Synthesis of the Concept of Maqamat Sufiyah Nawawi al-Bantani and Modern Psychology in Efforts to Treat Narcissistic Personality Disorder

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Abstract. This paper explores the potential of integrating Sufi spiritual practices with modern psychology in addressing Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD). The study begins by situating NPD as a contemporary mental health concern, influenced by social and cultural factors such as the rise of social media. While Heinz Kohut's self-psychology—through its four therapeutic pillars of empathy, creativity, humor, and wisdom—offers an established psychological approach to NPD, this paper argues that these concepts resonate closely with the *maqamat* (spiritual stages) of Nawawi al-Bantani, a prominent Sufi scholar. Using a qualitative-descriptive method and textual analysis of al-Bantani's works which refer to his books such as: *Salālim al-Fuḍalāʾ, Naṣāʾiḥ al-ʿIbād, Marah Labid* and *Marāqī al-ʿUbūdiyyah*, as primary source; then referring to supporting literature on Sufism, psychopathology, and Islamic psychotherapy from scholarly journals, monographs, and commentaries as secondary one. the paper identifies four *maqamat—qana'ah, muhasabah, shuhbah*, and *mahabah*—as practical principles capable of reducing narcissistic tendencies such as superiority, excessive need for recognition, and lack of empathy. The synthesis demonstrates that while Kohut provides a clinical framework, al-Bantani contributes a spiritual foundation that reinforces psychological healing. The conclusion emphasizes that integrating *maqamat* with self-psychology produces a holistic therapeutic model that addresses both psychological and spiritual dimensions, offering a more comprehensive path toward self-balance, humility, and healthy interpersonal relations.

Keywords: *Maqamat*, Nawawi al-Bantani, Self-Psychology, Narcissistic Personality Disorder, Psychotherapy.

1. Introduction

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) states in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (fifth edition) DSM-V that 0.5% of the United States population suffers from narcissistic personality disorder [1]. Judging from these percentages, it can be estimated that at least 1 in 200 Americans suffers from this disorder; furthermore, it is estimated that 2-16% of sufferers who visit a psychiatrist have this disorder [2]. This means that the prevalence rate may be lower than the actual number; this is because this personality disorder is difficult to diagnose because sufferers feel they don't have a problem.

This means that the prevalence rate may be lower than the actual number; this is because this personality disorder is difficult to diagnose because sufferers feel they don't have a problem. However, this difficulty does not make the identification of NPD impossible. Clinicians and researchers can still recognize potential cases through observable behavioral indicators and standardized psychometric instruments such as the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory (MCMI), and structured clinical interviews based on DSM-V diagnostic criteria. Moreover, secondary data from close interpersonal relationships—such as consistent patterns of grandiosity, lack of empathy, and hypersensitivity to criticism—are often used

to strengthen diagnostic validity. Therefore, while many individuals with NPD do not voluntarily seek treatment, their behavioral manifestations in social or professional settings provide observable evidence that allows the disorder to be identified and studied [1], [3], [4].

Based on this prevalence rate, the average narcissistic disorder sufferer is male. Of that percentage, at least 7.7% are male, while 4.8% are female. This was revealed in interviews with 34,653 adults (as participants) in Wave 2 of the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions [5]. In Indonesia itself, several studies have been conducted, one by Choirunnisa et al. on a number of junior high school students in Serang City, finding that 87% of them fall into the category of NPD sufferers in the middle (76%) and upper (11%) classes. This is evidenced by indications found that some of them demand public recognition, feel resentful when their opinions are not approved and/or affirmed, and lack empathy for their environment and others [6].

Nowadays, the development of technology and information has a massive role in increasing personality. A person's narcissism; this is indicated by the growing dependence on social media. Based on analysis by the Kepois team, it shows that 5.24 billion people worldwide, or 63.9% of the global population, are active social media users [7]. Zelda further subdivided the data into Indonesia, finding that 139 million Indonesians are active social media users. This represents 49.9% of the total population [8]. The results of DataReportal (2024) show that the dominance of social media users is among individuals aged 18-34 years (11%), 13-15 years (8.4%), and 5-12 years (13.4%) [9]. With these figures, it is quite clear that social media can be a digital platform for uploading various personal content on a massive scale, in order to gain social attention.

In the world of social media, a person with a narcissistic personality often flaunts their personal life, and often displays greatness that sometimes does not match reality [10]. This is identified by their excessive frequency of photo or video uploads, which seems to indicate a need for public recognition and validation. The above explanation aligns with Santi's research, which found that having a large number of friends and/or followers on social media increases self-confidence, potentially leading to narcissistic behavior in real life [11].

In essence, anyone can have a narcissistic personality; at normal levels, this personality trait can have a positive effect on productivity. However, extreme narcissism can disrupt normal health functions; this is called narcissistic personality disorder [11]. A person with a narcissistic personality has the potential to have a negative impact on social interactions, and often causes people around them to experience depression and conflict, especially in the work environment [12].

Narcissistic personality disorder isn't untreatable, but it can be difficult because sufferers often don't perceive themselves as having a problem. Heinz Kohut, in his book, The Analysis of Self, states that this disorder can be treated through psychotherapy, offering four practical concepts: empathy, creativity, humor, and wisdom [13]. When examined, these four concepts have essential intersections within the realm of Sufism, where they are prominent in the Sufi culture. When examined within an Islamic context, they offer the possibility of integration and reconciliation with Sufism, offering the concept of the Maqamat (orders) of Nawawi al-Bantani. The researcher aims to present a variety of Al-Bantani's Sufi teachings that have the potential to reduce the NPD personality disorder. According to the researcher, reducing the impact of NPD personality can be achieved through several Maqamat practices and can be an alternative solution in treating this personality disorder.

Several researchers have attempted to address NPD personality traits through a religious perspective. Koenig et al. demonstrated that spiritual and religious approaches have a significant impact on mental strengthening and transpersonal psychotherapy, including for personality disorders such as narcissism [14]. also M. Naufal Waliyuddin offers the concept of Sufi teachings as an effort to treat and prevent NPD [15]; Not only that, Dewi Purnama Sari sees NPD as having implications for mental health, tries to raise people's awareness to return to Allah SWT, and states that no one deserves to be praised except Him [16]. More specifically, the concept of tazkiyatu al-nafs from the perspective of Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani was used as a reference by Dr. Nur Hadi Ihsan, et al. to deal with the culture of consumerism that is widespread in society [17]; However, the concept of maqamat al-Bantani in

addressing NPD has never been explicitly explored to the best of our knowledge. Therefore, the significance of this research, which addresses NPD, broadens the scope of the maqamat's role in addressing various moral issues in society.

2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology rooted in textual and conceptual analysis. The primary objective is to explore the potential integration of *maqāmāt*—as formulated by Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani—with Heinz Kohut's psychotherapeutic principles in addressing narcissistic personality disorder (NPD). As a qualitative inquiry, this research prioritizes the depth of interpretation rather than statistical generalization, making it appropriate for examining complex, abstract constructs such as spiritual states and psychological dynamics.

The researchers employed content analysis and a hermeneutic-interpretive approach to examine and synthesize primary and secondary texts. The content analysis involved selecting key works: The Analysis of the Self by Kohut as the main psychological reference, and several works of Syekh Nawawi al-Bantani—including *Salālim al-Fuḍalāʾ, Naṣāʾiḥ al-ʿIbād, Marah Labid* and *Marāqī al-ʿUbūdiyyah*—as sources of Islamic spiritual thought. These texts were scrutinized to identify recurring concepts, metaphors, and therapeutic implications relevant to narcissistic traits.

Hermeneutically, the analysis focused on understanding the inner meaning (*maʿnā*) and functional correspondence of each *maqām* in Nawawi's framework with Kohut's therapeutic constructs: empathy, creativity, humor, and wisdom. This interpretive process was conducted within the epistemological traditions of both Western psychology and Islamic mysticism, taking into account their ontological assumptions and moral-ethical goals.

In terms of data classification, this study relies on:

1. Primary data: Original texts by Kohut and Nawawi al-Bantani.
2. Secondary data: Supporting literature on Sufism, psychopathology, and Islamic psychotherapy from scholarly journals, monographs, and commentaries.

The analysis was thematic and inductive, allowing the researchers to abstract therapeutic alignments from the textual material. The classification of concepts into functional categories (e.g., *maḥabbah* as empathy, *muḥāsabah* as self-reflection) follows a conceptual mapping technique often used in philosophical and psychological integration studies. This method enabled a synthesis that bridges spiritual ethics and psychodynamic theory, grounded in both academic rigor and religious sensitivity.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Maqamat Sufiyah Perspective of Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani

Maqamat Linguistically, it is the plural form of "maqam", which comes from the root word *qama-yaqumu*, which means "to stand", "to be", or "to be in a position". Ibn Manzur explains that "al-maqam" is a person's standing place or position, both physically and meaningfully; it can also refer to a certain level, degree, or condition that a person occupies [18]. *Maqamat* in Sufism refers to the spiritual stages that a servant must go through to achieve closeness to Allah. In short, Abu al-Qasim al-Qusyairi's perspective in *Risale-i Qusyairiyyah* defines *maqamat* as fixed stations that are progressive, where each stage builds the foundation for the next, with an emphasis on *mujahadah* (self-struggle) [19]. Meanwhile, al-Thusi in his work emphasized *maqamat* as a dynamic process that involves cleansing the soul from reprehensible traits, through a clear sequence of stages, accompanied by hard work [20].

Both al-Thusiy and al-Qusyairy understood that *maqamat* is a spiritual state achieved through a servant's *mujahadah* (inquiry) in drawing closer to Allah SWT. Both emphasized that maqam is not a condition that comes suddenly, but rather the fruit of hard work, spiritual practice, and sincerity in

subduing desires and gradually improving oneself. They agreed that maqam is a hierarchical structure that demands order and appropriateness, where a seeker must perfect one maqam before moving on to the next.

On the other hand, Imam al-Ghazali in his book *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, systematically discusses the *maqamat*, along with the stages that a servant must go through. In the *Rub'u al-Munjiyat* section, namely the last quarter of his book which discusses things that save the soul, among them are the *maqamat sufiyah*; namely: repentance, patience and gratitude, *khauf* and *raja'*, *faqr* and *zuhud*, *tawakal*, and finally, *mahabah* and pleasure (*rida*) [21]. Although al-Ghazali did not explicitly define the meaning of *maqamat*, the practice of *mujahadah* is in line with the *maqamat* defined by other scholars, and it is understood that from his discussion *maqamat* is interpreted as morals and a stable spiritual condition which is achieved through *mujahadah* and becomes a ladder on the journey towards Allah.

Al-Bantani understood the *maqamat* as the spiritual stages a seeker must go through to attain the highest level of closeness to Allah SWT. In his view, these *maqamat* are embodied in nine instructions, which serve as fundamental principles to be consistently practiced. These instructions are not merely ethical advice, but rather constitute a systematic framework for the spiritual journey and the core teachings of al-Bantani's Sufism [22], [23].

The uniqueness of al-Bantani's concept of *maqamat* compared to other Sufi scholars lies in the absence of an assertion that *maqamat* must be carried out sequentially, unlike al-Thusiy and al-Qusyairiy. This pattern is in line with Imam al-Ghazali in *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, which although discussing *maqamat* systematically in the *Rub'u al-Munjiyat* section, does not mention a rigid sequence. This is similar to al-Bantani's view that describes *maqamat* through the practice of nine wills of a seeker. This uniqueness makes it easier for researchers to interpret and identify al-Bantani's *maqamat* more flexibly, so that it can be reconciled with the Kohut psychotherapy framework. Thus, this research is directed at offering a Sufism-based NPD therapy model based on the concept of *maqamat*.

3.2. Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD)

3.2.1. Definition of NPD and its Characteristics

In terms of language, narcissism is a condition in which someone loves themselves [24]. People with NPD personality disorder have an excessive sense of self-love and a high sense of superiority, which leads to selfishness, a lack of empathy for others, and even problems in interacting with others [25]. The term narcissism was originally used by Paul Nacke and Havelovk Ellis with the phrase "narcissus-like" in 1898; later, in 1914, Sigmund Freud introduced the term as "*Narzissmus*" in his paper. At that time, Freud did not yet classify narcissism as a mental disorder, but rather considered this behavior a libidinal complement to instinctive egoism [26].

The discourse on narcissism in contemporary discourse was popularized by Heinz Kohut through his two works, The Analysis of the Self (1971) and The Restoration of the Self (1977), which later gave birth to the theory of self-psychology. Along with Freud, Kohut viewed narcissism as an individual's tendency to crave status and admiration, driven by egoistic motivations [3]. Robert Raskin and Howard Terry describe six aspects inherent in the narcissistic personality, namely authority, self-sufficiency, superiority, exhibitionism, the tendency to exploit others, and vanity [4].

In the DSM-V, narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) is defined if at least five of nine traits are present in a person: an exaggerated sense of self-importance, fantasies of unlimited success or power, belief in being special, need for excessive admiration, sense of privilege, exploitative behavior, lack of empathy, envy, and arrogance [1]. These symptoms can be simplified into three main characteristics of NPD: feelings of superiority, a need for recognition, and a lack of

empathy. The underlying causes are diverse, ranging from biological to psychological to sociocultural [27].

3.2.2. NPD in Islamic Perspective

From an Islamic perspective, NPD can be linked to the characteristics of munafiq described in the Quran, especially the QS. al-Munafiqun: 4-6, which states: "And when you see them, of course you will be amazed by their outward appearance. And if they speak, you listen to their words. They are as if they were sticks propped up (against a wall). They think every cry (that is heard) is directed at them. They are the enemies (whom you must) beware of. Allah cursed them. How did they become people who turned away (from the truth)?"[28] This verse describes hypocrisy as similar to NPD traits, such as false appearances and excessive sensitivity to criticism.

A review of the tafsir of al-Bantani's *Marah Labid li Kasyfi Ma'na al-Quran al-Majid* emphasizes that *munafiqun* have a sick heart due to pride and fear of exposure to weakness, which hinders true repentance. The following is a table of similarities between the characteristics of NPD (based on DSM-5) and the characteristics of hypocrisy in the QS. al-Munafiqun: 4-6 [29]:

Table 1. Similarities between Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) and Hypocrisy in QS. al-Munafiqun: 4-6 According to Tafsir al-Bantani

NPD Traits (DSM-5)	Relation to QS. al-Munafiqun: 4-6	Explanation of Tafsir al-Bantani
Grandiosity (sense of superiority)	"Amazing outward form" (v. 4)	Hypocrites hide their weaknesses with a false appearance, similar to narcissists who exaggerate themselves to avoid feeling inferior.
Excessive need for admiration	"Listen to their words" (v. 4)	They crave praise to cover up their restless hearts, like hypocrites who depend on social recognition.
Lack of empathy and exploitation	"The wood that was leaned on" (verse 4)	Hypocrites are intrinsically weak, exploitative of others without empathy, as al-Bantani describes as a form of *riya*.
Envy and arrogance	"Thinking that every cry was directed at them" (verse 5)	Excessive sensitivity to criticism, which al-Bantani interprets as a test for a heart that is sick due to envy.
Unlimited fantasy of success	"God cursed them" (verse 6)	Hypocrites are trapped in worldly illusions, far from the truth, similar to the narcissist's delusions that reject spiritual reality.

The above description shows a strong parallel, where NPD can be seen as a modern manifestation of Islamic heart disease.

3.3. Synthesis of Maqamat Sufiyah al-Bantani with Kohut's Self-Psychology

3.3.1. Heinz Kohut's Self-Psychology

Heinz Kohut, in his book The Analysis of the Self (1971), developed self-psychology as an approach to treating NPD with a focus on building a coherent "self" through mirroring and idealization [13]. Kohut offered four main principles for therapy:

1. **Empathy:** The therapist acts as a "self-object" who reflects the patient's needs without judgment, helping to reduce narcissistic defenses.
2. **Creativity:** Encourage creative expression to integrate fragmented grandiose aspects.
3. **Humor:** Used to relieve ego tension through a light perspective, facilitating self-acceptance.
4. **Wisdom:** Therapists provide wise insights for the transition from pathological narcissism to emotional maturity [13].

This approach emphasizes understanding empathy as central to healing, which has proven effective in cases of NPD resistant to other therapies

3.3.2. Implications of *Maqamat* al-Bantani in Handling NPD

Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani's *maqamat* can be traced through a number of his important works, such as *Salalimu al-Fudhola*, which outlines the *maqamat sufiyyah* in the form of nine wills; then *Maraqiy al-'Ubudiyyah*, which touches on the concept of *shuhbah*; and *Nashaih al-'Ibad*, which discusses the idea of *mahabah*. When compared with al-Ghazali's thinking, it is clear that al-Bantani's version of the *maqamat* has a similar substance in terms of practice and application [17]. From a modern psychological perspective, several concepts of al-Bantani's *maqamat* can be drawn as practical suggestions for treating personality disorders, particularly narcissistic personality disorder (NPD). Four of these can be explained as follows:

1. Contentment (*Qana'ah*)

    Contentment is an open-minded attitude toward accepting all of Allah SWT's gifts. Imam Shafi'i emphasized that sustenance will not diminish or be delayed if one is able to accept it sincerely [23]. Therefore, those who pursue worldly pleasures and those who maintain a simple lifestyle are essentially in the same position. By cultivating contentment, one learns to let go of excessive desires, abandon unnecessary luxuries, and focus more on what is beneficial. In the context of NPD, contentment serves to suppress greed and feelings of superiority, so that sufferers do not become consumed by ambitions for status or worldly pleasures, but instead achieve true inner happiness [30].

2. Self-reflection (*Muhasabah*)

    Muhasabah means self-introspection, namely reassessing good and bad actions and then making improvements. Hasan al-Basri emphasized that *muhasabah* is a spiritual practice that protects humans from the trap of worldly judgments [31]. This practice trains self-awareness, so that focus remains on one's relationship with God. According to al-Bantani, self-reflection is closely related to repentance, which is divided into three levels: repentance due to fear of punishment, repentance to gain God's approval, and repentance to maintain the quality of worship [22]. Through self-reflection and repentance, individuals are protected from behavior that is wasteful or harmful to others. This is beneficial in reducing narcissistic traits such as a thirst for praise and a sense of superiority.

3. Shuhbah

    In *Maraqiy al-'Ubudiyyah*, Sheikh al-Bantani explains *suhbah* as the full awareness that Allah is always present and accompanies every activity of His servants. Although difficult

to perceive with the five senses, a seeker is encouraged to make time for *munajat* (prayer) to constantly feel divine closeness. This concept is supported by fourteen etiquettes of relationship with Allah, including: submission and humility, guarding the tongue from vain words, controlling the limbs from sin, accepting fate with patience, continuously remembering Allah, choosing the truth, and surrendering in seeking sustenance [32]. By practicing *suhbah*, a servant will attain higher spiritual awareness, increase obedience, and attain inner peace. This awareness can destroy narcissistic arrogance, as the individual recognizes the presence of a Being far greater than themselves.

4. Mahabah

Mahabah, or divine love, is seen as the pinnacle of the spiritual journey. A servant's love for Allah surpasses his love for the world [33], as explained by al-Bantani in *Nashaih al-'Ibad*, true love is characterized by faith in His word, a longing to be close, and an orientation toward His pleasure. Imam Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani called it a *fardhu mahaba*, which encourages one to obey Allah's commands and avoid His prohibitions [34]. With love, a servant is willing to prioritize the benefit of the people, help others, and put aside personal interests. A dominating feeling of love will erode the symptoms of narcissism, both at the individual and collective level, and foster an empathetic and humanist attitude. Ultimately, *mahabah* fosters social harmony rooted in love for the Creator.

In addressing narcissistic personality disorder (NPD), Nawawi al-Bantani's maqamat offers a spiritual dimension that can complement Heinz Kohut's practical approach. Through principles such as contentment, self-reflection, self-sufficiency, and self-sufficiency, individuals are guided to purify their souls from the greed, arrogance, and need for external recognition that are at the heart of pathological narcissism.

This framework resonates with Kohut's four pillars of healthy personality development. Empathy gains spiritual grounding through contentment, which gives rise to genuine love for God and others. Creativity is fostered by contentment, which affirms self-acceptance, freeing self-expression from the obsessive urge to be praised. Humor, as a release from excessive self-seriousness, aligns with muhasabah, which emphasizes reflection without an attitude of superiority. Meanwhile, wisdom is born from suhbah, an awareness of the Divine presence that leads to humility. This integration of the maqamat and the pillars of Kohut psychotherapy creates a holistic model that not only addresses the psychological realm but also strengthens the spiritual foundation for holistic self-balance

4. Conclusion

Maqamat Nawawi al-Bantani presents a spiritual approach that can be an effective complement in the treatment of narcissistic personality disorder (NPD), by emphasizing the practices of contentment, self-reflection, self-compassion, and self-actualization as a means of developing a calmer and more humble soul. These four *maqamat* serve to reduce the roots of narcissism such as superiority, dependence on external recognition, and loss of empathy, while also aligning with the four pillars of Heinz Kohut's psychotherapy. Self-compassion affirms universal compassion that deepens empathy; contentment fosters healthy self-acceptance and encourages creative expression without an obsessive drive for praise; self-compassion provides honest reflection that frees individuals from ego dominance; while self-compassion instills spiritual awareness that gives birth to wisdom. With this integration, the *maqamat* serves not only as spiritual guidance, but also as a comprehensive psychological approach to restore self-balance, forming a more conscious, humble, and harmonious socially-relationship-oriented individual.

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