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MAKING SPACE FOR WOMEN'S *TAFSIR*: TURKISH FEMALE EXEGESIS, WITH COMPARATIVE REFERENCE TO INDONESIAN FEMINIST *TAFSIR* TRADITIONS

Zulfikri* and Mohammad Muafi Himam**

Abstract: This article explores how contemporary Muslim women claim hermeneutical agency in Qur'anic exegesis by bringing Turkish female exegetes into conversation with Indonesia's feminist *tafsir* tradition. Focusing on Semra Kürün Çekmegil's *Okuyucu Tefsiri* and Necla Yasdıman's *Kur'ân Tahlili*, we trace two distinct yet complementary strategies: a reader-friendly, narrative-rich *tafsir* that centres on women's lived experiences, and a lexicographic, grammar-based engagement that quietly widens semantic possibilities. Both authors work largely within Sunni orthodox frames, but negotiate verses on creation, marriage, *qiwamah* and social roles in ways that soften patriarchal readings and foreground reciprocity, compassion and moral responsibility. Their projects are then situated alongside three tendencies in Indonesian feminist exegesis that emerge from pesantren activism, university-based gender studies and institutional *tafsir* initiatives. Taken together, these cases show that women's Qur'anic interpretation in Türkiye and Indonesia does not always present as explicitly feminist; rather, it often operates as a calibrated agency from within the tradition, expanding women's authority over the text, unsettling androcentric norms and diversifying what counts as legitimate *tafsir* today.

Keywords: *female exegetes, contemporary tafsir, Türkiye, Indonesia, hermeneutical agency*

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INTRODUCTION

For 14 centuries, Qur’anic interpretation (*tafsir*) has been a domain dominated by male scholars, with few women visibly contributing to the exegetical tradition.¹ Yet in recent decades, Muslim women have increasingly sought to reinterpret the Qur’an through female perspectives, challenging patriarchal biases and asserting their hermeneutical agency.² This global trend in “Islamic feminist” scholarship – exemplified by figures like Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas – has begun to find echoes in Türkiye, a Muslim-majority republic with a unique intellectual history.³ In Türkiye, the late 20th and early 21st centuries witnessed the emergence of the first women to produce full-length Qur’anic commentaries and translations, marking a significant shift in a field long perceived as the purview of men.⁴

This article focuses on two pioneering Turkish women who have mapped distinct modes of Qur’anic exegesis: Semra Kürün Çekmegil (b. 1947) and Necla Yasdıman (b. 1962). Semra Kürün Çekmegil is author of *Okuyucu Tefsiri* (Reader’s Commentary), which is recognised as the first complete *tafsir* in Türkiye written by a woman.⁵ Her *tafsir* is reader-centred, aiming to make the Qur’an accessible and “lived” for contemporary Muslims. It integrates classical sources and hadith (*riwayah*) with reflective analysis (*dirayah*) to bridge authoritative tradition and the needs of modern readers. Semra’s work raises questions about interpretive authority: How does a self-described “non-scholar” woman navigate the malestream *tafsir* tradition and assert a voice in explaining scripture?

Necla Yasdıman, by contrast, represents a more linguistic mode of engagement with the Qur’an. Yasdıman produced *Kur’ân Tahlili: Arapça Gramer Işığında Sözlük-Meal-Tefsir* (Qur’anic Analysis: Dictionary-Translation-*Tafsir* in Light of Arabic Grammar). Published in multiple volumes beginning in 2006, this work functions as a hybrid of Qur’an translation, lexicon, and commentary, explicitly designed to teach Arabic through the Qur’an. Yasdıman’s approach can be described as lexicographic hermeneutics. She meticulously analyses Arabic roots and grammar, often surveying meanings in classical lexica before offering a translated sense and brief interpretation.

Given this context, our comparative study of Semra and Necla illuminates two complementary strategies by which women have entered the interpretive arena: one by

¹ Amina Wadud, *Qur’an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press USA-OSO, 1999); Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur’an* (University of Texas Press, 2006).

² Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences* (Oneworld Publications, 2013); Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Mulki Al-Sharmani, and Jana Rumminger, eds., *Men in Charge? Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition* (Oneworld Publications, 2015).

³ Sema Üstün Külünk, “The Uncharted Experience of Women Translators of the Qur’an in Turkey,” *Parallèles* 34 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.17462/para.2022.01.12>; Sinem Bozkurt, “Touched Translations in Turkey: A Feminist Translation Approach,” *Moment Journal* 1, no. 1 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.17572/mj2014.1.104124>.

⁴ Ümmü Selame Türkmenoğlu and Esra Hacimüftüoğlu, “Semra Kürün Çekmegil ve Okuyucu Tefsiri” [Semra Kürün Çekmegil and Reader’s Commentary], *Kafkas Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 9, no. 18 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.17050/kafkasilahiyat.1100420>; Üstün Külünk, “The Uncharted Experience of Women Translators.”

⁵ Türkmenoğlu and Hacimüftüoğlu, “Semra Kürün Çekmegil ve Okuyucu Tefsiri.”

composing an original *tafsir* that blends into popular religious discourse, and another by producing a scholarly translation-cum-*tafsir* that doubles as a language learning tool. Both have had to contend with the fact that women interpreters face scrutiny or marginalisation.

At the same time, female Qur'anic exegesis is not an exclusively Turkish phenomenon. Over the past three decades, a rich body of feminist and gender-sensitive *tafsir* has emerged in Indonesia, produced by scholars such as Zaitunah Subhan, Nur Rofiah, and Badriyah Fayumi, as well as through institutional projects like Muhammadiyah's *Tafsir at-Tanwir*. Indonesian women have articulated their interpretations through academic monographs, activist-oriented writings, oral-digital *pengajian* (Islamic study circle), and participation in collective *tafsir* teams. These developments constitute a distinct epistemic tradition of female Qur'anic interpretation in the Global South, one that shares with the Turkish cases a concern to contest androcentric readings, yet does so through different genres, institutional locations, and discursive registers.

Over the past several decades, a substantial body of literature has emerged around female scholars' engagement with the Qur'an and what is often termed feminist *tafsir* or Islamic feminist hermeneutics.⁶ Amina Wadud's landmark work exemplifies a holistic hermeneutical approach.⁷ She argues that the Qur'an's message is inherently egalitarian and verses must be examined in light of the Qur'an's overall ethic and historical context rather than through the prism of later patriarchal social norms.⁸ Asma Barlas takes a complementary approach of historical and theological critique, contending that patriarchal readings stem from interpretive traditions rather than the text.⁹ Ziba Mir-Hosseini and colleagues have shown how patriarchal interpretations in Islamic law and exegesis have been constructed and can be deconstructed; crucially, Mir-Hosseini stresses that, while the Qur'an is Divine, its interpretations are human and historically conditioned—hence, open to critique.¹⁰ In Türkiye's context prior to Semra and Necla, women's contributions were largely limited to pedagogical works or participation in translation teams rather than standalone full exegeses, with only three Turkish Qur'an translations by women identified to date.¹¹ Hidayet Aydar's survey *Hanım Müfessirler* (Women Qur'anic Exegetes) documents women exegetes across Islamic history and notes the paucity of Turkish female *mufasssirs* (Qur'anic exegete), underscoring the significance of Semra Kürün's *Okuyucu Tefsiri*.¹² Further, recent scholarship explicitly identifies *Okuyucu Tefsiri* as “the first full tafsir from beginning to end” by a woman in Türkiye.¹³

⁶ Aysha A. Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 17.

⁷ Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁹ Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an*, 20.

¹⁰ Ziba Mir-Hosseini, “Muslim Women's Quest for Equality: Between Islamic Law and Feminism,” *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 4 (2006): 632, <https://doi.org/10.1086/508085>.

¹¹ Bozkurt, “Touched Translations in Turkey,” 104.

¹² Hidayet Aydar, *Hanım Müfessirler* [Women Qur'anic exegetes] (Ensar Neşriyat, 2015).

¹³ Türkmenoğlu and Hacimüftüoğlu, “Semra Kürün Çekmeçil ve Okuyucu Tefsiri,” 628.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of hermeneutical agency is central to our framework. A hermeneutical approach attends not only to the Qur'an's textual meaning but also to its socio-historical context—namely, the communities and cultures, their attitudes, norms, and values, of the Hijaz and broader Arabia in which the text emerged.¹⁴ As Roger Trigg puts it, the hermeneutical paradigm concerns the interpretation of traditional texts, and its perennial problem is how we can understand, within our context, something written in a different situation.¹⁵ Accordingly, feminist hermeneutics seeks to understand the Qur'an and demonstrate that the Qur'an's core aims also empower women, thereby forming a new, gender-sensitive paradigm for Qur'anic interpretation. At its core, Muslim feminist hermeneutics emphasises the need to reread and reinterpret the Qur'an and, in particular, to challenge patriarchal interpretations within an egalitarian, anti-patriarchal epistemology.¹⁶ It offers “liberatory” and egalitarian interpretations through readings of the Qur'an that resist patriarchal and sexist biases in Arabic usage.

By this we mean the ability of an interpreter (here, female interpreters) to actively shape understanding and extract new meanings from a text, rather than passively transmit established interpretations. We consider Semra and Necla as exercising hermeneutical agency, albeit differently. Semra's agency is evident in her selective synthesis and commentary: she chooses which classical opinions to relay or omit and frequently supplements transmitted views with her reasoning and reader-facing applications.¹⁷ We see her hermeneutical agency in how she addresses the verse “men are a degree above them [women]” (Q. 2:228). In readings reported around Okuyucu Tefsiri, the “degree (*daraja*)” is framed not as an ontological superiority but as a functional responsibility tied to family law procedures (e.g., *idda* (waiting period for a widow), *ruju* (resumption of conjugal relationship)) and the equitable balancing of rights and duties in divorce contexts, rather than as a blanket male precedence.¹⁸ Here, Semra is actively reframing the scriptural discussion on gender. Such reframing is a hallmark of feminist *tafsir* and demonstrates agency in interpretation.¹⁹

Necla Yasdıman's hermeneutical agency is subtler but discernible in her choice of what to study and highlight. For instance, her study of the H-L-K root shows that derivatives can mean not only “creation” but also “to lie” or “to fabricate.”²⁰ This nuance affects how one reads verses like Q. 29:17 (*takhlūquna ifkan*, “you invent a lie”), where *khalaqa* functions in the

¹⁴ Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (Taylor & Francis, 2006).

¹⁵ Abdul Mustaqim, *Paradigma Tafsir Feminis* [Feminist Interpretation Paradigm] (Logung Pustaka, 2008), 35.

¹⁶ Irma Riyani, “Muslim Feminist Hermeneutical Method to the Qur'an (Analytical Study to the Method of Amina Wadud),” *Ulumuna* 21, no. 2 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v21i2.320>.

¹⁷ Türkmenoğlu and Hacimüftüoğlu, “Semra Kürün Çekmegil ve Okuyucu Tefsiri.”

¹⁸ Fadime Yenilmez, “Semra Kürün Çekmegil'in 'Okuyucu Tefsiri'nde Kadın Algısı” [The Perception of Women in Semra Kürün Çekmegil's Reader's Commentary] (Master diss., Necmettin Erbakan Üniversitesi, 2019), 65.

¹⁹ Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam*, 184.

²⁰ Necla Yasdıman Demirdöven, “Arapça Sözlüklerde (خ ل ق) H-L-K Kökü Türevleri ve Verilen Kur'an Ayeti Örneklerinin Mukayesesi” [A Comparison of Derivatives of the Root 'H-L-K' in Arabic Dictionaries and the Examples of Qur'anic Verses Provided], *EKEV Akademi Dergisi* 63 (2015): 244.

sense of fabrication rather than *creatio ex nihilo* (creation from nothing) (Q. 29:17). By surfacing such polysemy, Yasdıman enables readers to see layered meanings. In this sense, her practice aligns with what Mona Baker has called “activist translation,” where translation/explication deliberately broadens access and reframes understanding.²¹ Feminist translation theorists further argue that translation can operate as a form of cultural intervention that renders the translator visible and authorial.²² Simon also notes the historical pattern that women often gained earlier acceptance as translators than as authors, with translation serving as a gateway into the literary field.²³ Through choices of lexis, paratext, and didactic framing, such translators can subtly contest and reshape dominant narratives.²⁴

Having analysed each case individually, we then carried out a systematic comparison along key dimensions such as background, genre, methodology, use of sources, treatment of gender-related verses, style, and modes of claiming authority. A comparative table was constructed to map the convergences and divergences between Semra Kürün Çekmegil and Necla Yasdıman. In the discussion section, this comparative frame is extended by bringing their approaches into dialogue with contemporary Indonesian traditions of female Qur’anic interpretation, allowing us to situate Turkish female exegesis within a broader, trans-local epistemology of women’s *tafsir*. The comparative approach is informed by Amina Wadud’s typology of women’s interpretations (traditional, apologetic, holistic).²⁵ In sum, our methodology marries textual exegesis with contextual analysis, under a comparative framework. This approach allows us not only to detail each woman’s hermeneutical method and insights, but also to analyse how genre and gender interplay in their quest for interpretive authority. The following section will first present the necessary biographical and contextual background for each figure, before we delve into the details of their works.

RESULTS

Semra Kürün Çekmegil’s Okuyucu Tefsiri

Semra Kürün Çekmegil was born in 1947 in Malatya, Türkiye. Her life trajectory is markedly different from that of formal Islamic scholars. Semra did not attend secular university or an Islamic seminary (İlahiyat); the biographical record notes only primary schooling, with later religious formation outside formal institutions. She was mentored primarily by her father, Mehmet Said Çekmegil—widely regarded in Malatya as a respected Islamic thinker and public intellectual. She then married and took on the duties of family life; for years she led Qur’anic

²¹ Mona Baker, *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account* (Routledge, 2006).

²² Luise Von Flotow, ‘Feminist Translation: Contexts, Practices and Theories’, *TTR: Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction* 4, no. 2 (1991): 70, <https://doi.org/10.7202/037094ar>; Bozkurt, “Touched Translations in Turkey,” 114.

²³ Sherry Simon, *Gender in Translation*, Translation Studies (Taylor and Francis, 2003).

²⁴ Bozkurt, “Touched Translations in Turkey,” 110.

²⁵ Wadud, *Qur’an and Woman*.

sohbet (discussion) groups and weekly *tafsir* lessons at local foundations such as Akabe and Bilgi.

Semra began writing *Okuyucu Tefsiri* around 2004. The first volume (covering Surat al-Fatiha and al-Baqarah) was published in 2006 by Nida Yayınları in Malatya. Over the next decade, volume after volume appeared, until the 13th and final volume was completed by 2015. Semra's *tafsir* follows the standard order of the *mushaf* from al-Fatiha (1) to al-Nas (114), with no surah omitted.²⁶ At completion, the *tafsir* spanned 6,102 pages in 13 volumes, making Semra one of the few women ever to have written a full Qur'an commentary. Semra's modus operandi was not to assert herself as an authority but as a facilitator. She often uses the term "*Okuyucu*" ("Reader") to emphasise that this *tafsir* is for the reader and even by a reader. The title, as she explains, was inspired by the Qur'an's first revealed word "*Iqra*" ("Read!"). Originally, an Arabic title – *Tafsir al-Qari* – was considered (meaning "Reader's Commentary"), but her friend joked it could be misheard as "*kari tafsiri*" – colloquially "wife's *tafsir*" or even an impolite way to say "woman's *tafsir*" – so they decided to keep the title in Turkish to avoid sexist derision.²⁷ This anecdote reveals the social context: a woman authoring a *tafsir* was so unusual that it might not be taken seriously.

Semra's sources for commentary are diverse yet predominantly traditional Sunni *tafsirs* available in Turkish. She used around 30 different *tafsir* works as references.²⁸ These likely included classical commentators like al-Ṭabari, Ibn Kathir, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, and recent ones like Sayyid Quṭb, as well as Turkish exegeses (e.g., Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır's *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili*). However, it is crucial to note that *Okuyucu Tefsiri* is not a mere collage; Semra also injects her voice and interpretations, especially when choosing between differing opinions or addressing contemporary issues. Türkmenoğlu observes that Semra did not present a fundamentally new methodology in *tafsir*, meaning she followed the general patterns of classical *tafsir*, but her work is essentially a "*derleme*" (compilation) with her interwoven commentary.²⁹

Semra's work also includes input from classical scholarship beyond her primary *tafsir* sources. For difficult terms, she might mention how Arab poets used a word or linguists defined it. Intriguingly, instead of quoting lines of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, she often quotes Turkish poetry to illustrate a point or give a moral lesson. She draws on famous Turkish Muslim poets like Yunus Emre, Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, Namık Kemal, as well as her father Mehmet Said Çekmegil's verses. This makes the commentary resonate with Turkish cultural literacy and provides a familiar wisdom.

Another hallmark is that at the end of each surah's commentary, Semra usually provides a brief "*ders çıkarımı*" (lesson or moral extraction) and concludes with a *du'a* (supplication) related to the surah's themes. In volume 10, for instance, after interpreting a surah, she might

²⁶ Semra Kürüm Çekmegil, *Okuyucu Tefsiri (Tefsiru'l-Kari)* [Reader's Commentary], vol. 1 (Nida Dergisi Yayınları, 2006).

²⁷ Türkmenoğlu and Hacimüftüoğlu, "Semra Kürün Çekmegil ve Okuyucu Tefsiri."

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

summarise: “Thus we learn that... [moral], and we pray to Allah to help us embody this guidance.”³⁰ She maintains that style in print to keep a personal, engaged tone, so the reader feels like a participant in a study circle, rather than reading a dry academic tome.

Riwayah and Dirayah in Harmony

Semra draws on the inherited corpus of narrations for context and interpretation, while also employing her reasoning and insight to elaborate and derive meaning. Her use of *riwayah* is evident in many examples. For instance, when interpreting the first verses of Surat al-Ḍuḥā (93:1-3, where God tells the Prophet “Your Lord has not forsaken you”), Semra includes the *asbab al-nuzul* report that revelation had paused for a time and the Prophet was distressed until these verses came – a report where the pagans mock, “Muhammad’s Lord has forsaken him,” prompting this surah’s revelation. She cites that narrative to contextualise the comforting tone of the surah. In doing so, she transmits what earlier *tafsir* works like al-Ṭabari record.³¹

However, Semra does not stop at quoting narrations. She analyses and sometimes questions them. An illuminating instance concerns the creation of Eve. For example, she notes the Qur’an (4:1) says “created you from a single nafs and from it created its zawj (mate),” without stating “from his rib,” and she argues there is no clear, authentic Islamic text specifying a rib origin. She observes that the rib story’s similarity to the Torah’s account is telling, implying it entered Muslim exegesis from Israelite traditions (*isra’iliyyat*). Semra emphasises Qur’anic silence on the method of Eve’s creation and refuses to consider woman a secondary derivative of man. Instead, she explains that God created human beings in pairs from one essence, thus man and woman are two halves of one whole, “like the two mates of a pair of shoes,” as she vividly puts it.³² This analogy, somewhat homespun, drives the point that one is incomplete without the other, and neither is superior except in righteousness. Here we see Semra employing *dirayah* (reasoned consideration) when she interprets *nafs-i waḥida* not as “Adam” specifically, but as an original human essence from which both sexes came equally. She notes that humans are created in pairs, and superiority is only by *taqwa* (piety).³³ By doing so, she aligns the interpretation with the Qur’anic principles of justice and contradicts misogynistic readings.

On the contentious verse of *Qiwamah* (Q. 4:34, “men are protectors/maintainers of women”), Semra again blends sources and reasoning. She quotes the standard explanation that *qiwamah* refers to men’s financial responsibility but then criticises interpretations that have turned this into male supremacy.³⁴ According to Yenilmez, Semra points out that some circles have misused the concept of *qiwamah* to oppress, effectively turning women into slaves of men, an idea she firmly opposes. She reiterates that any notion of men’s absolute authority is conditioned by justice and custom, “not an unconditional rule,” and abusive interpretations must be rejected. She addresses misogynistic hadith-attributed statements (like “women are

³⁰ Çekmegil, *Okuyucu Tefsiri (Tefsiru’l-Kari)*.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.; Yenilmez, “Semra Kürün Çekmegil’in ‘Okuyucu Tefsiri’nde Kadın Algısı.”

³³ Çekmegil, *Okuyucu Tefsiri (Tefsiru’l-Kari)*.

³⁴ Ibid.

lacking in intellect” or “bad omen is in the woman”) by saying such views cannot be authentically from the Prophet but are people’s biases projected with a Prophetic chain.³⁵ This underscores her willingness to employ critical reasoning on transmitted reports when they clash with the Qur’an’s moral portrait of the Prophet and the broader Prophetic Sunnah she treats as authoritative.

Women, Society, and Modern Challenges

One of the most significant contributions of *Okuyucu Tefsiri* is how Semra Çekmegil handles verses concerning women and social issues. Given our focus on female exegesis, it is important to highlight a few key thematic insights from her *tafsir* on these matters, as mentioned below.

Semra’s commentary on marital relations often stresses mutual harmony and compassion. In Q. 30:21 (“He created for you mates from among yourselves that you may find tranquillity in them, and He placed between you love and mercy”), she elaborates on the idea of love (*mawadda*) and mercy (*rahma*) as the foundations of marriage. She also underscores women’s rights instituted by the Qur’an that were revolutionary for their time. When commenting on verses like Q. 4:4 (“Give women their dowries graciously”), Semra highlights that pre-Islamic Arabia often treated women as property, but Islam gave women financial rights in marriage.³⁶ She then frequently fast-forwards to the present, encouraging believers to apply these principles sincerely. She laments that marriage in her society sometimes became materialistic, and she exhorts a return to the Qur’anic ideal of marriage as a partnership for tranquillity and spiritual growth.³⁷

Okuyucu Tefsiri can be seen as a holistic, reader-friendly *tafsir* that remains rooted in Sunni tradition while gently steering that tradition towards a more women-inclusive and socially conscious understanding. The work’s significance lies not in radical new interpretations of every verse, but it consistently projects an Islam that uplifts women, demands personal and social responsibility, and is meant to be understood by every believer.

Necla Yasdıman’s Lexicographic-Exegetical Method

Necla Yasdıman Demirdöven was born in 1962 in İnegöl, Bursa province. She completed her schooling in the early 1980s, graduating from Ankara University’s Faculty of Divinity (İlahiyat) in 1984. After her undergraduate studies, Necla briefly worked for the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) in Ankara and then İzmir. Necla’s major publication, *Kur’ân Tahlihi: Arapça Gramer Işığında Sözlük-Meal-Tefsir*, began coming out in 2006—interestingly the same year Semra published her first volume. By 2014, the published portion had reached six volumes; the series continued to expand thereafter, with later listings indicating volumes

³⁵ Yenilmez, “Semra Kürün Çekmegil’in ‘Okuyucu Tefsiri’nde Kadın Algısı.”

³⁶ Çekmegil, *Okuyucu Tefsiri (Tefsiru’l-Kari)*.

³⁷ Yenilmez, “Semra Kürün Çekmegil’in ‘Okuyucu Tefsiri’nde Kadın Algısı.”

10–11 published in 2021 and a 12-volume set available by 2023.³⁸ Each volume includes a segment of the Qur'an's text along with extensive grammatical and lexical notes. As Külünk observes, her work is closely tied to pedagogy and even includes a CD of grammar exercises for learners of Qur'anic Arabic.³⁹

Necla Yasdıman's translation does not explicitly call itself a "female perspective" commentary, nor does she in her published work directly address women's issues as a separate theme. However, one might infer her views from subtle choices. For example, in how she translates verses like Q. 4:34, Yasdıman's translation of controversial verses stays within conventional bounds and does not add distinct woman-centred reinterpretations.⁴⁰ This suggests she did not want to stir debate on those issues in her capacity as translator. However, outside her book, she expresses the need for female scholarship, as seen in her dedication and the context of publication.⁴¹

Compared to Semra, Necla's commentary is succinct and stays close to textual issues rather than homiletics. For example, in Q. 2:35 (Adam and Eve told to not approach the tree), after explaining words like "approach" and "tree", she add an interpretive note: "This prohibition was a test; the psychological effect of forbidding something is that it increases curiosity."⁴² She interprets the command "do not approach the tree" through a psychological lens, when a valuable thing is forbidden, the desire to approach it can grow, leading to forgetfulness of consequences. She cites al-Razi for a similar analysis on Adam and Eve's situation. This indicates, while her commentary is brief, she engages classical *tafsir* for deeper points, but filters it through a lens relevant to readers.

Yasdıman surveys classical Arabic dictionaries to map the semantic range and morphological productivity of the root H-L-K (خ ل ق), listing its derived verb patterns and nominal formations (many of which are rare or poetic). She then cross-checks Qur'anic usage. In the Qur'an, the root خ-ل-ق occurs 261 times in eight derived forms: 184 occurrences of the Form I verb *khalaqa* and its conjugations; 52 occurrences of the noun *khalaq* ("creation"); 12 of the active participle *khaliq* ("creator"); six of the noun *khalaq* ("allotted share/portion"); two of *khallaq* (an intensive form for "all-creating"); two of *khuluq* ("character/disposition"); two of the Form II passive participle *mukhallaqa(t)* ("formed"), as in Q. 22:5; and one occurrence of the Form VIII verbal noun *ikhtilaq* ("fabrication"), in Q. 38:7. Notably, the Qur'an does not

³⁸ Hikmet Koçyiğit, "1980-2017 Arası Telif ve Tercüme Matbu Türkçe Tefsirler Bibliyografyası" [Bibliography of Authored and Translated Printed Turkish Qur'anic Commentaries, 1980–2017], *Karadeniz Teknik Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 4, no. 2 (2017). As of 26 December 2025, the Turkish bookseller Kitapyurdu lists Necla Yasdıman Demirdöven's *Kur'an Tahlili* as a complete 12-volume set (7,693 pages), with a listed publication date of 2 May 2023—indicating the work is commercially available.

³⁹ Üstün Külünk, "The Uncharted Experience of Women Translators," 145.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁴² Necla Yasdıman, *Kur'an Tahlili: Arapça Gramer Işığında, Sözlük, Meâl, İ'rab, Tefsir* [Qur'an Analysis: In Light of Arabic Grammar, Dictionary, Translation, Grammatical Analysis, and Commentary] (Anadolu Yayınları, 2006).

use the noun *makhlūq* (مخلوق); instead, it speaks of created beings through *khalq* and related derivatives.⁴³

This root study example demonstrates Yasdıman's scholarly meticulousness. It is in line with a traditional philological approach reminiscent of classical works like *al-Mufradat fi Gharib al-Qur'an* (Al-Mufradat: A Lexicon of Qur'anic Vocabulary) by al-Raghib al-Isfahani or the modern *Mu'jam alfaẓ al-Qur'an* (Lexicon of Qur'anic Vocabulary), but she presents it in Turkish, making it accessible to those who cannot dive into Arabic references.

Translation Choices and Neutrality

Necla Yasdıman's translation component (*meal*) is integrated with her *tafsir*. It is worthwhile to consider whether her status as a female translator led to distinctive translation choices, especially on gender-related verses, since feminist translators often adapt phrasing to avoid patriarchal bias. Yasdıman and the earlier translator Medine Balcı did not significantly deviate from conventional translations on controversial gender verses.⁴⁴ What stands out is that Yasdıman did not frame her translation as a woman's corrective to male translations. Unlike a later translator, Ayşe Zeynep Abdullah, who explicitly positions her translation as a female intervention and highlights the bias of male translators, Yasdıman did not emphasise her gender in the translation. Her relative "invisibility" as a female translator is pointed out.⁴⁵

Her methodology shows that interpretation is not only in grand commentary, but also in micro-level choices of meaning. By choosing how to explain a word, she influences understanding. For example, she chooses to translate *qawwamun* in Q. 4:34 as "protectors/maintainers," which is more benevolent than "in charge of" or "superior to."⁴⁶ If she followed the standard Diyanet translation, it would be something like "*erkekler kadınlar üzerinde yöneticidirler Allah'ın birini diğerine üstün kılması nedeniyle...*" (Men are the rulers over women because God has made one superior to the other).⁴⁷ Külünk suggests that she did not deviate; however, because the relevant volume is not available for direct consultation, this point cannot be verified against the primary text. Accordingly, the discussion here follows Külünk's characterisation. Since he argues that she maintained a low profile regarding a feminist agenda and did not adopt an explicitly "woman's perspective," it is reasonable to infer that she largely retains established wording.⁴⁸

Necla Yasdıman's lexicographic *tafsir* method represents a scholarly, technical avenue of exegesis that is different from Semra's narrative style. It exemplifies female hermeneutical agency in the domain of language and education. Yasdıman expands the tools available for Qur'anic interpretation in Turkish by providing a resource that merges translation with

⁴³ Yasdıman Demirdöven, "Arapça Sözlüklerde."

⁴⁴ Hidayet Aydar, Hidayet Aydar, and Mehmet Atalay, "Female Scholars of Quranic Exegesis in the History of Islam," *BEÜ İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 1, no. 2 (2015).

⁴⁵ Üstün Külünk, "The Uncharted Experience of Women Translators."

⁴⁶ Yasdıman, *Kur'an Tahlili*.

⁴⁷ Diyanet İşleri Bakanlığı, "Kuran Meali" [Meaning of the Qur'an], n.d., accessed December 25, 2025, <https://kuran.diyaret.gov.tr/mushaf>.

⁴⁸ Üstün Külünk, "The Uncharted Experience of Women Translators."

linguistic exegesis. In a sense, she reclaims an area that was once heavily male-dominated and opens it up to Turkish speakers broadly, including women. It is a quieter form of making a statement; rather than proclaiming new interpretations loudly, she painstakingly builds capacity in readers to interpret. This complements people like Semra who directly tackle some interpretive issues.

DISCUSSION

Comparative Analysis

Semra Kürün Çekmegil and Necla Yasdıman present distinct yet complementary paradigms of female engagement with Qur'anic exegesis. A comparative analysis reveals differences in their backgrounds, genres, methodologies, and thematic focus, as well as some noteworthy similarities in their underlying goals of making the Qur'an accessible and affirming women's capacity as interpreters. Below, we compare key aspects of their works.

Table 1. Comparison of Semra Kürün Çekmegil's *Okuyucu Tefsiri* and Necla Yasdıman's *Kur'ân Tahlili*

Aspect	<i>Okuyucu Tefsiri</i>	<i>Kur'ân Tahlili</i>
Genre	Traditional commentary with modern touches. Narrative, explanatory, and didactic style.	Qur'an translation and study guide. Structured as an educational text rather than a flowing narrative.
Purpose	Emphasises practical lessons, moral guidance, and spiritual reflection; often addresses contemporary issues and women's concerns.	Enables readers to understand the Qur'an in Arabic. Less about devotional insight, more about textual precision and academic study.
Methodological focus	Integrates classical <i>tafsir</i> reports with her reasoning and context-based interpretation. Uses storytelling, analogies, poetry, and contemporary examples to draw lessons.	Focuses on grammar and dictionary meanings of words in context. Sticks closely to text; minimal commentary beyond clarifying meaning and context.
Use of sources	Draws from ~30 <i>tafsirs</i> and hadith collections available in Turkish. Includes classical Turkish poets/thinkers to illustrate points.	References classical <i>mufassirs</i> for linguistic insights when relevant. Provides her carefully crafted translation of Qur'anic verses, reflecting scholarly consensus on meaning.
Treatment of gender issues	Explicitly addresses verses on women, aiming to remove patriarchal misreadings. Opposes using the Qur'an/hadith to justify female inferiority or domestic abuse. Overall, a <i>reactive-holistic</i> stance – correcting biases while remaining within an Islamic framework of values.	Focuses only on what can be linguistically and textually substantiated. In essence, a <i>traditional (textual)-reactive</i> stance – traditional in method, reactive in empowering readers against unfounded assertions.

The comparative analysis shows that Semra Kürün Çekmegil and Necla Yasdıman exemplify two modes of female exegetical agency that address different needs and audiences, and together they broaden the scope of how women contribute to Qur'anic interpretation in contemporary Türkiye. Semra's *Okuyucu Tefsiri* provides a full-fledged commentary that integrates a woman's voice and concerns into the interpretive canon, while Necla's *Kur'ân*

Tahlili enhances the technical and linguistic engagement with the text, indirectly supporting more nuanced future interpretations. Both works underline that women can operate in multiple registers of *tafsir*, each reinforcing the legitimacy and value of women’s perspectives on the Qur’an.

With the comparative picture in mind, we now proceed to a broader discussion of what these two cases mean in terms of interpretive authority and hermeneutical agency, and how they reflect and impact the social-religious imagination regarding gender and authority in Islam.

Navigating Traditional Authority

In classical Islamic scholarship, authority to interpret the Qur’an was tied to recognised credentials by mastery of Arabic, knowledge of hadith, *fiqh* etc., often certified by a scholarly network (*sanad*). Neither Semra nor Necla fits this exactly. Semra lacks formal titles, but leverages experiential and communal authority. She anchors her *tafsir* firmly in well-known sources. By doing so, she positions herself not as a rogue voice but as building on the tradition. In her *tafsir*, she often uses deferential language when presenting interpretations (“scholars have said...” and “from that we understand...”),⁴⁹ which can disarm critics who might accuse her of arrogance. At the same time, within that framework, she introduces her perspectives gently. This rhetorical approach resonates with what Saba Mahmood theorises as agency exercised through inhabiting normative discourses; in Çekmegil’s case, the “change” in question is best understood narrowly as the legitimation and widening of interpretive space for a woman’s exegetical voice within established Sunni frames.⁵⁰

The impact of Semra’s and Necla’s projects is best understood not as an abrupt, highly visible break in public discourse, but as a gradual form of ethical reform that can still carry significant social consequences without presenting itself as a program of political transformation. Mahmood argues that we should not reduce agency to resistance; rather, agency may be understood as “a capacity for action that specific relations of subordination create and enable.”⁵¹ From this angle, “change” is not only what happens when norms are opposed, but also what happens through “the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms.”⁵² This framing also clarifies why ethical reform can matter even when it is not oriented to state transformation, as Mahmood explicitly notes that movements of ethical reform can “unsettle key assumptions of the secular-liberal imaginary even when they do not aim to transform the state.”⁵³

Against that backdrop, Semra’s impact can be characterised as narrow but real. Her *tafsir* largely addresses an already pious readership, yet it works on the level of ethical disposition—how readers are trained to evaluate gendered claims, domestic authority, and the moral limits of coercion within an orthodox idiom. Mahmood’s account of mosque pedagogy is instructive

⁴⁹ Çekmegil, *Okuyucu Tefsiri (Tefsiru'l-Kari)*.

⁵⁰ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety* (Princeton University Press, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvct00cf>.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 99.

here because it highlights how reform is often pursued through accessible didactic media aimed at “ease of comprehension and practical applicability,”⁵⁴ and through repetitive forms of moral training in which “the body was...a site of moral training and cultivation.”⁵⁵ Semra’s reader-friendly rhetoric and her preference for “benevolent” semantic choices on gender-sensitive verses can therefore be treated as one instantiation of this ethical-pedagogical mechanism: it may “preach to the converted” in terms of audience location, but it can still shift what the converted take to be religiously defensible attitudes, while keeping the argumentative register recognisably Sunni and non-confrontational.

Necla’s impact, by contrast, is more oblique but potentially durable: her grammatical–lexicographic method functions as a pedagogy of interpretive competence, building the reader’s capacity to adjudicate meaning through morphology, usage, and semantic range rather than through inherited paraphrase alone. In Mahmood’s terms, this is another modality of agency that operates through the consolidation and disciplined inhabitation of norms, not their overt subversion. Norms are “performed, inhabited, and experienced in a variety of ways.”⁵⁶ Where Semra’s influence is primarily dispositional (a moral re-weighting of contested gender claims for a pious public), Necla’s is primarily epistemic (quietly widening what counts as legitimate textual evidence and linguistic warrant). Taken together, these works register their effects chiefly within pious interpretive communities, where they recalibrate hermeneutic habits and moral plausibility structures; they should not be read as evidence of a sweeping transformation of gender discourse across Turkish society.

Strategies of Hermeneutical Agency

Semra uses what one might call a strategy of “selective emphases and silences.” She emphasises certain Qur’anic themes in contexts related to women, thereby steering interpretation towards equality without necessarily coining a radically new exegesis. She also strategically de-emphasises or remains silent on weak or extraneous narrations that undermine women, effectively letting them drop from the discourse. Additionally, she sometimes reinterprets within acceptable bounds. For polygamy, for example, instead of denying it, she reframes it as a contingent practice with ethical constraints, flipping it from a symbol of patriarchy to a test of justice and compassion. She basically toes the line of doctrine but loads it with conditions that align with care for women.

Necla’s strategy is “precision and inclusivity of meaning.” By thoroughly presenting the range of meanings and grammatical nuances, she allows (or forces) readers to confront the complexity of the text. For example, by showing that *qawwamun* comes from a root related to maintaining and listing what classical lexicons say, she implicitly invites a more nuanced understanding than simply “in charge”. If she notes that *idribuhunna* (Q. 4:34) literally means “hit/strike” but in Arabic lexicon can also mean “to set forth (a parable)” or “to travel,” she might not say “thus it means leave” but just knowing that *daraba* has multiple meanings might

⁵⁴ Ibid., 100–101.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 160.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 43.

open a door of thought for the reader. Essentially, her hermeneutical agency is in uncovering possibilities that strict doctrinal interpreters might gloss over. Also, by dedicating her work to women in research, she frames the act of deep study of the Qur'an as a pursuit women rightfully engage in, which is a step away from leaving interpretation to male authorities.

Indonesian Women's Qur'anic Exegesis Tradition in Comparative Perspective

Recent scholarship notes that feminist *tafsir* discourse in Indonesia has grown vibrantly since the late 1990s.⁵⁷ Hayati maps this burgeoning landscape of Indonesian Muslim women's Qur'an interpretation, identifying diverse approaches ranging from academic-descriptive analyses to normative-expressive readings and critical-analytical reviews of earlier exegesis.⁵⁸ This era saw Muslim women in Indonesia increasingly shift from being mere "consumers" of *tafsir* to producers of *tafsir* discourse. In subsequent years, figures like Zaitunah and Nur Rofiah have re-examined key gender-related verses and contributed new frameworks for understanding them.⁵⁹ This marks a significant evolution as Indonesian women scholars are no longer on the margins but are shaping Qur'anic exegesis with gender-aware perspectives.

Another interesting point concerns the production of *tafsir* works. From what we have been able to trace so far, there is yet no Indonesian female *mufassirat* who has produced a complete 30-juz *tafsir*. Instead, Indonesian women exegetes generally interpret Qur'anic verses based on three tendencies. First, they respond to the unease provoked by non-egalitarian cultural phenomena in society, so their interpretations emerge from concerns rooted in *pesantren* educational institutions. Second, their academic backgrounds play a role: egalitarian and feminist discourses have developed as fields of study in various Indonesian universities, generating awareness of the need to reconstruct Qur'anic interpretation in a gender-sensitive way. Third, there has been emerging awareness within several major religious institutions and organisations in Indonesia, such as Muhammadiyah, which have begun to include women's participation in large-scale contemporary *tafsir* projects on Indonesian localities together with male *mufassir*.⁶⁰

From these three typological patterns, it follows that women's exegetical output has so far consisted mainly of interpretations of selected verses or *suras* that lie at the heart of major debates in Indonesia about women's position and recognition in the public sphere. The absence

⁵⁷ Fatima Seedat, "Feminist Jurisprudence, Women Ulama and Ifta in Indonesia: Dutiful Daughters or 'al Muftiyat al Mujadilat'?", *African Journal of Gender and Religion* 31, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.36615/z7970092>.

⁵⁸ Safira Malia Hayati, "Wacana Tafsir Feminis Dalam Kesarjanaan Muslim Indonesia Era Kontemporer" [Feminist Interpretation Discourse in Contemporary Indonesian Muslim Scholarship] (Master diss., UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2023).

⁵⁹ Zaitunah Subhan, *Tafsir Kebencian: Studi Bias Gender Dalam Tafsir Qur'an* [Exegesis of Hatred: A Study of Gender Bias in Qur'anic Interpretation] (LKIS, 1999); Nur Rofiah, *Nalar Kritis Muslimah: Refleksi Atas Keperempuanan, Kemanusiaan, dan Keislaman* [Critical Reasoning of Muslim Women: Reflections on Gender, Humanity, and Islamic Identity], ed. Achmad Fathurrohman Rustandi, 3rd ed. (Akkaruna, 2021).

⁶⁰ Ervan Nurtawab and Peter G. Riddell, "Modern Qur'anic Hermeneutics in Indonesia and Malaysia," in *Contemporary Qur'anic Hermeneutics*, ed. Georges Tamer (De Gruyter, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111320069-026>.

of a full, 30-juz *tafsir* by a female exegete can be traced,⁶¹ at least in part, to several factors. First, the production of classical *tafsir* and many major modern commentaries have generally been carried out by male scholars; this has created norms and networks of authority that diminish women's chances of large-scale authoring. Second, there are issues of institutional access, resources, and academic legitimacy. Producing a 30-juz *tafsir* requires extensive reference materials, institutional backing, and a long period of sustained work. Studies show that Indonesian *mufassirat* often operate in different academic spaces and networks, so a full 30-juz project is neither prioritised nor institutionally supported. Third, social burdens and the gendered division of roles remain deeply entrenched cultural patterns, which continue to restrict women's scholarly mobility. Fourth, publisher support and religious endorsement remain limited. Major publishers and religious institutions tend to give more space and promotion to works deemed "authoritative" according to older norms.

Nevertheless, what these female *mufassir* have done constitutes an ongoing process of meaning-making that has given rise to new paradigms and methodologies for explaining and viewing the Qur'an in egalitarian ways. Although they share the same *tawhīdic* orientation, they can formulate different methodological approaches. This represents a constructive achievement of Muslim feminist scholarship in Qur'anic exegesis, not only at the local level but also globally.⁶²

Modes of Women's Qur'anic Interpretation in Indonesia

In *Tafsir Kebencian*, Zaitunah conducts a critical study of influential Indonesian *tafsirs* to expose the workings of patriarchal bias in verses about women's creation and men's leadership. For instance, regarding the creation of woman in Q. 4:1, Zaitunah critiques the common interpretation of *nafs waḥidah* as "Adam," which underpins the idea that woman was derived from man and is therefore ontologically secondary. She instead underscores that the Qur'an describes all humans as coming "from a single self" – *nafs waḥidah* – meaning that male and female were created from the same essence, with no innate hierarchy. Thus, Q. 4:1 cannot be used to legitimise male superiority, and she rejects the "rib story" as an *isra'iliyat* import with misogynistic implications.⁶³ In Q. 4:34, Zaitunah similarly demonstrates how literalist readings of *al-rijal qawwamuna 'ala al-nisa'* ("men are in charge of women") and *wa-dribuhunna* ("and hit them") have been used to justify men's domination over women and even domestic violence. She argues that the verse's statement of men's *qiwamah* must be understood as a contextual, descriptive rule rather than a timeless normative mandate.⁶⁴ The Qur'an is, in Zaitunah's view, a functional difference, not a sign of spiritual or intellectual superiority. Therefore, Q. 4:34 should be read considering its socio-historical context and the

⁶¹ Howard M. Federspiel, *Popular Indonesian Literature of the Qur'an*, Cornell Modern Indonesia Project Publications 72 (Cornell University, 1994).

⁶² Hayati, "Wacana Tafsir Feminis Dalam Kesarjanaan Muslim Indonesia Era Kontemporer," 147.

⁶³ Subhan, *Tafsir Kebencian*, 47.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 104–5.

higher objectives (*maqāṣid*) of justice and compassion, rather than as a permanent endorsement of female subordination.

A second mode is the oral tradition of exegesis, as practiced in women's study circles, *pesantren*, now increasingly captured via digital media. A prominent example is Badriyah Fayumi, a *pesantren*-trained woman scholar who delivers Qur'an lessons in a performative, audience-engaging style.⁶⁵ Jamalallail et al. show that Badriyah employs a range of verses – for example, Q. 2:228–233, Q. 4:19, and Q. 4:34 – to develop the concept of *ma'ruf* as the ethical standard for marital relations.⁶⁶ She preaches that a marriage cannot be deemed successful or pious unless *ma'ruf* permeates all aspects of the husband-wife relationship, from financial support and dowry, to child-rearing, to even the processes of divorce and reconciliation. In Badriyah's interpretations, the Qur'anic mandate is not about “who holds power” in the household but “how each partner conducts the relationship with justice and empathy.”⁶⁷ This, Badriyah argues, demonstrates that *ma'ruf* is meant as a guiding principle even amid marital discord or dissatisfaction. She highlights that, whenever a marriage faces tension or injustice, the Qur'an consistently calls both spouses back to *ma'ruf* as the remedy.

A third mode is the inclusion of women scholars as co-interpreters in institutional or collective *tafsir* projects. A notable example is Muhammadiyah's official commentary *Tafsir At-Tanwir*. Unveiled in multi-volume stages, *At-Tanwir* is a collaborative effort and, significantly, it has for the first time included female *mufassirat* on its authorial team. Isnawati Rais and Atiyatul Ulya were co-authors of *At-Tanwir*, representing Aisyiyah (Muhammadiyah's women's wing) and contributing women's perspectives to this *tafsir*.⁶⁸ Methodologically, *At-Tanwir* espouses a “theo-anthropocentric” paradigm, which synthesises the God-centred (theocentric) and human-centred (anthropocentric) approaches. In practice, this means *At-Tanwir* pays due respect to the Divine text and classical context, while simultaneously engaging contemporary social realities and integrating modern scientific knowledge. For example, Rais, who was an expert in *fiqh al-nisa'* (women's jurisprudence), authored entries on topics such as marriage laws, *talaq*, *ḥayḍ* (menstruation), breastfeeding, and *'iddah*. In these passages, she consistently highlights the Qur'an's recognition of women's equal spiritual status and the importance of fairness in spousal roles.⁶⁹ In short, this represents

⁶⁵ Ulya Ulya, “Nyai Badriyah Fayumi: Mufassir Perempuan Otoritatif Pejuang Kesetaraan dan Moderasi di Indonesia” [Nyai Badriyah Fayumi: An Authoritative Woman Mufassir and Advocate of Gender Equality and Religious Moderation in Indonesia], *Hermeneutik* 12, no. 2 (2018): 66, <https://doi.org/10.21043/hermeneutik.v12i2.6150>.

⁶⁶ Ahmad Qoys Jamalallail et al., “Tafsir Lisan Badriyah Fayumi: Telaah Atas Konsep Makruf Dan Implementasinya Dalam Relasi Suami Istri” [The Oral Qur'anic Exegesis of Badriyah Fayumi: A Study of the Concept of Ma'ruf and its Application in Marital Relations], *Jurnal Semiotika-Q: Kajian Ilmu al-Quran Dan Tafsir* 5, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.19109/jsq.v5i1.27003>.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Wahyu Hidayat, “Transformasi Historiografi Tafsir Muhammadiyah: Analisa Pengaruh Tokoh Pemimpin Terhadap Perkembangan Corak Tafsir Muhammadiyah” [Transformations in the Historiography of Muhammadiyah Qur'anic Exegesis: An Analysis of Leadership Influence on the Evolution of Muhammadiyah Tafsir Trends] (Master diss., Universitas PTIQ Jakarta, 2024).

⁶⁹ Islah Gusman, *Khazanah Tafsir Indonesia: Dari Hermeneutika Hingga Ideologi* [The Rich Tradition of Indonesian Qur'anic Exegesis: From Hermeneutical Approaches to Ideological Frameworks] (LKIS Yogyakarta, 2013).

a form of feminist agency in the production of *tafsir* discourse, complementing the individual feminist interpretations outside the organisational framework.

Comparative Interpretations of Key Verses

Semra Çekmegil’s readings of key gender-related verses resonate strongly with the trajectories of Indonesian feminist *tafsir*. Although the textual genres and audiences differ, their hermeneutical moves converge; they reject ontological hierarchies between men and women, restrict male privileges by re-centring ethics, and reframe asymmetries in family law as responsibilities rather than permanent superiority. The table below summarises these convergences and nuances for three emblematic verses.

Table 2. Comparison of Semra and Necla works within Indonesian female exegetic traditions

Verse	Semra & Necla	Indonesian female exegesis (examples)
Q 4:1 – Creation of woman / “rib”	Semra rejects the rib legend as extra-Qur’anic, noting the verse only mentions <i>nafs waḥidah</i> and its <i>zawj</i> . She stresses that men and women share the same human essence; any hierarchy is based on <i>taqwa</i> , not sex. Necla’s lexical work on creation terms similarly separates Qur’anic language from later mythic accretions.	Zaitunah critiques readings that make woman derivative of man, arguing that <i>nafs waḥidah</i> denotes a common human origin and the rib story is an imported, misogynistic motif. Nur Rofiah reads the verse as an ontological affirmation of equality: both sexes are equally God’s servants and vicegerents; practices treating women as “second order” violate this unity.
Q 4:34 – Qiwamah and domestic authority	Semra accepts <i>qiwamah</i> as financial responsibility and protection but denies it legitimates domination or violence. She criticises uses of the verse to “enslave” women and questions misogynistic <i>ḥadith</i> as socially biased, not Qur’anicly mandated. Necla’s lexical mapping of <i>q-w-m</i> , <i>nushuz</i> and <i>ḍaraba</i> underlines contextual, non-violent readings.	Zaitunah treats “ <i>al-rijal qawwamuna ‘ala al-nisa’</i> ” as context-bound and grounded in men’s duty of maintenance, not timeless supremacy. Badriyah recentres the verse on <i>ma’ruf</i> : if <i>ma’ruf</i> is the norm, all abuse is <i>ghayr ma’ruf</i> and invalid.
Q 2:228 – “One degree” (<i>daraja</i>) in divorce	Semra reads <i>daraja</i> as a narrow procedural advantage, not as ontological superiority; the verse concerns orderly divorce and added responsibility, not male worth. Necla’s legal-lexical focus points in the same direction.	<i>Af-Tanwir</i> explains the husband’s “degree” as a heavier legal and financial duty rather than higher value and notes the surrounding insistence on <i>ma’ruf</i> . Badriyah stresses that all divorce-related provisions are framed by <i>ma’ruf</i> , undercutting any claim that the verse establishes permanent male superiority.

Overall, the tradition of Indonesian female Qur’an interpretation, much like Semra Çekmegil’s work in Turkey, exemplifies a conscious corrective to male-centric exegesis. Across different modes and through various verses, these women scholars articulate a Qur’anic vision that uplifts women’s dignity and equality. Despite differences in style and context, their agency converges in reading the Qur’an for liberation and justice by affirming women’s full humanity at creation, insisting on mutual kindness in marriage, and reimagining Islamic law as a field of ethical responsibility rather than unchecked privilege.

CONCLUSION

Semra Kürün Çekmegil and Necla Yasdıman exemplify how women in contemporary Türkiye have opened new pathways in Qur'anic exegesis. Through reader-centred *tafsir* and lexicographic hermeneutics, respectively, they have shown that female scholars can uphold the integrity of Islamic tradition while also expanding its interpretive possibilities. Their works reinforce the idea that interpretive authority in Islam is not static or gender-bound, but dynamic and enriched by diversity. As more women follow in their footsteps, bringing their scholastic talents and lived insights to the Qur'an, the *ummah*'s understanding of revelation stands to become ever more comprehensive, just, and attuned to the realities of all its members – men and women alike.

Female *mufassirat* in Indonesia also make a similar point. Indonesian Muslim feminist scholars have undertaken reinterpretations of exegetical discourses that were regarded as misogynistic in earlier works. The methodologies they propose have drawn attention not only from local feminists but also from feminist scholars globally. Their writings have inspired many activists to engage in more serious, in-depth studies on gender-related themes.

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