

CHILDFREE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ISLAMIC FEMINISM: AN ANALYSIS OF THE THOUGHTS OF AMINA WADUD AND ASMA BARLAS

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Abstract

The phenomenon of childfree, the decision not to have children, is increasingly gaining attention in social discourse, particularly in the context of modern society dominated by concepts of gender justice and bodily rights. This article analyzes the issue of childfree from the perspective of Islamic feminism through the thoughts of Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas. The main focus of this article is to understand how these two thinkers interpret women's rights, particularly regarding the freedom to choose their reproductive roles. Using qualitative methods based on literature studies, this research confirms that Islamic feminism, as proposed by Wadud and Barlas, supports women's right to choose childfree as a form of bodily autonomy and moral freedom guaranteed by Islamic teachings. This article also seeks to critique patriarchal interpretations that limit women to solely domestic roles. The results show that the decision to be childfree can be categorized as a form of women's liberation from social pressures that are inconsistent with the principles of justice and equality in Islam.

Keywords: Childfree, Islamic Feminism, Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, Bodily Autonomy, Gender Equality.

Abstrak

Fenomena childfree, yakni keputusan untuk tidak memiliki anak, semakin menjadi perhatian dalam diskursus sosial, terutama dalam konteks masyarakat modern yang didominasi oleh konsep-konsep keadilan gender dan hak tubuh. Artikel ini menganalisis isu childfree dari perspektif feminisme Islam melalui pemikiran Amina Wadud dan Asma Barlas. Fokus utama artikel ini adalah untuk memahami bagaimana kedua pemikir ini menafsirkan hak-hak perempuan, khususnya terkait kebebasan memilih peran reproduktifnya. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif berbasis studi literatur, penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa feminisme Islam, seperti yang dicetuskan oleh Wadud dan Barlas, mendukung hak perempuan untuk memilih childfree sebagai bentuk otonomi tubuh dan kebebasan moral yang dijamin dalam ajaran Islam. Artikel ini juga berupaya mengkritik interpretasi patriarkal yang membatasi perempuan dalam peran domestik semata. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keputusan childfree dapat dikategorikan sebagai bentuk pembebasan perempuan dari tekanan sosial yang tidak sesuai dengan prinsip keadilan dan kesetaraan dalam Islam.

Kata Kunci: Childfree, Feminisme Islam, Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, Otonomi Tubuh, Kesetaraan Gender.



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INTRODUCTION

God gave humans reason and senses that motivate them to do good to one another. Loving and caring for one another is a form of goodness in Islam. It's not contrary to human nature in general; feelings of mutual love between men and women often arise.¹ Islam is a perfect religion that regulates all aspects of human life, including marriage. Marriage, considered sacred and holy in Islam, has the potential to soothe the human soul and protect it from lustful desires.²

According to Islam, marriage is sacred and contains elements of worship to form a good family and produce children, which aligns with the purpose of human creation. This is in accordance with the definition provided in Article 1 of the 1974 Marriage Law, which states that "Marriage is a physical bond between a man and a woman as husband and wife with the aim of forming a happy and eternal family (household) based on the One Almighty God."³

This definition implies that marriage is not merely a civil contract implying a marriage contract (*ijab kabul*), but rather serves a specific purpose and goal: to form a family. Therefore, it's not simply about having fun, but about achieving happiness based on religious beliefs. The sacred element in this definition outlines the prohibition on same-sex marriage.

The progress of human growth and civilization has increasingly given rise to various complex problems and sparked debate among humans, including issues surrounding families who plan not to have children, also known as childfree.⁴ Many factors are said to drive someone to choose childfree, including various psychological, economic, and environmental issues. The childfree issue can be promoted by the feminist movement.⁵

Since mid-2021, the Childfree phenomenon has been increasingly discussed by netizens on social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram, starting with a YouTube content upload by celebrity Gita Safitri about her and her husband Paul Andre Partohap's decision to choose the path of a Childfree couple.⁶ The discussion about the choice to be childfree, or someone's choice not to have children, has generated many pros and cons, which have been widely discussed online, from religious to cultural perspectives. The principle of childfree living is still considered taboo in

¹ Nissa Ma'rifa Fillaili, "Keluarga Sakinah Menurut Prespektif Al- Qur ' an," *INNOVATIVE: Journal Of Social Science Research Volume 3*, no. 2 (2023): 2681–94.

² Wisnu Wardana and Faisar Ananda, "Hukum Pernikahan Dalam Perspektif Di Dunia Islam," *INNOVATIVE: Journal Of Social Science Research Volume 4*, no. 1 (2024): 4472–87, <https://doi.org/10.31004/innovative.v4i1.8388>.

³ Iffah Muzzammil, *Fiqh Munakahat Hukum Pernikahan Dalam Islam* (Tsmart Printing, 2019), 254.

⁴ Muhammad Ilham, "Telaah Maqashid Al-Syari'ah Fenomena Childfree," *Indonesian Journal of Shariah and Justice (IJSJ)* 3, no. 2 (2023): 197–220, <https://doi.org/10.46339/ijjs.v3i2.71>.

⁵ Ajeng Wijayanti Siswanto and Neneng Nurhasanah, "Analisis Fenomena Childfree Di Indonesia," *Bandung Conference Series: Islamic Family Law* 2, no. 2 (2022): 64–70, <https://doi.org/10.29313/bcsifl.v2i2.2684>.

⁶ Farrencia Nallanie and Fhelincia Nathanto, "Childfree di Indonesia, Fenomena atau Viral Sesaat?," *Journal Syntax Idea* 6, no. 06 (2024): 2663–73, <https://doi.org/10.36418/syntax-idea.v3i6.1227>.

Indonesia.⁷ This is due to the patriarchal perspective and culture of society. This culture views marriage as a decision made simultaneously with the necessity of having children.

The main challenge in understanding the childfree phenomenon is the dominance of religious interpretations which are often full of gender bias, which causes women to be required to follow traditional roles in the family and society.⁸ These interpretations often deny women the freedom to choose their own path in life, and they consider women who reject motherhood to be deviant or even against religious principles. Society then considers a woman's inability to bear children not only a barrier within the family but also a moral and spiritual problem that must be addressed.⁹

However, Islamic feminist thinkers such as Asma Barlas and Amina Wadud offer a different perspective. Both propose a reinterpretation of religious texts, particularly the Quran, that allows women the freedom to choose their life roles without being trapped in a restrictive patriarchal narrative. Asma Barlas, in her work, asserts that the Quran does not view women solely as mothers or domestic servants, but rather emphasizes women's freedom and right to independently determine their life choices, including decisions regarding reproduction.¹⁰ Amina Wadud also agrees with this view and states that reproductive decisions, including choosing not to have children, should be viewed as personal rights that must be respected within the context of Islamic teachings that prioritize justice and individual well-being.¹¹ Islamic feminist thought emerged as a response to patriarchal interpretations that limit women's freedom in various aspects of life.

Childfree is a topic that is currently phenomenal in Indonesian culture, which is famous for its character of upholding noble eastern traits and culture.¹² The thought of the decision in life to be reluctant or unwilling to have children in living a married life has sparked debate in society, especially among the younger generation.¹³ Childfree isn't a new issue, but it's becoming more widespread in Indonesia, especially when linked to several influencers and well-known celebrities

⁷ Amimah Shabrina et al., "The Childfree Phenomenon in Indonesia : An Analysis of Sentiments on YouTube Video Comments The Childfree Phenomenon in Indonesia : An Analysis of Sentiments on YouTube Video Comments," *JAMBURA : Journal Of Mathematics* 6, no. 1 (2024): 29–38, <https://doi.org/10.37905/jjom.v6i1.23591>.

⁸ Ilham, "Telaah Maqashid Al-Syari'ah Fenomena Childfree."

⁹ Shabrina et al., "The Childfree Phenomenon in Indonesia : An Analysis of Sentiments on YouTube Video Comments The Childfree Phenomenon in Indonesia : An Analysis of Sentiments on YouTube Video Comments."

¹⁰ Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (University of Texas Press, 2002), 60–62.

¹¹ Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. (Oxford University Press, 1992), 45.

¹² M Irfan Farraz Haecal et al., "Analisis Fenomena Childfree Di Masyarakat: Studi Takhrij Dan Syarah Hadis Dengan Pendekatan Hukum Islam," *Gunung Djati Conference Series* 8, no. 2 (2022): 219–33.

¹³ Vizcardine Audinovic and Rio Satria Nugroho, "Persepsi Childfree di Kalangan Generasi Zilenial Jawa Timur," *Jurnal Keluarga Berencana* 8, no. 1 (2023): 1–11.

who have made this decision in their marriages. Indonesian law clearly states that there is no coercion for families who wish to practice childfree.¹⁴ Islam itself has a universal view, including regarding childfree. Islam views having children as a gift as well as a field of worship.

The phenomenon of childfreedom has become a topic that is receiving increasing attention in gender and family studies.¹⁵ In her research on Generation Z, she showed that women's decision not to have children is a form of resistance against patriarchal constructions and an expression of individual freedom. However, this study is based solely on a general feminist perspective without addressing the religious dimension, especially in the context of Muslim women. On the other hand, an article from Herwan et al.,¹⁶ highlights Islamic legal views on childfree and concludes that this option lacks legitimacy in classical Islamic legal sources. The approach used in this research remains textual and normative, failing to allow for progressive interpretations that take into account the dynamics of contemporary women's lives.

Study by Ramadan¹⁷ broadens the discussion by placing the issue of childfree within the framework of reproductive rights under Islamic law. She asserts that a woman's decision not to have children is legally acceptable for legitimate reasons, but remains controversial in a society that values motherhood. Meanwhile, the study Ma'mun et al.,¹⁸ analyzes the childfree phenomenon among urban Muslims using a sociological approach, highlighting the economic factors, education, and social pressures that influence women's decisions. However, this study has not yet directly linked this to a religious interpretation approach.¹⁹ Reviews the feminist interpretation methodology of Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas in depth, but has not applied it to specific issues such as childfree, so that its contribution is conceptual and not yet contextual.

Based on the research found in these studies, this study offers a novelty by integrating the issue of childfree into the perspective of Islamic feminism, particularly through an analysis of the

¹⁴ Nallanie and Nathanto, "Childfree di Indonesia, Fenomena atau Viral Sesaat?"

¹⁵ Wijdatun Nabila et al., "A Feminist Study of the Childfree Trend in Generation Z : A Normative Review," *SICOPS: Solo International Collaboration and Publication of Social Sciences and Humanities* 2, no. 2 (2024): 143–58, <https://doi.org/10.61455/sicopus.v2i02.142> A.

¹⁶ Herwan Herwan et al., "Childfree in Islamic Persfective," *Proceedings of the International Conference on Education, Humanities, and Social Science*, no. ICEHoS 2023 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-249-1>.

¹⁷ Abdul Rahman Ramadhan, "Reproductive Rights and Childfree in Islamic Law : A Juridical and Social Analysis," *Proceeding International Conference on Religion, Science and Education* 4 (2025): 975–82.

¹⁸ Sukron Ma'mun et al., "Childfree Phenomenon Among Urban Muslims: A Multidisciplinary Examination of Science and Morality," *Akademika: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 28, no. 01 (2023): 111–24, <https://doi.org/10.32332/akademika.v28i1.6773>.

¹⁹ Dwi Fidhayanti et al., "Rethinking Islamic Feminist Thought on Reinterpreting the Qur ' an : An Analysis of the Thoughts of Aminah Wadud , Fatima Mernissi , Asma Barlas , and Riffat Hassan Introduction In the Modern Context , the Debate on Women ' s Roles and Rights in Islam Has," *Tribakti: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman* 35, no. 1 (2024): 37–56, <https://doi.org/10.33367/tribakti.v35i1.4956> E-ISSN.

thoughts of Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas. This study not only critiques patriarchal interpretations that dictate women's reproductive roles, but also offers an alternative reading that emphasizes the principles of justice, equality, and freedom of choice in Islam. Using a contextual hermeneutic approach and an epistemological critique of the classical tafsir tradition, this study presents a new interpretation of Muslim women's bodily autonomy in making life decisions, and expands the scope of Islamic feminist discourse to areas that have been neglected in contemporary Islamic studies. Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas, as two prominent figures in Islamic feminism, reject this narrow view by emphasizing that the Qur'an supports women's equality and freedom. The focus of this study is to explore Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas's views on women's freedom to choose their own path in life, including the decision to be childfree.

Based on the background and theoretical studies presented above, this study begins with several fundamental questions. First, how is the phenomenon of childfree understood in the context of contemporary Muslim society, which is still dominated by patriarchal culture? Second, how do Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas, as Islamic feminist figures, interpret the issue of childfree, particularly regarding women's freedom of reproductive choice? To answer these questions, this study aims to examine the phenomenon of childfree from an Islamic feminist perspective through an analysis of the thoughts of Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas. This study also aims to identify the extent to which critical and egalitarian religious interpretations can provide a space for affirmation of Muslim women's life choices amidst cultural pressures and patriarchal normative interpretations. With this approach, this study is expected to contribute to the development of a more contextual and responsive discourse on Islamic feminism to contemporary issues.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a study of Islamic thought that attempts to conduct an in-depth investigation or study of the scientific treasury of Islamic thought, specifically examining the childfree ideas advocated by feminists from an Islamic perspective. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a literature study. Sarwono states that literature study is the examination of data from various reference books and previous research results relevant to the research to obtain a theoretical basis for the problem being studied.

Data were obtained from key works by Amina Wadud, such as **Qur'an and Woman**, and Asma Barlas, **Believing Women in Islam**. The analysis was conducted using a critical hermeneutical approach to understand how these two figures interpret the principles of gender equality in the Qur'an.

The theoretical approach of Islamic feminism, the approach of Islamic feminism is critical of the interpretation of patriarchal religious texts. In this regard, Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas

make significant contributions. Amina Wadud: Emphasizes the importance of inclusive hermeneutics to interpret the Qur'an fairly towards women. Asma Barlas: Rejects patriarchal interpretations that limit the role of women and advocates an interpretation of the Qur'an that emphasizes moral freedom and equality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Feminism and Some Movements Within It

Etymologically, the word feminist is "feminism," which comes from the Latin word "femina," which in English is translated as feminine, meaning having feminine characteristics. Then, the word was added to "ism" to become feminism, meaning a feminist ideology that seeks to raise gender issues related to the fate of women who have not received fair treatment in various sectors of life, including domestic, political, social, educational, and economic sectors. Further developments, the word was intended as a theory of sexual equality. Historically, the term first appeared in 1895, and since then, feminism has been widely recognized.²⁰

The term feminism first appeared in the West with the word FeMinus. The terms femina, feminism, and feminist come from the Latin fei minus. Fei means faith, and minus means less, so feminus means less faith.²¹ Initially, the feminist movement in Europe was born because of the views that women were irrational creatures, and the discriminatory actions of the church against women.²² However, the opposite of feminism, masculinity, does not necessarily mean full of faith. Masculinity is often interpreted as sexual power. Therefore, in their religions, women in the West are victims of the Inquisition, and women in Western society are victims of male rape. It's no surprise, then, that religion and men are enemies of women in the West.²³

There are several movements in feminism, including:

1. Liberal Feminism

This feminist movement emerged in the 19th century. Liberal feminists believe that all humans, both men and women, are created equal and harmonious, and that there should be no mistreatment or oppression between them. Their leaders include Margaret Fuller (1810-1850), Anglina Grimke (1792-1873), and Susan Anthony (1802-1906).²⁴

This movement originated from the liberal group, in the 18th century this movement wanted equal education, where women were not only used as tools for the

²⁰ Lisa Turtle, *Encyclopedia of Feminisme* (Facts of File Publication, 1986), 107.

²¹ Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, *Misykat: Refleksi Tentang Westernisasi, Liberalisasi, Dan Islam*, 2nd ed. (INSIST-MIUMI, 2012), 237.

²² Anita Marwing and Yunus, *Perempuan Islam dalam Berbagai Perspektif: Politik, Pendidikan, Psikologi, Ekonomi, Sosial, Budaya* (Bintang Pustaka Madani, 2021), 68.

²³ Mansour Fakih, *Analisis Gender & Tranformasi Sosial*, 16th ed. (Pustaka Pelajar, 2024), 83.

²⁴ Valerie Bryson, *Feminist Political Theory: An Introduction* (Mc Millon, n.d.), 70.

perfection and happiness of people. In the 19th century, liberal feminism initiated political rights and equal opportunities in the economic field, according to John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill, who argued that women should have the right to vote to be equal to men.²⁵

This theory has the assumption that men and women have special characteristics that are autologically equal in their rights, but in this liberal theory there are things that cannot be equated between men and women, namely in terms of reproduction. Here the difference lies in the reproductive organs of women which have logical consequences in the life of society.²⁶

2. Radical Feminism

This feminism advocates for gender equality within the biological concept of men and women. It addresses the sex or gender system, the role of women as mothers, and pregnancy. According to this school, the root of women's problems lies in the reproductive differences between men and women. They recognize that sex is a political issue, pregnancy is a barbaric culture, and motherhood is the root of all evil. Therefore, a revolution is needed to abolish the biological family and biological production.²⁷

In her 1970 book "Sexual Politics," Kate Millet explained that marriage is a financial partnership, and the family is the supreme institution within a patriarchal system, with women playing only a complementary role. Therefore, she advocated for the sexual revolution and the promotion of reproductive technology to offer women freedom and independence from the bonds of marriage and the family. Therefore, women's independence must be achieved through a biological revolution.

Radical and cultural feminists have argued that differences between sex and gender flow from the overall socialization of women in a patriarchal society. Women should be free from heterosexuality. They are free to choose to be lesbian, autoerotic, and not have to become mothers, and avoid the four M cycles that women always go through: menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding.²⁸

3. Gender Feminism (Neo-Marxist Feminism)

This theory assumes that, based on the perspective of epistemological theory, all knowledge prioritizes certain social groups. Epistemological theory suggests that men have

²⁵ Marwing and Yunus, *Perempuan Islam dalam Berbagai Perspektif: Politik, Pendidikan, Psikologi, Ekonomi, Sosial, Budaya*, 80.

²⁶ Nasaruddin Umar, *Argumen Kesetaraan Jender Perspektif Al-Perempuan Islam Dalam Berbagai Perspektif Qur'an*, 2nd ed. (Paramadina, 2001), 64.

²⁷ Caroline Ramazoglu, *Feminism and Contradiction* (Routledge, 1989), 12.

²⁸ Wafa Suci Ningrum, "(Studi Gender Tentang Feminisme Liberal Dan Feminisme Radikal)," *FAMILIA: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga* 5, no. 1 (2024): 25–36, <https://doi.org/10.24239/familia.v5i1.197>.

a vested interest in dominating women, while men, as the providers of instructions within the institutional system, maintain this dominance.²⁹

In general, this movement aligns with radical feminism, which seeks to abolish biological reproduction and the biological family, and argues that motherhood is a political act. Furthermore, they argue that all forms of sexual deviance, such as homosexuality, lesbianism, and transsexuality, must be accepted. Therefore, they stated that sexual life should be separated from the institutions of marriage and reproduction. Therefore, sexual freedom and abortion are natural things so that women can enjoy a safe sex life.³⁰

4. Existentialist Feminism

This group argues that women are consistently relegated to secondary roles, insignificant, and less important than men. Marriage has essentially robbed women of their freedom. Their ability to bear and raise children is a source of oppression. Even the choice of being a wife is more despicable than that of a prostitute. While prostitutes receive payment for every service they perform, for a wife, that service merely makes them her husband's slave.³¹

Childfree and Influencing Factors

Terminologically, childfree refers to the condition of not having children that is consciously and voluntarily chosen by an individual. The term comes from the phrase "childfree by choice," which simply means someone does not want children and has no desire to undertake the roles and responsibilities of parenthood.³² In the definition quoted from Urban Dictionary, childfree is understood as a life decision that rejects the presence of children not because of biological limitations, but rather as a form of freedom to not bear the psychological, emotional, or social burden of parenting responsibilities.³³

The term childfree refers to a couple's conscious choice not to have children, believing that this decision is a personal right and a fundamental human right that cannot be imposed by anyone. One reason often cited by those who choose the childfree path is concern about the issue of global

²⁹ Marwing and Yunus, *Perempuan Islam dalam Berbagai Perspektif: Politik, Pendidikan, Psikologi, Ekonomi, Sosial, Budaya*, 83.

³⁰ Rebecca Harrington, "Childfree by Choice," *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 20, no. 1 (2019): 22–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15240657.2019.1559515>.

³¹ Marwing and Yunus, *Perempuan Islam dalam Berbagai Perspektif: Politik, Pendidikan, Psikologi, Ekonomi, Sosial, Budaya*, 75–76.

³² Herwan et al., "Childfree in Islamic Perspective."

³³ Ma'mun et al., "Childfree Phenomenon Among Urban Muslims: A Multidisciplinary Examination of Science and Morality."

overpopulation.³⁴ On the other hand, a perspective has also emerged that links this trend to the body politics movement, namely the view that a woman's body is entirely her own, so that no one has the right to force sexual activity, pregnancy, or the obligation to become a mother.³⁵

In Indonesia, the term childfree has become widely known since the viral statement of a public figure on social media who openly stated his choice to marry without having children.³⁶ Since then, the childfree lifestyle has seen a surge in popularity, particularly among millennials. It's important to distinguish between childfree and other commonly used terms, such as voluntary childless. While seemingly similar, childfree refers to a conscious and deliberate decision not to have children, while voluntary childless is more neutral and doesn't emphasize a specific ideology.³⁷

Meanwhile, the term involuntary childless refers to a condition where a person or couple wants to have children, but is hindered by certain conditions that are beyond their will.³⁸ Moulet explains that involuntary childlessness is a situation where the desire to become a parent cannot be realized due to biological, medical, or social constraints that are undesirable for the individual.³⁹ This differs from childfree; there are many factors that cause a married couple to consciously choose not to have children. Some of these include:

1. Economic Factors

Today's young generation feels anxious and lacks confidence, believing that the costs of having children are significant. Financial maturity is a crucial factor when a couple decides to have children. This assumption often becomes an argument for their childfree decision. The slogan "many children, many blessings" is unfamiliar to them. They believe that material blessings don't just come by themselves; they must be prepared for as well as possible.⁴⁰

2. Mental Factors

The responsibility of parenthood is no easy feat; there are many things that must be carefully prepared before becoming a parent. Mental readiness is the most important

³⁴ Tiara Hanandita, "Konstruksi Masyarakat Tentang Hidup Tanpa Anak Setelah Menikah," *Jurnal Analisa Sosiologi* 11, no. 1 (2022): 126–36, <https://doi.org/DOI: https://doi.org/10.20961/jas.v11i1.56920>.

³⁵ Siswanto and Nurhasanah, "Analisis Fenomena Childfree Di Indonesia."

³⁶ Nallanie and Nathanto, "Childfree di Indonesia, Fenomena atau Viral Sesaat?"

³⁷ Audinovic and Nugroho, "Persepsi Childfree di Kalangan Generasi Zilenial Jawa Timur."

³⁸ Haecal et al., "Analisis Fenomena Childfree Di Masyarakat: Studi Takhrij Dan Syarah Hadis Dengan Pendekatan Hukum Islam."

³⁹ Christine Beatrix Moulet, *Neither 'less' or 'free': A Long-Term View of Couple's Experiences and Construction of Involuntary Childness*. (Australian Catholic University, 2005), 238.

⁴⁰ Karunia Haganta et al., "Manusia, Terlalu (Banyak) Manusia: Kontroversi Childfree di Tengah Alasan Agama, Sains, dan Krisis Ekologi," *Prosiding Konferensi Integrasi Interkoneksi Islam dan Sains 4* (2022): 309–20, <https://ejournal.uin-suka.ac.id/saintek/kiiis/article/view/3189>.

factor in becoming a parent. Many couples decide to adopt a childfree lifestyle due to childhood trauma caused by poor parenting and family lifestyles.⁴¹

3. Overpopulation Factor

The relationship between population factors and childfree has received attention among scientific researchers. Thomas Malthus, in his research work, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798):

"that the power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man. Population when unchecked, increases in a geometric ratio. Subsistence increases only in an arithmetic ratio" (Thomas, 1798).

The power of the population is greater than the earth's ability to produce a living for humans. Uncontrolled population increases geometrically, while substances (food) increase in an arithmetic ratio. This makes the earth's resources unbalanced with the increasing human population. This is in line with the reasons of Cinta Laura Kiehl or often called Cinta Laura who chose childfree because of overpopulation. According to Cinta, the earth is already experiencing overpopulation, efforts are needed to stabilize the earth's condition. According to Cinta, adoption can be an option to not burden the earth that comes from procreation.⁴²

4. Personal Factors and Personal Experience

Children are a gift from God, but many assume they will be a burden and hinder a person's career, whether husband or wife. Dislike for children leads to the belief that their presence will complicate their life. Some even argue that choosing childfree is based on traumatic childhood experiences, which can lead to concerns about not being a good parent.⁴³ Reading and Amatea also argue that psychological factors contribute to the decision not to have children as a defense mechanism, stemming from past trauma or a troubled family life.

Gillespie identified two main factors that motivate someone to choose a childfree lifestyle. First, the desire to live a childless life in order to gain greater freedom, and the belief that relationships with partners or others will be more harmonious without children. Second, the rejection of the maternal role, characterized by a disinterest in becoming a mother, even accompanied by feelings of loss of identity when associated with that role.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Herwan et al., "Childfree in Islamic Perspective."

⁴² Haganta et al., "Manusia, Terlalu (Banyak) Manusia: Kontroversi *Childfree* di Tengah Alasan Agama, Sains, dan Krisis Ekologi."

⁴³ Nallanie and Nathanto, "*Childfree* di Indonesia, Fenomena atau Viral Sesaat?"

⁴⁴ Rosemary Gillespie, "'Childfree and Feminine: Understanding the Gender Identity of Voluntarily Childless Women,'" *Gender & Society* 17, no. 1 (2003): 122–36.

In this case, the childfree choice is not only a practical decision, but also a form of resistance to the socially imposed maternal identity.

In Indonesia, known as a pro-natalist nation, children are still considered a vital element in family life. With an average birth rate of 2.26 children per family and approximately 93% of the population viewing children as a source of happiness, children serve an irreplaceable social, cultural, economic, and even spiritual function.⁴⁵ Therefore, individuals or couples who decide to live without children are often viewed negatively by society. They are frequently labeled as selfish, uncaring, deviant from social norms, or lacking the moral responsibility inherent in marriage.

Several research findings indicate that those who embrace a childfree lifestyle generally come from groups with higher levels of education and live in urban areas. Higher education often influences how people view family roles and encourages a greater focus on career and self-development. Data from the US Consensus (2004) supports this finding, where the desire to remain childless increases with educational level: 14.3% among high school graduates, 18.2% among bachelor's degree graduates, and 27.5% among postgraduate graduates. Furthermore, 82.5% of single women stated they did not want to have children, while among married women, the percentage reached 12.9%.

Childfree in Feminist Review

The term "childfree" has become a well-known part of feminist discourse. The feminist movement itself stems from an awareness of the unequal roles between men and women in various aspects of life. This inequality has spurred various forms of critical research to understand the root of the problem and seek solutions to create equal relationships based on the human potential of both genders.⁴⁶ In this context, feminism is seen as a transformative movement aimed at eliminating gender inequality, both in the domestic and public spheres. In Indonesia, issues surrounding women's equal roles and positions in social and sexual relations remain a relevant topic, particularly since the reform era, which marked a turning point for the development of feminist discourse in various sectors of society.⁴⁷

According to the Collins and Macmillan dictionary, childfree is defined as a life choice of someone who consciously decides not to have children, either through biological processes,

⁴⁵ Miwa Patnani et al., "Bahagia Tanpa Anak? Arti Penting Anak Bagi Involuntary Childless," *Jurnal Ilmiah Psikologi Terapan* 9, no. 1 (2021): 117–32, <https://doi.org/10.22219/jipt.v9i1.14260>.

⁴⁶ Ilham, "Telaah Maqashid Al-Syari'ah Fenomena Childfree."

⁴⁷ Fidhayanti et al., "Rethinking Islamic Feminist Thought on Reinterpreting the Qur'an: An Analysis of the Thoughts of Aminah Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, Asma Barlas, and Riffat Hassan Introduction In the Modern Context, the Debate on Women's Roles and Rights in Islam Has."

stepparenting, or adoption.⁴⁸ In this context, Victoria Tunggono became a significant figure as the first Indonesian female writer to openly discuss the childfree phenomenon through her book, *Childfree and Happy*. Her work opened up a new space for discussion about the meaning of family and women's freedom to make decisions about their own lives.

However, in Indonesian society, childlessness for biological reasons or factors beyond personal will is still more acceptable than a conscious decision not to have children. Eastern culture, steeped in collective values and expectations of offspring, makes the childfree choice difficult to achieve widespread acceptance.⁴⁹ There is a social assumption that the success of a family is marked by the presence of children as successors, so couples who deliberately choose to live without children are often considered to deviate from the norms and goals of ideal marriage.

From a feminist perspective, the family institution is often a space rife with inequality, especially for women. They believe that the division of roles and responsibilities within the family is unfair and gender-biased, with domestic work falling predominantly on women.⁵⁰ This injustice is rooted in patriarchal ideology, which hierarchically regulates relationships within the household. However, feminists also believe that if gender relations within the family are built on the principle of equality, where men and women share rights, obligations, and opportunities fairly and with mutual respect, then the ideal goals of marriage can be achieved.⁵¹

Feminist activists continue to promote gender equality, particularly within the family institution, as part of the struggle to realize women's rights over their bodies and lives. Law Number 39 of 1999 concerning Human Rights states that women have the full right to determine their reproductive destiny, including choosing whether or not to have children. Several articles in the law, such as Articles 9, 10, 45, and 49, explicitly guarantee women's rights to life, the right to a family, the right to reproductive health, and the right to control their own bodies. Reproduction here is defined as a state of physical, mental, and social well-being, and encompasses all aspects related to the reproductive system and the choice of pregnancy. Therefore, the decision not to have children should be seen as part of women's basic rights, not a deviation.

This stance has also been echoed by various figures and activists, one of whom is Rainy Hutabarat from the National Commission on Violence Against Women. She emphasized that a woman's body belongs entirely to her, and any form of coercion to become pregnant—including from a partner—is a form of sexual violence. According to her, a husband has no right to unilaterally

⁴⁸ Victoria Tunggono, *Childfree and Happy* (Mustika, 2021), 120.

⁴⁹ Shabrina et al., "The Childfree Phenomenon in Indonesia : An Analysis of Sentiments on YouTube Video Comments The Childfree Phenomenon in Indonesia : An Analysis of Sentiments on YouTube Video Comments."

⁵⁰ Maulana Yusuf, "Childfree Perspektif Feminisme (Studi Analisis Ditinjau dari *Worldview* Islam)," *Yustisi: Jurnal Hukum & Hukum Islam* 11, no. 1 (2024): 45–62, <https://doi.org/10.32832/yustisi.v11i1.16191>.

⁵¹ Muzzammil, *Fiqh Munakahat Hukum Pernikahan Dalam Islam*, 72.

decide the number of children a woman can have without her wife's consent, as reproductive decisions must be based on mutual agreement. In this context, childfree is a legally and morally valid choice. As stated in the book "Being a Single Woman Is Not a Problem" by Wanda Roxanne Ratu Pricillia, the decision to have or not have children is a form of personal freedom that deserves to be respected as a legitimate and humane life choice.

Childfree in the Perspective of Feminism by Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas

The ideas of Asma Barlas and Amina Wadud are present in the study of Islamic feminism, offering innovative perspectives on women's issues and reproductive rights in Islam. Within the context of childfreedom, they propose that women's freedom to determine their reproductive roles is a fundamental aspect of gender justice as taught in Islam.⁵² By reinterpreting sacred texts, both offer a new understanding that women's reproductive rights must be seen as part of individual freedom that cannot be violated by any party, including religious norms that have been interpreted patriarchally.

Asma Barlas, in her book "Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an," emphatically emphasizes that patriarchal interpretations of the religion do not fully represent the true teachings of Islam. She argues that the Qur'an fundamentally grants women the freedom to manage their own bodies and lives. Barlas does not see the obligation to have children as an absolute obligation in Islamic teachings.⁵³ Through critical interpretation, Barlas shows that the Qur'an not only defines women as mothers, but also opens up space for women to determine their own path in life, without feeling forced or constrained by social and religious obligations.

Asma Barlas also emphasizes the importance of individual freedom in making life decisions. In his work "Believing Women," Barlas argues that patriarchal readings of Islamic texts must be questioned and deconstructed to open up space for a more egalitarian understanding. Barlas emphasizes that Islam never forces women to take on the role of mothers, and therefore, the choice to be childfree is a legitimate right within the framework of individual freedom granted by Islam.⁵⁴ As in the interpretation of Surah At-Tahrim verse 6

"O you who believe, protect yourselves and your families from the fire of hell..."

This verse is often understood as a person's responsibility to care for their family. However, many contemporary interpretations interpret this care not only as having children but also as

⁵² Fidhayanti et al., "Rethinking Islamic Feminist Thought on Reinterpreting the Qur'an: An Analysis of the Thoughts of Aminah Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, Asma Barlas, and Riffat Hassan Introduction In the Modern Context, the Debate on Women's Roles and Rights in Islam Has."

⁵³ Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*, 60–62.

⁵⁴ Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*, 70–75.

upholding the values of goodness and well-being within the family, including the decision not to have children if that is the best option.

Similarly, Amina Wadud, in her work *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, highlights the importance of conscious intention and freedom of choice in the context of gender. Wadud argues that one of the foundations of Islamic teachings is respect for the right of every individual, including the right of women, to manage their bodies without external coercion.⁵⁵ Wadud emphasized that the Quran essentially teaches justice and well-being, meaning that any decision a woman makes, including not having children, should not be viewed as wrong. In Wadud's interpretation, the choice to be childfree is seen as a legitimate spiritual and personal process, as long as the decision is made with good intentions and full awareness.⁵⁶

These two thinkers make a strong argument that women's freedom to choose whether or not to have children should be respected as part of their freedom to express their bodily autonomy, which is also in line with Islamic values that teach individual freedom and rights. Both perspectives emphasize the importance of bodily autonomy, moral freedom, and gender equality as fundamental principles in Islam. Thus, the decision to be childfree can be seen as a form of women's liberation from social pressures and patriarchal interpretations that are inconsistent with the principles of justice in Islam.

Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas' Theological Reinterpretation in Reflecting on Gender Justice in the Childfree Issue

Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas are two Muslim feminist figures who have made significant contributions to the reinterpretation of Islamic theology, particularly on issues of gender justice. In the context of childfree, their decision not to have children can be used to reflect on gender justice from an Islamic perspective. Their concepts include:

1. Amina Wadud in Contextual Interpretation and Focus on Justice

Amina Wadud emphasized the importance of reading the Quran contextually, taking into account universal principles of justice. For her, justice is at the core of the Quran's message, including in gender relations.

Wadud will encourage reading verses related to reproduction, family, and gender roles within a framework of justice. She may also emphasize that the decision to have or not have children is an individual choice that must be respected, as long as it does not violate principles of justice and does not harm others. Wadud invites us to consider the socio-

⁵⁵ Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, 80.

⁵⁶ Fidhayanti et al., "Rethinking Islamic Feminist Thought on Reinterpreting the Qur'an: An Analysis of the Thoughts of Aminah Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, Asma Barlas, and Riffat Hassan Introduction In the Modern Context, the Debate on Women's Roles and Rights in Islam Has."

cultural context in understanding women's roles as mothers. Regarding the issue of childfree, she may question whether social pressure on women to have children constitutes a form of structural injustice.

2. Asma Barlas in a Non-Patriarchal Reading of the Quran

Asma Barlas challenges patriarchal interpretations of the Quran, which often ignore the egalitarianism inherent in the Islamic holy text. She argues that the Quran does not support a patriarchal system, including in determining gender roles. Barlas will likely emphasize that the Quran does not explicitly oblige every individual to have children, but rather allows flexibility in determining life paths based on individual circumstances and needs. She will also criticize interpretations that force women to fulfill their primary reproductive role, considering this to reinforce women's subordination in society.

In this issue, Barlas will encourage a reading that bases a woman's worth not on her biological capacity for motherhood, but rather on her existence as a whole individual. Asma Barlas and Amina Wadud's theological reinterpretation of the Quranic texts demonstrates that both view gender justice as a fundamental principle in Islam that must be respected in all aspects of life, including reproductive decisions. From Barlas and Wadud's perspective, gender justice encompasses women's freedom to make their own life choices without being trapped by a narrow understanding of women's roles that requires childbearing as a non-negotiable obligation.

For example, in interpretations of the Quran often used by Islamic feminist thinkers, such as in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 256, which states "there is no compulsion in religion," we can see an emphasis on individual freedom to make decisions, including choosing whether or not to have children. The interpretations conducted by Barlas and Wadud provide a more open and fair interpretation of verses that have been used to oppress women in domestic and reproductive life.

Gender justice in Islam, according to both, demands that women be treated equally with men in terms of bodily rights and freedom of choice. This means that interpretations that position women as subjects confined to domestic roles must be changed, so that women can live their lives according to the choices they deem best for themselves, without pressure to conform to norms or roles imposed by society.

There is also an interpretation of Surah Al-Baqarah verse 233 which states "And mothers breastfeed their children for two full years, for those who wish to perfect the period of breastfeeding..."

This verse indicates that while Islam grants mothers the right and obligation to care for their children, it also allows them the freedom to choose whether or not to continue their

maternal role if health conditions or personal decisions prevent it. However, this decision often conflicts with patriarchal social norms. Therefore, Islamic feminism plays a crucial role in critiquing and reconstructing religious understandings that limit women's freedom.

CONCLUSION

This research reveals that the childfree phenomenon can be understood as a form of autonomy and freedom for Muslim women in determining their life choices, particularly in reproductive aspects, which are essentially guaranteed by the principles of justice and equality in Islam. The thoughts of Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas, as Islamic feminist figures, offer a progressive and critical interpretation of sacred texts, rejecting patriarchal readings that limit women to domestic and reproductive roles. Through an inclusive hermeneutic and epistemological approach, both assert that the decision not to have children is a personal right that must be respected and does not conflict with Islamic values.

Furthermore, this research confirms that social pressure and negative stigma against women who choose childfree stem from gender-biased religious interpretations and deeply rooted patriarchal culture. By prioritizing a re-understanding of Islamic teachings that embrace gender justice, it is hoped that society will become more accepting and respectful of women's reproductive freedom as a fundamental human right. This research makes an important contribution to developing a discourse on Islamic feminism that is responsive to contemporary issues and broadens the space for theological and social dialogue on women's rights.

As a recommendation, further research involving empirical approaches is needed to explore the real-life experiences of Muslim women who choose childfree, so that a more comprehensive picture of the challenges, motivations, and social consequences of this choice can be obtained. Furthermore, interdisciplinary dialogue and the involvement of religious institutions in building inclusive understanding are essential to support broader acceptance of women's right to choose their own path in accordance with Islamic teachings.

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