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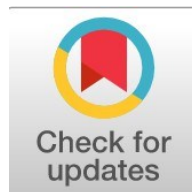
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Qur'anic Insights on Structural Femicide Reflected in *Bida'ah*

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Abstract

General Background: Structural femicide persists globally as a form of gender-based violence embedded within patriarchal sociocultural and religious systems. **Specific Background:** In Muslim-majority societies, distorted interpretations of Qur'anic teachings often legitimize violence against women, a dynamic vividly portrayed in the Malaysian series *Bida'ah*. **Knowledge Gap:** Existing studies rarely integrate Qur'anic thematic exegesis with media analysis to reveal how religious narratives are misused to reinforce systemic oppression. **Aims:** This study investigates the conceptual foundations of structural femicide, analyzes its narrative representation in *Bida'ah*, and reinterprets Qur'anic verses emphasizing justice and the sanctity of life. **Results:** Findings indicate that *Bida'ah* reflects multilayered violence—physical, symbolic, and institutional—sustained through patriarchal power and manipulated religious authority. The Qur'an, however, does not justify such violence; rather, it promotes protection, equality, and moral justice. **Novelty:** The study offers an integrated framework combining thematic Qur'anic interpretation and social hermeneutics with cinematic analysis to expose the ideological mechanisms underlying structural femicide. **Implications:** These insights highlight the urgency of contextual, justice-centered Qur'anic interpretation to dismantle patriarchal norms and to strengthen discourses countering gender-based violence.

Highlights:

- Shows how distorted Qur'anic interpretations legitimize structural violence against women.
- Uses the *Bida'ah* series to illustrate multilayered femicide: physical, symbolic, and institutional.
- Emphasizes contextual, justice-oriented exegesis to dismantle patriarchal religious narratives.

Keywords: Structural Femicide, Qur'anic Interpretation, Gender Based Violence, Patriarchal Power, *Bida'ah* Series

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Introduction

The murder of women caused by gender, commonly known as femicide, is still a frequent occurrence in various countries, including countries with a majority Muslim population. Femicide is not only a criminal act but also reflects structural inequality in society, which is often legitimized by patriarchal religious interpretations. In the context of femicide, the Malaysian film series *Bidaah*, comprising 15 episodes, offers a powerful reflection on this societal reality. The series portrays how women suffer from both physical and psychological abuse, justified through misinterpretations of religious teachings. *Bidaah* reveals that violence against women extends beyond the domestic sphere, being reinforced by patriarchal social and religious systems that perpetuate such oppression.

Islam places a strong emphasis on the principles of justice and the protection of human life. However, the reality shows that gender-biased religious interpretations are still used to justify acts of violence against women. As Husein Muhammad stated, "violence against women is a logical consequence of the male-dominated power system that is upheld in the name of justice, equality, togetherness, freedom, and respect for the rights of others." [1].

Therefore, it is important to re-examine existing religious interpretations and offer a more contextual and gender-just approach to exegesis. This approach aims to dismantle the patriarchal power structures that have been deeply ingrained in public life and to provide space for more egalitarian and humane interpretations. Based on this background, this study is based on two main questions: first, what are the understanding and characteristics of structural femicide, including its ideological and social roots that affect women's lives within a patriarchal system; and second, how is structural femicide represented and manifested in the *Bida'ah* film series, particularly in the context of religious power relations and violence based on religious interpretations.

This study seeks to explore the concept of structural femicide and examine how violence against women is represented narratively and symbolically in the film. It further aims to reinterpret selected Quranic verses thematically to emphasize the principles of justice and the protection of women from systemic violence sanctioned by religious authority. The significance of this research lies in its urgent call to challenge and deconstruct interpretive traditions that justify gender-based violence, while promoting a more contextual, humanistic, and responsive approach to interpretation in addressing issues of gender justice within contemporary Muslim societies.

This study uses qualitative research with a literature review and analysis approach. It is based on the main objective of the research, which is to explore the conceptual meaning of structural femicide and analyze how structural femicide is represented in popular cultural narratives. The Malaysian production film series *Bida'ah*, which went viral and became controversial for containing elements of misinterpreted religious teachings to legitimize violence against women. This approach enables the researcher to investigate the structures of meaning, power symbolism, and deeply rooted patriarchal relations reflected in the film's visual elements and character dialogues.

The primary data of this study is the *Bidaah* film itself—comprising 15 episodes available on a digital platform—while the secondary data consists of academic journals, Qur'anic exegesis works, official reports from institutions such as the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan), and relevant popular articles and media sources. The analysis is carried out in two main stages: first, narrative analysis is employed to explore the storyline, character development, and the dynamics of gender conflict and religious authority within the film; second, thematic analysis of Qur'anic verses is conducted using a thematic exegesis (*tafsir maudhū'i*) approach, by gathering verses concerning justice, the prohibition of killing, and the protection of women, which are then examined in relation to the film's depicted realities. Through this method, the research not only identifies forms of gender-based violence as represented in the media but also establishes a critical dialogue between religious discourse and social experience, thereby reinforcing Qur'anic interpretations that advocate for human dignity and justice.

Method

This article employs a library research method that draws upon both primary and secondary sources. The primary data is derived from various books, scholarly articles, and other relevant materials, while the secondary data consists of findings from previous library-based studies, including additional books, articles, and related references that support the topic under discussion. To analyze the collected information, a descriptive approach is utilized to interpret and elucidate the content of these sources. The data is then examined thoroughly and interpreted in line with the article's central focus, leading to conclusions that correspond with the research objectives. This method allows the author to explore the subject matter comprehensively and in a systematic manner.

Result and Discussion

A. Structural Femicide

Structural femicide is aimed at the killing of women that occurs within a social system context that systematically discriminates against women. The term femicide originates from the Latin words *femina* (woman) and *caedere* (to kill), meaning the killing of women because they are women. Structural femicide occurs when social norms, values, and

institutions, including religion, law, and culture, directly or indirectly justify or fail to prevent violence against women. Femicide is also one of the most brutal forms of crime against women, characterized by killings motivated by gender-based hatred or the desire to maintain patriarchal dominance. [2] This phenomenon reflects a fundamental failure in the social, legal, and political systems, which are supposed to protect the right to life and the dignity of women.

The definition of structural femicide also refers to certain elements that distinguish it from general murder. These elements may include gender-based motives, patterns of repeated violence, as well as cultural or structural contexts that support such actions. Femicide does not always occur as a result of direct conflict but can also be caused by social structures that make women who are targeted susceptible to violence without adequate protection. In certain cases, femicide is even closely linked to sexual exploitation, human trafficking, or economic conflicts where women are positioned as objects that can be controlled or exploited. [3] Femicides occur due to several factors, including: threats to masculinity, men's anger over women's pregnancies outside of marriage, domestic violence that leads to murder, sexual assault cases resulting in death, a patriarchal culture that does not want daughters, and women being trafficked as sexual objects.

The development of law in Indonesia, particularly regarding the protection of women and girls as victims of crime, especially violence, has been carried out. Various legal regulations include the Human Rights Law, the Child Protection Law, the Law on the Elimination of Domestic Violence, and the Law on Sexual Violence Crimes. The enactment of Law Number 12 of 2022 concerning Sexual Violence Crimes is a government response to address the high number of sexual violence cases occurring in Indonesia.

One of the factors that reinforces the occurrence of structural femicide in Indonesia is the weak legal system, which has not explicitly recognized femicide as a gender-based crime. The Law on Sexual Violence Crimes (UU TPKS) and the Criminal Code (KUHP) do include provisions related to violence against women, but they do not classify the killing of women based on power relations, patriarchy, or honor as a distinct crime. This results in many cases of female murder that should be categorized as femicide being handled merely as ordinary murder, without uncovering the gendered motives or social structures underlying them. [5] In this context, Indonesian law indirectly contributes to the perpetuation of structural violence against women, as it fails to provide legal recognition of the social and cultural dimensions of such acts of violence. The law's inability to identify and address gender-based violence holistically creates a loophole for perpetrators to use moral, cultural, or religious justifications as legitimacy for acts of violence, including the killing of women in situations of unequal power relations, as often occurs in cases of honor killings or domestic violence that ends fatally.

Religion, when interpreted conservatively and patriarchally, can become an instrument for legitimizing violence against women. In authoritarian religious communities, women are often controlled in the name of morality and family honor, which, if violated, is considered acceptable to punish, even in extreme ways. The film *Bidaah* is an example of a visual narrative that highlights how misleading religious interpretations can become instruments of oppression. In the film, religious male figures manipulate religious doctrines to justify violence against women deemed to deviate from "shari'i" norms. This phenomenon demonstrates a conflict between Qur'anic values of justice and compassion and the reality of violence driven by distorted interpretations of religion. [6]

In the context of religious societies, structural femicide is often wrapped in patriarchal religious narratives, where women are seen as sources of temptation, objects of male ownership, or guardians of the morality of family and community. Gender-biased religious interpretations are a major factor that sustains violence against women, as they position men as absolute leaders and women as those who must obey without critical space. In many cases, including those that occur in some traditional Muslim communities, religious arguments are used to justify punishments against women who are deemed to tarnish the family's honor or violate social norms, including in the form of honor killings. This makes religion not merely a spiritual background, but a structural instrument that facilitates systemic violence if interpreted in an authoritarian and masculine way. As Zulaichah stated, the social construction of women, reinforced by a narrow understanding of religion, often makes violence against women considered acceptable and not fairly processed by social or legal systems. [7]

B. Qur'an Exegesis

Gender-based violence, particularly structural femicide, in many Muslim societies cannot be separated from the way religious texts are understood and practiced. Exegesis of Qur'anic verses that initially carried the spirit of justice, compassion, and protection of life has experienced a biased interpretation due to the dominance of patriarchal readings that developed since the classical Islamic era. In the hands of mufassir who lived within patriarchal societal structures, certain verses have been used to justify male dominance over women, including in the forms of domestic and social violence. [8]

One of the verses that is often misunderstood is QS. An-Nisa' [4]:34, which talks about husband-wife relationships and the concept of "qawwām". Many classical interpretations understand this verse as a basis for justifying male leadership and authority in the household, even allowing for the act of *darb* (hitting) if a woman is considered *nusyūz* (rebellious). [9] In fact, the literal meaning of the word *qawwām* is caretaker and protector, not absolute ruler. [10] Interpretations that do not take into account the historical context and the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* actually reinforce a culture of violence based on religious legitimacy.

Gender-biased exegesis is not merely a matter of text, but is also related to the social structure of knowledge. In Islamic history, the authority of interpretation has been predominantly controlled by men, and women's life experiences are often overlooked in the process of interpretation. This has led to a reduction of Qur'anic values that are actually very egalitarian. [11] Amina Wadud, in her work *Qur'an and Woman*, demonstrates that the Qur'an never places men as superior beings, but rather emphasizes spiritual and moral equality between men and women (QS. Al-Hujurat [49]:13, QS. An-Nahl [16]:97). [12] However, in the practice of interpretation, this principle is often overshadowed by cultural interpretations that prioritize

control over women as guardians of family honor. [13]

The impact of this interpretative deviation is very concrete. Many Muslim communities consider violence against women in the household as a private matter, not a public crime, because it has been legitimized by the dominant interpretation. In fact, in some cases, the killing of women for allegedly violating family or religious norms, which constitutes a form of femicide, is not legally prosecuted because it is considered part of tradition. [14] This proves that deviant religious interpretations can contribute to social structures that justify gender-based violence systematically.

It is in this context that the importance of a contextual and ethical hermeneutical interpretation approach arises. This approach not only emphasizes the linguistic meaning of the text but also considers the social reality and the universal values of the Qur'an, such as justice (*'adālah*), mercy (compassion), and the protection of life (*ḥifẓ al-nafs*). Sahiron Syamsuddin points out that interpretation must be responsive to the conditions of the era, especially regarding contemporary social issues such as violence against women. He proposes an integration of *ushul fiqh*, *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, and social hermeneutic methodology so that interpretation does not lose its ethical relevance. [15]

Moreover, thinkers such as Asma Barlas remind us that the Qur'an should be read as an emancipatory text, not one that shackles. In her book "Believing Women" in Islam, Barlas rejects authoritarian readings of the Qur'an and asserts that the concept of patriarchy has no legitimacy in the sacred text itself, but only in the interpretations of the text. [16] This means that violence against women justified by 'religious teachings' often does not come from the Qur'an, but from interpretative cultures that have been contaminated by a patriarchal system.

Thus, deviations in religious interpretation serve as an ideological foundation for the persistence of structural femicide. It operates not in the form of direct calls to kill, but through social and moral legitimization of gender-based violence, which then comes to be seen as normative and legitimate within society. To dismantle this structure, it is necessary to rebuild an interpretative paradigm based on substantive justice and support for victims. Interpretation should not merely explain the text, but also serve as an instrument of liberation.

C. Structural Femicide of Heresy Films

The Malaysian drama series *Bidaah* offers a nuanced depiction of violence against women within deeply religious and patriarchal family and societal contexts. The female characters endure multiple layers of oppression—spanning verbal degradation, bodily control, and physical abuse—all stemming from rigid and distorted interpretations of religion. This violence is not portrayed as an isolated act but as a form of structural violence embedded within social, religious, and cultural institutions. The film's narrative reveals how male family members and religious authorities exploit religious teachings to sustain and legitimize their dominance over women.

Characters like Zubaidah and her daughters are not only made objects of control but are also morally positioned as 'sources of slander' that must be controlled. The religious arguments used by male figures to justify acts of violence, such as beating, confinement, and forced marriage, reveal a pattern of structural femicide that turns women's bodies into a territory of theological and social conflict. This film presents a critique of religious interpretations that solely support patriarchal dominance without providing space for the dimensions of compassion, justice, and protection of life that are highly valued in Islam. [6]

Bidaah is not merely fiction, but rather a reflection of phenomena that actually occur in many Muslim communities, including in Southeast Asia. Phenomena such as forced marriage, domestic violence excused in the name of "wife's obedience," and the denial of educational rights for women are real forms of structural femicide. A study by Lies Marcoes shows that gender-based violence perpetrated in the name of religion is often not critically examined internally because it is considered part of "teachings." [17] This is where *Bidaah* takes an important position as a social text that exposes how power in the name of religion can operate as a tool of repression against women.

The depiction of women as "sin instigators" or "sources of scandal" in films reflects long-standing theological myths that are rarely challenged. In visual representations, the use of religious symbols such as the kopiah, robes, or verses from the Qur'an serves as aesthetic devices that reinforce this symbolic violence. This representation shows that structural femicide does not always occur in the form of direct murder, but also in the form of the systematic and repeated "killing" of women's character, freedom, and dignity.

Interestingly, *Bidaah* presents a conflict of values between perpetrators of violence and the voices of women who reject such violence. This form of rejection can be understood as a kind of "social interpretation" rooted in the lived experiences of female victims. When connected to the Qur'anic texts, the acts of violence portrayed in the film stand in stark contrast to verses that underscore justice and the sanctity of life. For instance, Surah Al-Ma'idah [5]:32 explicitly declares that taking a single life unjustly is akin to killing all of humankind. [18] Progressive exegesis, as articulated by Quraish Shihab and Amina Wadud, underscores the importance of contextual interpretations grounded in historical understanding and the principle of gender justice, ensuring that religious readings do not become a justification for violence. [12] Thus, *Bidaah* is not merely a work of fiction, but a discursive space to reread the relationship between text, tradition, and power—especially when religion is used as a pretext to control and eliminate women from public spaces and decisions about their own lives.

Cinematic works like *Bidaah* have the power to influence public opinion and open discussions that have long been considered taboo in religious spaces. In an academic context, this film can be positioned as a catalyst for social interpretation arising from the reality of violence. Social interpretation, as theorized by Sahiron Syamsuddin, encourages that the meaning of the

Qur'an be traced not only from the text but also from the context and contemporary issues. [15] Therefore, the thematic interpretation approach with topics such as gender justice, protection of life, and equality in male-female relations becomes very important in addressing waves of violence hidden behind the legitimacy of religion.

Conclusion

This study shows that structural femicide, as depicted in the Bidaah series, is a form of systemic violence against women rooted in distorted religious understanding and patriarchal power relations. This violence is not only physical but also symbolic, emotional, and institutional. In the film Bidaah, women's bodies become spaces of ideological conflict where religion is used as a justification to oppress, silence, and even erase women's presence from social and spiritual spaces. The Qur'an itself explicitly and implicitly opposes all forms of violence against women, affirms justice in gender relations, and elevates human dignity without distinguishing between sexes. Verses such as QS. Al-Ma'idah [5]:32, QS. An-Nisa' [4]:1 and [4]:34, up to QS. At-Takwir [81]:8-9, when interpreted in the spirit of maqashid al-shari'ah, advocate for the protection of life (hifz al-nafs), honor (hifz al-'irdh), and justice (al-'adl). Therefore, all forms of femicide, including those carried out under the guise of religious justification, have no legitimate basis in the Qur'an. The Bidaah series not only offers a fictional narrative but also opens up a space for critique of the social and religious structures that legitimize violence. It serves as a kind of social interpretation that represents the need for a reinterpretation of Islamic teachings in order to liberate women from the constraints of violence that are institutionalized socially and theologically.

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