Self-identified Feminists Among Gender Activists and Scholars at Indonesian Universities

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Being a self-identified feminist is controversial among women's rights activists and scholars. This relates to different interpretations of and positive and negative associations with the term 'feminist' in society. The research presented here discusses the different 'feminist' identities and other labels among activists and scholars at Indonesian universities and explores what 'feminist' means for them. Respondents come from Pusat Studi Wanita *(Centres for Women's Studies) or* Pusat Studi Gender *(Centres for Gender Studies) at six universities in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Many respondents acknowledge that Western feminists are able to raise awareness of gender issues, strengthen feminist identity, and build up faith in Islam. The paper, however, also addresses the question of why some reject the 'feminist' label.*

Keywords: *Indonesia, Islamic Feminism, Feminist Identity, Women Studies, Gender Studies*

Die Selbstidentifikation als FeministIn ist unter FrauenrechtsaktivistInnen und WissenschafterInnen ein kontroverses Thema. In erster Linie liegt dies wohl an unterschiedlichen Interpretationen und positiven wie auch negativen Assoziationen die geläufigerweise mit dem Begriff „FeministIn" verbunden sind. Die hier präsentierte Forschung untersucht wie sich AktivistInnen und WissenschafterInnen an indonesischen Universitäten innerhalb oder gegenüber dem Begriff Feminismus selbst verorten und analysiert die den jeweiligen Inhalt und die Bedeutung, welche der Begriffs „FeministIn" für die befragten Personen einnimt. Die Datenerhebung erfolgte an Pusat Studi Wanita *(Zentren für Frauenforschung) bzw.* Pusat Studi Gender *(Zentren für Genderforschung) sechs verschiedener indonesischer Universitäten in Yogyakarta. Viele Befragte unterstreichen die Bedeutung westlicher FeministInnen für die Bewusstseinschaffung für geschlechtsspezifische Probleme, für die Stärkung feministischer Identität sowie islamischen Glaubens. Diese Untersuchung behandelt jedoch auch gezielt die Frage, warum der Begriff „FeministIn" widerum von anderen abgelehnt wird.*

Schlagworte: *Indonesien, Islamischer Feminismus, Feministische Identität, Frauenforschung, Genderforschung*

Women and Gender Studies in Indonesia[2]

The women's movement in Indonesia has a long history, an early example being Raden Ayu Kartini.[3] More than 70 women's organisations, such as *Putri Merdeka, Isteri Sedar, 'Aisyiyah, Gerakan Pemuda Islam Indonesia Putri, Muslimat, Keutamaan Istri, Pawijatan Wanito*, followed (Qibtiyah, 2009). However, the appearance of a movement of Indonesian Muslim women that acknowledges and adopts some Western ideas about feminism in a broader movement is a quite recent development. In Indonesia, the 1990s were an important decade for Muslim women because new forums, new organisations, and new Islamic books with more liberating ideas for women were launched in this period. Some books were concerned with the topic 'gender equality', for example *Women in Islam* by Fateema Mernissi and *Women in the Qur'an* by Amina Wadud, were published in Bahasa Indonesia in 1994 by Pustaka Bandung. In the same year, *Ulumul Qur'an* (Qur'an, 1994a; 1994b), a prestigious Islamic Journal in Indonesia, published a special edition on women's rights issues, feminism, Islamic feminism, and anti-feminism. Women activists had an opportunity to read and discuss directly with some prominent Islamic feminists from other parts of the Islamic world, such as Asghar Ali Engineer, Rifat Hasan, and Amina Wadud (Jamhari & Ropi, 2003). According to Arimbi (2006), the 1990s witnessed the shift from 'State *Ibuism*'[4] to a feminist discourse in Indonesia, including Islamic feminism, which challenges patriarchal culture, furthers equality and justice for women as an expression of her or his Islamic faith that is based on the Islamic texts (the Qur'an and Hadith), and promotes a happy and democratic family (*mawadah, warahmah*, and *maslahah*).

During the late 1980s, the government of Indonesia established *Pusat Studi Wanita* ('Centres for Women's Studies' or PSW) at prominent universities across the country as a way of supporting the government policy of women's empowerment and gender equality (Burhanudin & Fathurahman, 2004; Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan Republik Indonesia, 2004). One of PSW's functions is to help the process of developing

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2 I would like to thank all my supervisors, Dr Julia D. Howell, Dr Catherine Burn, and John Butcher, who have helped me through this arduous task. Their useful guidance and brilliant ideas as well as their spirit and support gave me confidence to write this paper. Many thanks as well to all respondents for their insightful ideas, without which this research would not have been successful.

3 Many sources mention RA Kartini as the first Indonesian feminist.

4 The New Order government of former President Suharto (1968-1998) started promoting 'State *Ibuism*': the roles of wife and mother (*ibu*) were mandated for women and government guidelines for those roles were implemented nationally.

methodologies and theoretical foundations for research with women (Committee on Women's Studies in Asia, 1995). According to Sadli (2010), the main objective of these centres is to provide research data on women's issues such as women's rights and women's needs relevant to specific provinces. She asserts that it is good to have PSW and *Pusat Studi Gender* ('Centres for Gender Studies' or PSG) for several reasons:

> *They constitute an awareness raising process for decision makers at ail [all] levels of which majority are men. In particular they help to raise their awareness that women's issues should be given adequate attention in program development, and that women should be part of the decision making process in developing these programs … adequate funds should be allocated in the provincial budget to do research on women and further on to develop relevant programs for women. These centres are therefore also good vehicles to stimulate university-government-community partnership (Sadli, 2010, p. 366).*

Looking at the historical development of the role of PSW, it seems that in the early decades they acted more as New Order government tools focusing on maintaining traditional gender roles.[5] From 2000, particularly after the launching of new forums, new organisations, and new Islamic books that redefined women and gender roles, some PSW in Islamic universities began to reformulate some programs that promoted women's interests, such as challenging patriarchal culture and providing new egalitarian interpretations on gender in Islam. These centres conducted research on 'misogynist' Islamic texts, by implementing historical and hermeneutics approaches[6] to get the relevant meaning of the texts and reformulate the egalitarian interpretations. They published these new egalitarian interpretations and used them as important references in their training for Islamic leaders and judges.

In 2000, the Indonesian government led by Abdurrahman Wahid made an important contribution to the gender equality movement by issuing a Presidential Instruction (*Inpres* No. 9/2000) on 'Gender Mainstreaming into National Development'.[7] This policy had a significant impact on the development of PSW in terms of subsequent female participation in education and other institutions. For instance, Kull (2009)

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5 Some programs were based on gender stereotype, such as giving sewing machines and cooking utilities to women, and holding cooking competitions for women.

6 The historical approach considers the influences of place and time on the revelation and recording of texts, understanding them as shaped by the social, cultural, and geographical conditions. It follows the principle of fallibility of human knowledge (Abdullah, 2002). The hermeneutic approach focuses on three aspects of the text: the context in which the text was written, the grammatical composition of the text, and the world-view of the text (Amina, 1999).

7 Gender mainstreaming is a major strategy to ensure that women and men gain equal access to, and participate equally in, the benefits of development. This instruction applies to all the ministries, the armed forces, the police force, the High Court, the heads of local governments and the heads of all other governmental agencies. It aims to mainstream gender in the planning, formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all national development programmes (Surbakti, 2002).

found that the number of female students enrolling in higher Islamic education has continuously increased for several decades, and currently female enrolments often constitute up to 50 percent of the students at these institutions. The number of females as postgraduate students, researchers, and teachers across all educational levels has also increased.

Looking at the attitudes and identities of the members of PSW is one way to research how widespread feminist identification in Indonesia is now and what feminism means to the Indonesians. PSW members are considered important actors in the area of gender equality in Indonesian academia; for example, some of them act as cultural brokers, crucial opinion makers, and academic multipliers, and are at the forefront of introducing feminist writings from the West, the Middle East, and Asia. They are considered agents of change by spreading information, research findings, and new interpretations about women's rights in Islam throughout Indonesian Muslim society, both in academia and at the grassroots level (Jamhari & Ropi, 2003). Since 2002, PSW IAIN/UIN Yogyakarta has been considered one of Indonesia's most active Islamic research institutions on Islam and gender (Doorn-Harder, 2006).

One important issue for both gender activists and feminist scholars is identity. 'Feminist' as a term of identity has been more controversial than the term 'feminism'. Most authors of Islamic feminism literature adamantly rejected being labelled as 'Islamic feminists' (Badran, 2008). Being a self-identified feminist is controversial among women's activists both in the West and the East. This includes Indonesian feminists. In the Western context, some young generation 'third wave' women activists are reluctant to identify themselves as 'feminist', stating that "I am not a feminist but …" (Caro & Fox, 2008; Gromisch, 2009). In the Indonesian context, the reluctance to identify as a 'feminist' stems from the stigma attached to the feminist label: 'feminists' are linked to either leftist (communist) or liberal tendencies (Suryakusuma, 2004; Wieringa, 2002) that allegedly promote individualism, selfishness, and 'immoral' behaviour such as premarital sex (Doorn-Harder, 2006). Identifying as a 'feminist' is also regarded as being anti-men, and sympathetic to lesbianism (Sadli, 2002). In addition, a feminist is often seen as someone who is against female natural attributes (*kodrat*[8]) and is anti-male, who destroys Islamic principle (*aqidah*), rebels

8 *Kodrat* is a power; the ability or capacity to do a particular thing; aptitude; everything that men and women have that have been determined by God and that humankind cannot change or reject.

against domestic tasks, and even challenges Islamic law (*syariah*). Because of these negative associations, some Indonesian women's organisation members make the disclaimer that "even though we struggle for women's rights, we are not feminists" (Suryakusuma, 2004, p. 271).

The debate over feminist identity also comes from the notion of compatibility between feminism and Islam. The debate is based on the historical polemic between the Islamic world and the West, between Islam and so-called Christianity-colonialists, a frequent Muslim assumption that colonialists were usually from the West and Christian (Safi, 2003). There are two positions taken by people engaged in the debate.

1. The first group argues that Islam lies on the line of faith, while feminism is a secular term; therefore Islam and feminism are not compatible. Hammed Shahidin (as cited in Moghadam, 2002; Mojab, 2001) points out that 'Islamic feminism' is problematical and an oxymoron in the Islamic world. Furthermore, this group argues that Muslims do not need to import Western terms or values into Islamic society, since Muslims have their own religious texts that are more relevant and culturally appropriate than those of the West.

2. The second group asserts that Islam and feminism are harmonious. Contemporary scholars who are in favour of the term 'Islamic feminism', such as Laila Ahmed, Riffat Hassan, and Fatima Mernisi, argue that feminism fits into Islam. According to Moghadam (2002), Islam does not inherently contradict feminism because Islam values the promotion of equality between men and women, although in practice this principle has been misused in order to justify the subordination of women. Majid (1998) also asserts that Islam and feminism are not necessarily two opposing terms or contesting with each other. Majid criticises those who limit the term 'Islamic' to a pure religious belief.

From these debates are generated the self-identity among women activists in Indonesia. According to Doorn-Harder (2006), the younger Indonesian women are more comfortable being called feminists than the older generation. One of the older generation activists, Saparinah Sadli, says that "I am reluctant to use Indonesian feminism because I am not sure that we have developed an Indonesian theory of

feminism" (Sadli, 2002). However, she calls Musda Mulia an Indonesian Islamic feminist (Mulia, 2005).

Another impact of the debate is on self-identified feminists: whether they identify themselves as 'Islamic feminists' or 'Muslim feminists'. According to Cooke (2001), 'Islamic' is more relevant than Muslim, because 'Islamic' means there is an Islamic tradition of feminism whereas Muslim feminism just refers to feminists who embrace Islam but who do not necessarily practise the Islamic tradition. Furthermore, Cooke describes an Islamic as

> *a particular kind of self positioning that will then inform the speech, the action, the writing, or the way of life adopted by someone who is committed to questioning Islamic epistemology as an expansion of their faith position and not a rejection of it (Cooke, 2001, p. 61).*

This paper shows the prevalence of controversial 'feminist' identity among Muslim gender activists and scholars in Indonesian universities based on quantitative and qualitative data. It also reveals various understandings they have about Western feminists and feminism. The discussion on feminist identity presents the percentages of (1) people who claim to have or dispute having a feminist identity, (2) the different feminist identities among respondents at the public and Islamic universities, and (3) the different feminist identities among the male and female respondents. Furthermore, in the feminist identity section, I explore what 'feminist' means for both people who identify themselves as 'feminist' and for those who do not, and for the latter, why they reject that identity. I also seek out what are the most and the least popular preferred labels for those two groups. The second section explores the various understandings of Western feminists' ideas among Muslim gender activists and scholars in the Indonesian universities surveyed. I show which Western feminist ideas have been incorporated into Muslim gender activists' understanding, and show which ones have not been and why some members of PSW and PSG disagree with these ideas.

In this paper I argue that self-identifying as 'feminist' among Muslim gender activists and scholars in Indonesian universities has been influenced by the ways of understanding the term 'feminist', which has both positive and negative connotations in Indonesian society. Furthermore, I will show that Muslim gender activists and scholars in Indonesian universities have a range of understandings about Western
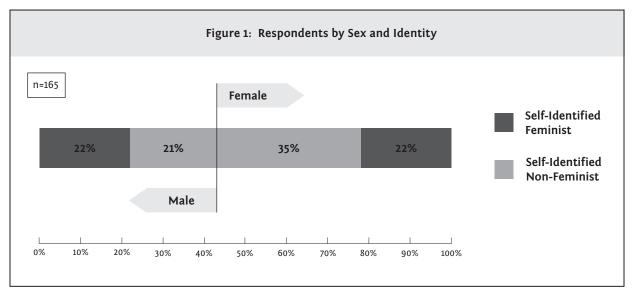
feminist ideas which can be adapted to the Indonesian context. Most hold that universal values such as gender equality, gender justice, and the recognition of women as equal human beings are grounded in the Islamic tradition (Quran and Hadith) and in local tradition. Those values are not imported from Western feminists. However, some respondents acknowledged that Western feminist concepts and strategies have influenced their views, their thoughts, and their strategies for dealing with gender issues in Indonesia.

The research was conducted through a case study involving PSW and PSG at six universities in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Three of them are Islamic: UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesian Islamic University (UII), and Muhammadiyah University Yogyakarta (UMY). Three of them are public universities: Gadjah Mada University (UGM), the State University of Yogyakarta (UNY), and the University of National Development (UPN). The total number of respondents is 165, including 70 males and 95 females. 105 are from Islamic universities and 60 are from public universities. All respondents have been involved in PSW or PSG and all self-identify as Muslims. In-depth interviews were conducted with 25 respondents across all categories. This paper uses pseudonyms to ensure the confidentiality of all respondents.

Research Findings on Feminist Identity

One of the important issues among Indonesian Muslim feminists is that of identity. Although all respondents of my study are gender activists or people who are concerned with women or gender issues, not all of them identify themselves as 'feminists'. Figure 1 illustrates that the overall percentage of respondents who are self-identified 'feminists' is lower than that of those self-identified 'non-feminists'. However, an analysis based on sex shows that the percentage of male respondents who are self-identified 'feminists' is slightly higher (22 percent) than those who are self-identified 'non-feminists' (21 percent). Conversely, the share of female respondents who are self-identified 'feminists' is significantly lower (22 percent) than the share of those self-identified 'non-feminists' (35 percent). This is an interesting finding because feminism mostly deals with women's issues. It was predicted that generally more women would identify themselves as 'feminists' than men, but in this research finding this is not the case.

Figure 1: Respondents by Sex and Identity

Source: Own Compilation

The reason why more women than men did not identify themselves as 'feminists' could be related to the connotation of the term 'feminist'. This term is usually attached to women rather than to men, and implies someone who is against women's *kodrat*, who is a man-hater, who wants to dominate men, and who accepts lesbianism. Therefore, if a woman labels herself as a 'feminist', she would be seen to possess those negative attributes held by certain members in the society. Conversely, those negative associations will not attach to men. In other words, self-identification as 'feminist' implies a higher risk for women than for men in Indonesian society.

Figure 1 also presents that males and females form the same proportion of the total of self-identified feminists (22 percent). These findings help us to understand how both male and female activists have become involved in gender and feminist activism in Indonesia (cf. Nuruzzaman, 2005). They also help us to understand the fact that male core members have been involved in all six selected PSW and PSG since their establishment.

Another argument is that the social structure in traditional Indonesian communities is bilateral and this local kinship may shape contemporary values. From my literature review, it is evident that the position of women has been relatively elevated, with a high status (Atkinson & Errington, 1990; Goody, 1976). Some of the women held leading positions in their societies. Javanese women have enjoyed more freedom to venture into public space than their sisters in Arab countries (Arimbi, 2006; White,

2006) and have had more rights than some African women (Goody, 1976). In some Arab countries women have not been allowed to go out and drive a car by themselves; most Indonesian women have been free to drive and go everywhere by themselves. In terms of inheritance, Indonesian women have been able to inherit land and other property; however, certain African women have been able to inherit only houses and other property but not land, since production from the fields is reserved for male offspring (Goody, 1976).

Using an 'Independent Samples T Test' analysis, my research shows that being affiliated with Islamic rather than public universities does not affect self-identification as 'feminist'. Table 1 below illustrates the significance (2-tailed) score as .072 and .069 (*p*>.000), which means that there is no significant difference between those who self-identified as 'feminist' in Islamic and public universities.

Table 1: Respondents' Affiliation With Islamic or Public University								
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-Test for Equality of Means					
							95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
TYPE OF UNI — Equal Variances Assumed	12.734	.000	-1.814	163	.072	-.1362	.07511	-.28455	.01207
TYPE OF UNI — Equal Variances Not Assumed			-1.832	159.555	.069	-.1362	.07436	-.28310	.01062

Source: Own Compilation

Research shows that the type of university is not the determinant social factor for feminist identity. It can be perceived that in the Indonesian context, the public and Islamic university backgrounds do not necessarily influence someone's religiosity. Around 71 percent of female respondents from public universities also wear a *hijab* as a symbol of Islamic identity and most of the respondents have been engaged in Islamic women's organisations such as *'Aisyiyah*, *Nasyiatul 'Aisyiyah*, or *Muslimat*. Many male respondents from public universities also have been involved in *Muhammadiyah* or *Nahdatul Ulama*. Therefore, Islamic and public university staff are considerably similar in their religiosity.

The sex of the respondents does not differentiate self-identification as 'feminist' and 'non-feminist'. Table 2 clearly shows that the significance (2-tailed) scores are .112 and .114 (p>.000), meaning that there is no significant difference between feminist identification and sex.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-Test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
SEX	Equal Variances Assumed	5.225	.024	-1.598	163	.112	-.1236	.07734	-.27630	.02913
	Equal Variances Not Assumed			-1.591	151.965	.114	-.1236	.07767	-.27703	.02986

Table 2: Respondents' Sex

Source: Own Compilation

The finding that the sex of respondents does not associate with self-identification as 'feminist' could be perceived as related to the heavily bilateral social structure of traditional Indonesian communities. This helps us to understand Jayawardena's observation that Third World countries, including Indonesia, "have had a history of active and militant feminism, as well as early movements for women's emancipation, supported by women and men reformers" (Jayawardena, 1982, p. v).

Respondents who identify themselves as 'feminist' are predominantly those who have considerable knowledge of feminism, have less prejudice toward the term 'feminism', and have a more progressive approach[9] to gender in Islam. This means that the influential aspect of gender awareness is not the level of education in general, but rather the knowledge of gender issues or feminism due to special interests, trainings, or workshops. In fact, although in society there are many people who have graduated from a higher education institution and hold the title of Master or Doctor, if they have never learnt about or studied gender and feminism, they will usually continue to have a gender-biased perspective.

9 Progressive Muslims have produced a growing body of literature that re-examines Islamic tradition and addresses pluralism and gender issues at both a theoretical and a practical level. They argue that a fresh interpretation of Islamic sources and a reformulation of Islam is urgently needed (Esposito, 1998).

Self-Understanding of Indonesian Gender Activists and Scholars

There are various understandings of the term 'feminist' among the respondents. The group of self-identified feminists obviously do not associate a negative understanding with the term 'feminist'. However, they define the term in a diverse way. Respondents who do not identify as 'feminists' explain that there are two meanings of the term 'feminist', one being negative, the other being positive.

For example, according to Dullah, a self-identified feminist, "a feminist is someone who has awareness that there is inequality experienced by women and who has notion that women are human beings" (Dullah, personal communication, 8 February 2010). Nova defines a feminist as "someone who has an intention to give rooms for marginalised groups, including for women by having either direct or indirect activities" (Nova, personal communication, 24 February 2010). Maman, a self-identified non-feminist, expresses his view that the different treatment between the sexes is part of the 'natural order', and therefore it is unproblematic:

> *I see that the position between men and women is natural, so for me that should be just like that … Treat men and women proportionally without making the ideas [gender relationship] an ideology. This is my understanding [about the gender relationship] that is grounded from my Islamic teaching … I fell that my family and neighbourhood do not find any problem about this issue (Maman, personal communication, 5 May 2010).*

Furthermore, according to some self-identified feminists, 'feminist' does not simply imply the awareness that women have capabilities, rights, and goals just as men do, it should also be followed by actions such as empowerment for themselves and others. Also a 'feminist' is not necessarily someone who participates in demonstrations or joins women's NGOs. Someone who is concerned about gender equality and women's issues through teaching or publishing his or her academic work is also a feminist. An example for this notion is presented by Gizela:

> *A feminist is someone who is aware of inequality and endeavours to empower her or himself and others … A feminist is not necessarily an activist or … goes down to the street. A philosopher who gives an egalitarian interpretation between men and women is also a feminist (Gizela, personal communication, 5 May 2010).*

In contrast, according to some self-identified non-feminists, a 'feminist' is someone

who struggles for gender equality, has a deep concern and knowledge of women's issues, and joins women's NGOs. As Dama and Hera said:

> I don't want to call myself a 'feminist', because … in my understanding a 'feminist' is someone who really has a deep knowledge on those issues … So someone can be called a 'feminist' if she or he really gets involved not only just sympathetic … (Dama, personal communication, 12 June 2010)

> I only write something … that relates to feminist thought … I want to be a feminist but not yet … A feminist struggles in the NGO or doing real research … because I have ever conducted research [about women and economic] and I was disappointed about the result, so I was like a failed feminist (Hera, personal communication, 1 June 2010).

In addition, according to Sita, 'feminist' depends on a person's mindset, neither being a man or woman. Therefore, a man can be a 'feminist'. Although there is an idea of a women's way of knowing,[10] meaning that only women have direct experience of what it means to be a woman, this does not mean that men cannot help to solve women's problems (Sita, personal communication, 3 June 3 2010). A similar idea is presented by Tria, a self-identified feminist:

> A feminist for me can be a man or a woman who sees inequality relationship between men and women and there is an effort to deal with that inequality problem … For me, I believe that actually men also feel oppression … for example, the idea that to be a head of family, the husband has to have more income than the wife (Tria, personal communication, 20 May 2010).

Interestingly, some people who reject a feminist identity define the term 'feminist' in a positive way. However, because there are many different beliefs in society about the term 'feminist', including the negative association mentioned previously, these people do not identify as 'feminist' as part of their strategic positioning. Abdullah and Zihan, self-identified non-feminists, reported:

> The definition of 'feminist' in positive manner is that someone who struggles for the equal position between men and women, therefore there will be an ideal life and an equal gender relationship in the society and in the family (Abdullah, personal communication, 22 May 2010).

> Socially I don't have to call myself 'feminist' because there are many negative associations on that term in the society, but personally I don't have any problem with feminist identity as far as the meaning is someone who struggles for the equality between men and women (Zihan, personal communication, 19 May 2010).

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10 Belenky, Clincgy, Goldberger & Tarule (1986) also present similar idea in the book *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* that women have a different experience from men, and only women themselves could experience and feel it.

Other reasons people reject feminist identification are that they define 'feminist' negatively and because some of them have misunderstood the term. Negative associations of the term 'feminist' respondents mentioned include: that a 'feminist' is too extreme and radical (Dama, personal communication, 12 June 2010); that 'feminism' is against women's *kodrat*, such as demanding that women want to become boxers or football players (Ana, personal communication, 5 February 2010); or that a 'feminist' wants to dominate men, wants men and women to be exactly the same, does not want to experience child birth, and accepts lesbianism.

Several misunderstandings about the term 'feminist' reported by some self-identified non-feminists are that 'feminist' is motherhood or womanhood and 'feminist' is something that relates to a woman's personality and femininity. One male respondent, Lida, states that "a feminist is someone who has women's attitude, characteristic, and personality" (Lida, personal communication, 24 February 2010). "Feminist for me is someone who has motherhood or womanhood characteristics, because of that I am not a feminist" (Joko, personal communication, 24 May 2010).

In summary, the range of definitions according to self-identified feminists includes that a feminist could be a man or a woman who is concerned with women's issues, who holds the notion that women are human beings and have the same capability as men do, and who is aware of gender inequality, but who does not necessarily participate in demonstrations or join women's NGOs. Although some self-identified non-feminists define 'feminist' in a positive manner they do not identify themselves as 'feminists' for four types of reasons:

1. To be a 'feminist', someone needs advanced knowledge, takes part in certain types of activities such as demonstrations or joining women-related NGOs, and also actively advocates and gets involved in issues dealing with women and gender publicly.

2. In society there are many understandings about the term 'feminist', including the negative associations such as being too extreme, too radical, a men-hater etc. Thus, some people reject identifying themselves socially as 'feminist', although they personally or internally may not have any problem with a 'feminist' identity. The rejection of self-identification as a 'feminist' is therefore a part of strategic positioning in society.
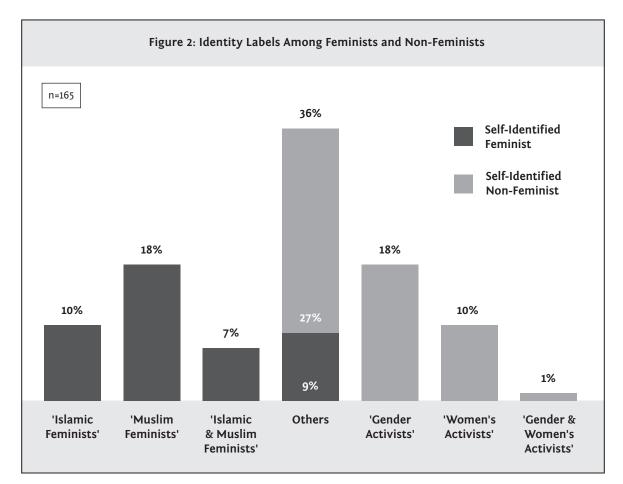
3. While some people do believe that the term 'feminist' is associated with negative connotations (see above), the different position and roles of the sexes are a common phenomenon and for them part of the natural order. Hence for them, different positions and roles do not need to be conceptualised as problematic.

4. There are misunderstandings about the term 'feminist': sometimes it is perceived as motherhood or womanhood and something that relates to a woman's personality and femininity.

The Most and the Least Popular Preferred Labels

In the survey, respondents who identified themselves as 'feminists' were then asked to reflect on more specific identity labels. Four choices were offered in order to identify the most and the least popular preferred labels among these respondents: 'Islamic Feminist', 'Muslim Feminist', 'Islamic Feminist and Muslim Feminist', and 'Others'. Likewise, four choices were offered to respondents who are self-identified 'non-feminist' to observe their ways of identifying themselves: 'Gender Activist', 'Women's Activist', 'Gender Activist and Women's Activist', and 'Others'

Figure 2 shows that 'Muslim Feminist' is the most popular self-label (18 percent) among the self-identified 'feminist' group, while the least popular label for this group is 'Islamic Feminist and Muslim Feminist' (only 7 percent). 10 percent of respondents identified themselves as 'Islamic Feminist'. In the self-identified 'non-feminist' group, the survey result shows that the 'Others' label is the most popular choice (27 percent). Only 1 percent of the respondents chose both 'Gender Activist and Women's Activist'. During their in-depth interview, some respondents differentiated between the labels 'Islamic Feminist' and 'Muslim Feminist'. Gizela, for example, described an Islamic feminist as someone who has the autonomy, power, and capability to reinterpret fundamental values about gender equality within Islam, whereas a Muslim feminist is anyone who embraces Islam (called a Muslim in Islam) and is not necessarily concerned with Islamic teaching on gender.

Gizela identifies herself as 'Islamic Feminist' and differentiates 'Islamic Feminist' from 'Muslim Feminist' as follows:
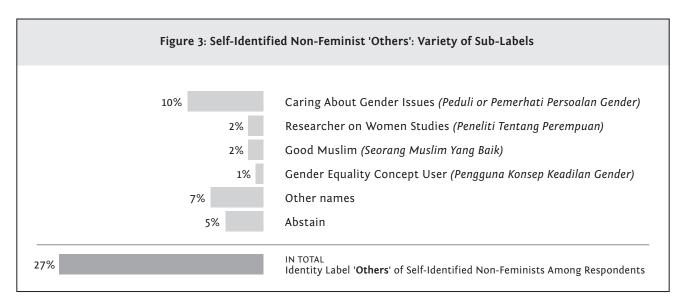
Figure 2: Identity Labels Among Feminists and Non-Feminists

Source: Own Compilation

A Muslim feminist … embraces Islam and printed in a personal identity formally and becomes Muslim without challenges, without having access to learn deeply and even she or he might not be practicing. For me … I would say that I am an 'Islamic Feminist' not a 'Muslim Feminist' because I teach tafsir *Qur'an [Qur'anic exegesis] and* Hadith, *so I have access to read the basic Islamic teaching to build Islamic values, so I have an access and capability to reconstruct Islamic teaching based on gender equality (Gizela, personal communication, 5 May 2010).*

Another respondent, Sita, labels herself as 'Muslim Feminist'. She defines a Muslim Feminist as a person but Islamic feminism as a discourse. Sita reported that:

If 'Islamic' is an attribute to the religion. I said that I am a 'Muslim Feminist' because I am a person who embraces Islam which in Islam we call a Muslim … I think the discourse is an 'Islamic Feminism' and the person is a 'Muslim Feminist' (Sita, personal communication, 3 June 2010).

However, Figure 3 now shows the variety of labels in the 'Others' option among 'non-feminists'. These data help us to understand that although the 'Others' label is the most popular option, it comprises respondents who held various understandings. This also implies that the 'Gender Activist' option, chosen by 18 percent of total

respondents among those self-identified as 'non-feminist' (Figure 2), is actually the most preferred label among people in this group.

Figure 3: Self-Identified Non-Feminist 'Others': Variety of Sub-Labels

10%	Caring About Gender Issues *(Peduli or Pemerhati Persoalan Gender)*
2%	Researcher on Women Studies *(Peneliti Tentang Perempuan)*
2%	Good Muslim *(Seorang Muslim Yang Baik)*
1%	Gender Equality Concept User *(Pengguna Konsep Keadilan Gender)*
7%	Other names
5%	Abstain
27%	IN TOTAL Identity Label '**Others**' of Self-Identified Non-Feminists Among Respondents

Source: Own Compilation

Indonesian Muslim Gender Activists' and Scholars' Understanding of Western Feminist Ideas

One of the research questions probed the various understandings about Western feminists' ideas among Muslim gender activists and scholars in Indonesian universities. The research has found that, for various reasons, not all Western feminist concepts are adopted by respondents at the selected PSW or PSG. There are many types of Western feminists such as radical, liberal, Marxist, psychoanalyst, standpoint, and postmodern feminist (Lorber, 2001). Although all of them have the same goal of improving women's lives, they have different concepts of how to identify the sources of women's problems. Having discovered different root causes, they have different strategies for responding to women's issues. Therefore, in this research, respondents were asked about Western feminist ideas in general rather than being asked which particular Western feminist ideas they identified with.

Respondents have different views on which Western feminist ideas can be applied in the Indonesian Muslim context. Mostly, they argue that universal values such as gender equality, gender justice, and the recognition of women as equal human

beings are derived from their own sources in the Islamic tradition (the Qur'an and Hadith) and are not imported from Western feminists. Some of them even mention that traditional Indonesian social structures have been egalitarian. However, some reported that Western feminist concepts and strategies have influenced and shaped their thoughts and strategies on dealing with women and gender issues in Indonesia.

For example, Gizela argues that 'feminists' have existed in Indonesia since the Queens of Aceh in the sixteenth century, and therefore Western feminism is only for strengthening feminist identity, particularly after experiencing 'competing identity' following the development of the Indonesian Islamist movement in the 1970s. Gizela explained as follows:

> *Actually since RA Kartini, … even since Ratu Sima … Queens in Aceh in the 16th century … there were many feminists around in Indonesia, because those women got involved in the war and social political activities … and then it seems that the appearance of feminism in Indonesia just happened in the 80s … in my opinion if we trace back in the 80s …* Ikhwanul Muslimin *has become stronger in Indonesia … particularly after Soeharto collapsed there were many Islamic symbols everywhere … also many friends, activists, in the 80s graduated from the West … and read feminist literature … So, non-Indonesian feminists [including from the West] Strengthening of the feminist identity … because there is competing identity [from Islamist group]. So we do have the values of equality since Ratu Sima … (Gizela, personal communication, 12 June 2010).*

In contrast, Rama and Darma, both self-indentified feminists, argued that Muslims do have gender equality values, but many Muslims still read Islamic texts on gender literally. As a result, its egalitarian values do not usually manifest themselves when reading these texts. In other words, Muslims need a different approach for rereading and reinterpreting the gender-related texts in a way relevant to the present. Therefore, the approaches Western feminists employ for understanding texts contextually is one they agree with. They explained:

> *Western feminists contribute to implement the Islamic values into real life easier, so it is like a tool to put the existing of Islamic values into ground. Honestly, I think we still recite the Qur'an and Hadith by memorising, sometime we don't understand the meaning … (Rama, personal communication, 11 June 2010).*

> *Western feminists influence two things the discourse … and raise our awareness … what I mean by influencing the smart discourse is not transferring their values into Indonesian, but the feminist discourse make aware that what they have done in the West is also stated in the Qur'an … and the most important thing is … that nowadays Western [succeed] because there is an effort to 'dismantle' [reinterpret] the religious texts based on what they need … that is the one that inspires Indonesian Muslim to do the same thing … so the discourse in the West … gets Muslim closer to their faith (*iman*) (Darma, personal communication, 9 May 2010).*

By implementing the historical and contextual approach that some Indonesian gender activists learned from Western feminists, some respondents reported that the contribution of Western feminists is strengthening their faith and belief. Indonesian gender activists have used the contextual approach as a tool to explore and understand how these values and beliefs become more tangible and more empirical. Also the approach encourages them to be more critical and to explore the impact of the Islamic doctrine on women.

Other ideas that most Indonesian gender activists and scholars in this research agree with Western feminist ideas are the issues that almost all women in the world experience similar discriminative and oppressive problems (Wira, personal communication, 8 May 2010) and the ideas of women's independence, persistence, and openness (Rama, personal communication, 11 June 2010). Furthermore, one respondent also mentioned that she has been inspired by the concept of gender or women's issues not only at the individual level but also at the collective level of Western feminist ideas (Aibar, personal communication, 3 June 2010). In addition, Western feminists have also encouraged the Indonesian discourse and understanding of feminism, such as the concept of patriarchal culture, equal work for equal pay, reproductive and sexual health and rights, women's rights, and other rights of marginal groups. Within this discourse, it is important to note that Western feminists introduced new terms such as gender, autonomy, feminism, and patriarchy to the Indonesian Islamic feminists.

There are also various views among Indonesian Muslim gender activists and scholars in academia regarding Western feminist ideas that are not incorporated into their understandings. The self-identified non-feminist group shows that most of them lack knowledge relating to feminist literature. They are not sure whether their statements represent Western feminist concepts. Some Western feminist concepts that they disagree with include the rejection of the family as an institution; the notion that men and women must have the same rights in all aspects of life; the idea of challenging and questioning the religious notion of women leadership in prayer and in the family; the acceptance of lesbianism; and the concept of men as an enemy. As noted here, many Western feminists also disagree with these ideas.

For example, Abdullah asserts that he does not agree with some radical notion about the rejection of family institution. "Few feminists do not need marriage institution

and then they are against that institution and create many things including [women] do not need men" (Abdullah, personal communication, 22 May 2010). Another example is presented by Joko:

> *In my understanding so far that Western feminists want [men and women] to be exactly the same…In everyday life we face a real life…sometime we cannot treat [men and women] exactly the same. So, for me we don't need to treat men and women exactly the same, as far as [the different treatment] is for the best interest for both men and women (Joko, personal communication, 24 May 2010).*

Both self-identified non-feminists and self-identified feminists have concerns about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights and the anti-male attitude. In respect to LGBT rights, respondents assert that in the Indonesian context it is difficult to accept them legally. Marriage occurs between man and woman. Moreover, they do not agree that lesbianism should be promoted through a political or ideological movement. Thus, Tono observed:

> *Homosexuality and lesbianism, for radical feminist are fine but in Islam they do not have room yet in Islamic jurisprudence. However, as human beings they have rights to live that need to be supported, whatever their sexual orientation is. In addition, Islamic teachings value the behaviour not on the attitude, meaning that if it is only on orientation [unobservable] not in behaviour is fine. Furthermore, if lesbianism become a political and ideological movement it is inappropriate in Indonesian context (Tono, personal communication, 9 May 2010).*

Another issue that some of the self-identified feminists disagree with is the radical and confrontational approach applied by a small number of Western feminists. Darma argues that "Western women [feminists] tend to employ a conflict approach [*galak dan melawan*] to achieve their goals" (Darma, personal communication, May 9, 2010). Based on a literature analysis, in Indonesia there are some women's NGOs outside the universities, such as *Perempuan Mahardika*, who also would not use the soft approach. For example, *Perempuan Mahardika* condemned the banning of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) congress in Surabaya on 24 March 2010 (PMN Committee, 2010).

The idea of the family institution in Indonesia differs from that in the Western concept. According to Sita (personal communication, 3 June 2010), in the Western context, family is the representation of capitalism that supports or complements public life and productive activities. Indeed, the standard assumption in the political economy is that gender equality can only be achieved when women participate in

the formal labour market, as a consequence, the economic and social significance of household labour is ignored (Ross, 2008). Therefore, positions, roles, and activities in the public sphere are more important than the private or domestic sphere. Marxist feminists challenge their non-Marxist counterparts on the greatly different valuations of these two spheres (Lorber, 2001).

In addition, Sita argues that in Islam the core value is not within the public sphere but in the family. Therefore, public activities must support the existence of the family. The family is the microcosmos of the society. A solid family foundation is the basis of a strong society (*ummah*). As a result, management of reproductive activity within the family unit is the most important aspect in the Islamic concept for community development. The family has a strategic function to strengthen the community by having natural regeneration in the family. Strengthening and empowering the family institution by creating equal rights among family members is one of the main goals of Islamic feminists. The family is a core value and not a commodity as in the capitalist model. When Sita discusses how she negotiates between her feminism and her family, she said "they both fit, because my feminism is the foundation of my family, and my family is a foundation of my feminism" (Sita, personal communication, 3 June 2010). This kind of notion is similar to what Amina Wadud (2010) articulates in her article *The "F" word: Feminism in Islam*:

> *Islamic feminism is not just about equality in the public space but also in the family, where most gender roles are prescribed and gender inequality is fixed. Islamic feminism takes responsibility for our souls and our bodies, our minds and our contributions at every level. We take inspiration from our own relationships with the sacred and with the community to forge a way that enhances the quality of our lives and the lives of all others (Wadud, 2010, p. 1).*

Another issue concerns the concept of power. Power in the West according to Sita often relates to hierarchy and is played out mostly in the public domain (Sita, personal communication, 3 June 2010). Individualism shapes the idea of power, and therefore power relationships tend to be top-down. Sita asserts that the concept of power in Indonesia has been shaped by the idea of collectiveness, and therefore power sharing in Indonesia is quite common. However Sita's notion is a simplification, because in the West power can also be the medium by which collective interests may be realised, including class interests (Olderma & Davis, 1991). An equally important point relating to the concept of power is that commonly Indonesian women have more

power in terms of managing the financial aspect of the family than their husbands. Therefore, the concept of power in Indonesia resides not only in the public but also in the domestic domain. As a consequence, the rigid segregation between public and private sphere is not compatible with Indonesian culture. Many Indonesian women choose to be housewives; according to some respondents this does not matter because their choices are based on their individual conscious decision and free will, and because in domestic life some Indonesian women have their own power.

Similar ideas have also been asserted by Suzanne April Brenner (1998). She argues that the domestic sphere is, according to the Laweyan community (Surakarta, Central Java), the source of power and prestige, while traditionally Western discourses claim that the public sphere is the main source of political power. In terms of the relationship between men, women, money, and desire, Brenner points out that a wife should control the family money because the husband could not manage the money. Usually if the husband handles the money he will *jajan* (visit a prostitute) or go gambling. Therefore, the good husband should trust his wife to control his desire by giving her the authority to manage the money. However, in some cases there were many Laweyan women who had more freedom to express their sexuality in a negative way when they had more power in controlling money. Again, Brenner argues that women did that based on economic and family concerns, not to fulfil their *nafsu* (sexual desire) like men.

Conclusion

In Indonesia, identifying oneself as a 'feminist' remains a controversial issue for people who are concerned with women's and gender issues. This relates to the various understandings surrounding the term 'feminist'. It is associated with both positive and negative connotations within the society. Because of this, for strategic reasons, some gender activists do not publicly identify themselves as 'feminist', although personally or individually they do identify themselves as 'feminist'. The negative connotations mostly attached to women – that a feminist is against women's *kodrat*, she wants to dominate men, she accepts lesbianism – make self-identification as 'feminist' a higher risk for women than for men in Indonesian society.

In terms of what Western feminism has shaped and been thought relevant to the

Indonesian context, most respondents argue that the universal values such as gender equality, gender justice, and the recognition of women as human beings are based on their own sources in the Islamic tradition (the Qur'an and Hadith) and local tradition, not imported from Western feminism. However, some respondents reported that there are many Western feminist concepts and strategies that have influenced and shaped their thoughts and strategies in dealing with women and gender issues in Indonesia, such as challenging patriarchal culture, the contextual approach that encourages the Indonesian gender activists to be more critical and use gender and feminism as a tool of analysis for gender power relationship. Many respondents acknowledge that Western feminists are able to raise awareness of gender issues, strengthen feminist identity, and build up faith in Islam among Indonesian Muslim gender activists.

Some Indonesian Muslim gender activists disagree with some Western feminist ideas which they claim are not relevant to Indonesian context. These include the rejection of the institution of family, the notion that men and women must have the same rights in all aspects of life, the idea of challenging and questioning the religious notion of women's leadership in prayer and in the family, the notion of lesbianism, and the concept of men as an enemy. The biggest difference between Indonesian and Western feminists according to my research findings is that in Indonesia the concept of having a family is non-negotiable (and this is borne out in reality), whereas in Western countries, feminists are often single women who also do not necessarily have a family.

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