

Interpreting Islamic Education For Social Change: Hasan Al-Turabi's Views on Women's Rights And Gender Equality

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ABSTRACT

The research examines the intellectual journey of Hasan al-Turabi regarding gender and the role of women in Islam. Al-Turabi, an influential Muslim scholar, demonstrates the evolution of his perspectives across several dimensions. This study analyzes Al-Turabi's progressive views on women's role and political participation and their impact on Sudan's Islamic women's movement. However, there is controversy concerning his opinions on leadership, female testimony in Islamic law, and polygamy. This research also illustrates how interpretations of religious teachings shape perceptions of gender equality and the role of religion in initiating social change. Al-Turabi encourages the Muslim community to reexamine sacred texts within the context of the modern era, seeking egalitarian values that align with the spirit of Islam. This exploration highlights the complexity of debates surrounding religion and tradition in the context of social change while promoting a broader understanding of the dynamics of contemporary Muslim societies.

Keywords: Gender, Hasan al-Turabi, Islamic Education, Women's Roles, Exegesis

A. INTRODUCTION

The differences between men and women often raise complex issues concerning their roles and substantive social involvement (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010; Alio et al., 2013; Manembu, 2018). While the biological and anatomical differences between men and women are evident, these differences sometimes lead to perceived injustices by one of the groups (Díaz-Morales, 2017; Morgenroth & Ryan, 2018). These physical differences provide the foundation for forming cultural concepts that define the roles of each gender (Alamona et al., 2017; Miranti & Wibawa, 2021). Artistic interpretations of these sex differences form the basis for the evolving concept of gender (Muzani, 2014; Nurhasanah & Zuriatin, 2023). Inequality in the determination of social roles within society, stemming from creative interpretations of sex differences, results in situations where gender injustice is realized (Huet et al., 2020; Gurieva et al., 2022; Halizah et al., 2023).

Most women and individuals lacking sufficient knowledge of the Quran often strive to defend men who consider themselves superior and women inferior (Arbain et al., 2017; Shah, 2017; Mubarakati, 2022). Social conditions and cultural oppression exacerbate this situation. Women endure mistreatment, violence, and unemployment (Montesanti & Thurston, 2015). Riffat Hasan notes that there are three fundamental theological assumptions underlying the male superstructure over women. The first assumption is that God created men as inherently superior to women. The second assumption is that women were created to serve the needs of men. The third assumption is that women are the primary cause of humanity's expulsion from paradise, and God cast Adam and Eve out of heaven. Therefore, all daughters of Eve are burdened with punishments such as menstruation and the weight of pregnancy (Hasan, 2019).

This verse underscores the idea that men and women are judged based on their actions, virtues, and deeds rather than being inherently superior or inferior due to gender. However, verses like these are often overlooked in specific patriarchal interpretations of the Quran. Supporters of male-centric and patriarchal viewpoints frequently use interpretations that align with their desires to maintain dominance and reaffirm a higher hierarchy over women. Advocates of gender equality recognize that the situation of women, especially in countries with an Islamic background, has complex underlying causes. Hence, they conduct thorough analyses and focus on factors that trigger gender inequality. With a profound commitment to Islamic principles as their philosophical foundation, the primary focus is directed toward the core sources of religious teachings, namely the Quran and Hadith (Young, 2020).

Islamic feminists see their work as reexamining traditional interpretations and challenging the patriarchal frameworks that have historically dominated religious discourse.

By highlighting gender-biased readings and promoting alternative viewpoints rooted in principles of justice and equality, Islamic feminists aim to transform how Islam is understood and practiced, ultimately challenging and changing patriarchal norms and practices within the Muslim community (Abou-Bakr, 2020). Referring to the context above, this research will delve deeper into the gender perspectives of one contemporary scholar, al-Turabi. Through this investigation, it is hoped that the understanding of gender equality within the context of Islam can be further enriched. The viewpoints will be elucidated on how the shift from traditional interpretations towards more inclusive and equitable perspectives can be reflected in al-Turabi's thoughts.

B. METHOD

The literature review methodology systematically collects and analyzes relevant literature (Siswanto, 2010). To conduct the review, various databases were consulted, including academic journals, books, and online sources (Walid, 2019). Inclusion criteria were established to select studies that specifically focused on transformative learning, critical pedagogy, and social justice in the context of Islamic education for social change. Conversely, research that does not align with these themes was excluded from the review (Durrani & Halai, 2018).

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Political Background of Hasan al-Turabi

Hasan Abdullah al-Turabi, his full name, was born in 1932 in Kasala, Sudan. His journey of thought and influence primarily emerged in the intellectual showdown against Mahmut Mohammad Taha and al-Na'im. Al-Turabi held differing viewpoints from Taha on various aspects of religious understanding and its application within the Sudanese context. Their disagreements reflected a broader debate about the direction of the Islamic movement in the country. As a key figure, al-Turabi influenced Islamic thought in Sudan and played a significant role in social and political transformation. His strong opinions and ideas shaped a highly influential narrative within the dynamics of religion and politics in Sudan (Al-Turabi, 2003).

Al-Turabi was born and raised in a family environment filled with religious values and a strong legacy of Sufi traditions. From a young age, religious education was emphasized, laying a solid foundation for him to become a devout individual in spiritual practice and dedicated to pursuing knowledge. The early stages of his educational journey began with his achievement of a bachelor's degree in law (LL.B) from the Faculty of Law at the University of

Khartoum, Sudan, in 1955. However, al-Turabi's passion for learning extended beyond the confines of his surroundings. With an ever-burning motivation, he decided to venture further by embarking on an academic journey to Europe, particularly London. There, he pursued a Master's program in law and completed it in 1959. The next step in his educational journey took him to Paris, where he earned a Doctorate in law from the University of Sorbonne in 1964. While in Paris, he deepened his academic knowledge and explored the European and American worlds (Al-Turabi, 2003).

Al-Turabi emerged within a historical context as a figure characterized by two primary roles: an intellectual and an Islamic activist. He also took on the role of a Quranic interpreter. Throughout his life, al-Turabi was not merely a supporter of integrating Islamic doctrines and practices into the political realm of the state; he also critically engaged with and explored various Islamic political ideologies that he deemed incorrect. His multifaceted personality allowed him to be recognized as a proponent of a new form of Islamism that emerged from the womb of an Islamist rebel, challenging conventional conceptions of pre-existing Islamism. Al-Turabi's unique combination of roles, as both a thinker and an activist, enabled him to navigate the complex interplay between religion, politics, and society. He played a pivotal role in shaping the discourse around integrating Islamic principles into political governance while scrutinizing and challenging specific interpretations of political Islam. This dynamic engagement with ideas and ideologies showcased his willingness to rethink and reshape Islamic thought and activism trajectory in contemporary contexts 9 (Zulyadain et al., 2022).

The political history of Sudan and the quest for the concept of an Islamic State within the country contain complexities reflected in three main elements: the Sudanese Mahdist movement, the existence of a secular state, and the inclusive Islamist discourse practiced by al-Turabi. In this context, it's essential to understand the distinction between Islam and Islamism, although they are interconnected. Islam is an authentic ideology, but when it takes the form of Islamism, it becomes a collection of ideologies or even a political party that believes Islam should be a comprehensive guide in various aspects of human life, including social, economic, political, and cultural dimensions. This direction of thought elevates the concept of Islamism as a term commonly used in Islamic studies, particularly in the context of issues related to Islamic resurgence, as seen in the Islamic Mahdism movement (Imdadun Rahmat, 2005).

As one of the critical elements in Sudan's political history, the Sudanese Mahdist movement played a crucial role in shaping the country's political views and identity. On the other hand, the existence of a secular state in Sudan added a dimension of complexity to its political journey. However, these dynamics were navigated by the significant role of inclusive

Islamism embodied by al-Turabi. He represented a new face of Islamism with a more inclusive approach, adapting to the changing times.

The Mahdist movement, centered around the concept of a messianic figure known as the Mahdi, held deep significance in Sudanese political and religious thought (Kevane & Gray, 1995). It influenced the perception of the role of religion in governance and shaped the dynamics of power in the country. The coexistence of the Mahdist legacy and the emergence of a secular state framework contributed to the intricate political landscape of Sudan. Al-Turabi's brand of inclusive Islamism marked a departure from the conventional Islamist ideologies prevalent during his time. His approach acknowledged the complexities of modern society and aimed to reconcile Islamic principles with contemporary challenges. By advocating for a more open and adaptive interpretation of Islam, al-Turabi attempted to bridge the gap between religious values and the changing socio-political environment. His ideas resonated with a diverse range of individuals and contributed to a broader discourse on the role of Islam in governance and society (A. A. Ibrahim, 1999).

In the analysis of global politics, Islamism is reflected as a response that emerges from multidimensional crises involving the Muslim community. This view portrays the perspective that the birth of the Islamic revival movement can only occur through reorienting Islamic values in all aspects of life. Within the framework of history, there are two main approaches to understanding Islamism. Firstly, Islamism emerges as a response to the influence of a Western imperialist culture that undermines Islamic values. Secondly, the Islamic revival is interpreted as a natural response to a range of multidimensional crises, including moral concerns, actions contrary to religious teachings, and issues of corruption and nepotism. This is evident in Sudan, Tunisia, and Morocco (An-Na'im, 2007).

As an ideologue, al-Turabi sought to merge Islamic principles with concepts of renewal in his movement. This element became evident when al-Turabi introduced the notion of *tajdid*, which carried a revolutionary spirit. Along his journey, many referred to him as the "founding father of the Islamic State in Sudan," primarily due to his collaboration with the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan al-Muslimin). This title points to al-Turabi's close relationship with Egypt in actualizing the various revolutionary ideas he advocated for (Cohen, 2007). The views and practices of Islamism adopted by al-Turabi introduced a significant dynamic dimension to the political landscape of Sudan. His efforts to integrate Islamic values with concepts of renewal substantially impacted the development of his movement, particularly in the aspect of gender equality.

Female Leaders

As a politician and intellectual, al-Turabi's thoughts on gender didn't emerge from a vacuum. Following the October 1964 Revolution in Sudan, women's movements on various campuses were primarily dominated by communist ideologies. This was of particular concern for Sudan's Islamic activists because their hesitance to engage with female students resulted in inevitable consequences. Additionally, female students' resistance towards Islamic activists significantly influenced the evolving discourse (2014, الترابي)

Outside of the campus environment, the situation was not much different, with communist groups controlling numerous women's organizations and associations. As such, these groups began influencing society by promoting ideas of women's liberation according to their views. Meanwhile, Western trends also impacted women in university, school, and societal settings. This situation prompted Islamic movements to seriously reconsider the role of women within a comprehensive Islamic approach. Initially, these efforts materialized by forming a women's organization, the "Patriotic Women's Front," led by several female members. This organization had a national impact influenced by the issues of that time and other women's organizations advocating for legal reforms, political opportunities for women, and similar matters, albeit without directly connecting them to Islamic issues. Thus, the role of women in Islam does not have rigid limitations. Meanwhile, the discipline of *fiqh* (Islamic law) also experienced development, both in theoretical and practical aspects. In an interview with al-Arabiyyah, al-Turabi stated: "I want women to participate in public life; Allah Swt prefers some of us over others (both men and women); Allah Swt created us from a single soul and created from that soul its mate." (W. J. Berridge, 2017).

In this verse, classic commentators like al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir interpret that men are responsible for women, and they are providers, protectors, and leaders who discipline them if women deviate. This is because men are superior to women and excel over them in certain aspects, and due to the sustenance Allah has decreed in His Book and the Sunnah of His Messenger to be provided by men to women (Thabari, 1994). For these reasons, it is fitting that men are the providers for women.

Al-Bukhari recorded that the Prophet Muhammad Saw said, "A people that appoint a woman as their leader will never succeed" (Al-Bukhārī, 1994). Similarly, appointing a woman as a judge or in other leadership positions is also debated. As for the term "disobedience," it is argued that it refers to a woman showing ill behavior towards her husband, such as acting as if she is superior to him, not obeying him, neglecting him, disliking him, and so on. When these signs appear in a woman, her husband should advise and remind her of Allah's punishment if

she disobeys him. Indeed, Allah commands a wife to obey her husband and forbids her from being disobedient due to the significant rights that the husband has and everything he does for her. The Prophet Muhammad Saw said, "If I were to command anyone to prostrate to anyone, I would have commanded the wife to prostrate to her husband, due to the magnitude of the husband's rights over her." (Ibn-Katsir, 1999a).

According to Ibn 'Ashur, this law applies generally to both men and women, not just to husband and wife pairs. Men are considered leaders, protectors, and providers for women because, in his view, Allah Swt has created men inherently superior to women. In situations where a wife is disobedient or disrespectful to her husband, the husband is permitted to take steps to discipline her. These steps begin with advising her, then sleeping separately, and as an extreme measure, physically admonishing her. However, Ibn 'Ashur emphasizes that physical admonishment should be strongly discouraged and limited to highly exceptional circumstances. He also acknowledges that some companions physically admonished their wives for disobedience that didn't amount to adultery. Nonetheless, he argues that physical admonishment should be highly discouraged, and even leaders should enact rules prohibiting the physical admonishment of wives and penalize those who violate these rules if it's proven that the husband is not using this permission wisely (Ashur, 1984).

Without explicitly stating so, this indicates that some women also have the potential to excel over some men. The argument that men are *qawwāmūna* (maintainers) of women due to providing dowries and sustenance illustrates that this superiority is not absolute. This excellence depends on economic factors, which, in turn, give women equal opportunities to focus on themselves within the family and society. Al-Turabi argues that men and women do not possess absolute superiority in this context. Both genders are considered equal as human beings, and this verse mainly refers to married men, not generally to all men and women. The concept that men are providers for their wives is related to the belief that Allah SWT has created each pair with certain advantages over the other in terms of masculinity, femininity, and physical and emotional characteristics. Women can conceive and breastfeed, while men have more time to work and earn a living. This is why they are responsible for providing sustenance to their partners (Al-Turabi, 2004).

In an implementational context, women significantly influenced the Sudanese Revolution of 1989 at various levels. The meaningful drive from al-Turabi and the Sudanese Islamic movement rested on the belief in the crucial role of women in nation-building across multiple aspects. The Sudanese Islamic movement promoted women's participation in all fields, from policy-making to the highest executive positions (Emerson & Young, 2007).

Al-Turabi's most notable achievements lie in legislative measures through the form of constitution and state laws, including granting women the right to confer citizenship to their children from non-Sudanese fathers. Additionally, al-Turabi opened the doors for women's involvement in the military, police, and diplomatic services (Morrison, 2001). Women were given the right to attain top positions and compete with men based on their abilities and qualifications. This implies that no Legal barriers prevented women from holding public office. Women played significant roles on the international stage through engagement in non-governmental organizations. Burr suggests that al-Turabi played a substantial role in establishing the International Organization for Muslim Women in November 1989, reinforcing the position of women in the struggle for gender equality. Overall, the role of women in the 1989 Revolution and beyond, as indicated by the steps taken by al-Turabi, reflects a genuine effort to bring about positive change in the status and participation of women in society (Burr, 2003).

Prominent researchers and female figures in Sudan, such as Lubaba al-Fadl, Thuraya Yusuf, Najwa Abd al-Latif, and Iman Muhammad Hussein, are part of a larger group of women who view al-Turabi as a liberator of women. This perspective is based on the fact that al-Turabi adopted religious viewpoints that supported women, even though they sometimes contradicted Sudanese customs. He also encouraged women's engagement in public activities by referring to religious legitimacy as the foundation of his outlook. This approach achieved significant success. Between the 1990s and 2000s, the Sudanese Islamic movement took even more progressive steps by providing high-ranking opportunities for women. This paved the way for women to become diplomats, judges, military officers, parliament members, and even nation leaders. Thus, these measures demonstrate no limitations on women's roles in Islam (W. J. Berridge, 2017).

In 1991, for the first time in Sudan's history, according to the Ministry of Information woman attained the position of state governor. In the parliament, there were 78 female members representing 25% of the total members. In the 2011 Cabinet, the Department of Justice and the Office of the Attorney General consisted of 5 female ministers, 89 female judges, and 284 female consultants. In the police sector, the percentage of women reached 10%, while in the military, it was 15%; in law, 41%; in higher education, 67%; and in diplomacy, around 7% (BTI, 2023).

However, despite this, the discriminatory and repressive interpretations of Sharia law under the al-Bashir regime contradicted al-Turabi's commitment to advocating for women's rights. Thousands of women were dismissed from their jobs, in line with al-Bashir's statements

that the ideal woman preserves herself and her reputation by serving her husband and taking care of children while considering household chores as a noble duty for women. Women's rights in public life and the workplace were restricted (Hafez, 2014). Regulation No. 78/1991 on public transportation mandated that women sit in public vehicles' back seats. The Public Order Law of 1991 enforced the separation of men and women. It prohibited women from selling food or tea after 5 pm and required them to cover their entire body and head with loose, opaque clothing. In 2011, al-Turabi condemned al-Bashir for using Sharia as an empty slogan and failing to recognize that "the most important elements of Sharia (relate to) public life, which is far more crucial than women's personal lives and attire." (W. Berridge, 2021).

Testimony

Regarding testimony, the Quran establishes that the testimony of women in matters of debt and property carries half the weight of the testimony of men. This is based on the verse of Allah in Qs. Al-Baqarah [2]:282. Similarly, in the saying of the Prophet Muhammad Saw: "The testimony of one woman is equal to half the testimony of a man." (Al-Bukhārī, 1994). In this context, al-Turabi strongly advocated his view that women's testimony is equivalent to half that of men. However, there is a difference in al-Turabi's perspective in the context of the verse related to debt. He argued that "A woman has the right to work as a merchant, judge, or scholar," which, in this case, gives the testimony of women greater weight than men who may have less experience and insight. Regarding testimonies about property, the testimony of men is given precedence due to women's lack of knowledge. However, if a woman's understanding is more significant, her affidavit is considered more valuable than a man's (Al-Turabi, 2004).

Therefore, judges need to consider the conditions and qualifications of witnesses. If a woman possesses good legal knowledge, understands Sharia law, is trustworthy, and has a strong memory, her testimony is equivalent to one male witness's. Her testimony may even be superior to that of a male witness who lacks experience in business transactions or employment contracts. The testimony of one individual holds greater credibility than another who has yet to keep pace with the evolution of realities (Al-Turabi, 2004).

However, many people need to fully grasp the procedures of giving testimony. Some regard testimony as "black and white," While others think it provides testimony directly to a judge. Judges carefully consider the testimony of witnesses, listen to arguments from both sides, assess whether the witnesses genuinely remember the events, and determine if they are reliable or have a bad reputation for honesty. Additionally, expertise in fields relevant to the case is also considered (2014, بواسطة).

Al-Turabi was also confronted with whether this could be linked to the context of trade, where the testimony of one man is considered equal to that of two women. In his response, al-Turabi explained that the Qur'an doesn't use the phrase "*satakūnā*" but rather "*‘an tadilla ihdāhumā*" (Qs. Al-Baqarah [2]:282). This doesn't imply that women's testimony becomes invalid, but instead, because most women are not involved in the trade. Men undertake the responsibility of earning and providing for the family. Therefore, the judgment of testimony lies solely with the judge. If their testimonies' capabilities are equal, the decision will be based on expertise in a specific field. This could also mean that a man's testimony might require support from another witness (Al-Turabi, 2004).

He also stated that the testimony of a knowledgeable woman is equivalent to the testimony of four men who lack knowledge. However, his view does not directly propose a principle of gender equality in his testimony. Instead, he uses the verse about debts as the basis that a woman's testimony is equal to a man's testimony depending on the level of expertise. Nonetheless, in specific situations, such as in the case of a woman who is an expert in a particular field like gynecology, al-Turabi clearly states that a woman's testimony is more valuable. Furthermore, he says that the primary qualifications of a witness are trustworthiness, integrity, never lying, having knowledge, and understanding developments. This view doesn't differentiate between men and women in this context. Therefore, al-Turabi strives to associate his perspective with the principles of fairness and accuracy, regardless of gender (2014, بواسطة).

Polygamy

Polygamy has been a significant topic of discussion and interpretation in the context of Islamic law. Generally, classical scholars did not question the validity of polygamy. However, they differed in their opinions regarding the number of women a man can marry simultaneously. First, the Zahiriyah scholars such as Ibn al-Shabbagh, al-'Umrani, al-Qasim ibn Ibrāhīm, and some Shia groups argue that polygamy can be practiced with more than four women. This view is based on Qs. An-Nisa' [4]:3. For them, the term "*al-nisa*" in verse is a general term that cannot be restricted to a specific number like "*matsnā*" (two), "*tsulatsā*" (three) or "*rubā*" (four). Some Zahiriyah scholars also follow this view by allowing a Muslim man to have up to 18 wives (Al-Din & Al-Razi, 1981). Al-Qurtubi, in his commentary (tafsir), explains this reasoning by stating: "Some followers of the al-Zahiri school of thought argue that men can have up to 18 wives. This is based on their argument that the numerical terms in the verse can be interpreted as cumulative. Therefore, they interpret the word for two as "two by two" and similarly for the words three and four." (Al-Qurtubi & Al-Ansari, 2006).

However, some view that this perspective attempts to interpret numerical terms literally, which might only sometimes be relevant in Islamic law. There's also the viewpoint that this perspective contradicts the Hadith that limits the number of wives to four. Some scholars, like Ibn Abd al-Bar, add that the hadiths restrict the number of wives and have weak chains of transmission, even though they are narrated through various channels (Al-Qasimi, 1957).

They strengthen their argument by pointing out that Prophet Muhammad married more than four women. The Prophet Saw passed away with nine wives (Al-Din & Al-Razi, 1981). By referring to the view that Prophet Muhammad Saw is an excellent role model, they allow Muslim men to marry up to nine women simultaneously. They refer to Quranic verses such as Qs. al-Hashr [59]:7, which states, “*wa mā ātākum al-rasūl fakhudzūhu*” (whatever the Messenger gives you, take it); Qs. al-Ahzab [33]:21, which says, “*liquid kāna lakum fī rasūli Allāh uswatun hasanah*” (Certainly, you have in the Messenger of Allah an excellent example); and Qs. Ali Imran [3]:31, which expresses “*Qul in kuntum tuhibbūna Allāh fattabi’ūnī yuhbibkum Allāh*” (Say, [O Muhammad], "If you should love Allah, then follow me, [so] Allah will love you") (Al-Qasimi, 1957).

Al-Turabi's unique approach to interpreting the thematic unity of Quranic verses allowed him to narrow the discussion on polygamy to the context of orphaned women. This approach disregards Hadith and the consensus of scholars. It should be noted that Al-Turabi's view shares similarities with the perspective of Muhammad Abu Zayd al-Damamhury. Both of them faced criticism and debates in the field of Islamic studies for limiting the practice of polygamy solely to orphaned women (E. E. M. Ibrahim, 2016).

D. CONCLUSION

Hasan al-Turabi's journey of thought on gender and the role of women in Islam reflects a complexity that portrays the evolution of ideas and perspectives across various dimensions. His progressive views in empowering women demonstrate a strong drive to transform existing gender norms, particularly in education and political roles. His influence on the Islamic women's movement in Sudan during the 1990s provides tangible evidence of the potential for social change by integrating women into power structures and decision-making processes. However, controversies persist in his views on women's testimony in the context of Islamic law and traditional perspectives on polygamy.

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