

Gender Education Values in the Story of Queen Bilqis in QS. Al-Naml/27: 32-34: A Study of Fatimah Mernissi's Thoughts

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Abstract:

Gender inequality in Indonesia is reflected in the 2024 data of the National Commission on Violence against Women (Komnas Perempuan), which indicate persistently high levels of violence against women resulting from entrenched patriarchal culture and misinterpretations of religious teachings. This study aims to examine the values of gender education embedded in the story of Queen Balqis in QS. al-Naml/27: 32-34 through the perspective of Fatimah Mernissi's thought. The research employs a library research method with an analytical approach to various written sources, including books, academic journals, and classical Qur'anic exegesis. The findings reveal that, according to Fatimah Mernissi, gender inequality does not originate from divine revelation but rather from social constructions and gender-biased interpretations. Furthermore, the story of Queen Balqis portrays female leadership characterized by intelligence, wisdom, and a strong emphasis on consultation in responding to political challenges. Therefore, based on Fatimah Mernissi's perspective, the narrative of Queen Balqis contains significant values of gender education, including the legitimacy of women's leadership, the principles of consultation and non-authoritarian leadership, an orientation toward peace and humanitarian values, as well as intellectual acuity and wisdom in decision-making.

Keywords: *QS al-Naml/27: 32-34; Gender Education Values, Queen Balqis, Fatimah Mernissi.*

Abstrak:

Ketimpangan gender di Indonesia tercermin dalam data Komnas Perempuan 2024 yang menunjukkan masih tingginya kekerasan terhadap perempuan akibat budaya patriarki dan misinterpretasi ajaran agama. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji nilai-nilai pendidikan gender dari kisah Ratu Balqis dalam QS al-Naml/27: 32-34 berdasarkan pemikiran Fatimah Mernissi. Metode penelitian menggunakan *library research* dengan pendekatan analisis terhadap berbagai sumber tertulis seperti buku, jurnal ilmiah, dan kitab tafsir. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa menurut pemikiran Fatimah Mernissi ketimpangan gender bukan berasal dari wahyu, tetapi dari konstruksi sosial dan tafsir bias gender. Lebih lanjut, kisah Ratu Balqis menampilkan kepemimpinan perempuan yang cerdas, bijaksana, dan mengutamakan musyawarah dalam menghadapi

tantangan politik. Dengan demikian, berdasarkan pemikiran Fatimah Mernissi, kisah Ratu Balqis memuat nilai-nilai pendidikan gender yang signifikan, antara lain legitimasi kepemimpinan perempuan, prinsip musyawarah dan kepemimpinan non-otoriter, orientasi pada perdamaian dan kemanusiaan, serta kecerdasan dan kebijaksanaan dalam pengambilan keputusan.

Kata Kunci: QS. al-Naml/27: 32-34; Nilai Pendidikan Gender; Ratu Balqis; Fatimah Mernissi.

INTRODUCTION

The discourse about gender inequality is still seen as a current issue. This is because in many aspects of life and society, gender bias is still evident (Luqman Hakim, 2023). The problems regarding gender inequality that have arisen so far are caused by misinterpretations of religious teachings and the patriarchal culture that exists in society, preventing women from having equal space in public areas. Patriarchal culture continues to be a strong and complex social phenomenon in Indonesia (Shihab Wicaksono Ardhi, 2025). According to the 2024 report from the National Commission on Violence Against Women, the level of violence against women is still showing worrying numbers, with an increasing trend in several areas such as cyber-based violence, domestic violence (KDRT), and discrimination in workplaces and education (Komnas Perempuan, 2024).

The empirical data shows that the issue of patriarchy is not only normative in texts, but also has a direct impact on the lives of Indonesian women. Therefore, discussions and research on this topic should be conducted to provide a clear picture of gender equality and the elimination of all forms of discriminatory actions against women (Aksin Wijaya, 2020). The value of equality between men and women, as well as the rejection of all forms of differentiation or discriminatory treatment among humans (Fachmi Farhan and Moh. Erihadiana, 2021), is also reflected in QS. Al-Hujurat/49:13.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۚ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَىٰكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

Translate: 'O mankind, indeed We have created you from a male and a female. Then, We made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. Indeed, the most honorable of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous. Indeed, Allah is All-Knowing and All-Aware.'

The verse implies that all humans have equal standing, without distinctions based on ethnicity, nationality, or social background. The Qur'an also presents the concept of gender justice through stories of female figures, one of which is by immortalizing a female figure as a role model (Misbahul Ramadhani et al., 2024). That figure is Queen Balqis, who was the queen ruling the people of Saba'. She is also known as Malikatus Saba' (Queen of Saba', The Queen of Sheba). Her reign coincided with that of Prophet Solomon (as). She was the daughter of Shurahil and also descended from Ya'rub bin Qahtan. According to history, Saba' was the capital of the Sabaean kingdom or Sabaiyah. This kingdom was founded by Saba' bin Yashjub bin Ya'rub bin Qahtan, who became the ancestors of the people of Yemen around 955 BCE (Elwi Yandri, 2018). In the Qur'an, Queen Balqis receives

praise from Allah for her greatness in leading her nation.

Although the Qur'an has hinted at gender equality, this does not automatically mean that all of its provisions, especially those related to women, have been fully understood (Al-Hidayati et al., 2022). Some Muslims still perceive women as a second-class group, and various views that legitimize the subordinate position of women have developed in religious discourse and later influenced Islamic thought, whether in the fields of tafsir, theology, Sufism, understanding of hadith, or fiqh (Fajrul Islam Ats-Tsauri, 2020). This situation shows that Muslims have not fully been able to eliminate long-standing patriarchal biases, which continue to persist in various regions where Islam has developed up to the present day. This issue has received both appreciative and critical responses from different circles (Lina Nur Anisa, 2024), including feminist groups, both secular and Muslim feminists. Muslim feminist interpreters like Fatimah Mernissi criticize the centrality and dominance of men in interpreting the Qur'an, which has created a sense of women's inferiority and promoted men's superiority (Djamali Mokoginta, 2025). As far as the research goes, studies related to the story of Queen Balqis as a figure of female leadership and evidence of gender equality have been widely conducted. In general, previous studies can be divided into five trends. First, Elwi Yandri, *The Dimensions of Islamic Education in Surah Al-Naml Verses 15-44 (Analysis of the Story of Prophet Solomon and Queen Balqis)*, this article discusses the goals of Islamic education, educator competencies, and student qualifications based on the story of Queen Balqis in Surah Al-Naml verses 15-44 (Elwi Yandri, 2018).

Secondly, Devi Suraya Az-Zahra and others, *Women's Leadership in Surah An-Naml Verses 23-44 (A Study of Ma'na Cum Maghza)*, this article discusses women's leadership in Surah An-Naml verses 23-44, which includes the story between Prophet Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. This story is suggested to provide an ideal depiction of women's leadership (Devi Suraya Az-Zahra et al., 2025). *Third*, Eko Setiawan, *Study of Fatima Mernissi's Thoughts on Gender Equality and Discrimination against Women in the Political Arena*, this article discusses Fatimah Mernissi's ideas by critiquing misogynistic hadiths and gender-biased interpretations of Quranic verses (Eko Setiawan, 2019). *Fourth*, Sari Rahmatunnur et al., *Fatima Mernissi's Views on Women's Leadership in the Public Sphere from the Perspective of Existentialist Feminist Theory*, this article discusses women's leadership according to Fatima Mernissi's views based on existentialist feminist theory, which advocates for women's rights in both domestic and public spheres (Sari Rahmatunnur, 2023). From this research, no one has specifically studied the gender education values from the story of Queen Balqis found in QS. Al-Naml/ 27: 32-34 by examining Fatima Mernissi's thoughts.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a library research method, which is an approach that focuses on exploring and analyzing various written sources such as books, scientific journals, tafsir texts, and other relevant data sources (Salim et al., 2012).

The study aims to examine QS. al-Naml/27:32-34 by presenting the story of Queen Balqis not just as a justification for female leadership, but also as sources of gender education values through Fatimah Mernissi's framework of thought.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Biography of Fatimah Mernissi

Fatima Mernissi was a feminist figure and a Sociology professor at Mohammed V University in Rabat. She was born on September 27, 1940, in the Harem district of the city of Fez in Northern Morocco and passed away in Rabat on November 30, 2015. She came from a middle-class family background and was part of the first generation of Moroccan women to pursue higher education. Fatima Mernissi was born in a Harem environment, so she experienced two different family cultures: the environment of her father's family in the city of Fez, symbolized by tall walls, and also the culture of her mother's family, which was far from the city, a Harem surrounded by vast gardens (Muh. Fadhlulloh Mubarak et al., 2022).

Fatimah Mernissi was born at a time when the nationalist rulers in Morocco wanted equal education for boys and girls, promising to abolish polygamy and ensure equality between men and women. Mernissi gained a lot of valuable experience about human equality and the meaning of harmony while being raised by her grandmother, Lalla Yasmina. Her grandmother always explained and told her stories about the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and Islamic teachings full of compassion for people. Besides her grandmother, her mother also played an important role in shaping Fatimah Mernissi as an adult. Her mother believed that men and women have the same potential and status. So, being inferior on one side and superior on the other is unacceptable and goes against Islam (Mayadina Rohmi Mushfirioh et al., 2019).

Fatima Mernissi continued her intellectual journey at Mohammed V University in Rabat, majoring in political science, which she completed in 1965. Her thoughts on challenging the patriarchal system seemed to be influenced by the culture she encountered while studying in France. Mernissi greatly appreciated the concepts of individualism, liberalism, and personal freedom that developed in the West. Fatima Mernissi earned her doctorate in sociology from Brandeis University. In 1974, she returned to Morocco and became a lecturer in the sociology department at Mohammed V University. She was also a regular participant in various international conferences and seminars, and served as a visiting professor at the University of California and Harvard University. Actively, she also worked as a consultant for United Nations agencies (Fahrudin and Ansari, 2019).

Mernissi's thinking has made many contributions to the world of Islamic thought related to women. She produced many phenomenal works that are still very relevant today. Here are some of her works: *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry*, which was translated into Indonesian as *Perempuan dalam Islam*; *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*, published by Indiana University Press Bloomington and Indianapolis, second edition, which was translated into Indonesian as *Seks dan Kekuasaan*; *Woman's*

Rebellion and Islamic Memory, translated into Indonesian by Rahmani Astuti as *Pemberontakan Perempuan*; *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, published by Polity Press, which was translated into Indonesian as “*Forgotten Queens of Islam*”; *Dream of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*, published by Addison Wesley Publishing Company, Inc, which was translated into Indonesian as “*Forbidden Terrace: Childhood Stories of a Muslim Feminist*”; *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World*, which was translated into Indonesian as “*Islam and Democracy*”; *The Fundamentalist Obsession with Women*, this book was written from an article *The Fundamentalist Obsession with Women*, a current articulation of class conflict in modern Muslim societies, published by Simorgh Woman’s Resource and Publication Centre. This book was translated into Indonesian as “*The Fundamentalists’ Obsession with Women*”; *Can Women Head a Muslim State?*, published by Simorgh Woman Resource and Publication, in Indonesian translated as “*Can Women Lead a State?*”; *Woman in Muslim Paradise. ‘kali for woman’ was published in Indonesian as ‘Perempuan di Surga Kaum Muslim’*; *‘Woman in Moslem History,’ published by Simorghat Resource and Publication Centre, was translated into Indonesian as ‘Perempuan dalam Sejarah Muslim Perspektif Tradisional dan Strategi Baru,’ and there are many other works as well.*

In her work, Mernissi revisits Islamic history and texts to critique patriarchal interpretations that hinder women’s progress in Muslim society. According to her, if women’s rights are an issue for some modern Muslim men, it’s not because of Islamic tradition, but simply because those rights clash with the interests of elite men. She emphasizes the importance of fighting for gender equality through a more inclusive understanding of religion. Her works have inspired and had a significant impact on the Islamic feminist movement as well as in broader studies of religion and gender (Leon Rohendi and Lily Suzana, 2023).

Gender Equality According to Fatimah Mernissi

As a Muslim feminist, Fatimah Mernissi didn’t simply adopt Western gender thought because it often stands apart from religious teachings. Instead, Mernissi built her framework based on Islamic teachings, so the idea of equality she offered remained both theological and normatively Islamic. Fatimah Mernissi explained that religion should be understood progressively to grasp social realities and their power dynamics. She used gender analysis to look at patriarchal culture that causes the subordination of women. Mernissi pointed out that women, beyond domestic roles, have been active in education and politics since the time of the Prophet. One example that's often mentioned is Aisyah, the wife of Prophet Muhammad, who was also a hadith expert and known for her courage and competence (Yusawinur Barella et al., 2023). She was involved in the Battle of Jamal against the forces of Caliph Ali bin Abi Thalib. This case doesn't just highlight political conflict; it also shows that women have the capacity and legitimacy to take part in the political arena (Muh. Haris et al., 2024).

Fatimah Mernissi also paid serious attention to the struggle against the injustices faced by women, especially in the field of education. She emphasized that women and men are equal in spiritual and intellectual aspects because education is a strategic step in elevating the dignity and worth of women. According to Mernissi, education for women is the key to societal development,

as well as a means to transform a society rooted in myths and outdated ideas into a knowledge-based society that views humans, both men and women, as valuable resources and potential.

Fatima Mernissi explains that the media industry is one of the important means of spreading education for women (Andri Sutrisno et al., 2022). Fatima Mernissi believes that with this feminist research method, it could be a step to raise awareness and mobilize women to get out of the 'dark zone,' which is illiteracy. Fatima Mernissi also emphasizes that research, especially in the form of translating works, is very important because it contributes significantly to the development of women's studies. According to Mernissi, the existence of these translated works makes it easier for women to access knowledge and also serves as a source of inspiration to boost learning motivation (Sayyid Ahsan et al., 2023).

Fatimah Mernissi's Thoughts on the Story of Queen Balqis in QS. al-Naml/27: 32-34

According to Mernissi, a distinctive feature of the Islamic view is the equality of rights and responsibilities between men and women. Mernissi's view on equal rights also applies to women's rights in leadership or politics. Fatimah Mernissi supports the Qur'anic verse that tells about Queen Bilqis's wise leadership of her people during the time of Prophet Solomon, as mentioned in QS. al-Naml/27: 32-34.

قَالَتْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ أَفْتُونِي فِي أَمْرِي مَا كُنْتُ قَاطِعَةً أَمْرًا حَتَّى تَشْهَدُون ۚ ٣٢ قَالُوا نَحْنُ أَوْلُوا قُوَّةً وَأُولُوا بَأْسٍ شَدِيدٍ ۚ وَالْأَمْرُ إِلَيْكِ فَانْظُرِي مَاذَا تَأْمُرِينَ ٣٣ قَالَتْ إِنَّ الْمُلُوكَ إِذَا دَخَلُوا قَرْيَةً أَفْسَدُوهَا وَجَعَلُوا أَعِزَّةَ أَهْلِهَا أَذِلَّةً وَكَذَلِكَ يَفْعَلُونَ ٣٤

32. She (Balqis) said, "Hey leaders, give me some advice on this matter. I never make a decision about something before you're present (in my council)." 33. They replied, "We have incredible strength and skills (for fighting), but the decision is in your hands. So, think carefully about what you're going to order." 34. She (Balqis) said, "Indeed, when kings conquer a land, they usually destroy it and turn its noble people into lowly ones. That's what they do."

Classical commentators interpreted the verse as a reflection of Queen Balqis's wisdom in leadership, as explained by al-Qurthubi, stating that Queen Balqis was a leader who treated her people well, marked by her consultative attitude in seeking her people's opinions when facing Prophet Solomon's call to guidance in his letter. There is also an implied concern from Queen Balqis for her people regarding the possible conquest by Solomon and his army. Throughout the negotiation process, Queen Balqis and her people eventually embraced the teachings brought by Prophet Solomon (Nur Arfiyah Febriani, 2025). Although this interpretation does not explicitly continue into discussions related to gender equality, it nonetheless highlights the presence of female leadership during Queen Balqis's era.

Starting from that understanding, Fatimah Mernissi reads the story of Queen Balkis more critically. From the Qur'anic depiction, can it be said that Queen Balkis failed in ruling her country? Mernissi emphasizes that the Qur'an portrays the Queen of Sheba (Balkis) as an intelligent and wise woman who made the best use of the power she held to guide her people to follow the teachings of Prophet Solomon. Queen Balkis appeared wise, unhurried, and prioritized

consultation, choosing a peaceful path and thinking rationally in responding to Prophet Solomon's letter. Therefore, she is certainly a very positive role model for a woman as a Head of State.

Gender Education Values from the Story of Queen Balkis in QS. al-Naml/27: 32-34 from Fatimah Mernissi's Perspective

The values of gender education are educational values that instill fairness, equality, and humanity between men and women. These values also involve rejecting subordination, discrimination, and stereotypes based on gender, while recognizing everyone's intellectual and moral abilities. From Fatimah Mernissi's perspective, the aim of gender education values is to emphasize that gender inequality does not come from divine revelation, but from social constructions and gender-biased interpretations. According to Fatimah Mernissi, the story of Queen Bilqis is one of the Qur'an's narratives that contain very rich moral and social messages, especially in the context of gender relations and leadership. The gender education values contained in QS. al-Naml verses 32-34 are as follows:

First, the legitimacy of women's leadership. The Qur'an shows that women can hold significant leadership roles without being limited by certain gender stereotypes, because leaders are chosen based on intellectual and moral capacity, not gender. According to Fatimah Mernissi, this verse challenges the assumption that women are not fit to be in public and political spaces. The gender education value here is that women have political legitimacy to lead and demonstrate a form of leadership that is participatory rather than emotional.

Second, deliberation and non-authoritarian leadership. Deliberation is an important characteristic of good leadership; a leader should prioritize wisdom and careful decision-making. This reflects that an effective leader should be open to others' input and not act in an authoritarian way, as in Surah Al-Naml verse 32, which shows Queen Balqis gathering the kingdom's officials and opening a space for dialogue to ask for opinions. In gender education, this value emphasizes that women also have the intellectual authority to engage in dialogue, consider, and make public policies.

Third, leadership oriented towards peace and humanity. This orientation is important because leaders need to focus on the safety and well-being of the people. It requires avoiding conflicts as much as possible and prioritizing peaceful ways to deal with differences. Mernissi emphasizes that the Qur'an actually presents women as political figures who are civilized and focused on the welfare of all people. The educational value here is that female leadership prioritizes ethics, humanity, and social sustainability, and shows that power is not for domination but for protecting the people. This value underlines that being sensitive to safety, welfare, and human dignity demonstrates leadership qualities, not a sign of a particular gender's weakness.

Fourth, Intelligence and wisdom. Surah al-Naml verses 33 and 34 show Queen Balqis's ability to analyze the impacts of war and social risks, indicating that women are capable of critically reading power structures. The gender education value apparent here is that women have the ability to analyze and reason about the decisions they make.

CONCLUSION

Al-Qur'an surah al-Naml/27:32-34 tells the story of Queen Bilqis, and in Fatimah Mernissi's thinking, it contains gender education values that emphasize equality between men and women in leadership, intellectual, and moral spheres. This story shows that the Qur'an does not position women as an inferior subject, but rather presents them as rational, wise, and empowered leaders in the public space. The findings of this research indicate that gender inequality is not a teaching of revelation, but rather a result of social construction and patriarchal interpretation that has developed within religious tradition. Through the figure of Queen Bilqis, the Qur'an instills values of legitimacy in female leadership, consultation as a principle of non-authoritarian leadership, a focus on humanity and peace, as well as analytical intelligence in decision-making, all of which are relevant as gender education values in the contemporary Islamic world. The suggestion from this study is the need to develop further research that integrates gender education values within Qur'anic narratives into Islamic education curricula, both formal and nonformal, and to encourage comparative studies with other Muslim feminist thinkers so that gender-just interpretations become richer, more contextual, and make a real contribution to efforts to eliminate discrimination against women in society.

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