider the values of reciprocity, justice, and the principle of protection against gender vulnerability in modern society. In the context of women's career rights, both

agree that work is a basic right that is not lost due to marriage and should not be dependent on the husband's permission, except in the context of deliberation and consideration of mutual benefit (Nuronyah et al., 2019). This common ground shows that although their methodological approaches differ, the normative orientation they construct moves in the same direction: building a religious understanding that places women as full moral subjects in the family and society.

Despite having common ground in their vision of equality, Husein Muhammad and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir take different methodological paths in reinterpreting texts and gender realities. Husein stands out through his strong social criticism, especially regarding the formation of *fiqh* history in a patriarchal social context that often marginalizes women's experiences. By tracing the social constructs surrounding the birth of classical laws, Husein asserts that much gender inequality stems from power structures, not from Islamic teachings themselves (Nashr, 2020). In contrast, Faqihuddin focuses on practical hermeneutics through the concept of *mubādalah*, which is a way of understanding texts from the perspective of reciprocity between men and women (Kodir, 2017). This approach not only dismantles interpretive biases but also offers an ethical framework that can be directly applied in everyday relationships.

These methodological differences result in distinctive styles of argumentation: Husein moves in a normative-historical pattern, linking fiqh products to their socio-cultural context, whereas Faqihuddin emphasizes relational ethics that emphasize reciprocal justice as the basic principle of Muslim families. This difference is evident when both read issues such as "husband's permission," "domestic roles," and "family responsibilities." Husein views these concepts as products of patriarchal culture whose underlying structures must be criticized, whereas Faqihuddin interprets them through the logic of *mubādalah*, that permission, domestic work, and economic responsibility are not unilateral rights, but rather mechanisms of reciprocity that must be mutually agreed upon and implemented. Thus, these two approaches do not negate each other but rather expand the spectrum of Islamic feminist thought in Indonesia.

Husein Muhammad's contribution to the discourse on gender justice in Islam lies primarily in his courage to open up epistemological criticism of traditional fiqh. Through an in-depth analysis of the history of law formation, he shows that many fiqh products are influenced by hierarchical social structures that are biased towards men. Husein not only criticizes the content of *fiqh* but also highlights the way religious knowledge is produced, who has the authority to interpret it, and how that authority often fails to capture women's experiences.

This approach provides an important intellectual foundation for efforts to reform Islamic law and provides space for a new generation of Muslim scholars to critically question the fiqh legacy without having to abandon the normative framework of Islam.

In contrast, Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir made an equally significant contribution through his constructive and applicable *mubādalah* methodology. While Husein opened up space for structural criticism, Faqihuddin offered a practical formula for building equal family relationships based on mutual rights and responsibilities. This approach quickly influenced the Muslim women's movement in Indonesia because it provided a more friendly, solution-oriented theological language that was easy to practice in everyday life. Together, Husein and Faqihuddin's thoughts occupy a strategic moderate position: not trapped in fiqh conservatism that closes the space for change, but also not leading the ummah to a model of liberal feminism that is often considered distant from the textual basis of Islam (Qibtiyah, 2020). Thus, both formed important pillars for the development of Indonesian Islamic feminism, which is rooted in tradition but open to social transformation.

The relevance of Husein Muhammad and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir's thoughts for strengthening women's career rights lies primarily in their ability to offer a theological framework that not only justifies but also normalizes women's

participation in the public sphere. Through his epistemological critique of patriarchal fiqh, Husein raises awareness that restrictions on women's careers are not absolute religious commands, but rather social constructs framed as religious norms. He shows that Islam has always had an egalitarian spirit; therefore, women have the right to develop their professional potential without being burdened by guilt or considered to be deviating from their nature. This structural approach is important in the Indonesian social context, where religious discourse is often used to legitimize the subordination of women in the economic sphere.

Meanwhile, Faqihuddin's approach, which emphasizes mutual relations (*mubādalah*), reinforces this legitimacy by offering a concrete ethical framework for

modern Muslim couples. By positioning women's careers as part of family cooperation, rather than as a threat to the husband's authority, he helps to dismantle the normative conflicts that often arise in Muslim households. This approach means that the issue of women's right to a career is no longer positioned as an attempt to “go against tradition,” but as a legitimate, ethical, and even recommended Islamic practice when it benefits the family. Overall, the thoughts of Husein and Faqihuddin present complementary conceptual and practical foundations, strengthening the position of women as full subjects in economic life while establishing a more equal and just family ethic.

A general comparison of the thoughts of Husein Muhammad and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir is presented in the following table.

**Table 1.** Comparison of the thoughts of Husein Muhammad and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir

Aspects of Analysis	Husein Muhammad	Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir
Epistemological Starting Point	Critiques of the dominance of patriarchal interpretation and jurisprudence in the history of Islamic scholarship; gender justice is positioned as a corrective project for structural inequality.	The belief that Islamic moral messages are universal and injustice arises from how the text is read, not from the text itself.
Women's Career Rights	The right to a career is normatively valid; restrictions are seen as products of patriarchal interpretations.	Career rights are affirmed through the logic of <i>mubādalah</i> : the value of goodness applies equally to both men and women.
Meeting Point	Rejection of gender-biased textual readings and assertion that injustice is not an Islamic teaching.	Both place gender justice as a primary ethical value in religious interpretations.

Differences in Approach	Emphasizing epistemological criticism and the deconstruction of classical interpretive traditions.	This study emphasizes an applicable and operational methodological reconstruction.
Contribution	Strengthening the critical foundations of Islamic intellectual renewal from a gender justice perspective	Provides practical methods for interpreting gender-just religious practice.

Source: compiled by the author

As shown in Table 1, a comparison of epistemological starting points, views on women’s career rights, common ground, differences in approach, and the contributions of Husein Muhammad and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir demonstrates that Islamic feminism does not operate within a single epistemological pattern. A shared normative vision of gender justice does not necessarily eliminate differences in their ways of thinking, strategies for reading texts, and the practical orientations they develop. It is precisely in this regard that the dynamics of Islamic feminism find their strength: Husein's epistemological critique opens up space for the deconstruction of patriarchal *fiqh* heritage, while Faqihuddin's *mubādalāh* approach presents a more applicable ethical mechanism in contemporary Muslim life, including in the issue of women's career rights. Thus, this epistemological plurality does not indicate a fragmentation of discourse but rather shows the complementary work between structural criticism and practical construction. Islamic feminism, in this context, appears as a living, adaptive discourse that continues to

negotiate with social reality without losing its normative footing in Islamic tradition.

**From Religious Discourse to the Public Sphere: The Implications of Islamic Feminism on Social Regulation and Practice in Indonesia**

The ideas of Husein Muhammad and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir provide a strong theological basis for strengthening the principle of gender equality in family regulations in Indonesia. Both emphasize that legal constructs that place men as the sole “heads of the family” and women as “housewives” are not final sharia provisions, but rather the result of social constructs born out of a specific historical context. This idea opens up space for new interpretations of the norms in the Marriage Law and its derivative regulations, especially those related to the distribution of roles in the household and women's right to work (Genisa et al., 2022). Their approach encourages the formulation of family policies that are more accommodating to contemporary social realities, in which both men and women play a role in supporting the family economy and making decisions through deliberation.

In contrast, their contributions are highly relevant to reinterpreting the provision of “husband's permission” as a requirement for women to work, which has often been understood hierarchically. Both Husein and Faqihuddin emphasize that this concept must be read through the perspective of mutual relations, so that permission no longer has a subordinative meaning but is a manifestation of deliberation and joint consideration for the benefit of the family. This paradigm is in line with a public policy approach that places women's moral autonomy as part of human rights. Thus, this reinterpretation can serve as a legal basis for more gender-responsive regulatory changes, including in the context of employment, protection of working mothers, and efforts to eliminate gender-based discrimination in public and domestic spaces.

Furthermore, the ideas of these two figures have significant implications for state institutions and religious organizations in developing guidelines, standard operating procedures, or educational modules related to family and working women. Husein's critical approach to classical fiqh bias and Faqihuddin's *mubādalāh* methodology can be used as references in the development of marriage guidance curricula, religious counselor training, and family service guidelines by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the National Commission on Violence Against Women, Islamic mass

organizations, or educational institutions. The integration of a gender justice perspective in these materials not only broadens the understanding of officials and the public but also provides religious legitimacy for the protection of women's rights in the workplace. At this point, the thoughts of both contribute to bridging the need for policy revision with an ethical-theological basis that is acceptable to the Indonesian Muslim public, so that more gender-equitable regulations can be developed gradually but sustainably (Suhada, 2021).

The ideas of Husein Muhammad and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir have also had a significant impact on how society views gender relations in the domestic and public spheres. By emphasizing that work is a moral and sharia right of women, not merely a dispensation dependent on the husband's willingness, both encourage a change in the mindset of Muslim society regarding the role of women in the family. The paradigm that places women solely responsible for the domestic sphere is beginning to shift towards a more equal model of relations, in which the division of roles is carried out flexibly based on expertise, capacity, and mutual agreement. This shift ultimately encourages Muslim families to form a more dialogical, mutually supportive, and welfare-oriented household culture, rather than one based on gender hierarchy.

In addition, their ideas have direct implications for the normalization of women's involvement in various fields

of work that were previously considered inappropriate or beyond established sociocultural boundaries. Both Husein and Faqihuddin emphasize that there is no shar'i prohibition for women to appear in public spaces, as long as Islamic ethical principles are fulfilled and family relationships continue to be managed fairly. This understanding provides a moral foundation for society to accept women's professional abilities as an integral part of family economic and social responsibilities. In the Indonesian social context, this is evident in the increasing acceptance of women as public leaders, professionals in the fields of law, education, health, and community activists. Thus, the views of these two figures not only pave the way for individual transformation but also encourage more egalitarian social structural change.

On a cultural level, the concepts of equality and reciprocity championed by these two figures are eroding the legitimacy of patriarchal norms that have long been attached to religious interpretations. By providing strong theological arguments, they have given society the conceptual tools to reject the stigma against working women, criticize practices of excessive control by spouses, and build a family culture that values women's competence and agency. Their thinking has also influenced public narratives, including discourse on social media and religious forums, by expanding the space for discussion on gender justice as a value that is not

incompatible with Islam (Setiawan & Maliki, 2020). The result is the formation of a new cultural landscape that allows women to achieve economic independence, engage in professional communities, and contribute more broadly to social development, without having to face accusations that they are "violating nature."

Although the ideas of Husein Muhammad and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir open up a large space for the reinterpretation of regulations and social transformation, their implementation still faces significant resistance from conservative groups that understand gender roles in a normative-hierarchical manner. This rejection is often rooted in a reading of classical fiqh that is considered final, such that a more equitable reinterpretation is seen as a threat to the traditional family order. This condition is reinforced by the lack of institutional support for mainstreaming the perspective of gender justice in formal education, religious curricula, and family guidance institutions. The limitations of this knowledge infrastructure mean that the narratives of mutuality and equality offered by these two figures are not always widely accepted; therefore, society's acceptance of women's right to work often depends on local conditions, local religious leaders, and the social context of each community (Kencanawati et al., 2024).

In addition to ideological resistance, the implementation of the views of these

two figures is also limited by economic and educational inequalities that are still characteristic of most Indonesian societies. In many cases, women who want to work face structural barriers, such as lack of access to education, unequal distribution of domestic burdens, and cultural pressures that reinforce economic dependence on husbands. This makes the ideal relational ethics offered by Husein and the *mubādalāh* methodology developed by Faqihuddin difficult to realize evenly in the field. Even when more gender-responsive regulations or more progressive religious understandings begin to be accepted, material and social barriers remain as determining factors that limit women's space for actualization (Saputri et al., 2024). It is at this point that the ideas of these two figures need to be complemented by systemic efforts involving policy reform, women's economic empowerment, family literacy, and the strengthening of social institutions so that the equality they envision does not stop at the normative level but is truly lived out in the practice of Indonesian Muslim families.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that the defense of women's career rights in Islamic feminism does not depend only on normative conclusions about whether women are allowed to work, but is largely determined by how religious knowledge is constructed and operated.

Through an epistemological analysis of the thoughts of Husein Muhammad and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, this article finds that gender justice in Islam is constructed through two different but complementary approaches: historical-epistemological criticism of the patriarchal fiqh tradition and the development of relational ethics based on the principle of reciprocity (*mubādalāh*). These methodological differences do not negate their theological common ground but rather show that Islamic feminism is pluralistic and dynamic, with an internal capacity to respond to social change without abandoning the normative basis of Islam. In the context of wives' rights to a career, the thinking of these two figures not only provides religious legitimacy but also normalizes women's participation in the public sphere as part of ethical and beneficial Islamic practice. These two epistemologies have real transformative power when translated into family law discourse, public policy, and social practice in Indonesia, although their implementation still faces cultural resistance and regulatory structures that are not yet fully gender-responsive.

These findings imply the need for a shift in approach in religious education, family law policy, and public discourse—from an emphasis on control and hierarchy to fair and equal partnership relations. Therefore, strengthening gender literacy based on Islamic epistemology, mainstreaming

the principle of reciprocity in family regulations, and supporting women's economic empowerment are strategic steps to realize Muslim families that are not only normatively valid but also epistemologically and socially just.

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