

Paid to care:

Women's experiences in non-profit/NGO work in Malaysia

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Abstract

In this thesis, I revisit classical and influential feminist texts, mantras and ideologies to analyse the experiences of women working in Malaysian-based women's organisations: International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAW AP), Sisters In Islam and Musawah, all of which are located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. I argue that even in difficult times, the women in my study continue to work for others because this is where they find meaning in their professional and personal lives. I examine how they view their feminist activism in an organisational setting and what this means to their greater identities. My ethnographic study contributes to research on women and work, especially in the Southeast Asian context. I identify how women are expected to use caring roles and emotion work typical of the home in these working environments that also promote self-neglect and overwork. While women experience trying moments in these spaces, they continue to work for women's rights because they are working for a larger cause and this satisfies them.

I follow Arlie Russell Hochschild's emotional labour thesis to explore the merging of home and work, and what this means to the intimate relationships women have to their work. I identify how the idea that 'work is good', a common motto in these workplaces, functions in professional and personal contexts. I extend Hochschild's research to examine how women's intersecting identities shape why they continue to work in a sector that expects them to give all of themselves. My research provides a gendered reading of non-profit/NGO work focusing on the history of contemporary Malaysian women's organisations, conflicting feminist identities, how the personal becomes the professional, health implications, funding challenges, and generational tensions in organisations that are rooted in wider feminist debates.

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Statement of Authenticity

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work.

This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

Signed:

Alifa Zafirah Bandali

June 23, 2017

List of Abbreviations

AWAM All Women's Action Society

AWAS Angkatan Wanita Sedar

AWID Association for Women's Rights in Development

CAR Citizens Against Rape

CEDAW Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women

FGE Fund for Gender Equality

FWCW Fourth World Conference on Women

HAWA Unit of Women's Affairs

IMM Indian Independence Movement

INGO International Non-Governmental Organisation

IWRAW AP International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific

JAG Joint Action Group

JAG-VAW Joint Action Group against Violence Against Women

JD Juris Doctor

KANITA Women's Development Research Centre

LRT Light Rapid Transit

MENA the Middle East and North Africa region

MFA Malaysian Feminist Activist

NCWO The National Council for Women's Organisations

NEP New Economic Policy

NGOs Non-Governmental Organisations

PAS Parti Islam Se-Malaysia

PO Program Officer

SCEF Southern Conference Educational Fund

UAFWHR Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights

UNCSW United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

UNIFEM United Nations Development Fund for Women

UMNO United Malay Nationalist Organisation

UPR Universal Periodic Review

USM Universiti Sains Malaysia

VAW Violence Against Women

WAO Women's Aid Organisation

WCC Women's Crisis Centre

WDC Women's Development Collective

WLM Women's Liberation Movement

WLMs Women's Liberation Movements

WLUML Women Living Under Muslim Laws

YFA Young Feminist Activism

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Introduction

When I embarked on my first internship abroad in 2010, I was heading to a country I knew nothing about. My family asked me, “Why Malaysia?” I replied, “This is where the organisation is located, they do good work on women’s rights.” I think I had frightened both of my parents, their youngest (a girl no less) was going to be by herself in a foreign country. Malaysia seemed far away, but once I arrived it felt comfortable and like home. The day I arrived at International Women’s Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAW AP)—also the primary field site of my thesis—I was invigorated with their work on women’s human rights. What was only meant to be a three-month internship extended into a four-month stay in Kuala Lumpur. I wanted to continue working with the organisation and learn from the women in the office. As I participated in many of the programs and projects, mostly from the sidelines, I saw women give much of themselves to their work.

Working in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is not particularly alluring, there is little pay, there are constant pressures to overwork with no recognition, but there is something about the work that keeps women there. I was inspired by their passion and dedication to their work and from watching and participating I wanted to research why they continue to work in the non-profit/NGO sector? What are their motivations? How do they think about their emotional relationship to their work and what does the work mean to them?

From watching and doing to researching

This particular period in my life led me to my PhD research, where I explore women’s experiences in their work. The core of my study consisted of fieldwork where I returned to IWRAW AP in 2014 and made subsequent field visits in 2015 and 2016 (see Appendix 1: Details of the empirical study). I chose IWRAW AP as my field site for a few reasons. First, the organisation gave me opportunities to meet with feminist activists from all over the world, and is the inspiration for this thesis. Second, I was familiar with many of the women working at the organisation and I wanted to continue to understand what the work means to them. Third, knowing that their work is difficult and not something I could do myself, I wanted to open up spaces for these women’s

voices to be heard. Fieldwork often consisted of working out of IWRAW AP's office in Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur. The women I interviewed there were those who I saw day-after-day during my participant observation. These women felt comfortable with me wanting to hear more about their experiences and life histories and this led to more in-depth interviews. Prior to entering the field, my curiosities of what I would find in my research led to initial questions of what motivated women to volunteer/intern or work in the non-profit/NGO sector; do they think they use emotions in their work; what are some of the ways in which women manage their emotions; and how does the work impact their personal lives?

At times I felt odd researching women at IWRAW AP, many of them are my friends, mentors and women I respect, but I am also interested in opening up possibilities between research and practice. Bridging this gap is a difficult task. Uma Kothari notes the challenges in making a feminist intervention in the development sector where “those engaged in the implementation of development [who] see themselves primarily as practitioners, and therefore have little use for (meta) theory.”¹ My research seeks to overcome the theory/practice gap to engage with theory in the examination of the important work women do and often receive little recognition for. Stuart Hall acknowledged that feminism is a major force in how we think and rethink ideas. In the field of Cultural Studies, he argues, “It has, of course, brought whole new concrete areas of inquiry, new sites of investigation into being within the Cultural Studies agenda, as well as reshaping existing ones.”²

My research crosses the fields of Cultural Studies, Gender Studies and Workplace Studies to foreground women's experiences in their work. I return to classical feminist texts, movements and debates. In Chapters One, Two and Three, I highlight the importance of women's movements and organisations in Malaysia, the possibilities of women's feminist identities working in women's rights spaces and I seek to re-energise the feminist slogan ‘the personal is political’ and use it to describe how, for the women in my research, ‘the personal is professional’. I draw on iconic

¹ Uma Kothari and Martin Minogue, eds., *Development theory and practice: critical perspectives* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 51.

² Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis, eds., *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies 1972-79* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1980), 27.

feminist texts from Linda Alcoff, Teresa de Lauretis, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Elspeth Probyn, Carol Hanisch and others who have offered ways to approach current debates within feminism, women's movements and organisations. I extend on their ideas with my own ethnographic research using their perspectives along with the sociological approaches to gender in the workplace to examine emotion at work. Arlie Russell Hochschild's *The Managed Heart* imbues this thesis. The ethos of her 1983 study on flight attendants is reflected in its ability to take gender and emotion seriously in the workplace, especially in service-related professions. I draw on Hochschild's methodology in two ways. First, I am interested in her concept of emotional labour and its relevance to my study of women working in NGOs. Second, I draw on her ethnographic account of flight attendants to follow women at work. I build on her emotional labour thesis to include the feeling body and take from feminist reworkings such as Diane Reay who has taken Pierre Bourdieu's work on capital and habitus to include a gendered perspective that allows us to develop and expand on his ideas. Her readings of the affective gendered habitus and the construction of emotional capital as a gendered capital are explored in Chapter Six to discuss the generational tensions in women's activism.³ Here I turn to my use of Hochschild's ground-breaking research on emotion in the workplace.

Hochschild as method

Before delving into Hochschild's concepts and research, I want to flag that I use the term *work* beyond its common sense understanding of what work is. I am interested in what forms of labour are involved and the meaning behind work for the women in my study.⁴ I use work to focus on the mundane tasks women engage in on a daily basis, along with what it represents. Women in non-profit/NGOs gain satisfaction from their work because it gives them a sense of self-fulfillment through an exchange of their labour. This is more evident in my discussion of 'good work', a central theme in my thesis and one that I use to examine women's justification to overwork and the self-

³ Jenna Ward and Robert McMurray, *The Dark Side of Emotional Labour* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 92.

⁴ Lynne Pettinger, Jane Parry, Rebecca Taylor and Miriam Glucksmann, eds., *A New Sociology of Work* (MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 9.

neglect their experience. In Chapter Four, I use this justification of self-sacrifice through Marcel Mauss' analysis on the gift exchange to investigate how women's health is affected by overcommitting themselves to their work.

Hochschild's *The Managed Heart* is a pivotal text in how to explore human emotions and how they are managed in the workplace. She uncovers the socialization of emotions where private feelings are utilised in waged labour. The book is divided into two parts. Part One/Private Life captures some of her main concerns and concepts that individuals regulate in their daily lives. Part Two/Public Life describes what happens when emotions are commodified and put to corporate use. Hochschild's study (based in the United States) provides an in-depth qualitative account of flight attendants, an occupation reliant on emotional labour demands. Her emotional labour thesis has contributed significantly to the debates on the role of emotions in not only the private sphere but exposes jobs that require workers to engage in managing their emotions for pay.

Hochschild's analyses of emotion traces the term using both social and psychological lenses. Hochschild's article, "Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure" (which precedes the publication of *The Managed Heart*) digs deeper into the origins of the word emotion. In this article Hochschild "proposes an emotion management perspective as a lens through which to inspect the self, interaction and structure."⁵ The article is an exploration of how emotion can be viewed and assessed, and Hochschild draws on Goffman's and Freud's theorisations of emotion. While I do not focus on the term emotion and its origins in my thesis—for example, which perspective (biological or psychological) is best suited for my own analysis—I focus on Hochschild's ideas on the socialisation of emotion, particularly her discussion of how emotion relies on external factors and is constructed through socialisation via feeling rules.

Hochschild's emotional labour thesis has opened up the concept of work and especially labour to encompass more than physical or mental aspects. Her research has become influential "in academic disciplines as varied as organizational studies, critical

⁵ Arlie Russell Hochschild, "Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure," *American Journal of Sociology* 85, no. 3 (1979): 551, <http://jstor.org.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/stable/2778583>.

management studies, human resource management, nursing, psychology and sociology.”⁶ Robert McMurray and Jenna Ward’s *The Dark Side of Emotional Labour* follows Hochschild’s original study to make a case for using her concepts in professions where emotional labour is rewarding and positive.⁷ Realising the importance of Hochschild’s 1983 study today, they argue:

What Hochschild’s work does highlight in sociological terms is the need to understand such work-based performances as inherently complex emotional interactions that shape and are shaped by our approach to organizing.⁸

Hochschild draws our attention to how emotion allows us to feel, and functions as a form of labour. In *So How’s the Family?* Hochschild argues that without emotion the world loses colour and meaning.⁹ She evaluates the underrated role of emotional labour expected of certain forms of work. Drawing on her concepts and ethnographic methodology, my study is informed by women’s experiences in their work that is connected to their overall identities. In this way, Hochschild as method, frames my study to examine: why women engage in work that is centred on the needs of others; the gendered nature of their work; how the division of labour from the home extends into the workplace through caring and emotional dispositions; and how women’s intersecting identities blur the private and public spheres.

One of the major contributions of Hochschild’s ethnographic findings is the importance of both personal and professional boundaries and the blurring of these spaces. A common theme in Hochschild’s research, especially *The Time Bind* and *The Second Shift*, is the merging of home and work and related shifts in home-work life identities.¹⁰ *The Time Bind*, unlike *The Managed Heart*, follows workers into the home and illustrates how home life has become work and work life has become represented as

⁶ McMurray and Ward, eds., *The Dark Side of Emotional Labour*, 6.

⁷ Ibid., 120.

⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁹ Arlie Russell Hochschild, *So How’s the Family?: And Other Essays* (CA: University of California Press, 2013), 4, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/stable/10.1525/j.ctt3fh2gr>.

¹⁰ See also Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Time Bind: when work becomes home and home becomes work* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1997); and Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Second Shift: working parents and the revolution at home* (New York: Viking, 1989), 44.

“home.” Here she traces AMERCO’s (A Fortune 500 Company based in the United States) new family policy and its failure to make women and men take advantage of the parental leave and part-time work arrangements available.¹¹ *The Second Shift* focuses on the intimate and complicated relationships of married couples (also located in the United States), looking at how they view the gender division of labour at home and how perceptions of equality were not necessarily reflected in their reality. Gender is central to Hochschild’s research, revealing how identities are blurred in the workplace. While I focus on Hochschild’s analysis from *The Managed Heart*, her greater impact on research extends beyond the discipline of sociology as she foregrounds women’s experiences in work, highlighting the gendered issues that arise in women’s increasing participation in the workforce. Hochschild conveys the meaning of human relationships and the network of obligation, emotion and care that bind people together.¹²

At the conceptual level, Hochschild gives us three key terms to use as tools, including: feeling rules, emotion management and emotional labour. I begin by discussing feeling rules because it is through them that Hochschild sets up the ideas of emotion management and emotional labour. Feeling rules rely on what a person should do in a given situation where outward emotion is expressed. In *The Managed Heart*, Hochschild argues feeling rules are dependent upon context, culture, society and location, suggesting: “Different social groups probably have special ways in which they recognize feeling rules and give rule reminders, and the rules themselves probably vary from group to group.”¹³ They rely on a consensus of what is acceptable and from there assume a natural disposition of how emotion should be expressed in differing social situations. Feeling rules are not an individual act of expressing emotion, but are based on external factors, such as other actors who interpret what emotion is expressed and if it follows the rules of a particular context. If feeling rules are socially constructed how do we recognise them? According to Hochschild:

¹¹ Irene Gotz, “Encountering Arlie Hochschild’s Concept of ‘Emotional Labor’,” In *Pathways to Empathy: New Studies on Commodification, Emotional Labor, and Time Binds*, eds. Gertraud Koch and Stefanie Everke Buchanan (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2013), 184.

¹² Amy S. Wharton, “The Sociology of Arlie Hochschild,” *Work and Occupations* 38, no. 4 (2011): 464, doi: 10.1177/0730888411418921.

¹³ Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 57.

We do so by inspecting how we assess our feelings, how other people assess our emotional display, and by sanctions issuing from ourselves and from them. Different social groups probably have special ways in which they recognize feeling rules and give rule reminders, and the rules themselves probably vary from group to group... We also know feeling rules by the way others react to what they think we are feeling. These external reactions or “claims”—both as they are intended and as they are interpreted—vary in directness or strength.¹⁴

From Hochschild’s analysis of feeling rules, we can begin to understand the connections between emotion management and emotional labour. It is clear in *The Managed Heart* how emotions are socialised and are based upon various factors, such as culture and context that shape how they are interpreted, resulting in set norms governing how one should act and respond to situations. Feeling rules were apparent in various forms across my research. For some of the women I interviewed it was how they discussed their feminist identities depending on which audiences they were speaking to. For others, it was how they moved in their working environments and spaces where they had to embody their feminist activism. Feeling rules also extended into spaces where workers engaged with participants of training programs and projects. Often overseas programs and projects called for NGO workers to negotiate their own identities within the limitations of representing the organisation, and this proved challenging for the women in my research because working with women from differing backgrounds was something they had to do, but not something they received training in. The ease with which they handled these interactions was learned through experience. Feeling rules then, in my research, came across in the standards of applying the ‘right’ emotions in conversation and interactions with others. As Hochschild argues “what is rightly owed and owing in currency of feeling.”¹⁵ Furthermore, it is through feeling rules we know what is owed in social encounters from our respected roles. As Hochschild states, “We pay tribute to each other in the currency of the managing act. In interaction we pay, overpay, underpay, play with paying, acknowledge our dues, and pretend to pay, or acknowledge what is emotionally due to another person.”¹⁶ These

¹⁴ Ibid., 57-58.

¹⁵ Ibid., 18.

¹⁶ Ibid.

invisible rules enforce the notions of what emotions are expected and in what spaces. In Chapter Three, I discuss this in relation to Sanyu's experiences, one of my research participants and a program officer at IWRAW AP, when she describes her role working at a Gender Recovery Hospital in Nairobi, Kenya. She is told to control her emotions in this particular environment and uses this early moment in her career to think through how she wants to proceed working on women's rights.

The second integral concept of Hochschild's research is emotion management. It is the term that follows feeling rules and gives us an entry point to discuss emotional labour. Emotion management relies on the interactive account of emotion and how feelings are constructed in the way we conduct ourselves both publically and privately. Feeling rules guide emotion work by "establishing the sense of entitlement or obligation that governs emotional exchanges. This emotion system works privately, often free of observation. It is a vital aspect of deep private bonds and also affords a ways of talking about them."¹⁷ The primary connection between the terms feeling rules and emotion management is how feeling rules govern emotion management by defining emotion.¹⁸ The gendering of emotion management is encapsulated by women taking on the role of the emotion manager in the home as an offering and trade for economic support.¹⁹ A woman offers this type of work to the man as a gift of labour she feels responsible for. Using this gendered approach to emotion management illustrates how emotion work relies on prescribed gender stereotypes, where the old idea or stereotype that women are responsible for housework travels into categorisations of certain professions as feminine and masculine. This is seen in how some working environments supposedly call for 'feminine' traits including caring and compassion. Tyler and Taylor also explore the experiences of flight attendants in their research but through a feminist reworking of Marcel Mauss' *The Gift*. Their research is highlighted in Chapter Four to convey what they call the 'Exchange of Aesthetics' that is embedded in the gendering of roles and characteristics ascribed to women.

¹⁷ Ibid., 57.

¹⁸ Catherine Theodosius, "Recovering Emotion from Emotion Management," *Sociology* 40, no. 5 (2006): 895, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/stable/42858247>.

¹⁹ Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 20.

When women's roles as emotion managers from the home become commodified, their labour is exchanged for value. This commodification happens through a process called transmutation. As Hochschild writes she needs "a grand word to point out a coherent pattern between occurrences that would otherwise seem totally unconnected."²⁰ Hochschild's discussion of transmutation is determined by the link between a private act, for example attempting to enjoy a party, and a public act, such as summoning up good feeling for a customer. She argues that transmutation relies on three aspects of emotional life:

Emotion work, feeling rules and social exchange... Emotion work is no longer a private act but a public act, feeling rules are no longer simply matters of personal discretion, negotiated with another person in private but are spelled out publically, social exchange is forced into narrow channels.²¹

After the transmutation is complete and private emotion work is exchanged for commercial value, the commodification of private emotions then becomes a part of a person's job — this is what Hochschild calls emotional labour. This labour requires:

One to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others—in this case, the sense of being cared for in a convivial and safe place. This kind of labour calls for a coordination of mind and feeling, and sometimes draws on a source of the self that we honour as deep and integral to our individuality.²²

Hochschild coined the term emotion labour, which includes how various aspects of one's identity have to work together, such as one's ability to induce or suppress emotion also involves one's capability to act according to what is needed in a particular context and situation. One of the problems with practicing emotional labour is:

Often part of an individual's job to accept uneven exchanges, to be treated with disrespect or anger by a client, all the while closeting into fantasy the anger one

²⁰ Ibid., 19.

²¹ Ibid., 118-119.

²² Ibid., 7.

would respond with. Where the customer is king, unequal exchanges are normal, and from the beginning customer and client assume different rights to feeling and display.²³

The unequal exchanges between an individual and their job and their client, puts the individual in a subordinate position where they have little agency. Workers use emotional labour as a method to keep this relationship in favour of the client, leaving them to internalise their ‘real’ feelings. Finally, as a term emotional labour has been used to describe how the management of feeling creates publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labour is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value.²⁴ Thinking about its presence in NGOs, Kathleen O’Reilly argues that NGO fieldworkers are being pushed to use emotional labour practices in their work. For example, her research found that NGO fieldworkers were told and trained to be empathetic to their clients’ situations.²⁵ Her research is focused on the Indian context where she has been involved in many development projects. She captures the shifts towards a more professionalised approach used by NGOs. The ‘corporate’ approach is increasingly becoming an issue in non-profits and NGOs. On the one hand, many older activists and experienced NGO fieldworkers are adamant about the altruistic grounding of NGOs and on the other hand, those who are entering this profession see it as a career that involves their passion.

In *The Managed Heart*, Hochschild illustrates that “The friction between company speed-up and worker slowdown extends beyond display to emotional labour.”²⁶ She argues that when emotional expression enters the public realm, the transmutation of emotion management to emotional labour occurs. Emotional labour requires a service worker to utilise two types of acting methods: surface acting and deep acting. Surface acting is “the art of an eyebrow raise here, an upper lip tightened there. The actor does not really experience the world from an imperial viewpoint, but he

²³ Ibid., 85-86.

²⁴ Ibid., 7.

²⁵ Kathleen O’Reilly, “‘We Are Not Contractors’: Professionalizing the Interactive Service Work of NGOs in Rajasthan, India,” *Economic Geography* 87, no.2 (2011): 207-212.

²⁶ Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 128.

works at seeming to.”²⁷ Deep acting methods are what really make up emotional labour. She states, “There are two ways of doing deep acting. One is directly exhorting feeling, the other by making indirect use of a trained imagination. Only the second is true method acting.” Hochschild looks to Stanislavski’s method acting techniques to define deep acting in her study. In this method, emotions are recalled from a personal emotional memory. This is where one’s personal identity is blurred into one’s professional identity.

For Hochschild deep acting methods can be dangerous for non-actors. It rearranges a service worker’s personality in that she is selling her feelings as a commodity; therefore deep acting is done too successfully. When flight attendants over-identified with their work, and began to see their own identity as inextricable from the image the company set out to portray, they are unable to distinguish clearly between themselves and their roles.²⁸ From this, we are able to see how performing at work impacts one’s private life and how private life is used as a resource for work life. Using life experience and the intersections of one’s identity is encouraged in NGO work. Where this becomes difficult, is when the use of personal emotion is accepted. Women’s personal lives are taken for granted.

Performing emotional labour presented by Ashforth and Humphrey is “characterized as threatening one’s sense of authentic selfhood in that it requires workers to evoke certain types of emotions while suppressing others.”²⁹ What happened evoked certain types of emotion while others are suppressed has been researched in various service sector occupations. Some of the women in my research made the conscious effort to manage their emotions. They understood that whether it was getting along with colleagues in the office, attending conferences with major stakeholders and donors or even at training with women and women’s groups, they were representing the organisation and this came first. Making work a priority was common for the women in my research. They would tell me, “it has to get done”, “whose else will do it” following

²⁷ Ibid., 38.

²⁸ Catherine Theodosius, *Emotional Labour in Health Care: The Unmanaged Heart of Nursing* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 22-23.

²⁹ Blake E. Ashforth and Ronald H. Humphrey, “Emotional Labor in Service Roles: The Influence of Identity,” *The Academy of Management Review* 18, no.1 (1993): 148, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/258824>.

the mantra of “the work is good”. In my own experiences working with IWRAW AP and even during my field site visits, I started to use this rationale. It is a contagious workplace practice.

Why Hochschild, after all of these years?

While Hochschild has been significantly praised for her work on emotional labour, its widespread adoption has also been criticised. There are many debates surrounding the use and renditions of her research. The one I draw attention to here is Sharon Bolton’s critique, as this has led to further debate. She argues, “Emotional labour is appropriate for describing some but not all practices...”³⁰ She identifies the relevance of emotional labour but pushes to extend beyond Hochschild. The original study of flight attendants and debt collectors has been included in studies examining Disneyland workers, retail and childcare workers, schoolteachers, psychotherapists, travel agents, call-centre workers, bar staff, waiters and many others, and has become a part of the ‘emotional labour bandwagon’.³¹ Bolton’s critique is centred on how emotional labour is now used as an all-encompassing way to think about emotion in the workplace, and encourages research on various service sectors. However, I suggest that Hochschild’s research remains a useful tool that offers researchers an entry way into assessing emotion in the workplace, and encourages research on various service sectors. Bolton’s suggestion that new strategies are needed to capture the many faces of emotion work is valid, but needs to be understood in relation to Hochschild’s research rather than instead of her research. For example, *The Managed Heart* does not delve into the interrelations of flight attendants, and is primarily focused on the flight attendant-passenger relationship, but critiques of this have spawned further research about this dynamic. Research that builds on Hochschild’s work has led to new and innovative studies involving emotion work. Further, by coining the term ‘emotional labour’,

³⁰ Sharon C. Bolton, “Getting to the heart of emotional labour profess: a reply to Brook,” *Work, employment and society* 23, no.3 (2009): 550, <http://www.jsot.org/stable/23749214>. For more on Bolton’s research that explores emotion in the workplace, see also: Sharon Bolton, *Emotion Management in the Workplace* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); and Sharon Bolton, “Who cares: Offering emotion work as a ‘gift’ in the nursing labour process,” *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 32, no.3 (2000): 580-586, doi: 10.1046/j.1365-2648.2000.01516.x.

³¹ Paul Brook, “The Alienated Heart: Hochschild’s ‘emotional labour’ thesis and the anticapitalist politics of alienation,” *Capital and Class* 33, no.2 (2009): 8, <http://www.cseweb.org.uk.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au>.

Hochschild opened up the discussion of what this concept could mean for future studies and work that concentrated on emotion in the workplace, the commodification of it, and the gendering of emotion in the workplace. As Paul Brook notes:

Hochschild's theory of emotion, therefore, binds together the psychological and the social into an interdependent and dynamic unity that is akin to Marx's ontology of the dialectical unity of the mind and body. It does this by integrating the notions of emotion as a signal function—a biological sensory function—with socially constructed prior expectations as indicative of the given self. Without such a conceptualization, it would be incoherent to theorise alienated emotional labour, for without a theory of human nature, how is it possible to identify an alien condition that violates the individual?³²

Paul Brook's reading of Hochschild's research focuses on a number of important aspects. First, he examines her use of psychological and social perspectives in assessing emotion. Second, he responds to scholars, such as Sharon Bolton, who critique Hochschild's research. He addresses critiques that argue Hochschild's use of Marx's alienation theory is inadequate by calling on Hochschild's critics to re-examine Hochschild's research, particularly how Hochschild's study allows flight attendants to give their accounts and interpretations of their work. In doing so, she captures how flight attendants participated in everyday worker resistance:

Workers have also – in varying degrees – reclaimed control of their own smiles, and their facial expressions in general...in the flight attendant's work, smiling is separated from its usual function, which is to express a personal feeling, and attached to another one, expressing a company's feeling. The company exhorts them to smile more, and 'more sincerely', at an increasing number of passengers. The workers respond to the speed-up with a slowdown: they smile less broadly with a quick release and no sparkle in the eyes, thus dimming the company's message to the people. It is a war of smiles.³³

³² Ibid.,13.

³³ Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 127.

Even though the use of the concept in a broader sense has motivated a tremendous amount of research some have argued, “It has been much less helpful in providing theoretical guidance for or integration of the results generated by these bodies of work.”³⁴ In addition, when examining service workers we should be aware of the double-edged aspects of service work and potential everyday resistance in one’s approach to their work. Brook writes:

Customer service interactions are double-edged in that they possess the potential to be subjectively satisfying as well as distressing for the worker... In essence, they reject the notion that the experience of having one’s emotions commodified is intrinsically alienating.³⁵

Wharton does not disregard the emotional labour thesis completely and points out that the initial use of emotional labour research focused on frontline service jobs, but has gradually expanded to consider interactive work in its broadest sense.³⁶ Calling for greater attention to social psychological theories of emotion and emotional experience, Smith-Lovin emphasises the study of emotion rather than emotional labour as the best way forward for this line of research.³⁷ Brook argues:

Devoid of an explicit class analysis. This undermines Hochschild’s argument in explaining individual and collective responses, including resistance by emotional labourers. She compounds this weakness with an insufficiently dialectical analysis whereby she is unable to capture the complexity and potential of contradictory dimensions in the emotional labour process.³⁸

However the relevance of Hochschild’s research in the development sector, especially in NGOs, brings fresh insights into ethnographic studies of these spaces.

³⁴ Amy Wharton, “The Sociology of Emotional Labor,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 35, no.1 (2009): 161, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27800073>.

³⁵ Brook, “The Alienated Heart,” 8.

³⁶ Wharton, “The Sociology of Emotional Labor,” 150.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 161.

³⁸ Brook, “The Alienated Heart,” 10.

David Lewis and David Mosse contend that non-normative ethnographies, “can explore the multiple rationalities of development.”³⁹ They further argue:

Ethnography that focuses on the lifeworlds of staff...brings out the performative aspects of development action and knowledge, and shows the work needed to keep official representations and professional (as well as beneficiary) identities in place while maintaining a degree of ambiguity and room for manoeuvring in the world of development.⁴⁰

I use an ethnographic approach to researching NGO workplaces that is coloured by a gendered approach and a feminist agenda. I follow Rosalind Eyben’s work on feminism, international aid and development, which is based on her personal experiences working in women’s organisations and the relationships she developed. As Eyben and Turquet state, “our approach takes seriously the notion of feminist reflexivity. We ask what is it about our positionality that shapes both how any one of us relates with others and how we choose to act.”⁴¹

In my fieldwork I used my own senses and through the involvement of my body I try to understand whether the workers are deep acting or whether they are surface acting and therefore performing a feeling.⁴² Gotz states, “Through participant observation and individual narratives, we learn ‘what social situations or rules call feelings forth or tuck them under’.”⁴³ Gotz further argues:

³⁹ David Lewis and David Mosse, eds., *Development Brokers and Translators: The Ethnography of Aid and Agencies* (CT: Kumarian Press, 2006), 15. For more on critiques of the NGO sector, see also: Anthony Bebbington “NGOs and uneven development: geographies of development intervention,” *Progress in Human Geography* 28, no.6 (2004): 725-745, doi: 10.1191/0309132504ph516oa. Bebbington et al. *Can NGOs make a difference? The challenge of development alternatives* (London: Zed books, 2008).

⁴⁰ Lewis and Mosse, *Development Brokers and Translators*, 16-17.

⁴¹ Rosalind Eyben and Laura Turquet, eds. *Feminists in Development Organizations: Change from the margins* (Rugby: Practical Action Publishing, 2013), 2-3.

⁴² Gotz, “Encountering Arlie Hochschild’s Concept of ‘Emotional Labor’,” 196.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 197.

Qualitative research produces deep insights into the construction of emotional labor, as well as into the different ways in which workers and customers deal with their feelings by adopting individual and collective social practices.⁴⁴

Taking Hochschild into women's organisations in Malaysia

Writing from the United States context, Hochschild's earlier works, especially *The Managed Heart*, *The Time Bind* and *The Second Shift*, are primarily focused on middle-class American women. According to Hochschild:

Middle-class American women, tradition suggests, feel emotion more than men do. The definitions of "emotional" and "cogitation" in the *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* reflect a deeply rooted cultural idea. Yet women are also thought to command "feminine wiles," to have the capacity to premeditate a sigh, an outburst of tears, or a flight of joy. In general, they are thought to manage expression and feeling not only better but more often than men do.⁴⁵

However her research is more widely applicable. In Brooks and Devasahayam's research on gender in the labour market in Asia, they found:

In Southeast Asia, gender ideologies are heavily bound up with how the identities of men and women are constructed. Despite social, cultural and demographic changes in the region, women are still largely responsible for emotion work...Discourses of gender in the region map out women's primary identities to be that of wives and mothers.⁴⁶

Brooks and Devasahayam's research aligns with Hochschild's study concluding that women are primarily responsible for emotion work. Brooks and Devasahayam's findings paint a picture of how gender ideologies are reinforced in Southeast Asia. I use

⁴⁴ Ibid.,196.

⁴⁵ Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 164.

⁴⁶ Ann Brooks and Theresa Devasahayam, *Gender, Emotions and Labour Markets* (London: Routledge, 2011), 32-33. See also: Ann Brooks, *Gendered Work in Asian Societies: The New Economy and Changing Labour Markets* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006); and Ann Brooks, *Postfeminisms: Feminism, cultural theory and cultural forms*, (London: Routledge, 1997).

their work as a starting point to think about gender norms and roles. Taking Hochschild's concepts to Malaysia and in particular, using them to examine women working on women's rights is challenging. It required unfolding the layers of the different ways women come to their work, what their expectations are for themselves and from the organisation, how they think about their overall identities and the blurring of their personal and professional lives.

In Malaysia, as elsewhere, NGOs are embedded in larger politics that involve funding, transparency and accountability structures. Women's organisations are tied to international and national women's movements and alliances, which has seen crucial shifts in policies in the period 1976–1985.⁴⁷ Major women's world conferences had an important role to play in the Malaysian context of women's organisations. It was at these international platforms, where Malaysian women and women's groups came together to unite and fight for women's rights at the global level. When they returned to Malaysia, women took their experiences from these conferences and used them to fight for women's human rights at the national level. In particular, the Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) held in Beijing is important to this thesis as this global movement for women's rights also impacted laws and policies at the national level in Malaysia. This event also highlighted major issues and tensions in the global women's movement that was flawed from its beginnings by privileging the voices of particular groups of women over others. Aihwa Ong argues that a logic of a strategic sisterhood was used to think about the ultimate goal of advancing women's rights over the divisions between women and women's groups who attended the event.⁴⁸

This also brings up another issue that comes across in Chapter Five, where I discuss funding. For too long there has been an uneven power imbalance between women's organisations located out of the Global North and Global South. I take from Linda Alcoff's "The Problem of Speaking for Others" to think through who gets to speak and in what spaces. Offering insights into how to proceed forward in the privilege

⁴⁷ David Lewis and Nazneen Kanji, eds., *Non-Governmental Organizations and Development* (OX: Routledge, 2009), 57.

⁴⁸ Aihwa Ong, "Strategic Sisterhood or Sisters in Solidarity? Questions of Communitarianism and Citizenship in Asia," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 4, no.1 (1996): 107-135, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy1.library.usyd.au/stable/20644642>.

of speaking, Alcoff suggests we, “strive to create wherever possible the conditions for dialogue and the practice of speaking with and to rather than speaking for others.”⁴⁹ This is important to continued dialogues between women working in the Global North and women working out of the Global South. It has been over 15 years since the Beijing Platform for Action and women’s rights have stalled, especially in accessing funding. In the unstable NGO environment where organisations are constantly seeking funding, I explore what this means for women working at the intersections of those they are trying to help in their work and institutional bureaucracies.

For the purpose of my research, I combine the terms non-profit and NGO to construct non-profit/NGO as this was the way the women in my research described the sector they work in. Their commitment to their work is not only based in the organisations they work for, but in their being as activists and as feminist activists. As I argue throughout this thesis, they bring their intersecting identities to work. However, in development and specifically NGO literature, non-profits and NGOs are written about separately and can be specific to country contexts. For example non-profit organisations is a term that is used in the United States, and as David Lewis and Nazeen Kanji write, “where the market is dominate, and where citizen organizations are rewarded with fiscal benefits if they show that they are not commercial, profit-making entities and work for the public good.”⁵⁰ For them, NGOs are harder to pin down, but they describe NGO structures as large or small, formal or informal, bureaucratic or flexible and can be governmentally or externally donor-funded.⁵¹ Typical NGO stories are told from an insider perspective with activist appeal that constructs NGOs as independent, value-driven and accountable organisations.⁵² By drawing on both Lewis and Mosse and Hochschild’s ethnographic approaches, I am able to highlight the importance of the inner workings of women’s organisations and the women working in them.

⁴⁹ Linda Alcoff, “The Problem of Speaking for Others,” *Cultural Critique* 20 (1991-1992): 23, <http://jstor.org.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/stable/1354221>.

⁵⁰ Lewis and Kanji, eds., *Non-Governmental Organizations and Development*, 7-8.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵² David Mosse and David Lewis, eds., *The Aid Effect: Giving and Government in International Development* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 149.

Women in ‘good work’

In the Malaysian context, as Chapter One describes, women’s organisations have been built on racial, ethnic and class hierarchies embedded in the colonial legacy of divide and rule policies that have initiated new sets of racial and ethnic challenges since the country received its independence in 1957. Race is a tense subject in Malaysia. Despite promoting itself as a multicultural country, and one that celebrates all religions and ethnicities, Malaysia also uses affirmative action policies in favour of the Malays who receive educational and economic privileges in the country. The racial breakdown of the country also reflects a disproportionately higher number of Malays, also called *bumiputras* (translated as ‘sons of the soil’) who make up 67.4% of population. Following the Malays are the Chinese who make up 24.6%, trailing them are the Indians with 7.3% and the category of Other with 0.7%.⁵³ In terms of religion, Islam is practiced by 61.3% of the population, followed by 19.8% who are Buddhist, 9.2% Christian and 6.3% Hindu.⁵⁴ Racial hierarchies were less visible in my site visits to IWRAW AP. As an international women’s organisation working out of Malaysia, it is afforded greater leniency in how it employs women and operates as an NGO. Race and ethnicity was more apparent in my visit to the Sisters In Islam office, this was conveyed through the number of women wearing the *tudong* (term for veil in Malay). The organisation only employs Muslims.

Initially when I began the interview process, I focused on the women of IWRAW AP, from there I was introduced to women from other organisations which led me to Sisters In Islam and Musawah. Sisters In Islam works at the national level and similar to IWRAW AP emerged in the 1990s when contemporary women’s organisations were forming in Malaysia. Sisters In Islam initially began as a reading group of educated Muslim women who were activists, lawyers, academics, teachers and journalists. The group’s first meetings were held in the home of Malaysian feminist activist Zainah Anwar who also heads the global network offshoot of Sisters In Islam called Musawah. From coming together to read the Quran, the organisation officially

⁵³ Department of Statistics Malaysia, Official Portal, “Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristic Report 2010,” *Department of Statistics Malaysia*, last modified May 7, 2015, <http://Dosm.gov.my>.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

became Sisters In Islam in the early-1990s with the aim to “search for solutions to the problem of discrimination against Muslim women in the name of Islam.”⁵⁵

The research of this thesis included ethnographic observation and interviews with women who engage in non-profit/NGO work, most of whom are affiliated with IRAW AP who are both local and have travelled from abroad to work at the organisation in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. At Sisters In Islam, I had limited opportunity to interview participants but was able to speak with its Executive Director Ratna on my 2015 field site visit. When I returned to Malaysia in 2016, I met with Natasha from Musawah and both of these women brought me closer to understanding the complexities of the different ways women come to their work, especially through religious identity. Many of the women who participated in my research suggested that they found satisfaction in their work and had achieved both work and life satisfaction from working on women’s rights. Despite their continued participation in this profession, they are challenged by NGO workplace practices that often neglect and overwork individuals. The perceptions of NGOs are embedded in debates of what it means to do ‘good work’ and at stake for the women in my research is the process of deciding when they have had enough of it.⁵⁶

Women working in organisations like IRAW AP, Sisters In Islam and Musawah have come to these organisations with a shared goal of raising awareness for women’s rights. While their approaches may differ, I argue they all engage in ‘good work’. The notion of ‘good work’ almost always came up in my interviews and multiple times to describe instances where they justified working long hours because they are doing ‘good work’ or rationalising the lack of recognition they receive from management because the ‘work is good’. In any rendition of ‘good work’ this was the intimate relationship women had to working in an NGO. Saan, one of the women I interviewed from IRAW AP said, “Good work, and it is like, the work that is of your choice. The work that you know you have that satisfaction when you are doing it.” She,

⁵⁵ Sisters In Islam, “The SIS Story,” *Sisters In Islam*, accessed December 19, 2016, <http://sistersinislam.org.my>. See also International Women’s Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific, “About Us,” *IRAW AP*, accessed December 19, 2006, iwraw-ap.org.

⁵⁶ William Fisher, “Doing Good? The Politics and Antipolitics of NGO Practices,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997): 446, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/stable/2952530>.

along with the other women, in my research highlighted ‘good work’ as an expression of ideas and ideologies. ‘Good work’, for Saan also suggests a psycho-social alignment and the kind of blurring which makes professional work an extension of the self. Saan, who began her professional career in the corporate sector, made a conscious decision to transition into non-profit/NGO work. After years of feeling unhappy and dissatisfied in the corporate sector, she went on to complete a Masters’ degree that focused on the development sector. For Ruby who also came to NGO work from the corporate sector, “good work is a noble profession, a martyrdom, you know, you have to sacrifice to do good for people and that is the kind of thing that is still in a lot of organizations.” Work is not only motivated by economic gain, but as I argue, impacts women’s greater being: from their life histories and experiences to the ways in which they move in the world. Integral to this thesis is how gender informs their commitment to their work.

Before turning to the structure of this thesis, I take this opportunity to talk about my position as a researcher. I borrow from Elspeth Probyn’s “Glass Selves” to situate my role and stake in my study. Probyn argues that the research project is one that is “a tableau of selves: the self and me, the researcher, in relation to the selves of the girls under study.”⁵⁷ Using Probyn’s approach, my ‘tableau of selves’ involves my personal experiences and life histories, my role as a researcher and my interactions with the generous women who participated in my study. My research is informed by a concept that I further explore in Chapter Six and that is, my gendered habitus, involving my intersecting identities. I use my experiences as a Canadian woman pursuing my PhD in Australia researching women in Malaysia where I crossed geographical and social locations. Beginning this project, I was comfortable with pursuing research in Malaysia, and in particular with IWRAW AP, an organisation I had worked with before. However, as my research progressed, I began to see the interconnections between women and women’s organisations working out of the Malaysian context. This was a turning point in my research, as it led me to Sisters In Islam. This was an uncomfortable, but productive element of my research. By having the opportunity to interview Ratna and Natasha who work for women’s organisations framed through Islamic principles, I was able to gain a better perspective of what was happening in women’s organisations in

⁵⁷ Elspeth Probyn, “Glass Selves: Emotions, Subjectivity, and the Research Project,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Self*, ed. Shaun Gallagher (2011): 685, doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199548019.003.0030.

Malaysia beyond IWRAW AP, and even found something deeper within myself as a conflicted Muslim woman. I realised that I had avoided Islamic women's organisations because of my unresolved religious background. In the introduction of her book *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil*, Katherine Bullock draws on her personal experience of converting to Islam and how this impacted her research. She speaks of her personal journey and its relevance in her research:

In 1991 I saw a news report on the television that showed Turkish women who were returning to the veil. I felt shocked and saddened for them. "Poor things," I thought, "they are being brainwashed by their culture." Like many Westerners, I believed that Islam oppressed women and that the veil was a symbol of their oppression. Imagine my surprise then, four years later, at seeing my own reflection in a store window, dressed exactly like those oppressed women. I had embarked on a spiritual journey during my Master's degree that culminated four years later in my conversion to Islam. The journey included moving from hatred of Islam, to respect, to interest, to acceptance.⁵⁸

Bullock's use of her personal narrative in her research is important in thinking about the changes within her relationship with religion and religious practices. Yet where she writes as a practicing Muslim woman at ease with her conversion, I write from the position as a sometimes-practicing Muslim woman, where my religious identity is still under construction.⁵⁹

Being confronted with Islam was made visible in my interview with Ratna who wore the headscarf. She brought me face-to-face with the visible gendered practice of veiling and the issue of religious identity that I had skirted around. She, like Natasha, used their religious identity in their work, which has impacted how I think about motivating factors in why women come to this work and why they remain in a sector that does not always look after them the way they look after others.

⁵⁸ Katherine Bullock, *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes* (VA: IIIT, 2010), XVIII.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, XVII.

Thesis structure

This thesis encapsulates the importance of women's experiences engaging in non-profit/NGO work. I use iconic feminist perspectives and interventions such as Hochschild's ideas on emotional labour and build on her work to include feminist epistemologies and feminist interventions on Mauss' gift exchange and Bourdieu's habitus to think about what the work means to the women in my study. Each chapter interweaves feminist writings and perspectives to unfold how women think about the greater identities in their work.

In Chapter One, I map the genealogy of women's organisations in Malaysia. I set the stage looking at contemporary women's organisations in Malaysia, in particular focusing on organisations, such as IWRAW AP and Sisters In Islam, and the histories that have shaped them. I draw on Michel Foucault's analysis on genealogy as a method to explore how colonial divide and rule policies left behind by the British brought about new challenges in governance in a post-independent Malaysia. I argue the ongoing class, ethnic and racial divisions in the country have impacted women, women's groups and women's organisations in Malaysia. My analysis examines how women's organisations are fraught with class, ethnic and racial tensions that have in turn shaped women's feminist activism.

Chapter Two takes feminism from the singular into the plural to highlight the importance in its multiplicity. This chapter provides a reading of feminist theory, drawing on Teresa de Lauretis' work on the subject of feminism to explore being both inside and outside the subject of feminism. This allows me a way to think through how women identify as feminists (or not) and in what spaces. The chapter captures how feminism is interpreted at both the individual and institutional levels in order to illustrate the experiences of the women working at Sisters In Islam and IWRAW AP. I argue their feminist position is blurred, intensified and complicated due to the merging of their personal and professional identities. I investigate what it means to work in women's human rights organisations that are framed from feminist perspectives, and how women find a sense of belonging in these spaces. I also concentrate on looking beyond Western perspectives of feminism to highlight the post-colonial context that is Malaysia and feminist discourses that have examined the post-colonial feminist subject.

Chapter Three takes the feminist slogan ‘the personal is political’ and re-energises it to capture how the personal is the professional for the women in my research. I illustrate the challenges of ‘good work’ and focus on how women’s feminist activism is bound up in their values and beliefs and altruism. As such, women have trouble distinguishing clear boundaries between their home life and work life.

Chapter Four follows and builds on the previous chapters to illustrate how continually working for others impacts the health of women in non-profit/NGO work. This chapter examines the repercussions of overwork on women’s physical, mental and emotional health. I return to Hochschild’s gendered analysis that considers women’s unpaid labour and how it is commercialised and build on this to include Marcel Mauss’ seminal work *The Gift* and gendered readings of his ideas to examine why women in this type of work offer their labour as a ‘gift’. This chapter also explores what kinds of agency are afforded to not only the women of IWRAW AP, but also more broadly women working in the non-profit/NGO sector.

Chapter Five examines how even ‘good work’ is grounded in economic realities of a changing NGO landscape. The current economic climate is hard for NGOs, especially NGOs like IWRAW AP and Sisters In Islam, which advocate for women’s human rights. How does securing funding affect the longevity of its work? Noticeably, there has been a shift from funding advocacy based organisations towards service based organisations. This shift towards service based organisations is founded on the notion of how effectively funds can be used by organisations and this is measured through concrete results that service based organisations must provide. I consider how this affects the workers of NGOs and the hiring practices of organisations and quality of workers.

The final chapter, Chapter Six, ties together the thesis from the perspective of the gendered habitus and women’s embodied feminist activism both personally and professionally. The final chapter examines the gendered and feminist reworkings of Bourdieu’s conceptions of the habitus and capital, and how the work also impacts the feeling body. The chapter also considers the intergenerational tensions in these working environments and the different relationships between women. In particular, I highlight the vulnerable positions of younger feminists who are still finding their footing and whose habitus are still being shaped.

The significance of research conducted on women's experiences in non-profit/NGO work, especially in the Southeast Asian context conveys voices of the unheard and often marginalised in research. Researchers are beginning to see the importance of aid and development workers, as this is a growing field of research. One of the major issues in the non-profit sector, especially for women, is the care that is involved in their work and that is lacking in their own lives. As health becomes more of a concern working in this sector, workers' experiences of exhaustion are increasing. This is a profession that asks workers to blur the boundaries of home and work and their personal morals and ethics, which factors into how they see themselves in their overall identities. In Malaysia, NGOs continue to operate under a code of silence, where workers often do not speak up to address their own care needs. This is one of the paradoxes of NGO work. At one level, the women in my research are dedicated to promoting women's rights and work to fight against discrimination and exploitation. At another level, this is what NGO workers experience in their workplaces. These spaces are the site for self-neglect which is perpetuated through mentalities such as 'good work' and 'working for others'. Despite the contradictions working in NGOs, the women in my research find satisfaction in their work and continue to work in conditions that promote practices of overwork. Calling for a change in workplace practice rather than a change in profession, the women in my research are aware of the challenges ahead of them where there are less numbers of women in the office who take on more tasks, where their time with loved ones is limited, and where their hard work fails to get recognised time after time. This is not a new revelation for women as women's labour, especially in the home, is often invisible; only when women engage in the workforce are they taken seriously and even this is limited.

Taking a gendered approach to non-profit/NGO work and one that centres on women's voices allows us to focus on professions that rely on gendered stereotypes, such as women as carers who are also responsible for emotion work. For the women in my study, they felt underappreciated in their work, and this is a growing concern, not only for them but also for the wider non-profit/NGO sector. Opening up the discussion of those who do the work and what it means to them from a gendered and especially feminist perspective focuses on why women continue to engage in work that takes on care roles from the home into the workplace, and what is expected of them as women. As the non-profit/NGO sector continues to change and rebrand itself towards an

increasingly corporate mentality, what does this mean for its workers? In particular, what sorts of tensions arise not only in individual experiences, but between women, and how do women cope with these challenges?

Chapter One – The history of contemporary women’s organisations in Malaysia

I didn’t see what the big deal was on working specifically with women’s human rights, but now I do, simply because [of] how ingrained the patriarchal norms and how society is. You realise the importance of having specific work on women’s human rights because until those structures and institutions are completely dismantled women’s human rights will always be relevant.

Dorathy began working as a program officer at International Women’s Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAW AP) in 2010. However, her NGO career started much earlier during the 1997/1998 *Reformasi* period, a volatile political time in Malaysia when civil society agencies protested the unfair firing of then Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. Dorathy relates *Reformasi* as her ‘political awakening’. She told me that the *Reformasi* movement showcased a lot of issues that for a very long time most Malaysians were afraid to voice because of the government’s repressive laws.

Dorathy recalls that as a student at the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) during the ‘reform’ movement, her lecturers would have discussions about the civil unrest and protests in class, and this also inspired her interest in getting involved in the non-profit/NGO sector. Her first job was with the *Tenaganita*, an organisation initially dedicated to migrant rights, but now a women’s organisation for workers’ rights. While Dorathy did not set out to work at IWRAW AP, she enjoys the work. Speaking about her friends in the corporate sector, she says, “they feel an alienation of who they think they should be or who they are, when I wonder why I do it, to a large extent, I am actually happy and the work I do reflects that.”

Dorathy is a long-time friend of mine. She helped me gain entry into Malaysian NGO circles, and introduced me to leading feminist activists who work at various women’s organisations in Malaysia. We both started our journey at IWRAW AP just months apart in 2010. She is a vibrant Indian Malaysian woman, who took an interest in mentoring me during my internship. When I returned to Malaysia in 2014 for research fieldwork and every subsequent trip thereafter, I saw Dorathy, and we would eat chilli

pan mee and talk about the ‘work’.⁶⁰ The ‘work’ for us in this context is everything about the non-profit/NGO sector, the changes we have seen, the challenges that persist for those engaging in it and what is happening in the Malaysian context of women’s organisations.

This chapter charts a history of contemporary Malaysian-based women’s organisations and how they have come to be. Drawing on Michel Foucault’s understanding of genealogy, most prominent in his texts *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality Volume 1* (1978), I map contemporary women’s movements and organisations in Malaysia from women’s participation in colonial resistance movements to more recent ideological and political movements, such as Islamic resurgence and universal human rights movements.⁶¹ I argue that women’s organisations in Malaysia have been built on structures embedded in class, racial, and ethnic tensions, most of which are rooted in a colonial divide and rule legacy. Despite this, women working in these organisations have found their sense of feminist belonging from their activism and in their identities founded in religion, class, ethnicity, and race.

Since its independence in 1957, Malaysia has seen new sets of challenges in its governance. This is in part due to leftover British colonial policies that used race as a category to divide populations for a capitalist-driven political economy. Weiss states:

By the time the British departed, they had done all they could to ensure that a team of race-based, moderate parties was prepared to take over, despite the fact that other alternatives had already represented themselves and continue to press for influence.⁶²

⁶⁰ Chilli pan mee is a spicy fried egg, pork noodle dish that is hard to find in Kuala Lumpur, because pork is considered *haram* (forbidden) in Islam. It can be found in the outskirts of the city, such as Subang, a predominantly ethnically Chinese area.

⁶¹ See also Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Penguin Books, 1978); and Michel Foucault, *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison* (London: Allen Lane, 1977).

⁶² Meredith Leigh Weiss, *Protest and Possibilities: Civil Society and Coalitions for Political Change in Malaysia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 53.

Malaysia's political context remains fraught with ethnic, racial and gender divisions. Notwithstanding this state of affairs in 2012, Prime Minister Najib Razak claimed "There is no need for a women's rights movement as we have from the start acknowledged equal rights for women."⁶³ From his speech given at the 50th National Women's Day celebration, Razak went as far to say "the success of Malaysian women is well known to the extent the men are said to be an endangered species."⁶⁴ His depiction of gender equality in Malaysia does not reflect women's everyday lived realities. For example, women remain underrepresented in the paid workforce. As of 2015, women make up 46.1% of the workforce.⁶⁵ Focusing on Malaysian-based women's organisations and the work they do allows us an entry point into the lives of those working in these organisations and how these workplaces continue to operate in various political climates that often favour patriarchal structures. To understand what has shaped women's feminist activism and the organisations they work for, it is important to investigate Malaysia's colonial and contemporary histories.

On genealogy and Malaysian-based women's organisations

Foucault's understanding of genealogy can be used to trace and draw out how the present relies on the past. This method seeks to understand the history of the present:

A genealogy should be seen as a kind of attempt to emancipate historical knowledges from that subjection, to render them, that is, capable of opposition

⁶³ Mohd Kamal bin Abdullah, "PM Najib: No need for women's rights movement in Malaysia," *Malaysians Must Know the TRUTH*, last modified 1 Oct. 2012, accessed October 23, 2016, <http://malaysiansmustknowthetruth.blogspot.com.au/2012/10/pm-najib-no-need-for-womens-rights.html>.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ United States Department of State, "Malaysia 2015 Human Rights Report," *Bureau of Democracy, Human rights and Labour*, accessed October 23, 2016, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/252989.pdf>. For a continued discussion on women's contribution and participation in the labour market, see also United Nations Development Programme, *Malaysia Human Development Report 2013: Redesigning an Inclusive Future* (Geneva: United Nations, 2014), xxi, 187-213.

and struggle against the coercion of a theoretical, unitary, formal and scientific discourse.⁶⁶

In the Foucauldian sense, genealogy strips away the conventionality of how historical events and moments are depicted. Foucault has a way of tracing history that uses particular events and historical developments that are not chronologically unified, but are multiple and discontinuous forms of knowledge. Elizabeth Stephens points out:

For Foucault, genealogy differs from traditional methods of historical inquiry in two key ways. The first is that a genealogy does not provide a linear or teleological narrative of historical events, nor does it concern itself with a search for origins. Instead, it is comprised of a series of ‘accidents’ and ‘deviations’.⁶⁷

Stephens concludes that a genealogy is a historical study that problematises the cohesion of its own object of study.⁶⁸ As it applies in this thesis, Foucault’s method of genealogy works both as a historical narrative, and one that allows for the entwining of ideological shifts that is encapsulated by Malaysia’s colonial histories to more recent Islamic resurgence and global/universal human rights discourses in the country.

Foucault’s work on genealogy, like much of his writing, is gender blind. Meaghan Morris highlights in *The Pirate’s Fiancée* that “any feminist drawn in to sending Love Letters to Foucault would be in no danger of reciprocation.”⁶⁹ Lois McNay also points out that his work is inherently masculinist, “The critique is one-sided, in that the subject has no density beyond that of an empty space or point of convergence for various relations of force.”⁷⁰ Despite the fact that “Foucault’s work is not the work of a ladies’ man,” his theorisations have been extensively used in feminist

⁶⁶ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* Michel Foucault, trans. Colin Gordon et al. (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980), 85. See also Barry Smart *Michel Foucault* (Sussex: Ellis Horwood Limited, 1985).

⁶⁷ Elizabeth Stephens, “Bad Feelings: An Affective Genealogy of Feminism,” *Australian Feminist Review* 30, no.85 (2015): 274. See also Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*. Trans. Robert Hurley, (New York: Penguin Books, 1978).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 274-275.

⁶⁹ Meaghan Morris, *The Pirate’s Fiancée* (London: Verso, 1988), 55.

⁷⁰ Lois McNay, *Foucault: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 165.

interventions and research.⁷¹ I am drawn to his sense of genealogy, as it offers a way to describe the complexities involved in the women's movement and women's organisations in Malaysia, where a linear historical analysis would not suffice. What makes Foucault's genealogy method appealing is its ability to weave through historical narratives and events that manifests in the present, but have been subjected to different conditions over time. Therefore, the product of ongoing ethnic, class, societal, and political tensions can be traced but not limited to Malaysia's colonial past and the legacy of the racially driven policies it left behind. The following section explores Malaysia's colonial encounters, sketching how colonial divide and rule policies impacted Malaysian women.

Malaysia's colonial encounters

Malacca is considered one of Malaysia's most historical states. Malacca was a significant and strategic location for trade and the movement of slaves and spices during colonialism. Its use as a port was integral to colonialists because it linked China to India and the near East. Malacca's strategic use as a port for trade would be occupied by many colonial rulers following the Portuguese. Succeeding the Portuguese colonial rule in Malaysia were the Dutch who rebuilt the city and employed it mostly as a military base to control the Straits of Malacca. Following the Dutch, the British took control of Malaysia, and unlike their predecessors who used local labour in their colonies, the British took a hands-on approach and influenced existing cultural and societal practices.⁷² The British were attracted to Malaysia because of the tin mines and to a lesser extent gold mines, but rubber soon became Malaya's staple export.⁷³ These industries required a non-local workforce that was decided by the British. Where the Dutch in Indonesia used the forced labour of the local Javanese population, the British imported their workers from India and China. The British thought that recruiting

⁷¹ Morris, *The Pirate's Fiancée*, 55.

⁷² Jamilah Ariffin, *Women and development in Malaysia* (Malaysia: Pelanduk Publications, 1992), 5.

⁷³ The term Malaya is sometimes used interchangeably with Malaysia when discussing the country's history and in particular Malaysia's colonial history. The significance of the word is rooted in pre-independent Malaysia, which implicates what is known as the geographical region of Peninsula Malaysia. Throughout British colonial rule Malaya took on different terminology. For example, when Peninsular Malaysia and surrounding territories unified under the Malaysian Union in 1946 it became known as the Federation of Malaya in 1948.

workers who were already familiar with colonial capitalist relations would ensure a more productive and adaptable workforce. This helped bolster a colonial rhetoric based on stereotypes of the local population. This colonial mentality used “the idea of the lazy native to justify compulsion and unjust practices in the mobilisation of labour in the colonies.”⁷⁴ The British thus coordinated, promoted and politicised ethnic divisions amongst dominated groups.

The negative portrayal of the local population by the British – that Malays were ‘traditional’ and living in archaic societies – had a twofold rationale. First, to ‘civilise’ the colonies under the guise of ‘the myth of the lazy native’ justified imported labour from other colonies. In this way, the British controlled the whole system of relations in Malaysia, particularly in economic life where they controlled plantations, mines, railways, engineering firms, and commercial houses.⁷⁵ Under British Malaysia there was an absence of nation-building and self-government, as there was little political room for local ethnic and racial groups to communicate with one another beyond the needs of daily life. This was of strategic importance to the British, because keeping different racial and ethnic groups from coming together enabled them to carry on with their racially driven division of labour. For example, the British kept the Malays in rural areas tying them to the land for rice production. The aim here was to keep Malays from modernising, leaving them behind in development processes and preventing them from forming any nationalist movements. This British strategy would come back to further exacerbate ethnic tensions between the Malays and the Chinese after Malaysia’s independence in 1957 leading up to the racial riots of 1969, which in turn fostered major policy reforms in the 1970s, to be explored later in this chapter.

In “The meaning of race in Malaysia” Sharmani Gabriel examines racial politics and discourses in Malaysia focusing on three principle frameworks. First, Gabriel explores state discourses focused on the racial paradigm of Malay, Chinese, Indian and

⁷⁴ Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native: A study of the image of the Malays, Filipinos and Javanese from the 16th to the 20th century and its function in the ideology of colonial capitalism* (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1977), 2.

⁷⁵ T.H. Silcock and E.K. Fisk, *The Political Economy of Independent Malaya: a case study in development* (London: Angus and Robertson LTD, 1963), 4. Referring to Malaya is a time in British colonial rule from the 18th to the 20th centuries under both direct and indirect control of a set of states on the Malay Peninsula and the island of Singapore before the Malayan Union was formed in 1946.

others that originated under British colonialism. Second, she argues academic discourses are epistemologically and ontologically based in colonialist knowledge production. Third, she examines the lived realities of individuals who are informed by dominant racial and ethnic discourses. Gabriel is interested in contextualising and articulating race in Malaysia in a way that articulates race to broader social structures, processes and possibilities. Race operates as a category of privilege and hierarchy, and in Malaysia, it is instrumental in perpetuating ethnic tensions. Gaik Khoo argues, “Race relations in Malaysia are complicated by policies that favour the majority of Malays under a discourse of Malay primacy and the privileging of Islam as the religion of the majority ethnic group.”⁷⁶ By setting up racial divisions in Malaysia the British built a political economy that continues even in Malaysia’s post-colonial imagining of the nation and its identity.⁷⁷ Gabriel argues:

Viewing race as a colonialist discourse is to also foreground the political economy of race. The British administrators introduced the notion of race as the primary identity to cater to their vested economic interests in Malaya; race was used to determine people’s place and function in the colonial economy.⁷⁸

During World War Two, the Japanese disrupted the British racial order in the political economy. The Japanese closed tin mines and stopped other economic sites from functioning, thus changing the structure of British colonial rule by offering support to Malay populations. Jamilah Ariffin explains:

To the Malays, the Japanese gave the impression that they would restore the authority that was taken from them by the British. This encouraged many Malay Nationalist movements and saw the formation of societies such as the Kesatuan Melayu Muda (KMM). The Chinese were, however, treated badly by the Japanese. This was due to the Japanese’ resentment towards the local Malayan Chinese’ formal support for China during the Sino-Japan War. As a result, many

⁷⁶ Gaik Cheng Khoo, “Introduction: theorizing different forms of belonging in a cosmopolitan Malaysia,” *Citizenship Studies* 18, no.88 (2014): 791, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2014.964542>.

⁷⁷ Sharmani P. Gabriel, “The meaning of race in Malaysia: Colonial, post-colonial and possible new conjunctures,” *Ethnicities* 15, no.6 (2015): 787, doi: 10.1177/1468796815570347.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 783.

Chinese joined the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA). The Indians were generally left alone but many were enlisted to build the "death railway" in Burma or join the Indian National Army to fight with the Japanese in Burma.⁷⁹

The Japanese rule may have been short lived, but this was an important period for the Malays. Women used this moment to their advantage in colonial rule. After the Japanese surrendered in World War Two, this began a new era for Malay women in education, employment, migration and activism. As noted by Ng, Mohamad and beng hui "The change of rulers, from British to Japanese, had a significant symbolic value. It awakened the local population to the possibility of their own liberation."⁸⁰ From this point on, anti-colonial movements, led by the Malays, helped Malaysia achieve its independence from the British. However, Malay nationalism would also further ethnic tensions and divisions in Malaysia.

Women's roles in resistance movements: Towards an independent Malaysia

In December 1945 until late 1946, after three years of Japanese rule, the British sought to reassert their control by unifying Malayan states. Their aim was to set up a government in the name of the British Crown. This would mean that Malay rulers – sultans who had kept their positions during colonial rule – would cede their sovereignty. Local Malay communities saw this as a problem, because sultans had been "a crucial element of Malay communities."⁸¹ Culturally, sultans embodied long traditions of temporal and spiritual authority in Malay religious traditions.⁸² Hearing of the British plan to remove these figureheads, the Malays took political action and formed the United Malay Nationalist Organisation (UMNO), which mobilised both men and women. Women were an integral part of UMNO protests and rallies. Women, such as

⁷⁹ Ariffin, *Women and development in Malaysia*, 7.

⁸⁰ Cecilia Ng, Maznah Mohamad and tan beng hui, *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Malaysia: An Unsung (R)evolution* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 17.

⁸¹ Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare: The Malayan Emergency 1948-1960* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish International, 2004), 23.

⁸² Ibid.

Zaharah Binti Abdullah, are remembered for their stance: “We will not agree to the Malaysian Union whatever happens. We make our protest strongly. We will work with our men to regain our rights.”⁸³ Abdullah and many other Malay women were integral members in resistance movements. As one British colonial officer who witnessed the protests wrote, “The most remarkable thing of all – was the part the women were playing in this great national movement.”⁸⁴ The Chinese and Indians were excluded from UMNO movements, which were predominantly led by Malay nationalists.

Upper class Malay women were allowed (with permission from their families) to engage in activism and resistance movements. In many cases, women leading the campaigns were the wives and daughters of political leaders.⁸⁵ While Malay women could take part in resistance campaigns, they also faced internal ethnic and racial discrimination based on their gender. Women censored their activism when they were perceived as overstepping patriarchal structures, which still had a strong hold in Malaysia.⁸⁶ Women were only meant to fill complementary roles to men in these movements. Seeking their own undertaking based on gender, Malay women grouped together to form the Malay radical women’s movement Angkatan Wanita Sedar (AWAS).

AWAS emerged post-World War Two as a left wing of the Malay Nationalist Party. It formed in 1946 to promote Malay women’s rights. It specifically aimed to unify Malay women, but had built alliances with non-Malay organisations. Following World War Two, the rise in women’s associations reached all races and ethnicities. The objectives of early Chinese and Indian women’s organisations centred on non-political activities. For Indian and Chinese women, this included teaching skills, such as cooking, needlework, and religious classes.⁸⁷ Chinese women’s organisations involved Buddhist nunneries and vegetarian houses. In 1917, prior to the associations formed

⁸³ Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, “Against Multiple Hegemonies: Radical Malay Women in Colonial Malaya,” *Journal of Social History* 47, no.1 (2013): 154-156.

⁸⁴ Aljunied, “Against Multiple Hegemonies,” 156.

⁸⁵ Noraini Abdulla, “Women’s Participation in the Political Development Process in Malaysia,” In *Readings on Women and Development in Malaysia*, ed., Jamilah Ariffin (Selangor: MPH Group Publishing, 1994), 101.

⁸⁶ Aljunied, “Against Multiple hegemonies,” 156-157.

⁸⁷ Ariffin, *Women and development in Malaysia*, 8.

after World War Two, the Chinese Ladies Association of Singapore was formed for the general improvement of young ladies.⁸⁸ Dancz writes, “Classes were held in cooking, pastry-making, sewing and embroidery. Its greatest achievement was permitting Chinese women to interact with each other and share common interests.”⁸⁹ Dancz’s research describes the activities women engaged in, but does not discuss if these organisations were politically motivated. Similarly, in Indian associations, the aim to fulfil a social need concentrated on providing recreational facilities for their members, and on celebrating Indian festival days.⁹⁰ Voluntary associations and AWAS were racially and ethnically based, however AWAS took part in nationalist movements against the British, unlike the Chinese and Indian voluntary organisations. AWAS was able to draw on their Malayness in their campaigning for the rights of Malay women. As Aljunied argues, using their identity as the basis of their activism, they were also “mired in the ethnic frame of reference that was institutionalised by the British.”⁹¹ The early ethnic distinctions in women’s movements and organisations came to be structures of the bedrock of women’s organisations. Cemented in women’s early activism are racial and ethnic hierarchies inherited from colonial divide and rule policies.

When Chinese and Indian women were politically active, it was in relation to their ‘home’ countries. This meant their political engagement was located in their involvement with national resistance groups. Chinese women joined anarchist movements and many more became members of the Communist Party.⁹² Indian women residing in Malaysia also engaged in Indian resistance movements. In 1941, Chandra Bose formed the Indian Independence Movement (IIM) in India and Indian women in Malaysia were recruited to be part of the Rhani Jansi Regiment of the Indian Army.⁹³ Chinese and Indian women’s citizenship in Malaysia under British rule during the

⁸⁸ Virginia Dancz, *Women and Party Politics in Peninsular Malaysia* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1987), 49.

⁸⁹ Dancz, *Women and Party Politics in Peninsular Malaysia*, 49.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁹¹ Aljunied, “Against Multiple Hegemonies,” 160.

⁹² Mazna Mohamad, “The Politics of Gender, Ethnicity, and Democratization in Malaysia: Shifting Interests and Identities,” In *Gender Justice, Development, and Rights*, eds. Maxine Molyneux and Shahra Razavi (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2002), 353-355.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

nationalist uprising “was an ambiguous notion.”⁹⁴ Mohamad states, “Among Chinese women, it was their schooling experience, moulded after the system in China, which played a pivotal role in influencing their specific political involvements... Some of the most active Indian women in the country also joined political movements engaged in struggles in India.”⁹⁵ This ethnic divide of women’s political activism carried through in nationalist politics following independence in the formation of political parties. The National Council for Women’s Organisations (NCWO) was set up as a non-partisan organisation (although it is connected to governing bodies) to combat political and organisational divisions between women to include a multi-ethnic collaboration.

Post-independence Malaysia: Race and ethnicity-driven policies

The NCWO was formed in 1962 and worked to overcome the segregation of ethnicities in women’s early activism and political engagement. It served “to act as a consultative and advisory body to raise the status of women and their participation in national development.”⁹⁶ Its vision to promote a society free from discrimination, meant inclusivity at all levels, where women could enjoy equality through the promotion of their human rights. Many of the organisation’s early leaders were elected because they represented women from differing ethnic classes. This was in part due to the ethnic inequalities represented in ethnic-based political parties that remained divided in achieving advancements for women across race and ethnic boundaries.

In its beginnings, the NCWO focused on employment, more specifically on women’s unequal pay. The organisation sought legislative reform for equal pay, women’s equal access to public service jobs and marital rights.⁹⁷ On paper, the NCWO worked to overcome embedded structures of racial and ethnic divisions to promote cross-party collaboration among women and politicians. In theory, the NCWO worked to cut across ethnic, racial and class distinctions, but in practice the organisation only

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ National Council of Women’s Organisations Malaysia, “Vision/Mission,” *NCWO*, accessed December 10, 2016, <http://www.ncwomalaysia.com/>.

⁹⁷ Mohamad, “The Politics of Gender, Ethnicity, and Democratization in Malaysia,” 354-357.

engaged in selective campaigns. The NCWO avoided issues that were considered controversial, which included reforms in Sharia law. The organisation shied away from internal Malay gender inequalities. The non-confrontational approach was also reflected in the ‘equal rights for equal wages’ campaign, which was not extended to industrial workers, but focused on white-collar professional workers.⁹⁸ NCWO campaigns focused on women from economically and educationally privileged classes, which left little room or campaign attention for working class women. As a result, the NCWO did not fulfil its goals of bridging ethnic divisions amongst women but continued to perpetuate divides through its use of colonial logic that promoted a hierarchy through an ethno-racial lens. This mentality would not only continue in both contemporary women’s movements and organisations, but also in state-sanctioned policies that increased Malay women’s participation in the public spheres through affirmative action policies.

Aihwa Ong highlights how race in Malaysia “has been based on a careful demographic balancing of the ‘races’ (*bangsa*): Malays, who are all Muslim, and the predominantly non-Muslim, Chinese and Indians.”⁹⁹ Ong’s work examines ethno-racial differences and differential treatment of populations that have dictated the lives of Malaysians past and present. She establishes that “segments of the population are differently disciplined and given differential privileges and protections, in relation to their varying participation in globalised market activities.”¹⁰⁰ Drawing attention to the ethno-racial hierarchies in Malaysia, she refers to institutionalised preferences for the Malays and indigenous groups, which make up the majority population of Malaysia:

These gradations of governing may be in a continuum, but they overlap with pre-formed racial, religious and gender hierarchies, and further fragment citizenship for people who are all, nominally speaking, citizens of the same country.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Ibid., 357-358.

⁹⁹ Aihwa Ong, “State versus Islam: Malay families, women’s bodies, and the body politics in Malaysia,” *American ethnologist* 17, no.2 (1990): 259, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/stable/645079>.

¹⁰⁰ Aihwa Ong, “Graduated Sovereignty in Southeast Asia,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 17, no.4 (2000): 65.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 62.

The institutionalised hierarchies she refers to are a part of what Ong calls *graduated sovereignty*, which has been taken up to examine institutionalised privilege in Malaysia and elsewhere in East and Southeast Asia. Ong has written extensively on the divisions and prioritisations of populations. She is an expatriate of Malaysia, born in Penang to a family of Chinese descent. Her 2006 book *Neoliberalism as Exception* explores state sovereignty, citizenship, nation building and rights. She describes Malaysia and citizen benefits based on race and ethnicity:

Special programs have awarded shares in state-held trusts, government contracts, business credit, scholarships, business licenses, university admissions, civil employment and jobs in large firms to Malay subjects. This, in effect, has created the world's first affirmative action system tied exclusively to ethnicity. The pastoral power that has been employed on behalf of the Malays has unevenly favoured the middle and upper classes, and Malays as a community enjoy more rights, benefits and claims than non-Malays.¹⁰²

From the 1970s, through the Fourth New Economic Policy the government sought to reduce imbalances in ownership assets and wealth and provided assistance to Malays and other indigenous groups.¹⁰³ James Chin writes:

Malaysia's affirmative action program was supposed to right a historical wrong. In 1969, deadly racial riots broke out between Malays and Chinese in several cities, and the country was placed under emergency rule. UNMO blamed British colonialists for unrest, claiming that until Malaya's independence in 1957 they had sidelined Malays and favoured Chinese in the economy.¹⁰⁴

Chin's piece is directed at the ethno-racial tensions informed by policies to uplift Malays where the UNMO justified its affirmative action policies that blamed British colonial rule for ongoing ethnic and racial tensions in Malaysia. The deadly riots were initiated on May 13, 1969, three days after the general election and just twelve years

¹⁰² Ibid., 59.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 60.

¹⁰⁴ James Chin, "The Costs of Malay Supremacy," *The New York Times*, last modified August 27, 2015, accessed March 23, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/28/opinion/the-costs-of-malay-supremacy.html?_r=0.

after Malaysia's Independence. Bloody violence between Chinese and Malay groups spread across the Malayan peninsula with the exact numbers killed still unknown. The riots protested Malay poverty, the majority of whom were peasants and forced the government to rapidly adjust the relations between the state and the races. In this way, the state focused its attention on the health and security of the Malays who institutionally became the *bumiputras*, translated as 'sons of the soil'. By implementing policies in the 1970s to accommodate the *bumiputras* (Malays and indigenous groups), Malays were granted economic and additional privileges over ethnic Chinese, Indians and other minorities. These policies narrowed the gap between the Malays and the Chinese, to counter colonial policies that tied the Malays to the land and to advance their positions as modern and urban. Yet, as Ong argues, these policies have done little to help poor Malays and have only benefited the wealthier classes and educated Malays.

Primarily geared to build a Malay middle class, the affirmative action policies enforced an increase in employment and ownership of share capital. The New Economic Policy (NEP) increased the Malay controlled equity capital from 2.4% to 30%. The NEP also inspired the state to administer a series of five-year plans, targeted at Malays to become capitalists, professionals and workers who would then become modern citizens.¹⁰⁵ For example, state intervention in the peasant economy generated a steady growth of Malays into the city. A significant number of those who migrated were young women. Women's economic participation was not intentional, but a result of transnational corporations seeking to exploit women's labour in electronic factories. The demand for women's labour in foreign manufacturing plants shifted the state's trajectory to create a Malay male working class. These labour-intensive outposts became special economic zones, and were the sites of racial privilege, as corporations were legally obliged to reserve 30% representation for Malays.

State intervention through the NEP generated growth in the peasant sector that saw a gradual influx of Malays into the cities, most of whom were young women. These women worked in urban free trade zones for large subsidiaries of transnational corporations. By the late-1970s, approximately 80,000 of peasant girls between the ages

¹⁰⁵ Ong, "State versus Islam," 259.

of 16 and their mid-20s had been transformed into industrial labourers.¹⁰⁶ Known as ‘the working daughters’ this introduced another important division of labour in the household. Women’s entry into the paid workforce changed the gendered dynamic of a predominantly male-centred public sphere. In the household, brothers of ‘the working daughters’ saw this as an opportunity to selfishly hold onto their paychecks for individual wealth. Therefore, ‘the working daughters’ were burdened with financially supporting the household.

Women’s participation in special economic sectors played a significant role in women’s emancipation through financial gains that shifted the gender division of labour, challenging dominant patriarchal norms. This was a significant moment in Malay history, as women had the money and social freedom to experiment with a new sense of identity outside of the home, where they could define themselves through their work.¹⁰⁷ This newfound economic emancipation also led to the exploitation of women’s labour. Chandra Talpade Mohanty observes:

Ong’s work illustrates the embodiment of sexist, racist stereotypes in the recruitment of young Malay village women into factory work, and delineates factors pertaining to their subjectivities. Thus, Malay women face economic exploitation, sexual harassment, and various levels of discipline and surveillance as workers.¹⁰⁸

For the Malaysian state, women’s participation in the workforce worked on two fronts. First, Malay women were economically contributing to the economy, which followed the state’s desire to promote Malaysia as a modernising country. Second, these women transgressed societal, religious and cultural norms. The state was faced with the problem of keeping women as good economic contributors, but also keeping them as good wives and mothers. It was at this pivotal point during Malaysia’s economic surge

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 265. See also, Aihwa Ong, *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987). In an ethnographic account Ong explores in depth Malay women workers in Japanese factories. She argues these women are caught between their culture and industrial production.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 73.

that then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad ran a state wide anti-Western political campaign emphasising the need for ‘Asian Values’, which contradicted his initiatives to economically modernise Malaysia with foreign investment.

Enter ‘Asian Values’

The political ideology of ‘Asian Values’ was used to unite Southeast Asian nations. After achieving independence, post-colonial countries in Asia formed alliances and agreements to create an Asian identity. Leading the charge were former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad and former Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew. Their goal was to position Asia in opposition to the West. Originating in the 1980s, ‘Asian Values’ was a campaign to oppose Western individualism by promoting communitarian collectivism of social interests.¹⁰⁹ For Mohamad and Yew, ‘Asian Values’ promoted ideals of harmony over personal freedom, valuing respect for authority and strong leadership, a strong attachment to family and a complementary set of gender relations. Chua Beng-Huat states, “Each of these countries has a place, an idea of communitarianism within the respective formal national ideology that seeks to project this idea onto the body politic. This has enabled each of the political leaders to stress the communitarian ethic of his respective culture.”¹¹⁰ The discourse surrounding ‘Asian Values’ was based in regional unity but with nationalist characteristics. This enabled Southeast Asian countries to unite under its larger Asian identity, but at the national level, local racial and ethnic hierarchies and categorisations remained.

The importance of the rise of ‘Asian Values’ in my research is how it was used to control women’s bodies. It aimed to confine women’s roles to the private sphere complementing men’s roles in the public spheres. The moral project of the ‘Asian Values’ discourse was quickly reframed ‘Asian Family Values’, which saw the Asian family as in crisis. It harnessed concerns about families and marriages in trouble, divorce, deviant youth, transgressive gender and sexual identities, crime and child

¹⁰⁹ Maila Stivens, “‘Family values’ and Islamic revival: Gender, rights and state moral projects in Malaysia,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 29 (2006): 356, doi: 10.1016/j.wsif.2006.05.007.

¹¹⁰ Chua Beng-Huat, “‘Asian-Values’ Discourse and the Resurrection of the Social,” *Positions: East Asia cultures critique* 7.2 (1999): 576, <http://muse.jhu.edu.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au>.

abuse.¹¹¹ The state moral project was cemented in Islamic values that tied the family and gender relations to wider global contexts, but remained patriarchal in its gender discrimination against women.¹¹²

‘Family development’ strategies aimed to regulate women’s bodies. In Malaysia, this meant that ‘the working daughters’ would stay home if their husbands could afford it, to raise children and take care of the home. Even for the poor, the ideal remained, ensuring an unattainable goal for policy and thus ideological repetition. In an official capacity, the state controlled the private sphere and this was enmeshed in two processes. First, the social construction of gender and the family is always class-specific in its effects. Second, among the middle class, conservative ideologies concerned with preserving this class privilege linked the privatisation of female sexuality under a male authority to benefit state social order and the body politic.¹¹³ Ong argues “The consequence of this struggle of capitalist state versus Islamic *umma* has been an intensification of gender inequality in Malay society.”¹¹⁴ Wider state ideologies imposed nationalist Islamic rhetoric that divided groups of women by interfering in the private spheres. Islamic revivalism in Malaysia followed the Islamic movements from Arab countries:

These movements strive to ‘Islamize’ society by imposing a collective enforcement of Islamic public morals. They seek to organize (or reorganize) the practices of social life, including the minute details of family life, through the implementation of what they deem as ‘truly Islamic’ or ‘authentic Islamic’ values. Their targets for this project of ‘Islamization’ are first and foremost women – women’s rights and status in the family and society – and women’s bodies.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Stevens, “‘Family values’ and Islamic revival,” 355.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ong, “State versus Islam,” 272.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Norani Othman, Zainah Anwar and Zaitun Mohamed Kasim, “Malaysia: Islamisation, Muslim politics and state authoritarianism,” in *Muslim Women and the Challenge of Islamic Extremism*, ed. Norani Othman (Malaysia: SIS Forum, 2013), 91.

Islam in Malaysia was no longer a local culture and tradition, but replaced with an ideological and ‘Arabised’ Islamic identity.¹¹⁶ Islamisation initiatives saw Islam as the solution to a better society freed from the problems of contemporary society and Western influences. This enabled *Dakwah* movements to gain momentum in Malaysia. Mazna Mohamad argues, “When Malays reconstituted their identities to stamp their exclusivity and separateness from non-Malays, Islam was used to redefine a new identity.”¹¹⁷ Using Islam in this way also combatted cultural connotations left over from British colonialism of Malays as inadequate and lazy. The impact of Islamic resurgence movements in Malaysia from the 1970s into the 1980s involved the politics of culture, religion, identity and nationalism that intertwined the relationship between state and religion.

The colonial legacy of divide and rule via ethnicity and race continues to govern the country today, which has also conflated race, ethnicity and religion through categorisations of the Malays, the Chinese and the Indians. Here we can begin to see the genealogical roots of present day conflicts. The ongoing racial and ethnic tensions in Malaysia cannot be traced to a single origin, but are located in how colonial policies have been taken up in post-Independent Malaysian politics and policies. Contemporary Islamic resurgence movements that transpired in the 1970s onwards furthered tensions between races and ethnicities. Therefore, the repercussions of Malaysia’s colonial history, coupled with wider political and religious global movements, furthered racial and ethnic tensions in the country. Tracing these political and ideological shifts in Malaysia’s history “[r]ejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies. [Opposing] itself to the search for ‘origins’.”¹¹⁸ The aim of this chapter then, is not to search for the origins of contemporary women’s movements and organisations, but how they have been built on existing racial and ethnic divisions.

¹¹⁶ Norani Othman, “Muslim women and the challenge of Islamic fundamentalism/extremism: An overview of Southeast Asian Muslim women’s struggle for human rights and gender equality,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 29 (2006): 343, <http://dx.doi.org.exproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/10.1016/j.wsif.2006.05.008>.

¹¹⁷ Mazna Mohamad, “The Politics of Gender, Ethnicity, and Democratization in Malaysia,” 357.

¹¹⁸ Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 77.

Where women and women's groups were concerned, family laws that proved problematic to Muslim women led to the formation of organisations such as Sisters In Islam. The organisation began with a group of women in 1987 who questioned and opposed the 1984 legislation of Islamic Family Laws. Academics, journalists, activists and other women seeking change wanted to read the Quran for themselves, especially as it related to women's oppression.¹¹⁹ Starting as a reading group, "They began to meet every week to study the Quran closely, especially verses used to justify domestic violence and gender equality in general."¹²⁰ Opening up women's groups and organisations to Islam saw a continuation of remaining racial and ethnic hierarchies left behind by the British that was also influenced by global Islamic movements, constructing Malayness through race, ethnicity and religion. Islamic influence was also bolstered by students returning from studies overseas, where many had become *dakwah* leaders who opposed the newly economically successful Malays and their 'nouveau-riches' lifestyle. Othman, Anwar and Kasim point out:

What began as the Islamization of society was transformed into a radical political movement with the return of Malaysian students (from Britain and the United States) who were exposed to the political Islam of the Muslim Brotherhood (Egypt) and *Jamaati Islami* (Pakistan). Their unambiguous struggle for an Islamic state and their denunciation of the secular, Westernized governments in Muslim-dominated countries provided a powerful ideological appeal to the young uprooted Malaysian students studying in the West.¹²¹

Using the Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) as the political party of their choosing, *dakwah* leaders helped to fuel radical changes in Malaysia. PAS is known for its conservative views on Islam and has a strong Malay following. The UMNO's position on Islam is through its 'modern' approach to Islam by introducing Islam-based banking, insurance, tertiary education, and legislation. In efforts to maintain its political control in Malaysia, UMNO have implemented various Islamisation policies and programs. In 1982, it introduced and amended Islamic laws. According to Othman, Anwar and

¹¹⁹ Sisters In Islam, "The SIS Story," <http://www.sistersinislam.org.my/>.

¹²⁰ Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "New Feminist Voices in Islam," *BARAZA!* No. 4 (2010): 3-4.

¹²¹ Othman, Anwar and Kasim, "Malaysia: Islamisation, Muslim politics and state authoritarianism," 85.

Kasim, “PAS’ conservatism, however, does not suggest that UMNO is somehow the more progressive party...The laws passed under the UMNO-led government have manifested themselves as only mildly less oppressive and anti-women than those of PAS.”¹²² Both PAS and UMNO favour the Malay class and have used their political platforms to influence their particular brands of Islam.

Towards the end of the 1980s some women’s and feminist groups began to incorporate Islamic principles and interpretations of the Quran in their work. The network called Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) initiated a global project of feminist dialogue and engagement with Islam. Organisations, such as the Women’s Aid Organization (WAO), the Women’s Crisis Centre (WCC), Women’s Development Collective (WDC), All Women’s Action Society (AWAM) and the already mentioned Sisters In Islam, used Islam to frame their organisations as seeking to reinterpret Islam from a feminist viewpoint.¹²³ One of the major aims of the integration of Islam into women’s organisations was to “keep clear of secular feminist discourses and organisations.”¹²⁴ There were clear signs of the emergence of a new consciousness and a gender discourse that is feminist in its aspiration and demands, but Islamic in its language and sources of legitimacy. Some versions of this new discourse came to be labelled ‘Islamic feminism’.¹²⁵ When the government implemented new Islamic family laws in 1987, Muslim women in Malaysia did not turn their backs on Islam, but used this as an opportunity to unite under Islamic feminism. This would prove difficult, as many of the women working and leading these organisations were implicated in universal discourses of women’s human rights, having attended global women’s conferences or receiving tertiary educational opportunities overseas. These women were educated, professional Muslim women who were still benefiting from state institutionalised affirmative action policies. Ng et al. suggest, “Even the violence against women (VAW) issue did not provide enough of a bridge to bring middle-class Islamic women and feminist groups together.”¹²⁶ Also contributing to the dichotomy

¹²² Ibid., 87.

¹²³ Mohamad, “The Politics of Gender, Ethnicity, and Democratization in Malaysia,” 363.

¹²⁴ Ng, Mohamad and beng hui, *Feminism and the Women’s Movement in Malaysia*, 29.

¹²⁵ Mir-Hosseini, “New Feminist Voices in Islam,” 3.

¹²⁶ Ng, Mohamad and beng hui, *Feminism and the Women’s Movement in Malaysia*, 29.

between the Islamic and the universal were the global Islamic revivalist movements that called for a hyper-ethnicised feminine identity.

To rebuild the Malay-Muslim identity, the ideal Malay Muslim woman “sought a psychological as well as pragmatic rationale to justify their choice of clothes, lifestyle and social behaviour.”¹²⁷ Furthermore, the project also aimed to dismantle ideas of a universalised woman who was a non-Muslim or perceived Western in her ideologies and beliefs. At this time many Muslim women returned to or took up veiling practices to signify their religious piety. Maila Stivens writes “[The] rivalry among Islamization projects have resulted in an intensification of Malay gender difference, segregation and inequality.”¹²⁸ This rivalry produced contradictory ideological convergence around gender, and most relevant to the Asian Values discourses, gender and the family unit.

Unity in diversity: The Violence Against Women campaign

Clearly NCWO failed to bridge racial and ethnic divisions among women. In the 1980s and into the 1990s, women’s groups and organisations tried again to unite under the issue of violence against women (VAW). Major women’s organisations formed alliances between the Women’s Crisis Centre (WCC), Women’s Development Collective (WDC), and All Women’s Action Society (AWAM). Many of the women working in these organisations were middle class, urban women who often received tertiary education in the West. Ng, Mohamad and beng hui describe the Joint Action Group (JAG) against VAW coalition:

A group of about 20 women aged 20 and 30 came together in Petaling Jaya, Selangor, to discuss issues related to the status of women in Malaysia, as well as the women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Some of the women had just returned from studies abroad and been exposed to various social justice movements such as the anti-Vietnam war and civil rights movement; others had

¹²⁷ Ibid., 23.

¹²⁸ Stivens, “‘Family values’ and Islamic revival,” 356.

been involved in different causes locally. All had the common desire to improve the lives of women in Malaysia.¹²⁹

Initially, when women's organisations aligned over the issue of VAW, many of the organisations functioned as shelters for women suffering domestic abuse and these spaces served as sites for counselling, legal assistance and advocacy. In the mid-1980s, the media's involvement helped women in the VAW campaign. In particular, campaigns dedicated to fight rape, such as the Citizens Against Rape (CAR) campaign began to gain traction. This was in response to many gruesome rape-murders of children. In 1987, nine-year-old girl Ang Mei Hong was raped and brutally murdered on her way home from buying breakfast nearby. This shocking case was used to accelerate the government's response to women's issues.¹³⁰ In 1989, the Malaysian Government enacted a penal code specifically relating to rape. The CAR campaign was short-lived and resulted in repressive state interventions that saw the jailing of women activists who were accused of being Marxists working to overthrow the state. Having women's voices heard and having action taken in support of women was a small success.¹³¹

Influence of international and global women's movements

Global conferences on women in the 1980s had been a factor in Malaysian women's movements and their early beginnings. For example, the 1985 Third World Women's Conference in Nairobi, Kenya resulted in the Malaysian Government adopting strategies from the conference. At world conferences, both at the state and individual level (through women's experiences), women's human rights campaigns gained exposure in Malaysia and put women's issues on the map. For instance, JAG-VAW used the already mentioned slogan "the personal is political" in many of their workshops. This feminist catchphrase was adopted to form collective decision-making processes that would unite women from not only Western and Asian contexts at the

¹²⁹ Ng, Mohamad and beng hui, *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Malaysia*, 43.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 44.

¹³¹ Ibid., 70.

global level, but could also work at the local level bridging disparities between differing classes, races and ethnicities of women.

The establishment of contemporary women's organisations in Malaysia is closely tied to world women's conferences. One of the first established units under the Ministry of Women, Family and Community, the Unit of Women's Affairs (HAWA) was formed in 1983 after the Second World Conference. After the Third World Women's Conference in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985, the Malaysian Government adopted seven of the eight 'Forward Looking Strategies' resulting from the conference with future goals to enact the National Policy on Women in 1990.¹³² From both the top down approach by the government and the bottom up approach of women's groups, women's rights were becoming an area of concern in Malaysia. Universal feminist ideologies are often pitted against Islamic frameworks and this friction is not only implicated in women's rights, but also in wider political, economic and global debates on Islam and the West.¹³³ Using the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) vision as the international bill of rights for women, the United Nations codified gender rights, which play a major role for the women in my research. Women's organisations, such as IWRAW AP, are framed through the convention and use it in all of its training and programs, highlighting the international appeal of the organisation, and its roots in a universal approach to women's rights. Working from an Islamic position, while still using CEDAW, organisations such as Sisters In Islam also use the convention as a strategy to hold Malaysia accountable for the discrimination against women, in particular removing its reservations on the articles pertaining to marriage and family.

World conferences dedicated to women were double-edged. On the one hand, through gaining respect from the international community, the Malaysian Government

¹³² Sumayyah Amar, "Feminism Movement in Malaysia Ensnare the Future of the Country's Women and Children," *The Khilafah*, last modified February 23, 2015, accessed July 17, 2016, <http://www.khilafah.com/feminism-movement-in-malaysia-ensnares-the-future-of-the-country-s-women-and-children>. Since the 1990s, the Malaysian Government has signed several international agreements to improve women's rights and has attempted to integrate these into national policies, but progress remains stagnant. For more on this, see also: Sisters In Islam, "Closing the Gender Gap in *The Star*," *Sisters In Islam*, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.sistersinislam.org.my/news.php?item.775.6>.

¹³³ See also Benjamin R. Barber's *Jihad vs. McWorld: Terrorism's Challenge to Democracy* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001).

became more active in taking seriously women's rights. On the other hand, this increased tensions between universal feminist approaches to women's rights and 'indigenous' frameworks, such as Islamic feminist approaches to women's rights, which coincidentally also travelled to Malaysia through Islamisation movements from the Middle East. Ideologically, Islamic feminism and universal feminism were pitted against each other in Malaysia to form a national identity reflected in political agendas, such as 'Asian Values' discourses and Islamic resurgence movements, to control women's bodies. International approaches to women's rights and 'global sisterhood' movements proved controversial to the diversities of women represented under this alliance.

Contemporary women's organisations in Malaysia do not fit neatly into an either universal or particular categorisation or a linear history of existence, but are representative of a discontinuous and unsteady lineage. Organisations such as Sisters In Islam, which began as a reading group in the late-1980s and officially became a women's organisation in the early-1990s, framed itself through Islam responding to Islamisation movements and new Islamic laws of the government. Malaysian feminist activist Zainah Anwar of Sisters In Islam and Musawah sought to open up the ways in which women could engage with Islam. Returning to the organisation's work, Sisters In Islam promotes the idea that both men and women are equal under Islam, that men do not have the right to beat their wives and that polygamy is not an inherent right of Islam.¹³⁴ Sisters In Islam is also affiliated with international organisations and global partners and engages in the United Nations treaty body reviews, such as CEDAW sessions and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process. While their work focuses on Islamic law and women's rights, the organisation uses both the universal human rights discourses embedded in the United Nations conventions in addition to re-interpretation of Islamic holy texts such as the Quran and Hadith. In the 1990s, Sisters In Islam, along with other national-level women's organisations in Malaysia, turned towards using Islam as a tool in their work. As Teresa de Lauretis argues the subject of

¹³⁴ Layali Eshqaidef, "Mapping the History and Development of Islam and Feminism," *BARAZA!* No.6 (2010): 8-9.

feminism is “not unified but rather multiple, and not so much divided as contradicted.”¹³⁵

Conclusion

This chapter has mapped the history of contemporary Malaysian women’s organisations. As Dorathy began this chapter with the importance of women’s human rights and the larger feminist project for women’s organisations, she also lives the day-to-day realities of negotiating her feminist identity working at IWRAW AP. She is faced with working from a United Nations codified lens of women’s rights in the Malaysian context as an Indian Malaysian woman. This becomes difficult for her and many of the women in my study, as women’s organisations in Malaysia have divided themselves along the lines of race, ethnicity and religion. This stems from Malaysia’s colonial history, when women’s unequal participation in resistance movements and women’s early activism to fight against British colonial rule signalled the beginnings of ethno-racial divisions amongst women and women’s groups. This stratification is also implicated in wider colonial, political, social, and economic structures left behind by the British. In attempts to combat divisions between groups of women, the NCWO was created to fix and bridge the ethnic divisions among women. However, the NCWO could not overcome years of ingrained colonial divide and rule strategies among ethnic groups and worked for only a select and privileged group of women who were usually educated and professional women of the middle classes or higher.

Islamisation movements and changing government policies that favoured the Malays have furthered ethnic tensions in the country that have also seeped into the everyday realities of Malaysians. Women’s movements and organisations have been plagued with ongoing divisions between women and their work on women’s issues. To rectify this, many women’s organisations and groups attempted to coalesce over the issue of VAW, but even this effort was futile as many of the women leading the charge in these initiatives still belonged to privileged groups.

¹³⁵ Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: essays on theory, film, and fiction* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 2.

I have discussed in this chapter the events, histories and policies that have influenced women's organisations in Malaysia. A recurring theme in these organisations are the deeply embedded class, racial and ethnic divisions and tensions that segregated women's activism in independence movements, in post-independent Malaysia and in the formation of contemporary women's movements and autonomous and semi-autonomous women's organisations. Tensions, contradictions and complexities among women and women's movements is not of course particular to Malaysia, but as will be explored throughout this thesis, have plagued wider feminist debates. Drawing on de Lauretis' discussion on the subject of feminism, the following chapter examines for whom and where is feminism a home?

Chapter Two – Inside and outside of feminism: Are you a feminist?

This question is confronting especially in the context of the everyday realities of women working in Malaysian-based women's organisations. It is still associated with negative stereotypes that continue to plague its understandings, interpretations and embodiments. Like many others, I have been asked this question numerous times in my life, and I answer differently depending on the context, situation and circumstance. During my fieldwork interviews I was nervous about asking my interviewees if they were feminists. I did not ask this question outright, instead I asked them questions like: what does it mean to work in a feminist organisation? How they think about feminism at work and how does feminism resonate with them personally? Some of the women in my study firmly identified as feminists, asking: "how could you not be?" and others found themselves at odds with this label, and shared their experiences inside and outside of feminism. As we saw towards the end of the last chapter, de Lauretis forcefully argues the difficulties in the contradictions residing in feminism. She critically engages with the terms gender, women and feminism to discuss "the uncomfortable condition of being at once inside and outside gender" to open up the possibilities in feminist research.¹³⁶

de Lauretis' 1987 *Technologies of Gender* gives us a way to theorise gender beyond the lens of sexual difference. Breaking away from the limitations of this approach rooted in the man/woman binary, de Lauretis opens up terms used in feminist theory, such as "gender" and "woman", and suggests a series of four propositions in the construction of gender. For de Lauretis gender is a representation, it is the result of representation and self-representation, it continues to be replicated and re-emphasised in expected and alternative spaces, and through its construction it is deconstructed and then reconstructed.¹³⁷ The fourth proposition is especially important to my research because it is where she examines, "For gender, like the real, is not only the effect of representation but also its excess, what remains outside discourse as a potential trauma

¹³⁶ Ibid., 11.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 3.

which can rupture or destabilize, if not contained, any representation.”¹³⁸ de Lauretis critically engages with the female subject of feminism to construct one that can move “across a multiplicity of discourses, positions, and meanings, which are often in conflict with one another and inherently (historically) contradictory.”¹³⁹

If women working in women’s organisations are deemed feminists by default, how does this impact their greater identities? In this chapter, I use iconic feminist texts to consider the present-day quandary many NGO women’s rights workers find themselves in. I draw on feminist scholarship to discuss how one can be inside and outside of feminism. For the purpose of my research, I am not interested in defining feminism, but rather seeing how it can be used to describe the experiences of women in my research, as well as how they negotiate their feminist identities. I also consider what feminism represents in the post-colonial context of Malaysia. Nkolika Ijeoma Aniekwu argues, “The writings and activism of many women in post-colonial contexts or in developing areas around the world have challenged the idea that there should be ‘commonality’ or ‘globality’ in the forms of feminist expression and activism.”¹⁴⁰ I take from Aniekwu’s lead to discuss the multiplicity of feminist voices and interpretations to include the contradictions and complexities within feminist spaces and discourses.

Feminist belongings

The three of us are sitting in a noisy Indian restaurant located in the heart of Georgetown, Penang. Sharon is a Chinese Malaysian woman with a short almost buzzed haircut wearing thinly framed glasses. Ruby is an Indian Malaysian woman; she has slicked black short hair, also wearing glasses. They are colleagues working for an NGO in Penang focused on gender issues. Ruby and I met at a conference hosted by the Women’s Development Research Centre (KANITA) at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). I was presenting my research for the first time in my candidature, and Ruby, who did not present a paper, had come to hear about research on gender. In their work

¹³⁸ Ibid., 3.

¹³⁹ Ibid., x.

¹⁴⁰ Nkolika Ijeoma Aniekwu, “Converging Constructions: A Historical Perspective on Sexuality and Feminism in Post-Colonial Africa,” *African Sociological Review* 10, no.1 (2006): 150, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/afrisocirevi.10.1.143>.

as NGO program officers they take concepts and make them accessible to a wide range of populations. Sharon's understanding of feminism is based on her experiences as an educated ethnic Chinese woman. While she said, "My uncles, my aunts and my mom all went to college and university and went on to get their degrees, some of them even got their PhDs," she also noted, "The power relations I see in my home are very patriarchal, there is a certain expectation that women in my family are to be educated, but when these women have children, then the children take the primary focus over her career." This double bind is common for women. In Malaysia, women are represented in high numbers in higher education, but are underrepresented in the workforce. Care responsibilities consistently fall on women's shoulders.

Sharon and Ruby were forthcoming about the role feminism plays in their greater identities. Sharon's feminism involves the intersections of her class, education and ethnicity. Ruby's understanding of feminism is located in wider feminist debates. Missing from the feminist conversation, according to the Ruby, were voices of those who do not fit into mainstream feminism. To find her own sense of feminist belonging, she uses ideas from lesbian activists and feminists, as well as concepts such as intersectionality and queer theory. Ruby's ability to take from feminist theories as they apply to her is reminiscent of Moira Gatens' description of the feminist theorist who "is a kind of patchwork-quilter, taking bits and pieces from here and there in an attempt to offer an account of women's social and political being that would be adequate to basic female principles."¹⁴¹

I have raised de Lauretis' importance in theory, and here I focus on how her epistemological shift affects the whole of feminism, theory and practice. de Lauretis develops a subject of feminism that is not bound in a singular definition of feminist identity, but is multiple.¹⁴² de Lauretis draws and extends on the works of Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault to build her subject in feminism, taking from Althusser

¹⁴¹ Moira Gatens, *Feminism and Philosophy: Perspectives on Difference and Equality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 1, 137.

¹⁴² Teresa de Lauretis, "Displacing Hegemonic Discourses," *UCSC*, accessed July 28, 2014, http://culturalstudies.ucsc.edu/PUBS/Inscriptions/vol_3-4/delauretis.html.

that “All ideology has the function (which defines it) of ‘constituting’ concrete individuals as subjects” then alters our perspective:

If I substitute *gender* for *ideology*, the statement still works, but with a slight shift of the terms: Gender has the function (which defines it) of constituting concrete individuals as men and women.¹⁴³

By re-conceptualising Althusser’s original argument, de Lauretis illustrates the shift in relations between gender and ideology. She states, “The shift from ‘subjects’ to ‘men and women’ marks the conceptual distance between two orders of discourse, the discourse of philosophy or political theory and the discourse of ‘reality’.”¹⁴⁴ de Lauretis tackles what Linda Alcoff considers one of the dilemmas facing feminist theorists: that “our very self-definition is grounded in a concept that we must deconstruct and de-essentialise in all of its aspects.”¹⁴⁵ Like Alcoff, de Lauretis offers a way to think about the gendered subject:

A subject [is] constituted in gender, to be sure, though not by sexual difference alone, but rather across languages and cultural representations; a subject engendered in the experiencing of race and class, as well as sexual relations; a subject, therefore, not unified but rather multiple, and not so much divided as contradicted.¹⁴⁶

I use her approach on gender and the feminist subject to convey the complexity of what it means being a feminist in women’s organisations. Women in these spaces are often hailed as feminists, but how they embody feminism in their personal lives may tell a different and conflicted story than their professional work. Alcoff’s article, “Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism” was written a year after de Lauretis’ *Technologies of Gender*. Building on de Lauretis’ earlier text *Alice Doesn’t*, Alcoff illustrates the development of de Lauretis’ argument in *Technologies of Gender*. Alcoff examines the

¹⁴³ de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*, 6.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Linda Alcoff, “Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory,” *Signs* 13, no.3 (1988): 406, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/stable/3174166>.

¹⁴⁶ de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*, 2.

possibilities of de Lauretis' ideas that give agency to the subject while at the same time is located in ideological processes.¹⁴⁷ Their conceptions and analysis of the ways sexual difference has been written about in feminist theory and moving towards a more comprehensive subject position of and categorisation of woman, remain integral in current feminist debates and politics.¹⁴⁸

Feminism at home

The moral policing of Muslim women in Malaysia, especially Malay women is entrenched in religious ideologies and practices, such as veiling, that continue to reinforce men's and women's gender roles both in the private and public spheres. Malay women are often coded through the practice of veiling. Through dress, women's bodies have become visible and political. Malay women are taught that it is their duty to their parents, families and ultimately God to represent themselves as good Muslim women. This rhetoric is emphasised in mainstream media, in schools and in the family. These spaces, most of which are controlled by men, are used to perpetuate dominant religious and heteronormative representations of men and women. When I interviewed Suraya, she talked to me about growing up in a Malay household. At first, hearing her family is Malay is surprising, because she does not conform to the typical representations of a Malay woman. This is visible: she does not wear the *tudong* (Malaysian for veil) at work nor does she wear the *baju kurung*, the knee-length loose-fitting blouse that is worn over pants or a long skirt. She is aware that she does not fit the idealised Malay woman and addresses this in our interview. She told me that she has five siblings and they all live at home with her parents on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. Suraya, however, lives in the city. She has a male housemate, and along with her choice not to veil, has caused a strained relationship with her family. She does not subscribe to the prescribed gender roles of her family and is viewed as an outsider.

Aware that she is not supported at home, she finds a sense of belonging in the work she does at IWRAW AP. Working on women's rights has allowed her to think about why she does not fit in with her family and how she is perceived as a woman. She

¹⁴⁷ Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism," 432, 424-425.

¹⁴⁸ Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism," 407.

constructs her feminist identity through her work. Being in her mid-20s, Suraya is personally connected to the women in one of the major programs she works on dealing with young Malaysian feminist activists. Despite her family's ambivalence or lack of care about the work she does, she is able to focus on what the work means in wider feminist politics.

Thinking about the contradictions within feminism and the gender division of labour in her home, she reflected on a confronting incident she had with her father:

We have this porch in front of the house and there is an unspoken thing that women do not sit there. One day I was reading my book, doing my own thing and then my dad looks at me, "Aya [what her father calls her] go make us some coffee." [She replies] "No, I don't want to, I am here happily and why don't you ask my brothers, why don't you make it yourself and why do you ask me?" I told him off and said, "Dad, I am reading my book, can you ask my brother to do it?" And he wouldn't talk to me for two months after that.

Suraya discovered what happens when she pushes back against her father who is the moral authority and power bearer in her family. Even on a seemingly trivial matter, she challenged the gendered space of her family home. While Suraya finds (to some extent) agency by talking back to her father, her actions are still viewed as political even at the micro level. Alcoff suggests that a woman's position is not inert, but she is an active agent in her identity making. She draws on de Lauretis' argument to convey "that the identity of a woman is the product of her own interpretation and reconstruction of her history, as mediated through the cultural discursive context to which she has access."¹⁴⁹ As such, Suraya's position as a woman in her family and in her work brings out her feminist identity that has meaning from her own position as a subject multiple.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 434.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Professional feminisms

Wathshlah is a former program officer at IWRAW AP and continues to act as a resource person for the organisation. She now works as an independent consultant for women's organisations. Wathshlah was unhappy in the corporate sector and went back to school to do a Masters in Counselling. Her first encounter with a women's organisation was with the Women's Aid Organisation (WAO), this is where she says, "I really got into women's human rights." For her, feminism became more familiar when she started working in women's organisations, she uses feminism not as concept or theory, but as a way of life. She says, "It's really about equality, it's about processes, about democracy and recognising your integrity as a woman. It is so many things, you need to make sure it is part of everything you do, not only principles on paper, you know?" She continues, "I could join the corporate sector (not saying she would) and bring in the feminist perspective and my approach. It is not just an NGO thing, feminism is beyond NGO work and beyond activism, it is really the principles you live."

In the wider NGO sector there is a growing fear of the professionalisation of women's movements and organisations. But there is also pressure on women to identify as feminists.¹⁵¹ When this came up in my interview with Natasha from Musawah, she spoke of the underlying tensions where women have their feminist activist credentials questioned. By drawing attention to whose feminist activism is legitimate, Natasha also reflects on the generational, ethnic and organisational differences between women's organisations in Malaysia. In particular, she sees that some prominent Malaysian feminist activists portray their brand of feminism as the ideal. Natasha explains this is due to their long-time service to women's movements and what they have experienced in women's organisations. She also notes, this ideal is no longer applicable because of changes and shifts in the sector. This remains an issue in women's organisations, as they were founded on activism and movements, but are now embedded in the wider

¹⁵¹ Srila Roy, "The Indian Women's Movement: Within and Beyond NGOization," *Journal of South Asian Development* 10, no.1 (2015): 107, doi: 10.1177/0973174114567368.

non-profit/NGO sector, where they have to conform to funding and transparency policies. In Chapter Five, I further explore the politics of funding and women's NGOs.

The women who pioneered contemporary women's movements in Asia have worked hard to see the advancement of women's rights. Sunila Abeysekera who was once the Executive Director of IWRAW AP and the founder of the Women's Media Collective in Colombo, Sri Lanka was a leading feminist activist in Asia. Abeysekera is critical of what she sees as the current culture of women's human rights workers:

I see very few young women identifying as feminists. With the new virtual forms of organizing I see how there is little sense nowadays of the need for 'women only' spaces. For example, when organizing among social media, they do not see it is an issue if it is a man or woman blogging or tweeting...I am amused when I hear a women's rights worker say I am not a feminist, when in fact through their work they do challenge male control and patriarchy but they do not like to see themselves as feminist. I think the stereotype of feminists in the 1960s as 'home breakers' and 'trouble makers' remains in Asia.¹⁵²

Abeysekera was born in Sri Lanka to a progressive family. She received her education in Colombo where she became politically active in the mid-1970s in the civil rights movement. She worked with many organisations over the years and her activism has attracted negative criticism, but as she stated in an interview "when everyone is criticising you...then you are doing the right thing."¹⁵³ She is politically invested in feminism, but has problems understanding why young women have trouble identifying as a feminist. In what follows, I draw on another interview with a woman named Sally to consider the complexity of feminist identity for younger women.

When I entered the field, my goal was to re-attune myself with the daily working rhythms of IWRAW AP, but many of the personnel had changed over the course of my

¹⁵² Wendy Harcourt, "Crossborder Feminisms Wendy Harcourt in Conversation with Srilatha Batliwala, Sunila Abeysekera and Rawwida Baksh," *Development* 55, no.2 (2012): 193-194, doi: 10.1057/dev.2012.12.

¹⁵³ Margalit Fox, "Sunila Abeysekera, Sri Lankan Human Rights Activist, Dies at 61," *The New York Times*, last modified September 13, 2013, accessed December 26, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/14/world/asia/sunila-abeysekera-human-rights-activist-in-sri-lanka-dies-at-61>.

time there, as did the location of the office. Sally was one of the first women I interviewed. She was an energetic early-20s Caucasian Australian woman who came to IWRAW AP as an intern. This was all very familiar, as this was how I began my journey with the organisation. When feminism came up in our interview, Sally stated, “That it has a negative connotation for my generation back home.” The feminist she is referring to is the stereotype of the 1970s woman who burned her bra. Fearing that she may be identified in the same way, she notes that she is not particularly radical. She adds, “You can be a feminist without being ‘hardcore’.” There are several feminist archetypes, including the Liberal, the Marxist, the Radical, and the Eco, but Sally’s feminist point of reference, and the one she is uncomfortable with, is the stereotypical anti-male lesbian.¹⁵⁴

Chilla Bulbeck’s study on feminism also explores how the women in her research viewed themselves within and outside of the concept. The women she interviews, “approved at least some of feminism’s victories, even though many rejected feminism, [because of its association] with bra-burning, radical lesbians and Germaine Greer.”¹⁵⁵ I ask Sally if she thinks the word feminist has evolved since the 1970s, and she says yes. When I follow up to ask whether she thinks younger women see themselves as advocates for women’s rights, she says some of the younger generation feel the fight for equality is over. This is not isolated to Sally’s experience. As Elspeth Probyn argues, “Feminism opens a discursive space that can be quickly filled with non-feminists as well as younger women who can claim that feminism is no longer needed, that they have the rights that their mothers worked for.”¹⁵⁶ How an individual chooses to define themselves within or around feminist ideologies is not specific or contained to any specific geographical location. Feminism is an issue that crosses borders and boundaries, especially in light of transnational activism and women’s movements across the globe. Being inside and outside of ideology is not a matter of doing feminism right, but is a lived reality that enables women working in organisations like IWRAW AP and

¹⁵⁴ Chilla Bulbeck, *Living Feminism: The Impact of the Women’s Movement on Three Generations of Australian Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 147.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁵⁶ Elspeth Probyn, “This Body Which is Not One: Speaking an Embodied Self,” *Hypatia* 6, no.3 (2008): 118, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/stable/3809842>.

even Sisters In Islam to straddle the lines of feminism, allowing for changes in their subjectivity. Sally draws our attention to the paradoxical nature of being inside and outside of feminism while she engages in feminist work, there are times she does not want to identify as a feminist.

When Sally speaks about her internship and her academic studies to her friends, she talks about human rights law to divert attention away from the specificity of women's human rights. She repositions her professional work to match how she wants to be perceived by different audiences in her personal life. She acknowledges that with certain groups of people she can describe her work more specifically as women's human rights, but she decides which audiences and at what times. I ask Sally how she talks about her internship with her friends back home, and what she says she does. Sally thinks about this question long and hard before replying. Sally gives me an example of who she would alter her response for, "I will say to some people who I think are particularly macho, that I am working in human rights law and I will expand if they ask more questions." Sally negotiates her feminist identity depending on what she feels is expected of her by her audience. She does not want to be associated with a particular brand of feminism, therefore she repositions her professional feminist identity. The way Sally negotiates between her personal and professional feminism is understandable. While my experiences and life history differ from Sally's, I also interned with IWRAW AP and am familiar with their projects, such as CEDAW training, and many of their major programs, such as Global to Local. This program in particular is the pinnacle of the internship experience with the organisation. Interns travel with one or two program officers (in rotation) to Geneva where they assist and attend a CEDAW session. Before the sessions take place, IWRAW AP offers CEDAW training to NGO activists whose countries are reporting. The trainings cover the main principles of the convention, how to lobby committee members, and how to prepare the oral statements they present in front of the committee.

I interviewed Sally before she left for Geneva. I can only speak for myself and from my experiences, but I found that it was only after engaging with women activists in Geneva that I began to see who the work was helping and why it is so important. I met a Ugandan woman activist who at the time in 2010 was no longer able to reside in the country because of her LGBT advocacy and activism. Uganda was one of the

countries reporting at this session and she came to give her oral statement to the CEDAW committee to advocate for LGBT persons. This was at a time when Uganda was about to pass the Anti-Homosexuality Bill. She came across as abrupt and harsh, and at first I thought she hated me. I was a young and naïve intern at the time, and only weeks into my internship with IWRAW AP. I also had not experienced the same struggles, I could not know what it feels like to have my rights taken away and fear persecution. I tried to draw on my family background to make a personal connection. I have roots in Uganda and in her hometown of Kampala. She was not interested. Dorathy my mentor and roommate in Geneva told me that it was common for activists to come across as terse. They are used to fighting, their activism is their identity. Years later in 2014 when I came back to IWRAW AP, I met Sanyu, a Kenyan woman who was just starting her role as a program officer. She spoke in depth of her experiences in activism in the African context. She says the term activist is so ‘loaded’ and often it comes with a checklist: have you been imprisoned? Have you been abused by the police? How many times have you been arrested? This put into perspective what I encountered with the Ugandan activist in Geneva and how concepts like activism and feminism are embodied based on contexts, experiences and life histories.

The program Global to Local is also tiring. For two weeks, resource persons (who lead CEDAW training), program officers and interns work 14 days straight (there are no days off during this time). This takes a lot of mental, physical and emotional energy. In particular, interacting with women from various country-contexts and making sure their needs are met. There is no training for these social exchanges; learning is through experience. Program officers who have attended Global to Local know how to conduct and move within NGO and UN spaces. For ‘newbies’ this takes time and a lot of watching. It is about noticing what participants want to gain from the sessions and trainings, what is at stake for them and what this means in their respected country-contexts. What may seem like unimportant intern tasks, such as checking PowerPoint’s, printing NGO oral statements and emailing participants and partnering organisations, have larger implications in non-profit/NGO work. Completing these daily tasks could mean the difference between the CEDAW Committee hearing about the persecution of LGBT communities, where they are able to hold government’s responsible through the process of the CEDAW sessions. Drawing on Wathshlah, Sunila, Sally, Sanyu’s and even my own experience in women’s human rights work, we

can see that the work is rewarding, despite some of the challenges of negotiating feminism, experience and emotions.

A concept-in-progress: The post-colonial subject in feminism

Just write this book down, there is this African American women's group called INCITE! They have written this fabulous book called *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*. [I am inspired even in reciting the title of the book].

This book was recommended to me by a Malaysian Feminist Activist (MFA).¹⁵⁷ She was excited about the text, because of its resonance with resistance and the ongoing tensions between the Global North and Global South in NGO spaces. The book is inspired by Gil Scott-Heron, an American poet, musician and author. She recites, “The revolution will not be televised, it will not be televised, and I tell you my brother the revolution will be live.”¹⁵⁸ This activist is influenced by black American women like bell hooks who have fought for spaces in feminism, calling them brave women “who don't put up with shit.” Moved by their words and actions, she says women in the Global South have a lot to learn from African American women. Speaking to the ‘white savior complex’ she sees:

A very strong First World/Third World analysis, you give me any situation, I see it and it bugs me, you know. When I go to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) all I see is white women lording it over brown women, you know, I don't see it as in any way a symmetrical space.

As an Indian Malaysian woman, she feels the racial difference in NGO and feminist spaces. Uma Kothari argues that race is concealed in non-profits and NGOs and that these are thought to be “non-racialised spaces and outside of racialised

¹⁵⁷ This activist wishes to remain anonymous in relation to having direct quotes used in this thesis. I call her the Malaysian Feminist Activist, because that is how she describes herself and will refer to her as MFA from this point on.

¹⁵⁸ I have quoted from this Malaysian feminist activist here, but she is referencing Gil Scott-Heron's best-known composition “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised” and how black feminists have drawn on his work to open up spaces in the non-profit sector. See also INCITE Women of Color Against Violence, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit/Industrial Complex* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007).

histories.”¹⁵⁹ Problematising this, MFA points out the contentions of race. Growing up in Malaysia, she has also experienced racial discrimination in a society that privileges the Malays. When race comes up in her profession, and in international spaces, she also feels marginalised, where she says, “I see women in the North having power and women in the South coming there and trying to squeeze into spaces that are narrow already.” Feeling beaten, she is adamant that the dynamics between the North and South have not shifted, but that they have become entrenched, “So, if you kiss ass to white women, you will probably be moving up a notch.” Responding to larger feminist concerns, and drawing on Alcoff’s notions of speaking for others discussed in the Introduction, she brings up who has the privilege to speak and in what spaces. MFA not only highlights the uneven power relationship between women, but how germane it is to consider the post-colonial feminist subject.

For post-colonial countries such as Malaysia, feminism has been viewed as an export from the West. However, as Chapter One highlighted, Malaysian women have played several roles in independence movements. While Malay women were on the front lines of nationalist movements in Malaysia, Indian and Chinese women also took part in movements that were located in their ethnic-nationalist identities from India and China. The influential feminist thinker from the Global South Kumari Jayawardene argues:

Feminism is generally thought of as a recent phenomenon, rooted in Western society, and people tend to overlook the fact that the word was in common usage in Europe and elsewhere in the [nineteenth] and [twentieth] centuries, to signify agitation on issues concerning women... The concept of feminism has also been the cause of much confusion in Third World countries. It has variously been alleged by traditionalists, political conservatives and even certain leftists, that feminism is a product of ‘decadent’ Western capitalism.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Uma Kothari, “An agenda for thinking about ‘race’ in development,” *Progress in Development Studies* 6, no.1 (2006): 9-12, doi: 10.1191/1464993406ps124oa.

¹⁶⁰ Kumari Jayawardene, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Zed Press, 1986), 2. See also the introduction of Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter, eds., *Feminist Epistemologies* (New York: Routledge: 1993) for further discussion on the history of feminist epistemology and the struggles women encounter to having their understandings of the world legitimated.

As Judith Butler writes on the unified and dominant views of feminism:

This form of feminist theorizing has come under criticism for its efforts to colonize and appropriate non-Western cultures to support highly Western notions of oppression, but because they tend as well to construct a ‘Third World’ or even an ‘Orient’ in which gender oppression is subtly explained as symptomatic of an essential, non-Western barbarism.¹⁶¹

Mohanty’s work has also elaborated on the othering of non-Western/Western women in feminism and women’s movements. Mohanty’s powerful text “Under Western Eyes” gained support from gender studies and post-colonial studies and has been translated in several languages since its publication. Her essay questions the dominant discourses of feminism where she argues:

[W]estern feminist discourse, by assuming women as a coherent, already constituted group which is placed in kinship, legal and other structures, defines third-world women as subjects *outside* of social relations, instead of looking at the way women are constituted as women *through* these very structures.¹⁶²

By addressing the power relations within feminism itself, she points out the dominant structures and where they are located. She exposes the Eurocentric and false universalisation of women as a category of identification. She argues this is in the self-interest of Western feminism.¹⁶³ Opening up the category of women then observes the differences of women and their representations, which aligns with de Lauretis’ approach and considers the expansion of women’s experiences beyond the First World.¹⁶⁴ Mohanty suggests that for too long the Third World has been defined through oppression, but what has not been captured in detail is the historical complexities and

¹⁶¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 3.

¹⁶² Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” *Feminist Review* 30, no.1 (1988): 80, doi: 10.1057/fr.1988.42.

¹⁶³ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, ““Under Western Eyes” Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles,” *Signs* 28, no.2 (2003): 501, doi: 10.1086/342914.

¹⁶⁴ I use the First World here to represent dominant discourses that get represented in feminism and are often prioritised.

struggles involved in changing oppressive relationships.¹⁶⁵ Mohanty deconstructs the all-encompassing category of women:

Women as a category of analysis, or: we are all sisters in struggle. By women as a category of analysis, I am referring to the crucial presupposition that all of us of the same gender, across the classes and cultures are somehow socially constituted as a homogenous group identifiable prior to the process of analysis.¹⁶⁶

Mohanty charts “the location of feminist scholarship within a global political economic framework dominated by the ‘First World’.”¹⁶⁷ When Mohanty originally wrote “Under Western Eyes” she was examining what she then called the First and Third Worlds. While this language has morphed into the North/South distinction this linguistic shift is not my concern as I am focused on the power imbalances located within these semantic divisions.

Tejaswini Niranjana reconstructs the feminist subject to include the post-colonial context. She proposes that the post-colonial political subject is one that includes the feminist subject: a subject-in-transition. This enables a way to historicise this subject and in turn “mark its supplementarity.”¹⁶⁸ This is informed in how women are identified as either Third World Women, Women of Colour or anything that specifies them as non-Western women. Looking beyond Western interpretations of feminism, she builds on feminist discourses to include Asian perceptions and viewpoints.¹⁶⁹ While Niranjana explores the feminist subject through translation and Mohanty uses the representation of ‘Third World’ feminisms and the making of the

¹⁶⁵ Mohanty, ““Under Western Eyes” Revisited,” 501.

¹⁶⁶ Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes,” 65.

¹⁶⁷ Mohanty, ““Under Western Eyes” Revisited,” 501.

¹⁶⁸ Tejaswini Niranjana, “Feminism and Translation in India: Contexts, Politics, Futures,” *Cultural Dynamics* 10, no.2 (1998): 135, doi: <http://doi-org.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/10.1177/092137409801000204>. Niranjana also explores feminism in the South Asian context and how it is used by Indian women and if they identify with the term. See also: Tejaswini Niranjana, “Feminism and Cultural Studies in Asia,” *interventions* 9, no.2 (2007): 209-218, doi: 10.1080/13698010701409152.

¹⁶⁹ See also Uma Narayan, “The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives from a Nonwestern Feminist,” in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, 213-224 (New York: Routledge, 2004).

Third World woman, both Niranjana and Mohanty are concerned with the historical complexities of the feminist subject. The ‘subject-in-translation’ identified by Niranjana is similar to de Lauretis’ feminist subject and what Mohanty explores in her analysis of the categorisation of women.¹⁷⁰ Niranjana and Mohanty’s interrogation of feminism, in tandem with de Lauretis’ approach, address the differences between and among women, and illustrate the diversities within feminist scholarship. As Alcoff puts it, “The strength of Lauretis’ approach is that she never loses sight of the political imperative of feminist theory, and, thus, never forgets that we must seek not only to describe this relation in which women’s subjectivity is grounded but also to change it.”¹⁷¹ Feminism’s political imperative is also manifested through its ability to be reflexive through building, revisiting and reconstructing ideas.

Returning to her original “Under Western Eyes” essay, Mohanty reflects on its meaning for transnational feminism, and how her position has changed over time:

What are the challenges facing transnational feminist practice at the beginning of the twenty-first century? How have the possibilities of feminist cross-cultural work developed and shifted? What is the intellectual, political and institutional context that informs my own shifts and new commitments at the time of this writing? What categories of scholarly and political identification have changed since 1986? What has remained the same? I wish to begin a dialogue between the intentions, effects, and political choices that underwrote “Under Western Eyes” in the mid-1980s and those I would make today. I hope it provokes others to ask similar questions about our individual and collective projects in feminist studies.¹⁷²

Mohanty acknowledges that her essay “Under Western Eyes” was her first publication after completing her PhD; however, “It remains the one that marks my presence in the international feminist community.”¹⁷³ In her re-visited work, she reflects on her then newly appointed academic position as a woman of colour in a

¹⁷⁰ Niranjana, “Feminism and Translation in India,” 135.

¹⁷¹ Alcoff, “Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism,” 422.

¹⁷² Mohanty, ““Under Western Eyes” Revisited,” 500.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 499.

predominantly white United States academic institution. Determined to make her mark in this environment, she carved out a space for the marginalised, and scholars like herself.¹⁷⁴ Her original essay is still used and taught in gender studies courses, and remains a seminal piece of feminist scholarship that deconstructs feminism and opens it up to possibilities outside of the Western context.

Feminist ‘homes’ in the NGO sector

I now want to turn to what feminist ‘homes’ in the NGO sector could look like in the Malaysian context. In a co-authored chapter written by Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Biddy Martin titled “What’s Home Got to Do with It?” they seek to develop an understanding of women’s multiple subject positions.¹⁷⁵ Mohanty and Martin take into consideration their feminist politics and use it in their configuration of home as a concept and a way to think about belonging in feminism. Inderpal Grewal and Victoria Bernal write of the NGO sector and feminism, “As feminist research makes clear, gender can best be understood as relational and as always in process, and NGOs now play a role in the processes through which gender is constructed and reimagined.”¹⁷⁶ As we have seen, these spaces illustrate the everyday lived realities and contradictions within feminism. Women working in these organisations can agree upon the importance of using a feminist lens working on the promotion of women’s rights. However, they are still working within a context that is fraught with ideological and political tensions related to Malaysia’s post-colonial situation, economic constraints and wider systemic gender inequalities.

The divisions among women’s groups often divide ideologies, such as the universal versus the particular, the international versus the national, and more specific to Malaysia, the universal versus the Islamic. These dichotomies are based in clear distinctions and binary logic. Countering these frameworks, I argue feminist spaces, such as women’s organisations, weave in and out of diversities and ideologies, which

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 503.

¹⁷⁵ Alcoff, “Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism,” 420. Located in footnote 35.

¹⁷⁶ Inderpal Grewal and Victoria Bernal, *Theorizing NGOs: States, Feminisms, and Neoliberalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 305.

often brings together various interpretations of feminisms. For instance, Sisters In Islam was influenced by women's world conferences, global Islamic resurgence movements and nationally charged VAW campaigns. Using the United Nations CEDAW framework, IWRAW AP takes the position of a universal feminist organisation. The founding members of IWRAW AP saw universal feminism as space for all women. Their motivation to be inclusive is also problematic, because it assumes that all women share the same discriminations and life experiences. Mohanty, de Laetis and Niranjana have pointed out this is not the case, and this is an existing issue and contradiction within feminism.

Mohanty and Martin's "What's Home Got to Do with It?" unsettles boundaries within feminism. They re-evaluate experience, identity and political perspective, which they also argue is impacted by the role of community in relation to experience and history. Mohanty and Martin began working on their project after visiting their respective 'homes' in Virginia and Mumbai in 1984. These visits were "fraught with conflict, loss, memories and desires."¹⁷⁷ Mohanty and Martin's homes are spatially and geographically very different, but they share in thinking about their relationships and appeal of "home" as a concept in feminism. According to Mohanty and Martin:

What we have tried to draw out of this text is the way in which it unsettles not only any notion of feminism as an all-encompassing home, but also the assumption that there are discrete, coherent and absolutely separate identities—homes within feminism, so to speak—based on absolute divisions between various sexual, racial or ethnic identities.¹⁷⁸

The text they are referring to is *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism*, where contributors like Minnie Bruce Pratt question "the all-too-common conflation of experience, identity and political perspective."¹⁷⁹ Seeking to push against white Western feminism, Mohanty and Martin challenge the totalisation

¹⁷⁷ Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Bidy Martin, "What's Home Got to Do with It? (with Bidy Martin)," In *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (United States: Duke University Press, 2004), 86.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

of feminist discourses that often centres on distinctions between Western and non-Western, white and non-white and so on to engage in a dialogue that offers an alternative way to think about binary distinctions and polarising ideologies. They focus on the tensions within feminism and examine feminism through its multiplicity rather than distinct divisions.

As NGO feminist ‘homes’, IRAW AP and Sisters In Islam work for the same goal of gender equality. Working at the international level of women’s human rights, IRAW AP is framed through the United Nations approach to women’s rights and follows the principles of CEDAW. Where these organisations differ is Sisters In Islam’s use of Islamic and United Nations inflected understandings of feminism in its work. Women who are not Muslim do not have the opportunity to work at Sisters In Islam who use affirmative action policies based on religious identity. This hiring policy has had mixed receptions. On the one hand, it excludes women who are not Muslim, and follows a similar state-sanctioned affirmative action trajectory. On the other hand, it also provides a space for Muslim women to use their religious identity to fight against the repressive and political uses of dominant patriarchal Islam. Both perspectives highlight the ongoing divisions between ethnic and religious groups in the country.

To discuss NGO ‘homes’ I begin by discussing my visits to Sisters In Islam and IRAW AP, and their geographic locations in Kuala Lumpur. IRAW AP is located in the busy expatriate area called Bangsar. The office is smaller in comparison to Sisters In Islam, but is situated near a busy Light Rapid Transit (LRT) train stop. It is easy to get to by train, bus or taxi. In contrast, Sisters In Islam is hidden away in a suburb called Petaling Jaya, a residential area outside of the city. To get to the Sisters In Islam office is difficult. Taking a taxi from KL Sentral (one of the major transportation hubs), I learned, is not easy. As a non-resident of Kuala Lumpur and without the MyTaxi application on my phone, my option was to take the LRT train from KL Sentral to Petaling Jaya, where I found a taxi near the station stop. I was lucky the taxi driver knew where he was going, because I did not. We passed through rows and rows of gated houses, in Malaysia, most houses look like compounds, something I am not familiar with growing up in Canada. We finally arrived at Sisters In Islam; it is the last house, green-gated with no signage. This is strategic. The organisation is the recipient of hate by local religious leaders and mainstream media. Zainah Anwar, a leading

Malaysian feminist activist and founding member of both Sisters In Islam and Musawah says, “We are challenged about our right to speak about Islam because we are not mullahs [religious leaders]. We are told that we are not educated in the religion.”¹⁸⁰ Refusing this sentiment, Anwar insists on the important work Sisters In Islam and Musawah do to promote women’s rights. Sisters In Islam, a place where women seek refuge and even obtain legal counsel, find the location ideal. Many of the founding members of Sisters In Islam are lawyers, and the organisation offers legal aid services, usually to women who are seeking divorce, which is a difficult process in the gender-biased Sharia courts.

When I finally figured out how to use the doorbell, I entered the workspace. I waited for Ratna, the Executive Director of Sisters In Islam so as not to draw attention to myself. When Ratna greeted me, she had a large presence, and welcomed me into her office. Our interview was during Ramadan, and aware she could be fasting, I profusely thanked her for agreeing to my interview. When I learnt she was fasting I worried that I was making her talk too much. I thought she was thirsty and I felt guilty. During the interview, I asked her if it was okay to continue numerous times. She said she grew up fasting and it was no big deal. When Ratna told me about Sisters In Islam, her voice clear and melodic. She explained that she came to the organisation from the corporate sector, a common thread for a few of the women in my research. Coming to women’s human rights work from outside of the women’s movement is becoming an increasingly popular option for women. While they earn significantly less money than they would in the corporate sector, they are satisfied because they feel they are making a difference in people’s lives. This is true for Ratna, she credits Sisters In Islam in helping her think about her feminist politics and views on gender relations. Beginning to see the unequal gender dynamics played out in Malaysian society, she questions her Muslim identity. She says:

It was always clear to me after I joined Sisters in Islam; it was very easy for me to see the bigger picture, the whole gender relation and the whole damage that

¹⁸⁰ Sheila Nair, “Challenging the Mullahs,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 9, no.2 (2007): 242, doi: 10.1080/14616740701259952.

patriarchal interpretation and misogynist messages within that interpretation has monopolized the Muslim society and I could relate to that.

Feminist principles have given Ratna strength and a new perspective on the world, where “everything makes sense, even when you count discrimination and hear of it, you know why it is happening.” Drawing on her experiences working at Sisters In Islam and the changes she sees within herself, she also considers her home within feminism that incorporates her ethnic and religious identities. She finds a sense of belonging at Sisters In Islam, because she grew up and continues practicing Islam, and sees this as a way to merge her personal and professional relationship to her faith. The changes she has seen in herself are also transferred to her three sons who have become more aware of gender inequality and negative stereotypes of feminism in Malaysia.

In my interviews with the women working outside of Sisters In Islam, and primarily at IRAW AP, their work focused primarily on feminist principles based in the Western context of Geneva where CEDAW sessions are located. Women’s NGOs in post-colonial contexts such as Malaysia have limited access to resources, but have their agendas dictated from outside of their national contexts. Working from the United Nations feminist lens of women’s human rights also impacts their feminist identities and how they understand themselves from their national contexts using international ideologies. However, the universal feminist home, via platforms like CEDAW, continues to be a site of contention for these women. It is open to everyone, but therein lies the challenge of this space. Who is able to enter this home? Who is able to find comfort in this home? How is home complicated by difference? There are no simple answers to these questions, but as MFA explains, “So many women join the women’s movement with this idea that in this space I will be understood, in this space I will find community, in this space I will experience solidarity.” Wanting to find comfort in the universal feminist home some women have been heartbroken because of tensions and existing hierarchies from the women’s movements. Mohanty and Martin argue:

Each of us carries around those growing-up places, the institutions, a sort of backdrop, a stage set. So often we act out the present against the backdrop of the past, within a frame of perception that is so familiar, so safe that it is terrifying

to risk changing it even when we know our perceptions are distorted, limited, constricted by that old view.¹⁸¹

What Mohanty and Martin put forward is relevant to how our experiences and locations (both geographic and social) contribute to our sense of belonging, where we think we fit in and how this comes to be. The women in this chapter are clear that their commitment to working in women's organisations can "either be for yourself to work through, your karma or to work through your story of abuse or your narrative of being neglected, or whatever it is that drew you into being able to see suffering in other people's lives." MFA points out that women are trying to work out something within themselves and use women's movements to do this, because they imagine them as a place of refuge, a safe home. Mohanty and Martin's analysis of feminist homes and homes within feminism reaches the wide breadth of feminist identities and allows for an examination that is not limited by dichotomies such as the universal and the Islamic. We can see women's experiences and their feminism is not limited by these distinctions, but are multiple in the way they come to their feminism and how they choose to embody it.

I return to the notion of the global 'sisterhood', which is problematic as it is still necessary in thinking about solidarity movements for women's rights. Aihwa Ong explains that after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing there was a sense of achievement for women's rights. She does not ignore the gap between northern and southern women's groups, but uses the 'strategic sisterhood' as a way to confront the entanglement in the globalisation of women's rights:

The term *strategic sisterhood* implies a contingent North-South feminist partnership for intervention in different countries where the gender gap is pervasive, but it also suggests a transnational notion of citizenship for all women, regardless of their economic, cultural or national differences.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Mohanty and Martin, "What's Home Got to Do with It?" 90.

¹⁸² Aihwa Ong, "Strategic Sisterhood or Sisters in Solidarity?" 109. See also L. Amede Obiora's "Feminism, Globalization and Culture: After Beijing," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 4, no.2 (1997): 355-406, for a continued exploration of Ong's article and her discussion of culture in defining feminist agendas and issues surrounding women's oppression.

Strategic sisterhood is a solidarity that is aware of inequalities between women, but is fueled by the greater disparities and inequalities between men and women. It offers an alternative to critique between northern and southern women, and, as Ong suggests, it opens the possibility for women's movements to negotiate and make partial collaborations between feminists in different countries.¹⁸³ She exemplifies de Lauretis' assertions that:

In spite of the divergences, the political and personal differences, and the pain that surround feminist debates within and across racial, ethnic, and sexual lines, we may be encouraged in the hope that feminism will continue to develop a radical theory and a practice of sociocultural transformation.¹⁸⁴

The discussion that women's organisations are fraught with gender, class, ethnic, racial and religious tensions is important, as it takes into consideration the differences among women, but as de Lauretis reminds us, we cannot give up on the potential to build solidarity among these divisions. Opening up the discussion and keeping feminist debates alive is politically imperative for women's organisations and wider feminist circles. However, focusing on these debates from only a critical perspective is limiting, but we must find ways to see the potential of these debates for practical uses and strategies in women's human rights initiatives and gender equality.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have highlighted how feminist analysis and theories, specifically through the perspectives of de Lauretis, recognise the multiplicity involved in feminism. This becomes important in the post-colonial feminist project that also examines the singularity involved in terms like women and feminism. Through women's experiences, it became clear there was no single way of approaching women's human rights work and how women come to understand themselves inside and outside of feminism. For some of the women in my study, feminism is more than a concept, but a way of life, and ultimately a way they seek to make change in the world. For others, it

¹⁸³ Ibid.,134-135.

¹⁸⁴ de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*, 11.

is tricky, difficult and embedded in negative stereotypes and representations. Being identified as a feminist has many layers and is constantly being negotiated and renegotiated.

The experiences illustrated in this chapter reveal the contradictions of how women view themselves within women's organisations that are framed through feminism but are complicated by their day-to-day lives. Women in non-profit/NGOs are interpellated as feminists through their professional work, but their experiences do not always reflect this identification. Some women have incorporated feminist principles in their personal lives, explaining that you cannot be in this type of work without being a feminist. Other women interviewed were not convinced of their feminist identity and illustrated the complexities of their personal and professional feminisms. The blurring of the personal and the professional has been discussed through feminist ideologies in this chapter and will be developed in the following chapter to discuss women's commitment and passion towards their work and how they think about merging these spaces.

I have also discussed the post-colonial feminist project, as it remains a significant influence on this thesis. This intervention gives voice to the marginalised and often neglected groups. I have drawn on Jayawardena, Niranjana and Mohanty, prominent post-colonial feminist thinkers to think through the Malaysian context and feminist identities. I have also used Mohanty and Martin's analysis to argue women's embodied feminist activism is related to where they find a sense of feminist belonging, a place they can call home and find comfort. Feminist homes are also implicated in larger debates surrounding the universal and the particular and, as the women in my research illustrate, this is not a simple matter of if they are a feminist or not, but are situated in their greater identities.

If being a feminist is a part of one's professional obligation, then why are so many women hesitant to be called a feminist or identify as one? As de Lauretis, Mohanty and Niranjana remind us, the ways in which women are represented and constructed differ and the intersections of their embodied experiences are not unified, but are multiple. The motivations for working in women's organisations involve various degrees of first-hand experience with women's movements and more specifically women's human rights initiatives. International conferences, such as the Fourth World

Conference on Women held in Beijing see the promotion of women's issues on the global level. This was a crucial setting for women's rights activists to recognise critical issues faced by women. I have pointed out that global women's conferences have also been critiqued for proposing that women's experiences are shared, but that they are still important for women's solidarity movements. In the next chapter, I follow on iconic feminist texts to examine the relevance of the feminist slogan 'the personal is the political' and how for the women in my research the personal is the professional. I consider how women blur their professional and personal boundaries and what this means to them in their greater identities.

Chapter Three – The personal is the professional

On my first field site visit to IWARAW AP, I noticed the office had more desks than women working at them. As each week passed, and program officers would leave and return to and from programs and consultations abroad, I desk-hopped. When I finally settled in, I ended up sitting across from Dorathy, and behind me sat Saan and Sanyu. There was little talking in the office. The loudest noises I heard were the sounds of keys typing. I was interested to hear about Sanyu's experiences, because she is from Nairobi, a place I have visited but have little knowledge of in terms of the non-profit/NGO sector. Sanyu is bubbly and energetic. She has worked for human rights organisations in the past and says, "What makes human rights work and women's human rights is that ideology and shared values and morals are a part of your belief system...it is part of your greater identity." After high school, she took a gap year and volunteered at the Nairobi Women's Hospital with victims of gender-based violence. Knowing that the non-profit/NGO sector was the professional path for her, she began her professional career working for an international NGO (INGO) in New Delhi and spent three years focused on advocacy for African countries that involved civil society issues and the promotion of civil and political rights. Sanyu embodies how the personal becomes the professional, following the feminist catchphrase the 'personal is political' made famous by United States feminist Carol Hanisch. The phrase was originally used in the late-1960s and 1970s by women's groups and movements who applied the slogan to discuss and dissect experiences of women's oppression, discrimination and stereotyping. Hanisch's essay titled "The Personal Is Political" was featured in Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt's *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation*.¹⁸⁵

In the last chapter I explored the ways in which feminism sometimes operates as a home, and sometimes as an uncomfortable subject position for women. This chapter takes the 1970s' rallying cry, the 'personal is political', and examines how it can illuminate the present day situation for women working in women's rights

¹⁸⁵ See also Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, eds., *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation: Major Writings of the Radical Feminists* (New York: Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, 1970), 76-78. When I refer to the title of Hanisch's paper I use "The Personal Is Political" and when I refer to the slogan I use 'the personal is political'.

organisations. The day-to-day routine in women's organisations is not particularly glamorous. Often, it involves sitting in front of a desktop computer checking and responding to emails. Women's feminist activism now entails women sitting at their desks rather than protesting in the streets.

This is something of a shock for women like Shanthi Dariam, one of IWRAW AP's founding members, for whom CEDAW's promotion of women's rights has been life changing. Her commitment to women's human rights is shaped by this framework and her own experiences with gender discrimination in Malaysia. What is clear from her feminist activist beginnings is the need to fight for better policies and laws that support women. She participated in the 1980s women's movements in Malaysia and her experiences have enabled her to continue to focus on women's rights. However, this is increasingly becoming blurry for women entering non-profits and NGOs. They have not shared in the same experiences of major global conferences or early feminist activist meetings and protests that have resulted in the creation of women's organisations working out of the country today. As such, the feminist mantra of the 'personal is political' has different meanings for women and their feminist activism. Experience here plays a vital role in women's organisations, and I argue has changed the way the 'personal is political' is embodied, especially for younger women entering this sector.

Carol Hanisch's use of the feminist slogan 'the personal is political' highlighted how the personal or the domestic realm of women's activities needed to be made public. This has been central to women engaging in non-profit/NGO work. Women's commitment to their work has meaning, even in the administrative tasks that they do because they see the bigger picture of helping others. Younger women entering this profession are also motivated by both their personal activism and making it a career. However, as we will see in this chapter, their passion and commitment is often questioned by their older feminist colleagues. This strains the relationships among women in these organisations, and leaves younger women searching for answers as to why they continue working in the non-profit/NGO sector. In this chapter, I argue that for these women in my research, the personal is the professional.

Gendering institutions and workplaces

Sociologist Joan Acker calls for a systematic theory of gender to encompass issues surrounding the gender segregation of work, how organisations disseminate forms of cultural reproduction, which in turn construct gender, and gender's role in producing organisational processes and pressures.¹⁸⁶ In their 1990 research, Grossman and Chester point out that less attention has been given to the experiences of work for women. Studies had not considered how women view themselves as workers, how they experience their work and the meaning they make of it in context to the rest of their lives.¹⁸⁷ More recent literature on women's participation in the formal economy has examined the commodification and blurring boundaries between the public and private spheres.¹⁸⁸ According to Rosemary Pringle, "Once we start thinking about the range of work that women actually do, it also becomes clear that the problem for women is not necessarily that they have been excluded from work but that they have too much work."¹⁸⁹ The blurriness of home and work then becomes difficult for women to make clear distinctions between their personal and private lives. Hochschild argues: "...it is necessary for scholars working in this area to widen their perspectives and to include in their research both work cultures and the private life worlds of the actors."¹⁹⁰ Her research thinks through the complexities of home and work and what this means for individuals' greater identities.

Hochschild's 1983 seminal text *The Managed Heart*, which has been discussed in the Introduction of this thesis, is an exploration of emotion in the workplace. In particular Hochschild convincingly examines the gendered realities of service-based professions such as flight attendants. In her study of Delta Airlines, Hochschild uses

¹⁸⁶ Joan Acker, "Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations," *Gender and Society* 4, no.2 (1990): 140, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/stable/189609>.

¹⁸⁷ Hildreth Y. Grossman and Nia Lane Chester, eds., *The Experience of Meaning of Work in Women's Lives* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1990), 2.

¹⁸⁸ Pettinger et al., eds., *A New Sociology of Work*, 6.

¹⁸⁹ Linda McDowell and Rosemary Pringle, eds. *Defining Women: Social Institutions and Gender Divisions* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1992), 123, 131. For more on the gendering of work and the divisions between men and women, see also: Ann Game and Rosemary Pringle, *Gender and Work* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1983).

¹⁹⁰ Gotz, "Encountering Arlie Hochschild's Concept of 'Emotional Labor,'" 185.

women's experiences to convey some of their emotional responses, which in turn affects their performance at work. As one flight attendant recalls:

I guess it was on a flight when a lady spat at me that I decided I'd had enough. I tried. God knows, I tried my damndest. I went along with the program, I was being genuinely nice to people. But it didn't work. I reject what the company wants from me emotionally.¹⁹¹

Hochschild's research illustrates the consequences of using personal feeling and emotion at work. I use her emotional labour thesis to examine non-profit/NGO work and extend her ideas to ask what is at stake for women engaging in women's human rights work where there may be a moral professional obligation. Rebecca Taylor's study "Rethinking voluntary work" lends itself as an approach to examine paid and unpaid workers. Her research follows two organisations, one that is local and informal and the other a national and highly organised workplace. She found that "Understanding a person's unpaid work in relation to their paid work and their economic and social position is crucial."¹⁹² A more holistic perspective on a person's working life would give rise to a more "textured and complete picture of people's work practices and choices."¹⁹³ This is relevant in the ongoing discussion about whether the non-profit/NGO sector is becoming more corporatised.

Kathleen O'Reilly argues the goal of NGOs is not to increase profits, but to implement successful projects. However, the increasing shift to secure donor funding has resulted in questioning NGO workers' passion and the intimate relationship they have to their work. O'Reilly maintains, "Fieldworkers are no longer hired because of their commitment to social service."¹⁹⁴ In her study examining NGO workers in Rajasthan, India she saw the struggles between participants in her research. She acknowledges these workplace conflicts were due to changing hiring practices that saw a more corporatised NGO worker, which is becoming more of a concern in the future of

¹⁹¹ Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 38-39.

¹⁹² Rebecca F. Taylor, "Rethinking voluntary work," in *A New Sociology of Work*, eds. Pettinger et al., (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 135.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ O'Reilly, "'We Are Not Contractors'," 209.

the NGO sector. The corporatised NGO worker threatens the altruistic nature of non-profits and NGOs, as they do not invest their personal politics, feelings and emotions in their work. While this chapter does not give an in-depth analysis of the corporatisation of non-profits and NGOs, it is important to flag this development in the sector, as from the current literature and my observations, future research on NGOs will be impacted by increasing corporate practices and strategies. Embedded in NGO workplace practices and perceptions are the selflessness of its workers. This is where I draw on the ‘personal is political’ to frame women’s experiences in their work and enmeshing the personal in the professional.

Contextualising ‘the personal is political’

Carol Hanisch’s “The Personal Is Political” is a widely published and reprinted paper that has been circulated in various languages throughout the world. The paper was originally written in response to the attack on the radical feminist movement by the Southern Conference Educational Fund (SCEF) in the United States.¹⁹⁵ Hanisch’s paper came out of the struggles she and the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM) experienced from those who either wanted to stop it or to push it into a watered down direction.¹⁹⁶ Talking from their experience and feelings enabled women to map their common connections and, although women were often critiqued for having ‘therapy sessions’ this communication proved invaluable to a greater awareness of women’s lived realities and commonalities.¹⁹⁷ The meaningfulness of the slogan is still utilised in women’s movements and activism today, as it has travelled all over the world. The slogan was first introduced into Malaysia when a group of young activists came together in Petaling Jaya, Kuala Lumpur on International Women’s Day in 1985. They discussed the status of women in the country, as many of them had just returned from

¹⁹⁵ Carol Hanisch, “The Personal is Political: Introduction” *Carol Hanisch*, accessed September 20, 2014, <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PersonalisPol.pdf>. In a 2006 website introduction, Hanisch remarks she did not give the paper its title, but the editors of *Notes from the Second Year*, Firestone and Koedt.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. While Hanisch worked with the SCEF, she noticed the staff, including both men and women, criticized women’s capacity building and groups that discussed their oppression as she says, “personal therapy”—and certainly “not political.”

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

overseas, where they had been exposed to various social justice movements as a way for women to unite in a collective decision-making process.¹⁹⁸

Hanisch was writing from personal experience and her paper sought to examine what it meant to be a movement woman in the WLM. She describes movement women as strong, selfless, other-oriented, sacrificing and able to be in control of their own lives.¹⁹⁹ She highlights that as a movement woman, “To admit to the problems in my life is to be deemed weak. So I want to be a strong woman, in movement terms, and not admit I have any real problems that I cannot find a personal solution to (except those directly related to the capitalist system).”²⁰⁰ Hanisch speaks to the ideals she needed to publically uphold and privately manage, and the challenges of finding solutions to everyday lived realities, beyond a non-resolving complaint mode. I argue what Hanisch describes as a ‘movement woman’ is reflected in the dispositions of women working in the non-profit/NGO sector. For the women I interviewed, maintaining ideal standards of how to approach their work was based upon their ability to work for others, to sacrifice not only their physical and mental selves, but also their emotional selves. Women working for IRAW AP, Sisters In Islam and other women’s organisations in Malaysia draw on their use of the intimate feelings they have for women’s human rights work.

In Hochschild’s study of Delta Airlines, flight attendants are told to think about passengers as someone they know. For example, as one graduate at Delta Airlines in Hochschild’s research says, “*You see your sister’s eyes in someone sitting at that seat. That makes you want to put out for them. I like to think of the cabin as the living room of my own home.*”²⁰¹ Wathshlah also acknowledges that her activism is personal and sometimes illogical. She says when you personalise it, “It involves emotion and it is how you manage emotion.” By making the work personal, she forgets about office politics and ‘dramas’ because “At the end of the day, the work is the most important

¹⁹⁸ Ng, Mohamad and beng hui, *Feminism and the women’s movement in Malaysia*, 43.

¹⁹⁹ Carol Hanisch, “The Personal is Political,” <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PersonalisPol.pdf>.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 105.

thing.” However, the Malaysian Feminist Activist (MFA) found women’s organisations challenging workplaces:

Why are our workplaces not sort of tingle and zing with justice and liberation and a sense of freedom and why are we all so bogged down and so burdened and heavy and why are we not enjoying ourselves and yet we are doing such important work? And this brings in the questions of so, then perhaps you have done this to yourself and you have this commitment to the work, but things in your personal life could be disastrous, but how does this then affect the commitment to your work as the years go by?

MFA highlights important and ongoing issues in the non-profit/NGO sector. Having passion for the work may not be enough to sustain working conditions that promote overwork, sacrifices to their health and time spent away from loved ones. Aware that women come to the work with different expectations and motivations, MFA also considers the longevity of continuing in the work. “[We need to ask] is there the commitment to the work, are you still committed and are you still putting in what you can?” MFA signals what Hochschild identifies as the issues that can arise when personal emotion enters the workplace, such as the over-commitment towards work and the potential of burnout.

If women’s commitment to non-profit/NGO work is expected to be emotionally driven through passion, then when do emotions become a problem at work? Sanyu recalls her volunteer experience at the Nairobi Women’s Hospital:

I was engaging with survivors of gang rape and I am an emotional being. I remember crying, [and] at lunch time [I would] go into the bathroom and cry and one of the older counsellors would be like, “Sanyu, you have to be careful, you don’t internalize everything because you are not going to make it.” And I was like, “What do you mean, make it in life? Make it in my internship? Do you want to be more specific?” And she was like, “You are not going to make it.” And I kept asking her, “How can you not internalize it, how can you separate it?” And she didn’t give me any answers.

The idea that non-profit/NGO work is morally inspired is not a new revelation. However, when personal emotion is involved in the work, this becomes difficult to

manage, especially when there is no training for NGO workers for how to control their emotions in these spaces. Sanyu quickly learns from her experience at the Women's Hospital that certain types of emotions are unacceptable in the workplace. It is only after her colleague scolds her for crying that she realises that she should have kept a stronger disposition, separating herself from heavy issues such as the ramifications of rape. This is where the personal becomes professional for her. How can she separate her own personal investment in the prevention of violence against women when this is what drew her into this organisation? This is also one of the contradictions in women's organisations, as the work is driven by passion and dedication to work for others, but when they become 'too invested' or 'too emotional' it is seen as an issue.

Here I turn to Adrienne Rich's work and her experiences in the Women's Liberation Movements (WLMs). Rich has not only been closely linked with the United States WLM, but she has spent time as a writer, a teacher, an editor-publisher, a pamphleteer, a lecturer, and a self-proclaimed sometime activist, and most importantly, a poet.²⁰² In *Blood, Bread, and Poetry* Rich argues:

By the end of the 1960s, the personal is the political [was necessary] ... because in other political movements of that decade the power relation of men to women, the question of women's roles and men's roles, had been dismissed.²⁰³

For Rich, writing as a woman and out of a woman's body focuses on women directly. She says, "To take women's existence seriously as theme and source for art was something I had been hungering to do, needing to do, all my writing."²⁰⁴ Rich uses her writing to reflect on her experiences to open up the space for women to have an art of their own, "Remind[ing] us of our history and what might be; to show us our true faces—all of them."²⁰⁵ When Rich writes about the body, she considers the difference between 'the body' and 'my body':

²⁰² Adrienne Rich, *Blood, Bread, and Poetry* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1986), Forward.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 181.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

When I write “the body,” I see nothing in particular. To write “my body” plunges me into lived experience, particularly: I see scars, disfigurements, discolorations, damages, losses, as well as what pleases me.²⁰⁶

Rich reflects on what is at stake when we think of how the body is located, especially through the use of ‘my body’ and the importance of her own position and life history:

Bones [well-nourished] from the placenta; the teeth of a middle class person seen by the dentist twice a year from childhood. White skin, marked and scarred by three pregnancies, an elected sterilization, progressive arthritis, four joint operations, calcium deposits, no rapes, no abortions, long hours at a typewriter—my own, not a typing pool—and so forth. To say “the body” lifts me away from what has given me a primary perspective.²⁰⁷

Writing from her located experience, “Rich has to move both outwards and inwards, outwards to social structures, power groups and political relationships and inwards in her own psyche, desires, conscience.”²⁰⁸ Here the politics of location extends beyond geographical location to encompass the social, the cultural, and the political ways in which we can then understand ourselves phenomenologically. Rich’s work can be utilised in an intersectional examination of race, class, gender and sexuality. In writing this thesis and more specifically this chapter, I reflected on my own position just as Rich does in her writing. Like Rich, I too have the teeth of a middle class person seen by the dentist twice a year from childhood. I am not white skinned, but have been afforded many similar privileges based on my Canadian citizenship and accent. But being marked by brown skin has factored into how I am able to move in the world. In particular, as a researcher my Indian background gained me a form of ethnic capital that connected me to women who are Indian and Indian Malaysian, because of the colour of my skin. However, this ethnic capital is contextual and in other situations, the colour of

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 215.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Mary Eagleton, “Adrienne Rich, Location and the Body,” *Journal of Gender Studies* 9, no.3 (2000): 300, doi: 10.1080/713678003.

my skin is not looked upon as a way to gain entry or access to certain groups and spaces, but forms a wall of discrimination.

Bringing together the personal and the professional mirrors Western feminist sentiments that incorporate personal politics into public spaces and politics. As Shulamith Firestone, a radical feminist of the 1970s, states:

The feminist movement is the first to combine effectively the “personal” with the “political.” It is developing a new way of relating, a new political style, one that will eventually reconcile the personal—always the feminine prerogative—with the public, with the “world outside,” to restore that world to its emotions, and literally to its senses.²⁰⁹

Linking the ‘personal’ to the ‘political’ enabled feminists to find a way to connect personal histories and experiences into public life. By developing this new political style, feminists have been able to write and re-write stories to include experiences that are enriched by reflexive practices. The construction of feminist-knowledge production through the personal has generated platforms for women’s voices and experiences to be heard. This becomes important for women engaging in non-profit/NGO work, because their work is engrained in both their personal and professional histories.

Experience as method: Women’s engagement in the non-profit/NGO sector

In non-profit/NGO work, it is difficult to neglect the role of experience because often it is what motivates individuals to get involved in this sector. It could be from a personal experience, witnessing something or a result of multiple experiences coming together. As Dorathy says, “[Growing] up in a very devout Catholic family from a very small town, it is part of your upbringing that you must do good, that you must be a good person, that you were put on earth for something better.” What she indicates here is that

²⁰⁹ Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (London: Jonathan Cape LTD 1971), 43.

“the personal” can be tied to wider projects. Drawing on Rich and other feminists to account for how experience ‘works’, Elspeth Probyn states:

I want to extend the reach of these momentary flashes of gendered selves. I want to stretch my experience beyond merely personal, not as a way of transcendence but as a way of reaching her experiences, the experiences and selves of women.²¹⁰

Probyn utilises experience as “a mode of theorising.”²¹¹ She considers what experience is and what it can do. Most germane to my thesis is how Probyn thinks through the female experience as a mode of mapping connections between and among women. From this understanding, we can use experience as a method to explore the lived realities of women as individuals and as a group, or a class, as de Lauretis would frame it. Using the lived realities and life histories of women positions them both inside and outside of gender representations. Probyn proposes that experience can work on two registers. First, at an ontological level, “the concept of experience posits a separate realm of existence – it testifies to the gendered, sexual and racial facticity of being in the social; it can be called an immediate experiential self.”²¹² Second, “At an epistemological level, the self is revealed in its conditions of possibility; here experience is recognised as more obviously discursive and can be used overtly to politicise the ontological.”²¹³ She argues for both of these levels, “The experiential self and the politicisation of experience – are necessary as the conditions of possibility for alternative speaking positions within cultural theory.”²¹⁴ If experience is used epistemologically, then “experience provides evidence of the interrelation of structural determination and individual relationships which compose social formation.”²¹⁵ She highlights how knowledge is known and represented and how this is then depicted in the real—the lived reality.

²¹⁰ Elspeth Probyn, *Sexing the Self: Gendered Positions in Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1993), 3.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid., 14.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 17.

Yet, the use of experience has not always been welcomed, even in feminist research. Feminist historian Joan Wallach Scott points out the problems with its use in her essay *Evidence of Experience*. Scott addresses how “subjects are constituted discursively and experience is a linguistic event (it doesn’t happen outside established meanings), but neither is it confined to a fixed order of meaning.”²¹⁶ Scott signifies that experience confirms what is already known and also upsets what has been taken for granted. For example, how we can learn from what we see, but not everyone may see the same images, and learn the same lessons at the same time or in the same way.²¹⁷ Mohanty is also wary of how experience can universalise women’s experiences when we “fail to examine the cultural processes that engender experiences and identities.”²¹⁸ Mohanty’s critiques of experience differ from Scott’s in that Mohanty recognises that experience is still vital in sharing stories. In her theorisations of Third World feminism, Mohanty investigates the power in ‘the histories from below’ and the tensions and contradictions within experience. Experience, for her, is not just what has been recorded, but how it is recorded, the way we read from recorded experience, and how we choose to use these records.²¹⁹ This trajectory allows us to see the importance of experience and, as feminist philosopher Linda Alcoff notes: experiences are layered.²²⁰ Experiences build on each other and “our past [produces] a set of sedimentations that contribute to interpretive processes.”²²¹ Alcoff situates experience in wider epistemic debates. She states, “*Experience* is a slippery word, and it is not one that philosophers today generally like to use. It can be used to refer minimally to the contents of one’s perception, or, more maximally, to a thick and rich set of sensations, or to a cognitively and affectively loaded attitude about an event.”²²² In this way, she is also interested in

²¹⁶ Joan Wallach Scott, “Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no.44 (1991): 780, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/stable/1343743>.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 793.

²¹⁸ Shari Stone-Mediatore, “Chandra Talpade Mohanty and the Revaluing of ‘Experience’,” *Hypatia* 13, no.3 (1998): 122, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/stable/3810641>.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 123, 130.

²²⁰ Linda Martín Alcoff, “Sexual Violations and the Question of Experience,” *New Literary History* 45, no.3 (2014): 458, <http://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2014.0030>.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Ibid.*, 446.

how experience is not just about what has been recorded, but who records this and what can be read from this recording.

Bringing together the ontological and epistemological grounds of experience allows us to cross boundaries in research and gives voice to those who are often neglected or left out of dominant discourse.²²³ Feminist interventions and research have further developed the ways in which we can locate individual experience and situate them in wider structures and debates that strengthen the ways in which knowledge is produced. Putting experience to work, my workplace ethnography captures the realities that highlight women's stories, especially ones that are rarely told. The focus for the women in my research has always been to represent the voices and rights of others. The more interviews I conducted with non-profit/NGO workers, the clearer it became that they are uncomfortable speaking about themselves and their experiences. Their emphasis on the importance of others almost always took priority in their narratives. This was conveyed through their responses that the work may be challenging, but it is 'good work'. They rationalised their self-sacrifice, because there are bigger issues than themselves. In saying this, they were still aware of their investment in their work. Speaking to the complexities of this, Sanyu recalls:

Unless in your personal life you make a conscious effort for [your] values to always translate and not just when you are dealing with [such as] advocacy or research specific cases. It is just so hard and I think we just very easily compartmentalise. So for instance you may operate in an environment professionally where it is all about feminism and equality, but in your personal life that may not translate, but that may not solely be your problem that may be the society or your partner or the space you are operating in or what you choose to take or not to take, I think it is so complex.

On the one hand, women who use their personal experience and politics in their work can be thought of as passionate and committed, or in Hanisch's terms a real 'movement woman', it can create tensions in their personal lives. On the other hand,

²²³ For more on experience and the use of affect and embodiment, see Alison Phipps, "Whose personal is more political? Experience in contemporary feminist politics," *Feminist Theory* 17, no.3 (2016): 303-321, doi: 10.1177/1464700116663831.

compartmentalising work and home is not an easy feat in this type of work, because it is enmeshed in their values and belief systems. Striking the right balance of work and home then becomes complicated in the name and justification for the work. The boundary blur between work and home continues to have women thinking about how they can, or, if they can strike a balance between the two worlds.

Blurring the domains between work and home

Work and home, public and private spheres: these are the familiar and well-worn categories which we use to talk about the main divisions in our lives. We make these structural distinctions so routinely that they seem self-evident.²²⁴

Gendered representations of the private and public spheres stem from larger political, societal and cultural practices. For example, in Rosemary Pringle's analysis, secretaries are:

Vulnerable to a blurring of boundaries between home and work. In the first place, the tasks overlap... They were reminded to clean and dust, empty the ash trays regularly, open the windows and adjust the curtains, keep an emergency supply of aspirin, bandaids and so on... the work can involve very long hours, while bosses exercise power by deliberately challenging the boundary.²²⁵

As we have seen care is a major part of non-profit/NGO workplaces. It works on multiple levels, as women have to care for others in their work, they have to care for the work, which in turn leaves them neglecting their own care. Always thinking about others has several harmful effects. MFA tells me that at the pinnacle of her NGO career her mind was always buzzing and she received affirmation to overwork and live a 'fairly self-abusive lifestyle.' When I interviewed her, she was relaxed. Through her experiences of neglecting herself for so long, she now centres her needs over her work. However, she still encounters pressures to overwork:

²²⁴ Rosemary Pringle, *Secretaries Talk: Sexuality, Power and Work* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1988), 213.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 216.

Thursday night at seven o'clock they tell me to do a piece of work to prepare for the post-meeting which includes summarising everything that has been said in the first three days and then proposing a new draft of the program or book. I said to them "If you want me to do this, this is going to take me through the night, yeah?" And what I was told by the feminists in the room and there were so many feminists in the room in charge that "yeah, well it's not easy work, but somebody's got to do it."

The non-profit/NGO sector relies on the absence of clear structures and policies in place to support workers' care. While flexibility is often viewed as a positive aspect in workplaces, it is through this plasticity that NGO work impedes on personal time. The notion that 'somebody's got to do it' reinforces how essential it is for the work to get done relating to the 'good work' mentality. Whether you are at the office, or conducting training outside of the office, it is always about the work, because activism is thought to be a part of one's overall performance of commitment.

Baillie Smith and Jenkins argue that "Such blurring is...an integral part of the very nature of activism—the participants' politics and commitments to social justice are embedded in their everyday practices, including, but certainly not limited to, their jobs as NGO workers."²²⁶ Their study examines the subjectivities of activists in local Indian NGOs and the relationship between cosmopolitanism and activism.²²⁷ One activist in their study stated, "Activism is not kind of easy, you know, once you start something, when it's on the move, it doesn't allow you to sleep sometimes."²²⁸ This mentality and approach then consumes those engaging in this type of work, committed on multiple and often self-sacrificing levels that have consequences that impact more than the personal and professional boundary blur, but workers' health. This will be further explored in the following chapter, where I examine how women in this type of work think about their health encompassing their physical, mental and emotional health.

²²⁶ Matt Baillie Smith and Katy Jenkins, "Existing at the Interface: Indian NGO Activists as Strategic Cosmopolitans," *Antipode* 44, no.3 (2011): 643, doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8330.2011.00888.x.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 641.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 643.

The tensions that surface when work-life becomes home-life and vice versa is not specific to non-profit/NGO work as has been illustrated by Pringle's study on secretaries and Hoschchild's analysis on flight attendants. It is becoming increasingly significant to examine how individuals think about their greater identity (involving both private and public representations) especially, considering work-life balance initiatives and the impact of round-the-clock communication technologies on people's working lives. Melissa Gregg argues that the concept of overtime has shifted and instead of counting and measuring working hours, work is measured by tasks completed.²²⁹ Gregg follows research on teleworking to illustrate how working from home opens up the possibilities for women in particular to balance childcare and work.²³⁰ However, working from home is not always the viable option, while in theory it offers flexibility, it still promotes the mentality 'to get the work done' and makes it easier to do so. This is one of the reasons why NGO workers may seek clear distinctions and boundaries between their home and work spheres. Audrey recounts, "So, the work that I do at IWRAP AP, I see in more of a professional sense, it's mainly in applying the knowledge I have on certain level concepts." Audrey is the program manager at IWRAP AP; she is in her 40s and began working with the organisation as a program officer. She is one of the longest serving staff members continuing at IWRAP AP. Unlike Wathshlah and Sanyu, she makes clear divisions in her personal and professional lives. For her, what she does in her professional work is not a part of her personal activism, which she describes, "[is] more rooted at the national level. I work with activist groups that supply services to displaced or migrant refugee populations, but this is completely outside of my work." Despite, her attempt to make clear divisions between her personal and professional activisms, Audrey did see there were connections between the two worlds, but still considers:

In my personal perspective, I see that as my activism... Maybe it is a personal call for me that I separate what I call activism as my personal time and what I do at IWRAP Asia Pacific is more about... kind of a professional space.

²²⁹ Melissa Gregg, "The Normalisation of Flexible Female Labour in the Information Economy," *Feminist Media Studies* 8, no.3 (2008): 292, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14680770802217311>.

²³⁰ Ibid.

Audrey's experiences convey an alternative approach to the work. She makes the conscious effort not to bring in her personal activism. This may be due to her position as a program manager who has less direct involvement with women and women's groups than program officers or even her experience working with the organisation for over a decade. Most of Audrey's workplace duties include filling in funding reports and acting as a liaison between program officers and other stakeholders, such as the organisations' board members. She is happy with her current role in the organisation, as she sees the work in a professional sense. The following and final sections of this chapter are dedicated to the complexities involved in 'good work', the emotional aspects of it and where burnout finds its way in the non-profit/NGO sector.

Complexities in doing 'good work'

While Hochschild's research is located in the United States context of service industries, she gives us an entry point to think about the changing non-profit/NGO sector and the shifting hiring practices that has seen a new kind of NGO worker, one that is perceived as less committed and passionate towards their work. The deep and surface acting methods that Hochschild draws our attention to, and that are utilised in service-based professions threaten NGO workplaces because they are not driven by activism, passion, politics or dedication. Hochschild tells us that emotional labour is dangerous for individuals and their overall identities, as it blurs the emotional relationship they have to their work. However, in women's organisations, workers are encouraged to draw on the deeper connection they have to their work. Their morals, values, feminist and activist politics are perceived as assets in these organisations. This is what makes this service-based profession different from others because it is values-based and brings in wider personal politics in the professional sphere.

The idea 'the work is good' was often spoken of by my interviewees and used as a justification for long hours and office politics. In his article called "Doing Good?" William Fisher argues that, "perceptions of NGOs are tied up with contested notions of what it means to 'do good'. At stake are the very notion of the 'good' and the processes

of deciding what it is and how to pursue it.”²³¹ For the women in my research, simply put ‘doing good’ is helping others. It relies on individual perceptions of what ‘good work’ is, not only for those who are doing it, but those who have a stake in it. This is where non-profit/NGO work differs from other service-based occupations, as it is embedded in elements of self-sacrifice for a greater ideological and moral investment. It becomes a part of an individual’s overall disposition, where one embodies overwork under the rationale “somebody’s got to do it” that people’s lives depend on their work and gives them reason to work harder. I should note this mentality was internalised by the women in my research, but it is also related to the relationships that organisations have with external donors and partnering organisations who all ask of these women in different ways.

Despite how much time women gave to their work and to others, they also found time to help me with my research. My interviews with participants usually lasted about an hour and at IWRAW AP, this meant interviews took place after lunch. Mornings for the women of IWRAW AP were busy, one of the first tasks is to check and respond to emails. Women were most productive at this time. Afternoons were a good time for interviews here, because most of the pressing work matters had been resolved. My interviews with other NGO program officers were usually conducted after working hours. For instance, Natasha and I met at seven in the evening, as this was the only time she had. When we introduced ourselves, she immediately told me she had to leave before nine, because she had a work call to get back to when she got home. This is the life for many of the women I interviewed, where they constantly think about the work and take it home with them. Where Gregg sees some of the beneficial aspects of teleworking, in the NGO sector, this often results in overwork. This is ingrained in the mentality to work for others, Dorathy once explained that at times she gets worried on the weekends, because she is not checking her work email and fears she may be missing important emails that need responding. Emails are important at IWRAW AP, as this is the primary method of communication and where most of the staff’s hours are spent.

I have conveyed many of the challenges that persist merging the personal and professional, and here I turn my attention to depict why women continue to engage in

²³¹ Fisher, “Doing Good,” 446.

‘good work’. I draw on my interview with Sanyu; she maintained that while many of her friends’ happiness was related to economic security, for her, job success via financial gain was not her primary concern when she began her career in activism. She relates her happiness to what she is doing and the impact of her work:

In terms of success—mortgages, houses, cars, but then, yeah, that is when I realized take a step back... I firmly believe everyone has their own race, but it is so easy to think about a small area ten people, eight are doing fabulously (economic wise) and there are two that aren’t and it is so easy for the two to question why they aren’t, and it goes back down to maybe they didn’t pick the right career, and so, I just have to realise that no, I actually enjoy what I do and if it doesn’t translate into monetary terms, I am happy as an individual and have no regrets.

From Sanyu’s perspective, her professional work will always be committed to human rights. She says, “Human rights for life, it will always be human rights for life.” She elaborates that the impact she is making in her work is centred on the dignity of a human being and that ‘good work’ is not about making a profit for profit sake, but is rooted in human rights and principles. She also speaks of the realities of engaging in non-profit/NGO work and the financial insecurity and disparity between working in the not-for-profit sector and corporate sector:

At 22, I didn’t care about the money, I didn’t care about the money per se, but there is a difference being short of money and being able to live...comfortably, so could I have a child now and take my child to the kind of school that I went to on my salary, no, and does that bother me? Yeah, it does.

What becomes evident then is that ‘good work’ with its principles and ideological underpinnings are important, it is not economically valued in the same way as other professions. For some, financial security may not pose a problem. However, for others, as in Sanyu’s case, it impacts personal ambitions, such as her ability to have and to properly educate a child. Women’s personal investment in this work “consider[s] the persona, and often relatively hidden, narratives of activists...provides the opportunity to

develop a less institutionalised understanding of civil society.”²³² By conveying the experiences of individuals and their everyday struggles, and their identification and pursuit of alternatives, we can become familiar with how they see themselves through ‘good work’.²³³ Sanyu is not motivated by economic success, but she would also like to be paid adequately for the work she does. Having a connection to the work is important in any profession. It can be a driving force in finding happiness at work, but in work that is not always about tangible results and in rooted advocacy initiatives, it is challenging for women to see the changes they are making in society.

Many of my interviewees struggled to identify clear and distinct boundaries between home and work, because they found that the two spheres were interconnected, because of moral and ethical ideals that may have been instilled in them from a young age or as a result of early activism. They also expressed the sentiment of ‘good work’ was at times enough to sustain long working hours. However, constantly thinking about the work may have made them highly principled individuals, but what about the everyday lived realities of these workers? What about their financial (in)securities? What about their long-term health when they continue to self-sacrifice themselves for others? These recurring questions are important to consider in relation to how those engaging in ‘good work’ think about rationalising their passion and commitment towards their work.

Carried away with emotion

Earlier in this chapter, Sanyu shared with us the negative impact emotion can have in the workplace. Realising there are situations and contexts where emotions are induced and or suppressed, women negotiate their emotional selves in their work. Emotion work, according to Hochschild, is an art that is fundamental in social exchanges, where the “cost is usually worth the fundamental benefit.”²³⁴ In activism, it is what drives individuals through passion and commitment. Wathshlah also notes that emotions are a part of her activism and that is about learning how to manage them at

²³² Smith and Jenkins, “Existing at the Interface: Indian NGO Activists as Strategic Cosmopolitans,” 641.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 21.

work. She says, “I can be absolutely carried away by my emotions, and I can be screaming at someone, but at the end of the day, I have to do it in a constructive manner that the end result is something I want to see.” Her passion is controlled in the workplace. Despite bodily and biological processes of emotion, Hochschild states:

When we manage emotion, we are partly managing a bodily preparation for a consciously or unconsciously anticipated deed. This is why emotion work is *work*, and why estrangement from emotion is estrangement *from* something of importance and weight.²³⁵

What makes emotional labour conflicting for the women in Malaysian-based women’s organisations is how they internalise emotion in their work, how they read social exchanges and situations and when to know where to feel. It is also expected in NGOs that individuals come with this training, and it is experience-based therefore emotions are negotiated and renegotiated and questioned in these working environments.

Switching off

Anne-Meike Fechter argues for the importance in examining the intertwining of altruistic and professional motives and what they tell us about aid workers.²³⁶ She reveals the gap and “the failure – or refusal – to consider the ‘care for the self’ as well as the ‘care for the other’.”²³⁷ To a lesser degree, the popular notion that aid workers are selfless heroes who rescue others from potentially endangering themselves takes shape in the non-profit/NGO sector.²³⁸ In the context of non-profit/NGO spaces, workers do not see themselves as heroes that risk their lives for others, but use their work to help others meanwhile finding happiness within themselves. As a concept happiness is used

²³⁵ Ibid., 230.

²³⁶ Anne-Meike Fechter, “‘Living well’ while ‘doing good’? (Missing) debates on altruism and professionalism in aid work,” *Third World Quarterly* 33, no.8 (2012): 1489, doi: 10.1080/09700161.2012.698133.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

to express feelings of joy and satisfaction. Wanting to find happiness in work, Sanyu says, “You will spend most of your time at work, so if you are not happy at work, I have a hard time believing you are happy.”

When I asked her if there is a balance in how the personal and the professional spaces blur, she replied, “No, because I believe the professional impacts the personal.” Furthermore, when I asked if the personal impacts the professional, she responded “To a certain extent, yeah” and when I asked what her balance was, there was no straightforward answer, but in her words, she expressed:

Yeah, you know where it gets complicated because unless in your personal life you make a conscious effort for those values to always translate and not just when you are dealing with advocacy or research or specific cases. It is just so hard and I think we just very easily compartmentalise...so for instance, you may operate in an environment professionally where it is all about feminism and equality, but in your personal life that may not translate, but that may not solely be your problem that may be the society or your partner or the space you are operating in or what you choose to take or not to take, I think it is so complex.

This complexity Sanyu addresses is one of the challenges that the women of IWRAP AP and other Malaysian-based women’s organisations face, straddling the lines of home and work. Some respond by strictly containing these spaces, while others find that approach problematic and not conducive to non-profit/NGO work. Hochschild notes the human costs of emotional labour are related to three stances: first, the worker’s identity is too entangled in their job and they risk burning out; second, the worker makes clear distinctions between home and work and is less likely to suffer burn out. In this situation, she presents herself as an actor with no personal investment towards the people she is helping and working for. Third, as Hochschild states, “the worker distinguishes herself from her act, does not blame herself for this, and sees the job as positively requiring the capacity to act; for this worker there is some risk of estrangement from acting altogether, and some cynicism about it.”²³⁹ Highlighted through the narratives of Sanyu, Wathshlah, MFA, Dorathy and to a lesser extent

²³⁹ Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 187.

Audrey are the ways in which they fulfill the first stance that Hochschild describes in their continued dedication for the work. In insisting that their passion is an essential form of commitment, they are fully self-policing emotional labourers. According to Hochschild, a “sense of emotional numbness [which] reduces stress... Burnout spares the person in the short term, but it may have a serious long-term cost.”²⁴⁰ In the case of non-profit/NGO work, when individuals lose commitment towards the work, they also lose access to feeling, and with this, “[loss of] a central means of interpreting the world around us.”²⁴¹ Being driven by passion or the rhetoric ‘that the work is good’ and a desire to work harder and longer was a common thread in my interviews. While some non-profit/NGO workers maintain these spaces can be separated, this distinction becomes slippery when they are asked to discuss how they negotiate between their work and home lives.

Conclusion

This chapter has drawn on the feminist mantra ‘the personal is political’ used by renowned feminists, such as Carol Hanisch and Adrienne Rich, in order to convey the importance of feminist perspectives in non-profit/NGO work. The slogan has been used in women’s movements across various global contexts. In particular, it pushes me to think through how people move in the world, especially as it relates to the personal entering the professional. It provides a way to theorise what experience is and what it can do. This mode of theorising is significant to capture the blurring of the personal and the professional spaces. In particular, when the ‘movement women’ in WLMs in the United States used experience in their activism, it was to improve the lives of all women. This is true for the women engaging in women’s human rights work; they too, seek to better the lives of women.

The everyday lived realities of women in the non-profit/NGO sector demonstrates some of the complexities they face as their personal lives, inevitably, merge with their professional lives. Over my multiple fieldwork site visits, I watched women work and talked to them about how they saw themselves in their work. Their

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 188.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

personal motivations—whether through their religious identity, their early activist careers and being politically engaged in civil society movements and their commitment to human rights—enabled them to continue to work for others. This is why women justify working late at night and taking their work home, they are satisfied by how their work is helping the greater wellbeing of others. Despite the challenges they face blurring their private and public spheres, they can find happiness in their work, for now at least.

Basing their work in their personal experience also conveys their passion and pushes back against the sentiment that NGOs are becoming increasingly corporate. While this is still a reality for the wider non-profit/NGO sector, it was less of a concern for the women in my research. They could think about themselves in their work from something they once experienced; how they were brought up to think about ‘good work’; what it means to be a woman in everyday life; their identity being questioned and challenged by various stakeholders; or even a basic interest in altruistic work. ‘Good work’ involves more than helping others. It also involves individuals wanting to sacrifice themselves for something they feel and believe is both work that is good and they feel good doing. This self-sacrifice is thought to be a choice, but as Hochschild, Pringle and others working on gender and work suggest, this can affect more than the mental and physical aspects of work, but the emotional-states of embodying work, especially in service-based professions. In the next chapter *Breaking bodies*, I examine how women’s care roles from the home are brought into their work and what this means for the self-neglect women experience resulting from the absence of a self-care regime.

Chapter Four – Breaking bodies: Looking after others and overlooking the self

As discussed in the previous chapter, mundane tasks such as turning on the computer and checking the office email, working on concept notes, completing reports and filling in funding applications have meaning.²⁴² In her examination of academics in a newly corporatising university, Ruth Barcan conveys how administrative work can be vocational,²⁴³ she argues, “Vocation implies the meaningfulness of work, a privileged collectivity with whom to share it, values and goals that transcend the everyday...”²⁴⁴ This is true for the women working at IWRAW AP. The routine of coming to the office day-after-day is traced to their commitment to women’s rights. As Barcan argues, “Academic work is not a job that involves turning up, doing your work and going home.”²⁴⁵ This has physical and emotional effect. I argue non-profit/NGO workers use the meaningfulness of work and working for others to justify self-neglect and a lack of self-care, and this is promoted by an NGO working culture of silence.

After several field site visits to Malaysia from 2014 to 2016, and more specifically to Kuala Lumpur and the women of IWRAW AP, I saw how women were conflicted in taking time for themselves. They were often tired, overworked and felt undervalued. Many even saw our interviews as a place where they could finally talk about themselves, which was unfamiliar territory for them. In a study of aid workers, researchers found that 79% of the 754 respondents stated they had experienced mental health issues.²⁴⁶ More than three quarters of the survey was taken by women who make up the majority of those engaging in aid work. While NGO workers in my research do

²⁴² Melissa Gregg, *Work’s Intimacy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 17. Ruth Barcan, *Academic life and labour in the new university: hope and other choices* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), 78. See also Ryan D. Duffy and Bryan J. Dik, “Research on calling: What have we learned and where are we going?” *Journal of Vocational Behaviour* 83 (2013): 428-436, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2013.06.006>, for more on calling and vocation in research.

²⁴³ Barcan, *Academic life and labour in the new university*, 79.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 78-79.

²⁴⁶ Holly Young, “Guardian research suggests mental health crisis among aid workers,” *The Guardian*, accessed November 23, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/nov/23/guardian-research-suggests-mental-health-crisis-among-aid-workers>.

not see the trauma that aid workers do, such as human tragedy, health consequences are common to all workers in this field, where staff welfare often takes a backseat.²⁴⁷

In a report conducted by the Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights (UAFWHR), Jane Barry and Jelena Dordevic argue:

Most activists don't like to talk about themselves... They can talk for hours about fundamentalisms, funding crunches, ending war and violence against women... But convincing activists to discuss their own hopes, fears, and concerns was much harder... For them, their stress, exhaustion, and even safety were private matters—unrelated to the real business of activism... There is no place for them in the real discourse of human rights.²⁴⁸

I encountered this on my first fieldwork visit to Kuala Lumpur during a dinner with friends connected to Malaysian activist circles. My host informed me that the NGO working culture promoted the use of unpaid labour and overwork. I was familiar with this perspective from my past experiences in the sector, but I was also curious as to what extent this took place in Malaysian-based women's NGOs. This chapter explores what self-care means for the women in my study, and how health comes at a cost in their commitment towards the work. Women find themselves continuing when their minds and bodies are slowly wearing out.

I begin by outlining the construction of women as carers. I then return to and build on Hochschild's research to examine why women are responsible or feel like they are for care work, incorporating Marcel Mauss' influential text *The Gift* and feminist readings of the gift exchange. I argue, as a result of bringing together these schools of thought that the representations of women as carers in non-profit/NGO work has a detrimental impact on women's health which, ultimately, compels them to focus on others above themselves.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Jane Barry and Jelena Dordevic, *What's the Point of Revolution if We Can't Dance?* (Boulder: Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights, 2007), 6.

The normalisation of self-sacrifice in non-profit/NGO work is a growing area of concern. Women's self-sacrificing dispositions impact their emotional and physical health, NGO workplaces do not always maintain and uphold adequate systems and structures to alleviate work stresses, and as a result women find themselves using informal social structures to work through issues and frustrations. Individuals become responsible for finding their own health remedies and solutions in the name of sacrificial productivity, which is a common reality of the NGO working culture and practice.

Women as carers: Gendered expectations from the home and their professionalised uses

In attempts to balance productive and reproductive work, women often neglect their own care to achieve the care needs of others. Kate Bezanson and Meg Luxton argue, "The replacement of a male breadwinner—female carer model with a dual earner-female carer model in Canada resulted in enormous pressures on women particularly to manage paid and unpaid work."²⁴⁹ While their research is centred in the Canadian context, bearing both paid and unpaid responsibilities is difficult in any circumstance and context. Taking seriously the changes in women's roles both at home and in the workforce illustrates the important work women do, but receive little recognition for. Women's perceived responsibilities as the primary carers contributes to the challenges of balancing home and work responsibilities.

Despite the fact that women only came onto the development scene in the 1970s, they make up a majority of those working in the non-profit sector.²⁵⁰ 'Caring' occupations, such as teaching, nursing and non-profits and NGOs, reinforce gendered stereotypes that perpetuate the notion of women as carers. As such, these understandings and stereotypes are heavily rooted in a construction of women's 'natural' ability to care for others, and are taken from traditional gender roles typically seen in the family unit. What becomes of women who work in the non-profit/NGO

²⁴⁹ Kate Bezanson and Meg Luxton, eds., *Social Reproduction: Feminist Political Economy Challenges Neo-Liberalism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 5.

²⁵⁰ Kothari and Minogue, eds., *Development theory and practice*, 43.

sector when the (unpaid) emotion work typical of the home becomes a part of one's professional work?

Women in non-profit work: Overrepresented and undervalued

Shahra Razavi's exploration of the political and social economy of care traces the lack of women's presence in dominant economic discourses to the over privileging of monetised aspects of the economy, which has consistently ignored the realm of unpaid work. Polarising dichotomies of the economy – paid versus unpaid and formal versus informal – neglects various types of mixed economies.²⁵¹ J.K. Gibson-Graham has long suggested a reworking of these binaries to open up more spaces for a transformative trajectory developing alternative paths of thinking about the economy aside from formal commodity markets and capitalist representations.²⁵² In the case of non-profit work, the lack of financial gain and deeply entrenched altruistic motivations provides a different model of paid work that does not conform to being profit-driven, but is based on values.

Women in Southeast Asia are represented in high numbers in both the informal economy and in values-based work voluntary associations and community enterprises. Typical representations of women in voluntary and charity-based initiatives portray them as workers who want to do 'good work' on behalf of others. When women enter the non-profit sphere they are stereotyped through the gendered division of labour from the private sphere of the home as devoted carers. Uma Kothari argues that development theory and practice have yet to engage with feminism, suggesting this is related to the prioritisation of men in development processes. She also reminds us of the gap between theory and development practitioners and this is in need of further exploration.²⁵³ Examining the construction of gender roles in non-profit work, particularly at a WHRO,

²⁵¹ Shahra Razavi, "The political and social economy of care in a developing context conceptual issues research questions and policy options," *Gender and Development Programme Paper Number 3* Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (2007): 3.

²⁵² J.K. Gibson-Graham and Gerda Roelvink, "The nitty gritty of creating alternative economies," *Social Alternatives* 30, no.1 (2011): 2, <http://search.informit.com.au.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/documentSummary;dn=201106329;res=IELA PA>.

²⁵³ Kothari and Minogue, eds., *Development theory and practice*, 51.

not only visibilises the societal and cultural gendered assumptions of this work, but more importantly also enables women's experiences to be at the forefront of research.

Care as a concept has been taken up in various fields of research. To better situate its use in my study of women and work, and more specifically the merging of the public and private spheres of women's care work, I utilise Razavi's approach:

An ambiguous notion because it stretches from a more pragmatic and practical endeavour of providing physical care, which may to some extent be independent of the relation between the carer and the person cared for, to deeply emotional caring, in which the person doing the caring is inseparable from the care giver.²⁵⁴

Here Razavi illustrates what care involves. It is a relationship between the caregiver and the cared for and it is the responsibility of the caregiver to perform emotional caring for another through this process. This is where, I argue, the blur between private emotion work becomes (what Hochschild termed) emotional labour. As Hochschild draws on surface and deep acting methods involved in the commodification of emotion management to argue that care also becomes a product for exchange. More broadly, we can examine how men and women have differing roles and expectations in care work, and more explicitly how women do more emotion work than men.

A gendered care analysis of social reproduction is characterised by three dimensions: biological reproduction of the species, reproduction of the labour force, and reproduction of provisioning care needs.²⁵⁵ Bezanson and Luxton argue social reproduction is cemented on individuals who are members of families, households and the wider community "[that] carry out their responsibilities for social reproduction in ways that are profoundly shaped by familial ideology and class, race and gender difference, while simultaneously producing and reproducing such ideologies and differences."²⁵⁶ How one moves in the world, according to Bezanson and Luxton, is

²⁵⁴ Razavi, "The political and social economy of care," 8.

²⁵⁵ Stephen Gill and Isabella Bakker, *Power, Production and Social Reproduction: Human In/security in the Global Political Economy* (United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 74.

²⁵⁶ Bezanson and Luxton, *Social Reproduction*, 10.

based on what has influenced them or shaped them. This is also reflected in Pierre Bourdieu's conceptions of the habitus, which I discuss in Chapter Six.

Gendered roles in the home and at work are still practiced today. In Malaysia women are encouraged to enter the workforce, however this is challenged when they marry and begin a family, as they are still perceived as the primary carers at home. Influenced by the 'Asian Family Values' discourses from the 1990s, which I discussed in Chapter One. Malaysian women's mothering roles also act as a moral metaphor for the nation that is based in the gendered divisions of labour between men and women in the home.²⁵⁷ In this way, Hochschild's gendering of the different emotion work men and women relates to the double bind of women's personal and professional lives.²⁵⁸ She captures the ongoing assumptions that women are inherent managers of feelings in private life and are built for emotion management. She argues that women's lack of economic power impacts women far greater than men: "Women in general have far less independent access to money, power, authority, or status in society."²⁵⁹

Hochschild also discusses the consequences that gendered roles have for both men and women; first, she notes women make a resource out of a feeling and "offer it to men as a gift in return for the more material resources they lack."²⁶⁰ The expectation of women to give is a transaction that is based on the household division of labour and the gendered nurturing role of women in the private sphere. Marcel Mauss's analysis on the gift exchange allows us an approach that acknowledges what is at stake when women self-sacrifice in this type of work, and their justifications. While, as Morny Joy points out he was not writing from a gendered perspective, women in Mauss' work were only ascribed certain roles that designated them as docile and amenable.²⁶¹ Feminist

²⁵⁷ Theresa Devasahayam and Brenda S.A. Yeoh, eds., *Working and Mothering in Asia: Images, Ideologies and Identities* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2007), 37.

²⁵⁸ Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 165.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 163.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁶¹ Morny Joy, *Women and the Gift: Beyond the Given and All-Giving* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013), 1-3. See also Aafke E. Komter, *Social Solidarity and the Gift* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) for further readings on Mauss' gift exchange. See also Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Expanded Edition*, trans. Jane I. Guyer (Chicago: Hau Books, 2016). See also Marcel Fournier, *Marcel Mauss: A Biography* (NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006) for a detailed account of Mauss' research and works.

readings, such as Joy's of Mauss' gift exchange open up his conceptions to a gendered approach that explores women in service-based industries and what is expected of them in their work.

Thinking about *The Gift* beyond Mauss' initial project by including gender and women's unpaid labour into the workplace forces a reckoning with the commodification of sexual difference. Tyler and Taylor examine the process of sexual differentiation where certain occupations have come to be perceived as 'women's work'. According to their analysis of Mauss' gift exchange:

For Mauss (1954), transactions of buying and selling are formally free, while 'gift' exchanges are obligatory. The second element of the Maussian model is that, in contrast to alienated commodities, gifts are inalienable; they assume a spiritual status because '...transfer of a possession can only establish a social relationship between persons if that possession carries the significance of being part of the personhood of the giver.'²⁶²

Women's work in contemporary capitalism becomes a case of an 'exchange of aesthetics'.²⁶³ From their analysis, women's work is offered through three characteristics involving her nature, femininity and sexuality, and it is through this feminised gift exchange that women simultaneously gain a sense of self-fulfillment in the process of the exchange.²⁶⁴ Similar to Hochschild's research, but using Mauss' model, Tyler and Taylor's research is based on flight attendants. According to one male training instructor from their study, "...women are best suited to this role because they are much more patient and caring than men...of other people's needs...they are much more thoughtful by nature."²⁶⁵ This perception was also expressed by one experienced female flight attendant who stated, "This job is more natural for a woman than for a man...because many females in general are more caring than men...women are much

²⁶² Melissa Tyler and Steve Taylor, "The Exchange of Aesthetics: Women's Work and 'The Gift'," *Gender, Work and Organization* 5, no.3 (1998): 166.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 166-169.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 167.

more helpful, they are kinder and more instinctive.”²⁶⁶ This logic that women use their caring dispositions in professional work blurs the boundaries of home and work and also justifies why they do so.

In the original Maussian model of exchange, “A gift is an object or service which is transacted as part of [the] social, as distinct from purely or solely commercial, relations of exchange; a gift exchange is a ritual offering.”²⁶⁷ Hochschild’s research uses a comparative analysis exploring how gender plays a role in emotional labour by signifying women take on the flight attendant side of emotional labour and men utilise the bill collector side, Tyler and Taylor are focused exclusively on female flight attendants. Hochschild’s research suggests women’s weaker status (for example their lack of economic capital) is also a consequence of their gendered role and contributes to their taking on others’ emotion work. Women then become more susceptible to take on further care work, managing the needs of others first. Boris and Parrenas argue “Those suffering from emotional dissonance are more likely to be persons in low-status occupations who are without status shields against the poor treatment they may experience at work from those with greater access to money, power, authority or status in society.”²⁶⁸ Women’s access to resources or more often their lack of such, directly contributes to their positions in society and how they think about emotion work in the workplace and emotional dissonance they may experience, especially those without or with weak status shields. In non-profit/NGO work (similar to other service-based professions) this is double edged, as women are simultaneously gaining a sense of self-fulfilment in the process of the exchange and also having their labour taken advantage of.

Taking up Hochschild’s research on the gendered differential side of emotional labour, I return to Donna Baines’ research of the non-profit sector in Canada.²⁶⁹ Baines considers the differences in men’s and women’s approaches to non-profit work. Her

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Eileen Boris and Rhacel Salazar Parrenas, *Intimate Labors: Cultures, Technologies, and the Politics of Care* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2010), 6.

²⁶⁹ Hochschild’s research on bill collectors has not been taken up in the same way as her research on flight attendants, but remains a strong aspect of her argument on the gendering of emotional labour.

research found that “male employees may have internalised firmer boundaries between the spheres of home and work, permitting them to ignore or be unresponsive to pressure to perform unpaid work or bring clients home with them.”²⁷⁰ According to Baines’ study, they were able to work without it having an impact on their personal lives. Her findings allow insight into the differences between men and women and their approaches towards work. Her analysis of men’s abilities to separate themselves from their work is significant, because this greatly juxtaposes women’s approaches towards the work, where their home and work boundaries are often straddled and crossed. Baines’ analysis of men’s roles in this sector, again, points toward clear lines of separation and distinguished boundaries, maintaining the notions that men’s and women’s roles as carers greatly differ. She further notes:

Caring labour has been synonymous with being female, providing women workers with little or no incentive to separate the worlds of caring at work and home. They may be more susceptible than men to management pressures to work unpaid hours, and to the agencies’ cultures of subsidizing workplace resources with personal resources. Reflecting the blurry lines between the caring spheres, female employees may even generate these solutions themselves with management’s explicit or tacit approval.²⁷¹

This professional vulnerability is related to the lack of separation between home and work, and relates to the personal becoming the professional. Here I turn to how private emotion becomes a commodity in the public sphere and what performing emotion management says about women in the non-profit/NGO sector.

²⁷⁰ Donna Baines, “Staying with People Who Slap Us Around: Gender, Juggling and Violence in Paid (and Unpaid) Care Work,” *Gender, Work and Organization* 13, no.2 (2006): 139, doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0432.2006.00300.x. For more on Baines’ research on non-profit work, see also: Donna Baines, “Gender mainstreaming in a Development Project: Intersectionality in a Post-Colonial Un-doing?” *Gender, Work and Organizations* 17, no.2 (2010): 119-149, doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0432.2009.0054.x; Donna Baines, “Neoliberalism and the convergence of nonprofit care work in Canada,” *Competition and Change* 19, no.3 (2015): 194-209, doi: 10.1177/1024529415580258; Donna Baines, “Race, Resistance, and Restructuring: Emerging Skills in the New Social Services,” *Social Work* 53, no.2 (2008): 123-131.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

Private emotion management takes off in the public sphere

So much of the effort and follow up that goes into it and the wow moments are there. This is where, for me, you have the intellectual and substantial growth, not just the nitty gritty of doing the logistics and through every single activity you learn something new of the national context of something about the way a person practices feminisms you learn something so substantive and I think working with and INGO you have so many wow moments. You literally create everything and in every single activity you learn something new. You think you are at a training [that] you have done ten times and you learn something new that something new adds and to that you engage fully holistically... emotions and intellect are in play and whatever substantive information and it can be very exhausting.

It is clear from Wathshlah's depiction, this is more than just work, it is about helping people, and it is about learning from others. Here she speaks of her work, and how she thinks of her own commitment towards care. She informs me, "If you are looking for a 9–5, this is not it." She has the expectation of herself and of others that you put in the extra work. She exemplifies what Baines suggests workers within non-profits and NGOs see as giving back to their society through their efforts.²⁷² In Mauss' use of the gift exchange, the gift is webbed in social relationships, relies on a reciprocal return or obligation in the form of social rules and practices. Wathshlah recognises how her work positively impacts the women who participate in IWRAW AP's programs and projects, but she is also aware of what is at stake for her in her work.

Wathshlah's passion towards the work and the women she has helped and met makes her susceptible to make sacrifices for the organisation and to strive for and achieve shared objectives.²⁷³ This follows Tomoko Hayakawa's study "Selfish Giving" that explores the voluntary community in London. She argues the "nature of the gift is

²⁷² Donna Baines, "Caring for Nothing: work organization and unwaged labour in social services," *Work, Employment and Society* 18, no.2 (2004): 289, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/stable/23748816>.

²⁷³ Ibid.

double-edged that gives us pleasure and poison at the same time.”²⁷⁴ When Wathshlah attends programs and consultations, she is representing both herself and the organisation. Her motivations for engaging in this type of work are noble, but not without professional motivations as her work involves being paid to care deeply for others, involving emotion work that complicates her genuine and performed emotions. The intent behind her work is morally justified and involves the emotional and material. As Mauss reminds us in *The Gift*, values can be emotionally driven: “Our morality is not solely commercial.”²⁷⁵ This merging of not only personal and professional spaces, but of personal and professional emotions, eventually impacts the ways women think about their commitment to the work.

The tensions between the personal and the professional for Wathshlah raise the importance of recognising burnout in NGO work, specifically when there is a feeling that the personal is always being sacrificed. In Wathshlah’s words:

Burnout...sometimes we let ourselves be burnt out and sometimes we have no choice because things are just so bad. Sometimes things are just so bad like for example and I don’t blame anyone at IWRAW now if they want to leave you have four people doing the work of eight and NGOs you know that is really not fair and they need to take that seriously. Really [it’s] not fair because it is going to physically and mentally affect you [and] that’s that level of burnout and there are people who come into NGOs with different levels of expectations and when those expectations are not met then you burnout as well it could be a time factor over work but also a mismatch of expectations.

By drawing attention to the increasing working demands that the women of IWRAW AP experience, Wathshlah highlights how few are doing the work of many. One of the concerns in NGOs is the declining donor funding allocations for human resources. This signals a future of continuing to overwork in a profession that is

²⁷⁴ Tomoko Hayakawa, “Selfish Giving? Volunteering Motivations and the Morality of Giving,” *Traditiones* 43, no.3 (2014): 15, doi: 10.3986/Traditio2014430302.

²⁷⁵ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: forms and functions of exchange in archaic societies* (London: Cohen and West, 1969), 35.

becoming more dependent on external donor funding, which in turn promotes occupation insecurity. I explore this in-depth in the next chapter.

Hochschild's concept *feeling rules* (what one should do in a situation relies on what is expected of them) illustrates how the expectations that women are self-sacrificing and have endless capabilities to care for others are normalised. Using their natural disposition as carers, women have a professional obligation and duty to be self-sacrificing in their work, which in turn exploits their labour because it is ingrained in workplace practices.²⁷⁶ Natasha, a program officer from Musawah is clear that her labour is exploited by management. She acknowledges that this is embedded in NGO workplace practice; however finds it difficult to address her concerns of overwork to management, because she does not want to be seen as weak. This becomes an issue for her career aspirations in the sector, because her silence also affects the possibility of being promoted within the organisation. Natasha says, "There has been no open discussion of increasing my salary and responsibilities and going for my Juris Doctor (JD)." She continues, "[They] haven't initiated [this conversation] and the ball is in my court."

The self-neglect women experience in their work is one of the contradictions of the non-profit/NGO sector. In particular, women's organisations centre their work on women's rights, yet some women working within these workplaces do not feel they have rights. The working mentality is focused on putting the work first and making it a priority, which puts a strain on the women's health, their commitment towards the work and time spent with family and friends. The expectations of women's organisations as outlined above illustrate the perpetual exploitation of women's labour. Playing on the gendered assumption of a woman being self-sacrificing and caring takes advantage of her labour, and generalises women into specific professional categories and representations, making it seem natural that all women share the same level of care for the work. This also reflects on the experiences of activists from the WLM and how they saw themselves during their struggles, which also led to both exhaustion and burnout. According to Hochschild, burnout acts as a form of emotional numbness, providing an exit from overwhelming distress that "allows a person to remain physically present on

²⁷⁶ Baines, "Caring for Nothing," 289.

the job.”²⁷⁷ While going into ‘robot-mode’ is one coping mechanism, others can take on substance abuse to cope with overwork. The Malaysian Feminist Activist (MFA) describes some of her experiences where she saw her health deteriorate because of long working hours and the compromises she made to ‘get the work done’:

It is actually encouraged to overwork...we leave the office...and still pounding away and there is affirmation for this kind of total self-neglect. I had no life, I drank coffee until ten o’clock at night, no wonder I got cancer [with] the life that I was leading. I quit smoking in 2001, but I continued obsessive behaviour all the way until the cancer. I was drinking 5–6 cups of coffee a day, just think about what that would do that was my substitute for cigarettes, it was so obsessive, yeah?

Many of the women were forthcoming about their coping methods. MFA went from one obsessive behaviour to another. Other women also noted they had taken up smoking and had poor eating habits. After being diagnosed with cancer, MFA changed her approach to her professional life. This would directly impact her personal life, as she remarked, she wanted to practice a ‘Zen’ lifestyle, taking time for herself and committing to projects she knew she could handle comfortably.

Examining NGOs: A space for self-neglect

I don’t know whether [it is] a feminist expectation or a socialist expectation or you know it’s this kind of degree of self-neglect that is acceptable in the women’s movement is shocking, which is why people like the Urgent Action Fund for Women and Human Rights (UAFWHR) have done this whole thing about sustaining activism as being about self-care. This language of self-care has come to the women’s movement in the last ten years, how do we take care of ourselves? We are all dying of cancer, we are all dying of diseases, our relationships are broken, we can’t keep long terms partners [and] our children hate us.

²⁷⁷ Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 188.

Here MFA refers to the UAFWHR report, which I opened this chapter with. MFA not only speaks of her own experience with cancer, but also colleagues and friends of hers that have passed away. I draw on her reflection here to note the importance of self-care for activists. The earlier discussion of care in this chapter examined women's caring roles and responsibilities and their use of this gendered trait in their work. Here I turn to how women think about caring for themselves. Self-care is a recent revelation for women in non-profit/NGO work and is a discussion that is still in progress. When women in this type of work give all of their time and energy towards helping others, what is left for them? The UAFWHR sought to acknowledge and raise awareness for activist sustainability and health by gathering a global collection of women's voices in non-profit/NGO work. According to Barry and Dordevic:

Activists may be uncomfortable talking about themselves, but they are beginning to talk. The idea that the *personal really is political* is starting to come full circle: not only do we have the right to speak openly about our 'private' concerns, but also we have the right (and a responsibility) to ensure that they are considered equally important to our public work.²⁷⁸

Barry and Dordevic's research illustrate the challenges of getting women activists to speak about their experiences. They place importance on women's voices, acknowledging the feminist slogan that has been central in this thesis 'the personal is political' and its continuing relevance, especially for women activists who have historically embodied its message. Considering women's voices who engage in 'good work' is to think beyond project outcomes and outputs, and puts the focus on those who invest their time, emotions and care into their professional roles.

By initiating a platform of dialogue for women activists, Barry and Dordevic recognise the lack of recognition given to women in this sector. They seek to problematise the impact the work has on women and in doing so use a bottom up approach to portray the importance of self-care. NGO work is different from other service-based professions because it involves care and social justice and relies on compassionate social relationships built and maintained by those engaging in the

²⁷⁸ Barry and Dordevic, *What's the Point of Revolution*, 4.

work.²⁷⁹ Drawing on the narratives of women activists, Barry and Dordevic illustrate the significance of women's voices and experiences, maintaining the vitality for the continued incorporation of feminist principles, especially in women-dominated organisations and groups. The self-sacrificing and emotionless attributes of the 1970s "movement women" that I discussed in the previous chapter are still encouraged and maintained by women's organisations today and are inherent in NGO workplaces. Perpetuating this mentality MFA says:

[Comes] at great cost to our bodies, our intimacy with other people, our relationships, our time with reflection, our relationship with God or whatever, you know...all of those things have been neglected, so people are now saying it's time to come back within and look because of that.

The driving force behind the UAFWHR publication was to open up and put into practice some form of self-care regime that women in this profession can use. When it comes to doing the work women will take on the burden of overwork because it is what is expected of them. As one activist from the UAFWHR publication shares:

We just go on doing the work—we go so far in exploiting ourselves, because we feel that if you don't do the work...then things don't happen...You are in a double bind...If you don't do the work, it won't be done, because others have so much on their shoulders already, they can't take more on.²⁸⁰

This activist's experience illustrates how women sacrifice themselves in the name of the work, and draws attention to the idea of women not wanting to burden other women with more work. Key terms, such as passion and commitment, are used to perpetuate and justify the personal/professional boundary blur. Natasha finds the word passion problematic. She says, "I just said it and I *feel* it." It can be used very violently, so if you stay up all night and everyone knows you are underpaid, the word that is used is automatically, "wow, you are so passionate."

²⁷⁹ Donna Baines, "Resistance as emotional work: The Australian and Canadian non-profit social services," *Industrial Relations Journal* 42, no.2 (2011): 139, doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2338.2011.00616.

²⁸⁰ Barry and Dordevic, *What's the Point of Revolution*, 25.

Rest is rarely a priority for these women. In Barry and Dordevic's report they cite a Jamaican activist named Yvonne Artis:

Since I started working, I never took a break. There is no break in Jamaica—there is nowhere to take a break...I get a call from six in the morning, 24 hours a day. There are times when they call me at three in the morning to find a homosexual male or female full of blood, or to go to their home that has been vandalised. Or they need a ride to go home because they are scared or they need somebody to follow them to their doors. Sometimes my partner says to me it is getting to her, but I have to do it.²⁸¹

Quite simply feminist activists can run themselves to their deaths. Taking time for themselves is unheard of, and even suggesting a holiday or a break can be considered insolent. Even when Yvonne, the Jamaican activist is called at home at a random hour, she sees it as her responsibility to help someone else in need and in doing so she sacrifices her personal life. The care responsibility she takes on has implications on her personal life as indicated by her partner's response. Being a 'professional' carer reinforces the ideal of being selfless. In some cases, women only stop when they get seriously ill, and from this, they can experience a wake-up call. For others, they will continue to work like this. In the process they emotionally distance themselves from the work and have their mental, emotional and physical health impacted.

The burden of work increases when there is geographical distance involved. Sanyu describes what happens working for an organisation that is not in the same physical location of on-the-ground activists. Sanyu's time with this organisation involved her working from home because of the time difference between her and the activists she was helping. Unlike the Jamaican activist's experience who could immediately help because of her physical proximity, Sanyu could not. She describes:

There is also a sense of hopelessness because I would be on Skype with an activist in Malawi who says, "I have been arrested once and they are going to come after me again, what can you do?" I am in Delhi and he is asking me "What can I do?" because he assumes that as an international organization, I

²⁸¹ Barry and Dordevic, *What's the Point of Revolution*, 28.

have got connections and networks I can tap into and if I sound the alarm it would be way better than him sounding the alarm, because I will have more people who will listen...right? But then I am sitting in Delhi and I am sounding the alarm, but then I realize there is nothing actually I can do in Delhi. I could not help him and if they came and arrested him again that's it. I had [contacted partners in] Brussels [and] Washington, [but depending] on how fast they can activate their own networks [it is out of my hands], so there is yes, you can be disconnected, but also you can be connected even if you are remote.

Sanyu feels powerless because she can not directly help her contact. Her only resources were telecommuting to other contacts and organisations to activate some form of support for her contact. Similarly, she and the Jamaican activist experience their personal space of the home impacted by the work and while they do not see this crossing of boundaries as an immediate issue, they are aware of the infringement of their personal space.

Individual and workplace responsibilities—Who shoulders the burden of thinking about care?

Overwork is the first of many sustainability paradoxes. While activists are deeply concerned and stressed out about the amount of work they have to do, they almost *universally accept this level of work as an inevitable fact of activism.*²⁸²

This paradox will continue in the work of non-profits and NGOs as long as the mentality of those engaging in this type of work remains self-sacrificing, thinking that others are more important than themselves. The women I interviewed acknowledged the non-existence of occupational health in NGO workplace policies by indicating the individualisation of finding methods of self-care and work stress relief. Wathshlah's reflection:

²⁸² Ibid., 24.

For an organization to really function well, you need to put in processes to make sure there is a space for people to have some kind of recourse when they are affected for overwork [and] not getting along with colleagues and to see how that can be dealt with. [The] ideal situation and a lot of NGOs don't have space [for this] and so you need to find your own way really creating the space, so what we used to do here, we used to go for cakes and drinks and then [the] more and more we were stressed we didn't make time to go and [do] that. So, that's where the organization, like literally spiralled to a major crisis.

While Wathshlah's experiences have highlighted the importance of enmeshing her personal and professional activism, she calls for organisations to have clear policies on workers' rights. She asks, "How can you ask us to work on rights without giving us our own rights?" She suggests informal structures and social groups have substituted as a form of self-care, but these were only temporary measures. Taking self-care into consideration, the Sisters In Islam office find the time to go for walks together during breaks at work. The workplace also includes a space that is set up for relaxing and at times is even used for group yoga sessions. Many of my interviewees revealed that even sharing their experiences in our interview allowed them a space to think through their commitment and understanding of themselves in their work, providing a space where they could reflect on their current situations and if this type of work is really worth continuing in.

Ruby was one of the women who found our interview cathartic. After our interview she had a slight smile of relief on her face and felt that she had been able to voice her concerns, and hoped it could have an impact. When we spoke about sacrifice, the work and health, she says:

You put on different hats, so when you come in and you are a let's say program officer, you are going to be multitasking like crazy. It's not just going to be your program work, but it is going to be other stuff. So, people expect a lot and they say if it's detrimental to your health that is a sacrifice you should make. Although they will not say it so bluntly that is the kind of culture that is around and permeates the entire organization and then if you do get sick and you do ask for a better environment in work then you are deemed too picky, you ask for too

much and then they will say, “we are not covered and you chose this life and this is what we have, so deal with it.”

Ruby frames the NGO working environment in terms of its many organisational shortcomings. She relates how when it comes to the health concerns of workers, this is a sacrifice they *should* be making, because the motivation for engaging in this non-profit/NGO work is a choice. While individuals come to this type of work through a variety of experiences, whether religious, family or educational, workers *have not* chosen to work in environments that exploit their unpaid labour and considers workers’ health concerns minor in the grand scheme of the work. While Ruby is clear about the shortcomings this does not stop her dedication towards human rights work and in her ‘free’ time she also helps subordinated populations in Malaysia.²⁸³ Like many, her approach towards her work is both due to her personal commitment and the working culture of NGOs. She describes:

I think most non-for-profits/NGOs don’t have any solid human resource systems, because their focus is a lot of helping the people outside that they don’t really focus on their people and any kind of learning, capacity building, investing in your people and your health and well-being is seen as the last priority, if we have time. It is not built in the processes of the organization, so the people who are doing all of this hard work are usually the last priority of the organization and that is really sad.

As Barry and Dordevic argue, “Activists [who] feel an enormous *sense of individual responsibility* to right so many wrongs. They feel that they have to keep going, and even take on more work—if they don’t do it, who will?”²⁸⁴ As I have argued, this reproduces stereotypes about women’s care roles from the home. As MFA notes:

I just want to walk away and not look back, I have had enough you know, but I was walking away half-dead you know sort of like that sort of I am not saying

²⁸³ Due to the nature of Ruby’s personal activism, I do not go into specific details, because of the dominant religious and cultural practices in Malaysia that severely oppress groups she works with and for.

²⁸⁴ Barry and Dordevic, *What’s the Point of Revolution*, 25.

that it was the women's movement, but it was my response to all of the nonsense.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the construction and implementation of women as carers in non-profit/NGO work. When women's unpaid care roles from the home are commodified primarily in service work, they are called upon to use their nurturing roles from the home in their work. I have drawn on the Maussian model of the gift exchange and have shown how gender is implicated in this exchange. For women, this exchange relies on women's abilities to be caring, nurturing and feminine. In particular, women in non-profit/NGO work and the emotion work that is asked of them not only considers how women's care role is extended into the public sphere, but also what impact it has on their overall health. The care roles they take on in their professional work, often leaves women to neglect their own self-care for the well-being of others in the name of 'good work'. This can have a detrimental impact on women's personal and professional lives as many have merged these spaces, only to find their health suffer, their personal lives and families affected and an overall feeling of self-neglect and alienation from their workplaces and working environments. What becomes even more evident and challenging is their continued justification of work in these spaces. The next chapter investigates the impact of the NGO funding crunch for both women's organisations and those working in them.

Chapter Five – You have to fight for your rights, and for your funding

Gender is now passé.²⁸⁵

This statement dates and periodises the concept of gender, suggesting we have moved beyond it. As this thesis has shown, gender is fluid and is always being constructed and reconstructed. In the situation of women's organisations and their access to gender-based funding, the idea that gender is old but is having an impact on funding for women's organisations. After the momentum from the women's world conferences dispelled, women's groups and organisations were left with the task of seeking external, non-government donor funding. A 2006 report conducted by the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) portrayed a bleak funding landscape for women's organisations. The report explored multiple questions, such as: are women's rights groups sufficiently bold in their funding strategies? Do donors understand the urgency and importance of this work?²⁸⁶ In this chapter I examine the funding realities for women's rights organisations and the driving forces behind those trends.

The report draws attention to the situation of women's organisations and potential strategies for changing the existing funding landscape, calling for more resources to be made available to women's groups and women's organisations.²⁸⁷ It was collated in the context where women's organisations continue to receive less funding now than they have in the past, which has seen them shifting their focus away from projects and programs towards fundraising for their survival.²⁸⁸ This resonates across

²⁸⁵ Cindy Clark, Ellen Sprenger and Lisa VeneKlasen et al., *Where is the money for women's rights? Assessing resources and the role of donors in the promotion of women's rights and the support of women's organizations* (AWID, 2006), 85, https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/assessing_resources_and_role_of_donors_fundher.pdf. The use of this phrase is to illustrate the significance of examining the changing funding landscape of the non-profit/NGO sector to dissect how women's organisations are affected by funding cuts.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

geographical boundaries and contexts, but women's organisations vary in how they adapt to the changing funding climate.

This chapter problematises donor-funding allocations to women's organisations by exploring women's experiences of precarity and how they understand the role of external donor funding. Just as David Mosse and David Lewis take an ethnographic approach to the development sector, I follow their lead and continue my analysis of Sisters In Islam and IWRAW AP in this chapter to consider some of the similarities and differences between how the organisations are embedded in wider NGO funding structures and politics.²⁸⁹ Mosse and Lewis suggest their ethnographic study, "reveals an unstable donor world in which the nature of the target, the 'field', the role of expertise or consultants, and even what it means to be a donor is constantly in question."²⁹⁰ Here we uncover systems of relationships that are both internal to organisations and external in broader NGO structures.²⁹¹ I argue that the decrease in funding to women's organisations (mostly in the Global South), have led to organisations prioritising funding over the work. This is important as it illustrates the layers between funding, the work, those who do the work and the justification of 'good work'. This then becomes a competition of which organisations can play the donor funding game in order to survive in an increasingly aggressive NGO playing field. Rethinking the North/South binary

In the 1990s, development as an idea, a practice and an objective was the subject of critique that saw an investigation of development theory and practice. Uma Kothari points out post-colonial and feminist interventions have challenged the normative ideals of a Western masculinist conception of development.²⁹² Development discourses have taken an interest in applying post-colonial feminist theory to the sector. Kothari argues:

²⁸⁹ Mosse and Lewis, eds., *The Aid Effect*, 1.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 16-17.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 17. See also J.G. Townsend and A.R. Townsend, "Accountability, motivation and practice: NGOs North and South," *Social and Cultural Geography* 5, no.2 (2004): 271-284, doi: 10.1080/14649360410001690259.

²⁹² Kothari and Minogue, eds., *Development theory and practice*, 12, 35. Uma Kothari, "Authority and Expertise: The Professionalisation of International Development and the Ordering of Dissent," *Antipode* 37, no.3 (2005): 427, doi: 10.1111/j.0066-4812.2005.00505.x.

[It] offers a critique that is relevant to development studies since it demands a rethinking of how the other places and people are constructed and problematized, while at the same time challenging common understandings of the concepts and representations within gender and development.²⁹³

Kothari is influenced by post-colonial feminists such as bell hooks, Gayatri Spivak and Mohanty who all draw on conceptualisations of the ‘Other’ in their research and writings. Edward Said’s 1977 masterpiece *Orientalism* describes the Orient as the ‘Other’ a construct reinforced by Europe and the West in knowledge production.²⁹⁴ Following his assertions, post-colonial feminist thinkers have taken up his ideas to illustrate the importance of de-centring hegemonic histories and subjectivities that have marginalised the voices of women from the Global South.²⁹⁵

The Global North and Global South dichotomy is the most recent binary relationship in development discourses. It is a way to describe the power imbalances between countries, those that are thought to be developed and those still developing. For my research purposes, it is used to describe the power dynamics between women who work in the Malaysian context for international women’s human rights that are mandated by the United Nations in Geneva and funders located in the Global North. Kothari argues, “Contemporary development strategies and interventions produce unequal global relations, not solely by invoking colonial forms of rule of the past, but also through the construction of expertise.”²⁹⁶ She further examines that the priority given to Western knowledge masquerades “as universal and neutral” posing as the acceptable authority.²⁹⁷ This is exemplified in the United Nations women’s human rights agendas that continue to reproduce inequalities between women in the Global North and Global South. Sondra Hale argues scholars and institutions in the Global South have led bold and insightful advances towards documenting and theorising feminism. Many challenges still persist, such as the lack of formal recognition and

²⁹³ Kothari and Minogue, eds., *Development theory and practice*, 46.

²⁹⁴ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 41.

²⁹⁵ Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders*, 78.

²⁹⁶ Kothari, “Authority and Expertise”, 433.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

networks in the South that limit its development for deeper scholarly understandings of these efforts.²⁹⁸ Tensions within feminist discourses are still unsettled, however, it is through them that I discuss the changing funding landscape in Malaysian-based women's organisations.

Reiterating the complexities and the tensions within and around feminisms, I use this chapter to discuss the changing funding landscape for women's organisations. Specifically, this chapter considers the effect that dominant forms of feminisms may have in relation to women's organisations and access to external donor funding. The consequences of financial constraints have made it challenging for organisations to think about sustaining their personnel and maintaining aims and mandates. I argue that when women's organisations shift their goals and objectives towards donor expectations and agendas, women working in these organisations are conflicted about who the work is serving and where they draw the lines between being fundraisers and program officers.

Tensions in the Global North and Global South relationship are not only related to donor funding, but is also a concern in wider feminist politics whenever the questions of who gets to speak, who speaks for whom and which groups' voices remain marginalised come into view. I return to Linda Alcoff's "The Problem of Speaking for Others," where she argues:

A speaker's location (which I take here to refer to their *social* location, or social identity) has an epistemically significant impact on that speaker's claims and can serve either to authorize or disauthorize one's speech.²⁹⁹

Here I map Northern and Southern women's organisations through their constructed cultural, political and historical geographies that directly impact which organisations have better access to donor funding. The inequalities between women's groups are geographical, political, epistemological and ontological. Epistemologically, the discursive constructions of these categories are deeply embedded in colonial roots

²⁹⁸ Sondra Hale, "Transnational Gender Studies and the Migrating Concept of Gender in the Middle East and North Africa," *Cultural Dynamics* 21, no.22 (2009): 135, doi: 10.1177/0921374008105068.

²⁹⁹ Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," 7.

and histories and continue to manifest through various global economic agencies and policies like the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The Third World as a category is produced and reproduced by the binary between the industrialised North and the developing South.³⁰⁰ Ontologically, the persistent inequalities remain in women's everyday realities, for example, which groups of women get to set the agenda at major conferences and activities, and which groups of women get to speak and have their voices heard. Chapter Three discussed the importance of the concept experience has in my research; here I use this approach to discuss the North/South binary relationship. In the Malaysian context of women's organisations, the remnants of colonialism have brought about new challenges in a post-colonial Malaysia that is still embedded in racial and ethnic inequalities. These divisions are cemented in wider political and economic structures of the non-profit/NGO sector, which themselves are located in the colonial legacy of inequalities.

I interrogate the power imbalance between women's organisations based in the institutions of the Global North and those based in the Global South by drawing on Alcoff's analysis. She argues the 'rituals of speaking' involves both the location of the speaker and listener, as such we are afforded a twofold mapping showing how an argument becomes significant and for which groups.³⁰¹ Arturo Escobar also argues that the problem of speaking for others is an area of concern in the development sector, noting that who can speak and from what authority then set the rules used in planning and policies.³⁰² Escobar, like Alcoff, is interested in the power behind whose voices are heard and from which locations they are speaking. From their approaches, and in addition to the approaches of Mohanty and de Lauretis discussed in Chapter Two, we can think through how various classes of women are positioned through the economics of donor funding to women's organisations.

Lata Narayanaswamy explores the intricacies of Southern Women's NGOs. She argues that the growing transnational feminist movement gained visibility through

³⁰⁰ Chilla Bulbeck, *Re-Orienting Western Feminisms: Women's Diversity in a Postcolonial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 35.

³⁰¹ Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," 12.

³⁰² Kothari, "Authority and Expertise," 428.

multilateral commitments to women's rights through women's NGOs. She problematises the North/South dichotomy and suggests this perception is outdated, because it does not account for the slippery in-between debates within these categories.³⁰³ This sentiment is also seen in organisations that enmesh "universal" rights discourses and Islamic approaches to women's rights such as Sisters In Islam and other Malaysian-based women's organisations. As we have seen women's organisations were influenced by Islamic resurgence movements in the 1980s in addition to international women's movements, conferences and conventions. World conferences on women brought women from various countries together, united by their assumed gender identity. These conferences have since been critiqued; for example, in what way issues arising in how Southern women's NGOs have been constructed by Northern stakeholders, which maintain the power imbalance between the North and the South where Northern stakeholders presume the capacity to represent the needs, interests and voices of marginalised people in the South to achieve empowerment goals in development programs and projects.³⁰⁴ They privileged so-called authentic voices from the Global South further inculcating the privilege of whose voices are heard and perceptions of women working out of the developing world.

Here I return to de Lauretis' *Technologies of Gender* and her definition of the subject as one that is not unified but multiple, not so much divided as contradicted, to illustrate the contention within the construct of Mohanty's Third World Woman.³⁰⁵ Highlighted again are the variations and reconfigurations of the Global North/South relationship. These relationships are further complicated by the changing NGO landscape with more organisations seeking external donor funding due to gaps in government aid and economic intervention. Donor funding has manipulated geographical boundaries to situate NGOs through economic funding rather than geographical borders. This is relevant to organisations such as IWRAW AP whose work is considered international, but is geographically located in the Global South. In the next section, I highlight the role of external donor funding and trace it to international

³⁰³ Lata Narayanaswamy, "NGOs and Feminisms in Development: Interrogating the 'Southern Women's' NGO," *Geography Compass* 8, no.8 (2014): 580, doi: 10.1111/gec3.12150.

³⁰⁴ Narayanaswamy, "NGOs and Feminisms in Development," 576.

³⁰⁵ de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*, 2.

politics, specifically to the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995.

Funding realities: The politics behind women's world conferences

The Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) was a global event that brought together women's organisations and state governments to discuss women's shared issues and concerns. At the time this was the biggest United Nations conference ever held. Dianne Otto points out:

Over 50,000 people, mostly women, participated in the official intergovernmental Conference and the parallel NGO Forum...Participants came from a total of 189 states and, in addition to the 400 NGOs which hold permanent consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), approximately 2,500 other NGOs were accredited to attend.³⁰⁶

One of its main objectives was to strategise initiatives to promote gender equality. The event was set to mark an important time for women and gender equality worldwide; however, in reality, there were several issues that plagued the conference, and continued after its closing days. It promoted the idea that women's shared common concerns could be addressed by working together and in partnership with women and men from various classes, races, ethnicities, countries and activist backgrounds. This endeavour to work together with diverse groups of women and men failed to take into account ongoing and unequal power relations, which can be traced to both political and colonial histories and women's differing contexts in the women's movements that I discussed in Chapter One. Beijing 1995's universal approach to women's rights failed to acknowledge the different ways women from different backgrounds came to the conference, where the common category of women was both politically and culturally problematic.

³⁰⁶ Dianne Otto, "Holding up half the sky, but for whose benefit?: a critical analysis of the fourth world conference on women," *Australian Feminist Law Journal* 6, no. 1 (1996): 7, doi: 10.1080/13200968.1996.11077188.

Recalling Aihwa Ong's use of 'strategic sisterhood', where she discusses how the FWCW led to superficial alliances between Northern and Southern women and women's groups describes, "Feminists from metropolitan countries seek a new North-South alliance whereby they make strategic interventions on behalf of third world women by putting pressure on their governments."³⁰⁷ Ong's use of *strategic* sisterhood highlights the tensions within feminism concerning whose voices are heard, who can speak for whom and from what positions are they speaking from. For her, strategic sisterhood is transnational and concerned with the complexities of globalisation and women's rights. Ong draws our attention to the role of colonialism through nationalism and political moralities in postcolonial contexts where women's rights are connected to wider communitarian structures and politics. Thus, women's rights are not only about individuals, but also their positions in the family, the community and the nation.³⁰⁸ She questions what these 'sisterly links and collaborations' are based on:

"Whose 'imagined communities' are we dealing with?" When we think about globalisation, and the pressing problems affecting women and children globally, we are tempted to brush aside other social imaginaries that do not view women's rights in quite the same way. It will be important to attend to how discourses of community, development and gender are negotiated in a particular society.³⁰⁹

Ong follows a similar path as Mohanty, de Lauretis and Alcoff who all consider the tensions within feminist discourses and ideologies, and whose ideas have been central to my thesis.

The year 2015 marked the 20th anniversary of the events in Beijing, and women's rights organisations are still seriously underfunded. When governments attended Beijing, they signed global agreements to drive positive outcomes on women's issues and for women's human rights. This policy-driven approach in Beijing was not met with the same economic rigour by governments to negotiate and secure further

³⁰⁷ Aihwa Ong, "Strategic Sisterhood or Sisters in Solidarity?" 107.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 110-112.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 114.

funding commitments for women's organisations and women's rights.³¹⁰ This triggered a response from external sources of funding, ranging from United Nations institutions, private donors and large funding organisations based out of the Global North to fill this funding gap. This enabled an environment of piecemeal and scattered pots of funding for NGOs, which does not adequately sustain organisations. Funding is based on specific projects, populations and programs. In addition, the 2008 financial recession in the Global North saw budgets allocated for international assistance slashed. Women's organisations were not given flexible funding, but project specific funding, which does not account for the administrative or infrastructure costs of an organisation.³¹¹ Respondents in AWID's research stated, "It is most difficult to find funding for staff salaries, administration and capacity building. It is significantly easier to raise funds for media, technology and communications work, leadership development and linking and networking."³¹² The perception that staff and organisational costs are not as important as technology reflects the disinterest of funders to consider the workers who are themselves in vulnerable positions of overwork and continued emotional investment.

Returning to the notion that 'gender is now passé', I examine shifting trends in external donor funding, as "many [women's] groups say they are struggling to maintain donor interest and support... Many feel that gender equality and even women's rights was [the] 'flavour of the month' for many donors."³¹³ External donor funding for women's organisations are represented through institutions and organisations, such as the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), Mama Cash and Hivos.³¹⁴ While there are many other donor agencies and funding institutions, these

³¹⁰ Lydia Alpizar Duran, "20 Years of Shamefully Scarce Funding for Feminists and Women's Rights Movements," *UNRISD*, accessed May 13, 2015, [http://www.unrisd.org/UNRISD/website/newsview.nsf/\(httpNews\)](http://www.unrisd.org/UNRISD/website/newsview.nsf/(httpNews)).

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

³¹² Clark, Sprenger, and VeneKlasen et al. *Where is the money for women's rights?* 12.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 14.

³¹⁴ From my observations and fieldwork, UNIFEM is a United Nations based institution that engages with women's organizations in a multiple of ways, such as the UNIFEM Trust Fund that supports a number of issues relating to women, for example, specific funds that are allocated in support of actions to eliminate violence against women. Mama Cash is a global women's fund with over 20 years of experience. It is one of the largest funders of small women's organisations, providing core funding (covering overhead and staff pay). It receives funds from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Irish Aid. Hivos is an INGO based in the Netherlands that supports civil society organisations in the Global South and East. Research examining these particular funders can be found in the 2008 OECD document "Gender Equality,

donors primarily support organisations with mandates to advance women's positions through a shared feminist lens.³¹⁵ Due to the shifting tendencies of donor funding, donor expectations and criteria make it difficult for women's organisations to maintain and secure core funding. According to AWID's research, women's rights and funding for women's organisations have become out of fashion with donors. Funding for women's rights have arguably been on 'safe' issues that focus on women's health or women's public participation.³¹⁶ The move is towards fashion funding, or following funding trends as Benoit Challand argues:

Many donors ride the fashion waves, like empowerment, awareness-raising, children's rights, mobile clinics, or mental health, etc. This translates into the emergence of a large number of new civil society organisations, often with overlapping or similar activities, with the ensuing risk of a good deal of duplication in project funding... Therefore what donors promote is more a plurality in terms of numbers rather than in terms of quality of work and a healthy competition among civil society actors.³¹⁷

As Challand points out, the growing numbers of NGOs have caused a great deal of overlap in NGO activities and this is directly tied to donors following issue trends as a means to allocate resources and funds. NGOs also respond to these trends, which complicates the external donor funding and NGO recipient funding relationship. The reality for many NGOs is one that comes down to economics, is there enough money to operate? For how many years? Will staff get paid? How many program officers and office support staff is realistic in terms of the organisation's budget? As a result of this instability and insecurity, organisations now expend resources and time to fundraising. In turn, this impacts their work, as the following section explores.

Women's Empowerment and the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness: Issues Brief 3 Innovative Funding for Women's Organizations".

³¹⁵ It should be noted that the shared feminist lens follows Western feminist ideals, particularly the universalisation of women's rights and empowerment goals.

³¹⁶ Clark, Sprenger, and VeneKlasen et al., *Where is the money for women's rights?* 14.

³¹⁷ Benoit Challand, "Looking Beyond the Pale: International Donors and Civil Society Promotion in Palestine," *Palestine - Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 12.1 (2005): 60.

Experiences on the ground: Women's organisations and funding realities

As we saw in the previous chapter, the common and shared characteristic of NGO workplaces relies on the habit of program officers to overwork themselves, driven by the ideal ingrained in NGO working culture that 'the work is good'. In women's organisations, as Wathshlah notes:

[Program Officers] are taking on more [of] the emotional battering and the psychological battering...you know usually where there is this total emotional and psychological abuse you see, there is only so much you can take until it starts affecting the work to a certain extent it has not affected the work, but it has affected your own psychological being and what is what's happening [now].

Wathshlah's use of the terms emotional battering and psychological battering to express how she experiences women's human rights work suggests this type of work asks women to act as a shield of impact. In other words, they bear both the impact of working on the ground with communities and participants, and to negotiating the NGO workplace culture. By working as gatekeepers or brokers between participants and NGO structures, the constant reality for women in this type of work is to now take on the brunt of the work without sufficient organisational support. Mosse and Lewis highlight social actors operate as active agents that deal in the institutional bureaucracies and social realities of helping others.³¹⁸ Their analysis of international aid institutions employs an actor-oriented approach that studies intermediary actors or brokers. Women NGO workers act as mediators in their positions where they utilise international humanitarian and human rights discourses, as well as negotiating relationships between women activists.³¹⁹ Their role hinges on their ability to follow organisational and institutional policies, while at the same time presenting themselves as caring and invested workers.

³¹⁸ Lewis and Mosse, eds., *Development Brokers and Translators*, 11, 16.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

The less funding that is made available for women's organisations, the more work women face. Natasha called this funding reality "the spawn of Satan". She says most pots of funding available now are program-based, which neglect costs such as paying and hiring NGO workers. This is a growing concern in the sector because donor funding is here to stay and current organisational structures have not allocated for this. Ruby told me "Most non-for-profits or NGOs don't have any kind of solid human resource systems, because their focus is a lot on helping the people outside that they don't really focus on their people." Her interpretation of non-profit and NGO workplaces appears bleak, however she proposed ways in which organisations can think about its workers and worker sustainability:

One of the strategies that would be good is to invest in your people and build them up, and if you say there is not enough people or not enough capacity, because there is a lack of people, then you need to go back to the core reason why there is a lack of people, because it is a lot of hard work and you don't get paid much, so one of the strategies is to make it a career and pay people better...people feel valued and stay.

Ruby's reflection of NGO workplaces emphasis the continued practice of manipulating workers through the 'good work' mentality. Women continue working in these conditions because they are motivated by the nature of the work, and their low pay and feelings of under appreciation in NGO workplaces are often overlooked. Ruby calls on organisations to rectify these practices, by incorporating better workplace standards of pay and to acknowledge hard work and commitment. As Ruby thinks through possible solutions, she highlights the idea of retention strategies in non-profits and the unwillingness of management to consider them. She is able to continue in this type of work because she does not have extra responsibilities beyond herself, but what about others who have families to support or have responsibilities that extends beyond their own? Ruby said that if something were to happen and she needed money to be able to help her parents in the future or if she wanted to study, travel or even have a family she would not have adequate financial resources. She sees this as a major problem in the profession.

Sanyu, equipped with long-term experiences with NGOs is not naïve about some of the professional realities and the frustrations she has felt in the work:

Yeah...and I think once you know there is a disparity between working in the corporate sector and working in the non-for-profit sector and I don't think you sort of realize how that will impact you on a personal level, until you are growing older.

In NGOs, the standard two-year contract compounds the volatility of secured funds. Employees are able to renew their contracts for an additional one-year term, but this employment process is based on how much funding is allocated for operational costs. Women engaging in the non-profit/NGO sector are aware of the pay realities and how their wages are often tied to how much funding organisations receive and what the organisation can dedicate to institutional and overhead costs. In their hopes that organisations will renew or can renew their contracts, workers are put in difficult situations where short-term contracts are a constant reminder of the financial uneasiness of their work. In some cases, where NGOs have adequate funding for a five-year term, they can implement activities and employ longer contracted personnel, however, even in this five-year term they are still constantly seeking funds and are always reassessing their financial security.

This onus is on fundraising and how NGO workers spend more time and energy dedicated to sourcing funds. This economic reality is directly related to piecemeal funding strategies that perpetuate the shifting culture of NGOs. Wathshlah, Ruby and Sanyu share some of the challenges they encounter in the work, but they do not question the level of personal over-burden that they absorb in the long, under-remunerated hours. To work less, would also potentially make them the first in line for non-renewal come contract time.

At the organisational level, IWRAW AP's funding is tied exclusively to those Western donor funders who financially support feminist-based projects and programs in the South. The organisation has to survive on this external funding as it receives no support from the Malaysian Government. Using external donor funding is in part a strategy by the organisation's founding members who see this as an opportunity to have less government intervention in its work on women's human rights. IWRAW AP's lack of economic attachment to the Malaysian Government affords it greater leeway as a women's organisation, because the government is not able to use funding as a way to control what the organisation does. But it relies on and is accountable to external

donors. The slash in funding to NGOs has seen women's advocacy organisations hit hardest. In 2005, over 100 developed and developing countries came together to agree on changing the asymmetrical practices between donors and recipients. This event, called the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, recognised the growing concerns on the impact that changing approaches to delivering aid have had on women's rights organisations.³²⁰ The struggle to secure and sustain funding in women's organisations points to the scarce resources in an uncertain non-profit/NGO sector that breed competition.³²¹

Audrey reflected on IWRAW AP's funding situation, "That is why we are facing a funding crunch because we don't fulfill the criteria right now for a lot of funds because they are based in their pockets." Here she referred to project-specific funding as 'based in their pockets'. She further clarified this with "South Asia will have its funds, Southeast Asia will have its funds, the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) has its funds and unless we work with partners we won't get the funds." She said funding connected to specific geographical regions places IWRAW AP in a vulnerable position. Even though IWRAW AP is located in Malaysia and is a part of Southeast Asia, because of its international framing, it cannot apply for funds that are region-specific and therefore is limited in what donors are looking for in specific times and locations.

National-level organisations, such as Sisters In Islam also located in Kuala Lumpur, have approached their funding realities through an emphasis on fundraising initiatives. Ratna, the Executive Director of Sisters In Islam considers that the cuts in funding for women's organisations has increased the amount of time and energy spent on fundraising over advocacy and research projects. As the Executive Director, part of her responsibilities is to address daily organisational operations, such as paying salaries of the staff. One of the differences between IWRAW AP and Sisters In Islam is that Sisters In Islam is a members-based NGO with 37 regular members who also fundraise for the organisation. Where most of the program officers at IWRAW AP also seek

³²⁰ DAC Network on Gender Equality, "Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment and the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness: Issue Brief 3," *OECD* (2008): 1, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/42310124.pdf>.

³²¹ Eyben and Turquet, eds., *Feminists in Development Organizations*, 181.

funding opportunities and prioritise funding, Sisters In Islam's members, rather than workers, take on the organisation's fundraising initiatives. It was unclear from my interview with Ratna if this membership is based on financial contributions or was simply a roster of individuals invested in the organisation's work. Program officers fundraise for IWRAW AP and staff research donors initiate contact, and in the final stages write grant proposals. In the past few years IWRAW AP has not had a long-term serving Executive Director whose primary responsibility is to network and seek funding opportunities and this has also contributed to staff taking on more workload.

Sisters In Islam voted in former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's daughter Marina Mahathir to their board in 2009. She continues to work with the organisation from her position as a media figure and a spokesperson for humanitarian causes. Her celebrity status in Malaysia benefits Sisters In Islam for further networking with potential donors. However, it is unclear if Sisters In Islam currently receives state funding and the relationship the organisation has with the current government. In its beginning, the organisation received financial support from the government, but this relationship has become strained over time. Although the organisation's work is based in Islamic principles to promote gender equality, more recently it has been vocal on the rights of LGBT persons and the Malaysian Government is not supportive of their work to help these groups. This tension between the State and Sisters In Islam and LGBT communities rests on the dominant heterosexual norms of men and women in Malaysian society. Trying to maintain government funding and work for vulnerable and marginalised groups, Sisters In Islam is also put in a difficult position of choosing who to allocate resources to.

I use these organisations' relationships to funding to illustrate donor funding's impact on the day-to-day realities of organisations and those working in them. I argue that women's organisations across the NGO spectrum are experiencing structural changes, however some organisations are better equipped to respond to these changes given their geographical positions, who they receive funding from and the priority given to fundraising strategies.

Financial instability of NGOs and shifting workplace practices

As gatekeepers between donors and participants, NGO workers not only labour at the front lines helping people, but also are involved in responding to donor concerns and expectations. At the organisational level, women are concerned with the organisation's economic survival and in turn their own personal economic survival is intertwined in their professional investment in NGO work. From the blurring of their personal lives into their professional lives, the women I interviewed began to question their futures in values-based work, as the precarious survival of organisations becomes more apparent. The Malaysian Feminist Activist (MFA) pointed out funding's effect on women's organisations working out of the Global South:

Our funders care about whether we have transparency, accountability...[Are] our finances in order and whatever and they come in and speak to our Executive Director and so the Executive Director can say anything and the board you know...So, you have this situation where it's only if the board and whatever are sort of mature and committed enough that you have organizations that are healthy enough...healthy organizations where people are joyful in the feminist movement I would argue is a dying thing.

MFA described the realities she encountered where funding is talked about through donor expectations, primarily from transparency and accountability perspectives where NGOs conform to economic checks and balances. She recognised the hierarchies of power within organisations, highlighting the roles of the Executive Director and Board Members who are in direct contact with donors, further emphasising which voices are acknowledged. She highlighted the reality for many women's organisations, particularly in the Global South, is the competition for funding that has prioritised efficient economics of organisations over organisational integrity. As a Malaysian feminist activist who has spent many years attending big international forums and conferences she knows the inner workings of this space and some of the issues that can arise.

Organisations grappling with financial sustainability or organisational integrity face a dilemma between the integrity of 'good work' and the reality of how the work gets funded. In the Southeast Asian context, the Mekong region (countries such as

Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia) has turned towards service-delivery projects. Audrey recognises this is typical in this region where NGOs operate under strict authoritative governments. Women's human rights work is diffused through education initiatives, such as schooling for girls, rather than at a structural level, such as gender equality policies:

NGOs are [moving towards] service delivery and very few are about policy and advocacy. [T]hey don't want to rock the boat [for example] in the Mekong region where the governments are very authoritarian, they are all about the services. [We can] make a recommendation about how to educate girls, so they will [go] back to school, but they are not openly and proactively about gender equality or human rights, but they are about development needs for girls in education. [What] we get a sense of is the state is a little bit more removed from the actual result because [organisations like] Oxfam are coming in, so [then] it's not my problem, they are already providing the service so it's okay. They do good work but they are taking over the space [overriding the] state rather than doing advocacy [work], most NGOs are [now] in the service sector.

Coming from an advocacy-based organisation like IWRAW AP, Audrey is aware the organisation is being left out of funding prospects because they have not shifted towards service-delivery. Audrey sees that the intentions of organisations from the Global North are for the most part good, but that local organisations can be pushed out of their own space and context. This is directly related to the funds they receive from larger external organisations. International organisations like Oxfam that are able to fund projects in areas such as the Mekong region do not take into consideration local organisations and their roles in community development and the lasting effects they have in the region.

Audrey highlighted the importance of the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis and how donors responded to the crisis:

We found that in the last four years, because of that whole capital crunch and the credit loss... [Funders] prioritize projects that deal directly with projects dealing with a specific population, right? With a very clear idea of what is the problem, how are you going to address it, what will you produce and in terms of program

management -- that is how they want it to be shown, because they don't want to be so confused by your project and if it is very complicated and about higher order type outputs and you can't promise anything because you say you will do all of these things so that the government will produce a law or policy that is positive for women, but you can't [say] that because we can only say that we will build enabling environments.

Audrey argued that organisations that focus on advocacy can easily get left behind. In the work of advocacy-based organisations, such as IWRAP AP, there is little in the way it can materially show in terms of how its work benefits the people. More specifically, the promotion of women's human rights and advocacy activities do not translate into mathematical percentages in the same way service delivery activities highlight groups helped, aid received and numbers of services utilised.

As Michael Edwards and David Hulme contend, "NGOs find themselves in a web of complex interactions in a particular context. The concept of multiple 'stakeholders' helps to further our understanding of NGO accountability... Donors and other resource-providers have a stake in the outcomes of NGO performance too."³²² Edwards and Hulme's analysis focuses on how the donor-favoured relationship that NGOs are constantly navigating through compromises organisations in order to keep their doors open. This is apparent when organisations concede to shifting donor-funding practices, as Audrey previously illustrated with some of the changing dynamics in the Mekong region. This is also represented in organisational activities that 'fit' with donor agendas, but deviates from the political agendas for justice, accountability and transformation in NGOs.³²³ In other words, organisations find themselves at odds with fulfilling their mandates and goals against funder expectations and requirements.

For the women at IWRAP AP, the changing NGO landscape and idealising 'fashion funding' fosters a sense that:

³²² Michael Edwards and David Hulme, eds., *Non-Governmental Organisations – Performance and Accountability Beyond the Magic Bullet* (London: Earthscan, 1995), 40-42.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 3.

Donors have already made up their minds about where we can be most effective with the money, and because to them it's about how useful is my one dollar and what I can show for the one dollar, so that's there ... and because they have already made these decisions, unless you impact them from early on, you can't work that way, your funding criteria and the way it is structured.

Audrey considered the complications of external donor funding and some of the rationale behind which projects are funded. It is clear there is little room for organisations receiving funds to negotiate changes in donor funding strategy or decisions. This can result in organisations making concessions in their work to fit in with donor demands, which puts workers in compromising positions as often the morality of the work takes a backseat to the economics of operations. For example, if donors are looking to support projects that are issues-based such as HIV/AIDS, organisations such as IWRAW AP would have to find a way to incorporate the mandate of CEDAW into the project, with the permission of the donor. If the donor rejects this, then it becomes a case of following the funding or the organisation's mandate. Once donor funding has been accepted and taken by organisations, donors expect NGOs to fulfill their obligations and complete all programs and tasks, holding organisations accountable for funds spent. Accounting for transparency is beneficial to both funders and organisations, but can at times be trying due to unforeseen circumstances. If, for instance, a program cannot be completed for reasons such as political instability, organisations are held accountable to their donors and have to find the best solution for their donors.

Kathleen O'Reilly, Srila Roy and many others have examined the professionalisation of the non-profit/NGO sector, which is critiqued for adopting a 'corporatised' approach. In their 1996 work, Edwards and Hulme use the African proverb "If you have your hands in another man's pocket, you must move when he moves," describing some of the relationships organisations have with funders.³²⁴ The reality is that if NGOs do not shift or make compromises in their work, then they are

³²⁴ Khaldoun AbouAssi, "Hands in the Pockets of Mercurial Donors: NGO Response to Shifting Funding Priorities," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 42, no.3 (2012): 585, doi: 10.1177/0899764012439629.

subject to a further funding crunch and a possibility of closing their doors. Dorathy considers:

NGOs are going to face this, because money is running out. Now there is fleeting resources because donors are also moving into so-called ‘work on the ground’ — they actually want a direct presence, they don’t want to use intermediaries, they want a direct presence and a lot of it is going back to national groups...so [then it becomes about] very strong national groups are like “give me the money and I will give you my report”.

The competition for funds that Dorathy raises is a shared reality for many organisations, which not only impacts women’s organisations, but governing states and groups who rely on NGO services. The extent of competition, as Emily Barman explores, has organisations struggling to obtain resources or risk failure.³²⁵ In some cases, organisations will make concessions in their own goals and strategies to ensure they are able to survive. For NGOs, where do organisations draw the lines of how many compromises are too many in regards to safeguarding funds in relation to their values and reliability as an NGO? For example, it could be to secure funding for programs and projects or a change in terminology from human rights to empowerment is needed to better serve donor agendas, however, is empowerment a part of the organisation’s vision? Questioning what appears to be a simple change in terminology can have disastrous ramifications for the integrity of NGO mandates and vision, what happens to the credibility of an organisation? In this way, the donor/NGO relationship becomes about economic restraints and financial susceptibility, where it becomes a one-sided game of donor/NGO tug-of-war, as AbouAssi acknowledges:

As key players, donors reposition themselves to accommodate demands from other members. However, the change donors undergo is subtle compared to that NGOs undertake. As implementing partners and receivers of funding, NGOs have to dramatically transform their organizational interests and cultures to align

³²⁵ Emily Barman, “With Strings Attached: Nonprofits and the Adoption of Donor Choice,” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 37, no.1 (2008): 45, doi: 10.1177/0899764007303530.

with those of other members in the circle. In doing so, they lose much of their identity and interaction with constituents.³²⁶

This is the power donors have over NGOs. While donors may make few concessions, NGOs make greater compromises, not only in their organisational integrity, but also in the workload. On the one hand, worker investment in values-based work exemplifies the meaningfulness and the nobility this type of work encompasses. On the other hand, NGO workers must also consider the economic realities of what it takes for organisations to continue its operations, especially when there is a plethora of NGOs who will make the necessary changes in order to survive one more day. Organisations and those working in them, straddle the lines of not only doing ‘good work’, but also the lingering hardships that come with this type of work. The shifting NGO/donor funding relationship poses new sets of challenges for NGOs as a shift in NGO mandates and goals may mean funding for today and the next few years, but what about its long-term effects and future implications?

Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the lack of funding for women’s organisations. More specifically, I focused on the Malaysian context and women’s organisations working out of the Global South. From this analysis, I considered the importance donor funding has had on women’s organisations and which organisations have access to funding in light of shifting funding trends. I traced the implications of funding to women’s organisations to the 1990s when women’s rights and gender equality were major issues in international politics and given large platforms. The gap in government economic support to women’s organisations saw an increase in external donors, which enabled a competitive NGO playing field. Women’s narratives illustrate a clear recognition that the economics of organisations took priority over the work, this was seen through increased fundraising efforts and shifting priorities of organisations, which became more concerned with donor needs over organisational integrity.

³²⁶ AbouAssi, “Hands in the Pockets of Mercurial Donors,” 586.

Organisations following donor-funding trends have been portrayed as becoming 'corporate'. This portrayal of NGOs does not consider the everyday realities and complexities of NGO operations and what it means to sustain and survive in the NGO climate where shifts in donor funding allocations and piecemeal practices of funding are all too common. The women I interviewed recognised funding had become increasingly limited, and that organisations were constantly struggling to secure both long- and short-term funding. In this way, their professional longevity was also uncertain, which in turn led them to think about their tentative positions at work and how that impacted their personal lives. In the next and final chapter, I use feminist reconfigurations of Pierre Bourdieu's conceptions on the habitus to explore what the gendered habitus means to women in non-profit/NGO work. I also examine the concept of emotional capital and how it is acquired and maintains the generational divide amongst younger and older feminist activists in these spaces.

Chapter Six – Bridging the gap: Generational tensions in women’s organisations

We see intergenerational tensions between faculty and students in academic settings, between second and third waves in the feminist movement, and between older women in higher positions in NGOs and young women in lower positions starting a career in this field – just to name a few.³²⁷

In 2010 the online platform Young Feminist Activism (YFA) was created by the Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID) to develop an online community for and by young feminists. This online space aimed to provide and share news, tools and opportunities connecting young feminists from different countries and regions. AWID’s vision — through YFA — was to increase young feminist activism across women’s movements. The online community targeted women 30 years old and younger who were active on women’s issues, rights, social, environmental and gender justice activism.³²⁸ One of the program’s overarching goals is to contribute to stronger multigenerational women’s/feminist movements across the globe.

Minjon Tholen, a contributor to the forum, highlights where generational tensions can take place. In Tholen’s blogpost titled “Intergenerate” she examines some of the ongoing issues in feminist debates and women’s organisations. After speaking with many young women in local and international contexts, and from her own experience, Tholen states:

Intergenerational tensions are by no means a new phenomenon, nor are articles on this issue. But as a young woman convinced of the urgency to address this matter, I would like to share my perspectives on the importance of

³²⁷ Minjon Tholen, “Intergenerate,” *Young Feminist Wire*, last modified 28 Apr. 2011 <http://yfa.awid.org/2011/04/intergenerate/>.

³²⁸ Association for Women’s Rights in Development, “About Us,” *AWID*, last modified May 2, 2016, <http://yfa.awid.org/about-us/>. AWID was mentioned earlier in this thesis. In Chapter Five, I explored AWID’s analysis of the lack of funding for women’s organisations. AWID is an international, feminist, membership organisation committed to achieving gender equality, sustainable development and women’s human rights.

intergenerational communication and collaboration to sustain progress in the fight for women's rights and gender equality.³²⁹

She notes that the tensions between younger and older feminist activists are not a new revelation in feminist activism, yet are still pertinent. In her words:

Young women are not looking to take over your movement and push you out; we are merely aspiring to further advance the powerful movement you have developed and we are all proud to be a part of – if you let us.³³⁰

Tholen calls for an inclusive approach to bridging the generational gap. She foregrounds the importance of the movement and what inclusivity could lead to, if there was a shared willingness from older generations of feminist activists:

As young women, we sometimes had to – literally – stand up and raise our hand to show our presence, passion for the cause, and eagerness to become more actively involved in this field. At other times, older women told us that they were not ready to give up their movement yet. If older women continue to consider this *their* movement, instead of a movement that belongs to all of us, the intergenerational divide will prove detrimental.³³¹

This mentality of '*their* movement' is a consistent issue in the generational divide. In my interview with Ruby she acknowledged the power dynamics between older women and younger women and finds it perplexing how older women are aware of the hierarchies and power dynamics outside of the workplace, but have little recognition for what is happening within women's organisations. This is reminiscent of Wathshlah's comments I discussed in Chapter Four where she asks, "How can you ask us to work on rights without giving us our own rights?"

One of the main concerns in women's feminist activism continues to be how to bridge disparities among differing groups of women. This chapter focuses on some of the tensions in feminist activism involving the generational divide between older and

³²⁹ Tholen, "Intergenerate," <http://yfa.awid.org/2011/04/intergenerate>.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid.

younger feminist activists and how women come to work in the non-profit/NGO sector. The concept “intergenerational” is important for my research as it implicates more than age, but also other tensions in women’s organisations, such as the role ethnicity and religion play in the Malaysian context. Specifically, women’s organisations in Malaysia are headed by women who have fought for women’s human rights in the country, but have also come from privileged ethnic and religious classes. The women who founded Sisters In Islam were also educated professionals. Many of them received university-level education abroad. As I discussed in Chapter One, Malay and Muslim women have been afforded privileges based on their race and ethnicity and this has enabled educational opportunities, which in turn furthered their status in gaining momentum to lead and create women’s movements and organisations.

The concept intergenerational in this chapter highlights the diversity in women’s embodied feminism through an analysis in the types of existing relationships in women’s organisations. Generational analysis in feminism more broadly has a complex and tenuous history. As Astrid Henry examines in her 2004 book *Not My Mother’s Sister*, feminism is embodied, performed and enacted through the imaginary of generations. She writes that generational identity conflicts are naturalised and seeks to problematise this. Her analysis will be explored further in this chapter to think through the experiences of the women I interviewed.

I also use this final chapter to explore women’s experiences in their work and the ongoing issues concerning the generational gap, ethnic tensions and the role of religion. I am particularly interested in how women’s individual and collective feminisms influence their approach to their work. What could this mean for the emotional capital they accrue, not only in their work, but also from their personal lives: how is this managed in the workspace? I seek to answer questions of why older women continue to dominate these spaces and how this impacts the dynamics within women’s organisations. Following on from the ideas and concerns discussed in Chapter Two, I argue women’s embodied feminisms are multiple. Drawing on the gendered habitus takes into account intersecting categorisations, such as race, ethnicity, age, nationality, and so on. Here I explore what the affective gendered habitus and religious gendered habitus could look like for women. Building on my earlier application of Hochschild’s emotional labour thesis, here I seek to explore how it is embodied, by focusing on the

experiences of Ruby, Wathshlah, Natasha and Ratna. These women work for different organisations across Malaysia with an interest in gender, gender equality, and women's rights, and have all come to embody feminisms shaped through their gendered habitus.

Feminist reworkings of Bourdieu

In his significant volume *Distinction*, Pierre Bourdieu describes the habitus as, “both the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgements and the system of classification (*principium divisionis*) of these practices.”³³² Habitus is created through both social and individual practices that can change depending on context and under unexpected conditions, where the interplay between dispositions generated overtime is shaped by past events and structures and that also shape current practices and structures. How we move in the world is embedded in class, culture, taste, education, family, social space and status experiences, and accumulated over time. Feminist readings of Bourdieu, as Beverley Skegg's points out, has enabled “feminists to put the issue of class back onto the feminist agenda.”³³³ In the 2004 edited collection by Lisa Adkins and Beverley Skeggs titled *Feminism After Bourdieu*, contributors offer gendered readings of Bourdieu's social theory to re-evaluate and expand on his theorisations.³³⁴ Feminist reworkings of Bourdieu's concepts focus on gendered practices. In this chapter I also employ the concept of emotional capital to tease out how emotion is utilised in the work in terms of commitment and passion, particularly through the formation of generational relationships in women's organisations.

Before mapping emotional capital and its use in my research, I return to Bourdieu's ideas on the habitus to illustrate some of its gendered aspects relating to the private sphere and the family. When Bourdieu speaks of social identity, he means a process that begins through early socialisation in the family. Skegg's recognises:

³³² Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1984), 170-174.

³³³ Beverley Skeggs, “Context and Background: Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of class, gender and sexuality,” in *Feminism After Bourdieu*, eds. Lisa Adkins and Beverley Skeggs (MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 20.

³³⁴ Lisa Adkins, “Introduction: Feminism, Bourdieu and after,” in *Feminism After Bourdieu*, eds. Lisa Adkins and Beverley Skeggs (MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 3.

For Bourdieu social identity is first made from sexual identity, from the experience of the mother's and father's bodies. But to this he adds the sexual division of labour in the home; the experience; the experience of the parental body is always shaped by this sexual division formed by the wider sexual division of labour.³³⁵

Here Skeggs highlights how children learn intimately to experience wider structural features, which are never just an experience of the structural but always intertwined with the child's physical and sexual presence, with its bodily relation to others.³³⁶ The intimate experiences that children learn in the family socialises them towards Hochschild's "training of the heart."

Women's work in the home has been long seen as a form of payment for men's paid work and the legal protections of being within a household. Women's mothering and care duties not only offer a form of payment to the household, but also renders them in charge of children's socialisation. In her research on schooling and education in the United Kingdom, Diane Reay points out:

Feminist research on the domestic division of labour would also point to the mother as the parent who expends the most time on childcare and thus the parent most directly involved in the generation of cultural capital. Childcare is made up of a complex amalgam of practical, educational and emotional work.³³⁷

As the mother is the parent involved in childcare, she is responsible for transmitting cultural capital and finding the appropriate ways for her children to accumulate it. Reay argues:

Cultural capital is primarily transmitted through the family. It is from the family that children derive modes of thinking, types of dispositions, sets of meaning and qualities of style. These are then assigned a specific social value and status

³³⁵ Skeggs, "Context and Background," 21.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Diane Reay, "Gendering Bourdieu's concepts of capitals? Emotional capital, women and social class," in *Feminism After Bourdieu*, eds. Lisa Adkins and Beverley Skeggs (MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 59.

in accordance with what the dominant classes label as the most valued cultural capital.³³⁸

The concept of emotional capital highlights the role of the mother in familial relationships. Reay states “While Bourdieu never refers explicitly to emotional capital in his own work...this work falls more particularly on women, who are responsible for maintaining relationships.”³³⁹ Emotional capital provided by mothers is a gesture of devotion, generosity and solidarity; and is a type of work that is linked more to the private than the public sphere.³⁴⁰ As such, women take on the job to create the emotional tone of social encounters both at home and in their work.³⁴¹ The gendered habitus relies on the naturalisation of gender roles, calling on men and women to do different kinds of work. Skeggs acknowledges that in Bourdieu’s habitus:

The normalcy of gendered reproduction works very differently for boys and girls. For girls it can only offer a limited form of capital if they conform to gender normalcy. For boys it offers masculine power, institutionalized in the school as a form of symbolic capital that (as with the family) represents accumulated privilege in other fields.³⁴²

The different ways boys and girls are socialised and trained to be effects the ways in which they not only acquire their habitus and forms of capital, but also impacts their gendered approach to emotion work. Women are more likely presented with tasks of mastering anger and aggression in the service of ‘being nice’ whereas men are not held to the same standards in their emotion management.³⁴³

Here I begin charting emotional capital using Elspeth Probyn’s argument about what emotion is and what it can do. In her 2005 book *Blush*, she examines the experiences, expressions and ideas about shame. She argues “shame gives us a way to

³³⁸ Ibid., 58.

³³⁹ Ibid., 60.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 60, 62.

³⁴¹ Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 20.

³⁴² Skeggs, “Context and Background,” 22.

³⁴³ Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 163.

rethink the types of oppositions that have become entrenched in popular debate.”³⁴⁴ Shame is a fact of human life that “is productive in how it makes us think again about bodies, societies and human interaction.”³⁴⁵ While I do not engage with Probyn’s in-depth analysis of shame in this chapter, I use her reconfiguration of Bourdieu’s concepts to examine the affective gendered habitus and draw on her analysis of emotion in Bourdieu’s work. Probyn states:

While the body and the social come together in much of his work, Bourdieu was also rather vague about the place of emotion within the habitus: is emotion important, or is it a side issue compared with the big questions about class and social capital? Bourdieu’s interest lay in how to account for practical knowledge—the stuff that people gather and deploy in their everyday lives and that constitutes for Bourdieu the real reason that one does sociology.³⁴⁶

Probyn not only opens up Bourdieu’s habitus to emotion, but also the feeling body, illustrating what emotion can physically do. Akin to Probyn’s injection of affect into Bourdieu’s concepts, Reay also considers emotion in his work. At the personal level, Reay reveals her relationship to Bourdieu’s work is as much affective as it is intellectual — she not only feels drawn by his words, but also moved by them. I am also drawn to Bourdieu’s conceptions, especially feminist rearticulations of his conceptions by Probyn, Skeggs and Reay. While Bourdieu never refers explicitly to emotional capital in his works, Reay uses this as an entry point for her genesis of the concept of emotional capital. Reay expands on Helga Nowotny’s definition of emotional capital that sees emotional capital as an extension of Bourdieu’s social capital. This is the network of relationships, which according to Bourdieu are “aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term.”³⁴⁷

Nowotny coined the term emotional capital in 1981 and defined it as an amalgamation of “Knowledge, contacts and relations as well as access to emotionally

³⁴⁴ Elspeth Probyn *Blush: Faces of Shame* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2005), xv.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, xviii.

³⁴⁶ Probyn, *Blush*, 51.

³⁴⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” 1986 *Cultural Theory: An Anthology* (2011): 89.

valued skills and assets, which hold within any social network characterised at least partly by affective ties.”³⁴⁸

For Bourdieu, the accumulation of capital is subject to certain conditions with the possibility of converting from one form to another. Recognising the value of different forms of capital (whether economic, social or cultural) is then implicated in an “exchange within complex networks or circuits within and across different fields.”³⁴⁹ Reay’s research suggests that the concept of emotional capital is useful to unravel some of the puzzling class and gender processes embedded in contemporary education markets, as it takes into account the emotional investment that is focused on others rather than the self.³⁵⁰ Her work also highlights the significance of the gendered role of the mother in particular and her ability to transmit emotional capital within the private and public spheres.

Nowotny argues that traditionally emotional capital was a trap for women as it limited them to the private sphere:

As long as women were confined to the private sphere, this was the only capital they could acquire. Like other forms of capital, they could accumulate it and build up positions of dominance, but their reach extended only as far as the validity of this currency; it was limited to the private sphere.³⁵¹

Taking the concept into the workplace, Jenna Ward and Robert McMurray point out in *The Dark Side of Emotional Labour* that:

Studies have focused on the ways in which families (i.e. mothers) generate this type of capital in the form of ‘emotionally valued assets and skill, love and affection, expenditure of time, attention, care and concern’. Yet, what these

³⁴⁸ Reay, “Gendering Bourdieu’s concepts of capital,” 60.

³⁴⁹ Rob Moore, “Capital,” In *Key Concepts: Pierre Bourdieu*, ed. Michael Grenfell (Durham: Acumen, 2012), 99.

³⁵⁰ Reay, “Gendering Bourdieu’s concepts of capitals?” 71.

³⁵¹ Helga Nowotny, “Women in Public Life in Austria,” in *Access to power: Cross-national studies of women and elites*, eds. Cynthia F. Epstein and Rose L. Coser (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), 148.

studies seemed to have overlooked is Bourdieu's most basic definition of capital 'as accumulated history'.³⁵²

Ward and McMurray return to Bourdieu's analysis of the field and habitus to explore the idea of emotional capital as a socially, culturally, economically informed capacity to explain why individuals have the capabilities to perform emotional labour.³⁵³ Bringing emotional capital to work is then connected to the gendering of emotion work and its role in organisations. Emotion is part of the body's accumulated knowledge where "emotion seems to work to amplify or reduce instilled tendencies."³⁵⁴ Ward and McMurray bring together practices, experiences and related resources that are drawn from workers engaging in emotional performances observing the impact of life experiences that contribute to their ability to undertake work.³⁵⁵ Their interviews include veterinarians, counsellors, home care workers and an organisation called the Samaritans.³⁵⁶ I follow their lead by taking emotional capital into the public sphere through my interviews with women working in women's organisations.

Whose capital counts? Emotional, cultural and economic capitals in women's organisations

Exploring emotional capital in women's organisations cannot be understood without recognising its relationship with other forms of capital such as economic, cultural and social capitals. In Bourdieu's "The Forms of Capital", he argues capital can appear in three ways. He describes:

[A]s economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the forms of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and

³⁵² Ward and McMurray, *The Dark Side of Emotional Labour*, 91.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 92.

³⁵⁴ Elspeth Probyn, "Shame in the habitus," in *Feminism After Bourdieu*, eds. Lisa Adkins and Beverley Skeggs (MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 231.

³⁵⁵ Ward and McMurray, *The Dark Side*, 89.

³⁵⁶ Samaritans is a voluntary organisation dedicated to reducing suicide and improving emotional well-being.

may be institutionalized in the forms of education qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations ('connections'), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of title and nobility.³⁵⁷

Capital is represented and subject to certain conditions. Economic capital is based in monetary value whereas cultural and social capitals are symbolic. Cultural capital in its embodied state is a part of one's habitus, as Bourdieu notes, "Cultural capital can be acquired, to a varying extent, depending on the period, the society, and the social class, in the absence of any deliberate inculcation, and therefore quite unconsciously."³⁵⁸ The acquisition of this form of capital is shaped through one's personal and collective histories. According to Ward and McMurray:

Emotional capital cannot be understood without an appreciation for Bourdieu's most central concepts of 'habitus' and 'field'... 'habitus' is best thought of as a system of dispositions... These dispositions are a spectrum of cognitive and affective factors that constitute a 'product of history [that] produces individual and collective practices'.³⁵⁹

The embodiment of dispositions is the product of accrued capitals that is carried by and through the body and the fit between the habitus and the field. It provides us with a way of recognising authority in its physical dispositions and then can become a reflection of social entitlement.³⁶⁰ Through the forms of capital, the visibility of younger women's subordinate status in women's organisations is encapsulated by older generations of women's experiences in women's movements and professional experiences in women's organisations. Older women have, over time, gained experiences in this type of work and therefore have the 'right' habitus that enable them to move with ease in the world of women's organisations and feminist activism. Their past experiences have shaped their feminist activism through their own struggles and

³⁵⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," In *Handbook of Theory and Research for Sociology of Education*, John Richardson, ed. (New York: Greenwood, 1986), 243.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 245-246.

³⁵⁹ Ward and McMurray, *The Dark Side of Emotional Labour*, 93.

³⁶⁰ Skeggs, "Context and Background," 23.

hardships with challenging governments and forming alliances between women across class, ethnic and religious boundaries. For many young women working in women's organisations, this is not the case, their habitus is still being shaped in relation to altered socio-economic conditions, as they are constantly negotiating their feminist activism and how they situate themselves in these spaces. This is illustrated through the relationships they form with older colleagues in the office and also through their lack of wages in the non-profit/NGO sector, a poor status that is also justified through the work being good, because it has purpose and meaning. Their positions in women's organisations is subject to change throughout their professional careers, as the longer women stay working they may be able to find their footing — but will they attain the right habitus and under what conditions and constraints is this made possible?

Currently, many young women lack the opportunity to form the same types of relationships and connections in women's movements and women's organisations in the ways of their older colleagues. They are perceived as junior, not only young but also as daughters. More widely across the non-profit/NGO sector, the cultural habitus plays a role in distinguishing who has the right fit. In the case of the foreign worker and the local worker another divide is made visible. In an article titled "Secret aid worker" an anonymous aid worker writes, "The discrepancies in compensation and benefits reflect the difference in value assigned not only to needs, but to the capabilities of local versus expat staff."³⁶¹ The secret aid worker continues, "In most companies, if two people who did the same role and had the same amount of experience got paid vastly different salaries, there would be uproar. Not so in the NGO world."³⁶² Here foreign experience and knowledge is a form of privileged cultural capital in its embodied state. There is an increased value placed on the travelled body over that of a local body, whose sacrificial status is often taken for granted. While the literature examining expatriate staff in NGOs is limited, Sarah Mukasa points out the tensions between expat and local staff is more than just a monetary divide, but the relationship is impacted by frequent changes of expat staff, undervaluing of local staff knowledge, a structural divide of "them versus

³⁶¹ Secret aid worker, "Secret aid worker: Why do expats earn more than the rest of us?" *The Guardian*, last modified March 29, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/mar/29/secret-aid-worker-why-do-expats-earn-more-than-the-rest-of-us>.

³⁶² Ibid.

us” and unclear policies on expats.³⁶³ Kothari also points out, “The expatriate development professional further enjoys the cultural capital acquired by being from or of the West and reproduces this on the ground through technical knowledge associated with ‘modern’ scientific ideas.”³⁶⁴ In the case of older Malaysian women their contact with the West enhanced their cultural and social capital. The disparities are not only grounded in intergenerational tensions, but also in the different ways in which they came to women’s movements.

Many of the founding members of women’s organisations in Malaysia took part in global and national campaigns for women’s human rights. Global conferences, such as the Second World Conference on Women in Copenhagen in 1980, used momentum from the adoption of CEDAW in 1979 to further women’s participation in political feminist movements. This carried through to Nairobi in 1985, which some consider to be where the controversial “birth of global feminism” began.³⁶⁵ It was in Nairobi that women became an international force unified under the banner of equality, development and peace. Women who attended international conferences used moments in women’s movements to strengthen their feminist activism, which was considered separate, but still implicated in their professional lives. In the Malaysian context, women who participated in these events were also professionals, occupying careers such as journalists, teachers, professors, academics and lawyers.

In today’s context of feminist activism young women left their careers in the corporate sector, dissatisfied with this career trajectory, to work in the non-profit/NGO sector in search of more rewarding work. In doing so, they value ‘good work’ over money. This is not always acknowledged in their newfound NGO positions. In addition to older women’s privileged positions in women’s organisations, many older feminist activists hold racial and ethnic privileges. Most are middle class Malay women, who have benefitted from affirmative action policies by the state and have used this to

³⁶³ Sarah Mukasa, “Are expatriate staff necessary in international development NGOs? A case study of an international NGO in Uganda,” *CVO International Working Paper 4* (1999): 18-21.

³⁶⁴ Kothari, “Authority and Expertise,” 428.

³⁶⁵ UN Women, “The Four Global Women’s Conferences 1975 - 1995: Historical Perspective,” *UN Women*, last modified May 2000, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/session/presskit/hist.html>.

strengthen their positions as feminist activists both at the national and international levels.

The class, ethnic, age and racial processes embedded in contemporary women's movements and organisations in Malaysia further perpetuates the disparities between younger and older feminist activists. This transpires through various institutional structures within women's organisations. In my interviews I did not ask questions about how much women earn but the women I interviewed referred to the wage disparities as an issue of concern. By examining capitals, and in particular emotional capital in these workplaces, which are already fraught with gendered, classed, racial, ethnic and aged divisions, I seek to convey some of the challenges in negotiating one's feminist activism.

Generational divides: Experiences of women in Malaysian women's organisations

Ruby: Profession – Passion – Pragmatics

Ruby's professional feminist activism came after being in the corporate sector for two years. She is in her mid-twenties to early-thirties and had been involved in the NGO sector for just a few years when I met and interviewed her. Having studied business at university, she felt the corporate world was the next logical step in her professional career. Like other women I interviewed, she realised she wanted satisfaction and meaning from work. She takes her experiences from the corporate sector into the non-profit sector. When I asked Ruby about her experiences working in an NGO, especially in relation to the generational divide, she responded:

What is ironic about NGOs/non-for-profits, especially feminist organisations is the critique of power structures, but I see that being replicated in a lot of women's organisations... So you are supposed to be passionate and want to do stuff, but when you critique this kind of [NGO] environment that is unhealthy then you get put down and suddenly you are deemed disrespectful, you don't follow orders, you are angry crazy kids who can't do the job they are supposed to do. Sometimes, it is really hard not only to fight externally, but sometimes there is a lot of tension internally and colliding between the intergenerational

differences can be very apparent and that is something I am trying to manage in my own experience.

When Ruby points out the structural inequalities within the workplace, she is perceived as ‘angry’ by her older colleagues; dismissed as a child and acting out. In the Indian context, Srila Roy highlights that feminists fear NGO-isation and the process of professionalisation. Roy argues that NGO-isation is representative of institutionalised feminism, where feminism’s political autonomy is sacrificed to government and donor funding programs and projects involving professionalisation, bureaucratisation and managerialism in organisational structures and functioning.³⁶⁶ She sees that has watered down the women’s movement by relating feminist activism to a career, especially for younger feminist activists whose activism is perceived as a profession and not part of a political movement; young women are “refusing to inherit the legacies of their feminist foremothers.”³⁶⁷ Younger women are then constantly reminded of their lack of credibility and often it is used against them as leverage to dismiss opposing opinions and decisions. This tension is not only about younger feminist activists and older feminist activists but also of who is thought to be a ‘real’ and altruistic feminist activist. This distinction between the younger ‘career’ feminist activist and older ‘altruistic’ feminist activist is implicated in how many of these organisations are structured. Ruby said:

You have to sacrifice yourself to do good for people and that is the kind of thinking that is still there in a lot of our organizations. Here, instead of seeing it, as okay, young people coming in and it needs to be a career, [it] needs to be something they can do; [and not] burn out and then leave and go back to the corporate sector, because then capitalism wins in that sense. I just think we need a mindset shift, but [it] needs to be honest.

Calling for a shift in NGO culture, especially in the continued portrayal that NGO work is purely based on altruism, Ruby is realistic about the changing landscape in the NGO sector. She wants an ethical career grounded in good work. Making her

³⁶⁶ Srila Roy, “The Indian Women’s Movement,” 100-103.

³⁶⁷ Srila Roy, ed., *New South Asian Feminism: Paradoxes and Possibilities* (London: Zed Books, 2012), 14.

feminist activism a part of her career is not a shared sentiment by older feminist activists who are skeptical of the career feminist, a view that is silently reinforced by the economic capital that underwrites their position. As Tholen noted earlier in this chapter, younger women are proud to be involved, if they are given the space. However, women's political movements and activism in Malaysia is always linked to the 1980s when the creation and proliferation of women's organisations flourished. This has instilled the idea that it was because of older generations of (middle class) feminist activists that these organisations not only exist, but continue to function today.

As discussed in the previous chapter, women's organisations are increasingly implicated in funding realities in the NGO sector. The economic factors have become a driving force behind how women's organisations continue to function in a difficult funding climate. The 'purely' altruistic mentality is complicated by donor funding practices in the NGO sector. NGOs are caught between doing good work and economic viability. Women's organisations are directly impacted by the changing funding landscape in the NGO sector, which also relies on embedded structural hierarchies of these organisations to disguise internal hierarchies and gender-age expectations. This further positions older women as those who have the right organisational habitus, as many of them have relationships with donors and funders and have experiences that help in accessing and obtaining further funding.

In her article "Politics, Passion and Professionalization in Contemporary Indian Feminism" Srila Roy discusses the rise in career feminism in NGOs and the role of younger women in India:

Autonomy is also linked to the idea of voluntarism in a wider social movement framework that is shared by the NGO sector. Unlike today's paid NGO 'staff', middle-class feminists retained their professional roles (in the media, law, academy), and contributed to political activism on the basis of their conviction and commitment, which was entirely voluntary (if not altruistic).³⁶⁸

³⁶⁸ Srila Roy, "Politics, Passion and Professionalization in Contemporary Indian Feminism," *Sociology* 45, no.4 (2011): 589, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/stable/42857556>.

Labels, such as the career feminist, can have serious consequences. According to Uma Chakravarti cited in Roy's article, career feminists are "women activists who are specialists on one issue: health, sexuality, micro credit, reproductive rights, sexual harassment, etc. without a larger understanding of the interrelatedness of these issues and the complexity of patriarchal powers."³⁶⁹ Roy notes that the possibility of fusing one's passion with one's livelihood contributes to the generational tensions. On the one hand, younger women are questioned if it is passion that drives them or just a profession where they are implicated in the '9 to 5isation' of the women's movement. On the other hand, older activists' versions of 'pure' feminism are continually used as a benchmark for younger feminist activists, which began in a different time and context, had different socio-economic conditions, and somewhat romanticise feminist histories and experiences, further dividing younger and older feminist activists.

Ruby's experiences as a younger feminist activist illustrate some aspects of younger feminist activist/older feminist activist dichotomy:

The intergenerational differences can be very apparent and that is something I am trying to manage in my own experience. I tried to follow the older generations, and this didn't work. Negotiating that kind of power dynamics within the organization can be very difficult as well, because NGOs are a tight knit community and word gets out and then you are labelled a difficult person.

Wathshlah: In-between generations – Vocation – Career

Wathshlah is a key figure in my thesis. She helped me to understand women's human rights when I interned with IWRAW AP three years prior to starting my research. Wathshlah was one among many women who mentored me in my internship. She has always been passionate about her work; she lives and breathes women's human rights. When I was an intern researching women and armed conflict she recited all of the United Nations Security Council resolution relating to women in armed conflict off by heart. When I caught up with her for an interview, Wathshlah was about to walk out of IWRAW AP's office for the day. I had stopped her at the door to say hello and reminisce, and after a few minutes of chatting, she agreed to be interviewed. We

³⁶⁹ Roy, "The Indian Women's Movement," 107.

proceeded to IWRAW AP's only meeting room located at the back of the office near the kitchen and away from the communal workspace.

Wathshlah is in her forties and straddles the line of the young/old dichotomy, finding this a constant struggle:

You are faced with challenges working with the older generation...and you are faced with challenges working with the younger generations. And your perceptions and histories are different and that's always been the challenge and I don't need to think like the younger generation to work with the younger generations. At the same time, you can't expect me to think like the older generation, and [then] where do you fit in?

Working with both the younger and older generations of feminist activists, Wathshlah has a difficult time situating herself as one or the other and remains in-between either side. Wathshlah experiences the tensions of being in-between younger and 'career' feminists and older 'altruistic' feminists.³⁷⁰ She elaborated on how the generational gap is reproduced from generation to generation:

It is an existing gap and is [an] ongoing thing and I know people who are one generation before me with the same problem, when they were my age and the biggest problem sometimes is you are not just starting off at the same time, you haven't reached that level of experience yet.

As Astrid Henry argues, "a generation is an imaginary collective that both reveals truths about people of a particular age and tries to mould those people into a unified group."³⁷¹ This is central to Wathshlah's work in IWRAW AP's projects called the Fund for Gender Equality (FGE): Young Women Making Change. The project's aim was to foster young women's engagement into feminist activism in the Asia Pacific region focusing on countries such as Vietnam, Laos, Timor Leste and Malaysia. Through the program, young women from these countries learned how to be activists

³⁷⁰ Diane Reay, "Habitus and the psychosocial: Bourdieu with feelings," *Cambridge Journal of Education* 45, no.1 (2015): 10-15, doi: 10.1080/0305764X.2014.990420.

³⁷¹ Astrid Henry, *Not My Mother's Sister: Generational Conflict and Third-Wave Feminism* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 6.

and how to use CEDAW as a tool to enhance women's rights. Activism was noted by some of the participants as something that was 'only for older generations and not for young women'. However, this perception changed with the young women's increased participation in the FGE project, where women learned how to not only use CEDAW, but also developed their advocacy skills.

Following on from IWRAW AP's FGE program, activists from Vietnam used their training in CEDAW to promote changes for women in their country especially, about dating violence, which they then raised in the 61st CEDAW session in Geneva, Switzerland. Wathshlah remarks of the Vietnamese activists:

Dating violence is not something that many people are familiar with in the region and in Vietnam. These young women took this issue to Geneva in July and we have seen the outcome of it where dating violence for the first time in Vietnam has been articulated as a recommendation. And I was sitting in Kuala Lumpur reading the concluding observations of the CEDAW committee and all I could say was "Wow." It was two years in the making but what an amazing achievement, because we've been working with so many issues and so it's so difficult sometimes to bring our issues at the global arena and at a redress mechanism and to get it articulated, but these young women were able to do it.³⁷²

Wathshlah's praise of the Vietnamese women encapsulates her desire to overcome generational tensions. What she sees is their commitments to working on women's human rights and the passion and dedication that they direct to policy reforms.

In our interview in 2014 before the FGE project took off, Wathshlah had spoken about the project and its aims:

There is this huge intergenerational gap, it is very much existent, so what is our role here? One is yes, build the capacity and understanding of this group of people so that they don't work separately. They are then able to engage through

³⁷² Michaela Guthridge (IWRAW), "FGE: Young Women Making Change – Stories of Change," *IWRAW*, last modified December 3, 2015, accessed May 6, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0TNLbr-IEI>.

intergenerational dialogues, so that was the bigger agenda working with younger women making sure it ties up with the work we are doing with the current partners, because one huge aspect of that is to bridge the intergenerational gap.

The purpose of programs such as the FGE and YFA attempt to bridge the generational gap in feminism and feminist activism and to target younger women as the means for change. This can cause problems for younger feminist activists situated in women's organisations as feminist activists grounded in hierarchical positioning and relationships. Furthermore, these younger women have not garnered the same kind of cultural, social and emotional capitals that tend to privilege older women and their feminist activist histories.

Many of the relationships between older and younger women in women's organisations position younger women as the dutiful daughter, where they are expected to fulfill what is asked of them, even if they feel it exploits their labour. Henry calls this the dutiful daughter syndrome in feminism: "The persistent nature of the maternal metaphors in feminism is often referred to as the matrophor."³⁷³ The mother-daughter relationship is difficult to escape. As Rosi Braidotti cited in Henry argues:

[The] mother-daughter nexus has reached the status of political paradigm. As such, it fulfils two crucial functions: firstly, it points to a specific type of woman-to-woman bonding. Secondly, it spells the conditions of negativity and violence that are specific to that type of bonding. It is precisely on these two accounts that I wish to defend it as a very adequate political metaphor.³⁷⁴

Drawing on Braidotti's analysis, I argue that the mother/daughter relationship further perpetuates the intergenerational activist divide in women's organisations. In the following section I consider Natasha's experiences to explore the mentor/mentee relationship, which is also representative of familial relationships from the home, such as the mother/daughter relationship.

³⁷³ Henry, *Not My Mother's Sister*, 2.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

Natasha: Mentor/mentee – Mother/daughter – Matrophor

I was told before I met Natasha that we would get along. And we did. We immediately talked about our love for the North American West Coast, home of the hipster these days. She tells me about how hipster parts of Kuala Lumpur have become. At one point in our interview Natasha asks about my ethnic, cultural and religious origins. She asks if I am *Desi*, which is a loose term to describe cultures and diasporic communities from India. I find this question difficult to answer. In my attempt to be concise, because this interview is about her, I responded with: “Well, my grandparents and their families have origins in Gujarat in India, and they moved to East Africa and well, then we ended up in Canada.” “Oh, she said you’re *Ismaili*.”³⁷⁵ In one word she was able to pinpoint my ethno-cultural and religious backgrounds. I did not have to explain my background to her, she already knew. She told me she has spent some time in Vancouver and this is where she met a lot of *Ismailis*, and proceeded to ask me if we have common friends. Jokingly, I responded that given I am a non-active member of the community she would know more people than me. After chatting about our South Asian heritage I turned the conversation back to Natasha and her experiences. I asked about her engagement in the non-profit/NGO sector working with Musawah, the global network that focuses on Muslim women’s rights. She told me about Musawah’s history and how it grew out of Sisters In Islam and brings together activists, academics, and policymakers at the international level to work on gender equality. Further into our interview, she spoke of her relationship with one of her mentors. She said:

She really picked me as her mentee...the kind of expectations and pressures of that compounded with the real mentoring that takes place, the guidance and leadership it makes it very messy...She is the one, I always say she picked me I feel picked and I didn’t know how big a name she was until I got here. I said “Fuck man, what did you see in me?” And to live up to what she saw in me and the need to live up to her expectations and to surpass [them] or at least meet them...And the positive feedback that I got from that...I was working for Musawah, but I was also equally looking for her approval and love, because it

³⁷⁵ *Ismailis* are a sect within Shia Muslims. They follow the teaching and guidance of the living Imam that is traced to the hereditary succession from Ali to Prince Karim Aga Khan, the 49th Imam in direct lineal descent of the Prophet Muhammad.

felt so good... They are aware they are doing this and they know, and that is how they get the work done.

It was difficult for Natasha to speak about this. While she is a cheerful and positive person, when it came to talking about her relationship with some of the women she works with she obviously felt a mix of complicated emotions. This was further exacerbated by a recent loss of a close family member two weeks prior to our interview, which made her reflective about her personal life and her work life. She positions her relationship with her mentor as both beautiful and problematic, saying at times “It hurts so bad.” She was drawn to Musawah, because she wanted to make her Muslim and gender identity a part of her work but that comes with conflicts especially around her mentor. Natasha believes that her mentor ‘chose’ her, treating her as if she were her daughter:

I think she sees me like a daughter figure...she would have these high expectations of her daughter as well and she would be hard with her and stern and strict and tell her that to her that to her face, but she also gives her opportunities and want her to grow and excited to see her do well and lets her know she is proud of her when she is.

Natasha realises her bond with her mentor is more than just a professional relationship. She is connected to her mentor through work, through feminist politics and through a personal connection. She sees the benefits and challenges of the blurriness of their relationship. On the one hand, she values her mentor’s opinion of her and looks up to her. On the other hand, she questions the strategy behind her mentor treating her like a daughter figure, suggesting that this is a way to get the work done at any cost. Blurring the private and public spaces then leaves Natasha feeling she has to put her work over herself, because she is invested not only through the ‘good work’ she does, but wants to please her mother figure. She spoke of some of her struggles at Musawah:

My labour, our labour is so clearly exploited and...that coupled with the hierarchy of it and major cognitive dissonance this entire year and I haven’t been able to dwell or talk about Musawah, it is just too hard to think through the love and the hate in the simultaneousness. It is intense and especially when it deals with things like faith, like this past year, I have literally come closer to my faith;

because of my work...it is intensely personal...it is intensely personal. I do this because I love it, because it is my passion, because it is my history, it's making me feel like a better human being and a better Muslim and then to know the way the structure that holds it is so problematic.

Natasha's personal activism comes up against institutional forces, such as the hierarchical relationships in women's organisations and deeply embedded generational feminist politics. She is unsettled with how her labour is utilised at Musawah, which she refers to the gendered practice of self-sacrifice and its role in women's organisations:

Exploitation is gendered...it is our gender, our young femininity is taken advantage of...the gratitude, the expected gratitude, the niceties and the not speaking out and being very civil and maintaining harmony socially and emotionally and all of that.

Here Natasha speaks of having her labour taken advantage of, and how this is based on the additional expectation that her emotional labour, as a woman, and especially as a younger woman, is inherently more patient, obedient and caring for other people's needs. As a young woman, Natasha is perceived as flexible and therefore more capable of working in tumultuous conditions. For example, Musawah has been temporarily working out of the Sisters In Islam office space for the past few years. This was supposed to be a short-term stint before moving to its permanent location in Egypt. However, with the onset of the Arab Spring and massive protests in Egypt, Musawah could not move and was forced to relocate to a more secure location. For Natasha, six months in Kuala Lumpur turned into a year, then over three years. This had her living a life of instability: never knowing when she would be leaving Malaysia; always feeling that she had to live like a nomad; and never thinking of Kuala Lumpur as a permanent fixture she could call home. From management's perspective, Natasha's personal life was not a priority, but for someone who needs a sense of rhythm and routine, this was challenging.

Natasha feels that her senior colleagues underappreciate her commitment to Musawah's work, and while her passion is recognised it does not result in better working conditions, financial remuneration or even work flexibility:

The way [they] use passion, dedication and commitment, it is so violent and functions to completely pre-empt any conversation of work-life-balance or equal pay for equal labour you know. It shuts you up, because I am passionate right, and that is a good thing, and I am not in it for anything else, and if I were to talk about my rights as a labourer, it would seem like it was disingenuous and other staff members are talked about like that... it is awful to see that actually happen.

Passion got Natasha into her work but it backfires when it is used against her. Referencing the pay disparity between the senior women and the younger women in the office, Natasha points out the difficulties for younger women entering this profession. Younger women do not voice concerns over the pay gap, because they do not want to be perceived as the 'career' feminist. But being called passionate implies immaturity, and this then legitimises exploitative practices involving overwork and pay disparities. These terms, such as passion, commitment and dedication, convey emotionally valued skills and knowledge, and demonstrate the blurriness of intergenerational feminist activist relationships.

Natasha's experiences as the dutiful daughter leave her susceptible to have her labour taken advantage of. This is a more general concern for women who engage in non-profit/NGO work as they are applauded for bridging their ethics and values in their work, but this in turn can work against them as they can overwork themselves. The gendered habitus has a role in who is able to move in these spaces with ease and who has trouble finding their footing. In the next section, I turn to the role of religion in the Malaysian context and in particular how women's feminist activism plays out in women's organisations that have Islam as a focal point in their work. I am interested in how the gendered habitus is impacted by religion and in particular, what an Islamic gendered habitus might look like for women who come to women's human rights work from very different contexts, situations and positionalities.

The Islamic gendered habitus: Natasha and Ratna's experiences

In what follows, I want to move away from Natasha's experiences with her mentor and reflect on the role of her Muslim identity in her work, which is also implicated in her family history and her mother's activism. Here I also raise Ratna's experiences at Sisters In Islam in relation to the role religion plays both at home and at

work, impacting her overall identity. In Chapter Two I discussed how Ratna places her feminist belonging and her feminist home in the work of Sisters In Islam. Her feelings of belonging are also generated by her Islamic gendered habitus. As a Malaysian woman, she came to feminist activism later in life and this has challenged her personal and professional investments in gender relations in Malaysia. Natasha and Ratna's experiences capture the different ways that their Islamic gendered habitus is employed in their respective organisations. Their embodied Muslim identities are shaped through their individual and collective experiences.

Natasha: Family history – Education – Feminist activism

As I flagged earlier, Natasha is genuinely interested in research, and in particular, research with a focus on gender. She is also passionate about using her religious politics. This is evident in her effort to identify my religious background. Her family is connected to the way she embodies her faith. When Natasha spoke of her activist beginnings, she recalls a moment from her childhood and tells me the story of when her biological father kidnapped her brother. She says:

When I was five my biological father kidnapped my brother and we had already moved to the U.S. at this point and he had taken him back to Pakistan from Berkeley. All of this was from [the] accumulation of abuse—physical, material, emotional and financial abuse. My mom was quite young, she was 27 and my brother was three and she went back to Pakistan and fought this dramatic, like almost cinematic/melodramatic custody battle in the courts for 11 months.

Natasha's mother eventually won the custody battle, but Pakistan's political climate and political Islamisation initiatives affected her mother's legal struggle. She discussed how the courts discriminated against women – women's legal testimony was given half the weight of men's. Natasha highlights that it was at this point her mother began thinking like an activist. She not only used the legal system in Pakistan but also involved the media in her case. Natasha's grandfather and mother used verses from the Hadith – believed to be the sayings of the Prophet – to emphasise the important role of the mother. The Hadith is a revered source of religious law and moral guidance and is thought of as second in importance only to the Quran. In winning this case, her mother also set legal precedent for kidnapping cases in Pakistan. Without formal education Natasha's mother won her custody battle and came back to Berkeley, California to put

herself through university. While she had no child support coming in and no green card, Natasha recalls that “We were healthy and we grew up in a space that was safe.” Her mother’s legal battle had a lasting impression on Natasha and has shaped her in thinking about what is at stake for women and especially Muslim women.

Natasha’s activism is also related to her political awakening. The aftermath of September 11th 2001, Islam became associated with terrorism, and this fueled Natasha’s passion to use Islam in her overall identity. More specifically in her context, living in the United States, she felt the need to intuitively and viscerally identify as Muslim. She said:

To politically identify as Muslim, politically that was critical...it affected my choice to major in Islamic and gender studies and the actual work that I did with legal reform in Morocco and the women’s movement. Musawah kind of fell in my lap after I graduated. There aren’t many opportunities to work with gender and Islam; [they] are far and few between.

As Natasha points out, the aftermath of September 11th 2001 was a critical time for Muslims to think about their religious identities. For her, Islam was something more than faith – a part of her politics and what she wanted to study at university. Even though she doesn’t wear the *hijab* (Arabic term for the veil) she embodies Islam and puts it to use in her work at Musawah through her individual and collective family and personal histories, meshing her personal and professional lives. The Islamic gendered habitus is a driving force in her work at Musawah, which is also connected to her position as a younger feminist activist, and through her experiences we can see how her habitus shapes her feminist activism through her age, family history, gender and religious backgrounds.

Ratna: Mother – Accidental feminist – Activist

Ratna’s journey to Sisters in Islam differs from Natasha’s as she comes from outside of feminism and activism and later in life, as she is in her late-forties to early-fifties. Ratna worked at an international brokering house before coming to Sisters In Islam. She left her job in the corporate sector because she felt dissatisfied and overworked. She said she wanted to do something more meaningful and came to Sisters In Islam ‘accidentally’ by coming across its work online. She applied for a position at

Sisters In Islam and has since worked with the organisation. Ratna grew up in Malaysia and as a child recalls watching her mother fulfill typical gender roles such as serving her father:

My mother would have to serve my father his glass of water while he sat reading the newspaper or watching TV, even if she herself was feeling tired after having cooked three meals a day and tending to six small children.³⁷⁶

Ratna also wanted to satisfy the role of a good Muslim girl. Growing up, her piety was a significant part of her life. She says this was instilled in her both at home and at school. Reminding us of the different roles mothers and fathers play in the family, Skeggs points out how this acts as a form of social reproduction that roots social identity in the sexual division of labour from the home.³⁷⁷ This is where it is reproduced and perpetuated, and then continues in other institutions. Ratna remembers her teachers at school telling her to be obedient otherwise her parents would be punished for her sins:

It was imparted to me that as a good Muslim girl, I should not assert myself—that speaking softly was a requirement so as not to draw too much attention to oneself. According to my educators, my voice, body, hair possessed the power to lead men astray...and should this lead to their ‘downfall’, it would be my fault entirely.³⁷⁸

From a young age, Ratna learned to do her gender and Islam correctly. Coming to Sisters In Islam changed the way she thought about being a Muslim woman in Malaysia. She began to question some of her classical interpretations of the Quran including those about Islamic family laws. She spoke to her experience working with Sisters In Islam:

This is definite[ly] a feminist group...With me feminism has not been, like something that I have known within me, I was a very traditional conservative

³⁷⁶ Ratna Osman, “My Personal Journey to Sisters In Islam,” *BARAZA! No.7* (2014): 3-4.

³⁷⁷ Skeggs, “Context and Background,” 21.

³⁷⁸ Osman, “My Personal Journey to Sisters In Islam,” 3-4.

Muslim. I came from an understanding that men were supposed to be the leaders and that you don't challenge that.

For her, feminism wasn't something she embodied or considered in her personal politics before Sisters In Islam. She thought of herself as a devout Muslim woman, which meant filling in a complementary role to a man. She grew up watching her father and her brother receive special treatment at home in comparison to the women in her family. However, she says she had little investment in women's rights until she began working at Sisters In Islam and this is when her personal politics shifted. She credits feminist ideologies and principles in helping her think about her own personal politics and views on gender relations. She says she began to see the unequal gender dynamics playing out in Malaysian society and started to question how she situates herself as a Muslim woman. Drawing on her experiences working at Sisters In Islam and the changes she saw within herself, she also considers the changes in her personal life, and how her shifting ideologies about gender, gender roles and gender stereotypes impact her family, especially her sons.

Ratna's face lights up when she talks about the changes she has seen at home with her boys since she started working at Sisters In Islam.³⁷⁹ For example, prior to working at Sisters In Islam she would hear and even use phrases at home, like "stop crying like a girl" and "why are you shouting like a girl?" She reflects on the negative use of the phrase "like a girl":

It is wrong to have such language at home, because then boys, they go out and they go to school and they interact with girls and they see girls, as you know somebody that is weaker than them, because crying or anything linked with girls...So, joining Sisters four years ago...changed with the way I communicate.

By linking her professional practices, aims and beliefs at home Ratna emphasises the importance of having a feminist lens. Her newfound awareness of thinking about gender beyond the dominant patriarchal lens has not only impacted her, but also her sons. Sociologists, such as Hochschild and Reay, have argued for the

³⁷⁹ Ratna readily speaks of her sons and some of their experiences at home, but she doesn't mention or discuss her husband when she talks about her professional journey at Sisters In Islam.

importance of the private sphere and the family, where women engage in far more emotion work than men. Hochschild tells us that women in general have far less independent access to money, power, authority and status in society and because of this they do extra emotion work as a way to repay their debt to the family household.³⁸⁰ Supporting Hochschild's analysis, Reay, following Diane Bell's work also argues that the economy of emotion is the responsibility of women. Where "[mothering is equated] with book-keeping, arguing that one of the major roles of mothering is to balance the family's emotional budget."³⁸¹

By taking on this responsibility women are instrumental in their children's emotional development.³⁸² By and large the feeling rules instilled in children is through their mothers. This familial and gendered responsibility placed on women is grounded in the traditional view of women's reciprocity to their partner's paid and formal income, where they are valued by their contributions to the household. While women have had more economic access since Hochschild's 1983 analysis, the ideal still remains that women are primarily responsible for the emotion work and the emotional capital they relay to their children. Moreover, Ratna's transmission of her professional feminist politics to her sons has in turn increased their emotional currency and feminist awareness. Emotional capital is contextual and may not always be an asset in certain circumstances and societies. In Ratna's work it is a valuable form of capital, however, in wider Malaysian society it has little currency, as Ratna's feminist interventions are not always revered. She recalls a particular example where her and her sons attended Friday prayers at the Mosque and she was vilified for the work she does at Sisters In Islam. An Imam said to her sons that their mother's work is "the devil's work". She continues her story saying how worried she was about how her role as a women's rights activist would impact her sons:

People are angry because this is our position [at Sisters in Islam]...[and] whenever I am in the newspaper and other groups will slam us, I worry about

³⁸⁰ Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 162-165.

³⁸¹ Diane Reay, "Gendering Bourdieu's concepts of capital," 59.

³⁸² Ibid.

my children and I ask them, they are like, it is okay mummy, and I don't know why people are so against you.

Since beginning her feminist activism and career at Sisters In Islam, Ratna's relationship with feminism, women's NGOs, herself and her sons grew and developed. She reiterates just how important it is to work for Sisters In Islam and women's rights more broadly. This was not a professional journey she thought she would embark on, but has surprisingly and significantly benefitted from, because for her, she couldn't see herself working anywhere else and "the amount of satisfaction you have inside where you have made a difference, you know that your work has impacted someone's life." Her position as the executive director of Sisters In Islam does not come without its own set of challenges, as she noted about how she is perceived in particular patriarchal institutions and circumstances, but she continues on the path of feminist activism, because she now embodies feminist ideologies and principles and makes them work for her as a Muslim woman.

She no longer hears the negative connotations of "like a girl" at home, but hears her sons making comments like, "Mummy, if I want to find a wife...I won't ask them to cover themselves, it is their choice and in the Quran it never mentions hair." Ratna equips her sons with emotional tools, and exposes them to alternative interpretations to dominant forms of Islam, breaking dominant gendered norms. As a Muslim woman working at Sisters In Islam, she believes she has the confidence to use her knowledge in a place that best fits her spirits and identity.³⁸³

Ratna anecdotally says (while laughing) that before joining Sisters In Islam, her sons made sure before she left the house that she had every strand of hair tucked away in her *hijab*, and how (pointing at the way she was wearing it the day we met) this would not have been acceptable to their standards, but now something like the headscarf is not a concern for them. The supposedly mundane practice of how to wear a headscarf, particularly for women working in an office focusing of women's rights through Islam, is symbolic of much more than an everyday practice. It signifies class, cultural, societal and political ideologies about Islam. It also suggests some of the ongoing politics of

³⁸³ Osman, "My Personal Journey to Sisters In Islam," 4.

working in a women's organisation that employs only Muslim women, where veiling is seen more than a choice, but how a woman embodies her Islam.

Drawing on Ratna and Natasha's experiences we can see the importance of religion in the ways women come to women's human rights work, in particular, organisations that focus on Islam. We can see how coming from inside and outside of women's movements and activism impacts the ways in which women view themselves in their work. For Ratna, coming from outside of women's activism has led to a newfound appreciation for feminism not only professionally, but also personally in her family. This, for her, has changed the ways in which she thinks about her gender. Growing up in the Malaysian context, Ratna had to embody a specific gender role as a good Muslim woman, since working at Sisters In Islam she realises the flaws in the ideal Malay Muslim woman and works to fight against dominant conservative patriarchal structures in Malaysia. Natasha has had a long family history of feminist activism, which brings together her faith and her activism in both her educational trajectory and her professional work. Natasha recognises the importance of the work, but, also considers its painful moments. For example, how she is expected to sacrifice her own care for the care of others, which is typical of women engaging in non-profit/NGO work. From the experiences highlighted in this chapter, women's feminist activism is not only about how women see themselves in their work, but also how they are portrayed and recognised as women, as younger or older women and focusing in the Malaysian context as Muslim women. Bourdieu's conceptions on the habitus and feminist reworkings allow for an analysis that considers gender and how the habitus is shaped and who is able to use their habitus to acquire the right kinds of capital in women's organisations.

Conclusion

Highlighted in this final chapter are women's embodied feminist activisms and the ways in which their religious/affective gendered habitus positions them in their work. Diane Reay's and Elspeth Probyn's respective analysis of Bourdieu's conceptions of the habitus and capital enable a feminist reworking to include emotion. I draw on the ideas of the affective habitus and emotional capital to convey the experiences of women engaging in work that is imbued with, but not limited to emotional labour. Non-

profit/NGO work is complex as it relies on morals, values and one's altruistic investment. I have argued that women's organisations in the Malaysian context are dynamic in the ways in which women come to embody their feminisms both at the individual and the organisation levels. In particular, I highlight intergenerational divisions between groups of women working in these organisations. Vulnerable positions of younger feminist activists in these spaces illustrate the tensions that surface, such as what it means to be perceived as a career feminist versus an altruistic feminist and replicating the mother/daughter relationship in the workplace.

Ruby, Wathshalah, Natasha and Ratna's embodied feminisms in their work are shaped by their gendered habitus, which is also coloured by how they feel in their work through emotion and through ethnic and religious factors. Through their experiences in non-profit/NGO work, I have mapped their feminist activism and how they have come to embody their feminist identities. This chapter brings together ideas, concerns and concepts that have been explored throughout this thesis to tie together how women embody their feminist activism according to their gendered habitus that is implicated in wider debates surrounding intergenerational tensions between women not only in feminist movements, but also in women's organisations. It is evident through women's experiences in this type of work that they share the mentality of the work being good and can easily justify this. However, many of their experiences are implicated in the challenges of working in NGOs, such as organisational issues of donor funding practices, the culture to neglect one's own care for the care of others, and the personal and professional blur, which all contribute to affects felt in their emotional, mental and physical health. How women see themselves in their work, in particular non-profit/NGO work is multifaceted, as their work is not only a profession, but tied to morals, values, and emotions, and brings together their individual and collective histories

Final conclusions

The mentality that women workers in women's organisations are working for a common good has enabled self-neglect and a lack of self-care for too long. This was conveyed to me in women's narratives. It continues to be a driving force behind why they continue working in a sector that pays little attention to the work they do and the sacrifices they make. Some women find solace working for others, where they are

emotionally-driven through their passion and commitment to advocate and promote women's rights. But, for how long is this sustainable in a profession that perpetuates overwork and a culture of silence to take on more work, especially in an increasingly precarious sector where external donor funding continues to be the main life support of NGOs?

The women in my study commit to their work wholeheartedly, giving their labour as a way to help others which in turn satisfies their own professional aspirations. However this professional multitasking takes a toll on their overall identities. First, women blur their personal and professional boundaries by using their morals and values. Recalling Anne-Meike Fechter's analysis of the intertwining of altruistic and professional motives are important as, "it tells us about aid workers, but reveals a lacuna in development ethics. This is the failure—or refusal—to consider the 'care of the self' as well as the 'care for the other'."³⁸⁴ Second, women constantly negotiate their intersecting identities involving gender, race, religion, ethnicity and class in these working environments. It was also through these identity markers they could relate to other women. This was made apparent in how they thought about finding comfort in their feminist identities and where they found their feminist belongings and homes. In Chapter Two Ratna described that her newfound feminist home was based in her Muslim identity working at Sisters in Islam. Third, NGO workplaces promoted overwork and self-neglect that then resulted in health concerns and a re-evaluation of their place and stake in women's organisations and the wider women's movement. For some, it was only after they fell ill or experienced health issues that they reconsidered their roles in this sector and how they wanted to continue.

Like the flight attendants in Hochschild's research, the women in my study experienced difficulties in setting clear boundaries between work and home. Hochschild gives us an approach to capture why this may be and how emotion work is gendered. Using her emotional labour thesis I argued women working in NGOs are caught between the passion of using emotion in their work and managing this emotion according to specific contexts and situations. *The Managed Heart* offered many starting points for my research on women's experiences in non-profit/NGO work. This allowed

³⁸⁴ Fechter, "'Living Well' while 'Doing Good'?" 1489.

me to open up the fields of workplace studies and gender studies that made it possible to trace the interconnections between them in the everyday working realities of the non-profit/NGO sector. Using women's narratives provided insights into the transformation of what work has come to mean and the complexities of intertwining the personal and professional spheres, especially in values-based workplaces. I have extended on Hochschild's research to include the feeling body that examined women's affective experiences. For example Sanyu, Ruby and Wathshlah recounted experiences negotiating their emotional investment in their work that highlighted that the more experience they had in NGOs the more it enabled them to find their footing in these spaces. Possessing the appropriate affect is based in one's gendered habitus in these workplaces, and was reinforced in older women's positions to move with ease in many of the spaces they created. Their social, cultural and emotional capitals have been accumulated over time, and younger women in this sector have not yet been afforded the same possibilities. Ruby highlighted that as a younger woman in this sector if she speaks out she is reprimanded by older colleagues, which was also reflected in Sanyu's experience. The body experienced for them hinges on their ability to find their footing in these spaces and follow idealised forms of feminist activism that are based in past feminist and women's movements. Learning to be strong and selfless continues the feminist legacy of being 'movement women' discussed in Chapter Three as the way to proceed in these working environments. However this may be slowly changing as non-profits and NGOs are taking on a more corporatised approach that is focused on output and service delivery over advocacy and capacity building as Audrey drew our attention to in Chapter Three.

Here I return to the chapters that have led to this point. In Chapter One "The history of contemporary women's organizations in Malaysia" I mapped the genealogy of contemporary women's movements and organisations in Malaysia. I argue that women's participation in anti-colonial resistance movements were important in Malaysia's fight for independence, but were fraught with racial, ethnic and class tensions that re-emerged in the formation of women's movements and organisations in the 1980s and 1990s. The divisions between women and women's groups were also intensified by political agendas, such as the 'Asian Values' discourse; women uniting under specific causes, such as Violence Against Women; and the influence of global sisterhood movements promoted by United Nations World Conferences on Women.

‘Women’ as a catch all term was utilised in major international conferences to unite women but failed to recognise the diversities within women, women’s groups and women’s organisations. This is an ongoing issue in feminism and feminist theory, and was explored in Chapter Two “Inside and outside of feminism.” In this chapter I discussed what it means to be identified as a feminist in women’s organisations and how women negotiate their feminist identity based on their comfort levels of the feminist home or homes within feminism. The contradictions in feminism continue, even today, and through feminist perspectives from Teresa de Lauretis, Linda Alcoff, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and others we are able to uncover the multiplicity in women’s embodied feminist identities and activism.

Building on Chapters One and Two, Chapter Three “The personal is the professional” takes from the feminist slogan ‘the personal is political’ and gives it new meaning for the women in my study where the personal becomes the professional. It is through women’s experiences we can get a sense of how they come to their work. To examine experience as a method in research, I focused on the works of Adrienne Rich and Elspeth Probyn. Bringing together the epistemological and ontological, Probyn gives us a way to use experience as a tool in research. From the blurring of their personal and professional spaces, women experience the challenges of overworking and neglecting their own care for the care of others. In Chapter Four “Breaking bodies” I illustrated the complications of this to think through the self-neglect women experience in their work and the lack of priority given to their care needs. It is in this chapter we see how ‘good work’ is not always good for those who are at the front lines. However, women use this mentality to justify their approach to work, in what I argue, follows Mauss’ analysis on the gift exchange. Following this chapter, Chapter Five “You have to fight for your rights, and for your funding,” I examined the funding realities for women in these organisations that have led program officers to become fundraisers. Funding was always a depressing issue discussed in my interviews, recalling Natasha’s sentiments, she called it “the spawn of Satan.” She, like many others, pointed out the difficulty for women’s organisations to fundraise and the politics behind donors usually located in the Global North and receiving organisations based out of the Global South. In this chapter I made a feminist intervention through the lens of donor funding to explore the unequal power relations between women’s organisations based in the Global North and Global South. I employed Linda Alcoff’s essay “The Problem of Speaking

for Others” which continues to be used in gender studies courses today to think about who has the privilege to speak for others and in what contexts and situations.

The final chapter, Chapter Six “Bridging the gap” concluded with the tensions that surface between women working at organisations such as IWRAW AP, Sisters In Islam and Musawah. I focused on the generational divisions among women and how this is a wider concern in women’s movements and feminist activism that crosses borders and contexts. Bringing together major themes discussed in my thesis, such as feminist identities, the challenges of ‘good work’ and the hardships of NGO workplaces, this chapter was concerned with how women come to their work and their expectations from work. I have used the gendered habitus as a starting point to consider how the affective gendered habitus and Islamic gendered habitus are manifested in women’s organisations. Thinking about feminist interventions of Pierre Bourdieu’s conceptions on the habitus and capital provides a framework that considers more than class divisions but the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, religion and emotion.

This thesis opened with the excitement of what inspired it. It was driven by a personal stake in voicing women’s passion and commitment to work on women’s rights. My starting point was to ask what motivated women to engage in working for others, what it meant to them and their emotional and personal stake in their work. I have also problematised this passion and commitment to show some of the darker sides of the non-profit/NGO sector and women’s often vulnerable positions. In particular, the generational tensions between younger and older women tend to define women along the lines that either it is simply a job or that the work is passion-based. Highlighted by the women in my study was that it was more than a job. However women’s approaches to their work is driven by the different ways they come into the sector, but for most of them they remain working in this sector. This thesis has argued that despite its trying moments and challenges in an unstable non-profit/NGO sector, where funding is drying up and workers take on the burden of overwork, there is meaning behind the mundane working for women’s rights.

Concluding a thesis that is inspired by my experiences working for a women’s human rights organisation is a conflicting undertaking. On the one hand, I have used this thesis to foreground women’s voices that are often unheard and undervalued. I have

drawn on iconic feminist ideologies and texts to excavate the gendered nature of non-profit/NGO work. I argued how women's overall identities become key factors in continuing to work for others. On the other hand, some of the experiences shared were painful and difficult moments in women's lives and have led to further questions and challenges in how they proceed in their work. While the empirical research drawn on is specific to the Malaysian context, many of the debates and issues concerned in this thesis could be a useful starting point for further research that crosses borders and boundaries of women's experiences in their work. In particular for younger women who are just beginning their careers, building relationships and strengthening themselves as feminist activists, they are caught in the ongoing generational debate that surrounds wider feminist politics. Finding their footing in these spaces is challenging and often perpetuates the mentality to overwork and to be silent otherwise they are positioned as disobeying their feminist, activist elders. Further research that examines women's engagement in a changing non-profit/NGO sector, especially for younger women, could explore if they will continue in the tradition of promoting the generational gap. Will they continue in the legacy of their predecessors of perpetuating overwork and a lack of self-care or break from it?

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Appendix 1: Details of the empirical study

Human Research Ethics Committee Approval

Approval for this empirical study was granted by the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) on November 1, 2013 when Protocol No: 2013/892 was issued. In compliance with process and procedures with the university, Professor Elspeth Probyn was listed as the chief investigator and Alifa Bandali was listed as the co-researcher. The following forms were applied in this study: Participant Information Statement and Participant Consent Form.

Research Participants

The table below detail the research sample and reflects the qualitative aims of this project. Taking seriously the HREC approval, all interviews were conducted with the consent of each research participant who agreed to the material being recorded, transcribed and published in this PhD thesis in addition to any associated academic publications. It was explained both verbally and in writing that the recording could be stopped any point throughout the interview.

Data Treatment

The interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically alongside other material gathered from the field. Key quotes and excerpts from the interviews provided direction in the research and have been utilized throughout the body of the thesis.

Located of Research: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Research Period(s):

First Site Visit: February 2014

Second Site Visit: July 2015

Third Site Visit: March 2016

Table of Research Participants

Research participant	Position	Organisation	Nationality
Sanyu	Program Officer	IWRAW AP	Kenyan
Amarjargal ‘Amara’	Program Officer	IWRAW AP	Mongolian
Susanna	Independent Consultant	Freelance	Malaysian
Ai Schuen ‘Audrey’	Program Manager	IWRAW AP	Malaysian
Shanti ‘Saan’	Program Officer	IWRAW AP	Nepali
Suraya	Program Officer	IWRAW AP	Malaysian
Sally	Intern	IWRAW AP	Australian
Lai Yoong	Administrative Support	IWRAW AP	Malaysian
Wathshlah	Independent Consultant	Freelance/ IWRAW AP	Malaysian
Dorathy	Program Officer	IWRAW AP	Malaysian
Sharon	Program Officer	Did not disclose	Malaysian
Rubini ‘Ruby’	Program Officer	Did not disclose	Malaysian
Natasha	Program Officer	Musawah	American
Ratna	Executive Director	Sisters In Islam	Malaysian
Rebecca	Program Officer	IWRAW AP	American