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# Is there a Sexism in Islamic Leadership? The Case of the Sultanahs in Lanao Sultanate, Philippines

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## Abstract

Scarce knowledge on the status of Muslim women in Islam causes misinterpretations and distasteful opinions regarding it in Islamic leadership, and predominantly on the roles of women in societies. This contributes negatively in a direct way to the plight of Muslim women in many Muslim countries in the Middle East, West, Asia, Africa, and elsewhere. This is a serious social problem that requires immediate attention and scholarly remedies so that the core of this social problem will be solved, and its damaging effects to the Muslim women shall be addressed. Women in Islamic leadership, are often misunderstood by the Westerners; and more specifically by the Muslim communities themselves due to scarce knowledge on the nature of leadership in Islam. Broadly speaking in the Islamic world; and particularly in the Muslim localities of Philippines, as a case study, the Mëranao women had a special role in the traditional leadership in Lanao Sultanate. Both the sultan and sultanah (*bai-a-labi*) form a mutual leadership that is unique from the leadership of the rest of the Muslim world and societies. This study examines whether or not there is a sexism in Islamic leadership under the lens of the said sultanate. This research explores the participation of Muslim women in the Lanao Sultanate leadership, and the selection process in choosing a sultanah, her functions and personal qualities. This scholarly endeavor navigates the Islamic perspectives on Muslim women in leadership.

**Keywords:** Islamic leadership, Lanao Sultanate, Mëranao women, qualifications, functions

## Introduction

There are classic and contemporary debates among Muslim scholars on the status of Muslim women in leadership as the state leaders. Such debates are wide-ranging and remain unclear whether the Muslim women could serve as the head of state or not. Currently, there are two opposing poles on these debates. On one pole, it favors that Muslim women could be directly involved in state leadership, and that women can be the state leaders themselves.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, the other pole opposes such views, hence, fundamentalists and Orthodox Muslims viewed that Muslim women should not be involved in politics, and they cannot take part in Islamic leadership.<sup>2</sup> However, in

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<sup>1</sup>See Dalia G., *Meet the Nine Muslim Women Who Have Ruled Nations*. Accordingly, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Turkey, Senegal, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Kosovo, Mali, Northern Cyprus, Mauritius, Singapore, Tanzania and Tunisia have had Muslim women as Prime Minister or President, 2015. <https://egyptianstreets.com/2015/06/09/meet-the-nine-muslim-women-who-have-ruled-nations/>. Accessed: October 10, 2022.

<sup>2</sup>Scholars and individuals who claim that Muslim woman cannot be the head of state refer to some verses of the Holy Qur'an in their support of their claim which are as follows: "And they (women) have rights similar to those of men over them in kindness, and men are a degree above them. Allah is Mighty, Wise. Next is, And call to witness, from among your men, two witness. And if two men be not (at hand) then a man and two women, of such as ye approve as witness, so that if the one erreth (through forgetfulness) the other will remember."

reality though, Islam allows the Muslim women to be involved in politics or themselves as leaders.<sup>3</sup> As a matter of fact, in the modern contemporary Muslim world, countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Turkey, Senegal, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Kosovo, Mali, Northern Cyprus, Mauritius, Singapore, Tanzania and Tunisia have had Muslim women Prime Ministers and Presidents respectively.

Jasser Auda proclaims that during the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) women were highly regarded by the Prophet (PBUH) for their immense contributions to the Muslim community ranging from literacy, charity, architectural details, education, religion, health, economics, market management, army, preventative medicine, public order, and many others.<sup>4</sup>

On a broader scale, socially, the genuine and tangible contributions of the Muslim women to the *ummah* have to be revisited, re-evaluated, and to be revived. The social, educational, economic, political, and material progress of any Muslim societies will never be materialised without the active engagement of Muslim women, thus, the recognition of women in their contributions to nation building, public administration, Islamic scholarship, and Muslim affairs in general, must be well established across the Muslim societies.

Historically, in the nascent stage of Islam, the female companions of the Prophet (PBUH) prayed in the Prophet's mosque, traded in their local and regional markets, taught the Qur'an and the prophetic traditions, gave charity, and even fought in the battle alongside the Prophet. This means that the Muslim women were already emancipated, empowered, and assumed leadership during the period of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). They cooperated with men in civil life and defensive warfare. They excelled in various fields including *Ḥadīth* studies, theology (*kalām*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), public administration, and warfare, etc.<sup>5</sup> For example, many *Sahaba* (companions of the Prophet, (PBUH) and *Tabeeeyeen* (direct followers of the *Sahaba*) used to come to *Hazrat Ayesha (RA)* for learning Islamic law, theology and *Ḥadīth*. *Hazrat Zainab (RA)*, the daughter of *Hazrat Ali (RA)*, was a great Islamic scholar of theology. Fatima Binte Abbas and Sikha Sayeeda, used to come to the mosque to deliver lectures on Islamic theology. Other historical records commemorated the name of many female warriors who fought against the enemies in the battle fields.<sup>6</sup>

Before dwelling further in our discussion, let us first highlight the problem statements of this study which it aims to answer: what are the Islamic perspectives on leadership from the perspectives in the Qur'an and *Ḥadīth*? Is there a sexism in Lanao Sultanate in the context of women's Islamic leadership? And how Mēranao women are appointed to becoming a sultanah, and what are their qualifications, roles and functions?

As for the objectives of the study, it pursues to investigate whether or not there is a sexism in Islamic leadership particularly in Lanao Sultanate in Mindanao, Philippines. In addition, this study aims to navigate the roles of Mēranao women's participation in Lanao Sultanate leadership.

<sup>3</sup>Sarah Shebabuddin, *Female Leadership in Islam* (Bangladesh: Islamic Research Foundation International, Inc., 2000); See link: [http://www.irfi.org/articles/articles\\_401\\_450/female\\_leadership\\_in\\_islam.htm](http://www.irfi.org/articles/articles_401_450/female_leadership_in_islam.htm). Accessed: December 15, 2020.

<sup>4</sup>Jasser Auda, "Female Role Models for Today's Muslim Women in International Seminar on Socio-Educational Empowerment of Muslim Women in the New Century," *Conference paper*, organized by SOASCIS, Universiti Brunei Darussalam on April 25, 2018.

<sup>5</sup>Mohammad Elius, "Islamic View of Women Leadership as Head of the State: A Critical Analysis," *The Arts Faculty Journal*, 2012.

<sup>6</sup>Alam S., *Islamic Thoughts* (Dhaka: Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1984), 305-11.

The significance of this research lies on the nature of its urgency which demands scholarly studies due to the uniqueness of state formulation of the Lanao Sultanate as it gives the Muslim women to participate alongside with men in leadership. Thus, this challenges the traditional Islamic leadership where the leadership is consigned to men only. In addition, this research highlights that there is no single formulation and single structure of Islamic leadership in Islamic countries or societies, for instance, the Lanao Sultanate has multiple mini-sultanates and it has sultans and sultanahs under the Democratic Republic of the Philippines. This shows that it has been coping with the renaissance period, and modern lifestyle as it embraced Islam liberally which regards women as equals to men in terms of accessing to powers and leadership.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. *Ulama's* Views on Leadership of Women

From Islamic perspective, a leader is a person who is elected or given a certain position consensually so that he/she could perform his/her duties and obligations in such a way that they are consistent with the Islamic laws. The most mind-boggling question is, what are the reasons why many Muslim scholars and non-scholars alike assert that Muslim women should stay away from leadership and refrain from taking part in politics? Many scholars hold a stringent view on the issue as to whether it is due to the verses in the Qur'ān and *Hadīth* that Muslim women are restricted from accessing to take a leadership position in the society, state and or nation, or is it on the basis of socio-cultural, historical, and economic make-up of the society, state or nation. Specifically, many Muslim scholars support the restriction of women leadership and often base their assertions on the Qur'ānic verses which were addressed to the Prophet's (PBUH) wives to stay home, and to avoid displaying their beauty in public places like that of the time during the ignorance and primitiveness in Arabia.<sup>7</sup> This said verse is misused and misinterpreted by many Muslim scholars and non-scholars, rather this verse intends to call for the Muslims to work on the preservation of life and dignity of women, and to materialize in giving honor and respect to women.

The only Prophetic tradition regarding women's leadership is that the Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said, "Never will succeed such a nation as lets their affairs carried out by a woman."<sup>8</sup> This said Prophetic tradition should be interpreted from a historical context and historical point of view only, and it should not be contextually applied in the modern time since the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was not given power by Allāh to predict the future events that will take place in the Muslim communities. In the modern times, the quest for women empowerment is integral to the issue of leadership.

Syed Mohammad Ather and Farid Ahammad Sobhani confirm that Islamic leadership is similar to conventional leadership regarding the role of a leader whose main duty is to lead a group whose practice influence in forming and achieving the organization's plans.<sup>9</sup> Ellyana Amran and Willy Arafah states that the position of Muslim women, in the era of globalization, as women entrepreneurs is allowed as long as it does not violate the religious values stated in the Qur'ān and *Hadīth*.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Al-Qur'ān, Al-Ahzāb 33:33.

<sup>8</sup>Muhammad b Ismail Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, "Book of Afflictions and the End of the World," Hadīth no. 7099, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:7099>.

<sup>9</sup>Syed Mohammad Ather, Farid Ahammad Sobhani, "Managerial Leadership: An Islamic Perspective," *IUC Studies* 4, (2007): 7-24.

<sup>10</sup>Ellyana Amran, and Willy Arafah, "Analysis of Factors Determining Islamic Motivation Entrepreneurship of Muslim Women Entrepreneurs in Jakarta," *Business and Entrepreneurial Review* 20 (2), (2020): 163-170.

Saba Yunus and Manorama Gupta declares that despite the great inclusion of Muslim women in socio-political life, yet many Muslims still harbours the notion that the ideal Muslim woman should maintain her role as a housewife. Such restrictions imposed on women in the public spheres is interpreted by the conservativeness of the Muslim communities and their patriarchal system which always imposes rules in favor of men over women in leadership.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Yunus and Gupta believe that the current century has witnessed an awakening among Muslim women in different spheres of knowledge, profession, political thought and literature. In the similar context, Arif Rohman argues that Muslim women had greater respect during prophet's life as they were treated equally having different roles in the society. In contrast, during the times followed by the period of the Prophet (PBUH) women were subjected to patriarchal societies which exclude women roles in different spheres of social life, confining their roles as housewives. They have done this to keep the status quo of men's domination over women and in leadership. Rohman further argues that many conservative scholars continue to use religious claims to block the progress of Muslim women to leadership positions.<sup>12</sup>

Majority of Islamic scholars disagree with the leadership of Muslim women, however, there are some prominent Muslim scholars who supported the leadership of Muslim women.<sup>13</sup> For example, Sharif M. Choudhury notes that Imām Malik has approved that women could become the heads of the states.<sup>14</sup> The *Maliki* jurists and followers have accordingly given verdicts that support the opinion of Imām Malik.<sup>15</sup> Somehow, this claim requires valid primary sources serving as evidences in order to support this particular claim. For instance, it would sound more agreeable if Sharif M. Choudhury, the *Maliki* jurists and their followers have provided us with the direct quoted statement of *Maliki* affirming that women could be strong leaders.

Corollary to this, *Mawlana* Ashraf Ali Thanvi confirmed that there is no barrier against a woman becoming the head of the government, if the government is democratic and its affairs are being managed by the leaders with the assistance of elected representatives.<sup>16</sup>

Islamically, *ijmā* (consensus) is one of the bases of decision-making process in Islam. Thus, if and when the modern societies are unanimous in voting for a Muslim woman to be their leader with her qualifications, then that decision is socially binding and permissible in Islamic law. The validity of consensus in Islam as source of law is through a saying from the *Hadith* which says, "My people will never agree in an error" (Hadji Abdul Racman, 2020).

## 2.2. Women Leadership During the Era of Prophet (PBUH)

When the prophet received his first revelation, he came home shivering due to his unusual experience. *Hazrat* Khadijah (*RA*) listened to him and told him: "Do not worry, for by Him who has dominion over Khadijah's soul, I hope that you are the Prophet of this nation. Allāh would never

<sup>11</sup>Saba Yunus, and Manorama Gupta, "Role of Indian Muslim Women in Politics," *International Conference on Law, Education, Business and Corporate Social Responsibilities* (LEBCSR-17) Budapest: Hungary, Sept. 4-5, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.17758/EAP.ED0917024>.

<sup>12</sup>Arif Rohman, "Women and Leadership in Islam: A Case study in Indonesia," *The International Journal of Social Sciences*, 16 (1), (2013): 46-51.

<sup>13</sup>Mohammad Elius, "Islamic View of Women Leadership as Head of the State: A Critical Analysis," *The Arts Faculty Journal*, Vol. 4, (2012): 195-205, <https://doi.org/10.3329/afj.v4i0.12941>.

<sup>14</sup>Sharif M. Choudhury, *Women's Right in Islam* (Delhi: India, Adam Publishers and Distributors, 1997), 147.

<sup>15</sup>Aftab Hossain, *Status of Women in Islam* (Lahore: Pakistan, Law Publishing Company, 1987), 228.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 173.

humiliate you, for you are good to your relatives, you are true to your word, you help those who are in need, you support the weak, you feed the guest and you answer the call of those who are in distress.”<sup>17</sup> *Hazrat Khadijah (RA)* supported the Prophet (PBUH) emotionally and morally, and spent her wealth in supporting Islam.<sup>18</sup>

*Hazrat ‘Ā’ishah (RA)* spent the rest of her days in Madinah in disbursing *zākat* (alms) to the orphans, widows, disadvantaged, and needy. She worked in transmitting the *Ḥadīth*, and in interpreting the Qur’ānic verses. She contributed in spreading the Islamic teachings. She has served the Muslim community for 44 years after the death of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). About a sixth of the *Ḥadīth* recorded by al-Bukhari in his famed work *Al-Jāmi’ al-Ṣaḥīḥ* are cited on her authority. *Hazrat ‘Ā’ishah (RA)* has issued legal opinions and engaged in *shura* (consultation) with the older male companions of the Prophet (PBUH).<sup>19</sup> This means that women can directly participate in consultation, and to any social matter that gives benefits to the Muslim communities.

Al-Shifaa was one of the wisest women of her time, a prolific teacher, skilled in medicine, and involved in public administration. She conducted preventative treatments and later became the officer or *wali* and in the administration of the marketplace in Madinah.<sup>20</sup> Public administration in the early period of Islam involved Muslim women.

Rufaydah al-Asalmiya was the first nurse in Islam, she treated the wounded, and had a tent by the Prophet’s mosque. When Sa’d ibn Mu’aath was injured in the battle of *Al-Khandaq*, the Prophet (PBUH) ordered that he be treated in her tent. Rufaydah shared her clinical skills with others.<sup>21</sup>

In the Battle of Adnain, Khawlah Bint Al-Azwar’s brother Diraar, amongst others, was captured by the Byzantine forces. Khawlah took a knight’s armor and weapons, wrapped herself fully in a shawl, and fought against the Byzantines. Many soldiers thought that Khawlah was Khalid until Khalid appeared. The Muslims defeated the Byzantines. When Khalid found Khawlah, she was covered in blood. After refusing several times, Khawlah finally revealed her identity. Khalid ordered his army to chase the fleeing Byzantines, with Khawlah leading the attack. Eventually, prisoners, including her brother, were found and freed.<sup>22</sup>

Umme Atyqah was known during the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as brave lady, she had accompanied the Prophet (PBUH) in seven battles. Another Muslim woman during the Prophet’s time was Wairyh, the sister of Muawia, she led a contingent of women in the battle of Yarmuk.<sup>23</sup>

Women in the early period of Islam played an active role in fighting against their enemies. Islam encourages the Muslims to protect their lives, properties, families, homes, and communities. Muslim women joining in the army is not an impediment to the Islamic teachings of Islam on leadership.

<sup>17</sup>Jasser Auda, “Female Role Models for Today’s Muslim Women in International Seminar on Socio-Educational Empowerment of Muslim Women in the New Century.”

<sup>18</sup>Shamim Aleem, *Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and his Family: A Sociological Perspective* (Bloomington, USA: Author House, 2011), 90-92.

<sup>19</sup>Arif Rohman, “Women and Leadership in Islam: A Case study in Indonesia,” *The International Journal of Social Sciences*, 16 (1), (2013): 46-51.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Omar Hasan Kasule, “Historical Roots of the Nursing Profession in Islam,” 2003. Retrieved from the worldwide web on 2 January, 2022 at [www.iiu.edu.my/medic/islmed/Leemed/rufaid98.nov.html](http://www.iiu.edu.my/medic/islmed/Leemed/rufaid98.nov.html).

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Alam S., *Islamic Thoughts*.

### 2.3. Women Leadership in Islamic World: Past to Present

In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, there were women who stood out as rulers such as Arwa al-Sulayhi, she ruled Yemen for a period of seventy-one years. Next is, Sultana Shajarat al-Durr, she took control of Egypt after the death of her husband in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Another Muslim woman leader is, Dhayfa Khatun, after the death of her son, King Abdul Aziz, she became the queen of Aleppo and ruled for six years. During her reign, she faced political and military invasion and threats from the Crusaders, Khwarzmein, Mongols and Seljuks. She also founded Islamic schools.

Meanwhile, Queen Zubayda, the wife of the 9<sup>th</sup> century Caliph Harun Ar-Rasheed, built several water resources and guest houses for pilgrims along major routes leading to Makkah. She was an intellectual woman who expressed her political views publicly and had supported the poets, writers, scholars and needy regardless of their religion.

In the sub-continent, we had Razia Sultana, she was the only female sultan to sit on India's throne in Delhi for four years in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

In the 1500 C.E., Hurrem Sultan, the wife of King Suleyman, founded number of institutions and mosque complex in Istanbul which had Islamic school, public kitchen, bathhouse, and women's hospital. She also built four schools in Makkah and a mosque in Jerusalem.<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, in Kelantan, Malay woman, named Siti Wan Kembang ruled in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. She controlled the social, political, economic and religious affairs of Kelantan. This gives us an idea that Muslim Malay women played in the Islamization of the Malays.<sup>25</sup>

In the Philippines, the Sultanate of Sulu, sultanah Nur-ul-'Azam became its 13<sup>th</sup> female ruler.<sup>26</sup> In the case of Lanao Sultanate, during its foundation in 1616, one of the twenty-eight founders of subordinate sultanates was a woman, named Bai-sa-Lumbak.<sup>27</sup> Today, in the modern and contemporary world, many Muslim women serves as Prime Minister and President.

### 3. The Lanao Sultanate

The Lanao Sultanate in Mindanao was founded in 1616.<sup>28</sup> This sultanate applies consultative monarchy which is equivalent to monarchical democracy. In this sultanate, there is no single authority, instead, it has multiple mini sultanates being historically, socially, politically and Islamically interconnected and united.

Geographically, the Lanao Sultanate was divided into division and each division was then divided into sub-division. Each sultanate was ruled by their respective *pagawidan/panoroganan* (high ranking sultan and sultanah), and the division and sub-division were ruled by the lower ranking

<sup>24</sup>Zaynab Aliyah, *Great women in Islamic History: a Forgotten Legacy* (Fundacion de Cultura Islamica, 2016). See: <https://funci.org/great-women-in-islamic-history-a-forgotten-legacy/?lang=en>.

<sup>25</sup>Khairudin Aljunied, *Islam in Malaysia: An Entwined History* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 85-104. DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780190925192.003.0005.

<sup>26</sup>Cesar Adib Majul, *Muslims in the Philippines* (Manila: Philippines, Saint Mary's Publishing, 1978), 14-24.

<sup>27</sup>Sohayle M. Hadji Abdul Racman, "The Islamicity of the Lanao Sultanate Practices on Land Grant with Special Reference to the Political Thought of al-Māwardī on Land Grant," *Firdaus Journal* 1 (1), (2021): 79-92c.<https://doi.org/10.37134/firdaus.vol1.1.8.2021c>.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

sultans and sultanahs, but they are inter-dependent on one another based on their *taritib* (order) and *ijma* (consensus).<sup>29</sup>

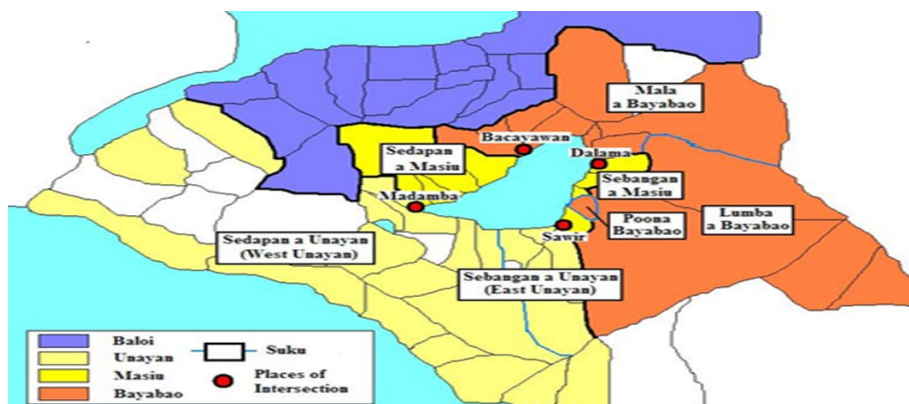
### 3.1. The Lanao Sultanate Laws: *Taritib* and *Ijma*

The Lanao Sultanate in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and today is governed by the *taritib*, and *ijma*. *Taritib* deals primarily with the political organizational set-up of Lanao. It regulates the succession of leaders, their duties and powers. *Ijma* is the consensus of all secular and religious leaders. It guides the Mëranao customs, traditions and laws, and defines the guidelines for all the people to observe and follow in all their day to day affairs. The *taritib* and *Ijma* are the drivers of the socio-political, economic, religious, and spiritual aspects of the Mëranaos, and they are sustaining their kinship systems and relations. The Lanao Sultanate has legal and religious advisers and judges which are now the Shari'ah Counselors. It has also the House of ladies, teachers, prayer leaders, and genealogists.<sup>30</sup>

## 4. The Four States of Lanao and its Geo-political Divisions

### 4.1. The Locale of the Study: The Four States of Lanao and its Geo-political Divisions

The four states of Lanao Sultanate are Bayabao, Unayan, Masiu, and Baloi. Each of this state has superordinate or *pagawidan* sultanate, and has subordinate or *pagawid* sultanate. The state of Bayabao has three districts, namely, Poona Bayabao, Lumba-Bayabao and Mala-Bayabao; and it has 9 superordinate sultanates, and has 12 subordinate sultanates. The state of Unayan has 2 districts, namely Butig and Domalondong, and it has 3 superordinate sultanates, and has 8 subordinate sultanates. The state of Masiu is divided into East and West, and it has 2 superordinate sultanates, and has 4 subordinate sultanates, and lastly, the state of Baloi has 1 superordinate sultanate, and has 4 subordinate sultanates. Overall, the Lanao Sultanate has 15 superordinate sultanates, and has 28 subordinate sultanates. Some of these sultanates have sultanah and sultan reigning simultaneously.<sup>31</sup>



**Figure 1.** The Map of the four states of Lanao Sultanate

<sup>29</sup>Sohayle M. Hadji Abdul Racman, "The Islamicity of Lanao Sultanate, Philippines in the 17th Century as a State," *International Journal of Sciences: Basic and Applied Research* 42 (3), (2018): 205-230.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Sohayle M. Hadji Abdul Racman, "The Islamicity of the Lanao Sultanate Practices on Land Grant with Special Reference to the Political Thought of al-Māwardī on Land Grant," *Firdaus Journal*, Vol. 1 (1), (2021): 79-92. <https://doi.org/10.37134/firdaus.vol1.1.8>.



#### 4. Methodology

In this study, secondary data were accessed through books, dissertations, journals and other sources. Ethnography and historical method of research were used in this research. Historical method is demanding since it requires an intensive fieldworks, social interaction and longer period of immersion of the researcher with the societies, communities, ethnic groups or social organizations which a researcher is studying about. For ethnography method, I have gathered a rich and holistic insights on the Mēranaos' ways of life, their world views and actions: norms, rituals, customs, traditions and their interactions as well as their locale, the Lanao. Being an ethnographer researcher, I am a Mēranao and stint in Lanao areas and lives with the Mēranao societies in Lanao Sultanate. With regards to the population sample of the Mēranao women sultanahs in Lanao Sultanate in Lanao del Sur, respondents were taken from the four major states of Lanao Sultanates.

#### 5. Results and Discussion

There is no sexism in Islamic leadership, however, culturally, men are preferred to lead the Islamic society or the state over women due to the dominant number of Muslim men in leadership after the death of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), for instance, the four 'rightly guided' caliphs namely Abū Bakr (reigned 632–634), 'Umar (reigned 634–644), 'Uthmān (reigned 644–656), and 'Alī (reigned 656–661) were patriarchal in essence since they were all men. Even after 'Alī's reign, there is no woman who became a caliph.<sup>32</sup> During the Umayyad dynasty (661–750), and then later during the Abbasid dynasty (750–1258) followed by the Ottoman Empire (1299–1922), no women took part in leadership. As time went on, many Muslim states emerged in the Middle East, Africa, East Asia, and in Southeast Asia whose kings, sultans, and heads of state were Muslim men.<sup>33</sup> As observed, the series of Islamic leadership in its early period had been dominantly male oriented and patriarchal in nature. Arguably, this leadership arrangement looms throughout the previous centuries and continued to this day.

In a nut shell, the leadership in the Muslim world had been dominated by men, meanwhile women took little interest in leadership due to the existing traditional beliefs that Muslim women should not participate in the leadership of a state; and the leadership of an Islamic state was confined to men only. These beliefs became the foundation bases of the Muslim communities and the Islamic nations to establish a male dominated leadership. Therefore, the little participation of Muslim women in state's leadership is interpreted in the context of traditional, historical, cultural, and social views toward the domestic roles of women who are deemed to do the domestic jobs rather than participating in leadership.

##### 5.1. The Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* on Islamic Leadership

Islamically, the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* does not dictate that the leadership in Islamic societies is exclusive for men. Essentially, Allāh bestowed leadership to both men and women. Allāh says in Sūrah Al-An'am, verse 165: And it is He Who has made you generations coming after generations, replacing each other on the earth. And He has raised you in ranks, some above others that He may try you in that which He has bestowed on you. Surely your Lord is Swift in retribution, and certainly He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful...<sup>34</sup>

This means that there are followers in Islamic leadership and they must obey the authority of their leaders, men or women. In line with this verse, Sūrah Al-Baqarah, verse 30, Allāh says, "when your Lord said to the angels, 'I am placing a successor on earth.'"<sup>35</sup> Sūrah Sād, verse 26 mentions

<sup>32</sup>Erkam Publications, *History of Islam* (Istanbul, Turkey: Erkam Publications, 2018).

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Al-An'am 06:165.

<sup>35</sup>Al-Baqara 02: 30.

the word *khalīfah* (vicegerent) which has also been used for Prophet David, “O Dawud (David)! Verily! We have placed you as a successor on earth, so judge you between men in truth (and justice) ...”<sup>36</sup> Here, Allāh conveys the viceregency of human beings on earth, and that men and women have the capacity to lead and enjoin truth and justice.

Prophet Ibrahim, may Allāh bless him, was given the glad tidings that he has been appointed a leader of all the people. “And (remember) when the Lord of Ibrahim (Abraham) [i.e., Allāh] tried him with (certain) Commands, which he fulfilled. He (Allāh) said (to him), ‘Verily, I am going to make you a leader (Prophet) of mankind.’ [Ibrahim (Abraham)] said, ‘And of my offspring (to make leaders).’ Allāh said, ‘My Covenant (Prophethood, etc.) includes not Zalimūn (polytheists and wrong-doers)’.”<sup>37</sup> This verse does not speak of leadership as exclusive to men. The leadership goes to Ibrahim and his descendants, men and women.

The next is *Ḥadīth*, the words, deeds, moral teachings and the tacit approval of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Some *Ḥadīth* relate concepts on leadership. For example: “Each of you is a shepherd, and all of you are responsible for your flocks.”<sup>38</sup> This *Ḥadīth* has two meanings, one is that every individual, men or women, could be a potential leader who could lead others to the right path, in addition, this *Ḥadīth* could be interpreted in essence that men are complementary to women, and likewise women are complementary to men. Hence, Allāh has created the opposite sex for this complementarity. With His immeasurable knowledge, He did not create men only nor women only; similarly, the purpose of human life and the creation of opposite sex is not only for procreation but also for mutual care which applies to leadership which shows that women can develop and nurture their skills, knowledge and potentials to become leaders as men do (Hadji Abdul Racman, 2020). Moreover, the leadership of the Muslim community is a shared leadership that is based on mutual assistance and cooperation between and among the leaders and the followers, both men and women. In a nut shell, at the end of the day, leadership is not based on gender or sex of a person but it is based on the leader’s ability, skills, and knowledge to lead his/her followers, state or nation.

A leader who uses his/her power or discharges his/her duties must also adhere to the noble characteristics of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) such as honesty, just, kindness, truthfulness, trustworthiness, boldness, courage, coolness, firmness, and steadfastness. A Muslim man who is a leader without these noble characteristics mentioned above could not lead his people or nation properly and effectively, hence this would tell us that in essence, leadership is not based on sex of a person but based on the characteristics, traits, knowledge, leadership skills, styles, experiences, education, and the moral inclinations of that person.

The Qur’ān also emphasizes that the Muslims must obey the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and emulate his noble deeds. Allāh says in the Qur’ān: O you who believe! Obey Allāh and obey the Messenger (Muhammad *SAW*), and those of you (Muslims) who are in authority. (And) if you differ in anything amongst yourselves, refer it to Allāh and His Messenger, if you believe in Allāh and in the Last Day. That is better and more suitable for final determination.<sup>39</sup>

Here, the leaders, regardless of their gender must be obeyed and their authority must be respected and recognized, however, blindly being obeisance to a leader is also dangerous. The followers must also check carefully the humanity, morality and goodness of leaders regardless of their gender be it a woman or a man.

<sup>36</sup>Saad 38:26.

<sup>37</sup>Al-Baqarah 02:124.

<sup>38</sup>*Al-Adab al Mufrad*, “Book of Being a master,” Chapter: The slave is a guardian, *Ḥadīth* no. 206, <https://sunnah.com/adab:206>.

<sup>39</sup>An-Nisa 4:59.

### 5.2. The Process of Selection of a *Bai-a-labi*

Usually, the ascendancy to the throne of sultanah takes place after the reigning sultanah passed away or when she voluntarily resigned for many reasons, like having a severe sickness, becoming very old or when she turns over her authority to her heir or to a person who is a member of other ruling clan, in this case, the heir gets the title based on the rotation of power as well as on the qualifications to become sultanah as stipulated in the *taritib* and *Ijma* of the four states of Lanao.

The members of family who are next in line will meet and discuss among themselves to decide and choose the most qualified person among them to take over the title of sultan, *datu* or *bai-a-labi*.<sup>40</sup> The qualifications and the descent line of a person are not sufficient bases for electing him/her as a ruler. According to Abdullah T. Madale, there are other criteria used in selecting a sultan, *datu* or sultanah to be followed: Does he/she come from a royal family that is entitled to the title he/she is aspiring for? Is this royal family entitled to this rank or title at the given time? Or is it the turn of this royal family to get the title or rank? Is the applicant the most qualified, capable, and appropriate member of his family? Does he/she possess the personality, the intelligence, and the wealth necessary to perform the duties, responsibilities, and authority inherent in the title or rank? Is he/she supported by most, if not all, other members of the royal families? And will the Council of Elders give him/her their blessing and approval?

If the above criteria are mostly met by a prospect, then his/her name will be enlisted among those to be enthroned. The new set of titled *datus* and *bais*, however, has still to get the approval from the 15 supported *pagawidan* sultans and the 28 *pagawid* sultans “who traditionally send their representatives to the enthronement ceremonies in order to give their imprimatur to the coronation.”<sup>41</sup> This means that the individuals who are aspiring to assume a royal title in the Lanao Sultanate went an extensive screening process of their lineage, family background, personal qualities, desired values, and moral inclination before their election; and only then they are enthroned to resume a royal authority.

### 5.3. The Qualities of a *Bai-a-labi*

The sultanah, before she would be enthroned, must undergo a process of checking her qualifications and qualities, according to Birte Brecht-Drouart, the qualities of a sultanah are not said to be much different from those of a sultan. These qualities are: she should be Muslim; has the royal descent; a certain character of grace and refinement; the means and wealth; social connections; knowledge of *taritib* and *Ijma*; should participate in the concerns of the community; should be recognized by the community, and has been confirmed by the 28 *m'babaya ko taritib/pagawid* (law-makers sultans), and the 16 *panoroganans* or *pagawidan* (high ranking sultans) or their representatives.<sup>42</sup>

The unique characteristic of Lanao Sultanate, is that, its Royal Court has been giving power and authority to women. The sultanahs are not simply symbolic leaders but they perform functions in their respective community as the sultan did.

<sup>40</sup>Sohayle M. Hadji Abdul Racman, “The Political Legitimacy of Lanao Sultanate in the 17th Century with Special Reference to the Political Theory of al-Māwārdī,” Ph.D. Thesis, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Brunei Darussalam, 2020.

<sup>41</sup>Abdullah T. Madale, *The Maranaw Torogan* (Manila: Rex Bookstore Inc., 1996).

<sup>42</sup>Birte Brecht-Drouart, “Between Re-traditionalization and Islamic Resurgence. The Influences of the National Question and the Revival of Tradition on Gender Issues among Maranaos in Southern Philippines,” *Ph.D. Thesis*, Goethe Universität, Frankfurt Am Main, 2011.

#### 5.4. The Functions of a *Bai-a-labi*

According to Birte Brecht-Drouart, the general obligation of each female title was said to be the same: to serve the community, peacekeeping, and to support the *bai-a-labi* backing up the sultan. The *bai-a-labi* is said to be responsible for the women in the gender segregated community, and she is the role model for the women.<sup>43</sup>

She could lead any social, spiritual, and cultural activities in the crowd of women. This means that in the M̄ranao societies, women have special rights, and are given authority to lead the community gatherings where women are dominant in numbers. According to Birte Brecht-Drouart, the sultanah also crowns those *bais* from her sultanate ranking below her. Women are ideally consulted and can contribute their ideas and suggestions.<sup>44</sup>

We see the application of Islamic practices i.e., consultation in decision-making process in the M̄ranao societies. The M̄ranao women have been consulted on implementing community matters and on tangible projects that give benefits to the community. Birte Brecht-Drouart says: Titleholders of both sexes (sultan, sultanah) are expected to share certain expenses (construction of a mosque, *madrasah*, weddings, funerals, bride price, blood price, etc. They tend to contribute according to their status. There are several events when titleholders can show their gratitude to their relatives. The sultan and sultanah might be expected to contribute to a feast for the community at *Eid al-Adha* and *Eid al-Fitr* as well as at the birth and death day of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Since giving celebrations on these dates is prestigious, other people of means will invite people to their place.<sup>45</sup>

This indicates that in the old days and today, the spirit of giving, sharing and cooperation is observed in M̄ranao communities. The social, cultural, political, and religious progress of the M̄ranaos lie in the cooperation of people, the titled leaders, the sultans and sultanahs. The Lanao Sultanate is a pioneering local politics in Southeast Asia which kept the early traditions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) which is, giving of position to women in the administration of the Muslim communities. Therefore, from this perspective, the various titles which are given to women with varying degrees and ranks in Lanao Sultanate is legitimate within the Islamic framework of Islamic leadership.

### 6. Leadership of Muslim Women in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

In the recent century, Pakistan has Benazir Bhutto who served as Prime Minister from 1988 to 1990, and again from 1993 to 1996.<sup>46</sup> In Singapore, its current president is Halima Yacob.<sup>47</sup> While, Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim populated nation had been led by Dyah Permata Megawati Setiawati Sukarnoputri as its 5<sup>th</sup> president in the year 2001 to 2004.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Khaleda Zia served as Prime Minister of Bangladesh from 1991 to 1996, and again from 2001 to 2006. In addition, Sheikh Hasina Wazed served as Prime Minister of Bangladesh since January 2009. She became also the Prime Minister of Bangladesh from June 1996 to July 2001. She served for a combined total of over 17 years as Prime minister of Bangladesh.<sup>49</sup> In addition, Turkey, Senegal, Kyrgyzstan, Kosovo, Mali, Northern Cyprus, Mauritius, Tanzania and Tunisia. These countries have had Muslim women as Prime Minister or President.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>*Encyclopædia Britannica*, "On Benazir Bhutto." Updated: December 23, 2021, Link: <https://www.britannica.com/editor/The-Editors-of-Encyclopædia-Britannica/4419>.

<sup>47</sup>*Channel NewsAsia*, Archived from the original on August 7, 2017. Accessed: August 7, 2017.

<sup>48</sup>*Encyclopædia Britannica* as cited.

<sup>49</sup>*The Daily Star*, "PM Birthday Today," Accessed September 29, 2019.

In a nutshell, Muslim women can take part in leadership, and can serve as the head of Islamic state. Interestingly, Singapore has diverse ethnicities such as Chinese, Indians, Muslim Malays and others. Thus, Singapore has Hindus, Buddhists, Catholics, Muslims and others.<sup>50</sup> This tells us that a Muslim woman could be elected as the head of state of a non-Muslim majority country.

Women in Islamic leadership is not yet resolved, and it is still being debated by the Muslim scholars and among Muslims across the divide. The Muslim conservatives and fundamentalists claimed that, "Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them,"<sup>51</sup> as Qur'an says. The arrangement of the Muslim families in many societies had changed due to the fact that nowadays, many Muslim women are the ones who are the breadwinners of their family. Meanwhile, several *ulamas* allow women to be leaders but not as political leaders.<sup>52</sup> Following reasons can be enumerated in favour of women being the head of state of a country that has been extracted from examples and narrations of the Qur'an. They are as follows:

1. "There is no verse in the Qur'an regarding the permission or prohibition of a woman's rule in a country. The Qur'an is silent on this particular point. The silence of the Qur'an on this crucial issue means that it has been left to the Muslim community to decide according to the circumstances.
2. The women have rights similar to those of the men.<sup>53</sup> If men have the right to become head of the state or government, why can't a woman aspire for this office?
3. The story of a woman ruler, Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba, has been related by the Qur'an in its chapter 27. From the description of the Holy Qur'an, we come to notice that:
  - a) Her rule was not that of an autocrat. She had the very good quality of consulting others on all important affairs of the state.
  - b) She was a very wise woman and her sound opinion could not be ignored. Prophet Solomon (*AS*) tested her judgment by miraculously producing her throne in a disguised form and she recognized it.
  - c) And on the top of all she accepted monotheism when she met the Prophet Solomon (*AS*), despite the fact that she was the ruler of disbelievers and had lived all her life among the polytheists.
4. The Qur'an has not talked to the rule of the Queen of Sheba with disapproval and condemnation. Rather her habit of the consulting others before taking decision on vital issues, her wisdom and sound judgment and her readiness to accept Islam at once rather than persisting in disbelief, have found special mention in the Qur'an.
5. The Holy Qur'an directs women to discharge the duty of enjoining good and forbidding wrong which can be discharged most effectively by the *ulil amr* (person in authority) who symbolizes the State. The verse paves the way for the women to become the repository of state authority including the authority of the Head of the State.
6. The functions of an Islamic state have been outlined by the Holy Qur'an in its verse 41 of chapter 22. These functions include establishing of prayer, collection of *Zakat* and enjoining good and

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<sup>50</sup>Encyclopædia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Singapore/The-people>. Accessed: Oct. 10, 2022.

<sup>51</sup>An-Nisa 4:34.

<sup>52</sup>Arif Rohman "Women and Leadership in Islam: A Case study in Indonesia," *The International Journal of Social Sciences*, 16 (1), (2013): 46-51.

<sup>53</sup>Al-Qur'an, Al-Baqara 02:228.

forbidding wrong. The responsibility of discharging these functions has been laid on the shoulders of both Muslim men and women.”<sup>54</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

In the case of Lanao Sultanate, the Mēranao women assumed position such as sultanah and among other royal titles for women. Their appointment to any position undergoes a certain selection process, i.e. their qualities are checked; and their functions are laid down which they are expected to perform for the betterment of the Mēranao societies. This shows that the Lanao Sultanate does not discriminate women to assume a position in Lanao Sultanate leadership. In a nutshell, there is no sexism in the said sultanate in terms of appointing women as leaders.

The leadership in some Islamic countries is still evolving, and slowly many societies are recognizing that Muslim women can take leadership of state. Women in Islamic leadership is still being debated by scholars and among Muslims. Broadly speaking, some Muslim countries had recognized that Muslim women can serve the *ummah* being the head of state.

Overall, this paper offers a fresh narrative on the status of the Muslim women on leadership. On the other hand, this paper also identifies the historical bases of several scholars who blocked the Muslim women to be the heads of states.

### 7.1 Recommendations and Scope for Further Studies

The researcher recommends to explore the other facets of Islamic leadership of Lanao Sultanate. Future researchers may study the similarities and differences of the Lanao Sultanate and the sultanates of Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam. In addition, the future researchers may examine the legitimacy of the plurality of sultanates in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Lanao Sultanate.

### Conflict of Interest

Author(s) declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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