

12-1-2017

## Habitus, Agency and Political Participation of Female Students: A Study at an Islamic University in Indonesia

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### Recommended Citation

Toyibah, D. (2017). Habitus, Agency and Political Participation of Female Students: A Study at an Islamic University in Indonesia. *Makara Human Behavior Studies in Asia*, 21(2), 113-121. <https://doi.org/10.7454/mssh.v21i2.3506>

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## Habitus, Agency and Political Participation of Female Students: A Study at an Islamic University in Indonesia

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### Abstract

This article aims to explain how and to what extent habitus and agency affect female students' political participation. Habitus, as one of the concepts of Bourdieu, emphasizes the existence of disposition, in which actions are done without prior consideration and deliberation, and encourages people to repeatedly do similar acts simply because they are common practices in society. In contrast, agency emphasizes the ability of reflexivity and conscious thought. Applying in-depth interviews with 10 female activist and non-activist students at an Islamic university in Indonesia, the study found that the habitus in their families and neighborhoods prevented female students from obtaining equal positions to male students. Eventhough, as members of the student community, they conducted the reflexivity process, and thus had agency to act freely. This reflexivity, however, has not managed to achieve a complete patriarchal cultural change.

### Habitus, Agency dan Keterlibatan Mahasiswa Perempuan dalam Politik Kampus: Sebuah Studi pada Universitas Islam di Indonesia

#### Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan menjelaskan bagaimana dan seberapa jauh *habitus* dan *agency* mempengaruhi partisipasi politik mahasiswa perempuan. *Habitus* sebagai salah satu konsep dari Bourdieu lebih menekankan keberadaan disposisi sehingga suatu tindakan dilakukan tanpa pertimbangan lebih jauh dan mendorong manusia untuk melakukan kembali tindakan yang sudah menjadi praktik-praktik yang lazim dalam masyarakat. Sebaliknya aspek *agency* menekankan pada kemampuan *refleksifitas*, yakni pemikiran yang bersifat reflektif dan dilakukan dengan sadar. Melalui wawancara mendalam terhadap 10 orang mahasiswa aktifis dan non-aktifis di kampus salah satu universitas Islam di Indonesia, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa *habitus* dalam keluarga dan lingkungan mereka tidak memberikan kebebasan bagi perempuan untuk mendapatkan posisi yang setara dengan mahasiswa laki-laki. Akan tetapi dengan menjadi bagian dari komunitas mahasiswa mereka melakukan proses *refleksifitas* sehingga aspek keagenan untuk bertindak secara bebas juga mempengaruhi tindakan mereka. Namun demikian, *refleksifitas* yang mereka lakukan belum mencapai suatu kondisi terjadinya perubahan budaya patriarki secara sempurna.

*Keywords: Habitus, agency, reflexivity, student political participation*

#### Citation:

Toyibah, D. (2017). Habitus, agency and political participation of female students: A study at an Islamic University in Indonesia. *Makara Hubs-Asia*, 21(2): 113-121, DOI: 10.7454/mssh.v21i2.3506

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### 1. Introduction

There is a disparity between women and men in political participation in many areas of life, which is documented and discussed in previous literature regarding the marginalized role of women (Seda, 2002; Mondak & Anderson, 2004; Andersen, Ertac, Gneezy, List, & Maximiano, 2013). As well, studies about student movements in Indonesia (Aspinall, 1993;

Jackson, 2005; Hasibuan, 2010) generally observe that there is a lack of female students playing roles in these movements. However, the factors influencing this general tendency is less discussed.

In general, families as primary agents of socialization tend to socialize different roles of men and women. Female children are expected to behave in a feminine manner, to not behave aggressively or actively like male

children. This socialization of gender roles is stronger in families with uneducated parents who tend to abide by existing social norms (Scanzoni & Scanzoni, 1981). In regards to political participation, McFarland and Thomas (2006) find that factors such as parents' education and family income are influential towards youth activism in politics. Likewise, Evans (2009) explains that families function as social networks, and therefore political discussion in a family tends to increase the political participation of its members.

This article will analyze the habitus that is socialized in society, and the process of socializing traditional gender roles in families and communities, particularly the obstacles that hinder the political participation of female students. This article will discuss how habitus and agency affects female student involvement in those activities.

The positive relationship between active political participation in voluntary organizations such as community service and religious organizations in Indonesia has been demonstrated in various studies (Mujani, 2003; Lussier, 2011). It has also been established in studies in the United States of America, Italy, and other countries (Schlozman, 2002; Evans, 2009; Putnam, 2000). This study looks at political participation from the perspective of participation in student organizations and extracurricular activities related to student leadership, both inside and outside of campus. Student organizations are voluntary organizations formed to build a spirit of leadership as well as honing sensitivity towards social problems. There are several student organizations in Indonesia, both internal and external, which are generally affiliated to mass religious organizations such as Islamic Students Movement (*Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia - PMII*), Association of Islamic Students (*Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam HMI*).

This study assumes that the *habitus* of families generally follows the tradition of patriarchal culture. Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992) states that the unequal relationship between men and women is reflected in *habitus*, which is something that is deep-rooted in families and communities. Gender disparity in the relationship between men and women has materialized in the form of symbolic violence. In light of Berger and Luckman's (1967) socialization theory, every individual experiences a phase of primary socialization, which occurs during childhood. Primary socialization during childhood within families instills norms, values, habits and perspectives on social realities. Other than family, an individual's social actions are also influenced by secondary socialization, which occurs through formal and informal institutions.

Bourdieu acknowledges that human action is influenced by certain dispositions, making it possible for people to

act without prior thinking or deliberation, which is reflexive. According to Bourdieu, habitus produced by social conditions pushes people to act in a way that repeats social practices and upholds existing social structures. These dispositions are like body gestures, accents, or movements of the mouth when speaking. In other words, social structures are internalized through various socialization processes and become dispositions that are done repeatedly such that the same social structures are reproduced (Mouzelis, 2008). Therefore, based on the concept of habitus, people tend to behave passively because they follow structures (or rules and resources, in Giddens' words) and cultures that are already well-established.

On the contrary, Archer believes that the aspects of agency and reflexivity in human behavior are of utmost importance. Conscious reflexive deliberation in human behavior occurs through internal thoughts about the individual, the situation being faced, behavior, values, and human aspirations. Archer also acknowledges the influence of social structures and culture, but rejects that one's social position fully determines their behavior, and that it is subjectivity that pushes individuals from the same backgrounds to behave the same way. Archer criticizes Bourdieu's ideas about habitus and dispositions (Vas, 2007a), along with Giddens' theory of structure (Archer, 2010). According to Archer, social structure and agents are two entirely separate things. Likewise, social structure is influenced by one's understanding and activities in the social world (Archer, 2013). Bourdieu and Giddens also acknowledge the importance of social structures in human behavior, even though they primarily argue in favor of reflexivity.

Based on Bourdieu's studies and other literature on political participation, this study assumes that habitus is deep rooted in the lives of female students, which impedes female students from having political participation that is equal to their male counterparts. Students are influenced by structures (rules and resources) and culture (values and habits) that have been accepted in society, making it difficult for them to participate with as much intensity as men. These structures and cultures are attached to families and other social institutions that are closely related to student life, such as campus activities and voluntary student organizations. Social structures are internalized through various socialization processes and become dispositions that produce repeated behavior, thus reproducing social structures (Mouzelis, 2008).

That being said, the factor of agency, in which people have the power to make choices, is something that cannot be ignored. This is especially true taking into account that the female students in this study are significantly educated and have been exposed to social changes. Freedom of thought is a value instilled in

higher education. Therefore, other than analyzing the influence of habitus, this study will also analyze how the factors of agency and reflexivity influence choices and behavior. According to Archer (2010), compared to the aspect of social structure, the element of reflexivity is more influential in people's lives. Actions are determined by people's ability to create norms as consequences of discussion and reflexive thinking regarding social situations. Having reflexivity is a mature ability used to develop one's personal identity and social identity (Archer, 2010).

## 2. Methods

This study is a qualitative study that uses in-depth interviews to collect data. The results of these interviews are hoped to illustrate how habitus and agency influence student political involvement in campus activities, as well as how reflexivity affects the socialization of traditional gender roles in female students. This article also discusses how people experience the process of changing old habitus that tend to impede political participation of female students into new habitus that minimize those impediments.

Habitus is measured through a series of questions regarding family life, such as support from parents and extended family towards their activities, what values they learnt in institutions prior to entering higher education, and what experiences they have related to the culture of patriarchy. Agency and reflexivity is measured through a series of questions regarding how they respond to certain situations, especially in regards to political participation and patriarchal culture. Reflexivity here focuses on how they try to change patriarchal culture and how they overcome the obstacles they experience.

This study is based on the experiences of 10 informants (8 female, 2 male) in an Islamic University in Indonesia, explaining the obstacles faced by female students in political participation, and how reflexivity and agency materialize. In-depth interviews were conducted between June 24<sup>th</sup> – July 5<sup>th</sup> 2014, with informants that fulfilled the criteria of being active in external organizations, (Islamic Students Movement/PMII/Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia, or Association of Islamic Students/HMI/Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam), active in internal organizations (heads or vice heads of student councils on faculty and program levels, Leadership development activities), along with non-active students. Several of the informants came from religious boarding schools ("*pesantren*") that focused on teaching traditional Islamic values through primary sources like the "yellow book" ("*kitab kuning*").

In this study, the author plays the role of a researcher as well as a research instrument, undergoing all the research processes including planning, data collecting,

analysis, and data interpretation. The author has a fairly close background with the student movement, having participated actively in extracurricular student activities at the commissariat level and executive level (national scale) during various periods between 1995 and 2000. Research was conducted while the author was a member of the teaching staff of this institution, and thus contacting the informants was not difficult.

## 3. Results and Analysis

The results of this study cover discussion with informants about the habitus that impedes female students of that university to actively participate in political activities, which includes the process of traditional gender socialization in families, middle level educational institutions, and society at large. Other than discussing the factor of habitus that causes low female political participation, this study also discusses the emergence of new habitus as a result of reflexivity and agency of students. This happens when students do not passively accept the habitus that is rooted in their lives, and instead become active agents in reflecting upon established teachings and traditions such as that women should primarily hold domestic roles. Similarly, there is the common view that politics is a cruel world that women should avoid. The effect of the emergence of new habitus is that students find new interpretations of religion and studies that they obtained from their university that they feel are more conducive, pushing them to become more determined in actively participating in politics.

**Habitus and Obstacles towards Political Participation of Female Students.** There are three basic themes in relation to habitus and obstacles that limit female students political participation. They are thought or teachings (i.e., conservative thought vs. modern thought), disinterest in student activities (including focus on academic achievement), and traditional gender socialization (including different treatment to female leaders).

The first one is thought: conservative thought vs. modern thought. Conservative thought is considered to limit the political role of women. Even with the development of modern thought, several informants still thought that conservative thought was a hindrance to women in general. One example is Am, a female student who said:

*"I am a villager, and my grandmother is very old-fashioned. I'm not allowed to do anything; so many things are considered sinful, such as girls shouldn't come home late".*

It seems that this conservative thought originates from religious teachings accepted with conservative attitudes. Specifically, religious teachings that are taught in a literal, textual sense, including teachings about female

leadership and female intimate parts, result in biased interpretations that are often considered impediments to female political roles. Am, a female student, said

*"...in my opinion, incorrect understanding comes from biased interpretations that aren't based on deep and comprehensive Islamic knowledge..."*

These conservative interpretations tend to give women no reason to participate in politics. This observation was obtained from informants who studied in religious boarding schools, where they completed high school.

*"...at my religious boarding school, I was taught that a woman's orientation should be to serve her husband, and that her husband must always be her main focus. But after studying at this university (an Islamic university in Indonesia), I have a different opinion. I have learnt about Aisyah and Khadijah who also fought wars defending Islam"* (L, female student).

Similarly, three other informants (two female students: Ay and Af, and one male student: M) who were educated at Islamic high school before entering higher education stated that to their knowledge, Islam does not push women to be politically active, because it is not within women's nature to be active. These students also observe that, while many religious schools still teach rigid division of roles between men and women, a few schools adopt ideas of gender equality between men and women.

In contrast to interpretations that see religious teachings as an obstacle to women's participation in politics, there are also increasing interpretations that give women the freedom to participate and lead. The informants were exposed to these teachings after becoming university students.

*"There are now many new interpretations, such as Ushuluddin lecturers that teach the study of nahwu, such that arrijalu qawwamuna 'alannisa can be interpreted from a more equal point of view..."* (S, June 24<sup>th</sup> 2014)

The same can be said for the issue that women and men have different social positions, along with the issue of women's *aurat* or private parts. New teachings are needed to push women to become more active in voicing their aspirations, including to participate in demonstrations. For example, Sa said:

*"...people blindly swallow verses in the Qur'an, for example, that women should be subordinates, and that women should not speak loudly. Even singing is not allowed. What about demonstrations? That is the problem. If I choose to not follow this,*

*I can voice my opinions as loud as I want. When I took a class on gender studies, I studied the reality of life and my perspectives changed. I believe that women are not always below men, depending on their capacity. I don't oppose the teachings of Islam; I just see if the teachings are good and not too extreme..."* (Sa, July 1<sup>st</sup> 2014).

Religious teachings are not the only obstacle to political participation of female students. Another cause of the lower participation of female students is disinterest in political issues. The values of politics developed in student activism tend to be more suited to stereotypical male traits. For example, the world of politics is considered harsh, cruel, requiring an attitude that is assertive and brave. This makes female students less willing to become involved.

*"...people say that politics is harsh, and I believe this because I have experienced smaller political organizations on campus. During the election of the head of student council, there was a blockade, even an attack, from the supporters of the other candidate. They brought sharp objects, and the police came. There is a mafia that works underground. This mafia is undetected, when it is actually working behind closed doors..."* (Sa, July 1<sup>st</sup> 2014).

Other than practices that are more suited to the stereotypical traits of men, the rules of student organizations tend to be unfriendly to women, particularly in terms of time management.

*"...To be active in a student organization, we finish late at night, because during the day we have classes and campus matters. For organizational matters like meeting people and meeting seniors, we usually work between 19.00 – 01.00"* (Am, June 25<sup>th</sup> 2014).

*"...organization meetings are always at night. The guys made that rule, with the reason that people have class during the day, so student organization activities must happen at night."* (A, June 24<sup>th</sup> 2014).

Even though it is getting less taboo to finish activities late, female students who come home late at night do not do so because of student organizational activities. It seems that some of them go home late for their personal interest, such as expressed by Am:

*"My friends who don't participate in student activities actually tend to participate in hedonist activities. They don't have a spiritual calling in life. We all finish late, but they go to the mall, hanging out and talking about things like Java*

*Jazz concerts. We think about important events”*  
(Am, June 24<sup>th</sup> 2014).

It was also found in the interviews that students thought that commitment to a student organization would reduce their academic achievements. Female students generally considered political activities and organizations as less useful than academic pursuits. This may be because academic achievements were their main focus as university students, while achievements in organizational life was only considered as a bonus, not emphasized by the university as something that students should strive for. When female students were faced with the choice of choosing between academic achievements and the opportunity to lead an organization, the female students chose to focus on academic achievements, because the world of academics was a considered a safe zone to avoid conflicts and arguments with friends.

One informant states that although she initially wanted to nominate herself as the leader of a student organization, she felt that it was time for her to concentrate on her thesis and graduation. According to her, “I actually wanted to be active. But because I was nearing my final semester, I didn’t want to have a position that would demand too many responsibilities.” These results demonstrate that personal interests, including focus on academic achievement, tend to limit student political participation.

The third common themes came up from the interview was traditional gender socialization. As discussed in the section on conservative interpretations, several informants explained their experiences with family as a primary agent of socialization and the tendency to socialize the role of men and women in a different way. This is related to parental fear of their children coming home late. Female students have this experience, as explained by the following informant.

*“My parents worry if I participate in student organizations that require me to come home late. So, I already know that if I join those organizations, my parents will reprimand and be angry with me. So, I choose to just be a normal student with ordinary activities, and I usually finish around nine o’clock...”* (A, June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014).

These arguments show that men have more freedom, both in family structures and student organizations. Parents usually do not let their daughters come home late, but are less concerned about sons coming home late.

Further, female students are not yet burdened with domestic responsibilities. They have the freedom to prioritize their education. However, they are still aware of gender roles in families and societies and the

different treatment between men and women. Several female informants reported that they were sometimes asked to help their mothers wash the dishes or tidy the dinner table, when their brothers were not asked to do the same.

In leadership positions, female informants also had different experiences compared to male leaders. They felt that they faced serious challenges from their male colleagues. As explained by an informant who was the head of the student council of a faculty,

*“...I felt that, even though I was head of the student council, my friends and colleagues wouldn’t really listen to me. It was difficult for me to motivate my colleagues, so eventually I just worked alone. It was really different to how the head of the commissariat, who was male, was treated. The students were far more active in the commissariat than in the student council...”* (S, June 25<sup>th</sup> 2014).

Similar experiences of feeling unappreciated as a leader were felt by other informants. There was a tendency for male co-workers to be unwilling to coordinate and follow organizational procedures. Female leaders are often perceived as incapable and emotional, and thus have to work harder than their male counterparts to able to coordinate with their colleagues.

*“...There was once an issue where someone misused money and didn’t make an accountability report. I scolded him, but he would not accept my reprimand and instead attacked me back. I cried, not because I felt incapable, but because I had to break through so many barriers. He should not have been allowed to behave in that manner; yes, I was a woman, but I was his leader”* (Sa, July 1<sup>st</sup> 2014).

One informant told her stories about negative experiences in campus organizations, which made her rethink their decision to continue their political careers, even though she were initially interested in the field.

*“...In the beginning of my college years, I thought being a member of the legislative branch would be cool, but now I am more interested to just be a political observer. Politicians don’t need to be intelligent, but political observers do...”* (A, June 25<sup>th</sup> 2014).

The choice to prioritize academic achievements is in line with the gender stereotypes in which women are expected to have feminine traits. Female students are therefore more likely to focus on finishing university quickly, abiding by expectations to follow the rules, be patient, avoid conflict, compromise, avoid arguments,

and have other traits assumed to be inherent to women. Traits of being critical, ambitious, and daring to be different as leaders are all characteristics traditionally associated with men (masculine traits).

**Reflexivity and the Emergence of New Habitus.**

Apart from the obstacles to political participation of female students, the majority of informants also talked about the process of reflexivity towards cultural conditions and structures that enabled them to overcome the aforementioned obstacles. One important aspect is that informants were reflexive towards the domestic role of women. As stated previously, even though female students in this study did not yet have the domestic responsibilities that married women usually have, they still understood that they would be faced with social expectations to fulfil their domestic responsibilities.

In general, the informants agreed that it was important for women to not abandon their primary role as housewives and still prioritize their function as caregivers for children, but they also considered it important for women to have public and political roles. This is because these students had started to be exposed to diverse understandings on religion, especially with regards to leadership and the public role of women. Initially, they had only learnt conventional religious teachings that do not support women's participation in politics. But through becoming a member of the academic community, they learnt new interpretations on old teachings that have long been thought to legitimize women's domestic roles.

One informant explained the hindrances she faced in assuming a public position as a woman. Her family's rules did not allow her to come home late, and many aspects of the position were considered sinful for a female. This informant explained that the hindrances she faced from her family's cultural values came from different expectations for the behavior of men and women. However, as her education progressed, she started change her thought, such that she became able to reflect on and challenge the principles that she had always been taught.

*...I experienced a significant change of perspective since I started attending this university. I read more materials, and became active in extra-curricular campus organizations. .... "I believe that what differentiates me with men is faith and devotion, not the fact that I am female. What differentiates me and my male counterparts is simply reproductive organs; my other roles in society are the same as theirs" (A, June 25<sup>th</sup> 2014).*

Conversely, some respondents still felt troubled by their interactions in student organizations and the imperfect process of learning new interpretations about the public

role of women. Two informants expressed their frustration about the fact that female students tended to be given jobs that were related to domestic roles, such as working in the food and beverages division.

*"...It irritates me, because girls are only ever assigned to the food and beverages division, instead of being put in a position where girls can give instructions..." (S, June 25<sup>th</sup> 2014).*

*"...I told them, in these modern times it is no longer appropriate to only allow girls to work in food and beverages. Food isn't just a female concern, but male too..." (A, June 25<sup>th</sup> 2014).*

After various protests, debates and negotiation, eventually opportunities were given for female students to become heads of committees, and all activities ran smoothly. The female student in question succeeded in negotiating, and the male students agreed to entrust the leadership role to a female student.

*"Eventually, we had a female head of committee and the event was a success. I have always said to stop using the reason that we are female to deny us leadership, because that stops girls from ever doing something bigger. I think that everyone knew this, but there is a difference between knowing something and actually doing it. There is a problem of pride in men who are unwilling to be led by women..." (A, June 25<sup>th</sup> 2014).*

As explained by Archer (2010, 2013), agents/people always transform the structures and cultures that affect their actions. In becoming a student and learning Islamic teachings from one's campus, the student experiences a transformation, such that old teachings of one's family become less relevant. This shows that human behavior cannot be limited by existing norms in families and communities. Individuals can free themselves from having a *sociocentris* (the belief that communities are the central determinant of human behavior) point of view, and rather see the world or communities as a process of interaction and socialization (Archer, 2010; Vas, 2007a).

This was apparent in the attitudes of several informants who seemed more willing to accept the role of female leaders, and could accept that women could assume roles that are usually associated with men.

*"...I think it's appropriate for women to be politicians. Of course, not all women need to be politicians. There are many other fields that women can dominate. But if they choose to be politicians, that is reasonable, because women surely need policies that benefit them" (A, June 24<sup>th</sup> 2014).*

Other than feeling upset about the expectations of women to only pursue household roles, almost all informants expressed the importance of women becoming leaders to influence policies.

*“...I, as a woman, nominated myself to be the head of student council. Why not? That was an important step to disprove the belief that women are undeserving. Queen Bilqis (who lived in the classical era) was brave enough to be a leader, so why shouldn't I follow her example? If there are religious teachings that disallow this, we should compare them with other interpretations...”* (R, June 25<sup>th</sup> 2014).

This opinion is shown in student efforts to search for religious interpretations that support their choices. Student activists feel that religious interpretations that inhibit women's capacity to participate are incorrect, because they are interpreted literally and do not take into account appropriate scientific rules. Thus, comprehensive discussion is needed to ensure that religion becomes a foundation that justifies equality.

The belief that women should not be elected as leaders is still prevalent in society. However, the rules hardly ever state this explicitly. As a result, social structures do not completely disallow women from participating in politics and leadership. The rules in student organizations also do not explicitly disallow women from participating in any activities. Instead, beliefs that women should be subordinates in families and communities are cultural, informal rules. This enables female and male students to create new perspectives in accordance with their wants, as expressed in by this student:

*“Personally, I reject the view that women are subordinates. Why should they be subordinates if they can become leaders? There should be a different understanding of equality and fairness. ‘Fair’ does not always mean ‘the same’. So if the wife is the breadwinner in a household, that should be fine. As long we are productive, why shouldn't it be allowed?”* (Sa, July 1<sup>st</sup> 2014).

The male participants, both active and inactive in organizations, explicitly stated that they had no objection to being led by women, as long as the women were qualified. Several female activists even explained that their bravery in nominating themselves as leaders was supported by their predominately male friends.

*“...most of my friends are male. So the ones who supported me were men. When I was a candidate to become the head of student council, it was my male friends who had originally suggested me to do so...”* (A, June 25<sup>th</sup> 2014).

These quotes signify that their awareness of gender equality is starting to grow. The determining of leaders is no longer made solely on the basis of the gender of the candidate, but rather on the basis of competence. All informants, both male and female, agreed that whether or not a student could succeed as a student leader was an issue of competence. The gender factor emerged precisely because of the assumption that women do not have the aforementioned competence. Likewise, female leadership is considered a sensitive issue. Even though there are no explicit objections to women becoming leaders, there are still implicit feelings influenced by traditional gender constructs. In other words, female students are generally still seem as less capable or substandard. However, in the situation where a female student has extraordinary competence, there is no reason to not support her, as expressed by these informants:

*“...I think it's an issue of potential and natural selection. If an incapable individual is elected, it won't work. There are always many candidates initially, but in the end it's always the same people who are active...”* (S, June 25<sup>th</sup> 2014).

*“...I agree that women should be allowed to become heads of student council, even though it's still a sensitive issue. But if she's qualified, why not?”* (R, June 25<sup>th</sup> 2014).

The aspect of reflexivity was also apparent in four out of six female participants that answered they would still be interested in taking part in political carriers after university. The other two answered that they would not continue their political careers. Those who are willing to continue their public activities, expressed:

*“...I want to be municipal mayor, and then I want to be governor...”* (S, June 25<sup>th</sup> 2014).

Further,

*“...yes, when I'm more mature I want to be a legislative politician. Rather than only having female artists who don't know anything and are only filling in quotas, it's better for us students who have experience in student organizations to fill those positions, having learned about these things.”* (Am, June 24<sup>th</sup> 2014).

Observing today's realities, that there are already several female leaders who are governors, mayors and legislative officers, the desire of informants from conventional families and families of rural areas to aspire high displays the aspect of reflexivity in moving from old habitus to new habitus. They are aware of the difficulties of politics and yet are still willing to pursue a career in that field. At the same time, some female students have different interests and tend to choose a career in their comfort zone.

#### 4. Conclusion

Social conditions of a certain social class, according to Bourdieu, create habitus and dispositions that drive social practices without reflecting on the action itself. Social conditions have the power, and thus able to shape attitude and behavior of the people in that habitus. Habitus is created by the tendency for people to reproduce long-standing practices and structures. It is even attached to things like body gestures and speech (Vas, 2007b: 327). In terms of political participation, habitus and dispositions of conventional families and communities make women feel that they are incompatible with the political arena. However, after becoming a part of an academic community in higher education, new habitus might emerge through students exposure to new ideas and values. Through new readings, scientific practices, and critical thinking, new habitus emerged.

The results of this study suggest that there is a tendency of reflexivity towards cultural conditions, especially amongst female students active in student organizations. One form of reflexivity is the development of modern, alternative interpretations to traditional religious thought that emphasizes the household role of women. These alternative perspectives enable female students to break free of existing cultures. This is in contrast to existing studies that primarily favour men as leaders that is resulted from gender bias in religious interpretation.

External forces that have the power to oblige people to act in certain ways, such as rules, are not explicitly written in families, organizations and communities, as our informants elaborated. Because these rules are not explicitly stated, several of the informants were able to conduct change, such as through becoming leaders of student organizations (heads of student councils), becoming heads of committees, participating in conventionally masculine activities like demonstrations, and signing petitions. Social interactions that emphasize reflexivity may have become possible because of the presence of friends and colleagues facing the same issues. Instead of seeing these actions as extreme, they were considered positive.

These women still upheld religious rules, but they did not blindly follow everything in a literal sense. When they were skeptical of a principle considered basic in religion, they didn't try to isolate religion from their lives but instead tried to find different interpretations that could still be religiously justified. This shows a different condition to the ones explained by Archer (2010), who stated that social actions and structures are entirely separate.

One important thing that warrants further studies is the very limited elaboration on structures and culture. This was apparent in explanations from female informants

who were unable to get support as strong as male leaders. These experiences of limited authority even in positions of leadership was explained by informants who successfully won elections to claim positions of power, such as becoming heads of student councils, yet still felt unaccepted compared to their male counterparts. Even though structurally there were female leaders, they were still unable to motivate and mobilize the members of the organization. In other others, the reflexivity conducted by informants was enough to create some changes, but was not enough to change the whole culture of patriarchy in which acceptance towards men and women is equal. The structural position of female leaders is attainable, but the authority of female activists in student organizations is still limited.

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