

Poverty and Oppression from the Perspective of Farid Esack's Hermeneutics of Liberation: An Analysis of Surah An-Nisa [4]: 75

Hifda Noon Fatwa Cahya Madania^{1*}, Safii², Muhammad Fathi Farahat³

^{1,2} Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo Semarang, Indonesia

³Sivas Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi, Turkey

Article Info

Article History:

Received: 28 July 2026

Revised: 27 August 2026

Accepted: 01 September 2026

Published: 20 September 2026

*Corresponding Author:

Name: Hifda Noon Fatwa Cahya Madania

Email: hifdamadania04@gmail.com

Keywords

Abstract

Structural poverty in Indonesia, reflected in the 23.36 million people living in poverty and the stark disparity between rural and urban areas, calls for a reinterpretation of the concept of *mustad'afin* in Surah An-Nisa [4]: 75. Classical exegesis interprets this verse in a normative-historical manner, positioning the *mustad'afin* as passive objects to be defended through collective obligations, thereby risking a loss of relevance when applied to contemporary structural poverty. This study analyses the concept of *mustad'afin* through Farid Esack's framework of liberation hermeneutics, whilst linking it to Amartya Sen's concept of capability deprivation to test its relevance to structural poverty in Indonesia. The research employs a qualitative literature review approach with interpretative analysis enriched by thematic analysis, conducted in three stages: an exposition of classical interpretations and the *asbabun nuzul*, a reinterpretation through Esack's six hermeneutical keys, and the mapping of the results against the dimensions of capability deprivation. The findings indicate that the linguistic structure of this verse affirms the *mustad'afin* as active subjects calling for their own liberation, rather than mere objects of compassion, and that the functional affinity between the *mustad'afin* and capability deprivation lies in their shared rejection of the view that oppression is a natural condition. This research contributes to opening an interdisciplinary conceptual dialogue that bridges the study of exegesis with development economics, whilst emphasising the need for a shift in the religious response to poverty from charitable philanthropy towards structural engagement.

Capability Deprivation; Liberation Hermeneutics; *Mustad'afin*; Structural Poverty.

Abstrak

Kemiskinan struktural di Indonesia, tercermin dari 23,36 juta jiwa penduduk miskin dengan kesenjangan tajam antara wilayah perdesaan dan perkotaan, menuntut pembacaan ulang atas konsep *mustad'afin* dalam QS. An-Nisa [4]: 75. Tafsir klasik memaknai ayat ini secara normatif-historis, menempatkan *mustad'afin* sebagai objek pasif yang dibela melalui kewajiban kolektif, sehingga berisiko kehilangan relevansi ketika diterapkan pada kemiskinan struktural kontemporer. Penelitian ini menganalisis konsep *mustad'afin* melalui kerangka hermeneutika pembebasan Farid Esack, sekaligus mempertautkannya dengan deprivasi kapabilitas Amartya Sen untuk menguji relevansinya terhadap kemiskinan struktural di Indonesia. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif kepustakaan dengan tafsir tahlili yang diperkaya analisis tematik, melalui tiga tahap: pemaparan penafsiran klasik dan asbabun nuzul, pembacaan ulang melalui enam kunci hermeneutika Esack, dan pemetaan hasilnya terhadap dimensi deprivasi kapabilitas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa struktur linguistik ayat ini menegaskan *mustad'afin* sebagai subjek aktif yang menyerukan pembebasannya sendiri, bukan sekadar objek belas kasih, dan bahwa afinitas fungsional antara *mustad'afin* dan deprivasi kapabilitas terletak pada penolakan bersama terhadap pandangan bahwa ketertindasan adalah kondisi alamiah. Penelitian ini berkontribusi membuka dialog konseptual interdisipliner yang menjembatani kajian tafsir dengan ekonomi pembangunan, sekaligus menegaskan perlunya pergeseran respons keagamaan terhadap kemiskinan dari filantropi karitatif menuju keterlibatan struktural.

Kata Kunci: Deprivasi Kapabilitas; Hermeneutika Pembebasan; Kemiskinan Struktural; *Mustad'afin*.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty and oppression are issues that are ever-present in the social life of communities, and the Muslim community is no exception. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency as of September 2025, 23.36 million people in Indonesia were living below the poverty line, equivalent to 8.25 per cent of the total population, with the poverty rate in rural areas standing at 10.72 per cent compared to 6.60 per cent in urban areas (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2026). This expenditure-based measurement method captures the monetary dimension of deprivation, rather than direct structural cause-and-effect relationships. A number of previous studies continue to support a structural interpretation of these disparities. Rinaldi et al., (2025) found that inter-regional development inequalities have a significant impact on poverty levels in Indonesia, whilst Putri et al., (2025) identified unequal access to education and the formal labour market as key determinants. Thus, poverty is not merely a matter of low individual income, but is shaped by structures that distribute access unevenly amongst different social groups (Ikma, 2023)

This issue becomes increasingly complex when poverty is not merely viewed through statistical measures, but is also examined from the perspectives of morality and justice. Religious texts become relevant here, particularly where the Qur'an speaks directly of groups experiencing marginalisation and oppression. Haecal (2025) state that the Qur'an itself has long recognised a term for groups that are structurally marginalised, namely *mustad'afin*. Morphologically, this word is the ism *maf'ul* of the verb *istad'afa*, a Form X construction, which shares a root with *dbu'afa* but is not identical to it, as *dbu'afa* is the plural form of *dba'if*, whilst *mustad'afin* specifically refers to those who are weakened by others (Alwi et al., 2022). This morphological distinction emphasises that the Qur'an views oppression as a condition imposed from the outside, rather than as an inherent characteristic of the group experiencing it (Fauhatun, 2025a).

One of the verses that explicitly contains this concept is Surah An-Nisa [4]: 75. This verse calls upon the faithful to strive in the way of Allah whilst defending men, women and children who are oppressed, and to seek help so that they may be rescued from an oppressive environment. The structure of the verse indicates a connection between groups experiencing powerlessness, oppressive social environments, and those with the capacity to offer defence. In his Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-'Azhim, Kathir and ibn Umar (1999) interprets this verse in the context of Muslims facing persecution in Mecca who lacked the means to free themselves from their circumstances. His emphasis lies not only on the existence of vulnerable groups but also on the obligation of believers to provide defence for those in a state of helplessness. Meanwhile, Al-Qurtubi and Al-Ansari (2006) places a more normative emphasis from a fiqh perspective by linking the call to defend the oppressed to a collective obligation (*fi dharbi kifayah*). Thus, both exegetes demonstrate that the condition of the *mustad'afin* does not exist in isolation, but is linked to the presence of an oppressor and another party capable of providing defence.

Ibn Kathir and Al-Qurthubi differ in emphasis, and that difference reveals two distinct approaches to interpreting the same verse. Ibn Kathir places greater emphasis on the historical context and the events underlying the situation of the Muslim community in Mecca, whilst Al-Qurthubi pays greater attention to the normative and legal implications of the obligation to defend the oppressed (Idris Idris et al., 2023; Isnaini, 2023). Nevertheless, both share a common ground in regarding the defence of the *mustad'afin* as the responsibility of those with the capacity to act.

This position does not imply that classical exegesis contains no dimension of liberation whatsoever, but rather indicates that liberation in both interpretations is primarily understood through the context of the ummah's struggle and the collective obligation to rescue groups suffering oppression (Suherlan, 2023). Therefore, both interpretations can serve as a starting point for examining how the concept of the *mustad'afin* has evolved from a historical issue towards the broader issue of social injustice.

Developments in contemporary exegesis have subsequently shown a broadening of this interpretative context. In Tafsir Al-Mishbah, Shihab (2020) continues to take into account the historical background of the verse's revelation, but the message of defending marginalised groups can be situated within a broader framework of social solidarity. This broadening of context allows the message of QS. An-Nisa [4]: 75 to be interpreted not only in relation to the situations of warfare or persecution experienced by Muslims in the early days of Islam, but also as a principle of standing in solidarity with those suffering injustice in different social contexts (Haeruddin et al., 2025). This shift in emphasis is significant as it opens up space to understand the *mustad'afin* as a category that does not merely refer to a specific group within a historical context, but can also be used to interpret various forms of marginalisation and injustice that arise in contemporary society. It is this space that subsequently brings together exegetical studies with Farid Esack's liberation hermeneutics.

Farid Esack's hermeneutics of liberation developed from his intellectual and social experiences of poverty and racial oppression under South Africa's apartheid regime. These experiences shaped Esack's view that the interpretation of the Qur'an cannot be separated from the social reality in which the text is interpreted and from the position of groups experiencing injustice (Randa, 2024). Within this framework, interpretation does not stop at the search for textual meaning, but is directed towards the formation of critical consciousness and change to the conditions that perpetuate oppression. Hasbi (2022) has linked the concept of *mustad'afin* in contemporary exegesis to Esack's thought, but his discussion remains descriptive and has not yet positioned Esack's six hermeneutical keys as a systematic analytical framework. Suherlan (2023) discuss this framework more comprehensively through the six keys, namely *taqwa*, *tawhid*, *an-nas*, *mustad'afin fi al-ard*, *al-'adl wa al-qisth*, and *jihad*; however, their study remains at a conceptual level and has not yet been specifically directed towards the exegesis of Surah An-Nisa [4]: 75.

Similar limitations are evident in other studies. Permana et al. (2022) discuss Farid Esack's hermeneutics of liberation through the lens of Thomas Kuhn's philosophy of science, using QS. An-Nisa [4]: 75 as a supporting illustration rather than the focus of their analysis. Meanwhile, Syahrul et al. (2025) specifically examine the struggle of the *mustad'afin* through Esack's hermeneutics, but their discussion remains focused on the oppressed in general and has not yet directed the full scope of Esack's hermeneutics towards an in-depth reading of QS. An-Nisa [4]: 75. Nor has this study linked the results of the hermeneutic reading to the dimension of poverty as observed through socio-economic indicators. Overall, previous research indicates that the relationship between the *mustad'afin*, liberation hermeneutics and issues of social injustice has received academic attention. However, studies that bring these three elements together within a single analytical framework specifically grounded in Surah An-Nisa [4]: 75 still have scope for further development.

This gap lies in the absence of a study that simultaneously employs Esack's six keys to liberation hermeneutics to interpret Surah An-Nisa [4]: 75, and then links the results of that interpretation to the issue of structural poverty as observed through development indicators. This study takes this gap as the starting point for its analysis. To strengthen the link between religious interpretation and socio-economic reality, this study employs Amartya Sen's concept of capability deprivation. Sen and Sen, (1999) views poverty not merely as a lack of income, but as a limitation on an individual's capabilities to achieve valuable functionings and lead a life considered dignified. From this perspective, deprivation can manifest across various dimensions, including limitations in access to education, healthcare, economic resources, freedom of choice, and social security. This framework provides a basis for expanding the interpretation of the *mustad'afin* from a moral-religious category towards an analytical category that can be used to understand the social conditions that limit the ability of individuals and groups to determine and improve their lives (Al-Farmawi, 1977).

Building on this framework, this article aims to analyse the concept of *mustad'afin* in Surah An-Nisa [4]: 75 through the lens of Farid Esack's liberation hermeneutics and to examine its relevance to the issue of structural poverty in Indonesia. The analysis is conducted by bringing together classical exegesis, *asbab al-nuzul*, Esack's six keys to liberation hermeneutics, and Amartya Sen's concept of capability deprivation. Through this approach, this study seeks to demonstrate that *mustad'afin* is not merely a category referring to vulnerable groups within a specific historical context, but can be interpreted as an analytical category for understanding the social processes that place certain groups in a vulnerable position and limit their capabilities. Consequently, this study is expected to broaden the dialogue within exegetical studies by framing poverty not merely as a statistical issue, but also as a matter of injustice with structural, moral and humanitarian dimensions.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative, literature-based approach to analyse the text of the Qur'an and its supporting literature, with Surah An-Nisa [4]: 75 as the primary focus of the study. This study applies the *tablili* exegesis method, which involves a detailed and systematic interpretation of a single verse, comparing the views of classical and contemporary exegetes on the concept of the *mustad'afin*. This method is enriched by a thematic analysis that situates the *mustad'afin* within the framework of poverty and structural oppression, integrating the linguistic dimensions of the verse, its historical context through the *asbabun nuzul*, and the social dynamics that have shaped the development of its exegesis over time (Al-Farmawi, 1977). Farid Esack's hermeneutics of liberation is then employed as the primary analytical lens applied to this study, chosen to trace the tendency towards a normative-charitable framing within the existing exegetical literature (Ulya & Amrulloh, 2023).

The data sources for this study fall into two categories. Primary sources include the text of the Qur'an, along with classical and contemporary exegetical works that directly interpret Surah An-Nisa' [4]: 75, namely Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-'Azhim by Ibn Kathir, Al-Jami' li Ahkam Al-Qur'an by Al-Qurthubi, and Tafsir Al-Mishbah by M. Quraish Shihab, which were read alongside Farid Esack's original work on liberation hermeneutics and Amartya Sen's work on capability

deprivation. Secondary sources consist of journal articles, books, and previous research relevant to the themes of the *mustad'afin*, liberation hermeneutics, and structural poverty, which are used to situate this analysis within a broader academic discourse whilst supporting the empirical claims in the discussion section.

Data were collected through a literature review, by identifying and categorising relevant literature in line with the research focus before the analysis phase began. The data were then processed through three sequential stages of analysis. The first stage provided a descriptive-analytical account of how classical and contemporary exegetes interpret the term *mustad'afin* in Surah An-Nisa [4]: 75, along with its *asbabun nuzul*. The second stage re-examines these interpretations through Esack's six keys to liberation hermeneutics, using this framework to critique the normative-charitable biases identified in the first stage. The third stage engages the results of this re-reading in dialogue with (Sen, 1999) framework of capability deprivation, in order to examine the meaning of *mustad'afin* amidst the transformation of structural poverty in contemporary Indonesian Muslim society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Mustad'afin and Asbāb al-Nuzūl in Classical Exegesis

Farid Esack develops his liberation hermeneutics around six interlocking keys for reading the Qur'an: *taqwā*, *tawhīd*, *an-nās*, *al-mustad'afūn fī al-ard*, *al-'adl wa al-qist*, and *jihād* (Rohmah & Asnawan, 2024; Suherlan, 2023). None of these keys functions in isolation. Together they orient Qur'anic reading toward siding with oppressed groups and toward liberative practice, not toward interpretation that halts at the theological level. QS. An-Nisa [4]: 75 is chosen as the object of analysis because several of its lexical elements can be read, against the criteria established below, as thematically resonant with most of the six keys at once, offering a compact textual site for showing how the six keys cohere rather than operate as separate categories.

This resonance is interpretive rather than a claim of exact lexical equivalence, and the basis for each mapping is established below before the verse itself is examined. Esack designates *taqwā* and *Tawhīd* as the first pair of keys, functioning as the moral and doctrinal criteria through which the remaining four keys are read. *Tawhīd* denotes the singularity and exclusivity of God as the sole source of authority and appeal, textually indicated by a direct, exclusive address to God without recourse to any other authority. *Taqwā* denotes sustained trust in and reliance on God specifically amid hardship, textually indicated by an expressed disposition of seeking protection under duress, which distinguishes it from *tawhīd*'s single act of address.

An-nās refers to humanity in its full social composition, textually indicated by inclusive enumeration of social categories. *Al-mustad'afūn fī al-ard* denotes those rendered weak through oppressive structures, textually indicated by explicit reference to a group so designated. *Al-'adl wa al-qist* denotes justice and structural balance, textually indicated by reference to a wrongdoing structure or its agents. *Jihād* denotes struggle as liberative praxis, textually indicated by verbs of active resistance. With these six indicators established, the verse itself can now be examined directly.

وَمَا لَكُمْ لَا تُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَالْمُسْتَضْعَفِينَ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ وَالنِّسَاءِ وَالْوِلْدَانِ الَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا أَخْرِجْنَا مِنْ هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةِ الظَّالِمِ أَهْلُهَا وَاجْعَل لَّنَا مِن لَّدُنكَ وَلِيًّا وَاجْعَل لَّنَا مِن لَّدُنكَ نَصِيرًا

“And why don’t you want to fight in the way of Allah and defend the oppressed people, whether men, women and children who pray, ‘O our Lord, take us out of this land whose inhabitants are tyrannical, and give us a protector and helper from Your side.’”

To base this analysis in more detail, Table 1 presents the key phrases in the verse as a basis for further analysis.

Table 1. Linguistic and Semantic Mapping of Key Terms in QS. An-Nisa [4]: 75

Words	Transliteration	Root Word	Lexical Meaning	Esack’s Key	Textual Indicator
تُقَاتِلُونَ	<i>tuqatiluna</i>	ق-ت-ل	Fighting or waging war reciprocally, containing active resistance	<i>Jihad</i>	Verb of active resistance
الْمُسْتَضْعَفِينَ	<i>al-mustad’afin</i>	ض-ع-ف	Groups that are made or considered weak by other parties	<i>Al-Mustad’afin fi al-Ard</i>	Explicit reference to a group rendered weak
الرِّجَالِ وَالنِّسَاءِ وَالْوِلْدَانِ	<i>ar-rijal wa an-nisa’ wa al-wildan</i>	ر-ج-ل. ن-س-و-ل-د	Men, women and children, encompassing all elements of society	<i>An-Nas</i>	Inclusive enumeration of social categories
رَبَّنَا	<i>Rabbana</i>	ر-ب-ب	The cry “Our Lord”, an exclusive address to a single source of help	<i>Tawhid</i>	Direct, exclusive address to God without recourse to any other authority
الْقَرْيَةِ الظَّالِمِ أَهْلُهَا	<i>al-qaryah az-zalimi ahluba</i>	ظ-ل-م	A land whose people commit injustice, emphasising an oppressive structure	<i>Al-’Adl wa al-Qisth</i>	Reference to a wrongdoing structure and its agents
وَلِيًّا...نَصِيرًا	<i>waliyyan...nashiran</i>	و-ل-ي. ن-ص-ر	Request for a protector and helper from Allah, a sustained attitude of reliance amid struggle	<i>Taqwa</i>	Expressed disposition of seeking protection under duress, distinct from the single act of address in tawhid

Table 1 shows the verse builds a pattern of three intertwined elements: an oppressed party (*al-mustad’afin*), an oppressive structure (*al-qaryah az-zalimi ahluba*), and a call to action performed while submitting to God (*tuqatiluna* and *Rabbana*), together supporting Esack’s argument that Qur’anic liberation demands concrete social practice, not merely spiritual reflection. Lexically, *al-mustad’afin* is the *ism maf’ul* form of *istad’afa*, morphologically distinct from *dhu’afa*, the plural of *dha’if*, since *dhu’afa* denotes general weakness while *mustad’afin* specifically marks those weakened by another party (Alwi et al., 2022). This distinction confirms that the Qur’an frames oppression as imposed from without, not as a natural attribute of the group (Mabrur & Abas, 2023).

QS. An-Nisa [4]: 75 in the classical exegetical tradition is positioned as the basis for the obligation to defend the weak amid the struggle of the early Muslim community. Most classical exegetes agree that this verse demands a collective response, physical jihad, to free Muslims stranded in Mecca due to limited resources for emigration. Ibn Kathir, in *Tafsir Al-Qur’an Al-*

'Azhim, reads the verse as a stern rebuke to believers reluctant to defend the powerless. His premise rests on the urgent situation of the weak Muslims of Mecca, which narrows jihad to a situational military obligation rather than a structural principle that applies across time, positioning the *mustad'afin* as passive recipients of defense rather than active subjects.

Al-Qurthubi, in *Al-Jami' li Ahkam Al-Qur'an*, strengthens the juridical-normative dimension of this reading by classifying the defense of *mustad'afin* as *fardhu kifayah*, a collective obligation waived once fulfilled by a sufficient portion of the community (Al-Qurṭubī, 2006). In Al-Qurthubi's view, *mustad'afin* is therefore not merely a moral category but one with concrete legal consequence for Muslim conduct. Yet this *fardhu kifayah* framing, while legitimate within Islamic jurisprudence, carries a risk that deserves scrutiny: once a small group is deemed to have discharged the obligation, the wider community may be released from further moral involvement a mechanism of tacit abdication rather than sustained structural commitment (Fauhatun, 2025b).

The convergence among classical commentators reflects the socio-historical setting in which they wrote. Early Arab-Islamic society faced open conflict with a Meccan power that oppressed a minority Muslim population, so an interpretive focus on urgent physical liberation was a reasonable response to that moment. Classical exegesis on *mustad'afin*, in this sense, is best read as a dialectic between text and context rather than a timeless statement detached from history (Al-Banna & Hilmi, 2022; Al-Farmawi, 1977). Difficulty arises only when this historically situated construct is treated as an ahistorical doctrine and applied without adjustment to contemporary structural poverty, a form of deprivation that differs sharply in character from the physical conflict faced by early Muslims in Mecca.

Poverty in Indonesia today is structural and systemic rather than the product of open physical conflict. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (2026) records 23.36 million people living in poverty, with a marked gap between rural and urban rates. Applying classical interpretations that confine *mustad'afin* strictly to physical jihad risks stripping the concept of practical relevance to this reality. Classical exegesis retains genuine historical value and remains a significant contribution to Islamic scholarship, yet its application to contemporary poverty needs critical, contextual reassessment. The *fardhu kifayah* logic identified above is equally relevant here: in the Indonesian context it risks being reproduced through state philanthropy or zakat institutions.

This convergence between Ibn Kathir and Al-Qurthubi should not be generalized to the whole of classical exegesis, whose approaches span *riwayah*, rationalist, and juridical currents far too broad to summarize here (Kathir & ibn Umar, 1999). What can be said more narrowly is that both, representing the *riwayah*-historical and *fiqh*-normative currents respectively, share a tendency to position *mustad'afin* as recipients of defense rather than subjects of liberation. A more contextual reading appears in *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*, where M. Quraish Shihab retains the verse's historical roots while reframing it as a call to solidarity with anyone in a condition of oppression, rather than a purely formal obligation to fight (Aiyub & Mutia, 2023). This shift in emphasis, from formal obligation toward broader solidarity, opens space for the liberation hermeneutics developed by Farid Esack, examined in the following section.

The Mustad'afin through Farid Esack's Six Hermeneutical Keys

Shihab's reframing of *mustad'afin* toward broader solidarity, while still a meaningful departure from Ibn Kathir and Al-Qurthubi, stops short of systematizing this shift into a coherent

interpretive method. Farid Esack's liberation hermeneutics supplies exactly this systematic ground. Rohmah & Asnawan, (2024) insists that reading the Qur'an requires integrating six keys, *taqwā*, *tawhīd*, *an-nās*, *al-mustad'afūn fī al-ard*, *al-'adl wa al-qist*, and *jihād*, as a single axis oriented toward liberative practice. Where the classical readings discussed above position *mustad'afin* as a category awaiting collective defense within the *fardhu kifayah* framework, Esack's six keys reconstruct it as an active category demanding structural engagement, a reconstruction the following analysis traces directly through the verse's own textual structure (Rohmah & Asnawan, 2024; Rozi et al., 2024).

The emergence of Farid Esack's liberation hermeneutics is a critical response to this trend. Rohmah & Asnawan, (2024) emphasizes that the reading of the Qur'an must integrate six key concepts: piety, monotheism, *an-nas*, *al-mustad'afūn fī al-ard*, *al-'adl wa al-qisth*, and *jihad*, as a unified axis that sides with oppressed groups and is oriented towards liberation practices (Rohmah & Asnawan, 2024; Suherlan, 2023). As explained in the previous analysis of the *mufradat*, these six keys are densely contained in the structure of QS. An-Nisa [4]: 75.

Rohmah and Asnawan, (2024) criticized readings that position the *mustad'afin* as mere objects of compassion. they asserted that the phrase *yaqūlūna Rabbānā akhrijnā*, which indicates the initiative of the oppressed group to pray and demand change, proves that the *mustad'afin* in the Qur'an are not a passive group, but rather active subjects calling for their own liberation. This reading aligns with Hasbi (2022) finding that contemporary interpretations of the *mustad'afin* are shifting from a charitable framework to a structural one, although that research has not systematically structured it into Esack's six keys as is done in this study.

Furthermore, Rohmah and Asnawan, (2024) expands the meaning of *jihad* in this verse from merely a situational military struggle to a structural liberation praxis that applies across time, encompassing all forms of resistance against institutionalized injustice, whether political, economic, or social. This expansion of meaning is closely tied to Esack's own biographical experience within the struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa (Fauhatun, 2025b). A structurally oriented reading of *jihad* is also echoed, albeit only illustratively rather than as a systematic analysis of this specific verse, by Permana et al. (2022) who approach Esack's hermeneutics through the lens of Thomas Kuhn's philosophy of scientific revolution.

Through this hermeneutic approach to liberation, *mustad'afin* is reconstructed as a concept that emphasizes active solidarity and the practice of taking sides, not simply as an object of charitable obligations. The relationship between oppressed and more empowered groups is no longer understood solely in terms of "helper and helped," but rather as a shared struggle against oppressive structures, as reflected in the phrase *al-qaryah az-ẓālimi ahlubā* which explicitly points to structures, not individuals, as the source of injustice (Kwag, 2024). This reading model allows for a more contextual and relevant interpretation of *mustad'afin* to the dynamics of contemporary structural poverty, without having to abandon the normative values of the Qur'an.

Applying Esack's liberation hermeneutics to the Indonesian context, however, requires methodological caution. This framework was born from the specific experience of the struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa, a system of explicit and legally institutionalized racial oppression. Structural poverty in Indonesia, as reflected in BPS data (2026), does not arise from a system of formalized racial discrimination by the state, but rather from a combination of factors

such as inter-regional development inequality, limited access to infrastructure, and unequal market mechanisms. These differences in the nature of oppression mean that transplanting Esack's framework to the Indonesian context cannot be done in a one-size-fits-all manner, but rather requires adjustments, particularly to the meaning of jihad, which in the apartheid context was oriented toward resistance against an explicitly oppressive regime (Anwar, 2024). In the context of structural poverty in Indonesia, it is more appropriately interpreted as actively supporting policies and movements that correct structural inequality, rather than resistance to a single, identifiable regime (Sen, 1999). Careful distinction between the theory's originating context and its application context is crucial to prevent the proposed reinterpretation from becoming trapped in forced generalizations.

Changes in the social and economic structure of contemporary Indonesian society have presented new realities that challenge the classical interpretation of *mustad'afin*. One of the most significant changes is the persistence of interregional poverty disparities, which are systemic in nature, not simply individual deprivation. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (2026) shows that the rural poverty rate reached 10.72 percent, significantly higher than the urban poverty rate of 6.60 percent. A pattern that indicates an unequal resource allocation structure across regions, not simply differences in individual efforts.

In this context, the meaning of *mustad'afin* which places men as the party obliged to act in defense needs to be seriously reviewed so that it remains relevant to the principle of justice which is the main objective of contextual reading of the Qur'an. Socio-historically, the concept of *mustad'afin* in QS. An-Nisa [4]: 75 emerged in the context of 7th-century Arab society which was in a situation of open conflict and humanitarian emergency that was direct and visible. However, when the social context changed and the form of oppression shifted from physical-political oppression to more hidden structural deprivation in the form of systemic poverty, the social function of the concept of *mustad'afin* also needed to shift accordingly.

To strengthen the analytical bridge between religious texts and the reality of poverty, this study brings together the reading of *mustad'afin* with the conceptual framework of capability deprivation developed (Karagiannis, 2022; Sen, 1999). In this framework, poverty is not understood merely as low income, but as the loss of a person's capability to carry out basic life functions with dignity, including the dimensions of economics, health, education, political freedom, and social security. This framework has a strong conceptual affinity with the meaning of *istad'afa* in the language of the Qur'an, because both refer to the process of weakening experienced by a group due to unfair structures, not natural conditions inherent in them (Adon et al., 2023).

From this meeting point, an argument can be built that *mustad'afin* as reread through Esack's hermeneutics and met with Sen's framework, is no longer limited to Muslim groups who are physically confined to a region, but rather includes all groups of people who experience structural capability deprivation, including the rural poor who lose access to education, health, and productive resources as reflected in BPS data (2026). Thus, the call for *tuqatiluna fi sabilillahi wa al-mustad'afin*, "fight in the way of Allah and defend the oppressed", can be reread not as a mere recommendation for physical struggle, but as a moral imperative to fight the structural mechanisms that perpetuate the deprivation of capabilities in contemporary society.

Bringing the theological category of *mustad'afin* into dialogue with Sen's capability deprivation framework carries an epistemological tension that this study cannot ignore. *Mustad'afin* is a category born from revelation and is loaded with normative-transcendental content, while capability deprivation is a secular concept built from the tradition of Western welfare economic philosophy, without reference to the divine dimension. Juxtaposing the two risks being read as an attempt to reduce theological concepts to mere economic equivalents, or conversely, imposing religious legitimacy on secular theories that are actually based on different argumentation. To avoid such a reduction, the point of contact proposed in this study needs to be understood not as an ontological equivalence between *mustad'afin* and capability deprivation, but rather as a functional affinity, namely that both reject the view that oppression is a natural condition, and both demand structural intervention as an appropriate response. With such limitations, the interdisciplinary argument constructed remains accountable without sacrificing the distinctiveness of each framework.

The *Mustad'afin* and Capability Deprivation: Relevance to Structural Poverty in Indonesia

The reinterpretation developed in the preceding section carries implications both for the study of *tafsir* and for religious responses to poverty. Theoretically, it confirms that Qur'anic verses on social relations, including the relationship between the powerful and the oppressed, cannot be read ahistorically or statically. *Mustad'afin* is not a theological category whose meaning is settled once and for all at the moment of revelation, but an analytical category whose reference can be renewed as the forms of oppression themselves change. This position aligns with the broader argument in contemporary *tafsir* studies that contextual and hermeneutical approaches extend the tradition of *ijtihad* rather than depart from it, reading the text in continuous dialogue with changing social realities.

A parallel methodological logic appears in Fazlur Rahman's double movement theory, which likewise insists that Qur'anic meaning must move from the present situation back to the socio-historical context of revelation and then forward again to contemporary application, rather than remaining fixed in either direction (Umair & Said, 2023). Read alongside this trajectory, Esack's six keys can be positioned not as a departure from the Islamic interpretive tradition but as one further articulation of the same underlying conviction, that *ijtihad* remains an open and ongoing practice rather than a closed historical episode. This convergence between Esack's hermeneutics and an established strand of Indonesian *tafsir* scholarship strengthens the methodological legitimacy of the reading proposed in this study.

Esack's liberation hermeneutics did not emerge in isolation, but drew explicitly on cross-traditions of liberation theology, most notably Gustavo Gutierrez in the Latin American Christian context, alongside interlocutors such as Mohammed Arkoun (Randa, 2024). This genealogy matters for the present study, since it indicates that bringing a Qur'anic theological category into dialogue with a secular development-economics framework mirrors a broader intellectual pattern in which liberationist hermeneutics has long been open to interdisciplinary engagement, rather than representing an unprecedented move within this line of scholarship. Read together with the *ijtihad*-based continuity established above, this openness situates the dialogue with Sen's capability framework as consistent practice, not ad hoc borrowing.

This interdisciplinary continuity becomes concrete once the six keys are mapped against Sen's five capability dimensions, economic, health, educational, political, and social security. The verse's *mustad'afin*, read through *al-'adl wa al-qist* and *al-mustad'afin fi al-ard*, corresponds most directly to the economic and social-security dimensions, since both frameworks identify unequal structures, not individual failing, as the source of deprivation. The rural poverty rate of 10.72 percent against 6.60 percent in urban areas (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2026) illustrates the economic dimension concretely, while limited rural access to schooling and healthcare, well documented in Indonesia's development literature, illustrates the educational and health dimensions that Sen's framework treats as equally constitutive of deprivation, not merely as its consequences (Adhitya et al., 2022).

Jihād, reread as structural praxis, maps onto the political dimension of Sen's framework, since resisting institutionalized injustice requires precisely the political freedom to organize, advocate, and participate that capability deprivation identifies as a distinct axis of poverty, not a mere byproduct of economic hardship. Taqwā and tawḥīd, by contrast, resist direct mapping onto any single capability dimension, since they operate as the moral and doctrinal orientation underlying the entire reading rather than as empirical indicators. This asymmetry is expected rather than a weakness: theological keys concerned with disposition toward God are not designed to function as measurable social indicators, and forcing such a mapping would misrepresent both frameworks.

This reading changes, in practical terms, how Indonesian Muslims might respond to structural poverty. When *mustad'afin* is understood as encompassing groups experiencing capability deprivation, religious responses can no longer rely on charitable philanthropy alone, such as incidental zakat and sedekah. This concern echoes the Islamic philanthropy literature itself, which notes that instruments confined to short-term consumptive aid have limited capacity to address structural poverty rooted in unequal access to education, capital, and productive resources (Ema & Sudemen, 2024). Zakat occupies an ambiguous position here: classical fiqh treats its distribution primarily as a consumptive right, yet its underlying *maqasid*, the removal of hardship and the strengthening of solidarity, arguably extends toward productive application under contemporary conditions (Arifqi et al., 2024; Zuchroh, 2022).

Institutional efforts to shift zakat management toward productive, capacity-building models reflect a similar recognition within Islamic philanthropic practice, that consumptive aid alone risks reproducing the dependency it seeks to relieve (Iswanaji et al., 2026). Responding to *mustad'afin* as understood in this study therefore requires involvement in structural efforts correcting disparities in access to education, health, and productive resources across regions. This reframing does not diminish zakat and sedekah as immediate, dignity-preserving responses to acute need, but situates them as one component within a broader repertoire of religiously grounded engagement, one that must also include advocacy, policy participation, and support for redistributive structural reform.

The main contribution of this study lies in placing structural poverty in Indonesia as a central analytical variable in the reinterpretation of *mustad'afin*. Prior scholarship has approached this terrain unevenly: Hasbi (2022) traces a shift toward structural readings but treats it descriptively, without organizing it through Esack's six keys; Suherlan (2023) map the six keys comprehensively

but remain at the conceptual level, without anchoring them in a specific verse; Permana et al., (2022) engage Esack's hermeneutics through Kuhn's philosophy of science, citing this verse only illustratively; and apply Esack's hermeneutics to the oppressed broadly, without linking the analysis to measurable poverty indicators. This study integrates all three elements these four studies address only separately.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that the concept of *mustad'afin* in QS. An-Nisa [4]: 75 cannot be adequately understood only through the normative-charitative framework of classical interpretation which positions it as a passive object in the *fardhu kifayah* scheme, but rather demands reconstruction through Farid Esack's liberation hermeneutics which positions it as an active and dynamic category, as reflected in the structure of the verse which shows the oppressed themselves calling for change, not just waiting for defense. By carefully bringing together this theological category, through restrictions on functional affinity and not ontological equality, with Amartya Sen's capability deprivation framework, this research expands the analytical scope of *mustad'afin* so that it is able to explain contemporary structural poverty in Indonesia which is different in form from the context of racial oppression in South Africa where Esack's hermeneutics was born, but is rooted in the same mechanism of structural weakening.

The main contribution of this research lies in the development of an interdisciplinary analytical framework that bridges the study of Qur'anic exegesis with the study of structural poverty in a methodologically sound manner, while also paving the way for practical application in the form of a shift in religious responses to poverty from purely charitable philanthropy towards engagement in structural reform. Given that this study remains normative and textual in nature and relies on macro-level poverty data, a question worthy of further investigation is how communities that are, in fact, experiencing conditions of *mustad'afin* interpret and internalize this concept in their daily lives a question that can only be answered through empirical approaches such as field studies or in-depth interviews.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to express their gratitude to all those involved in the writing of this paper for the academic support provided during the course of this research.

DECLARATION OF USING AI

The authors used ChatGPT and Gemini to verify that all requested revisions have been made, refine the writing style, and improve readability.

REFERENCES

- Adhitya, B., Prabawa, A., & Kencana, H. (2022). Analisis Pengaruh Pendidikan, Kesehatan, Sanitasi dan Rata-Rata Jumlah Anggota Keluarga Per Rumah Tangga terhadap Kemiskinan di Indonesia. *Ekonomis: Journal of Economics and Business*, 6(1), 288. <https://doi.org/10.33087/ekonomis.v6i1.501>

- Adon, M. J., Jeraman, G. T., & Andrianto, Y. (2023). Kontribusi Teori Kemiskinan Sebagai Deprivasi Kapabilitas Dari Amartya Sen Dalam Upaya Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Miskin. *Masyarakat Madani: Jurnal Kajian Islam Dan Pengembangan Masyarakat*, 8(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.24014/jmm.v8i1.22295>
- Aiyub, A., & Mutia, I. (2023). Muhammad Quraish Shihab's Methodology in Interpretation of The Qur'an. *Jurnal Ilmiah Al-Mu Ashirah*, 20(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.22373/jim.v20i1.16891>
- Al-Banna, M. R., & Hilmi, Moch. I. (2022). Tafsir Maudhu'i dan Ramifikasi Permasalahannya. *Jurnal Iman Dan Spiritualitas*, 2(2), 233–238. <https://doi.org/10.15575/jis.v2i2.18319>
- Al-Farmawi, A. H. (1977). *Al-bidāyah fī al-tafsīr al-mandū'ī: Dirāsah manhajīyah mandū'īyah*. Maktabat Jumhuriyyat Misr.
- Al-Qurtubi, M. bin A., & Al-Ansari, A. (2006). *al-Jami'li Ahkam al-Qur'an*. Beirut: Muassasah al-Risalah.
- Alwi, M., Rusdi, M., Abubakar, A., & Ilham, M. (2022). Al-Mustadh'afin: Reflection of the Qur'an on Social Inequalities. *Fitrah: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman*, 8(2), 327–344. <https://doi.org/10.24952/fitrah.v8i2.5633>
- Anwar, E. (2024). The Pursuit of Justice in the Women's March: Toward an Islamic Liberatory Theology of Resistance. *Religions*, 15(6), 706. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15060706>
- Arifqi, Moh. M., Sofyan, A., Mayaningsih, D., & Fitriyah, R. (2024). Productive Zakat Model: Economic Empowerment for Post-COVID-19 Recovery in Indonesia. *Al-Muamalat: Jurnal Ekonomi Syariah*, 11(1), 75–85. <https://doi.org/10.15575/am.v11i1.33518>
- Badan Pusat Statistik. (2026). *Persentase penduduk miskin September 2025 turun menjadi 8,25 persen*.
- Ema, M. K., & Sudemen, I. W. (2024). Kemiskinan Struktural di Karangasem: Menganalisis Penyebab dan Intervensi Pemerintah. *Jurnal Good Governance*, 19–32. <https://doi.org/10.32834/gg.v20i1.745>
- Esack, M. F., Budiman, W. A., Panggabean, S., & Liputo, Y. (2000). *Membebaskan yang tertindas: Al-Qur'an, liberalisme, pluralisme*. Mizan.
- Fauhatun, F. (2025). Farid Esack's Hermeneutics and the Contextualization of Religious Texts: A Response to Social Inequality. *Islamic Thought Review*, 3(1), 31–43. <https://doi.org/10.30983/itr.v3i1.8684>
- Haecal, M. I. F. (2025). Analysis of The Concept of Mustadhafin In Surah al-Nisa Verse 75: A Hermeneutical Study of Farid Esak. *Senarai: Journal of Islamic Heritage and Civilization*, 1(1), 01–08. <https://doi.org/10.66236/senarai.2024.1.1.01-08>
- Haeruddin, H., Mahfudz, M., Damis, R., Sahib, M., & Malli, R. (2025). Marginalized Groups in the Qur'an: A Thematic Study of the Divine Perspective of Social Justice. *Jurnal Adabiyah*, 25(2), 520–536. <https://doi.org/10.24252/jad.v25i2a14>
- Hasbi, N. A. (2022). Konsep Mustadh'afin Dalam Kajian Tafsir Kontemporer (Studi Atas Tafsir Farid Esack). *Al-Kauniah*, 2(2), 13–34. <https://doi.org/10.56874/alkauniah.v2i2.707>
- Idris Idris, Armai Arief, & Made Saihu. (2023). Keadilan Sosial dalam Perspektif Al-Qur'an. *Journal of Creative Student Research*, 1(4), 57–75. <https://doi.org/10.55606/jcsrpolitama.v1i4.2214>
- Ikma, P. P. P. (2023). Lemah Ekonomi Antara Takdir dan Struktur Sosial (Suatu Kajian Tafsir Tematik). *Al-Fahmu: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir*, 2(2), 130–142. <https://doi.org/10.58363/alfahmu.v2i2.81>

- Isnaini, S. N. (2023). Hermeneutika Al-Qurṭubi: Pengaruh Ibn Aṭīyyah terhadap al-Qurṭubi dalam 'Tafsir al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān. *SUHUF*, 15(2). <https://doi.org/10.22548/shf.v15i2.752>
- Iswanaji, C., Anwar, S., & Hanafi, S. M. (2026). Transforming mustahiq into muzakki through strategic management: An empirical study of productive zakat distribution in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. *Journal of Islamic Economics Lariba*, 12(1), 499–524. <https://doi.org/10.20885/jielariba.vol12.iss1.art18>
- Kathir, I., & ibn Umar, I. (1999). Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim. *Dar Al-Kutub Al-'Ilmiyah*, 1419.
- Kwag, E. (2024). The Meaning of Understanding in Paul Ricoeur's Text Hermeneutics. *The Korean Society for the Study of Moral Education*, 36(3), 45–69. <https://doi.org/10.17715/jme.2024.9.36.3.45>
- Mabrur, H., & Abas, S. (2023). Hermeneutik Sebagai Tawaran Metodologis dalam Menafsirkan Al-Quran yang Diperdebatkan. *SETYAKI: Jurnal Studi Keagamaan Islam*, 1(1), 78–89. <https://doi.org/10.59966/setyaki.v1i1.251>
- Permana, R. F., Zubaidi, S., Nuriz, M. A. F., Khakim, U., & Mumtazi, F. (2022). Hermeneutika Pembebasan Farid Esack Dari Perspektif Revolusi Ilmiah Thomas Kuhn. *AL QUDS : Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Hadis*, 6(3). <https://doi.org/10.29240/alquds.v6i3.4244>
- Putri, N., Smith, M. R., Ikbali, M., & Apriyanti, A. (2025). Peran Lembaga Sosial Dalam Mengatasi Kesenjangan Pendidikan Akibat Kemiskinan. *Jurnal Ilmiah Detubuya*, 1(4), 296–314. <https://doi.org/10.64581/jid.v1i4.121>
- Randa, S. (2024). Hermeneutika Sebagai Jalan Teologi Pembebasan Farid Esack. *Kalimah: Jurnal Studi Agama Dan Pemikiran Islam*, 21(1), 127–146. <https://doi.org/10.21111/klm.v21i1.9647>
- Rinaldi, M., Pakpahan, G., Sihombing, L. V. F., Simanjuntak, R. P., & Manihuruk, S. D. (2025). Pengaruh ketimpangan ekonomi terhadap tingkat kemiskinan di Indonesia. *Journal of Sharia Economics Scholar (JoSES)*, 3(2), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15874174>
- Rohmah, L., & Asnawan, A. (2024). Farid Esack; Hermeneutics of Liberation of the Quran and Education. *Ushuly: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin*, 3(1), 55–70. <https://doi.org/10.52431/ushuly.v3i1.2622>
- Rozi, F., Andrian, M. S., & Abdul Majid. (2024). Mustad'afin dalam Al-Qur'an. *PUTIH: Jurnal Pengetahuan Tentang Ilmu Dan Hikmah*, 8(1), 65–84. <https://doi.org/10.51498/b6jctc44>
- Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom* (Vol. 6). Oxford university press Oxford.
- Shihab, M. Q. (2020). *Tafsir Al-Mishbah: Pesan, kesan, dan keserasian Al-Qur'an* (Vol. 2). Lentera Hati.
- Suherlan, O. (2023). Hermeneutika Pembebasan Farid Esack. *Jurnal Filsafat Indonesia*, 6(2), 258–267. <https://doi.org/10.23887/jfi.v6i2.57647>
- Syahrul, Syarifaturrahmatullah, Mahbub Humaidi Aziz, Moh. Buny Andaru Bahy, & Bima Fandi Asy'arie. (2025). Interpretation of Farid Esack's Hermeneutics as a Value of Social Movement Transformation. *AL QUDS : Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Hadis*, 9(1), 153–166. <https://doi.org/10.29240/alquds.v9i1.9581>
- Ulya, N. N., & Amrulloh, A. Y. (2023). Analisa Metodologi Tafsir Al-Quran Berbasis Ormas di Indonesia Perspektif Metodologi Islah Gusmian. *Al-Fahmu: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir*, 2(1), 15–29. <https://doi.org/10.58363/alfahmu.v2i1.34>

- Umair, M., & Said, H. A. (2023). Fazlur Rahman dan Teori Double Movement: Definisi dan Aplikasi. *Al-Fahmu: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir*, 2(1), 71–81. <https://doi.org/10.58363/alfahmu.v2i1.26>
- Zuchroh, I. (2022). Zakat Produktif: Kebijakan Pengelolaan Keuangan Publik sebagai Instrumen Pengentasan Kemiskinan di Indonesia. *Jurnal Ilmiah Ekonomi Islam*, 8(3), 3067. <https://doi.org/10.29040/jiei.v8i3.6387>