

**GENDER EQUALITY IN THE HOUSEHOLD  
(THE STUDY OF BISRI MUSTOFA'S THOUGHT IN *AL-IBRIZ LI  
MA'RIFAH TAFSIR AL-QUR'AN AL-'AZIZ*)**

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**Abstract**

The issue of gender equality has recently become a topic that is often discussed in Islamic studies. The Qur'an has also touched on human equality regardless of gender since thousands of years ago. Interpretations of these gender verses also vary, depending on the social construct in which the interpreter exists. This article aims to explore Bisri Mustofa's thoughts in *Tafsir al-Ibriz li Ma'rifah Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Aziz* about verses with the theme of gender and the role of women, especially in the realm of marriage. This study examines how the efforts of a Javanese mufasir in interpreting verses about gender equality, especially regarding leadership in the household, so that the interpretation can be easily accepted by the Javanese people who at that time were very famous for their patriarchal culture. This article uses a descriptive-qualitative method. This article found that Bisri Mustofa's interpretation tends to be gender-biased, especially on the issue of leadership in the household. This tendency is due to the Javanese culture that surrounds it. However, Bisri provides an alternative that does not harm women, namely the issue of inheritance distribution. By doing a cultural engineering, she wants to provide a more moderate understanding of women's verses without having to abandon the views that have been firmly rooted in society. The accountability of *al-Ibriz*'s interpretation of women's status and role shows that in his time, this interpretation could change the mindset and progressively influence the attitude of the people around him towards gender equality. In fact, until now, this book is still studied as teaching material in the salaf Islamic boarding school.

**Keywords:** Gender Equality; Interpretation of Verses; Javanese Culture; Household.

**INTRODUCTION**

Gender equality is the key to creating a just and inclusive society in this contemporary era. With a synergistic role between men and women,

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development progress can be better accommodated. Article 1 paragraph (1) Law Number 1 of 2017 concerning gender equality states that gender is a distinction between women and men which is the result of socio-cultural construction. In article 1 paragraph (2), "Equality and justice, hereinafter abbreviated (KKG), is the condition of the relationship between women and men as equal partners in order to receive fair treatment to access resources, control, participate, and obtain development benefits".

Gender equality is not only about justice, but also about building a more harmonious and sustainable future, especially within the household. Households that are the first and micro communities for the community should understand and be well aware of the importance of gender equality for them. However, gender equality in households is still far from expectations. The embedded cultural construction considers that women play a sufficient role in the domestic sector according to their weak nature, even society considers this as a light job compared to the public sector which is a man's job. It is also mentioned that one of the factors of failure and misunderstanding of gender comes from sources of interpretation of religious texts that are patriarchal, misogynistic, and underestimate of women (Zainal, 2013).

Gender equality comes from two words, equality and gender. Equality is a concept that reflects balance, justice, and welfare in a concept. The justice in question is positioning something according to its portion with a reference that lies at the core, not only based on social attributes (Sri Sari, 2021). Gender is a trait that lies in men and women. In contrast to gender, which is a biological trait, gender can be understood as a concept of grouping between men and women based on socio-culture (Khana Suratna, 2017). From this description, it can be concluded that gender equality is an equal position between men and women where this position can be exchanged according to existing opportunities and their rights as human beings so that they can participate in public activities. The biological difference between men and women has been recognized by the Qur'an. However, the existence of these differences cannot be used as a factor in distinguishing their roles and positions. It has been explicitly affirmed in the Qur'an that men and women are equal (Susanti, 2019).

Not only in the general academic realm, gender equality has become an issue that is often studied in the realm of religious academies. This is evidenced by the existence of a book of tafsir by a Javanese scholar, namely

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*Al-Ibriz*, which contains gender issues. *Al-Ibriz* is a work by Bisri Mustofa, a scholar from Rembang, Central Java. He is a Muslim scholar who in his interpretation prioritizes the aspect of locality by using the Javanese dialect of the North Coast of Java. Bisri Mustofa's delivery is very unique, he uses three steps. The first, in interpreting each of his vocabulary using the meaning of bald. Second, using the Javanese language in its interpretation and translation, which is written at once and placed on the side of the pages of the book. Third, the translation is equipped with information related to the verse. Among these interpretations, there are verses that correlate with the issue of gender equality in the household such as explanations of the position of husband and wife, polygamy, and the distribution of inheritance.

Studies on gender equality have been widely reviewed. The research of Latifah et al. (2022) produced findings on gender equality based on a comparison of *Tafsir Ibn Katsir* and *Tafsir al-Mishbah*. In addition, Suci Wulandari's research entitled *Studi Atas Tafsir al-Huda karya Bakri Syahid* examines several verses of the Qur'an related to gender and women's issues in the book of *al-Huda*. Meanwhile, *Penafsiran Bisri Mustofa Terhadap Ayat-Ayat tentang Perempuan dalam Kitab Al-Ibriz* was written by Faiqoh (2013). In his research, Faiqoh uses the descriptive-interpretive analysis method to describe the condition of Javanese women and the interpretation of Bisri Mustofa objectively. Descriptive explanations are interpreted to further understand Bisri's thoughts and interpretations of the Qur'anic verses about women, which are then analyzed to find their relevance to the conditions of Javanese society at that time.

In contrast to the previous research, the study of gender equality in the household from the perspective of *Tafsir al-Ibriz* has not been widely studied. This interpretation can explain gender equality related to the position of men and women in the household, the distribution of inheritance, and the issue of polygamy so that it can open up the insights of a society that has been shackled by patriarchal culture.

Based on the results of the above description, the purpose of this study is to analyze the concept of gender equality in the household based on the *Tafsir al-Ibriz*. The implications in this study can be a reference for the community to run a household based on Islamic sharia as an effort to realize sustainable gender equality.

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## METHOD

This study uses a qualitative content analysis method to reveal these problems in detail with library research techniques. This content analysis method is a textual analysis method in literature study through the interpretation of the content of the message of a communication as revealed in literature that has relevance to the research theme that is oriented towards trying to describe a concept or idea of the mind. As quoted by M.N. Harisuddin in his research, content analysis is a technique to draw conclusions by identifying all the specific characteristics of a certain communication content objectively and systematically (T. F. Carney, 1972). The primary data source used in this study is the book entitled *Tafsir al-Ibriz Li Ma'rifah Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Aziz* by Bisri Mustofa, while the secondary data source used is literature related to the topic of discussion in the form of books, journals and scientific papers.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Bisri Mustofa's Biography

Bisri Mustafa is one of the charismatic scholars in Indonesia, he is known for his work on the interpretation of the Qur'an using the Javanese language, namely the *Tafsir Al-Ibriz*. Bisri Mustafa, whose real name is Mashadi, was born in the village area of Sawahan, Rembang, Central Java in 1915. He is the first of four children of Zainal Mustofa with his second wife, Khadijah (Ari Hidayaturrohmah, 2020).

In 1923, when Mashadi was 8 years old, his family took him on the pilgrimage. However, on the way back to his hometown, his father fell ill and died in Jeddah (A. Zainal H., 2003). After returning from the holy land, Mashadi's name was changed to Bisri Mustofa. After his father's death, Bisri spent time studying at the pesantren and studying many books. he was classified as a diligent and intelligent student until Kyai Cholil Harun Kasingan intended to make Bisri his son-in-law.

In July 1935 AD, at the age of 20, Bisri married to Kyai Cholil Harun's daughter named Ma'rufah. They were blessed with eight children, each named Cholil Bisri, Mustofa Bisri, Adieb, Faridah, Najihah, Labib, Nihayah, and Atikah. Among his eight children, there are two sons who are currently widely known by the public for their activity in the Nahdlatul Ulama, namely Cholil Bisri and Mustofa Bisri (Mafri Amir & Lilik., 2011).

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As the son-in-law of a kyai, of course, Bisri is obliged to teach students at Islamic boarding schools. However, feeling that he was not qualified enough, he returned to study religion from Kiai Kamil and Kiai Fadholi in Karang Geneng, Rembang (A. Zainal H., 2011). In 1936, Bisri Mustofa went on a pilgrimage to the holy land and stayed there for one year to study the scholars in Mecca. Some of the scholars who became his teachers there, among others.

- a. Sayyid Alwi al-Maliki. From him, he studied the *Tafsir Jalalain* by Jalaluddin al-Mahalli and Jalaluddin as-Suyuṭi.
- b. KH. Muhammin. From him, he studied the book *Jam' al-Jawami'* by Tajuddin Abdul Wahhab.
- c. Syaikh Hasan Mashshat. From him, he studied the book *Manhaj Zawi al-Nazar* by Syaikh Mahfuz al-Turmusi.
- d. KH Bakir. From there, he studied the book *Lubab al-Usul* by Syaikh Islam Abi Yahya Zarkasyi, the book *'Umdat al-Abrar* by Muhammad bin Ayyub, and *Tafsir al-Kasysyaf* by al Zamakhsyari.

After his return to Indonesia, Bisri helped his father-in-law to take care of *pondok pesantren* in Kasingan, Rembang. After a while, Bisri and his family returned to their home village and established the Raudlatut Thalibin Islamic Boarding School in Leteh, Rembang (Spring Air, 2006). Apart of being a caregiver of the boarding school, Bisri also played an important role in the struggle for Indonesian independence by serving as the Head of the Office of Religious Affairs of Rembang Regency. Bisri Mustofa died at 63 years, on February 16, 1977 AD due to a heart attack. He bequeathed an educational institution which was then cared for by his son, KH. Ahmad Mustofa Bisri, until now (Suprapto, 2009).

Bisri Mustofa is a very productive figure in writing. His works cover several fields, including the science of tafsir, hadith, *nahwu*, *sharaf*, *fiqh*, morality and so on. All of them amounted to approximately 176 titles. One of his main works is *Al-Ibriz li Ma'rifah Tafsir al Qur'an al-Aziz*. The book uses the Arabic pegon<sup>1</sup> script in three volumes. Bisri Mustofa compiled it for

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<sup>1</sup> The pegon script is an Arabic alphabet that is modified to write Javanese, Madura, Sundanese. The word pegon comes from the Javanese word pégo which means "deviant". Because the Javanese language written in Arabic is considered something unusual. In addition, it could be because the writing of the Pegon alphabet is written obliquely (deviated). The Pegon script is still related to the Jawi alphabet. The main difference with Jawi is that in Pegon there are several additional letters to represent some consonants in Javanese that cannot be represented by the standard Arabic alphabet and the Jawi alphabet. The Sorabe alphabet, which was once used to

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Available online at <https://proceeding.uinmataram.ac.id/index.php/iconside>

---

approximately four years, between 1957-1960 AD and was published by Menara Kudus. This book is still studied in salaf Islamic boarding schools to this day. *Al-Ibriz* was praised by many figures, including Hasbi as-Shiddiqy, Khadijah Nasution, and Martin Van Bruinessen (Sabik Al Fauzi, 2008).

### ***Tafsir Al-Ibriz, Tafsir of the Qur'an in Javanese***

*Tafsir Al-Ibriz* is widely used as a reference by Muslims in Indonesia. *Al-Ibriz* was first compiled by Bisri Mustofa in response to the need of the community to understand the Qur'an better. In addition, this interpretation also offers various solutions and views on the issues faced by Muslims at that time in Java.

*Tafsir al-Ibriz* was deliberately written in Javanese with Pegon Arabic writing. Bisri Mustofa wants Javanese people in general to be able to learn the Qur'an more easily. He wants his knowledge can be useful for the wider community. The main reason for Bisri Mustofa to write the book *Al-Ibriz* is explained in the opening of his book as follows.

*"Al-Qur'an al-Karim sampun kathah dipun terjemah dening para ahli terjemah, wonten ingkang mawi bahasa Walandi, Inggris, Jerman, Indonesia lan sanes-sanesipun, malah wonten ingkang mawi tembung daerah Jawa, Sunda lan sak panunggalanipun ugi sampun kathah. Kanthi terjemah-terjemah wau, umat Islam saking sedoyo bangsa lan suku-suku lajeng kathah ingkang saget mangertosi makna lan tegesipun,"* (Bisri Mustofa, 1960).

That is, "The Qur'an has been translated into many languages, including Javanese. The goal is for all nations of different tribes to understand the meaning of the Qur'an."

Before it was widely published, *Al-Ibriz* was first corrected or checked for truth by several scholars from Kudus who are experts in the Qur'an and *Tafsir*. They are Kyai Arwani Amin, Kyai Abu Ammar, Kyai Hisham, and Kyai Sya'roni Achmadi. In 1961, this book began to be printed and copied to the publisher Menara Kudus (Bisri Mustofa, 1960).

The method of interpretation used in this book is the *tahlili* (analytical) method, which is explaining the content of the Qur'anic verses from all its aspects based on the order of the *mushaf utsmani* (M. Alfatih S., 2005). As for the systematics of writing in this book, the Qur'an is written in the middle with a *gandul* translation . The interpretation is written in a

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write the Malagasy language in Madagascar, is believed to have been derived from the Pegon alphabet.

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Available online at <https://proceeding.uinmataram.ac.id/index.php/iconside>

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margin marked with numbers, and the verse number is located at the end. Instead, the translation number is located at the beginning. Other information is marked with : *tanbih*, *f'a'idah*, *muhimmah*, etc. (Bisri Mustofa, 1960). Bisri Mustofa also explains the meaning and types of each surah and the number of verses. The language used is Javanese, either in the form of *kromo* (polite Javanese language that is usually used when the interlocutor is an older person) or *ngoko* (Javanese language that is usually used with the interlocutor of his age).

In writing a work, especially a book of *tafsir*, an interpreter will not be able to escape the influence of the primordial cultural environment that has been attached to him (Mahin Muqoddam, 2021). Quraish Shihab emphasized that socio-cultural and ideological conditions greatly affect the results of a person's interpretation. *Al-Ibriz* was compiled by Bisri around 1958-1959 and then published in 1960. This book is compiled in the context of Javanese culture which is very thick. He lives in the Rembang area as a caretaker of the Raudhatut Thalibin Islamic Boarding School. Faiqoh, based on his interview with Gus Adib, stated that at that time, women were still underdeveloped, and it was not unusual for them to leave the house, even to seek knowledge. Women are positioned below men (Faiqoh, 2013).

There are many terms in the Javanese language that are often used to describe the position of women. Among them are *kanca wingking* (women are only complementary friends in the domestic area), *swarga nunut*, *neraka katut* (women's happiness and misery depend on the fate of men), and *sing lanang mikul*, *sing wadon nggendorong* (men are more responsible and bigger than women). Because of the great responsibility, men are entitled to a larger share of inheritance (*mikul*), while women get a share (*nggendorong*) (Suci Wulandari, 2018).

This socio-historical background contributed to the construction of Bisri Mustofa's thought. He grew up in a certain coastal area in Java with a diverse culture. He was also raised in a religious environment, namely *pesantren*. The Javanese coastal *santri* community has become a 'hermeneutic situation' around Bisri Mustofa, including traditions, culture, ideology, and life experiences. Gadamer mentioned the need to have a good history (the history that affects a person), whether consciously or not, plays an important role in shaping understanding. The message of this theory is that an interpreter of a text cannot be separated from the subjectivity influenced by the history that surrounds him (Gadamer, 2006).

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10 May 2025 | e-ISSN 3064-2310 | Volume: 3

Available online at <https://proceeding.uinmataram.ac.id/index.php/iconside>

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## Bisri Mustofa's Interpretation of the Verses of Gender Equality in the Household

### a. Leadership in the Household

In gender studies, the verse that is often discussed is QS. Al-Nisa' (4): 34. This verse is often interpreted to mean that men have a higher position than women. A man is considered the main determinant and responsible for all family decisions is also rooted in Javanese culture. Moreover, when it comes to the issue of women's roles, both in the family and in the public sphere, women are considered unfit to be leaders (Islah Gusmian, 2003).

However, Bisri Mustofa in the *Al-Ibriz* interprets this verse more contextually and looks at the socio-historical context in which this verse is revealed. According to Bisri Mustofa, this verse was revealed in the context of war and is an instruction for husbands to maintain the security of their families and the protection of their wives (Kautsar, 2023). This verse was revealed during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) living in Medina, after the Battle of Badr. At the time of this verse, Islam was facing the challenge of improving the status and treatment of women in Arab societies that were deeply rooted in patriarchal traditions and culture.

One common practice is the oppression of women where the husband treats his wife harshly and disrespects her as a human being who has equal rights and dignity.

Bisri Mustofa interprets this verse as follows.

*"Wong-wong lanang iku dikuasaake mengatasi wong-wong wadon. Sebab jenis lanang iku kaparingan kaluwihan ingatase jenis wadon. Bab ilmu. Akal. Wilayah. Lan liyan-liyane, lan sebab olehi infaq marang wong-wong wadon. Wong-wong wadon kang shalihah yaiku wong wadon kang taat marang lakine, kang ngrekso awakke lan liya-liyane nalika lakine lunga. Bojo wadon kang siro kuatirake nusyuze, nasihatono. Menawa wes terang nusyuze, aja baturi turu. Yen mekso ora mendo-mendo, ajaren nanging aja banget-banget. Menawa wes bali taat maneh, sira aja nganiyaya, sak temene Allah ta'ala iku Maha Luhur lan Maha Agung."*

Artinya, "Men are given the power to take care of women. They are given advantages over women in terms of knowledge, reason, territory (guardianship), and the obligation to provide a living for women. A pious

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---

woman obeys her husband and takes care of herself when her husband leaves. The wife you are worried about is nusyuz, then advise her. If the nusyuz is clear, then separate the bed. If they are still nusyuz, hit them but do not be too hard. When they are obedient again, then do not abuse them. Allah is Most High, Most Great."

Bisri Mustofa interprets the word *rijal* with *piro-piro wong lanang* (some men) and *qawwam* with *nguwasan* (mastery) (Bisri Mustofa, 1960). When viewed textually, the above interpretation shows the impression of patriarchy because men are given the power to dominate women, are given advantages over women in some ways and are obliged to provide for women (as husbands).

However, the meaning does not stop there, if we look back at the historical context, according to him, this verse intends to release the shackles that wrapped around women in the past ignorance, that the word *qawwam* means protector: men are in charge of protecting and leading their families, not dominating their wives. This shows that there is no superiority in marriage. This means that men and women have an equal position in accordance with their rights and obligations, where a husband is obliged to provide for his wife and a wife is obliged to protect herself and her family from evil that can threaten her household when her husband is earning a living.

In fact, Islam has also never distinguished between men and women. Islam does not discriminate against a person based on his or her gender. Because in essence, human beings are created the same even though they come from different nations, tribes, races, and genders. God created diversity so that we could get to know one another. What distinguishes one person from another before Allah SWT is their level of piety as stated in QS. Al-Hujurat (49): 13.

This equal position means that it does not limit women's movement space as wives. They can still develop their skills without feeling discriminated (BaKTI Foundation, 2020). A number of serious problems experienced by women so far include violence against women, double burden, marginalization, subordination, and stereotypes. With this more moderate interpretation, it is hoped that women can slowly break free from the shackles of patriarchy, especially in Javanese society which is thick with patriarchal culture.

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### b. Polygamy

This issue refers to QS. Al-Nisa' (4): 3. Various interpretations and thoughts have emerged regarding the law of polygamy, including those that allow polygamy because it is not prohibited by religion and even carried out by the Prophet (Misbah Mustafa, 1989).

Bisri Mustofa's interpretation of this verse is as follows.

*"Wong-wong Islam ing zaman awal, yen ono kang ngerumat yatinah ing mangka kabeneran ora mahram (anak dulur umpamane) iku akeh akehe dikawin pisan. Nalika iku nganti kedadeyan ana kang due bojo wolu utawa sepuluh. Bareng ayat nomor 2 mau tumurun, wong-wong mau podo nuli kuatir yen ora bisa adil, nuli akeh kang podo sumpek, nuli Allah nurunake ayat kang nomor 3 iki, kang surasane: yen siro kabeh kuatir ora bisa adil nafaqah lan gilir, mangka nikaha siji wae, utawa terima ngalap cukup jariyah kang sira miliki, nikah papat utawa siji, utawa ngalap jariyah iku sejatine luwih menjamin keadilan (ora melempeng)."*

"The Muslims in ancient times, if someone took care of an orphaned woman and happened not to have a mahram (such as a brother's child), then they usually married all of them. So, at that time, many men had eight or ten wives. After the second verse came down, the people were worried that they would not do justice, and many were restless. Allah revealed this third verse, which reads: if you are worried that you will not be able to do justice among the orphans you are raising, then marry two, three, or four of the women you like, not more than four. If you are worried that you will not be able to provide an adequate income and share in rotation, then marry only one woman or just the jariyah (slave girl) you have."

According to Bisri Mustofa, polygamy can be done with two conditions: First, if a husband can be fair. Second, do not exceed the limit of four women. The just conditions he means are fair in external matters, such as financial sustenance in the form of money and biological sustenance, i.e. sexual relations. If you are not able to do justice, then it is better to marry a woman.

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However, if viewed from a psychological perspective, polygamy is still detrimental to the wife because the husband's love will be divided for others. Polygamy is included in the act of psychological violence (Mansour Fakih, 2002). Of course, no wife wants to be polygamous. In fact, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) felt jealous of the other wives of the Prophet.

Marriage relations in Islam must be based on the principle of *mu'asyaroh bil ma'ruf* (good marriage between husband and wife), which is a relationship in which all family members are full of affection, there is no gender bias in it. The implementation of gender equality in the household from the perspective of the Qur'an means practicing understanding of gender (Rustina, 2017) based on the correct understanding of the Qur'an regarding justice and equality of husband and wife in obtaining opportunities and rights as human beings in the family as well as in terms of achieving their goals as servants, namely competing in goodness towards the highest piety.

## c. Inheritance

The issue of inheritance is one of the issues of gender equality that is often discussed. Textually, Al-Nisā' (4:11) specifies that the part of women is half of men. Quraish Shihab explained that the distribution of inheritance is placed in the context of needs. The reason is that men's needs for wealth are more significant, such as the demand to provide for their children and wives (Shihab, 2001). In Islam, men are indeed obliged to provide for their families, while women are not obliged to provide for others. So mathematically, women get more shares than men because their property is entirely theirs and is not required to provide for others. This division follows the principle of balanced justice between rights and obligations. Those who are burdened with heavier obligations get more rights (Susanti, 2019).

Bisri Mustofa in his commentary explains the following.

*"Allah ta'ala merintahake, nalika ana wong wong mati tinggal anak lanang-wadon, anak lanang oleh bagian warisan rong bagian anak wadon. Dadi upomo ninggal tinggalan warisan telu ewu, anak lanang oleh rongewu, anak wadon sewu. (lamun anak lanang mau ijen, telung ewu mau tibo anak lanang kabeh). "*

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It means, "Allah has commanded that if someone dies and leaves a son and a daughter, the son will receive twice as much inheritance as the daughter. So, for example, if the inheritance is three thousand, the son will receive two thousand and a thousand daughters (but if there is only one son as the heir, then the three thousand will be sons)."

Based on Bisri Mustofa's thoughts above, it is known that women's inheritance is half of men's as embraced by the wider community. However, apart from this interpretation, he provides an alternative regarding the division of inheritance. He stated that the distribution of inheritance does not have to be in a 2:1 condition. Another alternative can be done by sharing voluntarily.

## CONCLUSION

Gender equality in the household is very interesting to study. In *Kitab Al-Ibriz*, the book of *tafsir* in Javanese, there are several points that illustrate Bisri Mustofa's thoughts on this issue. First, related to leadership in the household, Bisri emphasized that men and women have an equal position in accordance with their rights and obligations, where a husband is obliged to provide for his wife and a wife is obliged to protect herself and her family from evils that can threaten her household when her husband is earning a living. This equal position means that it does not limit women's movement space as wives so that they can still develop their skills without feeling discriminated against. Second, according to him, polygamy can be done with two conditions: First, it can be fair. Second, do not exceed the limit of four women. If you are not able to do justice, then it is better to marry a woman. Third, the inheritance share of women is half that of men. However, he provides an alternative by stating that the distribution of inheritance does not have to be in a 2:1 condition, but can be done by sharing voluntarily. Although still influenced by the patriarchal culture that developed in Java, Bisri Mustofa's thinking was more moderate because he dared to voice the equality of position between men and women in the household, which was not common at that time.

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