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Gender Equity in Bimanese Muslim Society from Islamic Perspectives

Nurdin
Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.
nurdin2020@mail.ugm.ac.id

Abstrak

Etnis Bima adalah genealogi dari etnis spesifik di Bagian Timur dari Pulau Sumbawa yang dipengaruhi kuat oleh ajaran Islam dalam kehidupan sehari-harinya, termasuk dalam kehidupan keluarga. Mereka sangat menjunjung tinggi tradisi Islam dalam kehidupan sehari-hari mereka, dan konsep kesetaraan gender mereka berakar dari ajaran dan tradisi Islam. Oleh karena itu, artikel ini akan membahas konsep kesetaraan gender dalam perspektif Islam serta implementasinya dalam Budaya Bima sebagai konstruksi ajaran dan tradisi Islam dalam membentuk kehidupan sehari-hari masyarakat Muslim di Bima. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif-kualitatif. Data primer dikumpulkan dari studi kepustakaan meliputi jurnal, tesis/disertasi, dan buku-buku yang berkaitan dengan isu kesetaraan gender secara umum dan tatanan gender dalam masyarakat Bima. Data tersebut kemudian dianalisis secara deskriptif dan kualitatif. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa Islam sangat menjunjung tinggi kesetaraan gender dalam ajaran normatifnya berdasarkan interpretasi ulama Muslim modern, dan implementasi kesetaraan gender dalam perspektif Islam juga mengakar kuat dalam Budaya Etnis Bima meskipun tidak dipraktikkan dengan baik dalam kehidupan sehari-hari keluarga mereka di Bima saat ini.
Kata kunci: Bima, ekuitas-gender, keluarga, komunitas-muslim

Abstract

Bimanese ethnic is the genealogies of specific ethnic in the eastern part of Sumbawa Island who was strongly influenced by Islamic teaching in their daily basis, including family life. They immensely uphold Islamic tradition in their everyday life, and their concept of gender equity is rooted from Islamic teaching and tradition. Therefore, this article will address the concept of gender equity in Islamic perspective as well as its implementations in Bimanese culture as the construction of Islamic teaching and tradition in forming everyday life of Muslim society in Bima. This research used a descriptive-qualitative method. Primary data is collected from literature studies including journals, theses/dissertation, and books related to gender equality issues in general and gender order in Bimanese society. The data were then analyzed descriptively and qualitatively. This research found that Islam strongly upholds gender equality in its normative teaching based on the interpretation of modern Muslim scholars, and the implementation of gender equality in Islamic perspective is also deeply rooted in Bimanese ethnic cultures even though it is not practiced well in their everyday life of family life in Bima nowadays.

Keywords: Bima, family, gender-equity, muslim-society

Introduction

Although gender equality in Islam is openly debatable in some of Muslim community itself, the idea of gender equality in Islam was clearly mentioned in many verses in the Qur'an which strongly upholds the idea of justice for all human being with no limitation for specific gender identity. Therefore, gender equity is the main objective of this study while inequality of gender is the main issue that becomes the topic of the research problem. Gender inequality is a process of marginalization and impoverishment of women. The injustice is caused by several factors including: government policies, traditional beliefs, religious interpretations, cultures, and assumptions of science. While this research specifically focuses on gender studies in terms of religious dogmas derived from the verses of the Qur'an and its implementation in Moslem society in Bima.

There are several themes that are usually the main objects of gender studies in the Qur'an, such as the creation of women, inheritance, polygamy, and so on. The most frequently mentioned in this study is about the superiority of men over women that are frequently mentioned by Moslem scholars. However, some interpretations of the Qur'an by Islamic jurists led to the very patriarchal system where men are over women, and men always have rights over women in family life. Thus, men are prepared to be a father or a

leader in the family, and expected to be brave, assertive, responsible, and strong while women are prepared to be a mother, bearing children, mothering, and doing domestic work only.

This idea leads to injustice and imbalance status of gender due to the superior status of particular gender identity. This belief was taken for granted from the term of “*qiwwama*” that literally means “men have guardianship or authority over women”. This idea is commonly understood as mandating men’s authority over women and is frequently invoked as the main textual evidence in its support. This verse is often the only verse that ordinary Muslims know in relation to family law or the source of how women and men live. It reads:

Men are qawwamun (protectors/maintainers) in relation to women, according to what God has favored some over others and according to what they spend from their wealth. Righteous women are qannit (obedient) guarding the unseen according to what God has guarded. Those (women) whose nushuz you fear, admonish them, and abandon them in bed, and adribuhunna (strike them). If they obey you, do not pursue a strategy against them. Indeed, God is exalted, Great. (Q.S. An-Nisa': 34)

Many people take this verse for granted. They use this verse to legalize injustice and to marginalize women. Women are interpreted here as lower status than men. Women are expected to always obey men, and they do not have full rights to decide their life and the rights to take certain positions in public space. There is always a limitation for them in certain public jobs and important positions in politics or government. Simply for them, women are forcefully educated to become wives and mothers, no more than that. This is what is referred to as a patriarchal system where women are seen as second class and perpetuate gender inequality in the reality of social life. This system was deliberately built as a justification for the domination and superiority of men over women. The division of roles based on gender is deliberately constructed by this ideology, and is understood by most people, including women themselves as something normal and natural (nature) so as to further perpetuate injustice and inequality in many areas of life, both in the family order and in a larger order such as society and state.

The father (male) in this system is constructed as the owner of authority over women, children, and property (the property ownership). Implicitly this system institutionalized

male government and privileges and perpetuates the subordination and marginalization of women. So that patriarchy is commonly known as the magic system that is able to rule and control the order of social life to place men in special rights. According to Kamla Bahsin, the patriarchal system is a life order that places the dominance and superiority of men to control women where this ideology believes that men are higher in rank than women, that women are objects that are controlled and part of men (Bahsin, 1996). This ideology continues to grow and has even become a culture that is deeply rooted in society. In addition to the influence of global powers, this ideology is also perpetuated by erroneous religious understandings. In Islam, this understanding also developed very rapidly and was also perpetuated by influential Islamic scholars.

Therefore, this paper will describe a new paradigm in viewing and interpreting the concept of gender in an Islamic perspective from influential modern Islamic scholars and thinkers by deconstructing the erroneous understanding of gender that has perpetuated women's status as subordinate class or second class in social life. In addition, this study will look further at how the concept of gender equality has been practiced in the life of the Muslim community itself, in this case, will look further at the concept in Bimanese culture, where the influence of Islam is very dominant in the daily life of the people. Hence, the concept of gender equity in Islamic teaching and tradition will be an ideal concept to examine how it was implemented in Bimanese Moslem society.

This research examined the concept of gender equality in Bimanese culture as the construction of Islamic teaching and tradition in forming everyday life of family life in Muslim society, particularly in Bimanese ethnic community. This research used a descriptive-qualitative method. Primary data is collected from literature studies which include journals, theses/dissertation, and news related to gender equality issues in general and gender order in Bimanese society in particular. The data were then analyzed descriptively and qualitatively.

Result and Discussion

Reconstructing the concept of gender equality in Islamic perspectives

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the understanding of Muslim society towards gender perspective is strongly influenced by the ideology of patriarchal system. In Islam itself, the interpretation of the status of men and women refers to the letter An-Nisa: 34, which has been legitimized by earlier Islamic jurists as the domination and authority of men, and the subordination of women.

However, Al-Hadad, a Muslim scholar, argues that in order to understand the verses of the Qur'an, we must understand deeply the context of the verse by contextualizing the sources of Islamic law itself, both the Qur'an and the Sunnah. There are at least two main elements involved in al-Hadad's approach to Islamic textual sources. The first is the distinction between laws that are essential to Islam as a religion, and laws that are time and context dependent. Al-Hadad stated that

“We should make into consideration the great difference between what Islam brought and its aims, which will remain immortal in eternity, such as belief in non-monotheism, moral behavior, and the establishment of justice, dignity, and equality among people. Furthermore, we have to consider the social situation and deep-rooted mindset that existed in Arab society in pre-Islamic era” (Mir-Hosseini, 2009).

Mir-Hosseini adopted this opinion as a reference for understanding and reviewing the sources of Islamic law, both verses that were revealed to explain monotheism, the oneness of God, and morals in people's lives as the main aspect and purpose of the revelation of the verse which became the reference for the source of law, as well as important to see the historical context and the reasons for the revelation of these verses.

In Islam, the highest goal is equality among all God's creatures because Islam is a religion of freedom, but Islam tolerates the "selling and buying of people as goods" and their exploitation is a concession to the longstanding socio-economic imperatives of the time. Thus, it is not easy to abolish slavery quickly and simultaneously in the early Islamic period in Arab culture, but the Qur'an and the prophet advocate the liberation of slaves and explain that the principle of Islam is freedom and equality. Therefore, gender hierarchy was

tolerated at that time, but the basic principle in Islam is equality and upholding human dignity. Thus, Islam upholds the concept of equality and justice for all gender identities, both male and female. They are seen as equal and have the same rights and freedoms both at the domestic and public levels. It can be seen in QS. Al Hujurat: 13 where it mentions that there is no difference between men and women regarding social status in family and society.

Al-Hadad also stated that Although Islam highlights several differences between men and women in several verses in the Qur'an, this does not in any way affect the principle of social equality between them because the essence of Islam aims at justice and equality not looking down on them, and subordinates certain gender identities. Therefore, we are clearly aware that there are many differences between men and women, but that does not mean that it leads to inequality and injustice to certain gender identities (Mir-Hosseini, 2009).

The same idea also came from Amina Wadud where she criticized and re-contextualized gender identity in Islamic teachings. She argues that women and men are recognized as having equal status in the social order of life both in relation to family and society. She proposed reforming the *Tauhid paradigm*. With the concept of monotheism, Amina Wadud dismantled the patriarchal system and criticized Islamic jurists who also interpreted the verses of the Qur'an to legitimize the privilege of men, and subordination of women in social life.

According to her, the concept of monotheism becomes a new paradigm for formulating gender equity in society, particularly Muslim society because this concept views that no one is higher or superior to others because it violates the status of Allah as the supreme being. The only difference between them is their obedience to Allah (Wadud, 1999). This opinion is based on several verses of the Qur'an which explain the equality of status between men and women. One of them is QS. Al Hujurat: 13:

“Indeed, the most honorable of you in the sight of Allah is the one who is most pious among you” (Qur'an 49:13).

In the Qur'an there are a number of verses that also explain the equality of status between humans, such as Surah al-Nisaa'/4:1, al-A'raf/7:189, al-Zumar/39:6, Fathir/35: 11,

and al-Mu'min/40:67. These verses, in essence, explain that in terms of the nature and process of creation, there is no difference between one human and another, both male and female. They are all the same, from the same origin, namely from soil, from one self, namely Adam who was created from soil (Al-Thbathaba'I, 2010). Therefore, there is no superiority of one individual over another, one identity over another, and one group over another. As a consequence, there is no reason to view men and women as having different rights and obligations in the domestic and public spheres.

Furthermore, Amina Wadud saw that basically Islam upholds equal rights to gender equality and against all forms of injustice and discrimination against certain gender identities. In the Qur'an, both men and women are seen as equal in creation as humans because the Qur'an clearly states that men and women were created from a single soul known as *nafs wahidah*. She argues that there is no essential difference in the values attributed to women and men. There is no indication that women have more or less limitations than men. The Qur'an does not consider women as a type of man because men and women are two categories of human creation that are given equal or equal consideration and are endowed with the same or equal potential (Wadud, 1999). That is, neither one gender identity was created after or before the other, nor was one created for the purpose of complementing the other, but both were created for mutual benefits. Hence, it is in line with Islamic principles which highly uphold justice (*'adl*), equality (*musawah*), human dignity (*karamah*), and love and compassion (*mawaddah wa rahmah*) both in relationships between people and in family life.

In addition, Zainah Anwar views that in their social life (men and women) have the same rights for participation in politics, equal access and status in the economic, social, cultural fields in society as social beings. The Qur'an records that all human beings, male and female, are agents of Allah (*khalifah*) who are tasked with realizing Allah's will on earth (Anwar, 2009). Thus, men and women are seen as equal in domestic life in the family and in public life in society. They have equal rights in the decision-making process as well as shared responsibilities and contributions in their families. There is no form of

subordination and discrimination against certain genders, both in the division of roles in the family and in the public sphere.

This is in line with the opinion of Fazlur Rahman (1981), *Islam and Modernity, Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, which sees that the relationship between men and women, especially husband and wife is a mutual relationship (mutualism) where they are seen as complementary, helping each other, support each other, give affection, and moral values to each other. This concept strengthens the interpretation of the Qur'an which states that women and men should support each other and love each other and be loved because in the verse of the Qur'an (2:187) states that *"They (i.e. your wives) are garments for you and you are garments for them."* The term "garments" here by Fazlur Rahman is interpreted as a means to calm and cover each other's weaknesses (Rahman, 1981). Therefore, the author argues that this concept aims to reconstruct the concept of married life in Islam which has been considered by many to be a patriarchal system, because marriage in Islamic law basically involves giving and receiving love and affection because Islam considers compassion as the basis of love for marriage life. This is what is meant in the Qur'an (30:21):

....And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquility in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed, there are signs for people who give thoughts (Qs. Ar-Rum:21)

Thus, they must treat each other with kindness and wisdom as well as eradicate all forms of marginalization of women or wives that have been perpetuated by the patriarchal system. They must jointly help each other and strengthen the emotional bond between them to maintain a harmonious family life that is in line with Islamic teachings.

The implementation of Gender Equity in Bimanese Culture from Islamic Perspectives

The Bimanese ethnic is one of the tribes in the eastern part of Sumbawa Island, West Nusa Tenggara which is strongly influenced by Islamic teachings in their daily lives, including family life. They highly respected Islamic traditions and values in their everyday life which they considered as a system of life. The concept of gender equality according to

Islamic teachings and traditions is deeply rooted in the lives of the Bimanese people. They have contextualized the concept of gender equality from an Islamic perspective into their local culture which represents their life, particularly in relation to family life. This phenomenon can be seen as a social reality which is seen as a manifestation of the text of the scriptures (Ammerman, 2014) which has been contextualized by Islamic scholars and jurists in their own way to describe the story of Islam in prophetic period (Alatas, 2021) where in the context of the Bimanese community, Islam has been a source of teachings for the community since the time of the Bimanese sultanate and changed old cultural customs which were considered not to reflect Islamic teachings (Jurdi, 2011). The following paragraph will address how Islamic teachings related to gender equity are rooted in the culture and philosophy of life of the Bimanese society.

The Concept of “Dou di Uma” (Person at Home)

Dou di Uma is a term that refers to husband and wife in Bimanese culture. They view that the status of men and women are equal, that men and women have the same responsibilities both at home and in social life (Wardatun, 2019). They agreed that, even though there was no written rule, men and women, in this context husband and wife, are a single unity that cannot be separated emotionally and with a sense of responsibility. Equity in this context means that there is no special obligation for husband and wife to behave towards each other. Whatever the obligations of a man or a husband towards his wife, it is the same as the obligations of a woman towards her husband. In this sense, family life is a shared responsibility, and a common property.

In addition, the concept of Uma (Home) in Bimanese culture has a broader meaning. Home is not only a place to live but also a place to find peace. There are at least three cultural values that can be applied at home in the context of the Bimanese community to achieve shared goals and happiness. The first is the concept of *Mahawo* (to calm down), or literally means home as a place to find peace of mind and body. They must work together to create a happy and peaceful life for themselves. To achieve this goal, they must have a responsibility to advise each other and be open to suggestions and opinions from their partners because there is no upper and lower status between men and women.

The second concept is *Manggawo* or the house as a place to shelter (to shade) each other, they must have a strong sense of love and affection, and there are no barriers and boundaries that limit one gender identity in family life. The third concept is *Marimpa*, where the house becomes a place to strengthen each other and spread good/positive things (to spread positivity). Hence, the house becomes a shared property and responsibility to create peace and happiness together. This cultural value becomes very important to be applied in family life because in many cases today, the basic source of injustice is the imbalance of ownership, closeness, and the intensity of time spent between husband and wife in domestic life.

The Concept of “Cua or Angi” (Mutualism)

After husband and wife have equal rights in a family, they would have a sense of “*Angi*” or Mutualism. The concept of “*Angi*” in Bimanese culture and language is that both husband and wife have the same attachment in family activities (Wardatun, 2019). This participation includes matters relating to the work of nurturing, educating, and taking good care of children and families as a consequence of mutual love and affection. These values can be found in everyday conversation between husband and wife, for example in the local language they state: *Ta Cu ka Co'I angi, ta cua kawara angi, cua nenti angi, ta cua sakaka ro sandaka angi*, which literally means respecting each other, taking care of each other, strengthening each other, and helping each other. This term certainly has proven that the Bimanese culture highly upholds the equity of gender identity, and the balance rights for husband and wife in family life and social life.

Thus, by adopting the concept of “*Cua or Angi*”, all forms of injustice such as marginalization, negative labeling, excessive burdens, discrimination, violence, and degrading the status of a particular gender group can be avoided and eliminated. Basically, everyone has the same rights in society at all levels as in family life, society and state. In addition, *Angi* (Mutualism) becomes very important to create a sense of empathy for each other. Mutualism is the key to a harmonious and balanced life. This balanced responsibility aims to create a sense of mutual love and affection, and will never lead to marginalization, discrimination, and injustice in family life because in the daily life of the Bimanese people,

Sakaka ro Sandaka (mutual assistance) is a basic concept to build a family into a *sakinah, mawaddah, warahmah* family based on the true values and teachings of Islam.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the concept of gender equity in the Bimanese community is an important point in carrying out life both within the family and in the wider community. Some local cultures and terms from the Bimanese people refer to very strong Islamic teachings and traditions particularly regarding the Islamic view related to gender equality in social life.

In addition, the concept of gender equity in the Bimanese community not only adopts Islamic teachings and traditions with perspectives and interpretations that are in accordance with the aims and objectives of Islam itself, but is also in line with the concept of gender promoted by modern scholars such as Bielefeldt (2019), Biletzki (2019) , An-Na'im (2011), kbarzadeh (2010) in perspective of Human Rights and Freedom of Religions and Belief where everyone has the freedom to have an opinion and determine, and plan their own life choices (Bielefeldt & Wiener, 2019). This becomes a very important lesson in carrying out life both in the family and in the social environment of the community to implement Islamic teachings related to gender equality; there will be no forms of injustice, inequality, and marginalization of certain gender statuses.

However, the local cultural values of the Bimanese people, which are ideal in terms of concepts and beliefs, are not necessarily practiced thoroughly by the Bimanese people themselves. Besides the philosophy of life of the Bimanese people, which is strongly influenced and dominated by Islamic teachings and traditions, the practices of the patriarchal system in society are still often found in the community itself. That is, behind some of the respected values in the philosophy of life of the Bimanese people, it does not guarantee that they do not adhere to a patriarchal system like most of the Indonesian society nowadays.

At the domestic level, it can be seen that there are many activities that only and must be carried out by women (especially activities in the kitchen) and become taboo and strange when carried out by men. Then there are things that only men are allowed to do,

and are forbidden for women to do (e.g. farming and leading the household). This places men as the upper class, and men become the authority and control of family life. In the public sphere, there are certain job positions that must be filled or dominated by men. For example, in a work environment such as in an office or as simple as a school principal, it is always dominated and becomes better when held or filled by men. In the political sphere, the position of village head is also mostly filled by men. For Instance, in various religious ceremonies, such as the preparation of the marriage contract, prayers of salvation, the ceremony to commemorate the seven days of death mostly are led and handled by men.

Everything had to be presided over by men, and men were always treated better than women in every ceremony. As a very simple example, when they eat together as a family or in an important ceremony, men always have special plates and glasses that cannot be used by women and children. In contrast, women have limited responsibilities only to perform tasks such as washing dishes, washing clothes, cleaning the house, serving food, taking care of children, etc. This is what I call a miss-interpreting and contextualizing of Islamic teachings related to the equal rights and obligations of men and women in domestic and public affairs, which in the end reverts to a patriarchal system that often marginalizes and subordinates women and privileges men.

In the end, through the facts of the life of the Muslim community in Bima, it can be concluded that between the perfection and idealism of the concept of gender equality adopted by the community in their culture and philosophy of life, it is not easy for them to fully and thoroughly implement gender equality in their lives. The practices of patriarchal ideology are still easily found in every form of community household implementation in Bima. Thus, it is unfortunate that the gender equality that has been rooted in their local culture is not practiced well in society. This philosophy of life is now largely forgotten by the Bimanese people themselves.

Conclusion

Deconstruction of Islamic thoughts on the concept of gender equity (gender equality) becomes very important to remove all forms of subordination of social status to certain gender identities. The patriarchal ideology which has been widely understood and perpetuated by the community has participated in legalizing the privileged status of men and marginalizing the status of women. The author finds local cultural values or life philosophy in the Bima community which actualized Islamic teachings and traditions into their daily lives. Interestingly, the forms of practice of social life in the family which are depicted through the philosophy of life and culture are very relevant and close to understanding the concept of gender equality which places the status of husband and wife in the family in a balanced way. Hence, it is far from the concept of patriarchy even though it is not practiced well in society due to the influence of global power relation and the culture of many Muslim societies under patriarchal culture. All in all, the concept of gender equity has been rooted in the culture of Bimanese Moslem society in their philosophy of life. Therefore, the awareness of their cultural values is important to have balanced rights of men and women in domestic and social life in Bimanese community.

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