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## **Reinterpreting the Meaning of *Qawwam* in QS. Al-Nisa [4]:34: An Intertextuality Analysis in *The Qur'an with Cross-References***

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### **Abstract**

The interpretation of QS. Al-Nisa [4]:34, particularly the term *qawwam*, continues to be a subject of debate in exegetical studies because it is often associated with the legitimization of male leadership over women. This study aims to analyze forms of intertextuality in *The Qur'an with Cross-References* by Mun'im Sirry and to explain the reinterpretation of the meaning of *qawwam* that emerges through the relationships between verses. This study is a qualitative study based on literature review, employing a descriptive-analytical method and an intertextuality approach. The primary data consists of the book *The Qur'an with*

Cross-References by Mun'im Sirry, while secondary data was obtained from exegetical works, books, and relevant scholarly articles. The results of the study indicate that there are four forms of intertextuality in the book *The Qur'an with Cross-References*, namely terminological, methodological, receptive, and interpretive intertextuality. The meaning of *qawwam* is constructed through a system of cross-references by referring to a number of verses, including QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:202, QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:228, QS. Al-Nisa [4]:32, QS. Al-Nisa [4]:128, and QS. Al-Ahzab [33]:35. The relationship between these verses highlights an emphasis on the principle of justice, the balance of rights and obligations, and reciprocity between men and women. In this context, *qawwam* is not interpreted as the absolute superiority of men over women, but rather as a form of relational and functional responsibility within the domestic sphere. This study demonstrates that the intertextual approach in *The Qur'an with Cross-References* not only serves as a method for connecting verses but also functions as a hermeneutical strategy in constructing a more contextual and egalitarian reinterpretation of the meaning of *qawwam*.

Keywords: Qawwam; Intertextuality; Gender Equality; Cross-References; Mun'im Sirry.

### Abstrak

Penafsiran terhadap QS. Al-Nisa[4]:34, khususnya pada lafaz *qawwam*, terus menjadi perdebatan dalam studi tafsir karena sering dikaitkan dengan legitimasi kepemimpinan laki-laki atas perempuan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bentuk-bentuk intertekstualitas dalam *The Qur'an with Cross-References* karya Mun'im Sirry serta menjelaskan reinterpretasi makna *qawwam* yang terbentuk melalui relasi antar ayat. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif-analitis dan pendekatan intertekstualitas. Data primer penelitian berupa buku *The Qur'an with Cross-References* karya Mun'im Sirry, sedangkan data sekunder diperoleh dari kitab tafsir, buku, dan artikel ilmiah yang relevan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat empat bentuk intertekstualitas dalam buku *The Qur'an with Cross-References*, yaitu intertekstualitas terminologis, metodologis, reseptif, dan interpretatif. Makna *qawwam* dibangun melalui sistem *cross-references* dengan merujuk pada sejumlah ayat, di antaranya QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:202, QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:228, QS. Al-Nisa [4]:32, QS. Al-Nisa [4]:128, dan QS. Al-Ahzab [33]:35. Relasi antar ayat tersebut memperlihatkan adanya penekanan terhadap prinsip keadilan, keseimbangan hak dan kewajiban, serta kesalingan antara laki-laki dan perempuan. Dalam konteks ini, *qawwam* tidak dimaknai sebagai superioritas mutlak laki-laki atas perempuan, melainkan sebagai bentuk tanggung jawab relasional dan fungsional dalam ranah domestik. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan intertekstualitas dalam *The Qur'an with Cross-References* tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai metode penghubung antar ayat, tetapi juga menjadi strategi hermeneutik dalam membangun reinterpretasi makna *qawwam* secara lebih kontekstual dan egaliter.

**Kata kunci:** Qawwam; Intertekstualitas; Kesetaraan Gender; Rujukan Silang; Mun'im Sirry.

## Introduction

The interpretation of Qur'anic verses arises from a dialectic between the reader, the text, and social reality, such that the development of its exegesis reflects the ever-changing dynamics of civilization. This causes every generation of exegetes to produce different exegetical works according to their epistemological and social backgrounds, in line with the demands of changing times and the needs of society (Al-Faruq et al., 2023). The development of interdisciplinary approaches in Islamic studies further broadens the scope of tafsir studies, making it possible to understand verses more comprehensively by taking into account their social, historical, and normative dimensions. This makes tafsir studies a living and ever-relevant intellectual field in responding to the actual concerns of the Muslim community, including questions of gender relations and justice from a Qur'anic perspective (Bahrudin et al., 2025).

One of the verses most frequently debated within the discourse on gender relations is QS. Al-Nisa [4]:34, particularly the term *qawwam*, which is often translated as "leader" (Febriyani, 2025). Debate over the meaning of this term has continued from the classical era into the contemporary period, involving exegetes from diverse backgrounds. Some exegetes tend to interpret *qawwam* as a form of male leadership over women. Classical exegetes such as Ibn Katsir offer an interpretation that tends toward gender bias, stating explicitly that men are leaders over women because of the advantage Allah has bestowed upon men, making them superior and better than women (Katsir, 1997). A similar view is also found in the tafsir of Al-Zamakhsyari (2009), though without the use of discriminatory language.

On the other hand, some exegetes place a more relational and functional emphasis on the meaning of *qawwam*. Al-Jassas (1992), for instance, interprets *qawwam* within a framework of responsibility for the advantage granted by Allah, so that the leadership in question is a matter of trust (*amanah*) rather than unilateral authority. In the development of contemporary tafsir, the reinterpretation of the meaning of *qawwam* increasingly moves toward a more egalitarian and contextual understanding, particularly as a response to social practices that still tend to place women in a subordinate position (Ervienna, 2021). Exegetes such as Sayyid Qutb (2003) interpret *qawwam* in a more functional manner, particularly by taking into account the context of relations within domestic life. This

reinterpretive effort is also evident in various English translations of the Qur'an that no longer render *qawwam* hierarchically, but instead use terms emphasizing responsibility and protection, such as "support" (Yuksel et al., 2007), "take full care" (Asad, 1980), and "protectors and maintainers" in *The Qur'an with Cross-References* by Mun'im Sirry (Sirry, 2022b). This variety of meanings shows that the term *qawwam* is not singular in nature, but rather open to a range of interpretations shaped by the exegetical approach and social context underlying it.

A number of previous studies have examined the reinterpretation of the meaning of *qawwam* through various theoretical approaches. Hidayah et al.'s study (2024) employs Muhammad Syahrur's theory of *hudud* (limits) and shows that *qawwam* carries a minimum limit in the form of an obligation to protect and improve, and a maximum limit in the form of providing material and spiritual sustenance, such that a husband's leadership within the household is not authoritarian but rather a form of protection. Zakiah and Nurfajriyani (2023), using Abdullah Saeed's contextual hermeneutics, conclude that *qiwamah* is a form of relational responsibility and justice, which does not rule out the possibility of women leading in either the domestic or public sphere depending on the dynamic social context. Ismail and Rahmi's study (2024), through linguistic analysis, further shows that the verse's linguistic structure does not indicate absolute male leadership, since the use of *alif lam istighraq li-jinsi* is qualified by *ifrad al-jinsi*, indicating that not all men must lead and not all women must be led — meaning that within the domestic sphere, men and women must cooperate rather than compete for superiority over one another. These studies generally point to a shift in the meaning of *qawwam* from a hierarchical understanding toward a relational and functional one.

This study differs from previous research in two fundamental respects. First, prior studies on the meaning of *qawwam* have used a variety of approaches — Muhammad Syahrur's theory of *hudud*, Abdullah Saeed's contextual hermeneutics, and linguistic analysis. However, no study has specifically examined the reinterpretation of *qawwam* through an intertextuality approach in *The Qur'an with Cross-References* by Mun'im Sirry. Second, Mun'im Sirry's work offers a unique model for reading the Qur'an through a system of cross-references between verses, actualizing the method of *tafsir al-Qur'an bi'l-Qur'an* (interpreting the Qur'an through the Qur'an) within a contemporary framework, in which each verse is understood in its thematic and semantic relationship

to other verses (Kurdi, 2025). However, this system has never been examined in depth in relation to the issue of gender relations. This study not only identifies the forms of intertextuality present in that work but also reveals how the cross-reference system functions as a hermeneutical strategy in constructing a more relational, contextual, and egalitarian meaning of *qawwam* (Jamal et al., 2025).

Based on this background, the main problems this study seeks to answer are: what forms of intertextuality appear in *The Qur'an with Cross-References* by Mun'im Sirry, and how the relationships between verses within that system shape the reinterpretation of the meaning of *qawwam* in QS. Al-Nisa [4]:34. These questions are important to address given that the cross-reference-based model of reading the Qur'an remains an approach rarely examined in depth, particularly in relation to gender relations. This study also proceeds from the recognition that understanding a given term in the Qur'an cannot be separated from the network of meaning formed through its relationship with other verses, making intertextual analysis a methodological necessity (Miftahur Rohmah, 2022). In line with this problem statement, the study aims to analyze the forms of intertextuality contained within the work's cross-reference system and to reveal the reinterpretation of the meaning of *qawwam* in QS. Al-Nisa [4]:34 that emerges from the relationships between verses within that system.

Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich the study of intertextuality within Qur'anic studies, while also reviving the relevance of the *tafsir al-Qur'an bi'l-Qur'an* method within a contemporary academic context. Practically, it is expected to serve as a reference for researchers, academics, and practitioners interested in contemporary tafsir studies, particularly in developing a more contextual, relational, and justice-oriented reading of verses on gender — so that the interpretation of *qawwam* is no longer confined to a single, hierarchical understanding, but remains open to a more comprehensive reading.

## Theoretical Framework

The theory used in this study is the theory of intertextuality. Linguistically, "intertext" combines the words *inter* and *text*. According to the KBBI (the official Indonesian dictionary), the bound prefix *inter-* means "between two," "between," or "in

the middle" (*Arti Kata Inter- — Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI) Daring, 2025*). "Text," meanwhile, refers to written discourse (*Arti Kata Teks — Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI) Daring, 2025*). "Intertextual" means the relationship between one text and another (*Arti Kata Intertekstual — Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI) Daring, 2025*).

This theory was first introduced by Julia Kristeva, who explained that every text results from the absorption and transformation of previous texts, like a mosaic of quotations that never exists in an empty space (Tomilina & Korniienko, 2023). As it developed, intertextuality came to encompass various forms of relation between texts, such as quotation, allusion, parallelism, and the transformation of meaning (Bakhtiniso, 2024). Within Kristeva's framework, the concepts of the genotext and phenotext are two dimensions explaining how intertextuality works to generate new meaning (*meaning production*) (Rajabi et al., 2023). The phenotext is understood as the textual form explicitly present within a work, while the genotext refers to the conceptual and relational layer underlying the formation of that text's meaning (Hanafi, 2023).

As an analytical framework, Kristeva's phenotext–genotext pairing is operational in nature — it can be applied to a variety of different textual objects depending on the focus of the study at hand (Rajabi et al., 2023). Therefore, in this study, the phenotext–genotext framework is applied to the forms of intertextuality found in *The Qur'an with Cross-References*, namely terminological, methodological, receptive, and interpretive intertextuality. Among these four forms, interpretive intertextuality is the main focus of this study, because it is through this form that the process of producing new meaning for the term *qawwam* can be traced in depth. In this context, the phenotext is the translation of *qawwam* as "protectors and maintainers," which appears explicitly as the final outcome of Mun'im Sirry's interpretation of QS. Al-Nisa [4]:34, while the genotext is the meaning formed through the relationships among the reference verses Sirry selects. It is through the relationship between the phenotext and genotext that the process of intertextuality operates — not merely connecting verses, but generating a transformation and production of new meaning for the term *qawwam* (Abdurrachman & Parmin, 2022).

To operationalize this intertextuality framework, the study adapts the stages of analysis formulated by Mun'im Sirry in *The Qur'an with Cross-References* (Sirry, 2022b).

Sirry's first and second stages — identifying similarities and differences, and comparing meaning — are combined into a single comparative-analysis stage here, since analyzing similarities and differences is inherently part of the act of comparison itself (Lukito, 2022). The subsequent stages are the synthesis of meaning and the evaluation of meaning. These three stages do not function merely as descriptive procedures, but are designed to carry out the logic of Kristeva's intertextuality — from identifying the phenotext and genotext, through analyzing the relationships between texts, to uncovering the *meaning production* that arises from their convergence (Temenggung et al., 2025).

## Method

This study is a qualitative study based on library research, employing a descriptive-analytical method (Adiningrat et al., 2025). A qualitative approach was chosen because the data is textual and interpretive in nature (Sipayung, 2023), while library research was used because all data is drawn from written sources such as scholarly works, tafsir books, and other relevant literature (Agustini et al., 2023). The descriptive method is applied to present Mun'im Sirry's biography and the characteristics of *The Qur'an with Cross-References*, while the analytical method is used to examine the forms of intertextuality and the process of reinterpreting the meaning of *qawwam* through the relationships between verses within the cross-reference system.

The primary data for this study is *The Qur'an with Cross-References* by Mun'im Sirry, published by De Gruyter in 2022, while the secondary data includes classical and contemporary tafsir works such as those of Al-Tabari, Ibn Katsir, and M. Quraish Shihab, as well as relevant academic books and journal articles (Sulung & Muspawi, 2024).

Data collection was carried out through stages of identification, selection, and documentation of relevant literary sources (Iba & Wardhana, 2023). At the identification stage, the researchers traced works related to the term *qawwam*, intertextuality in Qur'anic studies, and Mun'im Sirry's thought. At the selection stage, these sources were filtered based on their relevance to the focus of the study. At the documentation stage, the selected data was recorded and classified according to primary and secondary data categories to facilitate the analysis process (Ardiansyah et al., 2023).

The data analysis technique uses an intertextuality approach. This approach is used to examine the forms of interconnection between texts in *The Qur'an with Cross-References*, including the relationships among cross-referenced verses in the formation of a verse's meaning (Siregar & Albina, 2025). Operationally, the concepts of the phenotext and genotext are used to identify several forms of intertextuality in the work, as well as to uncover the *meaning production* of the term *qawwam* formed from the reference verses.

The analytical process for uncovering the meaning production of *qawwam* is carried out through three stages explained in the Theoretical Framework: (1) analyzing comparisons, which includes identifying similarities and differences between the reference verses and QS. Al-Nisa [4]:34; (2) constructing a synthesis of meaning formed through the relationships between texts; and (3) evaluating the meaning in constructing the reinterpretation of *qawwam* (Sirry, 2022b).

These three stages are operationalized within Kristeva's framework as follows: the phenotext — the translation "protectors and maintainers" — serves as both the starting point and the final convergence point of the analysis, while the genotext is the meaning formed through the relationships among the five reference verses (QS. 2:202, QS. 2:228, QS. 4:32, QS. 4:128, QS. 33:35). The stages of comparison and synthesis function as the genotext, working to construct the meaning formed through the relationships among the reference verses. This resulting construction of meaning is then brought back into dialogue with the phenotext at the evaluation stage, making it possible to show how the translation "protectors and maintainers," as *meaning production*, is not a meaning that stands on its own, but rather the result of a dialogue with these five genotexts (Sofwatillah et al., 2024).

## Results

### *Mun'im Sirry and The Qur'an with Cross-References*

Mun'im Sirry is a Muslim scholar born in Sumenep, Madura (1971), known for a progressive-revisionist intellectual orientation (Prasetia, 2023). He received his *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) education at Al-Amien (1983–1990), then continued his

undergraduate and master's studies at the Faculty of Sharia and Law, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan (1990–1996). His subsequent studies in the United States further shaped his critical and moderate outlook; he earned a second master's degree from UCLA and a Ph.D. with distinction from the University of Chicago Divinity School (2012). He currently serves as an associate professor of World Religions and World Church in the Department of Theology at the University of Notre Dame, USA (Maulana, 2024).

His cross-cultural academic background spanning Indonesia, Pakistan, and the United States has helped shape an intellectual style open to critical scholarship (Arifin et al., 2023). According to Sirry, a believer's critical stance does not necessarily negate their faith, as exemplified by figures such as Fazlur Rahman and Abdolkarim Soroush, who remained both insiders and believers (Fuad, 2024).

Through several of his works, it is evident that Mun'im Sirry holds a serious interest in Qur'anic studies, hermeneutics, theology, and comparative interreligious studies. Some of his works have sparked intellectual debate, including Fadli Lukman's critique of his book on revisionist scholarship (Lukman, 2022). Likewise, his piece titled *Al-Qur'an, Kalam Allah, dan Perkataan Nabi* ["The Qur'an, the Word of God, and the Words of the Prophet"] (Sirry, 2022a) was critiqued by Muhammad Nuruddin in a seminar held at PTIQ University, Jakarta (TV PTIQ, 2025). This appears to be part of Sirry's broader effort to revitalize Islamic studies within the intellectual world (Wahyuni et al., 2024). In addition, Sirry has devoted particular attention to Qur'anic studies by producing an English translation of the Qur'an titled *The Qur'an with Cross-References*.

*The Qur'an with Cross-References*, written over roughly ten years (2012–2022), originated from a gathering of Qur'an scholars at "The Qur'an Seminar" held at the University of Notre Dame in 2012–2013. This was driven by the aim set by Gabriel Said Reynolds, who led the seminar, for participants to advance scholarly understanding of the Qur'anic text and to encourage direct engagement with it. *The Qur'an with Cross-References* thus represents Sirry's effort to provide a much-needed tool for that approach (Sirry, 2022b).

This 687-page book, which includes a substantial introductory section, contains the complete Qur'anic text and translation across all 30 *juz* (parts). Each verse, along with

its translation, is placed on the left side of the page, while the right-hand margin, aligned with the corresponding verse, contains the surah and verse reference numbers linking one verse to another. These references are intended to point to other parts of the Qur'an that can broaden the understanding of a given verse. It can be said that this book functions as a modern work of tafsir employing the method of *tafsir bi'l-ma'thur*, since it interprets a given verse through other verses — a practice known in the Islamic tradition as *tafsir al-Qur'an bi'l-Qur'an* (interpreting the Qur'an through the Qur'an) (Rohman, 2025).

In using the cross-references, there are several points worth noting:

- a. Cross-references are marked by the surah number and verse number, separated by a colon.
- b. Cross-references are based on relationships of meaning — whether in terms of words, phrases, themes, concepts, narratives, or figures — covering either an entire verse or only part of it.
- c. Cross-references are arranged according to the order of the *mushaf* (the standard written Qur'an).
- d. If a referenced verse contains more than one topic, each topic is marked with a superscript letter — a, b, c — whether in either the Arabic text or the reference text — serving as a marker that each part refers to another part corresponding to that superscript letter.
- e. If a cross-reference has a parallel verse that shares textual similarities or describes the same event, the superscript letters "pp" are used (Sirry, 2022b).

Figure 1. An example of how cross-references are used in Surah Al-Fatihah

Sūrah 1: Al-Fātiḥah سُورَةُ الْفَاتِحَةِ (The Opening)		
1 In the name of God, the Gracious, the Merciful.	بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ١	1 pp 27:30
2 Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds.	الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ٢	2 pp 6:45; 37:182; 39:75 a 6:1; 18:1; 27:93; 35:1 b 26:23-24
3 The Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.	الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ٣	
4 Master of the Day of Judgment.	مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ٤	4 82:17-19
5 It is You we worship, and upon You we call for help.	إِلَهِكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِلَيْكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ٥	
6 Guide us to the straight path.	اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ٦	6 2:142, 213; 4:68; 10:25
7 The path of those You have blessed, not of those against whom there is anger, nor of those who are misguided.	صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ٧	7 4:69; 19:58

The cross-reference system used by Mun'im Sirry shows that the meaning of the Qur'an is constructed through the interconnected relationships between verses, allowing a given verse to be understood comprehensively (Auliani et al., 2025).

### Intertextuality in The Qur'an with Cross-References

Intertextuality is understood as a textual-analysis approach that offers a broader perspective for understanding a text by examining its relationship to other texts — whether in the form of interaction, reference, or connections of meaning within a particular context (Putri, 2025). In line with Mun'im Sirry's critical stance toward conventional religious texts and teachings, intertextuality in the study of sacred scripture is understood as an approach that seeks to move beyond the orthodox framework of knowledge, which has tended to produce a sacred, singular reading of the text — thereby opening space for a more contextual reading (Tanadi, 2023).

In translation studies, the study of intertextuality is divided into two aspects: *translation as intertextuality* and *translation of intertextuality*. The first aspect views translation itself as a form of intertextuality, since a translated text is fundamentally the result of absorbing, interpreting, and transforming a prior text. The second aspect refers to the process of translating the intertextual elements present within a text, such as relations of meaning, references, and connections to other texts (Saideen, 2018).

This view appears relevant for application in the study of Qur'anic tafsir, particularly in reading the cross-reference system within *The Qur'an with Cross-*

*References*. In this context, the authors identify several forms of intertextuality — in the use of the cross-reference system itself, in its continuity with the tradition of *tafsir al-Qur'an bi'l-Qur'an*, and in the formation of meaning through the relationships between Qur'anic verses.

Based on Kristeva's intertextuality framework explained in the Theoretical Framework section, intertextuality in *The Qur'an with Cross-References* can be mapped into the following forms:

Table 1. Intertextuality in *The Qur'an with Cross-References*

No	Form of Intertextuality	Phenotext	Genotext
1	Terminological Intertextuality	The use of the systematic structure and terminology of cross-references between verses	Adoption of the systematic structure and terminology from the biblical tradition
2	Methodological Intertextuality	Interpreting a verse through another verse	A manifestation of the <i>tafsir al-Qur'an bi al-Qur'an</i> method
3	Receptive Intertextuality	Selection and grouping of reference verses	Dialogue with earlier tafsir works that influences the selection of reference verses
4	Interpretive Intertextuality	The construction of meaning for a word or verse — such as the translation of <i>qawwam</i> in QS. Al-Nisa [4]:34 as "Protectors and maintainers"	The resulting construction drawn from the reference verses

Intertextuality in *The Qur'an with Cross-References* appears to operate across several aspects, explained as follows:

- a. In the terminological aspect, the use of the term *cross-references* in the book *The Qur'an with Cross-References* is not merely an adoption of terminology from the biblical tradition, but is also accompanied by the adoption of its technical system and format. The cross-reference system used follows the same pattern as cross-

references in the Bible, namely referring one verse to another using a "surah number : verse number" code (Sirry, 2022b). This indicates the existence of terminological and technical intertextuality.

- b. In the methodological aspect, the cross-reference system used by Mun'im Sirry is connected to the tradition of *tafsir al-Qur'an bi'l-Qur'an* — the method of interpreting a verse through another verse that shares a relationship of meaning. The relationships between verses in this work show that the understanding of a given verse is not constructed independently, but rather through its connection to other relevant verses (Human et al., 2025). The cross-reference system in *The Qur'an with Cross-References* can thus be understood as a modern actualization of the *tafsir al-Qur'an bi'l-Qur'an* method.
- c. In the receptive aspect, Mun'im Sirry's selection of reference verses shows continuity with the interpretive tradition of both classical and contemporary exegetes, who had previously connected particular verses based on shared themes, concepts, or meanings. *The Qur'an with Cross-References* thus does not stand as an entirely independent work, but is rooted in the intellectual heritage of Qur'anic exegesis that developed before it. This aligns with Walid Saleh's view that a work of tafsir cannot be separated from the tafsir tradition that precedes it (Masyhur et al., 2025).
- d. As for the interpretive aspect, intertextuality is evident in the process of meaning formation through the relationships between Qur'anic verses (Aurellia et al., 2025). This can be seen, for example, in the interpretation of *qawwam* in QS. Al-Nisa [4]:34, which is constructed through its relationship with several reference verses. This relationship produces a synthesis of meaning that shows the concept of *qawwam* is not understood solely in hierarchical terms, but is also connected to responsibility, justice, and reciprocal relations between men and women. Intertextuality in *The Qur'an with Cross-References* thus functions not merely as a device for connecting verses, but also as a mechanism for forming and reinterpreting the meaning of the Qur'an more comprehensively. Of the four forms of intertextuality presented above, interpretive intertextuality becomes the focus of the discussion that follows, since it is through this form that the process

of forming and reinterpreting the meaning of *qawwam* in QS. Al-Nisa [4]:34 can be traced in depth through the relationship between the phenotext and genotext. The following discussion will explain how Mun'im Sirry's background shaped the direction of his reinterpretation, as well as how the relationships between verses within the cross-reference system produce a new construction of meaning for this term.

## Discussion

### *Reinterpretation of the meaning of qawwam in QS. Al-Nisa [4]:34*

Mun'im Sirry's social and intellectual background has shaped the character of his interpretation of gender-related verses, particularly QS. Al-Nisa [4]:34. Sirry was born and raised within a social environment that tended toward patriarchal norms (Anhary, 2023). However, his academic experience in the West exposed him to various critical discourses on freedom of thought, women's rights, and contextual readings of religious texts — all of which helped shape the direction of his reinterpretation of the meaning of *qawwam* in QS. Al-Nisa [4]:34.

Nevertheless, Mun'im Sirry's reinterpretation does not entirely break away from the classical tafsir tradition. Through the cross-reference system, he still employs the pattern of *tafsir al-Qur'an bi al-Qur'an* by referring to other verses that share a relationship of meaning with QS. Al-Nisa [4]:34. These reference verses also represent a form of dialogue between Mun'im Sirry and the earlier tafsir tradition, although that tradition is not adopted in its entirety — Sirry undertakes a process of selecting particular verses considered relevant for constructing meaning contextually.

To analyze the reinterpretation of the meaning of *qawwam*, it is first necessary to understand the translation of QS. Al-Nisa [4]:34 in *The Qur'an with Cross-References*, along with its interpretation. For this purpose, the tafsir *Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil al-Qur'an* by Al-Tabari is used as the benchmark for analysis. This is because both Mun'im Sirry and Al-Tabari similarly interpret *qawwam* as one who bears responsibility. Furthermore, this tafsir is also one of dozens of reference tafsir works cited by Mun'im Sirry in the introductory section of *The Qur'an with Cross-References* (Sirry, 2022b).

Table 2. Explanation of QS. Al-Nisa [4]:34

<i>QS. Al-Nisa [4]:34 in The Qur'an with Cross-References</i>	
<p>٣٤ الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا آتَوْا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ ۗ فَالصَّالِحَاتُ قَنَاطَاتٌ حَاطِطَاتٌ ۗ الْغَيْبُ بِمَا خِطَبَ اللَّهُ ۗ وَاللَّاتِي نُذَلِّقْنَ لَشَرِّهُنَّ فِعْظُهُنَّ وَآهْجُرُونَهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَاضْرِبُوهُنَّ ۗ فَإِنْ أَطَعْنَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ غَنِيًّا كَبِيرًا</p> <p>34 Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, as God has given some of them an advantage over others, and because they spend out of their wealth. The good women are obedient, guarding what God would have them guard. As for those from whom you fear disloyalty, admonish them, and abandon them in their beds, then strike them. But if they obey you, seek no way against them. God is Sublime, Great.</p>	<p>34 2:202, 228; 4:32, 128; 33:35</p>
Translation	
<p>Men are the protectors and those responsible for women, because Allah has bestowed upon some of them an advantage over others, and because they spend [provide] out of their wealth. Righteous women are those who are obedient, guarding what Allah has commanded to be guarded. As for women whom you fear may be defiant, advise them, leave them in their beds, and then strike them. But if they obey you, do not seek a way to harm them. Allah is Most High, Most Great.</p>	
Interpretation of the verse	
<p>In Al-Tabari's tafsir, qawwam is interpreted as one who bears responsibility, with an obligation to guide and direct his wife toward obedience to Allah. The husband's advantage over the wife is understood not as a form of absolute superiority, but as grounded in the material responsibilities he bears, such as providing the dowry (mahr) and financial support to meet the needs of the household. Meanwhile, a righteous (salihah) woman is one who is obedient to Allah and her husband, consistently performs good deeds, and safeguards her own honor, her husband's property, and the various obligations Allah has established, even when her husband is not present.</p> <p><i>Nusyuz</i>, meanwhile, is understood as an attitude of defiance toward the husband — such as withdrawing from the marital bed, failing to obey reasonable (<i>ma'ruf</i>) instructions, and displaying hostility or estrangement toward him. In addressing this situation, Al-Tabari explains a graduated set of steps: advising, separating beds, and, as a final step, permitting a strike that is not severe, does not wound, and does not injure. However, once the wife has returned to obedience, the husband is forbidden from seeking out faults, causing her harm, or troubling her. Al-Tabari also affirms that a husband may not compel his wife to love him, since matters of the heart lie beyond human control. Therefore, any form of arbitrary treatment or abuse of power toward a wife who is already obedient is forbidden, for Allah stands above all human authority and will be the defender of women who suffer injustice (Al-Tabari, 2001d).</p>	

In his translation, Mun'im Sirry renders the term *qawwam* with the phrase "protectors and maintainers." Lexically, "protectors" means those who protect, while "maintainers" can be understood as those who care for, sustain, or bear the needs [of others], including in the economic aspects of family life (Echols & Shadily, 2021). This translation choice constitutes the phenotext — the textual form explicitly present as the final outcome of the process of meaning-making. This choice of diction was not constructed independently, but was formed through intertextual relationships with a number of verses functioning as the genotext, namely: QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:202, QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:228, QS. Al-Nisa [4]:32, QS. Al-Nisa [4]:128, and QS. Al-Ahzab [33]:35. It is this relationship between the phenotext and genotext that will be analyzed through the following three stages.

1. Comparative analysis of meaning.

The first stage of this analysis operates at the level of the genotext, constructing the meaning generated by the relationship among the five reference verses through a comparison of their similarities and differences in meaning relative to QS. Al-Nisa [4]:34, as presented in the table below.

Table 3. Comparative Analysis of Meaning

Comparative Analysis of Meaning			
Surah : Verse	Similarities	Differences	Transformation of the Meaning of <i>Qawwam</i>
2:202 (Al-Tabari, 2001b)	A person will obtain the results of their own efforts.	Does not directly address the relationship between men and women	Men's responsibility ( <i>qawwam</i> ) is not a privilege free of burden, but rather a trust ( <i>amanah</i> ) directly proportional to one's effort and its consequences.
2:228 (Al-Tabari, 2001c)	Relates to the husband-wife relationship; encourages reconciliation; addresses the equality of rights and obligations.	Concerns divorce ( <i>talaq</i> ) and the waiting period ( <i>'iddah</i> ).	<i>Qawwam does not mean unilateral dominance. Men's advantage is understood as magnanimity and a forgiving disposition, not authority over women.</i>
4:32 (Al-Tabari, 2001d)	Relates to the relationship between men and women, equality in effort/labor ( <i>kasb</i> ).	Contains a prohibition against envy.	<i>Qawwam does not negate equality; men and women equally have a share of what they earn through their own effort, such that men's responsibility</i>

			is functional in nature, not hierarchical.
4:128 (Al-Tabari, 2001e)	Relates to <i>nusyuz</i> , the call for reconciliation, and the husband's just conduct.	The <i>nusyuz</i> in this verse is the husband's <i>nusyuz</i> , not the wife's.	<i>Qawwam</i> is reciprocal in nature; men, too, can commit <i>nusyuz</i> , meaning relational responsibility runs in both directions rather than being placed solely on women.
33:35 (Al-Tabari, 2001a)	Equality of men and women in obedience to Allah.	Concerns piety ( <i>taqwa</i> ) that is rewarded with forgiveness and reward.	<i>Qawwam</i> does not place men higher in the sight of Allah; their spiritual standing is equal, meaning men's responsibility within the household is domestic-functional in nature, not theological-hierarchical.

## 2. Synthesis of meaning

The synthesis stage seeks to weave together the meanings identified in the previous stage, in order to see how the five reference verses collectively form a single, coherent construction of meaning for the term *qawwam*.

Table 4. Synthesis of Meaning Analysis

Verse	Meaning of the verse
2:202	Responsibility is directly proportional to one's effort and its consequences.
2:228	Men's advantage lies in magnanimity, not dominance.
4:32	Men and women are equal in their right to what they earn.
4:128	The call for husbands to act justly.
33:35	The spiritual equality of men and women before Allah.
Synthesis of meaning:	
<i>Qawwam is not a legitimization of superiority, but a relational responsibility that demands justice and mutuality within the domestic sphere</i>	

Based on the table above, the five reference verses do not operate in isolation, but engage in dialogue with one another to form a single, coherent construction of meaning. QS. 2:202 affirms that the responsibility of *qawwam* is directly proportional to effort and

its consequences; QS. 2:228 frames men's advantage as magnanimity and a forgiving disposition rather than dominance; QS. 4:32 and QS. 33:35 jointly affirm the equality of rights between men and women, both within the domestic sphere and before Allah; while QS. 4:128 demands justice from men as a consequence of the responsibility they bear. It is the convergence of these five meanings that produces a new construction of the term *qawwam* — not a legitimization of men's absolute superiority over women, but a relational and functional responsibility that demands justice and mutuality within domestic life. It is this construction of meaning whose relationship to Mun'im Sirry's choice of translation will next be evaluated, as a manifestation of meaning production.

### 3. Evaluation of meaning

The evaluation stage represents the moment of convergence between the phenotext — the translation "protectors and maintainers" — and the genotext constructed during the synthesis stage. It is this convergence that produces the new meaning (*meaning production*) of the term *qawwam*: a shift from a hierarchical understanding toward a relational and functional one.

Through the cross-reference system, Sirry selects verses that tend toward relational meaning, thereby forming a construction of meaning that emphasizes mutuality and responsibility. It is precisely this process of selection, and this manner of reading the genotext, that constitutes the mechanism of meaning production in Kristeva's sense — namely, that the choice of particular textual fragments, and whether they are read in full or in part, will produce different meanings.

This is clearly evident in how QS. 2:228 is treated as a genotext. Both Ibn Katsir (Katsir, 1997) and Asy-Syanqithi (Asy-Syanqithi, 2006) treat this verse as a reference point for QS. 4:34, but cite only its closing fragment (*wa lir-rijali 'alaihinna darajah*, "and men have a degree [of advantage] over them"), producing a meaning that tends to place men hierarchically above women. By contrast, Mun'im Sirry (Sirry, 2022b) cites the verse more fully, as does Quraish Shihab (Shihab, 2017), producing a more balanced meaning in which men's advantage is understood not as structural dominance, but as magnanimity and a forgiving disposition within the husband-wife relationship. This is a concrete example of how the selection and full reading of the genotext produces a *meaning production* that differs from the earlier tafsir tradition.

In addition, the genotexts of QS. 4:32 and QS. 33:35 further reinforce the understanding that the advantage granted to men in QS. 4:34 is functional in nature, not hierarchical. Both verses address women's unease over the command of jihad directed at men, yet this very obligation (*amanah*) was in fact intended to protect women. Likewise, with regard to the larger share of inheritance granted to men, this is because they bear the responsibility of providing maintenance (*nafkah*), a burden not placed upon women (Ridha, 2025).

In his tafsir, Sayyid Qutb explains that Allah does not desire injustice toward any of His creatures. Every function He has ordained is accompanied by the corresponding characteristics needed to carry out that function well. Women's function includes conceiving, giving birth, nursing, and caring for children — a demanding task for which women are equipped with gentleness, compassion, emotional sensitivity, and a spontaneous responsiveness to children's needs. These characteristics are not merely a cultural inheritance, but are embedded in women's physical structure, nervous system, intellect, and spirit, down to the cellular level (Qutb, 2003). On the basis of this division of functions, men are charged with the obligation of meeting basic needs and protecting women, so that women can concentrate on carrying out their own tasks. As a consequence, men are equipped with firmness, strength, and a tendency toward careful deliberation before acting. It is this division of functions and characteristics that makes men better suited to carry out *qiwamah* — that is, leadership and management of the household — a role further reinforced by the obligation of maintenance (*nafkah*) they bear (Rahmawati, 2023).

Thus, Sirry's choice of the diction "protectors and maintainers" is the logical result of the meaning production arising from the dialogue between the phenotext and genotext within the cross-reference system, giving rise to a reinterpretation of *qawwam* that no longer rests on a hierarchical understanding, but instead remains open as a relational and functional responsibility demanding justice and mutuality within domestic life.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, two main conclusions can be drawn. First, the cross-reference system in *The Qur'an with Cross-References* exhibits several forms of

intertextuality: terminological, methodological, receptive, and interpretive. Terminologically, the use of the term *cross-references* reflects a dialogue with the biblical tradition. Methodologically, this system represents a modern actualization of the *tafsir al-Qur'an bi'l-Qur'an* method. Receptively, the selection of reference verses shows continuity with the earlier tafsir tradition. Interpretively, the relationships between verses produce a synthesis of meaning that is more relational and egalitarian. Second, the reinterpretation of the meaning of *qawwam* in *The Qur'an with Cross-References* is constructed through intertextual relationships with five reference verses: QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:202, QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:228, QS. Al-Nisa [4]:32, QS. Al-Nisa [4]:128, and QS. Al-Ahzab [33]:35. These relationships demonstrate an emphasis on the principle of justice, the balance of rights and obligations, and mutuality between men and women. Through these relationships, Sirry reinterprets *qawwam* not as a legitimization of men's absolute superiority over women, but as a form of relational and functional responsibility within domestic life, as encapsulated in the phrase "protectors and maintainers."

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