

Gendered work and power relations in Indonesian NGO:s

A qualitative study from two organizations in Java

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate and analyze power relations between Muslim female and male employees, active in working together with gender issues in two Indonesian non governmental organizations in Java. The study analyzes power relations and gendered work among female and male employees in the daily work and aims to give a picture on both female and male experiences from working together with gender issues and feminism. The study found that both NGO:s are aware of power relations among the female and male employees and are working actively to avoid separating women and men in doing different tasks and having different positions, although the study shows that a majority of the male employees had higher positions than women in both of the NGO:s. The thesis is a qualitative study of two different NGO:s in Indonesia, both promoting an Islamic view on gender and feminism, and analyzed using Joan Acker's theory on organizational structure and gendered work, as well as Raewyn Connells theory on masculinities. The study is based on eight qualitative semi-structured interviews with Indonesian female and male employees as well as participant observations in the daily work at the organizations.

Keywords: Islam, pluralism, feminism, gender, intersectionality, female and male participation, powerrelations, masculinity, male hegemony, organizational structure, equality, gendered work

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

New Order – The authoritarian Suharto regime between 1967-1998

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) – The largest traditionalist Muslim organization in Indonesia

Muhammadiyah – The second largest Muslim organization in Indonesia, modernist tradition

Aisyiyah – A Muslim women organization (part of the Muhammadiyah)

Pesantren – Islamic boarding school

Madrasah – Islamic school (not boarding)

Reformasi – The period after the fall of Suharto from 1998 and forward

Kitab kuning – Classical Islamic literature

Fiqh – Islamic jurisprudence

Kiai – Male Islamic leader

Pancasila – The official Indonesian state ideology

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1. Introduction

Indonesia, the world's largest archipelago with around seventeen thousand Islands and a population of more than 240 million inhabitants and with the largest Muslim majority population in the world, has gone through a rapid change in a period of social, economic and political reforms since the fall of the authoritarian Suharto regime in 1998, also called *Reformasi* (UN Women, 2014). The economic development have had a positive effect on the progress in eliminating gender discrimination in Indonesia and the country has ratified several international agreements on women's rights, such as the Law on Domestic Violence and the Law on Anti-Trafficking (Ibid, 2014). The Indonesian government has also undertaken a Zero-tolerance policy on violence against women and an increasing number of women have also taken part in the political sphere. According to UN Women, the political participation by women increased from 11% in 2004 to 18% in 2009. As a part in the gender equality process, which this thesis aims to illustrate, Indonesian NGO:s still play a crucial role in putting pressure on the Indonesian government and the National Assembly on highlighting discrimination against women (Ibid, 2014).

One of the major challenges for a developing country as Indonesia is thus to focus on women's rights and to work towards gender equality¹. History has shown that female empowerment does not only benefit individuals – neither does gender equality benefit not only families but also the whole society in a longterm perspective (UNFPA, 2014). Focusing on highlighting women's role in the society must therefore be seen as a prerequisite for the continued economic, social and political development in a country (UNFPA, 2014). It is well known that improved gender equality is closely connected to development and economic growth, and to empower women is one of the most important factors for a well-functioning and equal society (IDEA, 2000:173). As pointed out by Kathryn Robinson, a prominent researcher in the field of Islam and gender in Indonesia, "the economy is an important site of gender inequality, whether in regard to the gender order of enterprises, including the sexual division of labour in tasks, or the separation between the world of work and domestic relations that is characteristic of modern/capitalist societies" (Robinson, 2009:89). In summary, it would be

¹ This thesis uses UNESCO:s definition of gender equality described as: women and men having equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and for contributing to, and benefiting from, economic, social, cultural and political development. Gender equality is therefore the equal valuing by society of the similarities and the differences of men and women, and the roles they play. It is based on women and men being full partners in their home, their community and their society (UNESCO, 2003)

impossible to talk about development and economic growth in Indonesia without taking gender and female participation into consideration, as well as class and ethnicity. Thus, discrimination against women has negative consequences for the whole society. Discrimination against women is still a major problem, as women in Indonesia do not have the same access to resources and benefits as men. Above that, a disproportionately small representation of influence in decision-making processes (IDEA, 2000:173). According to Freedom House, workplaces are the most common places where women are discriminated, for instance by getting less salary or being sexually harassed by male colleagues (Freedom House, 2013). One reason for this unequal treatment is that female workers in many contexts still are seen as so called “extra-wage earners” (Sadli, 2007:6). Since the main income to the family household is earned by the men, the work of women tend not to be valued as equally important and salary earned by women is defined as an extra, but not always necessary, effort (Ibid, p.6). Although the gender discourse in Indonesia has been changed since the fall of Suharto, many conservative assumptions about the role of women still remain very strong, and the state constructions of female identity is closely connected to housework and reproductive responsibility (Ford and Parker, 2008:10).

The term feminism is often referred to as “secular” and Western feminist framework has been strictly separated from religion and could in general be described as non-religious and in many cases even “anti-religious”. Although, the view on Indonesian Islam has gone through a rapid change in the past decade, and Indonesian Islam has – especially on Java – often been portrayed as more complex, heterogenous and able to follow modernization processes compared to Middle Eastern more conservative forms of Islam (White and Fealy, 2008:1). This view on Indonesian and Javanese Islam although was challenged after the October 2002 Bali bombings as well as the 11 September attacks on World Trade Center, and as pointed out by Fealy and White, “terrorism has become the main prism through with much of the West views the Muslim world (Ibid p. 2).

Thus, Fealy and White call for a more nuanced view on Islam and Muslim communities and a willingness among scholars to understand Muslim communities on their own terms rather than reflect Western concerns and assumptions, mainly focusing on security issues. A majority of mainly Western scholars and media regularly claim that feminism and gender equality is incompatible with religion, and especially Islam is often brought forward as the most radical anti-feminist belief in the modern world, as well as it is being portrayed and

significant with terrorism, violence and a main threat against democracy (Ibid p.2).

Blackburn, Smith and Syamsiyatun want to change the picture on Indonesian Muslim women and stress the importance of changing the view on Indonesian women as passive victims of discrimination and instead regarding them as active agents of change (Blackburn, Smith and Syamsiyatun, 2008:3).

Margot Badran discusses that Muslim women have created two different types of feminism – secular feminism and Islamic feminism (Badran, 2009:3). These two categories provides, according to Badran, two ways of thinking regarding gender equality. She describes secular feminism as more "action-oriented" and "engaged in social and political militancy" (Badran, 2009:3) while Islamic feminism is based on the Qu'ran and Islamic beliefs and often more related to the private sphere rather than the public. When looking closer into gender roles in a specific context it is important to have in mind that gender relations and a greater focus on equal rights often is a common consequence in countries who are going through democratic transitions. Indonesia is a good example of a country where this focus has become more and more universal, which can be partly explained by Indonesias historical background and recent transition to democracy (IDEA, 2000:173).

1.1 Aim and research question

There are several NGO:s in Indonesia working actively with gender issues, framing women's rights and female participation in the labour market as well as in politics. In some ways, Indonesia is unique when it comes to women and politics – even though the country is far from equal regarding gender roles, they have had their first female President Megawati Sukaroputri between 2001-2004, and male participation within gender-related NGO:s have become more and more common. The NGO:s that I will focus on in this thesis have a relatively strong Islamic approach and they include both female and male employees, although a majority are male workers in one of them – especially those holding the top positions.

Main research question

- How is the power distribution organized within the two NGO:s, focusing on gendered work, positions and power relations among female and male employees?

The main research question is followed by following sub questions in order to gain a deeper understanding of the research:

- How do women respectively men experience the cooperation within these NGO:s? Do women experience that they have the same opportunities as men in the organizations?
- How are terms such as gender, gender equality and feminism defined by both female and male employees? How are the men, active in these issues, seen by other non-active men?

1.2 Definitions of gender

Gender as a concept, refers to the roles of women and men that are created in our societies and cultures. They are not predetermined and the concept of gender is different in different countries and cultures and can therefore change over time. Unlike our biological sex as female or male, which are universal and predetermined from our birth, the gender roles are learned and socially constructed in different ways in different societies (UNESCO, 2003). There are many factors that affect the roles of women and men, such as class, ethnicity and status. Thus, it is always necessary to combine a gender perspective together with an intersectional perspective in social analysis, in order to understand why and also how the differences can vary within and between contexts (Ibid, 2003). This definition of gender framed by UNESCO will be used throughout the thesis, whenever the author refers to the term gender.

2. Methodology

2.1 Semi-structured interviews

My study is based on semi-structured qualitative interviews and participant observations with in total eight female and male employees working in two NGO:s on the Island of Java. The

primary data was collected during a field trip to Indonesia in February and March 2014 and the interviews took place in two different cities at the workplaces of the informants. The interviews were conducted with a prepared interview guide, although with a lot of space left for follow-up questions and changes of questions dependent on the interview situation and the informant - and the informants were offered to have the interview guide sent to them beforehand, if they wanted to read and prepare answers on the questions before the interview took place. A majority of the informants although did not find this necessary.

From the beginning, it was decided between the informants and me to have a majority of the interviews outside the office buildings in order to create a more relaxed atmosphere, and because the office environment could have affected the answers I got from the informants. Due to practical reasons, it was not possible to conduct the interviews outside the office buildings - apart from one - but the informants agreed on that all the interviews should take place in a quiet room where we were not disturbed by other employees or guests visiting the organization. The identities of my informants will not be revealed and I have given them fictional names in the thesis. However, since the sex of the informants are relevant for the understanding of power relations in order to highlight possible differences in the answers and their personal experiences, this will be deducible. Also the employment positions of the informants are in some cases relevant to be aware of, and a short presentation of each respondent is therefore given in the appendix.

Before conducting the interviews, one of the potential obstacles I prepared to face was a language barrier, since this could make it difficult to do my study in a proper and fair way – and especially to be able to understand the correct answers from my informants and also their understanding of my questions, aim and thesis. I knew that a majority of the people I was going to meet and interview at the NGO:s had a good knowledge in the English language, since I had established email contact with a few employees three months before my trip. Due to the fact that the informants are sometimes also working outside Indonesia in an international environment and are used to meet and speak English in their daily work as well as producing written material - such as books and newspapers in both English and Bahasa – although the language spoken at the workplaces is mainly Bahasa Indonesia, I could without any obstacles conduct all the interviews in English. Being aware of this and also trying to think of how I could re-formulate my questions so that it would be easier for my respondents to understand them, if some barriers would become a problem during the interviews (such as

giving them the written questions beforehand if they wished), made the interview processes more reliable.

2.2 Informants

Four employees in each NGO, two women and two men, were interviewed, in total a number of eight informants, and I have given them fictional names.

NGO A male informants: Saiful, Abdul, female informants: Lili, Dewi

NGO B male informants: Islah, Wakhit, female informants: Novia, Iris

2.3 Participant observation

Participant observation is a suitable research method when analyzing social processes and social relations since it increases the researcher's understanding for the social situations and the people being observed in different contexts (Saunders et al., 2009). Together with the data collected and interviews conducted, participant observation provides another dimension to the research. As Alan Bryman points out, participant observation is a method where the researcher gets the possibility to “observe and listen with a view to gaining an appreciation of the culture of a social group (Bryman, 2012:383). Participant observation as a method in this thesis is therefore very suitable in order to create my own perception of the dynamics within the certain groups I have been focusing on, since my focus has been to discover if it exists any kind of power relations within organizations working with gender issues and where a majority of the employees with leading positions are men. Thus, focusing on what's not being said but although done in terms of power relations between men and women in daily situations at work, helps the researcher to discover eventual gender differences within an organization. The observations together with the written material and the interviews therefore provided me with a special understanding of the organizational structure and relations between the employees.

The observations took place between the interviews and I tried to spend as much time as possible together with both the female and male employees in the office. In one of the organizations, NGO A, I spent nine whole working days starting from eight in the morning until six in the evening and I also got an own desk in the same room as the employees, where I could sit together with them and observe their work and interactions at the same time. It

also gave me a possibility to be a part of their routines, for instance taking part in the morning exercise and having breakfast and lunch together. I also attended a number of meetings and workshops that were also held within the building. Since I also lived together with one of the female employees during my fieldstudy in one of the cities, it naturally gave me a very good insight in her life and working experiences, which I also could apply on my research.

At NGO B, I spent around seven times a´ four or five hours each time, mostly attending meetings or having the interviews. Since they were not able to provide me with a working desk, I was more of a visitor when I came there rather than an integrated part of the work compared to my research position in the other organization. Due to this, the research at NGO A gave me the possibility to discover patterns that I might have missed when conducting interviews and doing observations at NGO B. This aspect is important to note in the result and findings, since a longer period of time at NGO B might would have given me other perspectives and opportunities to more in-depth observations.

When I discovered anything that I wanted to remember during the observations, I took notes in the computer, my notebook or in my cell-phone by writing the day, time and occasion, so I could easily return to them later on.

2.4 Ethical considerations

All informants in my study have been clearly informed about the purpose of the study. I got the their consent to use all the material collected from both interviews and observations done. In order to create such an ethical study as possible, I decided to mask the identity of my informants - although a majority of them did not see any problem at all using their real names in my study, since they are all very open with their work, their values and identity as human rights activists within Indonesia. All of the interviews were recorded and fieldnotes were written down during the working process. These are used to further describe and give a picture of the working climate and power relations among the women and men within the NGO:s.

2.5 Role of the researcher

My own role as a researcher must be taken into consideration during the whole research process. I have tried to be aware of my own preconditions when firstly choosing the topic of the thesis, the way I formulate my research questions and problematize the analysis and also how I might affect the informants I have met during my study. The answers you will get as a researcher must be seen in the light of power relations, age, cultural and religious differences as well as gender, class, background and identity. Different factors such as our size, sex and colour will automatically affect the informants (Scheyvens and Storey, 2003:149). Thus, these factors cannot be separated from my research.

In this study, when studying gender issues, I tried to be especially aware of my own preconceptions and opinions about feminism and gender which of course are influenced by Western values, both when writing and analyzing and also when choosing certain literature sources. The organisations I have visited both have a quite strong Islamic approach. Therefore, in order to be respectful, I chose to have a proper and neat clothing that didn't include shorts, transparent tops and skirts above the knee, since it could have affected my role as a researcher in a slightly negative way.

2.6 Limitations

Since this thesis touches several aspects of both democracy, concepts of gender and interpretations of religious texts, it has been necessary to make strict delimitations in order to make such a narrow thesis as possible. According to the limitation of space, I have therefore chosen to exclude analyzing the debate on Islam versus democracy and especially the current ongoing debate on Islam's role in democratic processes. I will also exclude discussions on polygamy, niqab and headscarf and Islamic marriage law. Although the thesis touches how interpretations of Islam can be closely connected to gender, the main focus in this thesis will be on how women and men themselves experience their own roles and how the organizational structure can be linked to issues of gender roles and power relations in an Islamic context.

Lastly, the thesis does not claim that the findings and results are representative for all NGOs in Indonesia working with gender issues, nor does it claim that the results would have been exactly the same if the time-frame would have been several weeks longer. The study is based on eight informants, from two different organisations, own personal experiences and my own observations during participation and interviews conducted in a limited scope of time. If

changing any of these variables, other and more deep-going findings might be possible to pertain.

2.7 Disposition

In order to make this thesis easy to follow for the reader, the thesis is divided into seven different chapters. Chapter 1 identifies the research problem and introduces the research questions as well as relevant concepts, my role as researcher and limitations. Chapter 2 presents the Methodology chosen for this research as well as ethical considerations. In Chapter 3 I discuss the theoretical framework divided into three themes. Chapter 4 aims to give the reader a historical background about the democratic development in Indonesia, as well as a picture of the climate in which the NGO:s are operating. Chapter 5 introduces the two NGO:s, their activities, history and organizational structure. Chapter 6 and 7 discusses and analyzes the findings based on the interviews and observations by using the theoretical framework presented in chapter 3. The thesis ends with a final concluding discussion, in which I also aim to suggest topics for further research in this field.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Gender theory

Not only the role of women but also the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality has been highlighted in the international debate during the last decades. Focusing on gender roles, not only the role of women included, deepens the understanding of inequality and of how gender inequality have a negative impact on both the life of women and men in the society (ILO, 2013:1). The main reason for using gender theory is because it is useful in social analysis in order to understand men's domination and women's subordination and the underlying reasons behind inequality patterns in different contexts. In gender theory, the researcher looks at both the role of women and men in order to explain these roles as sociological categories rather than sociobiological explanations that mostly refers to biological differences to describe inequalities or differences between the sexes as more "fixed" and unable to change and vary over time.

In this thesis, I stress that gender roles must be seen as roles shaped by cultural, religious and social factors in society and therefore have to be analyzed in the specific context in which

they operate. Gender roles, in every society, are dependant on historical events, economic status and development and especially religious and cultural traditions. Thus, when using gender theory in research, the researcher must always be aware of these factors, since they are dependant on each other and are shaped different in different contexts. Considering that gender theory consists of a range of different social scientific theories, I have chosen to focus on a few prominent researchers view on gender within the field that focuses on masculinities and Islam as a part of the gender work in Indonesia.

3.2 WID and GAD approach

During the 1970's and 1980's, two approaches on gender development studies emerged in the academic field - Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development theory (GAD). The WID approach was mainly developed by American liberal feminists in the early 1970's in order to highlight how the modernization processes could benefit both women and men by using different strategies, for instance through creating income-generating activities as well as social and welfare components. The approach also aimed to highlight the negative impacts that was a natural consequence of both capitalism and colonialism and a great focus was therefore put on women's labour at home as well as in public workplaces. In short, the aim with the WID approach was to put focus on, and integrate women, in the public sphere and making them becoming equal participants in the society. The approach was criticized by several feminists who were rooted in the socialist and feminist anthropology. The main criticism concerned that the WID approach did not take the underlying reasons behind women's subordination into consideration, since the focus of WID was more on *how* women could be integrated rather than questioning *why* women's position in society was subordinated men's. For instance, socialist feminists criticized that women's reproductive role tends to be forgotten or ignored within this approach. (Hadiwanata, 2003:172-173)

The GAD approach emerged in the early 1980's as an answer to the criticism of WID approach and with an aim to fill the gaps that the WID approach missed. GAD focuses on gender relations rather than women as the main category of analysis, since the role of men, according to GAD, is equally important as the role of women when analyzing gender discrimination and inequality in different contexts, cultures and societies. The approach tries to answer questions on *why* women are subordinated, and how women's respectively men's roles and expectations are constructed and through what kind of policies and strategies women can be empowered, having this knowledge as a basis for analysis. Compared to WID,

the GAD approach provides both a perspective on social constructions and gendered relations and patterns, which is useful when understanding the gender discrimination and its historical background as well as when creating policies and strategies that benefit both men and women in the development process. (Ibid p. 172-173)

3.3 Gendered work and organizational structure

The structure in every workplace, social structure and social process is *gendered* (Acker, 1990:145). Acker argues that "the structure of the labor market, relations in the workplace, the control of the work process and the underlying wage relation are always affected by symbols of gender, processes of gender identity and material inequalities between women and men" (Ibid p. 145). Gender is therefore always an integral part of every organization and to define an organization as *gendered*, in accordance to Acker, means that "advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine" (Acker, 1990: 146). When analyzing power relations and gender inclusion among the female and male employees in this thesis, Ackers theory and model of discovering patterns of gendered work is very suitable, since it helps the researcher to discover underlying power dynamics in an organizational structure that expresses gender differences and gender inequality, focusing on masculinity and femininity in its specific context. This model will therefore be used as a basis for the analysis of the organizational structure in NGO A and B. Acker stresses that gendering occurs in *five* interacting processes in an organization, which are:

- Construction of divisions along lines of gender, such as divisions of labor, allowed behaviours and power. She also stresses the fact that men almost always hold the highest positions of organizational power
- Constructions of symbols and images that express these gendered divisions, with roots in language, culture and ideology
- Interactions between women and men; men and men; women and women, focusing on patterns that express dominance or submission
- Consciousness of the existence of gendered patterns; being aware of yourself as a gendered member in a larger context
- Gender can not be separated from any social structure; it is a basic constitutive element in family relations, which affects and frames relations of other structures, such as complex organizations (Ibid p. 147)

3.4 Gender and Islam

Since Islam has become more and more prominent in the Indonesian political sphere in the post-Suharto period, *Reformasi*, which began in 1998 after the fall of the authoritarian regime, Islam has automatically also played a crucial role when framing feminist views in Indonesia (Blackburn, Smith and Syamsiyatun, 2008:1). Views on Islam and especially Western constructions of Islam have often framed Islam as “the Other”, keeping Edward Saids classical book *Orientalism* in mind, applying negative attributes and values on Islamic societies (Ibid p. 4). Since this view on Islam also is highly gendered, meaning that a Western construction of Islam often portrays Muslim women as victims and exclusively equating Islamic values with patriarchal structures (Ibid p. 4), it has been necessary to look closer into how the influence of Islam affects both women’s and men’s view on themselves as well as the prevailing outside view.

Susan Blackburns discussion on Islam and gender discusss concepts such as pluralism and Islams relationship to Indonesian women in particular and she claims that cultural understandings of Islam and gender are necessary in order to understand how and why the feminist movement has been so prominent in Indonesia over the last fifteen years (Ibid 2009:7). Considering the fact that a great part of the work for gender equality in Indonesia is actually made by men and both of the NGO:s, whose work is the basis for this paper, are founded by male gender activists, Blackburns discussion on gender and Islam are relevant in order to trying to find answers on the research questions. When analyzing power relations and male participation in the organizational structure and discovering patterns, it is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of cultural interpretations of Islam, since the religion and belief is permeating the work on gender equality in both of the NGO:s where the qualitative research has been done.

3.5 Men and masculinities

As pointed out in the beginning of this chapter, taking “masculinities” and the role of men into consideration when designing theoretical frameworks as well as strategies for eliminating gender inequality and discrimination, is highly important and necessary for achieving equality between men and women (ILO, 2013). Since this thesis concerns terms of masculinity and how men actively working with gender issues are seen by other non-activists

in Indonesia, R.W Connell's theories on masculinity will be applied on the primary data and findings. Connell discusses and raises difficult issues regarding masculinity and inequality between men and women, problematizing difficult issues for men and boys, global relations as well as the concept of masculinity. According to Connell, the concept of masculinity is inherently relational, since it would not exist if there was not a concept of "femininity" (Connell, 2005:68). Connell argues that masculinity could be described as non-femininity, which he also calls a *semiotic* approach. This means that in the semiotic definition of masculinity, masculinity stands for authority, while femininity is defined by lack of such (Ibid p. 68). But there is not just one masculinity and therefore, a focus on relations and multiple masculinities is highly important for understanding male hegemony and how it can change and vary within different contexts. Connell stresses that hegemonic masculinity embodies a "currently accepted" strategy, and when the conditions for the patriarchal structures change, new types of masculinity can be constructed by new groups that challenge old patterns and norms (Ibid p. 79). This view on masculinity and how it can change within a specific context, combined with Acker's theory on gendered work in organizations, will be applied in my research and analysis on the questions of male and female participation in the work towards gender equality. Connell's theories are especially interesting since they raise important issues on masculinity that can be applied and used to further understand and problematize different world issues – all connected to concepts of masculinity and how gender roles affect all levels in the society (Ibid p. 79).

4. Islam, democratization and gender in Indonesia

This chapter provides an overview of my informants and the organizational climate they are working in within in Indonesia, in order to give a picture of the democratic development in Indonesia and to provide a deeper understanding for why the interest in these issues among many Indonesians seems to grow very rapidly. I want to illustrate how and why it became possible for the women's movement in Indonesia to grow and how new approaches on women's issues, gender and feminism got a big influence in politics, education and Islamic thinking and interpreting of the Quran.

4.1 NGO: s in Indonesia

The perception of women's issues have gone through a rapid change in Indonesia, but the process should not be labelled as a modern process that recently started. Women's movement in Indonesia had begun from the early twentieth century and the first women's organization in Indonesia, *Putri Mardika*, was established already in 1912 as a protest to child marriage (Hadiwinata, 2003:170). One of the first female pioneers who raised her voice for women's rights and emancipation was Hari Kartini, a Javanese woman born in 1879 in North Central Java (Sadli, 2002:85). Kartini is often referred to as a national heroine in Indonesia because of her work for Indonesian women's right to education and as Indonesias first feminist, struggling for female emancipation and to liberate Indonesian women from old patriarchal values and systems (Sadli, 2002:85). In 1903, she opened the first primary school in Indonesia for native girls with economic funding from the Dutch government.

Putri Mardika was later on followed by another organization, *Isteri Sedar*, which focused mainly on giving women greater power in the political sphere (Hadiwinata, 2003:170). During the New Order, several programmes created specifically for women were established. In order to control and mobilise Indonesian women into politics, several state-sanctioned women groups was formed during the 1970s and 1980s, whereas the biggest organization was named Dharma Wanita, an umbrella organization for all civil institutions, and the Dharma Pertiwi organization where wives of police and military forces were associated (Ibid p.171-172).

NGO:s are in general common in Indonesia, especially those working with human rights, pluralism and gender issues. It has been increasing since the fall of Suharto in 1998 and the increasing number of NGO:s in Indonesia could be seen as one of many "natural" steps in Indonesias ongoing transition to democracy, *Reformasi*, since people are now allowed to organize themselves in organizations without strict state regulations. They are also allowed to work openly and actively with issues that concern a majority of the Indonesian people, such as democracy, human rights, gender, economic development and migration/trafficking issues. This goes hand in hand with the reform of Islamic education in Indonesia, where steps are being taken in improving gender perspectives and erasing patriarchal power structures – although it is a slow and difficult process (Kull, 2009:33).

Since a majority of the Indonesian Muslims receive their main religious education at *Pesantren*, *Pesantren* education is very influential in shaping values and knowledge about the society, religious understanding and roles of men and women. These values and traditions are mainly found in classical Islamic literature, *kitab kuning*, where women's rights and a critical gender perspective traditionally has been very absent (Ibid p. 33). There is an ongoing debate in changing these traditions, especially among female scholars, teachers and students (Ibid p.34). Many female teachers, scholars and researchers thus play a crucial role in re-shaping Islamic education and including a critical gender perspective on *kitab kuning* and the understanding of religious texts, and for the empowerment of women. Rahima Women's Association, Rifka Annisa Women's Crisis Centre, Fahmina Institute and Fatayat Welfare Foundation are a few names of four influential NGO:s working actively in strengthening the role of women within an Islamic context in Java (Ibid p. 33). They stress the importance of applying a critical approach on traditional Islamic texts and the importance of contextual reading of the Quran as well as promoting gender-equal treatment of women and men in all levels of society.

One of the role models in this field is Abdurrahman Wahid, leader of the Nahdlatul Ulama between 1984-1999 – the world's largest Islamic organization - and during his short position as president of Indonesia, he took an important step in creating a gender mainstreaming policy that nowadays is included in all sectors of the Indonesian society (Ibid p.28).

One of Indonesias leading feminist activists named Sapparinah Sadli, professor in psychology and the founder of the Women's Study Center at UI (nowadays named Gender studies center), has also played an important role in highlighting a gender perspective in Indonesian higher Islamic education and academia. Muhammadiyah, Indonesias's second largest Muslim organization and very influential in shaping knowledge on Islamic thinking and interpreting, has been affected by the work of Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin, a powerful member of Muhammadiyah who strongly has promoted an increased gender perspective on women's issues and religion (Kull, 2013:61). Since NU and Muhammadiyah are schools from which a majority of Indonesian Muslims gets their Islamic education, *Pesantren*, it is a powerful platform for a continued work on reforming Islamic education and values to become more focused on gender and human rights.

As noted earlier, women's movements in Indonesia has a long history, and although the women groups during the Suharto era experienced a setback and the government's

programmes on women failed to address issues such as gender equality between men and women during this time, the tradition of organizing groups for women still remained strong even under the authoritarian regime (Hadiwinata, 2003:172). The consequences for marginalized groups during Suharto also created a wish among Indonesian feminists to strengthen networks between especially marginalized women, mainly rural women who had been forgotten in the New Order Programmes, and making them aware of their problematic situation as well as raise awareness on their rights to organize themselves in associations where they could network and get access to power (Ibid p 173). Ann Kull discusses how the many years of Suharto rule has shaped many Indonesian thinkers to become more progressive and neo-modernistic (Kull, 2009:27-28)

As will be brought up later in this thesis, the organizations that I met also collaborated with each other and also with NGO:s in other places both inside and outside Indonesia. The new Muslim civil society, meaning an increasing power of Islam in the public sphere in Indonesia, grew stronger in the 1990's and especially women's rights became one of the main focus points in the national debate (Rinaldo, 2013:64).

Getting access to contact persons working in the organizations were very easy and both of the organizations are active on social media, such as Facebook and Twitter. They also have their own webpages, where daily updates about current human rights issues are frequently published. The democratisation process in Indonesia has thus made it possible for NGO:s to work on open platforms which is a big change from the previous authoritarian society. According to my own observations and impressions after six weeks of fieldwork, it seems that the environment in Indonesia is quite tolerant towards NGO:s working with issues, such as gender and feminism, that among many Muslims is perceived as highly controversial and progressive. Therefore, I will also put some light on the role of Islam in the modernizing era and how Islam has been, and still is, a tool for modernization of values in Indonesia and in the organizations where I have been doing research.

4.2 Human rights and democratisation in a developing Indonesia

Gender perspectives on society and family have become more and more present and important in Indonesia over the last decades and it is closely connected to the changes that

have taken place in Indonesia on especially the transformation of the Suharto era (Rinaldo, 2013:33). As pointed out by Rinaldo, Islam have played a modernizing role in Indonesia during the twentieth century, and gender politics emerged in the nationalist era and is still very influential in the public life and politics (Ibid p.33). Focusing especially on women's rights, the post-Suharto era has made increasing changes on gender politics and Islamic politics, which nowadays are closely interlinked (Ibid p.33). The democratisation process, that started after the fall of Suharto in 1998, have also played a crucial role for the improvement of women's rights in Indonesia – while women now have freedom to organize and become activists in state-supported Islamic institutions, especially middle-class women. Globalization is naturally also one part of the increased gender awareness in Indonesia and the ongoing global processes must be seen as both an inspiration and help to improve and influence the Indonesian feminism and gender work.

But as mentioned by Rinaldo, women's activism was also one of the main casualties of the Suharto regime, since many women at this time became a part of the educational institutions in Indonesia as well as in the formal workforce (Rinaldo, 2013:44). A kind of independent movement for women started to rise and grew stronger, and many young women became a part of Islamic activism (Rinaldo 2013:44). One example of how influences from outside Indonesia affected activists within the country to start a women's rights movement, was the focus in late 1980's to start forming NGO:s – which they claimed that the Indonesian government had failed to do. Indonesian activists saw examples from several international organizations where a lot of priority was on how to improve women's rights, and they got the opportunity to meet other human rights activists from other countries and started to apply for funding from the big international organizations such as Oxfam and UNICEF (Rinaldo, 2013:44).

This focus was also spread to Muslim women's groups and they became inspired by literature written by Middle Eastern feminists about gender equality, Islam and feminism, and several Indonesian NGO:s translated these texts into Bahasa Indonesia. Also Western feminist scholars, who published writings on gender interpretations of the Quran, were at this time a great inspiration for many Muslim women activists in Indonesia (Rinaldo, 2013:45). Along with a greater female participation in NGO:s and progressive student movements in the late 1980's, the democracy movement in Indonesia grew stronger and stronger and to be a part of mobilizations that were critical towards the authoritarian regime became more and more

common. A developed discourse of human rights, gender and feminism therefore had the chance to grow in what one could say was a very dynamic time in Indonesia, where great changes in state politics were about to begin its rise, and finally resulted in the reformist movement after the fall of Suharto.

5. The work for gender equality in two NGO:s in Java

The following chapter explores the working structure and the organizational structure in two different NGO:s on the Island of Java in Indonesia. The chapter starts with a presentation of the two NGO:s, divided into separate parts (NGO A and NGO B) where the research is done. This chapter aims to describe their historical background, their work and values in order to understand what they want to achieve with their work and what kind of activities they do in order to reach their goals. The NGO:s are located in two different cities on the Island of Java.

5.1 Presentation of the organizations: NGO A and NGO B

Establishment and historical background

NGO A, situated in a relatively small city on the north coast of Java, was established in 2001 by four male founders and is a non-profit and non-governmental organization. The four founders were all young Pesantren or ex-Pesantren (Islamic boarding school) student activists at this time, who had become more and more critical towards the lack of social and intellectual philosophy in the modern Pesantren. They felt a need to fill a gap in the modern teaching of Islam, and one of my informants, who were also one the founders, described his feelings at this time as being young and confused.

”When I was a student, I followed a workshop on gender awareness. I was very confused – the gender discourse, relation between men and women. In traditional Islamic law, men are superior on women. That made me reflect over this and I recognized the gender idea and that this is right (Saiful, 19 February 2014)

In 1998, the grassroot activists started to form themselves into a more organized group, focusing on contextual readings and understandings of classical Islamic texts, also called *kitab kuning*, and their activism got great response from influential higher religious leaders

and political activists with power. In order to highlight marginalized people in the Indonesian society, such as women, victims of violence and religious minorities and to empower marginalized groups in the society, they started circle discussions among politically interested young people. This was also in a time of great change in Indonesia and the fall of the authoritarian Suharto regime had created a radical atmosphere among many young people, especially students at this time, who wanted democracy after many years of limited freedom within their country. Their activities and programmes were all used with a gender perspective, which still today have remained very strong.

”Gender is the issue of equality and justice – feminism is the movement. One dimension of NGO A is feminism – but NGO A has many dimensions. NGO A concentrate on pluralism, human rights, democratisation. Gender is one of the core values” (Saiful, 19 February 2014)

NGO B, located in a relatively big city on the Island of Java, was formally established in 1997, although the work of forming NGO B started many years earlier as a part of the democratization movement in Indonesia under the authoritarian Suharto era. Like NGO A, the founders of NGO B are all men – at that time five close friends and student activists at the university. The organization started as circle discussions among male student activists who wanted to engage in issues about politics, democracy, religion, culture and women’s rights, built on a view that pluralism is a basis of democracy (Wakhit, 7 February 2014). One of the male respondents described that his interest for these issues grew stronger and stronger during the authoritarian regime and he especially highlighted the very limited press freedom, which made it both dangerous for young students to publish information and hold meetings about the undemocratic regime in Indonesia (Wakhit, 7 February 2014). Today, NGO B focus mainly on religion and social issues, and on first hand gender and pluralism, and also LGBT rights and the role of muslim women in the Indonesian society.

5.2 Activities

NGO A works closely with *Pesantren* and local and national institutions and they hold a number of activities related to human rights and gender issues; study groups, discussion groups for *Pesantren* women, organized Islamic text studygroups as well as courses and workshops on democracy and human rights for women. The NGO also runs an Islamic school on the same area as the office building, a school with around three hundred students. The

school was established in 2008 and they have three different faculties, divided into Islamic education, Islamic economics and Islamic theology. The lectures are all permeated by a gender and democracy perspective and the students get to learn about human rights, gender, democracy, pluralism, LGBT rights, domestic violence and sex education.

”Women have double burden, they have to carry both the children and their husband” (Male student at the NGO A school, 18 February 2014)

The students are all encouraged to do daily research and organize meetings with different kind of people, such as religious minorities, transgender people and also work actively with, for instance, giving support to victims of religious intolerance in villages in Indonesia.

These activities are seen as a way to empower both women and men, although women in particular, to become active in politics and to work within the government, and their belief is that it is highly important to let these values permeate traditional Islamic teaching in Pesantren.

According to one of the founders and also my male informant, the courses on gender and Islam consists mainly of women and only a minority of men (Saiful, 19 February 2014). Apart from gender programmes, workshops on gender awareness and gender and human rights education, NGO A also produce and publish magazines and books on trafficking, HIV/AIDS and gender justice and Islam. They are also active in reaching the local community through channels like radio community, television, Facebook/Twitter and a very well functioning website and blog. They also run programs to promote gender in public policy and local as well as national regulations – for instance a bill on marriage law, domestic violence and human trafficking (Saiful, 19 February 2014). A focus on good governance, which according to NGO A means ”direct participation by the people”, is one of the most important perspectives in NGO A. Therefore, they work strongly for public participation and an increasing female participation in the Indonesian society.

NGO B, although a bit smaller than NGO A, also hold a number of activities which are all divided into three main themes/programmes: Islam and gender, Media and culture and Library activities. They produce and publish a newsletter every second week within the Islam and gender-theme, a Bulletin regarding different views on women’s issues in every edition of the newsletter. Some of the themes regard the debate about wearing headscarf or niqab, and

some newsletters have also discussed the debate about Western feminism versus Islamic feminism and how they can interact with each other. NGO B also runs a library with around six thousand books, available for students, teachers and scholars to borrow interested in gender issues, politics related to *Pesantren*.

The library is also located in the main office building and one of the staff is specifically responsible for the library section, to order recent publish books on relevant subjects and also responsible for the organizations own printing business – where they also print their own literature. Apart from this, NGO B also organizes ”reading programmes” for mothers and children in Indonesia. The reading programmes includes going with a car packed with children literature, mainly for children under the age of ten, to different villages in Indonesia and organizing reading activities for mothers and children together. This activity have become more and more popular among young mothers around Indonesia, who get the possibility to improve their reading skills and habits as well as improving the reading skills of their children from an early age. This is, according to NGO B, a good way to, in a more long-term perspective, improve especially young women’s possibilities to get access to higher education. Since the lack of language skills, as well as lack of education for women, is a great problem in the Indonesian society, NGO B mean that focusing especially on their reading abilities is an important step in the work towards gender equality (Iris, 7 February 2014). After finishing every reading activity, NGO B donates around thirtyfive books to the village they have been visiting.

NGO B also collaborate with other NGO:s in Indonesia working on the same issues, and they have close contact with NGO A, although they are located in different cities. When organizing demonstrations and celebrating important human rights-events such as the anti-violence days and Women’s day on the 8th of March, they often come together with these NGO:s in street rallies and street demonstrations. During 2013, NGO B held a number of workshops in *Pesantren* regarding gender balance between men and women as well as workshops and forums on domestic violence against women, and for some years ago, they also produced shorter documentary movies filmed by staff and students active within NGO B. They have also produced several books on human rights issues; trafficking, domestic violence, feminism, gender and dmeocracy within an Islamic context, all available at their own library.

5.3 Organizational structure

NGO A consists of many active member and this part aims to give a picture of organizational structure within the NGO A. Five people sits in the board of NGO A, three women and two men, and the head of the foundation is a man. The head of the foundation changes every year and is elected by the other staff members, and this year, a male staff was elected to this position. The senior officers at NGO consist of two men and four women, and the formal staff people consists of fourteen men and seven women, working at NGO A on a daily basis – both full-time workers and part-time workers. In this chapter, I have chosen to exclude the teachers at the school runned by NGO A, since I have been focusing mainly on the people working actively within the NGO and not as teachers in the school.

In total, the staff of NGO B consists of eight full-time employed and two part-time employed activists, whereas six women and four men. The two directors of NGO B are men, and their positions have been the same since the organization was established in 1997, since both of them were also two of the founders of NGO B. Islah is head of the NGO and Wakhit is executive director. Apart from their positions, one man is programme officer for the Islam and Gender programme and one woman holds the responsibility for the Media and Culture Programme. Female respondent Iris is library officer and apart from these positions, two men are working with office tasks such as economy and administration, and there are two women working as secretaries which includes dealing with daily administration tasks such as post, printing and deliveries.

6. Findings and analysis

The following section aims to describe the results from the field study, including interviews and observations, based on my research questions presented in the introduction chapter. This section will present and describe the working experiences from the NGO informants about gender, feminism and Islam, with special attention given to power relations between female and male activists working in the NGO:s based on Acker's organizational theory. The first part will focus on definitions of gender and how the NGO informants define the terms gender

and feminism. The second part goes deeper into feministic interpretations of the Quran expressed by the NGO informants and how the Quran expresses values such as gender equality and human rights, according to the informants. The third part looks at how these values are taught and how they also permeate the organizational structure within the NGO:s, in order to explore the power relations between the female and male employees. In this part I have also chosen to include the greatest part of the observations done during the study.

6.1 Key concepts: gender and feminism

The official term used when talking about women's rights among the NGO informants were mainly "gender" and "gender equality". Sadli states that feminism as a term is still not uncomplicated to use and it is associated with secular and nationalist values that in many people's minds are not compatible with the Indonesian pluralistic society (Sadli, 2002:84-85). This view was very common among a majority of the informants. They articulated that feminism was a sensitive term to use within an Islamic context since, as noted above, the term is among many people associated with Western and secular values that are not always seen as compatible with an Islamic belief (Wakhit, 7 February 2014). Therefore, "feminism" was not a term used outside the organizations, although a majority of the NGO informants identified themselves as feminists, but they didn't define their organizations as a feminist movement.

"No, NGO B is not a feminist movement. NGO B is a part of women's movement" (Wakhit, 7 February 2014)

"We does not claim that we are a feminist organization, because it can be sensitive. But many men are feminists. I am a feminist. (Wakhit, 7 February 2014)

The definition of feminism among the informants in both of the organizations was very similar to each other, but none of the organizations have chosen to use feminism as a term outside the organization. The general term when holding lectures, debates and publishing books is *gender*. None of the informants though seemed to reject the term feminism, but they all claimed that it is a term that is sensitive to use in daily speech with people who are not familiar with these issues. Although, one of the male informants defined that "gender is the issue of equality – feminism is the movement. One dimension of NGO A is feminism – but

NGO A has many dimensions” (Saiful, 19 February 2014). This answer might therefore be interpreted as more positive towards the use of feminism in the organization.

As highlighted by many researchers in this field, feminism as a term and movement has a ”cultural baggage” which often elicits negative reactions and associations among people outside the Western world. The main criticism is often that feminism is a form of Western imperialism (Rinaldo, 2013:8). The idea that feminism, which grew out from a social movement in Europe and the US, would threaten traditional Islamic values is a relatively common perception. Although the debate is ongoing and the term has become more and more accepted, and according to Rinaldo, feminist ideas are not only limited to the West and it is also differently defined by individuals and organizations (Ibid, p 38).

The general use of the term gender before using the term feminism could therefore be seen more as a strategic way in attracting people to the gender equality-movement rather than claiming that feminist values are not in line with their own values about the role of women in an Islamic context. Framing women’s rights within an Islamic context and using Islamic terms is a common approach to gender and feminism in Indonesia, and religion is a crucial focus for many Muslim women when it comes to democracy and gender activism (Rinaldo 2013:28). It is therefore important to understand the social context in which the activists operate and and also how religion have played a crucial role in the democratisation process in Indonesia, and still does, in order to gain a better understanding for the use of specific terms. At the same time, its also important to know that apart from Islam, which has been a very important method to highlight women’s roles and to create a women’s mobilization in Indonesia, other factors like class and ethnicity have also played a crucial role (Ibid p.34).

According to the majority of the informants, gender was defined as ”the social sex” meaning that the society ”makes men and women different” (Lili, 3 February 2014). This was a recurrent interpretation of the term gender among the acitivists. Gender was defined as the social sex given to us, with predetermined notions of how women and men are. According to one of the male informants, his definition of gender was that ”gender is an eye of analysis”. He described the organization’s view on gender as putting ”humanity first – not see people in term of their sex. In principal, treat everybody as a human” (Abdul, 16 February 2014).

On one question on the definition of gender equality, a majority of the informants articulated that the most basic value is that women and men should have the same rights, because they are able to do the exact same things in society. Two of the male informants discussed the difference between gender, the given sex, and the biological sex - female or male - and especially pointed out menstruation and pregnancy as one factor that separates women from men.

”Men and women are equal in all conditions of human life. The differences are given from God – women have vagina, men have penis – but socially and culturally men and women are equal” (Saiful, 19 February 2014)

Human rights and women’s rights goes hand in hand in the organizational activities and view on gender, and the focus on gender can be explained in part by the ongoing democratisation process in Indonesia, where many activists have become more aware of the fact that female participation in public life and especially in the labour market and state politics are important factors to accelerate in the process of democratization, and womens rights are especially important in this sense (Wakhit, 7 February, 2014).

The discourse on democracy and the democratisation movement, which both of the organizations defined themselves as, therefore realized that at concentration on female empowerment must be given greater attention.

New models of masculinity and femininity in both personal and working life has played a crucial role for the economic development in Indonesia, and in order to be able to develop economically, women must also take part in the global market area and in labour market and educational institutions– not only in the private sphere (Robinson, 2009:189). The economic policies that came with the New Order, which has also made Indonesia to one of the most emerging market economies in the world, have especially focused on that women have become increasingly in demand and needed in the labor market – such as in the manufacturing industry but also as migrant overseas in other Asian countries (Ibid p. 189).

6.2 Gender and feminist interpretations of the Quran

While interpretations of the Quran are central for the understanding of Islamic gender feminism and definitions of gender equality, especially since both of the NGO:s which are represented in this thesis have a strong Islamic approach, it is crucial to look deeper into how the Quran are read and understood by my informants – since this was a recurrent theme that was brought up when conducting interviews with the informants.

”Many think women are weak – they can’t do this and that, emotional, doesn’t use her brain – its influences from religion and culture, they are responsible for this view” (Wakhit, 7 February 2014)

According to the informants, interpretations of the Quran were often seen as a ground for discrimination and misunderstandings regarding gender and feminism, which could be explained in part by that the Quran is not read contextually (Islah, 10 February 2014). One male respondent experienced that in traditional Islamic law, men were seen as superior on women.

”I believe in gender equality and gender justice, it should be a part of Islamic teaching. Gender in my mind is the core of Islamic teaching” (Saiful, 19 February 2014)

The focus on how traditional Muslims are interpreting the religious texts are therefore a central focus point in the work of both NGO:s, since the Islamic discourse on gender, as mentioned in the historical background, provides a very powerful role in the Indonesian society. As previously mentioned, many state sanctions have throughout history affected women in the Indonesian society disproportionately – one of these is the Indonesian Marriage law. Marriage structure has been a very important factor for men to keep having power over women in Indonesia (Robinson, 2009:189), and the law was a common thing brought up by the informants when criticizing, what they defined as traditional and ”wrong” interpretations, of Islam. The Marriage law allows a man to have many wives and the law considers men to be the head of the household. This law was not seen as compatible with gender equality, according to the NGO informants, and one male respondent especially mentioned his own negative experiences regarding how the Marriage Law discriminated and neglected women and how this reality made him become interested in working actively with gender issues.

”I have personal experiences, family experiences. My father had many wives, that is common in my environment. Women were neglected in this kind of society” (Islah, 10 February 2014)

The focus on how Islamic interpretations are a big part in this discrimination was therefore crucial in the discussion on gender equality in an Islamic context. Several of the informants claimed that it is not the religion itself that provides unequal values – it is *how* the Quran is read and interpreted by the practitioners. One of the male informants particularly stressed the importance of reading the Quran *contextually*, meaning that the religious texts should be seen in the cultural and temporal context, and be able to follow modernization processes along with the modernization of the Indonesian society.

The school runned by NGO B use classical Islamic teaching and old Islamic literature as the basis of Islamic education, in order to promote gender issues. One of the male informants working at NGO B discussed classical Islamic literature in relation to gender equality and feminism. His reasoning was that gender issues and gender equality are to be found in classical Islamic literature.

”We found gender issues in classical Islamic literature – we found equality there. Not only from the West. Western values and classical Islamic teaching can co-exist, it is similar. The gender issues can co-exist together. I hope the result will be that gender has roots in Indonesian Islamic literature – it is not only a Western idea” (Saiful, 19 february 2014)

As mentioned by Ann Kull, it has become problematic to promote liberal interpretations of the Quran since the fall of Suharto, and progressive Muslims thus meet a lot of criticism when using terms such as feminism, pluralism and secularism (Kull, 2013:165). Since my informants all identified themselves as progressive Muslims promoting a kind of progressive Islam, they shared with me their experiences on meeting conservative Muslims who criticised their usage of gender work within an Islamic context.

“Progressive Islam means that women are not under men. A Muslim conservative has ideas like “women cannot be leaders, because Allah does not like women leaders. According to NGO B, this is wrong. It is all about interpretation, not Allah. In Islam, men and women are equal” (Wakhit, 7 February, 2014)

7. FEMALE AND MALE PARTICIPATION

7.1 Organizational structure

The informants, when talking about their working conditions in the organizations, expressed equality and equal treatment of male and female workers as highly important. They identified a small number of differences between male and female workers which were mainly related to the fact that women can become pregnant and also have their menstruation once a month, which could have effect on their working capacity during a small number of days.

“If you are a woman, you are different from men (menstruation and pregnancy). Because of this, you can have the right to be free during pregnancy and menstruation – men has no such rights. But we can not separate men and women because of that. You have the same rights and can do the same things” (Wakhit, NGO B, 7 February, 2014)

“In NGO A, some of the regulations have a clear gender perspective. You can have one day off because of the period, and tampons/menstruation covers are always available in the office building” (Novia, NGO A, 3 February, 2014)

This view was also brought up by several of the informants at both of the organizations, and the regulations within the organizational structure openly tried to work against traditional separations between “masculine” and “feminine” tasks. One of the female informants at NGO B especially pointed out that she got the responsibility for taking care of the technical part when producing documentary films, such as editing and recording, which traditionally are seen as “masculine” working tasks. According to her, this division of tasks showed awareness from the head of the organization in working for a gender balance also between the female and male employees in the daily work at the NGO (Novia, NGO B, 3 February, 2014).

“The positive thing with working in NGO B is that it is very equal between the workers, not so strict, flexible and NGO B is focusing on many things, wide networking and it is a chance for women to network in this city” (Novia, NGO B, February, 2014)

“If NGO A was not equal, I would not work here (Dewi, 19 February, 2014)

According to Acker's framework, the division of labor in an organization is obvious to a casual observer and could therefore easily be analyzed with a gender perspective (Acker, 1990:146). She highlights Cynthia Cockburns studies on masculinity and particularly mentions her study on technology and masculinity, where male worker's often linked their gender with technical skills, and such skills represented by a woman therefore was a threat to their masculinity (Ibid p.147). Assumptions on what you are "allowed" to do as a woman or man is thus closely linked to the gender roles, and as pointed out by Connell, this shows the masculine and feminine polarity (Connell, 1995:13). Since Acker stresses that gender and gendered substructures are permeating the daily life at every organization, the observations I have done have been focusing particularly on female and male inclusion in decision making processes, division of tasks, leading positions and the interactions between female and male employees at the offices. Another important point, also brought up by Acker, is gender differences in conversation and how these differences could recreate gender inequality (Acker, 1990:147).

During the meetings and workshops I have participated in, the tendencies to separate female and male employees regarding tasks or influence in speaking at the meetings have been absent. At NGO A, the office building includes two floors with office-desks where all the employees sit together. There is no division in positions – deputy director, head of the organization as well as workers on the different programmes and interns are sharing the same space (Fieldnotes, 14 February, 2014). The working environment was, according to my own observations, very relaxed and comfortable. The female and male workers talked very openly with each other, were joking and expressed their thoughts as well as talking about personal experiences on different things. As observer, I could not discover any gender differences in the conversations or certain patterns in treating female or male colleagues different, and it seemed to be a clear awareness on creating an including working environment for both female and male employees.

This aim was expressed through the creation of a few office-traditions. The head of the organization at NGO A organized weekly recurrent traditions called "Morning refresh" and "Friday exercising". The *Morning refresh* was started in order to improve leadership skills among the female and male employees, and it was held three times a week in the conference room in the office building. One person in the team then got the opportunity to prepare a short speech around fifteen minutes about a topic that she or he wanted to raise awareness on, and

the colleagues got the opportunity to ask questions and giving feedback on the speech afterwards. Every Friday morning, the employees also joined together in a tradition called *Friday exercising*. For about twenty minutes, the employees danced together with instructions from a music-video. Although the exercising was voluntarily, all employees – including the head of the organization as well as the cleaner – joined the exercise (Fieldnotes, 14 February, 2014).

According to my findings at NGO A and B, I have found that both of the organizations have male leaders and directors, although NGO A has a female deputy director and a female manager. The NGO:s are also founded by the men that are still holding the top positions of the organizations and these positions have not been changed since the establishment of the organizations. As the following quote show, the head of the organization of NGO A acknowledged the importance of an increasing number women working with gender issues in the organization:

“It is difficult to find female activists in (this city), because of the affect of inequality. I promote women as leaders in NGO A! Dewi is the deputy director and Riza is manager. But not yet in the top level and that is a problem. I myself want to see a woman leader in the NGO and also at the University, more women should be on top positions. NGO A promotes women to be leaders in the local and national government. We have special programs for this (Saiful, 19 February, 2014)

The female informants in NGO A also called for more female employees in the organization, and they expressed dissatisfaction with the absence of female workers.

“Men and women have different values, that is why they should work together. It is difficult, but we need more women at NGO A. Many women choose other activities in NGO A, for instance as teachers instead. They want to work less because of family and children. We need more women! (Lili, 20 February 2014)

“Women do not have enough confidence, maybe that is why? (Dewi, 19 February 2014)

The absence of female employees, especially in top positions, could probably be partly explained by the view presented by the informants above. Women’s identification with

housework and childbearing, as noted by Acker, is closely connected to the ranking of women's jobs (Acker, 1990:152). Although the view on women as important actors in the labor market as well as in educational contexts have gone through a positive change in Indonesia, old cultural traditions and patriarchal gender roles in the private sphere naturally affects women's possibilities to work on the same premises as men. It has a great affect both on self-confidence and the self-esteem.

As pointed out by Lili, childbearing is a big part of a woman's life and considering the fact that many Indonesian women get their first child in an early age and their husbands are responsible for the main household income, makes many women devoted to stay at home and work less. Acker discusses the concept of "bodied processes" which is interesting to apply in this context. She claims that women's bodies, such as their ability to become pregnant, having menstruation and be able to breast-feed, are used as grounds for control and exclusion (Ibid p. 153).

Mens bodies, emotions or parenthood are never discussed or described in terms of working capacity compared to womens, something that I also experienced when conducting the interviews. This creates a gender segregation but at the same time, it also raises questions on how much or less the individuals can decide how much influence childbirth and motherhood should have on the possibilities for women to become educated as well as develop their positions in the workplace. It should be noted that pregnancy nor menstruation was never articulated as an obstacle for women's emancipation by the informants, and pregnancy was only expressed as potential *explanation* for the absence of female workers, rather than saying that women's capacity to work at the exactly same level as men is dependant on their ability to become pregnant (Fieldnotes, January-February, 2014).

7.2 Masculinites "Why should men engage in these issues?"

As mentioned earlier, it is important to look at both women and men as *gendered beings* in order to understand women's subordination and the underlying reasons for gender inequalities in every society. Many scholars, like Connell, claim that the research on men and masculinities in gender studies has been given to less attention (Ford and Lyons, 2012:1). In my study and in the meeting with male informants in Indonesia, I have come the same

conclusion. As noted by Ford and Lyons, a large part of the research on Southeast Asia focuses exclusively on the lives of women rather than discussing masculinity (Ibid p. 1). The activities, books and workshops organized and produced by the NGO: s in Java all have a clear focus on female empowerment, the female role and the relation between feminism, gender, women and Islam.

A little attention is actually given to the role of men – especially those men working actively with gender issues within an Islamic context. However, this view is important, not least in the understanding of Islamic values influence over gender education in *Pesantren* that have dominated Islamic education in Indonesia, which traditionally is very patriarchal and where the current leading *kiyai* – mostly a man - plays a crucial role in reproducing values (Kull, 2009:25). Conservative interpreters of Islam were often brought up among the informants when talking about their role as men and gender activists and it was impossible to separate religion from their sex, since the criticism regarded their role as gender activist *Muslim men* rather than only *men*. Although I did not use the term masculinity, the question regarding how they were seen by other, non-active men sometimes seemed to concern a sensitive topic. This impression is based on the answers I got which were mainly focused on their role as religious activists and not in a more private way; as a man, husband, friend or son. On the question on how non-activists, family and friends outside the NGO:s responded to their work and interest in gender issues, the male informants experienced that they met both positive and negative reactions.

“It is a fifty fifty reaction – both positive and negative. Activists will applause me, and Muslim feminists. From Muslim academics; they say that I am in the new experience, say “be careful”. The critic’s say that I am far away from the principle of Islam, they think I am too progressive. I try to be diplomatic” (Abdul 16 February, 2014)

“In NGO A there is mostly men, men of NGO A believe in gender equality, all of us promote these values. Many men see us as negative – why should men engage in these issues, why not women? All should be equal, that is our opinion” (Saiful, 19 February, 2014)

One of the male informants at NGO B stressed that the supporters of their view on progressive Islam is bigger than the ones who are against them, although “there are some groups blaming everything we do, calling us “not real Muslims” (Islah, 10 February 2014)

“Conservative Muslims claim that we are agents of a Western Agenda” (Wakhit, 7 february, 2014)

The ideas and assumptions expressed by their criticisers mainly concerned that “real Muslim men” should not work with women’s issues, feminism and gender equality since this focus is not compatible with conservative, Islamic values or the expectations that are included in the male gender role. Connells discussions on masculinity are interesting in this context, since masculinity can be applied on this criticism. It is a clear statement that “a real Muslim”, which was the term some critics used, according to his gender role, should be focusing on certain “masculine” things, which not include gender issues. The negative approach towards Muslim men working with gender issues is on many levels a clear sign that these men are a challenge towards the traditional male role in Islam, since none of the women met the same criticism based on their sex. Working with gender issues was somehow defined as a “feminine” task and not in line with traditional, masculine ideals. Having a gender perspective, as highlighted by Connell, too often in policy discussions seems to be similar to addressing only women’s concerns (Connell, 2005:1805) Masculinity and femininity are thus two important concepts in this context, not least because it also gives a picture of the working conditions for men who wants to be an active part in the gender movement – and how traditional stereotypes can be an obstacle for many men since they want to conform to these masculine stereotypes and feel pressured or afraid of being ridiculed by other men (Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2005:11). The great involvement of both younger and older men working in both NGO A and B thus is a step in the right direction in trying to challenge these stereotypes – not least in a religious context. In many of their meetings and workshops, they also highlighted patriarchy within the *Pesantren* system.

As Connell discuss, the position of men has not greatly, worldwide, changed, and still, men hold the top positions in every level of the society (Ibid p. 1808).

Connell also mentions that many surveys have shown men’s resistance to change in gender relations and especially workplaces are a common forum for a masculinized and unwelcoming culture toward’s women. These patterns are able to change, but that also includes a social change of the *definition of masculinity* (Ibid p. 1811). Several of the programs runned by the NGO:s, as well as the books, workshops and lectures had themes concernng women, human rights and the role of women but a little less focus on masculinity

and the role of men. Connell points out that initiatives regarding educational programs for both young and older men in order to support gender reform is important, and present in many countries – although often small-scale (Ibid p.1811). In the school runned by NGO A, these kinds of programs were also common.

As mentioned by one of the male students studying at the school “we have daily activities connected to human rights, gender, pluralism and sex education. I have learned a lot about gender roles here and I can now see my family in a different gender light” (Male student, Fieldnotes, 18 February).

8. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The Indonesian transition to democracy has played an important role in identifying women's role in the Indonesian society, not least as important actors in the labor market and as a prerequisite for the ongoing economic development. It has also opened up another climate in Indonesia in which NGO:s and grassroots organizations have got the opportunity to develop and work more openly, and where a greater focus has been put on feminism and gender issues –although it is still sensitive topics among many conservative and traditional Indonesian Islamic kiyais and scholars. In an Indonesian context, it is impossible to separate feminism and gender work from Islam because of the fact that Islam plays such a crucial role in peoples lives and the choices they make. That is way this aspect has been important to include in my study and analysis and understanding of *how* gender is defined in an Indonesian, Javanese context.

As noted earlier, the greater focus on gender issues have been influenced by more progressive scholars such as Saparinah Sadli, Kathryn Robinson and Margot Badran. They have highlighted feminist interpretations of the Quran and how Islamic values can be interlinked with gender equality and womens role in the Indonesian society. By influencing the education in *Pesantren* in becoming more focused on raising issues on gender equality, the process towards a more progressive interpretation of classical Islamic literature have made many young people – both women and men – becoming more aware of their own roles as producers of gender inequality, and also how old traditional texts can be read and understood *contextually*. This was also clear among the informants. The importance of reading the Quran contextually was expressed by a majority of the infomants, and they especially stressed that feminist values are not a Western idea. These values can also be found in classic Islamic literature. When asking the informants about how they became interested in working with these issues, a majority of them were influenced by the gender education from *Pesantren*, which had made them reflect over their own personal situations and experiences, such as family norms and gender structures in society that affected them in a both positive and negative way.

Both women's and mens roles as creators of gender equality have been highlighted in this thesis and my study shows that the interaction between women and men are important to

analyze in order to understand how gender equality and gender roles, as well as inequality, are shaped and reproduced in workplaces - even in those workplaces that are active in working with eliminating gender inequality. As mentioned in my analysis, a lot of criticism has been directed against the high focus on women when talking about gender issues, and many scholars have called for a greater discussion and debate about the role of men in the gender context. By not acknowledging the role of men and the hierarchies among men, as discussed by both Connell and Acker, many important factors tend to be overseen and even forgotten. This thesis claim that when taking men's role into consideration, many invisible patterns suddenly become clearer. Considering the fact that the gender roles are dependant on each other and only exist in contrast to each other, both men and women are negatively affected by the gender roles – despite womens subordination.

The female and male informants challenged the traditional role of women as wives and mothers, and they were all very positive towards women's emancipation, education and participation in the organizations, and they all called for more female leaders in their organization – especially the male directors. The lack of female leaders was expressed as a major problem, which was partly explained by the fact that many women still took the main responsibility for housework and children, despite that they had an academic education, and therefore wanted to work less. However, this problem was never discussed in a “male context”, and none of the informants problematized men's lack of participation in the family sphere – for instance by lifting the issue of a fifty fifty division between the husband and wife regarding household duties and parenthood. Men's role in the gender process could therefore be seen as a bit excluded from the discussions and issues raised by the organizations, where the main focus was actually put on women and how one could empower women. A greater debate on the male role, masculinity and how the male role within an Islamic context could be strenghtend and becoming more interlinked with traditional “feminine” duties could open up interesting discussions.

Despite this fact, I as a researcher definitely got the impression when conducting the interviews and observations, that the inclusion of both men and women doing all tasks at the organization had its roots in an awareness about the workplace as being “gendered”. For instance, there was no division in “female” and “male” tasks, such as cleaning, doing the dishwasher, making coffee or being responsible for technical tasks, which is often a common

structure in many workplaces – since these tasks are highly gendered. This was not only a coincidence, rather a very deliberate choice from the head of the organizations.

Overall, a little discussion and ideas about men and masculinity were articulated by the informants, and when talking about reactions from other, non-active men, a majority of the critique that they met was articulated through a religious perspective, saying that “real Muslim men should not focus on women's issues”. Traditional male and female roles are rooted in Islam, but these roles can be challenged and change over time since it can follow modernization processes, according to the informants.

The analysis and findings found that workplaces, as expressed by Acker, all include a highly gendered structure, which was also able to apply on NGO A and B – especially regarding the organizational structure. Even though the employees expressed a willingness to have female leaders, the organizational structure with men on the highest positions had almost been the same since the establishment of the organizations. I therefore claim that, although the employees are not always aware of it, old patterns and traditions are difficult to break and they do permeate the organizational structure. The female and male role begins at home and affects all parts of society, especially the structure in workplaces. If gender equality is to be defined as fifty-fifty participation and equal influence in decision-making processes – whether in workplaces or at home, a majority of men in leading positions at both of the NGOs has to be defined as problematic – even though they are active in challenging ideas about the female and male role in their daily work.

Thus, it is difficult to state if a majority of men working with gender issues, as in the case of the NGOs I have been visiting, is an actual problem. As noted earlier, gender work is traditionally done by women, and as many studies have shown - a greater male participation is an important starting point in the gender work and development. Men's and women's roles cannot be separated from each other and cooperation between men and women is very necessary. Lastly, the findings claim that men active in these NGOs are important as role models for other men – such as male kiyais promoting gender issues and influence on young, male students.

For further studies in this field, this thesis suggests a greater attention on masculinity and the role of men. By making more men conscious of concepts as gender and giving relevant

examples on how gender also affect their lives in a negative way, more men could hopefully fill a gap and become more involved in the gender and feminist movement. Based on this belief, the study in Java, Indonesia, shows a positive picture of the gender development in Indonesia regarding male participation and a true willingness among men to eliminate gender inequality. However, the study also shows that even though the awareness on gender structures and gendered work was very high among the male informants in the organizations, traditional female stereotypes still has a strong influence on women's possibilities working on the same level as their male colleagues and husbands. In-depth studies of how strong family norms could change, maybe by focusing more on men's participation in their homes, as fathers, could be an interesting and important perspective on gender roles – since they all have their starting point at home.

APPENDIX 1

Interview questions/guideline

How came you started working in this organisation?

How long have you been working here?

Tell me about yourself (self-background, education, interests)

Share with me how your background motivates you to join this organization.

- Past experience with other organizations?
- What keeps you to stay in this organization?
- What is your personal definition of gender?
- The organizational public definition of gender and feminism as concepts?

Can you state your position in this organisation? (permanent, voluntarily, seasonal)

- How many female and male employees?
- Work load and daily tasks?
- How frequent is the meeting of staffs? Who is incharged?
- Please explain the organizational structure?
- Who is whom holding the top rank position and involved in decision making level?

What is your opinion regarding your female and male workers?

- Are you comfortable working in this organizational structure? Are there any gender preferences?
- Are there any differences in treating female and male workers? Wages, benefits, working hours, Maternity leaves, Paternity leaves, daily tasks?
-

(Questions to male informants)

How are your family and friends responding to your work and job position?

In case they have any opinions/thoughts about your job – what are they saying about it?

Do they care about your involvement in this organization?

Main activities in the organization:

- The kind of service provisions provided by this organization?
- Workshops and seminars – frequency of having them?
- Division of labor or task – do the same people assigned to do the same job/tasks (feminine or masculine jobs?)
- (Based on numbers of female and male workers): Why do you think there are more male than female employees working in this organization?

APPENDIX 2

Personal information about the informants

NGO A

MALE INFORMANTS

Name: Saiful

Age: 43

Educational background: Basic education, senior high school in Pesantren, studied Islamic law as undergraduate, postgraduate program/PhD in Islamic Law, lecturer.

Position at NGO A: One of the founders of NGO A. Position as deputy director until 2013, now position as one of the members of the Policy council/board at NGO A. Part-time.

Active years working in NGO A: Since 2001

Name: Abdul

Age: 43

Educational background: Pesantren, Bachelor in Islamic Law/Sharia at Damaskus University, Syria, Master in Islamic Law from Malaysia International Islamic University, PhD in Indonesian religions

Position at NGO A: One of the founders.

Now Head of restauration/Head of council at NGO A. Full-time

Active years working in NGO A: Since 2001

FEMALE INFORMANTS

Name: Lili

Age: 28

Educational background: Still undergraduate student at the University, major: Law and language (bahasa), Law facultu and Faculty of education

Position at NGO A: Programme staff, project officer: Sexual reproduction, health and anti-trafficking programme. Full-time

Active years working in NGO A: Since 2008

Name: Dewi

Age: 37

Educational background: Pesantren, working for several international NGO:s related to gender and women legislative

Position at NGO A: Full-time employed, Deputy director

Active years working in NGO A: Since 2011

NGO B

MALE INFORMANTS

Name: Islah

Age: -

Educational background: Studying (PhD) at the University, major: Arabic literature. Been working for other NGO:s focusing on womens rights since 1997 and as a translator from bahasa Indonesia to English

Position at NGO B: Director of NGO B. One of the founders.

Active years working in NGO B: Since 1992 (NGO B was formally established in 1997)

Name: Wakhit

Age: -

Educational background: Studying (PhD) at the University, major: Arabic literature. Also been working in other NGO:s focusing on interreligious dialogue

Position at NGO B: Director of NGO B. One of the founders.

Active years working in NGO B: Since 1992

FEMALE INFORMANTS

Name: Novia

Age: 26

Educational background: Studied anthropology between 2004-2009, 2009-2012 Master in Anthropology

Position at NGO B: Programme officer: Media and culture

Active years working in NGO B: Since 2012

Name: Iris

Age: 23

Educational background: Pesantren, learned English for one year, been working with tourism as a guide in Indonesia

Position at NGO B: Responsible for library activities

Active years working in NGO B: Since June 2012

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