

The Qur'an's View of Career Women: Analysis of Sheikh Nawawi Al-Bantani's Interpretation in *Tafsir Marāh Labīd*

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the Qur'anic perspective on career women based on the interpretation of Sheikh Nawawi Al-Bantani in his work *Tafsir Marāh Labīd*. As a 19th-century Nusantara scholar, Nawawi offers a distinctive approach that harmonizes classical Islamic scholarship with the socio-cultural realities of the Indonesian archipelago. Using a qualitative library research method with content analysis, this study explores three main themes: women's roles in politics (QS. An-Naml: 29-35), women's opportunities to excel (QS. An-Nisā': 32), and women's rights to pursue careers (QS. Ali 'Imrān: 195). The findings reveal that Nawawi does not prohibit women from public leadership, as exemplified by his appreciation of Queen Balqis's political wisdom. He affirms spiritual equality between men and women in terms of reward for deeds while acknowledging contextual, functional role differences. Moreover, Nawawi emphasizes that righteous work (*amal ṣāliḥ*) is not limited by gender, and women have the right to work and achieve as long as they adhere to Islamic principles and, for married women, maintain marital harmony. This interpretation provides a theological foundation for gender equality within the framework of Sharia, bridging traditional Islamic values and contemporary demands for women's empowerment.

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Introduction

Talking about women is certainly an interesting topic of discussion. Both men and women have equal rights before God. However, in reality, there is still a lot of injustice and social inequality in society. In most societies, women are second to men, especially in terms of gender, culture, history, and other factors (Setiyanto, 2017, p. 2). Issues that arise in society are often related to gender. These differences create injustice for women. Recognizing this, we understand that everyone has rights that must be protected regardless of gender, nationality, language, or

ethnicity. Women have the right to pursue careers in their areas of expertise and are free to choose the type of work that suits their passions (Wahyuni, 2023, p. 51).

Back in the past, namely the pre-Islamic era or before the arrival of Islam, women had a very low status. In the days of ignorance, women were considered *nishf al-insan* or half human. Women at that time were not considered to exist. They were only considered to be beings that had a soul, and even that soul came from a despicable soul. In addition, they were also considered to be humans who brought bad luck, disaster, or calamity (Al-Bar, 1998, p. 10). During the *Jahiliyyah* period, men would feel very sad and angry if their wives gave birth to a girl. Even more tragically, men would bury their daughters alive, and their wives had to accept this. If a husband died, his wife had to remain by his side until death took her too (Yasin, 1997). However, when Islam arrived, it granted women proportional rights, requiring men to provide a dowry as a form of respect, granting them inheritance rights, limiting the number of wives a man could have, and ensuring they received protection and respect even after divorce (Simamora, 2018, p. 7).

After the revolution, specifically in the last two centuries, the world has undergone a major transformation in terms of women's participation in the workforce. Investors have made them workers who are paid low wages. This is in contrast to men, who are paid higher wages even though they do the same type of work. This wage gap still exists and is even increasing every year. There are several factors that have led women to join the workforce, one of which is necessity. Every woman wants to be able to live a decent and independent life so that she does not always have to depend on her husband.

Recently, the status and position of women in economic and social development in a country is no longer limited to behind-the-scenes roles. In contrast to women in the past, who played only a supporting role in the family to achieve success, women are now able to participate in various jobs and social activities (Manembu, 2017, p. 2). Career women are women who are active in their daily routines, carrying out activities in line with their chosen professions. Career women can also be defined in the same way as working men (Ghosiyah, 2016, p. 210).

On the other hand, there are still many issues related to gender differences. Patriarchal culture often hinders women's development. This is due to the low level of public literacy regarding women's expression, career, and socialization (Swari, 2023). In addition, the development of androcentric science has resulted in norms that are only based on Muslim men. Misunderstandings of the verses of the Qur'an and hadith have led to an imbalance in the roles of men and women (Wahyuni, 2023, p. 52).

Recently, it has become a tradition in society that women's roles are limited to being wives, mothers, and homemakers. This often puts women in a dilemma (Hesti, 2019, p. 3). Islam highly respects the dignity and honor of women. Allah SWT says in QS Al Ahzab: 33:

وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ وَلَا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الْأُولَىٰ وَأَقِمْنَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتِينَ الزَّكَاةَ وَأَطِعْنَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا

Meaning: "And stay in your homes and do not adorn yourselves as the people of ignorance did before, and perform prayer, give zakat, and obey Allah and His Messenger. Indeed, Allah intends to remove sin from you, O people of the household, and purify you thoroughly."

As explained above, this would certainly be an interesting topic for study. Therefore, the discussion presented in this study is closely related to the Qur'an's view of career women. The researcher will explore in greater depth the verses of the Qur'an that are closely related to the view of career women. Furthermore, a more in-depth analysis and study will be conducted with the interpretation of Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani in the *tafsir Marah Labid*.

This study chose Sheikh Nawawi Al-Bantani as its main focus because of his position as an Indonesian scholar with globally recognized scientific authority. He is not only a key reference in traditional Indonesian Islamic boarding schools, but also respected as a grand master at the Grand Mosque in Mecca. Sheikh Nawawi's uniqueness lies in his ability to harmonize the classical Islamic scholarly traditions of the Middle East with the socio-cultural realities of the Indonesian archipelago, resulting in his interpretation in *Tafsir Marah Labid* offering a distinctive and contextual perspective. His tafsir work uses a holistic approach that combines linguistic analysis (*lughawi*), *Shafi'i fiqh*, and ethical Sufi values, which are highly relevant for examining contemporary issues such as career women while maintaining the principles of sharia.

The selection of Marah Labid's interpretation was also based on the need to fill a gap in previous research, which tended to focus on modern Middle Eastern scholars. As a product of 19th-century intellectual thought, this interpretation reflects an Islamic response to the social realities of the colonial era, including the role of women in society. This research is important because it reveals how an Indonesian scholar interpreted the verses of the Qur'an about women by taking local culture into consideration, without neglecting the basic principles of Islam. Furthermore, Sheikh Nawawi's position as a pesantren scholar makes his interpretation highly relevant to the Indonesian context, which remains strongly rooted in traditional values, while also serving as a bridge between rigid religious views and modern demands for gender equality.

Method

In conducting this research, the author employed a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is descriptive in nature. The purpose of qualitative research is to examine and interpret in depth the facts, phenomena, issues, and events observed directly in the field within a specific temporal context (Friantika et al., 2022, p. 32).

Furthermore, in this study, the author employed a literature review approach aimed at exploring the Qur'an's perspective on career women through various sources, including books, theses, dissertations, articles, and other materials that address this topic.

The data sources used in this study include primary and secondary sources. Primary data is data obtained directly from the original source (Narimawati, 2008, p. 98). This study bases its primary data on the exegetical work *Marah Labid* by Sheikh Nawawi Al-Bantani. Secondary data was obtained from existing sources, including books, notes, websites, documentation, and scholarly works intended to support the research data (Nugrahani & Hum, 2014, p. 113).

In data collection, this study employed content analysis, a systematic procedure for examining the information contained in documents such as manuscripts and literary works in a thorough, critical, and meticulous manner (Nugrahani & Hum, 2014, p. 142). The data collection process for this study involved gathering written materials that served as primary and secondary data sources. After the data was collected, the author presented it in the form of a systematically organized description, ranging from the biography of Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani to his tafsir. Subsequently, verses discussing career women were collected; Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani's interpretation of these verses was analyzed; a socio-historical analysis of the 19th century was conducted; and the relevance of Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani's interpretation regarding career women in the modern era was examined.

Results and Discussion

1. Biography of Sheikh Nawawi Al-Bantani

There are many academic works and literature that examine the biography and greatness of Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani. Discussions about his life can be found in various forms, such as theses, dissertations, books about Indonesian scholars, and encyclopedias in Indonesian, Arabic, and English. Some present it briefly, while others explain it in detail.

Historically, the birth of Sheikh Nawawi Al-Bantani around 1813 AD coincided with the final phase of decline of the Banten Sultanate. At that time, leadership was held by Sultan Rafi'uddin until 1813 AD, when British Governor Thomas Stamford Raffles forced him to abdicate on the grounds of failing to maintain political stability. Sultan Syafi'uddin was then appointed as his successor. During his reign (1813–1816 AD), the Dutch colonial authorities, who regained power after the British interregnum, carried out administrative restructuring through an agreement with Sultan Rafi'uddin in 1816 AD. This policy included the appointment of the first Regent (Prince Aria Adisenta) by the Dutch and the establishment of a Residency system held by European officials. The structural transformation reached its peak in 1832 AD, when the colonial government forcibly moved the center of government from the Kaibon Palace to Serang, marking the dissolution of the Banten Sultanate as a political entity as a result of colonial system integration (Bukhori, 2017, p. 51).

Born in Tanara, Tirtayasa, Serang (in the Banten Residency at that time), West Java, Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani was born during this crucial period of political transformation. With the full name Abu Abdul Mut'hi Muhammad Nawawi ibn Umar al-Tanari al-Bantani al-Jawi, he grew up to become the most famous and respected scholar in Indonesia, especially in Islamic boarding schools (Hidayat, 2019, p. 198).

In the Arab world, he is known as al-Sheikh Muhammad Nawawi al-Jâwi al-Makki, while in Indonesia he is more popularly known as Kiai Nawawi Banten. This full name is listed in his own works, while the name "Muhammad Nawawi" was taken from a great scholar and prolific writer in the Shafi'i school of thought. The naming of his son with this name carried the hope that he would follow in the footsteps of Imam Nawawi's scholarship. This hope was realized through his prolific writing of various works in various religious disciplines. From his lineage, Sheikh Nawawi was the 12th generation descendant of Maulana Syarif Hidayatullah (Sunan Gunung Jati Cirebon), through the lineage of Maulana Hasanuddin (Sultan Banten I) who had a son named Sunyararas. His father, K.H. Umar bin Arabi, was a scholar and village chief in Tanara Village, as well as the leader of the mosque that later became the foundation of the family's Islamic boarding school. It was from this boarding school that Sheikh Nawawi began his education (Parhani, 2019, p. 6).

Sheikh Nawawi's mother, Nyai Zubaidah, was known as a pious and devout woman. This religious family background helped shape his intellectual and spiritual intelligence. In addition, his ancestors had a strong influence in the fields of government and religion, which provided a solid foundation for his intellectual development. The legacy of knowledge and leadership from his family and strong religious environment had a significant impact on Sheikh Nawawi's intellectual growth. This explains why he was able to become one of the leading scholars with widespread influence, both in the archipelago and in the global Islamic world (Suwarjin, 2017).

Sheikh Nawawi Al-Bantani was married twice during his lifetime. His first marriage was to Nyai Nasimah, a woman from Tanara, who bore him three daughters: Nafisah, Maryam, and Rubi'ah. After Nyai Nasimah passed away, he married another woman named Hamdanah, and they had two children: Zuhra and Abdul Mu'thi. However, Abdul

Mu'thi died at a young age, leaving only his four daughters to grow up. Between 1830 and 1860, Sheikh Nawawi studied in the Middle East for a relatively long period of time by the standards of that era. While there, he studied under a number of prominent scholars, including Sheikh Ahmad Khatib Sambas (an important figure in the unification of the Qadiriyyah-Naqshabandiyah Sufi orders in Indonesia) and Sheikh Abdul Bima, an Indonesian scholar who settled in the Middle East.

In Mecca, Sheikh Nawawi deepened his knowledge under the guidance of Sayid Ahmad Dimiyati and Ahmad Zaini Dahlan, while in Medina he studied under Muhammad Khatib al-Hanbali. Not stopping there, he also continued his studies in Egypt and Sham (Syria), where he studied under Sheikh Yusuf Sumbulawini, Sheikh Ahmad Nahrawi, and Abdul Hamid Daghastani. This long and intensive learning process in various Islamic centers of learning shows Sheikh Nawawi's seriousness in pursuing knowledge. His interactions with great scholars from various schools of thought and disciplines helped shape his scholarly capacity, which later led to him being recognized as one of the leading scholars of the 19th century (Agustina, 2024).

As a figure who mastered various disciplines, had noble character, and was sincere in teaching and preaching Islam, Sheikh Nawawi succeeded in producing many great scholars. Some of his students from Indonesia include: a) K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari (Tebuireng, Jombang, East Java) - founder of Nahdlatul Ulama, b) K.H. Khalil (Bangkalan, Madura) charismatic scholar, c) K.H. Asyari (Bawean) propagator of Islam in coastal areas d) K.H. Asnawi (Caringan, Pandeglang, Banten) influential scholar in Banten.

Not only was he an accomplished educator, Sheikh Nawawi was also known as a prolific writer with dozens of works in various fields of Islam. According to records in Yusuf's Dictionary of Arabic Printed Books, at least 34 of his works have been documented (Anwar et al., 2008, p. 267). Some of his most popular books among Islamic boarding schools include:

1. *Marah Labid (Tafsir al-Nawawi)* - A commentary on the Qur'an completed in 1886 and printed in Cairo;
2. *Nihayah al-Zain* - A commentary on the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence that serves as a basic reference;
3. *Kasyifat al-Syaja* - An in-depth explanation of practical jurisprudence;
4. *Tanqih al-Qaul al-Hatsis* - A study of hadith based on the commentary by Imam al-Suyuti.

The uniqueness of Sheikh Nawawi's works lies in their simple yet profound presentation. His clear and systematic writing style makes it easy for students to understand the material without spending a lot of time. This ease also helps teachers (kyai) in delivering lessons, so that knowledge transfer takes place effectively in the pesantren environment (Mabrur, 2016).

2. Analysis of Sheikh Nawawi's Interpretation of Career Women in the Marāh Labīd

In analyzing the Qur'an's view of career women, Sheikh Nawawi Al-Bantani's interpretation in *Tafsir Marāh Labīd* offers a unique and contextual perspective. As a 19th-century Nusantara scholar, Nawawi not only communicated the literal meaning of the Qur'anic text but also integrated social, ethical, and legal values relevant to the realities of his society. His interpretation of women's roles in the public sphere, particularly in relation to work, economic activities, and social participation, is based on a *tafsir bi al-ma'tsūr* (tradition-based) and *bi al-ra'y* (rational) approach that adheres to the Shafi'i school of thought. The basic principles of Sheikh Nawawi's views in his interpretation of the role of women, including career women, do not explicitly discuss "career women" in modern

terminology.

Below, the author will group the relevant verses into three main themes: (a) The role of women in politics, (b) Women's right to achieve, and (c) Women's right to pursue a career.

a) Women's Careers in Politics (QS. An-Naml: 29-35)

قَالَتْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُوٓا۟ إِنِّيٓ أَلْقَيْتُ إِلَيْكُمۡ كِتَٰبَ كَرِيمٍ (29) إِنَّهُۥ مِنْ سُلَيْمٰنَ وَإِنَّهُۥ بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ (30) أَلَّا تَعْلَمُوٓا۟
عَلَيَّ وَأَتُوْنِي۟ مُسْلِمِيْنَ (31) قَالَتْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُوٓا۟ أَفَتُونِي۟ فِي۟ أَمْرِي۟ مَا كُنْتُ قَاطِعَةً أَمْرًا حَتَّىٰ تَشْهَدُوْنَ (32) قَالُوٓا۟
نَحْنُ أَوْلُوٓا۟ قُوَّةً وَأُولُوٓا۟ بِأَسْ شَدِيْدٍ ۗ وَالْأَمْرُ إِلَيْكِ فَانظُرِي۟ مَاذَا تَأْمُرِيْنَ (33) قَالَتْ إِنَّ الْمُلُوكَ إِذَا دَخَلُوا قَرْيَةً
أَفْسَدُوهَا وَجَعَلُوٓا۟ أَعْرَٰةَ أَهْلِهَا آذِلَّةً وَكَذٰلِكَ يَفْعَلُوْنَ (34) وَإِنِّي۟ مُرْسَلَةٌ إِلَيْهِمْ بِهَدِيَّةٍ فَنظُرُهُۥ بِمَ يَرْجِعُ
الْمُرْسَلُوْنَ (35)

In verse 29, Queen Balqis gathered the kingdom's officials to discuss the letter she had received. According to Nawawi al-Bantani, this letter was special and revered. It was special because it was sent in a miraculous way, and its good contents were a sign of the power and love of Allah SWT (Al-Bantani, 1996a, p. 173).

Not only that, Nawawi al-Bantani also recounts how Queen Balqis told her advisors that she had received a very valuable letter from Prophet Solomon. Nawawi uses the word "kitāb" to refer to this letter, which emphasizes how special and formal the document was. This shows the grandeur of the letter because it was written by a leader who was not only a mighty king, but also a noble messenger of Allah. Seeing the quality of the letter and its sender, Queen Balqis realized that Prophet Sulaiman was a king who was far greater and more authoritative than herself (Al-Bantani, 1996a, p. 173).

In verse 30, it is explained that the letter from Prophet Solomon began with a very noble and blessed phrase, namely bismillāhirrahmānirrahīm (in the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful). Then, in the next verse (31), Queen Balqis read the contents of the letter in front of all her advisors and royal officials. The essence of the letter was a polite but firm call from Prophet Solomon, inviting Queen Balqis to abandon her arrogance and submit to Allah. Prophet Solomon invited her to come to his palace in a state of submission (Muslim), that is, as a believer who acknowledges the oneness of Allah. This shows that the letter not only contained a diplomatic message between leaders, but also contained a call to the path of truth (Al-Bantani, 1996a, p. 173).

Not stopping there, in verse 32, Queen Balqis opens her speech with a formal and solemn call, "O nobles!", addressed to all her advisors and high-ranking officials. This verse explains that Queen Balqis was asking for the full attention of these leaders to discuss a serious problem that was afflicting her. With the attitude of a wise and humble leader, she did not impose her own will. Instead, Queen Balqis specifically asks for their views, considerations, and advice before making a final decision. This habit of hers demonstrates a very democratic and wise leadership principle. She never settles important matters alone. Whenever faced with major state issues, she always and without exception gathers her advisors and members of the royal council to deliberate first (Al-Bantani, 1996a, p. 173).

In verse 33, the response of the royal advisors to Queen Balqis' request for advice is

explained. With full confidence, they stated that the Kingdom of Sheba did indeed have a formidable army and unquestionable courage on the battlefield. They expressed their absolute readiness to carry out the Queen's orders, including if ordered to go to war. However, behind their military confidence, these officials showed deep respect and trust in Queen Balqis' leadership. They emphasized that the final decision rested entirely with the Queen, because in their opinion, Queen Balqis had greater wisdom and insight into what was best for the future and welfare of their kingdom (Al-Bantani, 1996a, p. 173).

From this explanation, we can understand that the nobles of the kingdom of Sheba showed a very mature and respectful attitude. They did not question Queen Balqis' leadership on the basis of gender, even though in an era when female leadership was often questioned. Instead of using the classic argument that "*female leaders are not fit to lead men*," they accepted Queen Balqis' final decision with open hearts. Even more impressive, not only the nobles, but the entire population supported her leadership. This fact shows how Queen Balqis had proven her capacity as a wise leader, enabling her to gain the loyalty and respect of all levels of society regardless of gender.

According to Nawawi al-Bantani's interpretation, the phrase "*wa nahnu muṭī'unā laki*" uttered by the royal officials carries a profound meaning that Queen Balqis truly deserves the full respect and obedience of her people. This obedience did not arise from coercion, but from sincere recognition of her fair and wise leadership, which always prioritized deliberation. Her leadership skills had brought the kingdom of Sheba to the peak of its glory, with a prosperous society and stable government. This extraordinary success was even immortalized by Allah in the Qur'an with two titles of honor: Baldatun Tayyibah (a good country) and Lahā 'Arsyun 'Aẓīm (one who has a great throne). This remarkable achievement is clear proof that a woman is capable of leading successfully and achieving accomplishments that change history, recognized by heaven and earth (Al-Bantani, 1996a, p. 173).

In verse 34, Queen Balqis conveys her wise views to the royal advisors regarding the option of war. With deep concern, she reminds them of the destructive patterns that have always occurred in wars throughout history. Queen Balqis clearly describes how the conquering kings of that time usually acted. They not only destroyed a country's infrastructure and buildings, but also treated its people cruelly and without mercy, humiliating and oppressing both nobles and commoners without mercy. Based on this historical pattern, Nawawi al-Bantani explained that Queen Balqis predicted that Prophet Sulaiman would act like other rulers, because that was the custom and standard of behavior among the kingdoms of that era. This concern shows Queen Balqis' wisdom in reading the political situation and her deep concern for the safety of her people (Al-Bantani, 1996a, p. 173).

In his book of interpretation, Nawawi al-Bantani describes in detail the diplomatic gifts sent by Queen Balqis to Prophet Solomon. These gifts were a very sophisticated political strategy, consisting of a thousand selected servants divided equally between five hundred young men and five hundred young women, accompanied by five hundred pieces of pure gold and five hundred pieces of silver as symbols of the wealth of the kingdom of Sheba. However, what is astonishing is that all the preparations for sending these gifts did not escape the watchful eye of the loyal hoopoe bird. Immediately, this bird, which possessed special intelligence, flew back to Prophet Solomon's palace to report Queen Balqis' entire plan and diplomatic movements, giving Prophet Solomon a perfect strategic advantage in dealing with this situation (Al-Bantani, 1996b, p. 174).

In his interpretation of the story of Queen Bilqis, who ruled the Kingdom of Sheba,

Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani did not state that female leadership was forbidden. On the contrary, this great scholar explicitly appreciates Queen Bilqis' strategic intelligence, political wisdom, and brilliant decision to submit to Prophet Solomon and embrace the teachings of monotheism. This attitude is very progressive considering the context of the era in which patriarchal thinking often dominated.

Furthermore, Sheikh Nawawi's interpretation implicitly acknowledges women's intellectual capacity and leadership capabilities in managing public affairs. Queen Bilqis' decision to relinquish power is not seen as a sign of weakness, but rather as the pinnacle of wisdom of a visionary leader. Thus, this interpretation provides a strong theological basis for the legitimacy of women's leadership in Islam, while also confirming that leadership qualities are not determined by gender, but by intellectual capacity, spiritual maturity, and wisdom in decision-making.

b) Opportunities for Women to Excel (QS. An-Nisā': 32)

وَلَا تَتَمَنَّوْا مَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بِهِ بَعْضَكُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ لِّلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَتَبُوا^ق وَلِلنِّسَاءِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَسَبْنَ^ق وَسَأَلُوا
اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ^ق إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا

In interpreting this verse, Nawawi al-Bantani first provides an explanation according to Ibn Abbas. He says that one should not be jealous or covet the wealth, position, spouse, or worldly possessions of others. Such actions are considered despicable envy, because all the advantages that a person has are determined by Allah based on His wisdom and knowledge of the condition of each servant.

It is mentioned that this verse was revealed in response to a request from Ummu Salamah (the Prophet's wife) who hoped that women would receive the same reward as men in certain acts of worship. However, Allah emphasized that men and women have their own merits, and each will be rewarded according to their deeds. Nawawi al-Bantani emphasized that men and women have different areas of work and responsibilities, but both are equally valuable in the eyes of Allah. Men are mentioned in terms of their role in jihad (striving in the way of Allah) and providing for their families, which reflects their public and economic roles. Women are directed toward domestic roles: maintaining their honor, obeying Allah and their husbands, and taking care of the household (cooking, caring for clothes, breastfeeding, etc.) (Al-Bantani, 1996a, p. 194). These differences are not hierarchical (one being more important than the other), but rather functional and contextual, in accordance with the socio-cultural conditions and human nature of the time.

Sheikh Nawawi emphasized that rewards are given based on what is "earned" (practiced), not based on gender. The phrase "women have a share of the reward for what they earn" affirms spiritual equality: women's good deeds in the domestic sphere are equal in value to men's good deeds in the public sphere. This is in line with the Qur'anic principle that whoever does righteous deeds, whether male or female, will have a good life (Al-Bantani, 1996a, p. 194).

Nawawi al-Bantani's interpretation is not intended to create a hierarchical relationship, as if one role is more important than another. On the contrary, Nawawi al-Bantani's view is functional, in which each role complements each other and forms a harmonious unity in society. Men carry out their roles in the public sphere not because they are superior, but because it is their responsibility, just as women carry out

their domestic roles as a form of equal responsibility (Sanusi, 2015, p. 144).

This division is also contextual, meaning that it is greatly influenced by the socio-cultural conditions and demands of the era in which Nawawi al-Bantani lived. In that era, the structure of society generally placed men as responsible for providing for and protecting their families, while women had full control over the management of the household and the education of children. However, this contextualization does not preclude the possibility of adjustments as long as they do not violate the principles of Sharia and continue to prioritize the common good (Alma'arif & Muhajir, 2023).

The most important thing to emphasize is that these differences in roles in no way diminish the spiritual value and opportunities for righteous deeds for both parties. In fact, by carrying out their respective duties with full awareness and sincerity, men and women can achieve the same level of piety before Allah. Thus, the essence of Nawawi's interpretation is not about limiting roles, but about recognizing that every sphere of life can be a field of worship that is highly valuable.

c) Women's rights in pursuing a career

In Islam, women have the same rights as men to work and pursue a career. There are no types of work that are permitted in religion that are specifically prohibited for women or exclusive to men. Islamic law does not discriminate between men and women in terms of employment opportunities, as long as the work is in accordance with Islamic values. However, for married women, there are specific provisions requiring the consent of the husband if they wish to work. This is not a form of restriction, but rather a sign of respect for marital harmony. This rule is intended to maintain a balance between individual rights and obligations within the family, as well as to ensure that the management of the household and the fulfillment of the rights of husbands and wives are properly maintained. Thus, Islam provides freedom while also regulating its implementation, especially in the context of marriage, for the benefit of all parties (Darut-Tauhid, 1995, p. 65).

This is explained in the verses of the Qur'an, especially in QS. Ali Imran: 195, Allah says:

فَاسْتَجَابَ لَهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ أَنِّي لَا أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَامِلٍ مِّنْكُمْ مِّمَّنْ ذَكَرَ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ بَعْضُكُمْ مِّنْ بَعْضٍ ۖ فَالَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا
وَآخَرِجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ وَأُوذُوا فِي سَبِيلِي وَقَاتَلُوا وَقُتِلُوا لَأُكَفِّرَنَّ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ وَلَأُدْخِلَنَّهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ
تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ثَوَابًا مِّنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الثَّوَابِ

Nawawi Al-Bantani, in his interpretation, emphasizes the fundamental principle of gender equality in divine retribution, whereby Allah SWT grants prayers and rewards all His servants without distinction of gender. Both men and women receive equal treatment in the divine justice system—there is no discrimination in the granting of rewards for acts of obedience or in the imposition of punishment for transgressions based on gender. This principle reflects Allah's absolute justice that transcends all forms of worldly bias, while also emphasizing that human excellence in His sight is determined solely by piety and the quality of deeds, not by gender identity. Thus, through this verse, Islam offers a concept of substantive equality that is transcendent and spiritual, far beyond the materialistic understanding of equality that has developed in modern discourse (Al-Bantani, 1996a, p. 177).

Nawawi Al-Bantani, in his interpretation, emphasizes the concept of the granting of prayers and God's promises as a tangible manifestation of His justice and generosity.

Allah SWT answers every request of His faithful servants, whether it be a request for forgiveness for sins or a request for rewards for obedience. Moreover, Allah's promise that "no one's deeds will be wasted" is inclusive and universal, covering all believers without exception – whether male or female, old or young, rich or poor. This divine promise affirms that every good deed, no matter how small, and every sincere sacrifice will be recorded and rewarded perfectly by Allah. This provides certainty that faith and piety are the only measures of glory in His sight, while also removing any doubt about Allah's justice in rewarding every effort of His servants (Al-Bantani, 1996a, p. 177).

In his interpretation, Sheikh Nawawi Al-Bantani explicitly stated the principle of equality through the phrase: "Some of you are equal to others," which affirms that men and women have equal standing before Allah, both in terms of rewards for obedience and in pursuing careers as long as they are in accordance with Sharia law. This statement not only covers spiritual equality in worship, but also encompasses equality in the social and professional spheres as long as these activities are carried out with the principle of piety. Sheikh Nawawi emphasized that there is no difference in value between the contributions of men and women in society as long as both adhere to divine values, so that women have the same rights to develop their potential, work, and achieve in various fields as long as they continue to obey religious guidelines. Thus, Islam guarantees substantive equality without neglecting the responsibilities and roles of each in maintaining social and spiritual balance (Al-Bantani, 1996a, p. 177).

Based on the above interpretation, it can be concluded that Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani explicitly acknowledges the principle of equality between men and women in the right to perform righteous deeds as long as they are based on faith. From this perspective, work is not only viewed as an economic activity, but also falls within the realm of righteous deeds that are considered acts of worship. Linguistically, the term "amal," as defined by Ibn Faris in his book *Mu'jam Maqayis al-Lughah*, has a meaning that encompasses all forms of human actions, work, and activities (Faris, 2013, p. 574).

Thus, work in its various forms, as long as it is carried out with sincere intentions and in accordance with Islamic law, is an integral part of religious practice that does not discriminate based on gender. This view emphasizes that piety is not only reflected in ritual worship, but also manifested in fair and equal socio-economic contributions for men and women.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of Sheikh Nawawi Al-Bantani's interpretation in *Tafsir Marāh Labīd* regarding the Qur'an's view of career women, several conclusions can be drawn.

First, regarding women's political careers, Sheikh Nawawi does not forbid women from assuming leadership roles. His interpretation of the story of Queen Balqis (QS. An-Naml: 29-35) explicitly acknowledges women's strategic intelligence, political wisdom, and capacity to lead. Queen Balqis is portrayed as a democratic, wise, and visionary leader whose authority was respected by her nobles and people, regardless of gender. This provides a theological basis for the legitimacy of female leadership in Islam, as long as it is exercised with justice and deliberation.

Second, concerning women's opportunities to excel, Sheikh Nawawi interprets QS. An-Nisā': 32 as affirming that men and women each have their own spheres of responsibility and reward. While acknowledging contextual role differences – men often in the public sphere and women in the domestic sphere – he emphasizes that these differences are

functional and complementary, not hierarchical. Spiritual value and rewards are based on deeds (iktisāb), not gender. Thus, women have equal opportunity to achieve righteousness and excellence in their respective roles.

Third, regarding women's rights to pursue careers, Sheikh Nawawi, through his interpretation of QS. Ali 'Imrān: 195 and other verses, firmly establishes the principle of substantive gender equality before Allah. Work (amal) is considered a form of righteous deed that is not limited by gender. Women have the right to work, develop their potential, and achieve in various fields, provided they adhere to Islamic legal principles and, for married women, maintain marital harmony with the husband's consent. This perspective views professional work as an integral part of worship and socio-economic contribution.

In summary, Sheikh Nawawi Al-Bantani's interpretation offers a balanced and contextual view: it does not rigidly confine women to the domestic sphere nor uncritically endorse all forms of modern careerism. Instead, it affirms women's rights to work and lead while upholding ethical and legal boundaries derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah. His thought serves as a bridge between traditional Islamic values and contemporary demands for gender justice, making it highly relevant for Muslim societies, particularly in the Indonesian context.

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