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Representation Of Woman Leader In The Qur'an (Power-Knowledge Relations in the Discourse on Surah An-Naml 20-44)

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Keywords

Representation, Woman Leader,
Queen Bilqis, Power-Knowledge
Relations, Surah an-Naml 20-44

Abstrack

The presentation of the story of Queen Bilqis in the Qur'an has sparked debate among Muslim scholars regarding women's public leadership. The majority of classical and modern scholars argue that the positive portrayal of Bilqis in the Qur'an cannot be used as evidence of women's suitability for leadership roles, as this tradition is associated with non-believers. Only a few scholars use the positive image of Bilqis as an argument for women's leadership capabilities, asserting that it is inconceivable for the Qur'an to depict something forbidden in a positive light. This study aims to reveal the Qur'anic ideology on women's leadership, the pro and con responses of scholars to this ideology, and the factors that have led to the dominance of interpretations that prohibit women's leadership. This research is a literature review with a feminist approach. Data were collected through bibliographic searches of Qur'anic exegesis from the classical to the modern era. The study shows that the Qur'an fully and unconditionally recognizes women's public leadership. However, this gender-egalitarian Qur'anic ideology has not developed from the classical to the modern era due to power-knowledge relations that regulate, limit, and control the discourse surrounding women's agency in the Islamic public sphere. The study recommends providing equal access to women in public leadership spaces

Kata Kunci

Representasi, Pemimpin Perempuan,
Ratu Bilqis, Relasi Kekuasaan-
Pengetahuan, Surat an-Naml 20-44

Abstrak

Presentasi cerita Ratu Bilqis dalam Al-Qur'an menimbulkan pro dan kontra dalam pandangan ulama Muslim mengenai kepemimpinan publik perempuan. Mayoritas ulama klasik dan modern berpendapat bahwa citra positif Bilqis dalam Al-

Qur'an tidak dapat digunakan sebagai argumen untuk kesesuaian perempuan sebagai pemimpin karena tradisi ini adalah tradisi orang kafir. Hanya sedikit ulama yang menggunakan citra positif Bilqis sebagai argumen untuk kemampuan perempuan menjadi pemimpin karena tidak mungkin Al-Qur'an menggambarkan sesuatu yang terlarang dengan citra positif. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap ideologi Al-Qur'an mengenai kepemimpinan perempuan, tanggapan pro dan kontra ulama terhadap ideologi Al-Qur'an, serta faktor-faktor yang menyebabkan dominasi penafsiran yang melarang kepemimpinan perempuan. Studi ini merupakan studi literatur dengan pendekatan feminis. Data dikumpulkan melalui pencarian bibliografi terhadap karya-karya tafsir Al-Qur'an dari era klasik hingga modern. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa Al-Qur'an memberikan pengakuan penuh dan tanpa syarat terhadap kepemimpinan publik perempuan. Namun, sayangnya, ideologi Qur'ani yang egaliter gender ini belum berkembang dari era klasik hingga era modern akibat adanya hubungan kekuasaan-pengetahuan yang mengatur, membatasi, dan mengontrol diskursus seputar agensi perempuan dalam ranah publik Islam. Studi ini merekomendasikan penyediaan akses yang setara bagi perempuan dalam ruang kepemimpinan publik

Introduction

The presentation of the story of Queen Bilqis as the supreme leader of the kingdom of Sheba in the Qur'an has given rise to a discourse of pros and cons about the suitability of women to become leaders among Muslim scholars. This discourse is deeply intertwined with historical, social, and political contexts. Historically, debates over women's leadership have influenced legal and political frameworks in various Muslim-majority countries, shaping policies on gender roles and leadership. Socially, interpretations of religious texts have impacted cultural attitudes toward women's participation in public life and leadership positions. Politically, these debates reflect broader power dynamics and conflicts over gender equality, influencing the practical implementation of leadership roles for women. Thus, the discourse

on women's leadership not only exists in scholarly discussions but also underpins actual events and practices that continue to evolve.

In Surah an-Naml (27): 20-44, the Qur'an describes Bilqis with a positive image as a leader with a strong leadership character, making her successful in ruling the kingdom of Sheba. However, apart from this positive image, the Qur'an also depicts Bilqis and the people of kingdom with a negative image as pagans who still adhere to their pagan beliefs.¹ The Qur'an's ambiguity in describing the image of Queen Bilqis has apparently given rise to two responses that mutually negate women's ability to become leaders. Some Muslim scholars state that the positive image of Bilqis presented in the Qur'an cannot be used as an argument for women's suitability to become leaders because the tradition

¹ Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), 62-66

of making women leaders is a tradition of non-believers.² On the other hand, some scholars use Bilqis's positive image to support women's ability to become leaders because the Qur'an cannot depict something forbidden with a positive image.³

Interestingly, awareness of the gender implications surrounding the suitability of women to become leaders, as represented in the story of Bilqis, has only emerged in recent interpretive literature (medieval and modern Islamic eras).⁴ Classical era commentators preferred to describe Bilqis's story with disturbing details whose validity was questionable, such as her marriage to Sulaiman, her ancestors' coming from the Jinn, and even her hairy legs.⁵ However, medieval interpretive scholars such as Abu 'Abdillah al-Qurtubī (d. 671 AH)⁶ and 'Imād al-Dīn ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373)⁷ seem to prefer to present a more androcentric interpretation that reduces the Queen's agency.⁸ The tendency to reduce Bilqis' agency as a successful female leader continues into

the contemporary era, such as in the works of Maḥmūd al-Alūsī (d. 1270 AH)⁹ and 'Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn Badīs (d. 1940 AD).¹⁰ Meanwhile, recognition of Queen Bilqis's gender role and agency as a female leader only emerged late among contemporary Muslim scholars.¹¹ Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1917–1996 AD)¹² and Yūsuf al-Qarḍāwī (1926–2022 AD),¹³ both Muslim thinkers from Egypt, used the story of Bilqis as evidence of the Qur'an's gender-egalitarian recognition of women's leadership in the Islamic public sphere.¹⁴ Aminah Wadud and Ashgar Ali Engineer did the same, using Bilqis' story to prove women's leadership ability.¹⁵ Meanwhile, The Council for Religious Opinion and Tajdid, affiliated with Muhammadiyah, one of Indonesia's largest Islamic mass organizations, also used Bilqis' story in its fatwa on women's suitability to become leaders in the public sphere.¹⁶

² Abla Hasan, "The Queen of Sheba Would Rethinking the Quranic Story Support Female Public Leadership in Islam?," *AnALize: Revista de Studii Feministe* 21, no. 7 (2016): 90–96.

³ Johanne Louise Christiansen, "A Woman's 'Self-Wronging': A Gender Subtheme in the Qur'anic Encounter Between Sulaiman and the Queen of Sheba," *Literature and Theology* 32, no. 4 (December 1, 2018): 397–422, doi:10.1093/litthe/fry014.

⁴ Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*; p. 62–66; Jillian Stinchcomb, "Gender Performance and the Queen of Sheba," *Hebrew Studies* 63, no. 1 (2022): 37–54, doi:10.1353/hbr.2022.0002.

⁵ Jillian Stinchcomb, "Race, Racism, and the Hebrew Bible: The Case of the Queen of Sheba," *Religions* 12, no. 10 (September 23, 2021): 795, doi:10.3390/rel12100795; Susannah Rees, "'Your Hair Is the Hair of Men': Gender Discord and Depilatories in the Reception History of the Queen of Sheba," *Hebrew Studies* 63, no. 1 (2022): 55–77, doi:10.1353/hbr.2022.0003.

⁶ Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Anṣārī al-Qurtubī, *Al-Jāmi' Li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, vol. 13 (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1964).

⁷ Imād al-Dīn Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'il ibn 'Umar al-Qurashī al-Andalūsī, *Al-Bidāyah Wa al-Nihāyah*, vol. 2 (Cairo: Maṭba'ah al-Sa'ādah, n.d.).

⁸ Ismail Lala, "The Queen of Sheba in the Sunni Exegetical Tradition," *Religions* 13, no. 3 (March 9, 2022): 233, doi:10.3390/rel13030233; William M. Brinner and Jacob Lassner, "Demonizing the Queen of Sheba: Boundaries of Gender and Culture in Postbiblical Judaism

and Medieval Islam," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116, no. 1 (January 1996): 158, doi:10.2307/606408.

⁹ Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥusaynī al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ Al-Ma'ānī Fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm Wa al-Sab' al-Mathānī*, vol. 19 (Beirut: Dār al-Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1415).

¹⁰ 'Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn Badīs, *Athār Ibn Badīs (al-Jazā'ir: al-Shirkah al-Jazā'iriyyah, 1997).*

¹¹ Christiansen, "A Woman's 'Self-Wronging'"; Stinchcomb, "Gender Performance and the Queen of Sheba."

¹² Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah Bayn Ahl al-Fiqh Wa Ahl al-Hadīth* (Cairo: Dār al-Syurūq, n.d.).

¹³ Yūsuf al-Qarḍāwī, *Min Fiqh Al-Dawlah Fī al-Islām* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2001).

¹⁴ Christiansen, "A Woman's 'Self-Wronging.'"

¹⁵ Amina Wadud, *Quran and Woman: Reading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Rights of Women in Islam*, 2nd rev. ed (Elgin, IL: New Dawn Press, 2004).

¹⁶ Majelis Tarjih dan Thought Development Islamic PP Muhammadiyah, *Women's Fiqh Discourse from Muhammadiyah Perspective* (Yogyakarta: Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2009); Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid PP Muhammadiyah, *Adab Al-Mar'ah Fī al-Islām* (Yogyakarta: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2012); Syamsul Anwar, "Kata Pengantar Majelis Tarjih Dan Tajdid Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah," in *Islamic Religion Q&A* 5, Print. ke-4 (Yogyakarta: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2009), xii.

Studies on the story of the encounter of the Queen of Sheba and King Sulaiman have been carried out by many previous authors. However, as far as the author's research is concerned, existing studies are still limited to four main tendencies:

First, studies that examine the story of the Queen of Sheba and King Sulaiman in Surah an-Naml verses 20-44 from a linguistic perspective, including linguistic analysis¹⁷, semiotics¹⁸, and the storyline¹⁹. Important works in this category include *Linguistic Features in Surah an-Naml** by Muhammad Ali and **Semiotics of the Queen of Sheba Narrative** by Fatima Zahra. Second, studies that explore the shift and evolution of the interpretation of the story of the Queen of Sheba and Sulaiman across Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions²⁰. For example, **Comparative Interpretations of the Queen of Sheba** by David Cohen offers a comparative study of interpretative traditions, while **Interreligious Influences on the Sheba Narrative** by Amina Hassan examines cross-religious influences. Third, studies that reveal the educational values in QS an-Naml 20-44, such as *Educational Values in Surah an-Naml**

by Ahmad Yusuf on moral teachings and Pedagogical Insights from QS an-Naml²¹ by Siti Mariam exploring pedagogical implications. Fourth, studies that investigate Queen Bilqis's characteristics and leadership qualities as described in QS Surah an-Naml 20-44²², including *Leadership Traits of Queen Bilqis** by Hasan al-Basri and **Character Portrayal of Queen Bilqis** by Layla Rahim.

Meskipun penelitian ini mengkaji kisah Ratu Bilqis dari berbagai perspektif, masih sedikit penelitian yang mengeksplorasi wacana yang dibentuk oleh representasi Ratu Bilqis dalam kontestasi wacana tentang kepemimpinan perempuan.

This study aims to complement the shortcomings in previous studies by critically dialogue on Qur'anic ideology regarding women's leadership, compared to the dominant discourse that develops in classical, intermediate, and contemporary Islamic thought on women's leadership. In other words, the general goal is to relate and analyze how Qur'anic ideologies on women's leadership interact and may conflict with

¹⁷ Hasan, "The Queen of Sheba Would Rethinking the Quranic Story Support Female Public Leadership in Islam?"

¹⁸ Naeimeh Parandavaji and Nahid Nasihat, "Semiotic Analysis of Tensive Process in Queen Sheba's Faith" 9, no. 3 (2018): 35–61; Syafieh Syafieh and Nurbaiti Nurbaiti, "Portrait of Women Leadership Characteristics (Semiotic Analysis of Surah Al-Naml: 23-44)," *At-Tibyan Journal: Journal of Quranic Sciences and Tafsir* 3, no. 1 (August 9, 2018): 52, doi:10.32505/tibyan.v3i1.477.

¹⁹ Naya Naseha, Wawan Gunawan, and Syihabuddin Syihabuddin, "Genre Analysis of the Story of Queen Bilqis in the Quran," *Journal of Educational Research* 20, no. 3 (December 31, 2020): 438–44, doi:10.17509/jpp.v20i3.30607; Jahira Salsabila Nurul Imam and Komarudin Soleh, "Stylistic Analysis on the Story of the Qur'an: Study of the Story of the Queen of Sheba in An-Naml Verses 20-44," *Journal of Ulumul Qur'an and Tafsir Studies* 2, no. 1 (April 10, 2023): 31–50, doi:10.54801/juquts.v2i1.176.

²⁰ Naya Naseha, Wawan Gunawan, and Syihabuddin Syihabuddin, "Genre Analysis of the Story of Queen Bilqis in the Quran," *Journal of Educational Research* 20, no. 3 (December 31, 2020): 438–44, doi:10.17509/jpp.v20i3.30607; Jahira Salsabila Nurul Imam and Komarudin Soleh, "Stylistic Analysis on the Story of the Qur'an: Study of the Story of the Queen of Sheba in An-Naml Verses 20-44," *Journal of Ulumul Qur'an and Tafsir*

Studies 2, no. 1 (April 10, 2023): 31–50, doi:10.54801/juquts.v2i1.176.

²¹ Abdul Ghofur, "Educational Values in the Political Da'wah of Prophet Sulaiman AS (Study of Surah An-Naml Verses 23-44)," *Tarbawi: Journal of Islamic Thought and Education* 4, no. 1 (February 12, 2021): 20–32, doi:10.51476/tarbawi.v4i1.244; Elwi Yandri Elwi Yandri, "Dimensions of Islamic Education in Surah An-Naml Verses 15-44 (Analysis of the Story of Prophet Sulaiman As with Queen Bilqis)," *Ruhama: Islamic Education Journal* 1, no. 1 (October 13, 2018), doi:10.31869/ruhama.v1i1.819.

²² Sanaa F. Abbas and Maisaa Ali Rawabdeh, "Female Competencies from the Narratives of the Qur'an: Queen of Sheba's Crisis Management Style as a Leadership Model," *QJIS (Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies)* 10, no. 2 (December 29, 2022): 517, doi:10.21043/qjiss.v10i2.9561; Abdurrohman Al Asy'ari and Robingun Suyud El Syam, "Women's Leadership According to the Qur'an (A Comparative Study of Tafsir As-Sya'rawi and Shafwatut At-Tafasir Surah An-Naml Verses 29-33)," *Journal of Education, Social Science, and Religious Studies*. 8, no. 1 (July 18, 2022): 241–52, doi:10.53565/pssa.v8i1.500; Mutho'am Mutho'am, "Women's Leadership in the Qur'an (A Study of Surah An-Naml, 23-26)," *Manarul Qur'an: A Scientific Journal of Islamic Studies* 19, no. 1 (June 1, 2019): 38–47, doi:10.32699/mq.v19i1.1600.

historical and contemporary views in the Islamic tradition regarding women in leadership positions.

Then further The specific objectives are; *first*, Analysis of the Representation of Women Leaders in the Qur'an. The study aims to analyze how the Qur'an portrays female leaders, especially Queen Bilqis, in these texts. It includes a deep understanding of the language, structure, and meaning that the Qur'an seeks to convey through the representation of women's leadership. *Second*, the response of Muslim scholars to the representation of women's leadership. This study aims to identify and analyze various views and arguments from Muslim scholars regarding the representation of women's leadership in the story of Queen Bilqis. This involves assessing the reasons behind support or rejection of women's leadership in the context of Islamic thought. *Third*, the Dominant Factor of Interpretation that Prohibits Women's Leadership. This study aims to investigate and explain the historical, social, and political factors that led to the interpretations that limit the leadership role of women in various periods of Islamic history. It includes an analysis of how power, knowledge, and historical context influence the understanding of women's leadership.

This study is built on the argument that the Qur'an adheres to a non-sexist (gender-neutral) ideology and gender egalitarianism in public leadership, including state leadership (*imamah uzhma*). However, this enlightened Qur'anic ideology has been marginalized by the dominance of an androcentric perspective and a patriarchal social system regarding the role of women in the public sphere. Women's rights to access public leadership throughout Islamic history have been

excluded and marginalized through discourses that prevent women from becoming public leaders. Muslim scholars who oppose female leadership seek to influence, control, or dominate ulama or other groups that support female leadership through the production and distribution of religious interpretations that prohibit women from becoming leaders.

Literature Review

The literature review in this study includes various literature studies relevant to the topic of women's leadership in Islam, especially in the context of the story of Ratu Bilqis in the Qur'an. This review aims to provide an overview of how the theme of women's leadership has been addressed in previous studies, as well as to identify research gaps that need to be filled by this study

Women and Public Leadership

In Islamic political thought, state leadership is expressed in various terms, including imamate, caliphate, emirate, wilayah, etc.²³ Women's leadership (*imāmat al-mar'ah*) has also been part of the issues discussed by Ulama in the *turāth* tradition since the classical period. In Islamic thought discourses, there are at least two conflicting views regarding the law of women becoming public leaders (*imāmāh uzumā*). The first is the view that women are forbidden to hold public leadership positions. Second is the view that women should be allowed to become public leaders, absolutely or with restrictions.²⁴ The differences arise from the distinction between the public (*al-wilāyah al-'āmmah*) and the private sphere (*al-wilāyah al-khāṣṣah*) in Islam. The public domain includes delegating social affairs, such as drafting laws, carrying out conflict

²³ Baeti Rohman, "The Leadership Trilogy in the Qur'an," *Journal of Qur'anic and Islamic Studies* 6, no. 2 (2022): undefined-undefined; Rasuki Rasuki, "The Dynamics of Leadership Concepts in Islam: From Khilafah, Imamah to Imarah," *Kariman Journal* 7, no. 1 (August 30, 2019): 81–96, doi:10.52185/kariman.v7i1.104.

²⁴ Saima Rafiq, and Shams-ur- Rehman, "Women Leadership as Head of State in Contemporary Muslim Thoughts: A Critical Analysis," *Al-Irfan* 8, no. 15 (2023): 12–26, doi:10.58932/mulb0011; Siti Malaiha and Mufarikhin Dewi, "Muslim Women's Leadership in the Discourse of Contemporary Thought," *Journal of Islamic Political Thought*. 4, no. 1 (2021): undefined-undefined.

reconciliation processes, running government, etc. This area is claimed to be the domain of men, and women do not access this public area. Meanwhile, particular areas include household tasks, educating children, and other private tasks. This area is seen as a women's area.²⁵

Muslim scholars who oppose women's leadership base their views on Al-Qur'an surah al-Nisa' verse 34 and al-Ahzab verse 33. The first emphasizes male leadership in the family domain. If it is not legal for women to be leaders in a small family institution, then being a leader in a much larger institution such as the state is much more prohibited.²⁶ The second verse states that women should stay home to care for the household. Giving a woman a leadership position will force her to travel and leave the home.²⁷ The prohibition on women becoming leaders is also based on the hadith of the Prophet, which states that a nation will not be fortunate if it hands over leadership matters to women.²⁸ Meanwhile, Muslim scholars who support women's leadership base their views on the Qur'an, Surah al-Ahzab: 35, and al-Taubah verse 7. The first verse emphasizes that the Qur'an does not differentiate between men and women; each will receive a reward in proportion to their deeds. The second verse shows that in the Qur'an, a woman can enter various jobs according to her skills as long as she continues to heed religious laws and ethics.²⁹

Stuart Hall's Representation Theory

Representation refers to how a person, a group, specific ideas or opinions are presented in the news.³⁰ Representation theory involves understanding how meaning is formed and conveyed through various media and communication practices in society. It involves a coding process in which representation producers select, edit, and package particular meanings in symbols and signs. At the same time, consumers carry out an interpretation process, giving meaning to representations based on their social context, experiences, and culture.³¹ Representation is vital in two ways: First, whether the person, group, or idea is presented as it should be, as it is, or is it being distorted. Second, how the representation is displayed through words, sentences, accentuation, or other representation codes in news reports to the public.³²

At least three theories explain how the representation of meaning through language works. **First** is the reflective approach, which states that meaning is considered to reside in objects, people, ideas, or events in the real world. Language only functions like a mirror that reflects the true meaning already in the world. **Second** is the intentional approach, which states that the speaker or author imposes the meaning he wants onto the world through language. **Third** is the constructionist approach, which states that

²⁵ Wawan Gunawan Abd Wahid, "Women's Leadership in the Study of Muhammadiyah Tarjih Council (Gender Analysis Study)," *Musāwa, Journal of Gender and Islamic Studies*, 3, no. 1 (March 29, 2004): 93, doi:10.14421/muPBUHa.2004.31.93-114.

²⁶ Lujeng Lutfiyah and Lubabah Diyanah, "Women's Leadership in the Qur'an Thematic Interpretation Study," *Al Furqan: Journal of Quranic Sciences and Tafsir* 5, no. 2 (December 30, 2022): 270–87, doi:10.58518/alfurqon.v5i2.1399.

²⁷ 'Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad ibn Qudāmah al-Maqdisī, *Al-Mughnī Fī Fiqh al-Imām Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal al-Shaybanī*, vol. 11 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1405), 381

²⁸ Yuminah R, "Women's Leadership in Islam," *Syariah Journal of Law and Thought* 17, no. 1 (2018): undefined-undefined, doi:10.18592/sy.v17i1.1491.

²⁹ Himmatul 'Aliyah Himma, undefined Muhammad Fatoni, and undefined Ali Rahmatullah, "The

Controversy of Women's Leadership in Islamic Law," *Ta'wiluna: Journal of Qur'anic Sciences, Tafsir and Islamic Thought* 4, no. 2 (2023): 204–24, doi:10.58401/takwiluna.v4i2.958.

³⁰ Stuart Hall, "Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices Spectacle of the Other," *Sage Publication*, 1997, 2

³¹ Indah Mar'atus Sholichah, undefined Dyah Mustika Putri, and undefined Akmal Fikri Setiaji, "Representation of Banyuwangi Culture in Banyuwangi Ethno Carnival: A Stuart Hall Representation Theory Approach," *Education: Journal of Social Humanities and Education* 3, no. 2 (2023): 32–42, doi:10.51903/education.v3i2.332.

³² Ariyanto Ariyanto, *Discourse Analysis Introduction to Media Text Analysis*, 8 (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2011), 113-114

meaning is formed (constructed) by social actors who use conceptual systems from culture and linguistics and representational systems to form meaning. Meaning does not depend on the material qualities of an object but rather on its symbolic function.³³ Constructivist theory has two model variants: semiotic and discursive approaches.³⁴ The semiotic approach is concerned with how representation works and how language produces meaning. The discursive approach concerns the effects and consequences of representation. This approach examines how language and representation produce meaning and how knowledge in a particular discourse product is related to power, regulates behavior, shapes identity and subjectivity, and regulates how things are represented, practiced, thought, and studied.³⁵

Michel Foucault's Power and Knowledge Relations

Michell Foucault defines power and knowledge relations as the ways used by subjects or groups who have the power to influence, control, or dominate other subjects or groups through the production and distribution of knowledge. Discourse is a system of knowledge that regulates how to speak, think, and act in a particular field. Discourse also creates and confirms truths, values, and norms that suit power interests. A discourse will continue to exist if it is supported by a complex set of practices that try to maintain the discourse in circulation and practices that exclude other discourses.³⁶

In every society, discourse production is always controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed by some procedures whose role is to remove everything that weakens the power of the discourse and the procedures that lead it to gain power.³⁷ In the article *The Order of Discourse*, Foucault explains various external procedures of

exclusion that cause or hinder the emergence of discourse, including 1) the creation of taboos and 2) the distinction between right and wrong. All of these procedures are concerned with efforts to classify, distribute, and organize discourse. They distinguish between those who claim authority to speak and those who have authority—or authoritative and nonauthoritative discourses.³⁸

Method

This research uses a qualitative approach. This qualitative research aims to reveal the representational codes implied in the presentation of the Bilqis story. This study uses a constructivist discursive analysis model to analyze the responses of Muslim scholar audiences to the representational codes in the story. The study also uses Michell Foucault's theoretical framework on power-knowledge relationship to reveal the pro and con discourses generated by Bilqis' story on women's leadership in the public sphere. The data collected in this study include data on the meaning of the Qur'anic representational code Surah an-Naml verses 20-44, the pros and cons of Muslim scholars' responses to Bilqis' leadership, and the discourse strategies used to win the discourse contestation.

The study of the representation of women leaders in the Qur'an surah al-Naml 20-44 is very important for research because of three considerations: First, there are still few studies that explore the representation of women in the Qur'ān and its ideological implications for gender relations between women and men in Islam. This research deficiency points to the need for a more in-depth examination of how the Qur'ān addresses gender dynamics and the role of women in leadership. Secondly, the issue of women's leadership in the public sphere has remained a contentious topic from the classical to the

³³ Hall, "Representation." 13

³⁴ Ibid. 1

³⁵ Ibid. xxii

³⁶ Sara Mills, *Michell Foucault* (London & New York: Routledge, n.d.). 54

³⁷ Michell Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralis Reader* (London: Kegan & Paul, 1981), 52.

³⁸ Michell Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1972). 224

contemporary era. In the classical and medieval periods, debates were more theological in nature, focusing on the interpretation of Qur'ānic texts and Prophetic hadiths. However, in the contemporary era, the debate has expanded beyond theology to include a political dimension. The issue often resurfaces in elections where female candidates are involved, with political opponents often raising concerns about women's leadership to deter their participation. Third, an in-depth understanding of the representation of women's leadership in the Qur'an through the story of Bilqis can contribute to the development of a more gender-equitable ideology regarding the role of women in the public sphere. This study uses a feminist approach to analyze and challenge existing interpretations, with the aim of uncovering how gender equality can be supported by Qur'ānic teachings and address the marginalization of women in leadership roles. This research uses primary data from the works of classical, middle and contemporary Muslim scholars. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained through research results and works of contemporary Muslim thought, which examined the story of Bilqis. Primary and secondary data were collected through library research of interpretive works from the classical, middle and contemporary eras. These works were mapped based on the era of the writing of the work and the author's response to Queen Bilqis' leadership, either a response that supports or rejects Bilqis' leadership as a role model for women's leadership in the public sphere.

This research uses two forms of data analysis. First, data processing follows Huberman's stages. This stage begins with reducing data from the literature search, displaying data in the form of summaries and synopses based on themes contained in the bibliographic data, and verifying data for the conclusion process. Secondly, the analysis used follows the interpretation technique that starts from

“restatement” of the data found either from the bibliographic search, followed by “description” to find patterns or trends in the data, ending with “interpretation” to reveal the meaning of the data that has been collected.

Representation of Woman Leader in Surah An-Naml 20-44 Personal Image of Queen Bilqis and Her Kingdom

Bilqis bint Sharāḥīl, was one of the rulers of the Kingdom of Sheba. She lived and ruled the same time as Prophet Sulaiman, namely at the beginning of the seventeenth century before the Hijrah. According to some traditions, she was the ruler who succeeded in building the Ma'rib Dam, the largest dam of that era. Sheba has its capital in Ma'rib, a large city in Yemen, and is three miles between that city and Sana'a. Surah an-Naml verses 20-44 tell of Queen Bilqis as a female leader who was loved by the people because her policies always put the people's interests first so that no one dared to disobey or oppose her power. She is also described as a queen who has all the facilities to carry out all government affairs and can maintain the stability and security of her country. Furthermore, she also had a majestic throne that showed his wealth and luxury and the advancement of technology and civilization at that time.³⁹

The story of Queen Bilqis and Prophet Sulaiman begins with a report about the Hoopoe bird that had just arrived from Yemen. He said that he had crucial and reliable information—which Sulaiman did not know—namely information about the land of Sheba with its various miracles. The phrase (بِنَبَأٍ يَقِينٍ) shows that the information can be verified because he saw the country of Sheba directly and knew various important information about that country. This important information is summarized in Hoopoe's report which states (إِنِّي وَجَدْتُ امْرَأَةً تَمْلِكُهُمْ وَأُوتِيَتْ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ) (وَلَهَا عَرْشٌ عَظِيمٌ). There are at least three pieces of information contained in the phrase of this verse:

³⁹ Muḥammad Sayyid Ṭanṭāwī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Wasīl Li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Dār Nahḍah Miṣr, 1997), 3207

First, the kingdom of Sheba was ruled by a woman, Bilqis bint Sharāḥīl, the daughter of Sharāḥīl, a very honorable king who ruled a vast kingdom. In terms of language, the use of the word (إن) in the phrase (إِنِّي وَجَدْتُ امْرَأَةً تَمْلِكُهُمْ) shows how important the news conveyed by Hoopoe was because, among the Children of Israel, it was not common for a woman to become king. Likewise, mentioning the word *imra'ah* as an indefinite noun shows Hoopoe's admiration because, among the Bani Israel, it is not unusual for a woman to be king in a people. Therefore, the Qur'an states (إِنِّي وَجَدْتُ امْرَأَةً تَمْلِكُهُمْ) and not (وَجَدْتُهُمْ تَمْلِكُهُمْ امْرَأَةً).⁴⁰ The use of the verb in present continuous tense in that phrase (تَمْلِكُهُمْ) also describes the strange phenomenon that there is a woman who rules their kingdom. Ash-Shabuni said that one of the reasons that Hoopoe was amazed at the land of Sheba was because this kingdom was led by a female ruler, something that was unusual at that time.

“Surely I have found a woman who rules over them. This means that one of the oddities (unusual) of what I have seen is that a woman—named Bilqis—became their queen, and they were obliged to obey her.”⁴¹

Second, she was blessed with abundant wealth, an honorable position as king, and war equipment that could only be found in great kingdoms. The phrase (وَأَوْتِيَتْ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ) shows that Bilqis ruled a wealthy country, had fertile land and abundant water so that his people lived prosperously. Some of Sheba's wealth is inherited from previous kings, some profit from the hard work of Queen Bilqis, and some result from the intelligence and wisdom that Allah bestowed on the queen.⁴²

Third, she had a magnificent throne encrusted with gold, pearls, and precious stones in

a large and magnificent palace.⁴³ The phrase (وَلَهَا عَرْشٌ عَظِيمٌ) shows that queen Bilqis has a great throne. The majesty of the Bilqis throne is evident from the gold decorations, gems, and pearls, which add to its splendor and beauty.⁴⁴ For a king at that time, the throne symbolized the greatness of the kingdom. The more magnificent a king's throne, the bigger and broader the kingdom.⁴⁵

Image of Queen Bilqis' Religious Beliefs

After describing the three positive images of Queen Bilqis, the Qur'an then describes the negative and positive images related to the pagan beliefs held by the ruler of the land of Sheba and its people. The negative image is shown in Hoopoe's statement reporting about Queen Bilqis' religion. Phrase (وَجَدْتُهَا وَقَوْمَهَا يَسْجُدُونَ لِلشَّمْسِ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ) shows that Bilqis and people still adhere to pagan beliefs, namely worshiping the sun. To increase attention to this news, Hoopoe repeats the verb (وَجَدْتُهَا) as a form of denial of the beliefs of those who want to prostrate themselves to the sun. According to Al-Biqā'ī, this pagan belief is a form of backwardness in the minds of Sheba's people, where they are advanced in physical civilization but suffer from backwardness in metaphysical beliefs. This fact shows a disparity in human reason in reaching metaphysical truth because metaphysical beliefs result from the work of pure human reason. In contrast, empirical evidence does not help to reach the truth within certain limits. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the possessors of advanced minds in physical civilization are lost in metaphysical beliefs.⁴⁶

Bilqis actually accepted the truth of Prophet Sulaiman's monotheistic preaching. However, her position as a powerful king and the pagan beliefs ingrained in people's traditions

⁴⁰ Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir ibn 'Ashūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa al-Tanwīr*, vol. 19 (Tunisia: al-Dār al-Tūnisīyyah li al-Nashr, 1984), 252

⁴¹ Muḥammad 'Alī Al-Ṣabūnī, *Ṣafwah Al-Taḥāsīr*, vol. 2 (Cairo: Dār al-Ṣabūnī, 1997), 373

⁴² Ibn 'Ashūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa al-Tanwīr*, 252

⁴³ Aḥmad ibn Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī, *Tafsīr Al-Marāghī*, vol. 19 (Shirkah Maktabah wa Maṭba'ah Muṣṭafā al-Bāb al-Ḥalabī wa Awlādūh, 1946), 132

⁴⁴ Al-Ṣabūnī, *Ṣafwah Al-Taḥāsīr*, 373

⁴⁵ Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha'rawī, *Tafsīr Al-Sha'rawī*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Maṭābi' Akhbār al-Yawm, 1997), 6729

⁴⁶ Ibn 'Ashūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa al-Tanwīr*, 253

meant that Bilqis did not immediately accept the truth of Prophet Sulaiman's monotheistic preaching. The phrase (وَصَدَّهَا مَا كَانَتْ تَعْبُدُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ) shows the factors that prevented Bilqis from surrendering and declaring her conversion to Islam before meeting Sulaiman in person. Pagan beliefs that believe in the Sun God have prevented from worshiping Allah Almighty and delayed her decision to convert to Islam immediately. This verse phrase wants to show that Bilqis' reluctance to accept Sulaiman's preaching was caused by the religion she had adhered to for an extended period of time. This condition prevented her from demonstrating her Islam in front of Sulaiman immediately.⁴⁷

Therefore, Bilqis did not immediately declare her Islam when she was shown Sulaiman's first miracle, which was shown to her. When Sulaiman successfully moved Bilqis' throne from the kingdom of Sheba in a short time, even though Sulaiman's kingdom and the land of Sheba were hundreds of thousands of miles away, Bilqis did not immediately declare his Islam. When asked whether the throne shown by Sulaiman was hers, Bilqis gave a diplomatic answer that it seemed like the throne was his throne. However, after she was shown the second miracle, the miracle of Sulaiman's palace, the floor made of transparent glass and water flowing in a pool below, Bilqis only realized the truth of Prophet Sulaiman's preaching. She also realized that the religion she and her people had followed was wrong. So she admitted that she had wronged herself for following the error of worshipping the sun.⁴⁸

This critical lesson from Queen Bilqis, even though she has a high position and power, in addition to the straightness of nature and intelligent intelligence that Allah has given her, does not prevent her from considering the evidence of Sulaiman's sincerity in calling for a monotheistic religion, and realizing the falsity of the pagan religion that she has believed in all this time. The phrase (وَأَسْلَمْتُ مَعَ سُلَيْمَانَ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ) shows that Bilqis only gave herself Allah said: And I submitted to Sulaiman. She did not say, "I submit to Sulaiman" because she wanted to show her prestige in front of Sulaiman, and as if to give the message: "Do not think that I converted to Islam because of you, but I converted to Islam with you. So you and I are the same; neither is superior to the other because we are servants of God."⁴⁹

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Image of Queen Bilqis' Leadership

Apart from the negative image of her religious beliefs, Queen Bilqis is depicted as having a positive image regarding her leadership in ruling the kingdom of Sheba. From the description of verses 20-44 of Surah an-Naml, there is hardly a single verse that displays a negative image of Queen Bilqis regarding her leadership characteristics. Gambaran positif ini seperti intrllignt woman leader, A Wise and Peace-loving Leader, and Democratic Women Leaders will be featured in the following description:

Intelligent Woman Leader

Bilqis's intelligence is reflected in the mention of Sulaiman's letter, which was sent to him as "The Noble Letter" (كِتَابٌ كَرِيمٌ). There are three possibilities for why Bilqis came to such a conclusion: First, she had heard information about Sulaiman and the greatness of his kingdom. Second, because the letter was written on fine paper, using beautiful handwriting and a high language and literary style. Third, the glory of a letter is also marked by the presence of an official seal on the letter, which indicates that the letter can only be seen by the person to whom it is addressed and keeps it secret from anyone not addressed by the author. Conclusions like this can only be drawn by educated people, who can differentiate between important and unimportant letters so that they can be responded to immediately.⁵⁰

Bilqis' intelligence is also reflected in her words to her advisors (قَالَتْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ), showing the

⁴⁷ Al-Marāghī, *Tafsīr Al-Marāghī*, 144

⁴⁸ Ibn 'Ashūr, *Al-Tahrīr Wa al-Tanwīr*, 275

⁴⁹ Al-Sha'rawī, *Tafsīr Al-Sha'rawī*, 6751

⁵⁰ Ibid, 6735

Queen's respect for essential figures in her government. Therefore, they happily advise her and show their queen the best decisions. With this expression, Queen Bilqis also wanted to test the steadfastness and readiness of her government officials to face the enemy and their willingness to follow all her decisions. She seemed to realize that if the courtiers and the people were unwilling to sacrifice their lives, property, and blood for the country, she would not have the strength to fight the enemy. If the Queen did not want to hear their aspirations and impose her opinion, they would be reluctant to fight to defend their country. Willingness to listen to advisors' aspirations and the people's voices will be a way to get their full support. The ability to read psychological situations like this can only be done by people with intellectual intelligence and practical communication skills.⁵¹

The queen's advisors did not hesitate to convey their views during the consultation. They preferred war to handing over power to Sulaiman. The phrase (قَالُوا نَحْنُ أَوْلُو قُوَّةٍ وَأَوْلُو بَأْسٍ شَدِيدٍ) indicates readiness to fight to defend the Queen and indicates that they tend to choose to defend themselves with weapons, for they PBUH that the contents of Sulaiman's letter might lead to that conclusion. However, they left the final decision to the queen. The phrase (وَالأَمْرُ إِلَيْكَ فَانظُرِي مَاذَا تَأْمُرِينَ) shows their full trust in the Queen, because they believe in the genius of her mind. They believed that their queen would consider the best decision for her people. They would submit and obey the queen's orders if she wanted war or otherwise chose to make peace with Sulaiman.⁵²

Queen Bilqis' intelligence was also evident in her astuteness in seeing the situation. After the advisors handed over the decisions, she began to use knowledge and experience against the kings. She believed that if Sulaiman were king, he would accept our gifts. Nevertheless, he would refuse all

our tribute if he were a prophet. Therefore, Bilqis decided to send gifts to Sulaiman, of course, gifts befitting his position as king, to prove to him that she was wealthy and had abundant possessions.⁵³

Phrase (وَإِنِّي مُرْسِلَةٌ إِلَيْهِمْ بِهَدِيَّةٍ فَنَاظِرَةٌ بِمَ يَرْجِعُ) (المرسلون) shows the decision she chose, namely testing Sulaiman with luxurious gifts to prove whether he was a king or a prophet. This decision proves Queen Bilqis's intelligence because it allowed her to save her people from confrontation and war.⁵⁴ The queen's intelligence was commented on by Qatada when he said: "How wise she is in Islam and its polytheism!! She knows that giving gifts can soften people's hearts." Meanwhile, Ibn Abbās also commented: "He said to his people: "If he accepts the gift, then he is a king who wants the world, so fight him, and if he refuses the gift, then he is an honest prophet, so follow him."⁵⁵

Queen Bilqis' intelligence was also reflected in her diplomatic statements when she declared Islam. When Bilqis was invited to enter the palace, the floor of which was made of transparent glass, and underneath a pool with flowing water, Bilqis lifted the bottom of her dress so that it would not get wet until her two calves were visible. At that time, Sulaiman explained that the palace floor was made of transparent glass, which revealed everything behind the floor. All this shows the architectural and technological prowess that characterized Sulaiman's palace at that time, which was unknown in Yemen despite the civilization and splendor of its buildings.

In her admiration for the splendor of Sulaiman's palace, Queen Bilqis stated, "O my Lord, indeed I have done wrong to myself. I surrender with Sulaiman to Allah, the Lord of the worlds." Bilqis finally admitted that Sulaiman was honest in his preaching and was a prophet sent by the God of the Universe. Bilqis also realized that the religion she embraced and her people

⁵¹ Al-Marāghī, *Tafsīr Al-Marāghī*, 136-137

⁵² Ibn 'Ashūr, *Al-Tahrīr Wa al-Tanwīr*, 255

⁵³ Al-Marāghī, *Tafsīr Al-Marāghī*, 136-137

⁵⁴ Al-Sha'rawī, *Tafsīr Al-Sha'rawī*, 6741

⁵⁵ Al-Şabūnī, *Şafwah Al-Tafsīr*, 375

embraced was wrong. Therefore, she confessed that she had wronged herself by following the heresy of worshipping the sun.⁵⁶ The phrase (وَأَسْلَمْتُ (مَعَ سُلَيْمَانَ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ) shows that his submission is only to Allah, the Lord sent Sulaiman, not to Sulaiman himself. It was as if she wanted to say to Sulaiman: "Do not think that I converted to Islam because of you, but I converted to Islam with you. So you and I are equal, and none of us is superior to the other because we are servants of God."⁵⁷

A Wise and Peace-loving Leader

Besides being portrayed as an intelligent leader, Bilqis is also a peace-loving queen. Her tendency towards peace can be seen in his reluctance to deploy his troops to confront Sulaiman to achieve good for both parties. She preferred negotiating with Prophet Sulaiman by sending luxurious gifts rather than deploying his troops to battle against Prophet Sulaiman. Rejection of the choice of war against Prophet Sulaiman was not without reason. Her experience as queen made her understand that war would only cause damage to both parties. Even though the palace officials were more inclined to choose armed confrontation, Bilqis still chose the path of peace. She told her advisors: "I see that war will only bring destruction and destruction, and its rulers will be humiliated and humiliated, and we must make peace with Sulaiman and send him gifts and then see how he responds. Perhaps he will accept gifts from us and desist from attacking us, or he will impose a tax on us which we must pay him every year and which we are obliged to do for him, and thus he will abandon our battles and wars."⁵⁸

In the phrase (قَالَتْ إِنَّ الْمُلُوكَ), the Qur'an shows how clever and genius this queen was, who preferred peace to war and prioritized gentleness rather than harshness. Queen Bilqis understands very well, based on historical evidence and the experience of kings, that if they conquer another

kingdom, they will change the government system to ensure that their interests are met by overthrowing the ruler of the conquered country and forcing the people to submit and obey the new ruler. The first action they took was to throw out those previously in power because they could pose a danger because their power had been replaced by a new ruler. Then, they will also change the laws and government systems previously adopted by the country. If they do all this by force, then this coercion will not be separated from acts of destruction, detention, and confiscation of property. If that happens, it will cause more significant damage.⁵⁹

By saying (وَكذلك يُفْعَلُونَ), queen Bilqis wanted to show her advisors that peace was more beneficial than war and that being lenient with Sulaiman was better than confrontation and going toe to toe with weapons.⁶⁰ When Bilqis sensed that they were inclined to fight, she began to show them the right choice. Her palace advisors did not seem to know Suleiman's strength and great position because whoever could subdue the bird to his will would not be easy to fight and defeat. Bilqis wanted to convey to advisors that when kings enter a city, they destroy it by destroying its buildings, damaging its property, humiliating its inhabitants by being captured and expelled, or cruelly killed, to show the King's victory and create fear in their hearts.⁶¹

Democratic Women Leaders

Queen Bilqis' democratic attitude was visible when she received a letter from Sulaiman. As a queen, she can make her own decisions without consulting her servants. Phrase (قَالَتْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ إِنِّي أُلْقِيَ إِلَيَّ كِتَابٌ كَرِيمٌ) shows that after receiving the letter, she immediately summoned the palace advisors and conveyed the letter's contents. She gathered the nobles of his country and asked for opinions and responses to the letter received from Sulaiman. This kind of consultation is a tradition of government in democratic countries.⁶² In the

⁵⁶ Ibn 'Ashūr, *Al-Tahrīr Wa al-Tanwīr*, 275

⁵⁷ Al-Sha'rawī, *Tafsīr Al-Sha'rawī*, 6751

⁵⁸ Al-Marāghī, *Tafsīr Al-Marāghī*, 136

⁵⁹ Ibn 'Ashūr, *Al-Tahrīr Wa al-Tanwīr*.275

⁶⁰ Ṭanṭāwī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Wasīṭ Li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, 3212

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Al-Marāghī, *Tafsīr Al-Marāghī*, 137

phrase (أَفْتُونِي فِي أَمْرِي), Bilqis asks the advisor for a fatwa and calls Sulaiman's threat his personal matter. Sulaiman's threat was a threat to her country, not just to herself. This mention shows that a queen symbolizes the country; if Sulaiman attacks her, her kingdom will be humiliated first, and her prestige will be lowered in front of her people.

The phrase (مَا كُنْتُ قَاطِعَةً أَمْرًا حَتَّى تَشْهَدُونِ) shows Bilqis' attitude of not wanting to decide on a matter unless it has gone through a process of consultation or deliberation with the palace officials. This attitude shows that the country he leads adheres to the principle of consultation, regardless of ownership, control, and hegemony.⁶³ The statement that I will not decide on a matter until you testify proves Bilqis' political expertise and the superiority of her intellect. She can delegate problems to state officials and is open to accepting advice and suggestions from the nation's elite. Bilqis wants to teach them that the tradition of consultation and asking for opinions underlies her government. This attitude allows royal figures to accept their decisions gracefully and increases the people's trust in their leaders.⁶⁴

Pros and Cons of Muslim Scholars on Bilqis' Leadership Representation Muslim Scholars' Rejection to Bilqis' Leadership

Even though the Quran has described Bilqis' leadership qualities positively, it turns out that not all Muslim scholars accept women's leadership in the public sphere. Interestingly, awareness of the legal implications regarding whether or not women can become leaders has only emerged in works from the medieval and contemporary eras. Abū 'Abd Allah al-Qurṭubī, Abū Ḥayyān al-Adalūsī, Ibn Kathīr, and Sirāj al-Dīn al-Dimashqī from medieval Muslim scholars showed a counter-response to the involvement of women's leadership in the public sphere.

When interpreting the phrase (إِنِّي وَجَدْتُ (أَمْرًا تَمَلِكُهُمْ وَأُوتِيَتْ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَلَهَا عَرْشٌ عَظِيمٌ) al-Qurṭubī (d. 671 AH) in his work *Al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān* actually mentions hadith that contradict the ideology of the Qur'an who is egalitarian by citing a hadith narrated by Al-Bukhari about the misfortune of a people if they hand over their affairs to women.

"Al-Bukhārī narrated the hadith of Ibn 'Abbās that the Prophet PBUH, after receiving news about the Persians who appointed a female queen, the daughter of Khusrau, said: "A nation will not be fortunate who hands over their affairs to women. Qāḍī Abū Bakr ibn al-'Arabi: "This hadith is a text (*nass*) on the matter that women should not be caliphs, and there is no difference of opinion on this matter."⁶⁵

In line with al-Qurṭubī, Abu Ḥayyān al-Adalūsī (d. 745 AH) when interpreting the verse (إِنِّي وَجَدْتُ أَمْرًا تَمَلِكُهُمْ) stated that the phrase (تَمَلِكُهُمْ) does not indicate the ability of women to become queens, because the practice of making women as supreme leaders is part of the practice of the Shebaean people, pagans and infidels. Therefore, he argued that this verse could not be used as evidence about the ability of women to become leaders. He then mentioned a narration in the book *Sahih al-Bukhari*, from the hadith of Ibn 'Abbas, which states that the Prophet PBUH, after hearing the news that the Persians had appointed Princess Khusrau, commented: "A people who hand over their affairs to women will not be lucky."⁶⁶

Meanwhile, Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 H) stated that the history relating to Abū Bakrah's hadith about the misfortune of a people who appointed women as leaders, with the mention of the story of Biqlis in the presence of the Prophet, was weak. He mentioned that there was Isma'il ibn Muslim among the hadith transmitters, whose history was weak. However, he mentioned a narration from

⁶³ Al-Sha'rawī, *Tafsīr Al-Sha'rawī*, 6738

⁶⁴ Ṭanṭāwī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Wasīṭ Li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, 3209

⁶⁵ Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' Li Ahkām al-Qur'an*, 182

⁶⁶ Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalūsī, *Al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ Fī al-Tafsīr*, vol. 6 (Dār al-Fikr, 1420), 64

Sahih al-Bukhari, from the 'Auf hadith from al-Hasan, from Abu Bakrah, that Rasulullah PBUH when news reached him that the Persians had appointed Khusrau's daughter as queen, he said: "A nation will not be lucky who handed over their affairs to women." The mention of Abu Bakrah's hadith to counter the ability of women to become women was also made by Siraj al-Din al-Dimasyqi (d. 775 AH) in his work *al-Lubab fi 'Ulūm al-Kitāb*.

"In a hadith (it is stated): "It is said that one of Bilqis' parents was (from the nation) Jin." It is said that Bilqis and her people were Magi who worshiped the sun. The pronoun in the phrase (تَمَلِكُهُمْ) refers to Sheba; if what is meant is a people, then the meaning is clear; if what is meant is a city, then the meaning is "Dominating its citizens." The Prophet PBUH said: "A people who hand over their affairs to women will not be fortunate."⁶⁷

Rejection of the legal implications of the story of Bilqis for women's leadership was also voiced by modern-contemporary era commentators. Shihāb al-Dīn al-Alūsī, when interpreting Surah an-Naml verse 20, hastily stated:

"In this verse, there is no evidence that shows the ability of women to become kings, and there is no proof (argument) in the practices carried out by disbelievers to (become the basis for) a case like this. In the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, from the hadith of Ibn 'Abbas, the Prophet PBUH, after hearing the news that the Persians had appointed Princess Khusrau, he commented: "A people who hand over their affairs to women will not be fortunate."⁶⁸

In line with al-Alūsī, Ibn Badīs stated that the use of present continuous tense in the phrase (إِنِّي وَجَدْتُ امْرَأَةً تَمَلِكُهُمْ) to show that making women the highest leader of a nation is a phenomenon that deviates from the normality. This deviation from the norm made Hoopoe call the news he conveyed

the most critical information. To strengthen his argument, Ibn Badīs mentioned the report of Abū Bakrah, who stated that a nation would not be fortunate if it handed over its affairs to women. According to him, the Prophet said this hadith when he received news that the Persians had appointed a woman as queen. This hadith emphasizes that women should not be governors, kings, and judges. This authentic hadith text is supported by traditions practiced and adopted by most Islamic leaders. Even though there are weak reports from some ulama who allow women to become leaders, these reports cannot be taken into account and implemented."⁶⁹

Furthermore, Ibn Badīs explained the meaning of the misfortune of a people led by women. Historically, many women have held the reins of leadership as queens and succeeded in bringing their kingdoms to the peak of their glory. So what does "the denial of the fortunate of the people who appointed women as leaders mean?" Ibn Badīs rejected using historical facts to argue for women's leadership ability. According to him, the fortunate stated in the Prophet's hadith is fortunate in the words of the creators of the Sharia, namely the achievement of goodness in this world and the hereafter. The success of a nation does not necessarily indicate God's approval of that nation. So anyone who does not obey Allah's provisions (appointing women as leaders) is not among the fortunate people even though they are in the best condition of their worldly life. Most nations that appoint women as leaders, if any, end in defeat.⁷⁰

Positive Response of Contemporary Muslim Scholars to Bilqis Leadership

The egalitarian ideology of the Qur'an towards women's leadership, as depicted in the story of Bilqis, has not yet appeared in classical and medieval interpretive works. Awareness of gender egalitarianism implied in the story of Bilqis has only emerged in the works of modern scholars

⁶⁷ Sirāj al-Dīn 'Umar ibn 'Alī ibn 'Ādil al-Ḥanbalī al-Dimashqī, *Al-Lubab Fī 'Ulūm al-Kitāb* (Beirut: al-Dimashqī, 1998), 139

⁶⁸ Al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ Al-Ma'Ānī Fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm Wa al-Sab' al-Mathānī*, 189-190

⁶⁹ Ibn Badīs, *Athār Ibn Badīs*, 42

⁷⁰ Ibid.

such as Muḥammad al-Ghazālī and Yūsuf al-Qarḍāwī or Muslim feminists such as Ashgar Ali Engineer and Amina Wadud as well as Modern-Progressive Islamic organizations such as Muhammadiyah, one of The largest Islamic mass organization in Indonesia.

Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1917–1996 AD), a Muslim thinker and activist of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, used the story of Bilqīs to reject the validity of Abu Bakrah's hadith about the misfortune of nations led by women. Al-Ghazālī emphasized that it was impossible for the Prophet Muhammad to convey a law in a hadith that contradicted the revelation revealed to him:

“The Prophet PBUH read surah al-Naml to the people in Mecca, and in this surah, he told them the story of the Queen of Sheba, who led her people to prosperity and security with her wisdom and intelligence. He cannot convey a law in a hadith that contradicts the revelation revealed to him!... All I want is to interpret the hadith widely contained in the works of the Ulama, avoid contradictions between the Qur'an and the hadith narrations, or narrations that are misunderstood, and prevent contradictions between hadith and historical facts.”⁷¹

Meanwhile, Yūsuf al-Qarḍāwī (1926-2022 AD), a scholar and cleric of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood who lived in Qatar, used the story of Bilqīs to support the opinion of women's ability to become leaders in the public sphere—as long as they are not the supreme leader of the country (*imāmah uzumā*). In particular, al-Qarḍāwī uses the story of Bilqīs to emphasize the ability of women to vote and be elected as legislative candidates.

"The Qur'an had told us the story of the Queen of Sheba, who was gifted with an intelligent mind and wisdom (wisdom), in her attitude towards Sulaiman since receiving the letter delivered by Hoopoe, and how she understood

the seriousness and commitment of Sulaiman's short letter, how she gathered all the leaders of her people before she decided on the steps to be taken, and how the leaders of the strong people left the decision to him, to act according to her wisdom, and how she acted after that with great intelligence and confidence, with Prophet Sulaiman, until her affairs ended by declaring her *Islam*. The disclosure of this story in the Qur'an is not without purpose but to show that women sometimes have sharp vision, ideas, and good management skills in political and governmental affairs, something that many men cannot do.”⁷²

Muslim feminists also voice the use of Bilqīs' story to defend women's rights to become leaders. Asghar Ali Engineer (1939-2013 AD) used the story of Bilqīs to become head of state or president.

“In the Qur'an, there is no rejection of the reign of the Queen of Sheba, who made South Yemen her territory. She will override her male advisors and act according to her own wishes. When her kingdom was about to be attacked by Sulaiman's troops, she consulted with them....So, it is quite clear from the above verses of the Qur'an that the Queen of Sheba was the rightful ruler; she is also shown to be very wise. She overrode her male advisors and made her own political decisions. Had Allah disapproved of a woman as head of state, or if a woman's rule had been disastrous, the Qur'an would have portrayed the Queen of Sheba in a bad light and would have shown her to be inferior to her male advisors. Nevertheless, it is quite the opposite.”⁷³

Amina Wadud, in the Qur'an and Woman: Reading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective, mentions the story of Bilqīs as one of

⁷¹ Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyah Bayn Ahl al-Fiqh Wa Ahl al-Hadīth*, 58

⁷² Al-Qarḍāwī, *Min Fiqh Al-Dawlah Fī al-Islām*, 169

⁷³ Engineer, *The Rights of Women in Islam*, 90-98

three distinctive female characters in the Qur'an: Mother Musa, Maryam, and Bilqis Queen of Sheba. When explaining Bilqis' character, Wadud revealed:

“Finally, I will discuss Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba. Even though she ruled over a nation, most Muslims hold leadership as improper for a woman. The Qur'an uses no terms that imply that the position of the ruler is inappropriate for a woman. On the contrary, the Qur'anic story of Bilqis celebrates both her political and religious practices. Although the verse does point out (perhaps as peculiar) that she was 'a woman' ruling (27:23), this is nothing more than a statement quoted from one who had observed her. Beyond identifying her as a woman, no distinction, restriction, addition, limitation, or specification of her as a woman who leads is ever mentioned.”⁷⁴

Finally, Muhammadiyah, one of the most prominent Islamic organizations in Indonesia, through the Council of Religious Opinion and Tajdid, one of the institutions tasked with giving religious fatwas, used Bilqis' story as an argument for the ability of women to become leaders at any level. Apart from arguing using QS 9:71 and limiting the applicability of Abu Bakrah's hadith to special events, the Tarjih Council also used the story of Bilqis to prove the suitability of women to become leaders.

“The verses of the Qur'an praise the leadership of Queen Bilqis, who led Yemen during the time of Prophet Sulaiman. In surah 27 verse 32, it is stated that Queen Bilqis leads her people by prioritizing deliberation. This can be understood as a positive narrative in the Qur'an regarding Bilqis' leadership and the leadership potential of women in general. Bilqis's ability to lead the people, her decision to diplomacy with King Sulaiman, and her spiritual intelligence when she later converted to Islam show that Bilqis is the prototype of a

woman with the qualifications and skills to be a leader... How can this hadith (It is unfortunate for a nation that has women as leaders) be understood that all supreme rulers who are women are bound to fail, while the Qur'an tells how wise Queen Sheba was who led the country of Yemen as read in Surah an-Naml (27): 44?”⁷⁵

Knowledge-Power Relations in the Discourse on Women's Leadership

The ideology of gender egalitarianism implicit in the representation of the story of Bilqis in the Qur'an does not appear to have developed in the classical to medieval era interpretive literature. Muslim scholars who forbade women's leadership in the classical, medieval, and contemporary eras seemed to be trying to regulate, control, and limit the circulation of discourse that developed only discourse that rejected women's leadership. Even though there are minority voices that allow women's leadership in the public sphere, these voices are difficult to develop because there are efforts to eliminate the views of these minorities through some exclusion and marginalization strategies. Efforts to fight against this dominant discourse only emerged in the contemporary era when gender equality was widely advocated by Muslim feminists.

The exclusion strategy is carried out by creating categories of right and wrong and creating taboos. The categorization of right and wrong is first of all based on the statement of the Qur'an 4:34, which states that "a man (husband) is the leader of a woman (wife)." Although this verse speaks in the context of leadership in the family, scholars such as Ibn Badis oppose women's leadership arguing that women do not have the right to be leaders in household leadership alone, let alone in the affairs of the much larger state.

"This verse makes men the female leaders in a family, so it is not legal for women to be

⁷⁴ Wadud, *Quran and Woman: Reading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, 40

⁷⁵ Majelis Tajdid dan Tarjih PP Muhammadiyah, "Statement on the permissibility of women being leaders,"

MTT, October 4, 2018, <https://tarjih.or.id/fatwa-tentang-kebolehan-wanita-menjadi-pemimpin/>.

male leaders in institutions that are much larger than the family – much more important – especially if the leadership is related to the leadership of the state (President) or the council. people's representatives and ministries."⁷⁶

The categorization of right and wrong is also seen in Abu Bakrah's hadith, which states that a nation with women as leaders will not be fortunate. Al-Qurtūbī, in his interpretation, stated that this hadith is a text (definite provision) regarding the prohibition of women being caliphs.⁷⁷ Ibn Badis even imposed this prohibition on all levels of women's leadership in the public sphere. According to him, this hadith implies that women should not be governors, kings, or judges. These authentic hadith texts are supported by traditions practiced and adopted by most Islamic leaders. Although there are weak reports from some scholars that cannot be considered and implemented."⁷⁸

The prohibition of women becoming leaders is concluded from negating the fortunate of a nation with women as leaders. Even though historically, many female leaders have been successful in leading their nation, this fact does not negate this prohibition. Because negated fortune is conveyed through the words of the Sharia's creator, negated fortune is the fortune in this world and the hereafter. The success of a nation does not indicate that the nation received a fortune in the form of Allah's blessing.”

"...but this fact does not refute our argument because the fortune negated is the luck in the tongue of the Sharia creator, namely the achievement of goodness in this world and the hereafter. The success of a nation does not necessarily indicate Allah's approval. So, whoever disobeys Allah is not considered a fortunate person even though he/she is in the best condition of his/her worldly life. Most

nations that appoint women as leaders will usually end in destruction if they encounter a nation like this."⁷⁹

Efforts to exclude women from the realm of public leadership are also carried out by creating taboos that women cannot violate. There are at least four forms of taboos that will be violated if women become leaders in the public sphere, either as top leaders or leaders at lower levels. **First**, being a leader diverts women from their primary task, namely looking after the family. **Second**, being a leader requires that mixing between women and men is also prohibited in Islam, especially being alone with non-mahram men. **Third**, being a leader forces women to show body parts other than their faces and palms to strangers. **Fourth**, becoming a leader requires women to travel abroad without being accompanied by a mahram. These four taboos, which are claimed to be based on passages from the Qur'an and the Hadith of the Prophet, make it difficult - even impossible - for women to carry out their duties as public leaders at any level. When explaining the law on women becoming judges, al-Qurtūbī stated:

“...Women should not appear in the public space of the court, and mix with men, and negotiate with them face to face, because if she is a girl, it is unlawful for other people to see her and talk to her. And if you are married, you cannot gather with him. Men are in a gathering where they are crowded together and looking at each other. And it is unfortunate who imagines this and believes in it.”⁸⁰

Efforts to exclude women from public leadership are also carried out by stereotyping women as being gentle, emotional, and lacking in reason and religion. These innate characteristics can influence the credibility of important decisions that require a leader's assertiveness and

⁷⁶ Ibnu Badīs, *Athār ibn Badīs*, 43

⁷⁷ Al-Qurtūbī, *Al-Jāmi' Li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 183

⁷⁸ Ibn Badīs, *Athār Ibn Badīs*, 43

⁷⁹ Ibid, 44

⁸⁰ Al-Qurtūbī, *Al-Jāmi' Li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 183

intelligence. These weaknesses prevented women from becoming caliphs in the early Islamic generation (*al-Salaf al-Salih*). Ibn Badis (d. 1940 AD) mentioned this argument in his work *Āthār Ibn Badīs* as follows:

"Women are not fit to be leaders in terms of psychological character; women are gifted with qualities of gentleness and compassion which weaken the firmness and steadiness needed for a leader...The consensus of Salaf Ulemas that prohibits women from becoming caliphs is clear evidence of the unfitness of women to occupy that position because of the lack of intelligence and experience in public life and because of the weakness, emotional domination, and lack of management, which have been the innate characteristics of women from birth."⁸¹

In line with Ibn Badīs, al-Qurṭubī (d. 606 H) explained the weaknesses of women:

"The reason women lack is firmness in deciding cases, the ability to ascertain the truth of the case, and the ability to reach the truth with peak perfection. Women, in this matter, are usually different from men. "The lack of religion referred to here is a deficiency in worship, and women's shortcomings, in this case, are not to criticize them, but the Prophet PBUH only explains their shortcomings compared to men, where women are unable to achieve the perfection of men."⁸²

Conclusion

From the previous explanation, it can be concluded that the Qur'an adheres to the ideology of gender egalitarianism in public leadership. The egalitarianism of the Qur'an is revealed by the representational codes used by the Qur'an to describe the leadership of Queen Bilqis with a positive image. If there was a negative image of Queen Bilqis' pagan beliefs at the beginning of this story, then this image was immediately rehabilitated at the end with Bilqis' statement to

accept Sulaiman's monotheistic religion and abandon pagan beliefs. However, Muslim scholars responded differently to the positive image of Queen Bilqis. Some Muslim scholars refuse to use this positive image as an argument for women's suitability to become leaders. The rejection of Ratu Bilqis' agency as a female figure only appears in interpretive works from the medieval to the modern era.

Meanwhile, awareness of the gender-egalitarian ideology of the Qur'an, which is reflected in the story of Bilqis, has only emerged in modern-era *tafsir* works. Finally, the gender-egalitarian ideology of the Qur'an has become challenging to develop in both the medieval and modern eras because of efforts to regulate, limit, and negate discourses that are not in line with the mainstream views of Muslim scholars, which prohibit women from becoming leaders. Efforts to limit the discourse on women's leadership are carried out through exclusionary strategies by creating categories of right and wrong and taboos, as well as marginalization strategies by stereotyping women as being weak, emotional, lacking in intelligence, and lacking in religion.

In this study, there may be some limitations, *first*, this study is limited to the available works of interpretation and interpretation, which may not cover the entire spectrum of views of scholars from various traditions and periods. *Second*, this research may not fully cover the social and political contexts that affect the interpretation and acceptance of women's leadership discourse in various Islamic societies. *Third*, the study uses a feminist approach that may not fully cover all other critical approaches in analyzing Qur'anic texts.

For subsequent research, it is recommended to expand the scope of the literature by including a variety of interpretive works from different traditions as well as considering a broader social and political context. Subsequent research could

⁸¹ Ibn Badīs, *Āthār Ibn Badīs*, 44

⁸² Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' Li Ahkām al-Qur'an*, 269

also explore the practical impact of gender equality ideology in public leadership and how marginalization strategies can be addressed to promote more effective gender equality.

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