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ETHICS OF CARE AS PRACTICAL THEOLOGY IN MUSLIM WOMEN'S GENDER JIHAD COMMUNITIES: A SYNTHESIS OF FOUR DIMENSIONS

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ABSTRACT: *This article analyzes the concept of the ethics of care within Amina Wadud's thought, not as an abstract ethical theory, but as a manifestation of practical theology that shapes spaces of autonomy and agency for Muslim women. Departing from previous studies that treat grassroots movements merely as fieldwork objects, this study is a library-based inquiry that positions Wadud's Inside the Gender Jihad as both the primary source and the principal object of analysis. Through a critical reading of Wadud's narrative concerning two Muslim women's communities in Richmond, Virginia – Muslim Women United (MWU) and Together Righteousness Unites The Hearts (T.R.U.T.H.) – the article argues that the care work they perform constitutes a concrete form of Gender Jihad, a transformative struggle for gender justice. This practice reconstitutes the central Islamic concept of mu'amalat (just social relations) while also functioning as a tacit corrective to the failure of patriarchal Islamic structures in realizing social justice. The article demonstrates how the ethics of care builds legitimacy through impactful praxis, creates an alternative epistemology grounded in women's lived experiences, and offers a relational, justice-centered, and sustainable paradigm of Islam. By synthesizing these four interconnected dimensions –*

interpretive tool, autonomous space, legitimacy strategy, and epistemology—the study shows that MWU's crisis-responsive care and T.R.U.T.H.'s sustained, network-based care are complementary expressions of a single theological praxis. These findings underscore the importance of reading theology not only from texts but also from the bodies and actions of women in everyday spaces.
Keywords: *Ethics of Care, Gender Jihad, Grassroots Movements, Muslim Feminist Community, Practical Theology*

ABSTRAK: *Artikel ini menganalisis konsep etika kepedulian dalam pemikiran Amina Wadud, bukan sebagai teori etika yang abstrak, melainkan sebagai perwujudan teologi praktis yang membentuk ruang otonomi dan agensi bagi perempuan Muslim. Berbeda dari studi-studi sebelumnya yang menempatkan gerakan akar rumput semata sebagai objek lapangan, penelitian ini merupakan studi pustaka yang menjadikan Inside the Gender Jihad karya Amina Wadud sebagai sumber primer sekaligus objek kajian utama. Melalui pembacaan kritis atas narasi Wadud tentang dua komunitas perempuan Muslim di Richmond, Virginia—Muslim Women United (MWU) dan Together Righteousness Unites The Hearts (T.R.U.T.H.)—artikel ini berargumen bahwa kerja kepedulian yang mereka lakukan merupakan bentuk konkret Gender Jihad, yakni perjuangan transformatif untuk keadilan gender. Praktik ini merekonstruksi konsep mu'amalat (relasi sosial yang adil) sekaligus berfungsi sebagai koreksi implisit terhadap kegagalan struktur Islam patriarkal dalam mewujudkan keadilan sosial. Artikel ini menunjukkan bahwa etika kepedulian membangun legitimasi melalui praksis yang berdampak, menciptakan epistemologi alternatif yang berlandaskan pengalaman hidup perempuan, dan menawarkan paradigma Islam yang relasional, berpusat pada keadilan, serta berkelanjutan. Dengan menyintesis keempat dimensi yang saling terkait—instrumen interpretatif, ruang otonom, strategi legitimasi, dan epistemologi—studi ini menunjukkan bahwa kepedulian responsif-krisis MWU dan kepedulian berjejaring berkelanjutan T.R.U.T.H. merupakan ekspresi komplementer dari satu praksis teologis yang sama. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya membaca teologi tidak hanya dari teks, tetapi juga dari tubuh dan tindakan perempuan di ruang-ruang sehari-hari.*
Kata Kunci: *Etika Kepedulian, Jihad Gender, Gerakan Akar Rumput, Komunitas Feminis Muslim, Teologi Praktis*

INTRODUCTION

Discourse on Islam and gender is often characterized by a polarized dichotomy.[1] On one end lies state-centric legal-textual reform discourse focused on formal institutions, and on the other, fundamentalist narratives that reject critical interpretation. Within this divided landscape, the voices and practices of Muslim

[1] Karin Ask and Marit Tjomsland, *Women and Islamization: Contemporary Dimensions of Discourse on Gender Relations* (Routledge, 2021); Ipek Yilmazgil, "Masculine States, Feminine Others: Postcolonial Anxiety and Gendered Internal Othering," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* (August 2, 2026): 1–20, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09557571.2026.2708889; Núria Simelio, Maria Forga, and Marta Rizo, "Gender, Identity and Power: Representations of Women and Men in Social Media Narratives on Migration," *Identities* (July 7, 2026): 1–24, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1070289X.2026.2699523.

women at the grassroots level are frequently marginalized or reduced to mere social activism, seldom acknowledged as a legitimate theological resource.[2] This article addresses this gap by foregrounding the scholarship of Amina Wadud, who locates the genesis of a vibrant, lived theology precisely in women's daily practices, particularly in community-based care work.

Through her concept of Gender Jihad, Amina Wadud not only deconstructs patriarchal interpretations of sacred texts but, more fundamentally, shifts the locus of religious authority from scholarly circles (*ulama*) and formal institutions toward the embodied experiences of women practicing an ethics of care.[3] This article argues that, within Amina Wadud's framework, the ethics of care is not merely an activist strategy. Rather, it constitutes a form of practical theology that simultaneously operates as a space for autonomy, a source of legitimacy, and an epistemological foundation for Muslim women to articulate and enact a vision of Islam rooted in justice.[4]

This research proceeds from the assumption that theological authority and Islamic knowledge are not the exclusive preserve of textual exegesis or institutional doctrine. Instead, it posits that authentic religious meaning and legitimacy can be generated through everyday ethical praxis, particularly the often-overlooked, embodied labor of care performed by women in community settings. Therefore, the lived experiences and social actions of grassroots actors represent a critical, yet under-examined, site for theological innovation and Islamic renewal.

The analysis will focus on the practices of women's networks such as Muslim Women United (MWU) and Together Righteousness Unites The Hearts (T.R.U.T.H.) in Richmond, Virginia, which serve as central case studies in Amina Wadud's work.[5] These communities exhibit distinct characteristics that warrant scholarly attention. MWU and T.R.U.T.H. are urban grassroots collectives rooted in the African-American Muslim experience in Richmond, a mid-sized city in the American South with a complex history of racial segregation, economic inequality, and religious pluralism. The socio-cultural condition of these communities is shaped by the intersection of race, class, and gender: predominantly African-American, predominantly working-class or lower-income, and operating within a context where mainstream Islamic institutions have often marginalized women's voices.

Religiously, these communities are characterized by a non-hierarchical, inclusive, and practice-oriented Islam that prioritizes mutual care, community

[2] Dorcas Chebet Juma, "A Refraction of Interfaith Dialogue: Presenting Christian–Muslim Women in the Prism of Their Own Cultural Values," *Feminist Theology* 35, no. 1 (September 12, 2026): 79–92, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/09667350261473265.
[3] Amina Wadud, "Islam beyond Patriarchy through Gender Inclusive Qur'anic Analysis," *Wanted: Equality and justice in the muslim family* (2009): 95–112.
[4] Amina Wadud, "Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam," *Praktyka teoretyczna*, no. 08 (2013): 249–262.
[5] Wadud, "Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam."

welfare, and lived ethical conduct over formal theological disputation.[6] Their relevance lies precisely in this marginality: as communities that exist at the periphery of both mainstream Islamic institutional structures and secular feminist movements, they embody an alternative locus of theological authority that emerges from the concrete labor of care rather than from textual expertise or institutional endorsement.

The research gap this article addresses is twofold. First, existing scholarship on Islamic gender reform has predominantly focused on either state-centric legal-textual approaches or elite intellectual production, thereby neglecting the theological significance of grassroots women's care practices. As Wadud observes, "so much of Muslim women's grassroots work remains behind this veil of silence and invisibility",[7] despite constituting the primal living example of whatever is most fundamental to a theory, a theology, or an ethics of care.[8] Second, while feminist scholars have long theorized care ethics as a site of moral and political knowledge,[9] this framework has rarely been applied to Islamic theological contexts, particularly in relation to the concept of mu'amalat as ethical social relations. By examining how MWU and T.R.U.T.H. enact care as a form of practical theology, this article contributes to filling both gaps, demonstrating that the ethics of care forms the core of Gender Jihad and presenting a transformative vision of Islam centered on relational justice and communal sustainability.

This article investigates the following questions: How can seemingly mundane care work such as cooking, providing care, and creating safe spaces be interpreted as (1) a radical reinterpretation of the Islamic concept of mu'amalat (ethical social relations); (2) a strategy for cultivating internal autonomy and emancipatory space; (3) an alternative method for establishing Islamic legitimacy that transcends discursive conflict; and (4) a source of authentic feminist knowledge? By examining these questions, the article demonstrates that the ethics of care forms the core of Gender Jihad, presenting a transformative vision of Islam centered on relational justice and communal sustainability.

This article rests on the assumption that theological authority and Islamic knowledge are not exclusively the domain of textual exegesis or institutional doctrine, but can be generated through everyday ethical praxis—particularly the embodied care work performed by women within community settings. Accordingly, the lived experiences and social actions of grassroots actors constitute a critical yet under-examined site for theological innovation and Islamic renewal. This assumption derives from Amina Wadud's thought, which positions women's experiences as a legitimate source of religious authority, equal to textual and institutional sources, and views the ethics of care not merely as an activist strategy

[6] Wadud, "Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam." P, 87-117.
[7] Wadud, "Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam." P, 105.
[8] Wadud, "Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam." P, 108.
[9] Joan C Tronto, "An Ethic of Care," *Generations: Journal of the American society on Aging* 22, no. 3 (1998): 15–20; Virginia Held, "The Ethics of Care," *The Oxford handbook of distributive justice* (2018): 213–234.

but as a form of practical theology that simultaneously functions as a space for autonomy, a source of legitimacy, and an epistemological foundation for Muslim women to articulate and enact a vision of Islam rooted in justice.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach using an intrinsic case study design,[10] integrated with critical discourse analysis (CDA), to examine how the ethics of care is operationalized as practical theology within Muslim women's grassroots communities. The intrinsic case study design was selected because the primary aim is to understand the particularity and complexity of two specific communities—Muslim Women United (MWU) and Together Righteousness Unites The Hearts (T.R.U.T.H.) in Richmond, Virginia—rather than to generalize findings to a broader population. In this context, an intrinsic case study refers to a research design in which the case itself—rather than a broader theoretical puzzle—is the primary focus of interest, chosen for its unique characteristics and inherent value.[11] These two communities were purposively selected based on three criteria: (1) they are explicitly discussed in Amina Wadud's *Inside the Gender Jihad* as exemplars of grassroots care work; (2) they are women-led, non-hierarchical, and operate outside formal Islamic institutional structures; and (3) they demonstrate sustained care practices over an extended period (MWU was founded in 1989; T.R.U.T.H. was founded in the late 1990s).[12]

The integration of CDA serves to critically examine how language, texts, and social practices within these communities reproduce, negotiate, or resist patriarchal theological discourses, particularly in relation to the concept of *mu'amalat* and the public-private dichotomy in Islamic thought. CDA, in this sense, is an analytical approach that examines how power relations, ideologies, and social inequalities are embedded in and reproduced through language and discourse, thereby enabling a critical reading of how theological authority is constructed and contested. By combining the intrinsic case study design with CDA, this study seeks not only to describe the care practices of MWU and T.R.U.T.H. but also to uncover the broader discursive structures that shape, enable, or constrain their theological agency.

The primary data source for this study is a close reading of Amina Wadud's *Inside the Gender Jihad*, which serves both as the primary source and as the principal object of inquiry. The analysis focuses on how Wadud describes and reflects upon the practices of the ethics of care within these two Muslim women's communities, as well as on how her narrative constructs theological meaning through the lived experiences of the women involved. As this study constitutes a library-based (desk) study, no participant observation or fieldwork data collection was conducted; all data were obtained from existing written texts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Brief Biography, Life Journey, and Works Of Amina Wadud

[10] Lexy J Moleong, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: Remaja Rosda Karya, 2018).
[11] Wadud, "Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam."
[12] Wadud, "Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam."

Amina Wadud, born Mary Teasley on September 25, 1952, in Bethesda, Maryland, United States, is a globally influential Muslim intellectual, feminist, and gender justice activist. Raised in a Methodist Christian family with a cross-cultural and interreligious upbringing, she converted to Islam in 1972 and adopted the name Amina Wadud. This background shaped her distinctive perspective on interpreting Islamic texts through the lenses of justice, equality, and inclusivit.[13] Her academic training in Islamic studies is robust: she earned a bachelor's degree in Islamic Studies and Arabic from the University of Pennsylvania in 1975, followed by a master's degree in Near Eastern Studies from the University of Michigan in 1976, and a Ph.D. in Islamic Studies and Arabic from the same university in 1988. Her innovative dissertation laid the foundation for her magnum opus.[14]

Wadud's most seminal work is *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, which revolutionized Qur'anic hermeneutics by introducing a holistic and gender-inclusive reading methodology.[15] She challenged traditional patriarchal interpretations by emphasizing the universal principles of justice (*'adl*) and mercy (*rahmah*) as central messages of the sacred text, establishing her work as a cornerstone of contemporary Islamic feminism.[16] In her subsequent book, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam*, she introduced the concept of "Gender Jihad" as a non-violent transformative struggle for justice within Muslim communities,[17] framing jihad not as armed conflict but as a continual effort to reform oppressive social and theological practices grounded in an ethics of care. The book also reflects her personal and intellectual journey as an activist-scholar.[18]

Wadud's theoretical contributions are transformative.[19] She developed a woman-centered Qur'anic hermeneutic that incorporates historical, linguistic, and lived experiential contexts,[20] and articulated an ethics of care as practical theology, positioning care work and social justice as forms of worship equal to formal rituals.[21] Most radically, she expanded the notion of experience-based religious

[13] Debra Majeed, "Amina Wadud," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (Am: Oxford University Press, 2025), https://oxfordre.com/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-849.
[14] Majeed, "Amina Wadud."
[15] Amina Wadud, *Qur'an And Women Reading The Sacred Text From Womans Perspective*, 1999.
[16] (Alfani et al., 2025)
[17] Aniqoh Zuhri, "Hermeneutika Al-Qur`An Amina Wadud Muhsin," *REVELATIA: Jurnal Ilmu al-Qur`an dan Tafsir* 2, no. 2 (2021).
[18] Wadud, "Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam."
[19] Amina Wadud, "Foreword: Engaging Tawhid in Islam and Feminisms," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 10, no. 4 (December 2008): 435–438, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14616740802393858.
[20] Khoirul Umam Addzaky, Ilzam Hubby Dzikrillah Alfani, and Masyhuri Rifai, "Amina Wadud's Feminist Hermeneutics on Gender Verses and Its Implications for Islamic Education," *El-Maqra': Tafsir, Hadis dan Teologi* 6, no. 1 SE-Articles (May 12, 2026): 98–111, https://ejournal.iainkendari.ac.id/index.php/el-maqra/article/view/14400.
[21] Ibrahim Hasan Ray, "A Critical Analysis of Amina Wadud's Feminist Hermeneutics in Qur'anic Interpretation," *Modern Islamic Studies and Sharia Research* 1, no. 2 (2025): 104–120.

authority, recognizing knowledge born from lived marginalization as a legitimate source of authority alongside textual and institutional sources.[22] In March 2005, she became the focus of global controversy when she led a mixed-gender Friday congregational prayer in New York—a historic event that sparked international debate on women's leadership in Islamic worship. Although harshly criticized by conservative circles, this act inspired similar movements worldwide and solidified her position as a courageous challenger of the status quo.[23]

In activism and academia, Wadud has taught at the International Islamic University Malaysia and Virginia Commonwealth University, and she actively mentors grassroots movements such as Muslim Women United (MWU) and Together Righteousness Unites The Hearts (T.R.U.T.H.), making her work relevant not only in academic spaces but also in direct community transformation. Her approach, which integrates deep theological reflection with concrete social action, is a hallmark of her contribution.[24] Wadud's intellectual legacy continues to thrive: she has left a foundation that challenges patriarchal interpretive hegemony while paving the way for an inclusive, justice-centered theology.[25] Her work bridges academia, activism, and spirituality, clearly demonstrating that the struggle for gender equality is not an external influence on Islam but an integral part of the deepest call to faith within Islam. Through her life and work, Wadud demonstrates that theology is not merely for study but is to be lived and enacted in tangible action for humanity.[26]

Ethics of Care as a Theological Reinterpretation of Mu'amalat: From Discourse to Justice Praxis

Amina Wadud emphatically positions *mu'amalat*—just and ethical social relations—as the ultimate objective of Shari'ah, taking precedence over and underpinning formal rituals (*'ibadat*).[27] This perspective forms the theological foundation for interpreting the practices of groups like Muslim Women United (MWU).[28] When they provide meals for families in need or care for sick community members, their actions are not charity in a secondary sense. Instead, they constitute a form of social worship that directly engages the essence of *mu'amalat*. They

[22] M Hamington, I van Nistelrooij, and M Sander-Staudt, "Care Ethics, Religion, and Spiritual Traditions," *Torrosa Online Digital Bookstore* (2022).
[23] Naili Rosa Urbah Rusydiana, Rika Lusri Virga, and Mohammad Afri Muadom, "Contesting Female Religious Authority in Digital Space.," *TAJDID: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin* 24, no. 1 (June 20, 2025): 1–25, https://tajdid.uinjambi.ac.id/index.php/tajdid/article/view/513.
[24] Wadud, "Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam."
[25] Margherita Picchi, "Amina Wadud," in *Volume 5 Contemporary Qurʾānic Hermeneutics* (De Gruyter, 2025), 341–360.
[26] Roohi Khan Stack, *An Analysis of Muslim Women's Rights Based on the Works of Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, and Riffat Hassan* (Harvard University, 2020).
[27] Safiyyah Surtee, "Women's Prayer in Islamic Law: Embodiment and the Construction of Gendered Ritual" (University of Johannesburg (South Africa), 2017).
[28] Wadud, "Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam."

transform abstract principles of divine mercy (*rahmah*) and justice (*'adl*) into material reality.[29]

This practice entails a sharp, albeit implicit, theological critique. By assuming the function of securing basic welfare—a collective responsibility (*fard kifayah*) of the Muslim community (*jama'ah*) under the concept of public interest (*maslahah*)—these groups highlight the failure of formal Islamic institutions, such as mosques and religious organizations, which are often managed patriarchally.[30] This failure is not merely administrative; it is a theological failure: an inability to realize the ideal of social justice that lies at the heart of Islam's message. Consequently, their care work functions as a corrective praxis. It is a peaceful jihad to remind the community of its foundational commitment. It demands that Islam be felt not only from the pulpit but also in sated stomachs, cared-for bodies, and provided safety. Thus, the ethics of care performs a direct hermeneutic on the social text, reinterpreting *mu'amalat* as justice embodied through the labor of women.[31]

Wadud's own theological framing supports this interpretation.[32] She argues that in Qur'anic cosmology, the ability to name things implies a unique power over those things, and that human creativity brings about change in meaning.[33] Her idea of Islam without patriarchy stems from her ability to imagine an end to patriarchy, and this imagination spurs action. As she writes, At the most fundamental level, this is what I mean about the relationship between theory and practice.[34] Theory is the idea, and in this case the idea of particular changes in the status of women in Islam and the world, which is imagined in terms so eloquent that it can be passed on to others who can use their limited human empowerment or agency to transform the existing reality toward greater resemblance of that idea. The care work of MWU and T.R.U.T.H. exemplifies this transformation of idea into reality.[35]

Forging Autonomous Spaces: Personal Spirituality as a Sphere of Liberation

A vital contribution of grassroots movements like Muslim Women United (MWU) is their capacity to create autonomy independent of external structures. Unlike NGOs such as Sisters in Islam (SIS), which must navigate state political and legal arenas and adhere to donor logic, these grassroots groups root their work in

[29] Umar F. Moghul, "Islamic Spirituality: An Impetus to Responsibility and Impact," in *A Socially Responsible Islamic Finance* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 1–37, http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-319-48841-7_1.

[30] Rosidi Rosidi, Muhammad Ayman al-Akiti, and Vateen Nayla Nurul Varyda, "From Law to Spirituality: Al-Ghazali's Contribution to the Concept of Religious Moderation," *Empirisma: Jurnal Pemikiran dan Kebudayaan Islam* 34, no. 2 SE-Articles (July 31, 2025): 397–418, https://jurnalfuda.iainkediri.ac.id/index.php/empirisma/article/view/3189.

[31] Aleksandre Kvakhadze, "Gender and Jihad," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 14, no. 2 (2020): 69–79, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26910408.

[32] Mushfique Wadud, "Digital Sermons and Divine Warnings: Bangladeshi Islamic Preachers' Framing of the 2025 Southern California Wildfires," *Environmental Communication* (June 23, 2026): 1–15, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17524032.2026.2680562.

[33] Amina Wadud, "Reflections on Islamic Feminist Exegesis of the Qur'an," *Religions* 12, no. 7 (2021): 497.

[34] Wadud, "Islam beyond Patriarchy through Gender Inclusive Qur'anic Analysis."

[35] Wadud, "Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam."

personal spirituality and organic communal commitment.[36] This autonomy represents a unique form of empowerment. Their motivation springs from an inner conviction that serving others is a direct manifestation of faith (*iman*) and piety (*taqwa*).[37] This conviction becomes a sustainable source of energy and grants them freedom from external political and economic calculations.

The implications are profound. The private sphere—the home, the kitchen, small meeting spaces—transforms into an alternative, liberating public sphere. Here, women are no longer mere objects of law or religious edicts (*fatwa*); they become active subjects formulating their own theology.[38] They are practical jurists (*faqihah*) who articulate Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) through acts of care.[39] Amina Wadud astutely employs the ethics of care to dismantle the public-private dichotomy that negates women's work.[40] She demonstrates that precisely within spaces deemed domestic and non-economic, the moral foundations of society are built. These spaces become the primary *madrasah* (school) for social justice education, where values of responsibility, empathy, and reciprocity are learned and practiced long before they are codified in public discourse. The autonomy born here is inherently subversive, as it constructs power from the margins, from what has long been deemed insignificant.

Amina Wadud herself notes the significance of this dynamic, that so much of Muslim women's grassroots work remains behind this veil of silence and invisibility.[41] Yet, she argues, If what they give could be bottled and handed out on the open market of humanity, it would contain the primal living example of whatever is most fundamental to a theory, a theology, or an ethics of care. This observation underscores the theological weight of what appears, on the surface, to be mere social welfare activity. The autonomy cultivated in these spaces is not merely strategic but deeply spiritual, rooted in the conviction that faith without

[36] Wadud, "Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam."
[37] Elad Ben David, "Between Religion and Crisis: Yasir Qadhi's Da'wa as Islamic Practical Theology in Post-October 7 America," *Religions* 17, no. 1 (January 21, 2026): 118, https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/17/1/118.
[38] Fatima Sadiqi and Moha Ennaji, "The Feminization of Public Space: Women's Activism, the Family Law, and Social Change in Morocco," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 2, no. 2 (July 1, 2006): 86–114, https://read.dukeupress.edu/jmews/article/2/2/86/42925/The-Feminization-of-Public-Space-Women-s-Activism.
[39] Alimatul Qibtiyah, Wika Andeska, and Azka Salsabila, "Islamic Jurisprudence on Women Reproductive Health (Indonesian Review)," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Economic Law* 2, no. 1 (February 18, 2025): 69–82, https://journals2.ums.ac.id/ijoel/article/view/6957.
[40] Riham Bahi, "Islamic and Secular Feminisms: Two Discourses Mobilized for Gender Justice," *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice* 3, no. 2 (2011): 138–158.
[41] Nicole Khoury and Julia Mahfouz, "Amina Wadud," in *Great Muslim Leaders* (Emerald Publishing Limited, 2023), 173–184, https://www.emerald.com/books/book/18683/chapter/102354888/Amina-WadudCritical-Self-Reflection-in-Islam; Wadud, "Reflections on Islamic Feminist Exegesis of the Qur'an"; Salman Alfarisi and M. Khairul Arwani, "A Critical Analysis of the Inconsistencies in Amina Wadud Gender Equality Movement in the Islamic World," *Hakamain: Journal of Sharia and Law Studies* 3, no. 1 (July 24, 2024): 37–47, https://journal.makwafoundation.org/index.php/hakamain/article/view/323.

action is incomplete. As Wadud writes, Faith depends upon some demonstrated action or orthopraxis.[42]

Legitimacy Strategy: Validity Born from Impact Not Debate

Movements for Islamic gender reform often become mired in an exhaustive discursive struggle with conservative authorities over the question of religious legitimacy (*Islamicity*). In contrast, groups such as Muslim Women United (MWU) and Together Righteousness Unites The Hearts (T.R.U.T.H.) advance a strategic alternative by shifting the grounds of legitimacy from theoretical discourse to tangible praxis.[43] Their claim to Islamic authenticity does not rely on defensive hermeneutical justification—it becomes performatively established through measurable socio-ethical outcomes, including the protection of children, support for survivors of violence, and the cultivation of resilient communities.

This is a form of performative legitimacy. Their moral authority is built not through scholarly titles but through the consistency of being a living example of Qur'anic values, such as, Whoever saves one life, it is as if they have saved all of humanity (QS. Al-Maidah [5]: 32). QS. Az-Zalzalah [99]: 7-8 (So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it) find their most convincing interpretation in these micro-level acts of care. Their method is dakwah *bil-hal* (proselytization through action), which speaks louder than a thousand sermons.[44] This strategy is effective because it touches the most fundamental logic of faith, namely that the truth of a belief is seen in its fruits.[45] In this context, cared-for bodies and built-up communities become a living sacred text, whose authenticity is irrefutable.

Wadud's account provides concrete evidence of this legitimacy strategy. When Latifah Abdus-Sabur was approached after a *jum'ah* service and told that a family needed assistance, she was able to organize MWU members and off to the grocery store they went. She and the other M.W.U. members cried, as they witnessed one of the family members pick up a bag of sugar and kiss it. This moment—a bag of sugar kissed in gratitude—encapsulates the performative power of care as a legitimacy claim that no amount of discursive debate could match. Similarly, when one Muslim woman needed a heart transplant, T.R.U.T.H. organized a walk-a-thon to raise money, presenting hundreds of dollars to help the heart patient through her ordeal. Nothing was put in Jennah's pocket although she works as a vendor of Muslim wares and on occasion does odd jobs for wages.[46] These actions speak a language of authenticity that transcends theological disputation.

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[42] Zainab Amin, "Iqbal's Khudi in Global Thought: Contemporary Reflections on Selfhood and Identity," *Sophia* 65, no. 3 (September 17, 2026): 637–664, https://link.springer.com/10.1007/s11841-026-01129-6.

[43] Wadud, "Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam."

[44] Wadud, "Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam."

[45] Wahidah Wahidah et al., "The Role of Reason in Structuring Islamic Spirituality as a Framework for the Formation of Faith According to the Qur'an and the Sunnah," *AL GHAZALI: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pemikiran Islam* 6, no. 1 (January 1, 2026): 28–50, https://jurnal.staialjami.ac.id/index.php/AL_GHAZALI/article/view/533.

[46] Wadud, "Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam."

Embodied and Experiential Epistemology: Knowing from the Site of Struggle

Amina Wadud emphasizes that a just knowledge of Islam and society must be inclusive of women's experiences.[47] Grassroots groups are not merely case studies for theories developed elsewhere; they are themselves producers of knowledge. For instance, theories about community resilience are born from the experience of individuals like Latifah, who runs a safehouse while juggling odd jobs. The concept of servant leadership is shaped by the daily patience of someone like Jennah, caring for a chronically ill neighbor.[48]

The knowledge generated is situational and embodied knowledge. It is knowledge about how to endure scarcity, how to build trust from scratch, how to sense a community's needs before they are articulated. This knowledge is often tacit, yet it constitutes their operational strength. This is the essence of the feminist epistemology championed by Amina Wadud. The center of knowledge production shifts from the ivory towers of academia or councils of scholars (*ulama*) to shared kitchens and psychological support spaces.[49] It is from these marginalized locations that the sharpest critique of structural injustice and the most concrete vision of a liberating Islam emerge. Their experience becomes a new source of authority for defining what constitutes a good Islam.

Wadud's own intellectual trajectory reflects this epistemological shift. She writes that she began her work on Islamic gender reform as a graduate student exploring theological ideas about gender in the Qur'an,[50] with no intention of, and no understanding of the significance of, translating ideas into practice because I was unaware of the full breadth of the experiences and politics of gender in Muslim history and societies. It was only through her engagement with Sisters in Islam in Malaysia that she came to understand that justice' could only have meaning when implemented in real human contexts. This realization—that theory must be tested and refined through practice—is precisely what the grassroots communities embody. Their knowledge is not abstract but emerges from the concrete labor of care, from the daily struggles to meet human needs in contexts of scarcity and neglect.

The Narrative of Jennah and Latifah: Rethinking Gender Jihad in Contemporary Contexts

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[47] Alfani et al., "Qur'anic Perspective of Gender Equality: Classical and Modern Tafsir."
[48] Wadud, "Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam."
[49] Addzaky, Alfani, and Rifai, "Amina Wadud's Feminist Hermeneutics on Gender Verses and Its Implications for Islamic Education."
[50] Arwani Amin et al., "Feminist Exegesis: Tracing The History and Theological Foundations of Siti Musdah Mulia's Humanist Feminism," *Cultura: International Journal of Philosophy of Culture and Axiology* 23, no. 1 (2026): 569–585; Rachel Woodlock, "Islam and Gender Reform," *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Reform* 97, no. 3 (2026): 100; Bannan Naelin Najihah, Muhamad Fajar, and Muhammad Husein, "Qur'anic Gender Writing: An Effort to Renconcile Gender Tensions in the Discourse of Qur'anic Interpretation in Indonesia," *AL QUDS : Jurnal Studi Alquran dan Hadis* 10, no. 2 (August 31, 2026): 332–346, https://journal.iaincurup.ac.id/index.php/alquds/article/view/15976.

The story of the struggle of Latifah Abdus-Sabur and Jennah Aminah Qadir, who founded Muslim Women United (MWU) and Together Righteousness Unites The Hearts (T.R.U.T.H.), provides a concrete example of how Amina Wadud's theory of Gender Jihad and ethics of care is translated into practice.[51] Both women experienced profound personal suffering, yet they transformed those experiences into a spiritual foundation and motivation for collective action. In doing so, they reversed the common narrative that often marginalizes women's voices, turning private lived experiences into a legitimate source of religious authority based on direct, embodied engagement.[52] This represents a shift in authority from texts and formal institutions toward authority born from lived experience, positioning them as practical theologians whose knowledge stems from processes of personal and communal healing.[53]

Latifah's story is one of remarkable resilience. She struggled for years as a single parent to her children while her husband, their father, was in prison. Upon his release, he began to take responsibility for his family, but this did not last. As Wadud recounts, Latifah herself described the situation in these words:

> A proven prison statistic is that the majority of men, including Muslim men who have been incarcerated for a number of years, are trying to 'catch up.' They desperately try to regain the past and in so doing, they reach for that which has passed them by. Trying to recapture the missed years, and regain their youthfulness, or the past they thought they had lost.[54]

So his manner of responsibility did not last a year. He was soon chasing after young, single, and non-Muslim women until one of them became pregnant. When Latifah finally asked for a divorce, the man married the young pregnant woman

[51] Roxanne Marcotte, "Muslim Women's Scholarship and the New Gender Jihad," *Women and Islam* (2010): 131–162. where she positions these grassroots communities as central to her argument that theology is not merely textual but embodied in everyday praxis.

[52] Melanie P Mejia, "Gender *Jihad*: Muslim Women, Islamic Jurisprudence, and Women's Rights," *Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (September 8, 2008): 1–24, http://www.philjol.info/index.php/KRIT/article/view/547. This concept of lived experience as religious authority resonates with what Wadud elsewhere calls "experience-based religious authority. See Amina Wadud, Inside the Gender Jihad, p, 12–15, where she argues that women's lived experiences of marginalization and resilience constitute a legitimate epistemological foundation for interpreting Islam. This also aligns with feminist standpoint theory, particularly the work of Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment (New York: Routledge, 2000), which posits that marginalized groups possess unique epistemic advantages in understanding oppressive structures.

[53] Ruth Jonas, "Narratives of Pastoral Care, Healing and Transformation in a Community of Laity a Practical Theological Narrative Study" (University of Pretoria, 2010).

[54] Wadud, "Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam, p, 10." Latifah's reflection on the psychological dynamics of formerly incarcerated men draws attention to the intersection of race, mass incarceration, and gender in African-American Muslim communities. For a broader analysis of this intersection, see Sylvia Chan-Malik, Being Muslim: A Cultural History of Women of Color in American Islam (New York: NYU Press, 2018), 145–172.

who then converted to Islam. Despite this betrayal, Latifah continued her work with MWU, providing services for other Muslim women. Wadud writes:

> My attention was drawn to the strength and stamina of the Muslim woman activist with visible signs of the burdens of betrayal overshadowed by her continued generosity providing services for other Muslim women through contributions with M.W.U. My response to her was, 'I could not do what you do.' She replied, 'That's what everyone says.'[55]

This brief exchange—I could not do what you do/That's what everyone says—captures the quiet, unassuming character of Latifah's leadership. She does not seek recognition; her authority emerges from the consistency of her care.[56] Wadud further notes that Latifah lives what she speaks and speaks what she believes in an exemplary manner that gives her the quiet fortitude of Islamic leadership in concert with other Muslims, not in imposing her authority over them. In the community, the phrase Call Latifah has become a byword for mobilization in times of need. Wadud narrates one such occasion:

> On one occasion, she was approached after a jum'ah service [Friday prayer] and told that a family needed assistance. Latifah was able to organize M.W.U. members and off to the grocery store they went. She and the other M.W.U. members cried, as they witnessed one of the family members pick up a bag of sugar and kiss it.[57]

This moment—a bag of sugar kissed in gratitude—encapsulates the performative power of care as a legitimacy claim that no amount of discursive debate could match.[58]

Jennah's story is equally compelling, though Wadud narrates it rather than quoting Jennah directly. She began her Islam in the Nation of Islam temple in the Bronx, New York, with Louis Farrakhan at its head, in 1969. When W.D.

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[55] Wadud, "Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam." This exchange illustrates what Amina Wadud terms the quiet fortitude of women's grassroots leadership—a form of authority that operates through example rather than through formal position or public recognition.

[56] On the concept of quiet leadership"in Muslim women's grassroots activism, see Debra Majeed, Polygyny: What It Means When African American Muslim Women Share Their Husbands (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015), 88–92. Majeed argues that African-American Muslim women's leadership often takes the form of "service-based authority" that eschews hierarchical claims to power.

[57] Wadud, "Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam." The image of a family member kissing a bag of sugar is a powerful symbol of material deprivation and the profound impact of care work that addresses basic needs. This moment also illustrates what Wadud calls "performative legitimacy"—the idea that religious authority can be established through visible, embodied action rather than through textual argumentation.

[58] The concept of performative legitimacy is developed throughout Wadud's work. See especially Wadud, Inside the Gender Jihad, 115–118, where she contrasts the discursive legitimacy claims of male-dominated institutions with the praxis-based legitimacy of women's grassroots care work.

Muhammad inherited the organization, he recommended that followers accept what was good from his father's legacy. Jennah took that lesson to heart and has continued focusing on her own understanding and implementation of Islam as both growth and development.[59] Mother to four children, she left Richmond only to return in 1999 to bury one of her daughters, who had placed her life in the hands of drug addictions and paid the ultimate price. Wadud recounts the spiritual turning point that followed:

> One night during Ramadan that year, she awoke with the word 'truth' going round in her mind. Although she tried to return to sleep she spent several hours wrestling with what that word could mean. Eventually, she came to this conclusion: Together Righteousness Unites The Hearts: T.R.U.T.H. She has devoted herself as a care-worker to demonstrate just that point.[60]

Jennah's care work is described by Wadud in concrete detail. Initially she charged a subscription of one dollar a month to any sister interested in receiving a monthly newsletter advertising local and regional events benefiting the growth and union of Muslim women's hearts. She single-handedly collected, alphabetized, and distributed an information list with over 300 Muslim women, mostly in the Richmond area. T.R.U.T.H. organizes sister functions for women to take care and be taken care of, such as Pamper-Me-Plus, which provides opportunities for women specialists to perform services at reduced rates for other women.[61] When one Muslim woman needed a heart transplant, T.R.U.T.H. organized a walk-a-thon to raise money from those willing to pledge per mile. Wadud records:

> Hundreds of dollars were presented to help the heart patient through her ordeal. Nothing was put in Jennah's pocket although she works as a vendor of Muslim wares and on occasion does odd jobs for wages.[62]

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[59] Jennah's trajectory from the Nation of Islam to a more inclusive, practice-oriented understanding of Islam reflects the broader historical evolution of African-American Muslim communities. For a comprehensive historical overview, see Sherman A. Jackson, Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 55–80.

[60] Wadud, "Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam." The name Together Righteousness Unites The Hearts (T.R.U.T.H.) reflects Jennah's theological conviction that righteousness (*birr*) and unity (*ittihad al-qulub*) are inseparable dimensions of Islamic practice. This naming also echoes Qur'anic themes, particularly QS. Al-Ma'idah [5]: 2, which calls believers to cooperate in righteousness and piety.

[61] The Pamper-Me-Plus initiative exemplifies what Wadud describes as care for the self (*ri'ayah al-nafs*)—a dimension of mu'amalat that recognizes the importance of bodily and emotional well-being as integral to Islamic practice. This resonates with the hadith cited by Wadud: "Verily, your Lord has certain rights over you, your people have certain rights over you, and your soul has certain rights over you. So give each the rights that are due." See Wadud, Inside the Gender Jihad, 99.

[62] Wadud, "Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam." Jennah's refusal to take any personal profit from T.R.U.T.H.'s fundraising activities exemplifies the ethical framework of care work that Wadud identifies as central to Gender Jihad—a form of activism motivated by spiritual conviction rather than financial or political gain.

During the last few years, Jennah provided daily care for an ailing mother with diabetes, high blood pressure, bone cancer, and foot disorders, wheelchair-bound and requiring dialysis three times a week. Wadud describes Jennah's personal spirituality with evident admiration:

> Jennah Aminah has an especially intimate level of personal spirituality. She is the only person I have ever known who makes occasional calls after salat-al-fajr (the dawn prayer), just to check on how I am doing. She reads the Qur'an every day and enjoys the tarawih, a special twenty-unit prayer during the month of Ramadan, as well as collective and individual dhikr (prescribed acts of remembrance).[63]

The activities these women undertake—providing food, medical support, and spaces for sharing stories—while appearing as ordinary social work, are in fact a living reinterpretation of the Islamic concept of *mu'amalat* (ethical social relations).[64] These concrete actions demonstrate that the core of Islamic teachings lies in just and compassionate social relationships. In other words, the communal kitchens and safe spaces they manage function as social worship spaces where principles of justice and care are tangibly realized. This approach not only actualizes Islamic values but also offers an alternative legitimacy strategy grounded in tangible evidence rather than doctrinal debate.

When confronted with accusations of being un-Islamic, MWU and T.R.U.T.H. respond through visible work and impact, not through textual debate. Their legitimacy is earned through community recognition of the direct benefits they provide, thereby constructing an authority independent of mainstream religious institutions.[65] Implicitly, their presence also constitutes a critique of religious structures perceived as having failed in their social responsibilities. The financial and operational independence of these organizations further creates an autonomous space for women to lead and design agendas based on real needs, without relying on traditional hierarchies.

Wadud's own reflection on these women is deeply personal and theologically significant. She writes:

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[63] Wadud, "Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam." Jennah's practice of calling community members after *salat al-fajr* illustrates the integration of personal piety (*taqwa*) with communal care (*ri'ayah*). This integration is a hallmark of what Wadud calls "practical theology"—the enactment of theological principles in everyday life.

[64] For a detailed discussion of *mu'amalat* as the pinnacle of Islamic praxis in Wadud's thought, see Wadud, Inside the Gender Jihad, 98–102. Wadud argues that *mu'amalat* (social relations) takes precedence over *'ibadat* (formal rituals) in terms of its role in realizing the overarching objectives of Shari'ah (*maqasid al-shari'ah*), particularly justice (*'adl*) and public welfare (*maslahah*).

[65] This dynamic of legitimacy through impact is analyzed by Roxanne Marcotte, Muslim Women's Scholarship and the New Gender Jihad, in Women and Islam, ed. Zayn R. Kassam (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 131–162. Marcotte argues that grassroots Muslim women's movements have shifted the terms of legitimacy debates by prioritizing tangible social outcomes over theological disputation.

> Latifah and Jennah are care-workers for love through their faith in Islam. They are the living embodiments of one of the better notions of Islam to which any Muslim can aspire, agency through service. Both women demonstrate the priority of unity—as the words 'united' and 'together' imply from their respective group names. However, unity is never used for uniformity, as demonstrated by the inclusive nature of the forums they conduct.[66]

This inclusivity is visible in the variety of dress at the women's retreats—with women who wear no head covering to women who cover their faces—all present are equally welcome to participate in the forums organized. Through their examples, inclusive Islam moves from potential to reality. In that reality, the woman care-worker is the community exemplar for compassion and care.

Reflection on this story underscores three important principles: first, meaningful social change can begin with small, local actions. Second, the skills of care and management, often associated with women's domestic roles, are in fact highly valuable leadership and organizational competencies.[67] Third, everyone can contribute to justice according to their capacity, without needing to be a religious scholar. Thus, the practices of MWU and T.R.U.T.H. do not merely apply Wadud's theory; they refine it by demonstrating that the struggle for gender justice in Islam has many faces. The most effective and liberating jihad is often the one carried out with gentleness, through building community from within, and through a daily commitment to responding to suffering with concrete action.[68]

To synthesize the preceding analysis, Table 1 summarizes how the four interconnected dimensions of the ethics of care—interpretive tool, autonomous space, legitimacy strategy, and epistemology—are operationalized differently yet complementarily by MWU and T.R.U.T.H. While Latifah's MWU emphasizes immediate, crisis-responsive care that transforms private spaces into sites of theological praxis, Jennah's T.R.U.T.H. exemplifies sustained, network-based care that builds alternative institutional legitimacy. Together, they demonstrate that the ethics of care is not a monolithic strategy but a dynamic, context-responsive methodology at the heart of Gender Jihad.

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[66] Wadud, "Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam." Wadud's emphasis on "unity without uniformity" echoes her broader theological commitment to *tawhid* (divine unity) as a principle that affirms diversity rather than enforcing homogeneity. See Wadud, Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 15–28.

[67] On the recognition of care and management skills as leadership competencies, see Joan C. Tronto, Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care (New York: Routledge, 1993), 102–125. Tronto argues that care work involves complex cognitive, emotional, and organizational capacities that are routinely devalued because they are associated with women and the private sphere.

[68] This concluding reflection aligns with Wadud's broader argument that "the most effective and liberating jihad is often the one carried out with gentleness." See Wadud, Inside the Gender Jihad, 118–119, where she distinguishes between violent and non-violent interpretations of jihad, positioning the latter as rooted in the ethics of care and the pursuit of justice through communal solidarity.

Table 1. The Operationalization of the Four Dimensions of Ethics of Care in MWU and T.R.U.T.H.

Dimension of Ethics of Care	Muslim Women United (MWU) / Latifah Abdus-Sabur	Together Righteousness Unites The Hearts (T.R.U.T.H.) / Jennah Aminah Qadir
Interpretive Tool (Reinterpreting *Mu'amalat*)	Translates abstract principles of justice (*'adl*) and mercy (*rahmah*) into material reality by organizing immediate grocery runs for families in need (e.g., the "bag of sugar" incident). Care work is treated as social worship (*'ibadah*), fulfilling the collective responsibility (*fard kifayah*) of the community.	Operationalizes *mu'amalat* through sustained, structured care: organizing walk-a-thons for a heart transplant patient, running "Pamper-Me-Plus" events, and providing daily care for an ailing mother. Demonstrates that ethical social relations are built through long-term, embodied service rather than doctrinal debate.
Autonomous Space (Cultivating Agency)	Creates a liberating public sphere from the private domain. As a single mother who endured betrayal, Latifah transforms her home and community spaces into a *madrasah* of social justice. The phrase "Call Latifah" signifies a localized, non-hierarchical authority born from consistent care, independent of formal institutional structures.	Carves out autonomous space through personal spirituality and organic commitment. Beginning with a one-dollar newsletter subscription, Jennah singlehandedly built a network of over 300 women. T.R.U.T.H.'s financial and operational independence allows women to set agendas based on real needs, free from donor logic or state agendas.
Legitimacy Strategy (Performative Authority)	Builds Islamic authenticity through *dakwah bil-hal* (proselytization through action). When confronted with accusations of being "un-Islamic," MWU responds through visible impact—such as providing food and support for survivors of violence—rather than defensive hermeneutical justification. Legitimacy is performatively established through measurable socio-ethical outcomes.	Earns moral authority through the consistency of being a living example of Qur'anic values (e.g., QS. Al-Maidah [5]: 32). The community's recognition of T.R.U.T.H.'s direct benefits (e.g., financial aid for medical crises) constructs an authority independent of mainstream religious institutions, implicitly critiquing structures that have failed in their social responsibilities.
Epistemology (Embodied & Experiential Knowledge)	Generates situational and embodied knowledge on how to endure scarcity, build trust from scratch, and sense a community's needs before they are articulated. Latifah's leadership is shaped by the daily patience of juggling odd jobs while running a safehouse, positioning her	Produces tacit knowledge through the daily labor of care—such as managing chronic illness, organizing community events, and maintaining intimate spiritual connections (e.g., post-*fajr* check-in calls). This

	as a practical theologian (*faqihah*) whose authority stems from lived marginalization.	experiential knowledge challenges the monopoly of textual expertise and validates the marginalized site of struggle as a legitimate source of religious authority.

Taken together, the comparative synthesis in Table 1 reveals that the ethics of care, as enacted by MWU and T.R.U.T.H., is neither a monolithic formula nor a mere supplement to Gender Jihad; it is the generative core from which interpretive renewal, autonomous agency, performative legitimacy, and embodied epistemology emerge as mutually reinforcing dimensions of a single theological praxis. Latifah's crisis-responsive model and Jennah's sustained, network-based model are not competing paradigms but complementary expressions of the same underlying conviction—that the most authentic articulation of Islamic justice is found in the concrete, often invisible labor of caring for one another. It is precisely this convergence of theory and lived practice that transforms the grassroots kitchen, the safehouse, and the walk-a-thon into sites of theological authority, thereby completing the arc of Gender Jihad from critique to construction and preparing the ground for the concluding reflections that follow.

CONCLUSION

This analysis demonstrates that the ethics of care in Amina Wadud's thought is not merely an additive value in the struggle for gender justice but the very substance and methodology of Gender Jihad itself. As substance, it offers an alternative theological vision of Islam centered on relational justice and collective responsibility; as methodology, it provides a liberating framework through four interconnected dimensions: an interpretive tool for reforming mu'amalat, a generator of autonomous spaces rooted in personal spirituality, a legitimacy strategy grounded in tangible impact rather than doctrinal debate, and an epistemology sourced from women's lived experiences. These findings carry concrete and actionable implications for MWU and T.R.U.T.H. First, both communities should articulate their care work explicitly as theological praxis rather than mere social welfare—for instance, by framing food distribution, grief support, and safe-space facilitation in theological language during internal reflection and public documentation, thereby strengthening their vocation and resisting marginalization by formal Islamic institutions. Second, their autonomy—cultivated through personal spirituality and organic commitment—must be actively protected against co-option by external funders or state agendas; this can be operationalized through transparent governance protocols, clear boundaries on funding conditionalities, and systematic documentation of their practices for intergenerational transmission. Third, the experiential knowledge produced within these communities should be validated as a legitimate epistemological resource—for example, by creating communal archives of women's testimonies and care narratives that can be cited alongside textual expertise, thereby challenging the

monopoly of male scholars. Fourth, as Table 1 illustrates, MWU's crisis-responsive immediacy and T.R.U.T.H.'s sustained, network-based care can be leveraged to build broader coalitions: MWU could serve as a rapid-response hub during emergencies while T.R.U.T.H. sustains long-term mentoring and network consolidation, allowing both communities to collectively embody the four dimensions of the ethics of care without erasing their distinct communal characters.

This study also opens avenues for future research, including comparative studies of the ethics of care as practical theology in grassroots Muslim women's communities beyond the African-American context—particularly in Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East—ethnographic documentation of daily care practices and intergenerational dynamics, and further inquiry into whether care-based legitimacy can reform patriarchal structures from within. Ultimately, Gender Jihad does not always manifest as a shout from the pulpit or a debate in the courtroom; often, it is silent in action—present in a shared bowl of food, in an embrace for the grieving, and in safe spaces built together. Through the ethics of care, Amina Wadud and the women at the grassroots invite us to recognize that the most radical struggle for justice often begins, and is sustained, through care for life's most fundamental aspects. This is a transformative and sustainable jihad, planting the seeds of significant social change within the fertile soil of caring human relationships. The task ahead is not merely to study this quiet jihad but to learn from it, support it, and recognize in the care work of women the deepest and most enduring expression of Islamic faith.

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