

CONSTRUCTING GENDER AUTHORITY IN MODERN ISLAM: A SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE ANALYSIS OF YUSUF AL-QARADHAWI AND NAZARUDDIN UMAR ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

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Abstract

This study examines how religious authority shapes gender discourse in contemporary Muslim society through a comparative analysis of Yusuf Al-Qaradhwai and Nazaruddin Umar's thoughts on women's political participation. Using a sociology of knowledge framework integrated with Bourdieu's field theory and Giddens' structuration theory, this study answers three questions: how is epistemic authority built in different field positions, how do socio-religious structures shape intellectual production, and do different approaches contribute to the transformation of gender discourse? The analysis reveals three main findings. First, both scholars successfully established credible positions that enabled women's eligibility to run for president through contrasting strategies: Al-Qaradhwai accumulated orthodox reformist capital in the field of transnational scholars, enabling broad acceptance while setting conditions (Islamic dress, family priorities, husband's permission); Umar developed a comprehensive gender hermeneutics at the boundaries of academia and government, enabling unconditional participation based solely on competence. Second, field positions tangibly shape interpretive possibilities; Al-Qaradhwai's ulama habitus produces incremental modifications, while Umar's academic-modern habitus enables radical hermeneutic interventions, yet both demonstrate reflective agency in negotiating patriarchal structures. Third, both approaches contribute complementarily but incompletely to transformation: Al-Qaradhwai achieves broader acceptance through moderate reformism; Umar offers a stronger theological foundation through the principle of equality. Both maintain skepticism toward classical caliphate, indicating uneven transformation across institutional domains. The integration of Bourdieusian and Giddensian frameworks explains how discourse operates simultaneously as a mechanism of structural reproduction and a site of transformative possibility. This study concludes that religious knowledge functions as a socially embedded practice, facilitating partial rather than total transformation of patriarchal structures.

Keywords: *Al-Qaradhwai, Islamic Gender Discourse, Nazaruddin Umar, Religious Authority, Sociology of Knowledge, Women's Political Participation.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana otoritas agama membentuk diskursus gender dalam masyarakat Muslim kontemporer melalui analisis komparatif pemikiran Yusuf Al-Qaradhwai dan Nazaruddin Umar mengenai partisipasi politik perempuan. Menggunakan kerangka kerja sosiologi pengetahuan yang diintegrasikan dengan teori lapangan Bourdieu dan teori strukturasi Giddens, penelitian ini menjawab tiga pertanyaan: bagaimana otoritas epistemik dibangun dalam posisi lapangan yang berbeda, bagaimana struktur sosial-religius membentuk produksi intelektual, dan apakah pendekatan yang berbeda berkontribusi pada transformasi diskursus gender. Analisis mengungkapkan tiga

temuan utama. Pertama, kedua cendekiawan berhasil membangun posisi kredibel yang memungkinkan kelayakan perempuan untuk mencalonkan diri sebagai presiden melalui strategi yang kontras: Al-Qaradhawi mengumpulkan modal reformis ortodoks dalam bidang ulama transnasional, memungkinkan penerimaan luas sambil menetapkan syarat (pakaian Islam, prioritas keluarga, izin suami); Umar mengembangkan hermeneutika gender komprehensif di batas-batas akademik-pemerintahan, memungkinkan partisipasi tanpa syarat berdasarkan kompetensi semata. Kedua, posisi bidang secara nyata membentuk kemungkinan interpretasi; habitus ulama Al-Qaradhawi menghasilkan modifikasi incremental, sementara habitus akademik-modern Umar memungkinkan intervensi hermeneutik radikal, namun keduanya menunjukkan agen reflektif dalam bernegosiasi dengan struktur patriarki. Ketiga, kedua pendekatan berkontribusi secara komplementer namun tidak lengkap terhadap transformasi: Al-Qaradhawi mencapai penerimaan yang lebih luas melalui reformisme moderat; Umar menawarkan landasan teologis yang lebih kuat melalui prinsip kesetaraan. Keduanya mempertahankan keraguan terhadap khilafah klasik, menunjukkan transformasi yang tidak merata di berbagai domain institusional. Integrasi kerangka Bourdieusian dan Giddensian menerangkan bagaimana diskursus beroperasi secara simultan sebagai mekanisme reproduksi struktural dan lokasi kemungkinan transformatif. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa pengetahuan agama berfungsi sebagai praktik yang tertanam secara sosial, memfasilitasi transformasi parsial rather than total dari struktur patriarkal.

Kata Kunci: *Al-Qaradhawi, Diskursus Gender Islam, Nazaruddin Umar, Otoritas Agama, Sosiologi Pengetahuan, Partisipasi Politik Perempuan.*

A. Introduction

Women's political participation in contemporary Muslim societies operates as a battleground where religious authorities legitimize or restrict women's involvement in the public sphere. Indonesia is a prominent example of this tension. Despite formal progress, including a constitutionally mandated 30% parliamentary quota since 2003, its implementation faces persistent structural resistance. Empirical voting data reveal systematic discrimination against female candidates, even after controlling for party affiliation, candidate quality, incumbent status, and educational qualifications (Aspinall, White, and Savirani 2021; White, S., Warburton, E., Pramashavira, Hendrawan, A., & Aspinall 2024). This pattern suggests that barriers extend beyond formal policy mechanisms and extend to deeper patriarchal social structures and political culture.

Recent large-scale empirical research complicates the simplistic narrative that attributes gender inequality solely to Islamic ideology. Aspinall, et al. (2021) found that Islamic parties in Indonesia face similar challenges in achieving female representation as pluralist secular parties, suggesting that gender inequality stems from structural rather than purely ideological sources. Similarly, research analyzing voter behavior across regions shows that voter preferences systematically disadvantage female candidates regardless of party ideology, suggesting that gender discrimination operates through

cultural mechanisms rather than purely theological commitments. This empirical complexity suggests that explanations rooted exclusively in Islamic doctrine do not provide an adequate analytical foundation.

However, religious interpretations do shape gender relations in Muslim-majority societies. Conservative religious discourses that portray politics as an inherently masculine domain create a cultural framework that legitimizes the political exclusion of women. Conversely, progressive reinterpretations of religion that affirm gender equality in Islamic theology provide a powerful alternative discourse to challenge discriminatory practices. The issue is not whether religion matters (it clearly does) but how religious knowledge is produced, legitimized, and applied in shaping gender relations. The gap between formal commitments to women's representation and low practical representation points to deeper problems in the way religious knowledge is socially constructed and politically mobilized.

Understanding this phenomenon requires moving beyond a theological-normative approach that treats religious interpretation as a neutral academic activity seeking objective truth from sacred texts. The production of religious knowledge must be analyzed as a social practice embedded in specific power structures, institutional hierarchies, and material interests. The historical dominance of patriarchal interpretations in classical Islamic studies created what Bourdieu (1990) calls *doxa* (beliefs accepted without critical examination), which legitimizes the subordination of women as natural or divinely ordained rather than as a historical consequence.

Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes that gender inequality does not stem from Islamic texts themselves, which contain complex and often contradictory passages on gender roles, but rather from interpretive practices shaped by patriarchal social structures (Fitriyah and Rahman 2024; Khabibullina 2023; Wadud 2021). Classical *mufassirin* operated in an androcentric context where female public authority was unimaginable, so they emphasized verses that limited women's roles while ignoring verses that affirmed women's capabilities and rights (Wadud 2021). These interpretive choices reflect the social world of their authors, not the inevitable meaning of the text.

Two significant reformist movements have emerged that seek to renegotiate the discourse on gender. First, moderate reformism, represented by transnational scholars such as Yusuf Al-Qaradhawi, seeks to strike a balance between maintaining classical Islamic orthodoxy and opening up space for interpretation through careful reinterpretation of texts. This approach respects the continuity of tradition while arguing that the contemporary context requires new applications of classical principles (Hosen 2022). Second, gender hermeneutics developed by intellectuals such as Nasaruddin Umar uses an approach based on historical consciousness and critical methodology to assert gender equality as a fundamental theological principle, rather than a pragmatic accommodation (Sakdiah 2022). This approach prioritizes the fundamental theme of equality in the Quran over later interpretive additions, which potentially challenge basic assumptions in certain classical traditions.

Two decades of academic development reveal critical analytical gaps. Early studies used a normative theological approach to identify Islam's authentic position on gender through textual analysis, ignoring the sociological dimensions of knowledge production (Mernissi 1987; Wadud 1999). These works made important contributions to gender-sensitive Islamic studies, but did not explore how interpretive authority is socially constructed or how field positions shape interpretive possibilities. Second-wave studies adopted a contextual approach that analyzed gender discourse in specific social contexts, but remained descriptive without a rigorous sociological framework (Hardy 2025; Jamali and Al Ariss 2021). Studies that specifically examine Al-Qaradhawi and Umar use a theological-normative or comparative approach with limited attention to the sociological dimensions of the formation and contestation of authority (Nor Muhamad 2022; Putra 2023; Sakdiah 2022; Warren and Gilmore 2021).

Critically, the sociology of knowledge approach, which views interpretation as a product of specific social conditions, is still rarely applied to Islamic gender discourse. Bourdieu's (1990, 2016) concepts of field, habitus, and capital, as well as Giddens' (2016) theory of structuration, are still underutilized despite their significant analytical potential. This framework allows for an understanding of how religious authority operates in shaping gender meanings, how social positions limit interpretive possibilities, and how reflective agents negotiate patriarchal structures.

This study addresses this gap by analyzing the thinking of Al-Qaradhawi and Umar through an integrated Bourdieu-Giddens framework. Their selection is based on several considerations. Both have had a significant influence in shaping discourse in various contexts and groups. They represent different approaches to negotiating the tradition-modernity relationship, allowing for comparative illumination. They occupy unique social-institutional locations; Al-Qaradhawi in the field of transnational scholars, Umar on the academic-governmental border, making them ideal comparative cases for exploring how social position shapes interpretive possibilities and field dynamics.

This study pursues three interrelated analytical directions. The first concerns how Al-Qaradhawi and Umar construct epistemic authority in their respective fields, analyzing the specific strategies and resources they mobilize to establish the legitimacy of their positions regarding women's political participation, as well as the unique advantages or limitations afforded by their different field positions. The second explores the dialectical relationship between socio-religious structures and intellectual production, investigating how broader structural conditions in Islamic knowledge production shape what interpretations are possible, and conversely, how scholarly work can restructure the boundaries and possibilities within those structures.

The third evaluates the transformative potential of their different approaches, assessing both their capacity to expand women's political agency and the simultaneous reproduction of certain patriarchal elements, thereby determining whether and how gender discourse transformation actually occurs through these intellectual interventions.

This research integrates Bourdieu's theory of practice with Giddens' theory of structuration to comprehensively reveal these dynamics.

Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus, and capital explain the structural conditions and mechanisms of reproduction that shape interpretive possibilities, revealing how social position determines what can be thought and expressed in religious discourse. Giddens' concepts of the duality of structure and reflexivity explain transformative dynamics and the possibilities of agency, showing how reflexive agents can negotiate and partially alter structural constraints. Rather than claiming a seamless integration between these theorists, this study shows how both operate in productive tension: structural forces including field position, internalized habitus, and capital distribution limit interpretive possibilities, while reflective engagement and critical awareness enable partial transformation within those constraints. This tension reflects the actual dynamics of religious intellectual work itself, in which scholars simultaneously reproduce and challenge inherited frameworks.

B. Method

This study uses qualitative interpretive text analysis rooted in the sociology of knowledge perspective. The main analytical questions focus on social conditions, functions, and mechanisms of knowledge production, rather than theological truths. A comparative-contrastive design analyzes two reformist figures who support women's political participation but differ significantly in their geographical-institutional contexts, methodological approaches, and argumentative foundations.

The primary data consists of writings that directly discuss women's political participation. For Al-Qaradhawi: *Min Fiqh al-Daulah fi al-Islam* (2009); *Min Hady al-Islam Fatawa al-Mu'asirah* vol. II-III (1996); and *Ad-Din wa Siyasah* (2008). For Umar: *Argumen Kesetaraan Gender: Perspektif Al-Quran* (2001); *Fikih Wanita untuk Semua* (2010); *Ketika Fikih Membela Perempuan* (2025).

The analysis was conducted through three interrelated stages. First, ideological construction analysis identifies how figures construct key concepts through an in-depth reading of explicit definitions, supporting arguments, and established boundaries. Second, positional analysis uses Bourdieusian concepts to analyze intellectual habitus, types of capital, positions in the field, and strategies for accumulating symbolic capital. Third, reflective interpretation uses Giddens' framework to analyze the patriarchal structures encountered, reflective agents, and transformative potential.

Validity is enhanced through source triangulation, in-depth contextual description, methodological transparency, and recognition of interpretive pluralism. The researcher acknowledges his position in an academic tradition that prioritizes gender equality and sociological analysis. This study analyzes transformations at the level of discourse regarding what scholars argue is possible without exploring transformations at the level of acceptance regarding what Muslim communities actualize. Therefore, the

findings reveal interpretive possibilities rather than proven institutional or behavioral changes.

C. Findings and Analysis

1. Al-Qaradhawi's Orthodox Reformist Position

a. Symbolic capital and orthodox reformist position

Yusuf Al-Qaradhawi occupies a unique position among contemporary transnational scholars, successfully navigating the tension between preserving classical Islamic traditions and responding to the modern context. His accumulation of symbolic capital comes from various mutually reinforcing sources, which strengthen his authority among diverse Muslim constituencies.

His credentials from Al-Azhar University provide classical legitimacy rooted in one of the most prestigious Islamic educational institutions, signifying a solid foundation in traditional Islamic sciences through formal institutional affiliation (Al-Qaradawi 2011; Graf and Skovgaard-Petersen 2023). This institutional capital is particularly significant because Al-Azhar represents over a thousand years of continuous Islamic scholarly tradition, and its certification carries weight throughout the Sunni Muslim world regardless of geographic location or sectarian affiliation. The university's historical prestige creates what Bourdieu calls “institutional capital”—authority that stems not only from individual achievements but also from association with an institution that has accumulated symbolic power over generations.

Its prolific academic output demonstrates intellectual productivity and comprehensive engagement with various fields of Islam. Over 100 published books cover Islamic fiqh, Qur'anic exegesis, Islamic history, and contemporary Islamic thought, positioning him as a polymath rather than a narrow specialist. This diversity is strategically significant because it positions Al-Qaradhawi as a comprehensive authority capable of addressing the interrelated dimensions of Islamic life. His documented participation in the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood signifies a practical commitment to the cause of Islam beyond academic theorizing, positioning him as an engaged intellectual rather than a detached scholar (Al-Qaradawi 2011).

His diaspora experience in Qatar significantly expanded his transnational reach. Prominent television programs on Al-Jazeera, particularly *Al-Shariah wa al-Hayat*, connected him to millions of people around the world with varying levels of Islamic knowledge (Graf and Skovgaard-Petersen 2023). This media visibility represents a crucial form of capital in contemporary Islam, allowing Al-Qaradhawi to bypass traditional gatekeepers and establish a direct relationship with the Muslim public.

This multi-platform presence allows him to reach diverse audiences simultaneously: traditionally trained scholars find his methodological rigor and classical references appealing; educated urban middle classes appreciate his contextual sensitivity and modern applications; activists value his political engagement and willingness to address contemporary challenges. Each group finds different resonant dimensions of his

work, creating broad and unusual support among contemporary Islamic scholars who typically target narrower audiences.

In Bourdieusian terms, Al-Qaradhawi accumulates orthodox reformist capital; the authority to speak on behalf of Islam through a strategy that combines strict adherence to tradition with strategic expansion of boundaries. His field position is thoroughly reformist, working within the parameters of orthodoxy while carefully modifying those parameters. This position reflects a sophisticated understanding of the dynamics of the field: radical deviation from orthodoxy risks delegitimization, while pure conservatism fails to address contemporary challenges. The middle ground maximizes influence by maintaining credibility among traditional audiences while offering substantial innovations that appeal to reform-oriented constituencies.

His intellectual habitus was shaped by diverse influences, including the activism of Hasan Al-Banna, the contextual fiqh of Muhammad Shaltut, and the critical thinking of Sheikh Al-Ghazali, creating a synthetic habitus that selectively drew from various traditions. This eclecticism proved strategically valuable as it allowed him to draw on diverse intellectual resources while avoiding identification with the limitations of a single school of thought.

A hallmark of this habitus is a disposition toward *wasathiyyah*; seeking a middle way to avoid extremism. This internal orientation shapes his approach to nearly every issue. Traditionalists appreciate his classical grounding; modernists appreciate his contextual sensitivity; activists appreciate his engagement with socio-political issues (Karniol-Tambour and Milton 2023). However, this middle-ground orientation also limits transformative radicalism. The need to maintain orthodox credentials means that certain patriarchal assumptions remain unquestioned. This is not only a personal limitation but a conscious value commitment that prioritizes the maintenance of orthodoxy alongside reform.

b. Conditional permission for women's political leadership

Al-Qaradhawi builds his permissive position on women's political participation through sophisticated theological arguments, which base women's rights on fundamental Islamic principles. His approach uses layers of mutually reinforcing arguments to create a solid juridical foundation.

First, Al-Qaradhawi (2009) bases women's political participation on a collective obligation (*fard kifayah*) derived from the principles of the Qur'an. He interprets QS At-Taubah:71: "Believing men and believing women are allies of one another; they enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil," as establishing that *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* is an obligation for both genders equally. This approach transforms women's political participation from a mere permission to a religious obligation under certain conditions. Because commanding good and forbidding evil inherently requires public involvement, women cannot fulfill this Quranic obligation if they are systematically excluded from political participation. This principle-based approach provides a stronger foundation than

mere pragmatic permission, embedding women's political rights in fundamental Islamic ethics.

Second, Al-Qaradhawi (2009a) cites early Islamic examples that demonstrate women's ability to play a role in public life. He refers to Nusaibah bint Ka'ab's participation in battle, Umm Haram's involvement in naval expeditions, and 'Aisha's role in community leadership. These examples prove that early Islamic communities recognized women's ability to hold public authority. This argumentative strategy proves effective because it refers to the respect in Islamic discourse for the salaf, using traditionalist impulses for progressive purposes by showing that early communities practiced greater gender inclusion than many contemporary Muslim societies.

Third, Al-Qaradhawi uses contextual reinterpretation to limit the application of texts traditionally used to restrict women. Most crucial is his interpretation of QS An-Nisa:34: "*Men are the protectors and maintainers of women.*" Al-Qaradhawi argues that *qawwamah* refers specifically to family leadership based on men's financial responsibility, not to male superiority in all public domains (Al-Qaradhawi 2008). This contextual limitation transforms the verse from a general principle into a specific provision governing the domestic economy, thereby removing the text's obstacle to women's political participation.

This interpretation represents a reformist position within a broader exegetical tradition, not a universal academic consensus. Conservative interpretations maintain a broader application of *qawwamah* in the public sphere. Understanding Al-Qaradhawi requires situating him within a controversial interpretive landscape, not presenting his interpretation as the inevitable result of an objective reading of the text. His strategy of contextual limitation represents a moderate reformist intervention: maintaining the authority of the verse while limiting its scope.

Fourth, Al-Qaradhawi historicizes the frequently cited hadith, "*those who entrust their affairs to women will never prosper*," by explaining its specificity to the seventh-century Persian context involving Buran bint Khosrow. By placing this hadith in a specific historical setting, Al-Qaradhawi argues that it conveys information about a specific situation, not a universal prescriptive principle (Al-Qaradhawi 2009b). This contextualization strategy proves crucial because this hadith represents a major textual obstacle to female political leadership.

Regarding presidential leadership in particular, Al-Qaradhawi (2009b) carefully distinguishes the modern presidency from the classical *al-imamah al-'uzhma* (comprehensive caliphate). He argues that the contemporary presidency, operating within a constitutional framework with checks and balances, is fundamentally different from the classical caliphate, which represented absolute authority. The modern president functions primarily as an administrator and political executive, not as the supreme religious-political authority. This institutional difference allows for the permission of female presidential leadership while maintaining a categorical prohibition on classical *khilafah* (Al-Qaradhawi 1996).

However, Al-Qaradhawi (1996) sets significant conditions for women who wish to serve as president. Women running for president must adhere to Islamic dress standards and avoid uncontrolled interactions; prioritize family responsibilities, preferably avoiding long periods away from children; and require their husband's permission for extended travel. These conditions effectively create significant practical limitations that are not available to male presidential candidates. Male presidential candidates do not face similar requirements.

These requirements reflect conditional rather than equal permission; formally allowed but substantially restricted. This pattern reveals Al-Qaradhawi's moderate positioning strategy: making the presidency theologically acceptable to a conservative constituency while maintaining patriarchal structures through practical restrictions. These conditions serve to reassure traditional audiences that women's political participation will not fundamentally disrupt the gender order. This strategic compromise allows for the expansion of women's formal political rights while maintaining a substantial gender hierarchy.

Al-Qaradhawi explicitly bars women from *al-imamah al-'uzhma*, citing classical *ijma'* as justification. His reasoning emphasizes that comprehensive *khilafah* encompasses religious interpretive authority, prayer leadership, military command, and binding religious-political decision-making. He argues that this comprehensive office requires qualities that are supposedly incompatible with women's nature and their primary domestic roles (Al-Qaradhawi 1996). However, contemporary scholarship questions whether categorical *ijma'* ever existed or remains binding in a modern context. This categorical prohibition reflects a value commitment to maintaining orthodox credentials rather than an inescapable textual requirement.

2. Nazaruddin Umar's Comprehensive Gender Hermeneutics

a. Cultural capital and a position that crosses boundaries

Nazaruddin Umar occupies a position that is fundamentally different from Yusuf al-Qaradhawi, operating at the intersection of academia, government, and religion. Unlike al-Qaradhawi, whose background is firmly rooted in classical Islamic education, Umar's intellectual formation combines traditional Islamic scholarship with modern academic disciplines such as gender studies, hermeneutics, and critical social sciences.

This hybrid formation produces an analytical framework unavailable to those educated solely in the classical tradition. Umar holds multiple institutional roles: Minister of Religious Affairs, Grand Imam of the Istiqlal Mosque, professor in Indonesia's Islamic higher education system, and active figure in Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah.

These positions generate symbolic capital based on state legitimacy, academic authority, and social-organizational recognition (Hasyim 2022). This contrasts with al-Qaradhawi's transnational academic capital, which is accumulated through recognition as a leading legal scholar and global visibility through Al-Jazeera (Shemer 2021).

Umar represents religious authority embedded in the national bureaucratic framework, while al-Qaradhawi is an example of charismatic transnational academic authority operating outside state structures. These differences shape their respective spheres of responsibility. Umar must balance the expectations of an academic community that values critical autonomy, government institutions that demand administrative loyalty, and a religious community that requires theological authenticity. Al-Qaradhawi negotiates legitimacy primarily through academic peers and a transnational public.

Umar's habitus reflects the academic habitus of Indonesian Islam, shaped by the institutional tradition of UIN, the openness of post-Suharto civil society, and engagement with gender discourse. The intellectual environment of Indonesian Islam, influenced by the traditionalism of Nahdlatul Ulama, the reformism of Muhammadiyah, and the state's policy of moderation, provides a unique environment for reinterpreting gender and modernity. This environment provides resources unavailable in the more restrictive Middle Eastern context, including civil society advocacy for women's rights and discursive space to question orthodox interpretations.

This Indonesian contextualization is crucial. Indonesian Islamic organizations have historically adopted pragmatic approaches to gender issues, with the *pesantren* tradition accepting women's religious studies and NU recognizing women's public roles within certain parameters. Post-Suharto democratization expanded the space for gender discourse, with women's Islamic organizations such as Fatayat NU and 'Aisyiyah advocating progressive interpretations. Umar's work emerges from this unique Indonesian Islamic feminist discourse.

A hallmark of Umar's intellectual disposition is her willingness to critique assumptions embedded in the classical interpretive tradition. Her awareness of the social construction of religious knowledge allows her to critique gender bias in certain interpretive approaches more explicitly than al-Qaradhawi.

Umar's academic background equipped him with methodological tools: historical awareness, hermeneutic theory, and sensitivity to epistemic power, which are not always developed through classical Islamic training alone (Hasyim 2022). However, Umar's position in government limits his room for maneuver. While providing a platform for policy influence, it also limits the radicalism of his intellectual intervention.

Operating within the structure of the state requires navigating political considerations that independent scholars might avoid. This necessitates a balance between transformative aspirations and institutional demands for legitimacy and stability (Musonnif et al. 2024). His position in government creates the constraint of official Islam; the pressure to articulate positions consistent with the state's moderate Islamic agenda.

b. Five Qur'anic principles of gender equality

Umar advocates for full and equal political participation for women, basing his position on a comprehensive gender hermeneutical framework that establishes gender equality as the primary interpretive principle. This methodological choice reverses the

traditional interpretive hierarchy in which specific restrictive texts override the general principle of equality.

Umar (Umar 2001) articulates five Qur'anic principles of gender equality that function as a meta-interpretive framework. First, equality as servants of Allah (QS Al-Hujurat:13) in which Allah created humans “*from male and female*,” establishing fundamental equality based on piety rather than gender. This verse explicitly rejects gender as a criterion for spiritual hierarchy, establishing a transcendent principle that should inform all gender-related texts. If Allah judges humans solely on the basis of piety, human institutions that impose restrictions based on gender contradict divine criteria.

Second, equality as caliphs on earth (QS Al-Baqarah:30), in which Allah establishes humans as His representatives (khalifah). Umar interprets khalifah as a philosophical-theological concept indicating that all humans have equal capacity as Allah's representatives. This khalifah includes moral agency and the capacity to manage society without gender distinctions.

If both genders act as Allah's representatives, limiting women's public authority contradicts their divinely appointed status. This is based on Wadud's influential interpretation of the concept of khalifah. Third, equality in accepting the primordial covenant (QS Al-A'raf:172) indicates that all souls bear witness to Allah's power.

This establishes both genders as equally responsible moral beings. The primordial covenant creates equality in cosmic responsibility; men and women are equally bound by divine commands, equally responsible for ethical actions, and equally subject to eschatological judgment. This undermines arguments that restrict women based on presumed moral deficiencies.

Fourth, equality in the role of moral agents in the cosmic drama (QS Al-A'raf:22), where both genders function as responsible moral agents in Allah's narrative. The Qur'anic narrative depicts women as independent moral actors in making meaningful ethical decisions. Figures such as Maryam, Sarah, Asiya, and Queen Sheba appear as independent agents, whose choices shape sacred history, demonstrating women's ability to make moral judgments independently without male intermediaries.

Fifth, equality in the right to excellence (QS An-Nahl:97) promises, “*Whoever does righteous deeds, whether male or female, while being a believer, We will give them a good life.*” This establishes the basic principle that the achievement of righteous deeds receives equal rewards regardless of gender. The verse explicitly mentions both male and female subjects, indicating a gender-neutral evaluation. This creates a theological foundation for women's equal participation in all fields oriented toward excellence, including politics.

These principles refer to previous works of Islamic feminism, including Mernissi's work on leadership capacity, Wadud's conceptualization of the caliphate, and Amin's arguments for equality (Badawi 2024; Ibrahim 2021; Nugroho 2025). Umar's contribution lies in his systematic elaboration in the Indonesian context, integration with rigorous hermeneutical methodology, and application to concrete policy advocacy.

Umar employs a strategy of text hierarchization, prioritizing universal theological principles over specific contextual applications. When there is tension between fundamental principles of equality and texts that appear to restrict women, Umar interprets specific texts contextually as temporal applications that do not override universal principles. This is a deliberate hermeneutical choice, reflecting an axial commitment to gender equality as a meta-principle. The theological justification is likely based on a premise of divine perfection: universal principles reflect the eternal divine will, while specific provisions address contingent historical circumstances.

Using the principle of equality as a hermeneutical lens, Umar treats restrictive texts differently from Al-Qaradhawi. Regarding the hadith about people entrusting matters to women, Umar conducts a rigorous critique of the hadith by analyzing the chain of transmission and contextual factors, finding insufficient strength for a categorical prohibition. More fundamentally, he criticizes how certain interpretive traditions selectively highlight restrictive texts while systematically ignoring texts that affirm equality, revealing bias in traditional interpretive practices (Umar 2001, 2025).

Both classical exegesis and Umar's hermeneutics employ selective emphasis; it is not objectivity versus bias, but rather different interpretive priorities that reflect different axial values. Classical studies emphasizing restrictive texts reflect a patriarchal social context. Umar's emphasis on principles of equality reflects a contemporary commitment to gender justice shaped by feminist theory and critical awareness of patriarchal power.

Umar cites the story of Queen Bilqis from QS An-Naml:23-44 to demonstrate the positively recognized leadership capacity of women in the scriptures. Bilqis ruled justly, made decisions through consultation (shura), demonstrated wisdom, and was recognized by Solomon as a legitimate leader. The Quranic narrative describes her reign positively without criticism of her gender (Umar 2001, 2010).

Then, he allows women to become president without the conditions set by Al-Qaradhawi. His permission is based on the difference between modern presidency and classical caliphate. Presidents in contemporary democratic systems operate within a secular-administrative framework limited to worldly affairs without religious authority. The presidential function involves policy implementation and administrative oversight; technical-managerial tasks that require competence regardless of gender. Women's capacity should be evaluated based solely on competence, qualifications, and ethical character (Umar 2001, 2010).

Umar explicitly rejects additional requirements regarding dress codes, family priorities, or spousal permission as additional burdens that reflect patriarchal control rather than Islamic principles (Siregar 2025). Domestic responsibilities should be understood as a negotiated partnership requiring fair distribution rather than an exclusive burden on women that justifies political exclusion.

This unconditional permission represents a more radical position than Al-Qaradhawi's conditional permission, which treats gender as completely irrelevant to political capacity. For Umar, female presidents must meet the same standards as male

presidents without additional gender-specific requirements, reflecting a principle of true equality rather than limited permissions that maintain patriarchal structures.

Umar does not categorically exclude women from the classical caliphate, but acknowledges that this remains a controversial area where theological complexities prove significant. He recognizes that the caliphate represents a theological institution that contains both religious and political authority, fundamentally different from the modern presidency. The comprehensive religio-political nature of the caliphate creates a theological complexity that modern presidencies do not possess.

Although Umar's principles of equality prove powerful for the modern political context, they encounter limitations when applied to classical religio-political institutions. Whether theoretical positions on the classical caliphate are practically relevant when the institution no longer exists remains a matter of debate. Umar's refusal to definitively resolve the eligibility of women in the classical caliphate may indicate a sophisticated recognition that modern hermeneutics may not suffice for classical institutions, or a limitation of the framework that suggests that the principle of gender equality faces unavoidable theoretical difficulties (Siregar 2025; Umar 2001, 2010).

3. Comparing Field Position, Habitus, Capital, and Transformative Strategies

a. The formation of field position and habitus

Al-Qaradhawi's intellectual formation is an example of what Bourdieu (1990) conceptualizes as the habitus of the ulama; a deep and internalized disposition acquired through classical Islamic education that emphasizes mastery of texts, traditional fiqh methodology, and respect for academic consensus. His education at Al-Azhar and subsequent socialization within the Muslim Brotherhood network produced a lasting orientation toward incremental modification rather than revolutionary rupture. This disposition created what Bourdieu calls a *feel for the game*; an intuitive understanding of what arguments would resonate within traditional academic circles.

Umar's trajectory reveals a fundamentally different pattern of habitus formation. His intellectual disposition emerged from the context of modern Indonesian higher education, which integrates critical methodology, historical awareness, and interdisciplinary approaches alongside traditional Islamic learning. This produced a modern-academic habitus that tends to question established wisdom and employ non-classical analytical tools.

b. Different strategies of capital accumulation

Al-Qaradhawi's capital portfolio centers on classical scholarly credentials; training at Al-Azhar, mastery of traditional Islamic sciences, and recognition among transnational Muslim constituencies. This symbolic capital provides substantial legitimacy but comes with an implicit obligation to continuously demonstrate loyalty to orthodox methodology. His strategy involves the accumulation of orthodox reformist

capital; authority derived from a combination of strict adherence to traditional forms and substantial strategic modifications.

Umar operates with a fundamentally different composition of capital, reflecting his position in various institutional fields. His symbolic capital comes from diverse sources: academic qualifications, government administrative experience, and organizational networks. This multi-field position provides structural autonomy; the ability to take radical stances because rejection in one field does not eliminate authority in another.

c. Orthodox versus heterodox positions

Al-Qaradhawi operates firmly within the orthodox realm, maintaining the traditional framework while attempting to modify it from within. His acceptance of the basic doctrines of interpretive methodology signals a commitment to working within established rules. This orthodox position makes him widely accepted in mainstream Muslim communities, but it comes at a cost, limiting transformative radicalism.

Umar's position exhibits characteristics of heterodoxy; a position that challenges not only specific interpretations but also the epistemic practices that produce those interpretations. His explicit critique of gender bias in classical exegesis represents a heterodox intervention, questioning assumptions about interpretive authority that are taken for granted. This heterodox position allows for more radical criticism but faces unique challenges that require careful navigation between innovation and ambiguity.

d. Surface convergence that hides substantial differences

The apparent convergence between Al-Qaradhawi and Umar on the eligibility of female presidents initially suggests that scholars from very different fields can reach similar conclusions. Giddens' (2016) theory of structuration helps explain the meaning and limits of this convergence. Both demonstrate deep knowledge; a sophisticated understanding of the structures they navigate and a strategic capacity to mobilize available resources.

However, a deeper analysis reveals that the surface convergence hides important substantive differences. Al-Qaradhawi's permission is based on institutional differentiation, allowing him to permit female presidency while prohibiting *al-imamah al-'uzhma*. However, its application to conditions creates practical gender differentiation. Umar's unconditional permission arises from a fundamentally different theoretical foundation, rooted in his gender hermeneutics, which treats gender as completely irrelevant to political capacity.

e. Reproduction and transformation of patriarchal structures

Giddens' (2016) concept of duality proves illuminating in understanding how the work of both scholars simultaneously reproduces and transforms patriarchal formations. Al-Qaradhawi utilizes the traditional legal framework to open up interpretive space for

women's political participation. However, his practice also reproduces certain structural elements, particularly assumptions about women's primary domestic responsibilities.

Umar's hermeneutic work shows a similar duality with a different emphasis, reflecting his heterodox position. His explicit mobilization of the Quranic principle of equality challenges restrictive interpretive traditions. Yet even his sophisticated hermeneutics face structural limitations, as suggested by his acknowledgment of unresolved theological complexities regarding classical caliphate.

f. Practical consciousness versus discursive consciousness in interpretive work

Giddens' (2016) distinction between practical consciousness and discursive consciousness provides a crucial analytical tool. Al-Qaradhawi operates primarily at the level of practical consciousness in his engagement with traditional methodologies, demonstrating mastery without necessarily questioning the fundamentals of tradition. Umar's hermeneutic work, in contrast, operates substantially at the level of discursive consciousness, explicitly raising principles that are usually accepted without question for critical examination.

4. Implications for Gender Discourse Transformation

A comparative analysis of Al-Qaradhawi and Umar's approaches reveals significant implications for understanding and developing gender discourse transformation in contemporary Muslim societies. The contrasting strategies of the two highlight different pathways through which religious authority can be mobilized to challenge patriarchal structures, while also revealing persistent limitations.

First, the coexistence of orthodox reformist and heterodox hermeneutical approaches suggests that transformation requires pluralistic strategies rather than a single correct methodology. Al-Qaradhawi's moderate reformism has proven essential for reaching conservative constituencies that would reject radical intervention, while Umar's comprehensive gender hermeneutics provide a solid theological foundation for progressive constituencies. Rather than competing alternatives, these approaches function complementarily within a differentiated Islamic intellectual field, each serving constituencies that the other cannot effectively reach. This suggests that promoting gender equality requires the strategic application of multiple interpretive frameworks simultaneously, rather than insisting on a single orthodoxy.

Second, the persistence of classical caliphate as an unresolved theoretical issue in both frameworks suggests that certain patriarchal structures are more resistant to transformation than others. Both scholars successfully expand the possibilities for women's political participation in the context of the modern nation-state while remaining wary of comprehensive religio-political leadership. This pattern of uneven transformation suggests that institutional differentiation strategies (distinguishing modern presidencies from classical caliphates) are more implementable than comprehensive theoretical

resolutions to all questions of gender hierarchy. Practical progress may occur through institutional uniqueness rather than universal principles alone.

Third, the institutional involvement of both scholars; Al-Qaradhawi in transnational networks of scholars, Umar in state bureaucratic structures, shows that transformative discourse requires legitimacy within existing power structures even while challenging them. Criticism from outside lacks the institutional leverage for real policy influence, while a position entirely within risks co-optation that limits transformative radicalism. Effective transformation requires a strategic position at the institutional boundaries where scholars accumulate sufficient capital for credibility while maintaining sufficient autonomy for critical intervention.

D. Conclusion

This study successfully answers three main questions through an integrated Bourdieu-Giddens analysis of Al-Qaradhawi and Umar's discourse on women's political participation. With regard to the construction of epistemic authority, both scholars have successfully established credible positions that enable women's political participation through different strategies. Al-Qaradhawi accumulated orthodox reformist capital in the field of transnational scholars, enabling broad acceptance while maintaining his orthodox credentials. Umar accumulated diverse academic-governmental capital, enabling more radical hermeneutic interventions among progressive constituencies.

These different strategies perform complementary functions in a differentiated landscape in the field of Islamic intellectuals. With regard to the dynamics of structure-agency, social-religious structures tangibly shape intellectual production through field positions, habitus, and capital distribution.

Simultaneously, both figures demonstrate reflective agency that negotiates structures through strategic text reinterpretation, institutional differentiation, and meta-hermeneutic critique. Neither achieves complete transcendence over structural determinism, but both achieve meaningful partial transformations, opening up new interpretive possibilities.

Regarding transformative potential, both approaches contribute complementarily but incompletely to the transformation of gender discourse. Al-Qaradhawi's moderate reformism achieves broader institutional acceptance, facilitating gradual change. Umar's gender hermeneutics offers a stronger theological foundation through the principle of comprehensive equality.

Both maintain skepticism toward classical caliphate, indicating that transformation remains uneven across institutional domains. The integration of Bourdieu and Giddens' frameworks demonstrates significant analytical value, illuminating how religious discourse operates simultaneously as a mechanism of social reproduction and a space of transformative possibility.

Future research exploring the ethnography of acceptance, institutional adoption processes, and women's autonomous hermeneutics will provide a more complete understanding of discourse-level transformations translated into practice-level changes.

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