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'The Ties That Bind': Indonesian Female Academic Leaders' Agency and Constraints in Higher Education

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Abstract: Indonesia has achieved equal parity in access to education, income, and career opportunities. Yet in many parts of the country, female academic leaders are still highly under-represented in top academic boards. This study examines how fourteen (14) Indonesian female higher education academic leaders (FALs) enact identity salience and agency in performing their duties, while experiencing social control schemas or 'triple binds'—exigencies of gender roles, unequal power-plays due to social status and positions, and lack of organizational resources and capital in higher education—in Indonesia, one of the world's emerging economies still consolidating democracy and building necessary social, fiscal, and physical infrastructures. Taken as a whole, the study found the 'triple binds' as aggregate constraints for female leadership progression, driving female academic leaders to resist and rise above this discursive struggle and confrontation through sense-making, assertiveness, depth of conviction, a take-charge attitude, and the use of other tactical strategies like networking with key gatekeepers to obtain the resources they need. The study presents a framework of the triple binds that university leaders can use to assess constraints to academic leadership.

Keywords: *Academic leadership, gender, constraints, sense-making, Indonesia.*

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Introduction

The theoretical and practical opportunities to study gender and leadership captured the variety of contextual dimensions that contributed to women's representation (or the lack of it) in educational leadership, with a focus on personal, organizational, and societal dynamics that support or hinder women's advancement to the top (Airini et al., 2011; Heilman, 2012). In Asia, research in this area is expanding (Qian et al., 2009). However, in Indonesia, the dearth of studies that focused on female higher academic leaders leaves us to wonder why women remain fewer in number in university leadership roles (Directorate General of Higher Education Indonesia [DGHE]; 2013; United Nations Educational and Scientific Organization [UNESCO]; 2011, 2014). There were only less than 10 female university rectors (vice chancellors) in a country of more than 3,200 state and public colleges and universities (UNESCO, 2011, 2014). For example, studies show that in Indonesian Islamic universities, there is no explicit policy promoting female participation on the academic board, or in obtaining higher leadership positions, and that women were at a disadvantage when applying for academic appointments, causing great discrepancy in the number between women and men at top leadership levels (Kull, 2009). This situation illustrates that the absence of a comprehensive development program for female academic leadership, and the lack of attention especially on leadership development, have demotivated those female academics who have strong leadership potential (Australian Agency for International Development [AUSAID]; 2010).

This study reports on the experiences of fourteen (14) female Indonesian higher education academic leaders (FALs) from five state universities and two private universities in Central Java, West Java, and the capital Jakarta, Indonesia. This study is part of bigger study on Indonesian higher academic leaders' roles which involved 35 academic leaders, consisting of 21 males and 14 female (Arquisola et al., 2020). The study addressed the questions 1) what conditions constrain FALs' agency in Indonesia's higher education context; and 2) how do Indonesian FALs navigate through these constraints? Through this study, gendered practices in Indonesian higher education have been critically examined in

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relation to FALs' agentic leadership, and the underlying causes of problematic constraints facing FALs are now identified.

The study makes three important contributions. *First*, it focuses a critical lens on gendered practices in higher education that pose problematic aspects for female FALs, and examining the conditions that bring about these problematic aspects (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). *Second*, this study examined constraints on FALs' agency in a non-Western context where leadership is predominantly seen as a masculine prerogative (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The final contribution is the typology of the *triple bind*—which are social control schemas constraining female leadership at the individual, group, and organizational levels. The 'triple bind' works in three ways: gender expectations limit the entry of female academics into leadership positions; established power-plays compound the difficulties for women advancing in leadership; and the generally lower social status given to women means that they bear a greater burden of access to scarce organizational resources. Exploring this concept is a novel contribution because literature on this kind of triple bind is scant, with most studies focusing on gender and ethnicity (Fitzgerald, 2006). As our review of the literature shows, this is the first time such a typology of constraints to female academic leadership has been visualized in this manner.

The article is structured as follows: First, the study presents the rationale for the research by looking at developments in female leadership in the research context, Indonesia, followed by our methodological approach to collect and analyse the data. Our research team travelled to Indonesia for three months to gather primary data from female FALs. Finally, the results and the study's theoretical and practical contributions to the literature on gendered leadership in higher education are presented.

Indonesia: The research context

Indonesia is the world's most populous Muslim country, proud of its rich socio-religious and ethnic diversity, and is an emerging economic force with a stable democracy. Indonesia is described as having a patriarchal society with a collectivist culture (House, 2004). In a patriarchal society, men have powerful positions in the household and in economic life. The female gender role is stereotypically described as subservient to men (Arimbi, 2010 as cited in Murniati, 2012; Nurmila, 2013), although the situation is not as extreme as in other parts of Asia such as India or Japan (Basu, 2008). Role expectations or the *kodrat wanita* (biologically ordained role of caring for family and spouses) dominate gender relationships that were promoted under the Soeharto regime (Robinson, 2009). Women who recognize their *kodrat wanita* also recognize patriarchy in the family (Robinson, 2009), where men are leaders because they provide economically for the family (Murniati, 2012). It is understood that women must prioritize caring for their families over careers (Tjahjono & Palupi, 2010).

While Indonesia is touted as reaching gender parity in education (Overseas Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] & Asian Development Bank [ADB]; 2015), data show low female labor participation (Central Bureau of Statistics Indonesia [CBS]; 2011). In educational leadership, there are few female administrators, rectors, or principals, in most schools and universities in Indonesia compared to males (DGHE, 2013). Inside higher education, board membership positions at large regional universities, in particular, are overwhelmingly male-dominated, suggesting implied policies only exist for male representation at the academic board level. It has been suggested men enjoy a clear advantage in terms of academic appointments (Kull, 2009). A report by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID, 2015) in Indonesia shows that only 6-20% of women faculty members serve in leadership positions within their institutions.

Nevertheless, while most Indonesian women would like to overcome this notion of under-representation in the academic sphere, studies report that many lack sufficient self-confidence to assert their leadership (Azmi et al., 2012; Murniati, 2012; Srimulyani, 2007, 2008;). In this context, women need to work hard to prove they are capable leaders. Thus, as Atwell (2006) found, women resort to other means of engagement, e.g. having their own small businesses, being financially productive, or pursuing their own careers, as ways of elevating sense of self in this domain. Awareness of the barriers drives their inner motivation to succeed and show their leadership abilities (Gaus 2011; Bai et al., 2012). In the public sphere, women activists would like to have institutions protect them against discrimination, and address the problems of corruption in the recruitment and selection of leaders in public office.

The social imbalance created by lack of gender equality in socio-economic and political life in Indonesia is further confounded by the nation's patriarchal society. In academia, seniors with higher academic ranks are accorded elevated yet ascribed social status (Hofstede, 1980). By the same token, social interactions with ranked senior academics must also avoid 'loss of face', especially to maintain social harmony (House et al., 2004). Showing respect, not necessarily deference, characterizes the dynamics of interactions between younger and senior academics in most Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), although it has been argued that such social imbalance denies younger academics the chance to contribute freely and be heard of (Mulder, 1996). In Asia, avoiding conflict is encouraged for the desire to support relationships, and by waiting to resolve a problem outright until the right time and opportunity present themselves (Tjosvold & Sun, 2002).

Theoretical Underpinnings of the Study

Gender and Power

Gendered power relations have been cited as contributing to gender inequality in organizations in the way tasks are distributed in structural arrangements (Benschop & Dooreward, 1998). Even though policies are gender neutral, visible actions are gendered, reflecting unstated norms and values ingrained in an institution's cultural psyche (Martin, 2003). Such dynamic informal processes create paradoxical subtleties that affect men and women in organizations. For example, implicit norms and rules connected with masculinity and femininity expect women to behave in gender appropriate ways. If they behave otherwise, they are evaluated negatively (Fitzsimmons et al., 2013; Young, 2005). These expectations compel them to be compliant to stereotypical roles so as to be liked, and yet entail them to be agentic (Kaufman & Grace, 2011; Zhu et al., 2016), to appear tougher and more decisive—a tendency occurring in academic environments that warrants and rewards masculine leadership traits, consciously forcing female leaders to adopt masculine traits (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007).

Expectations of this nature pose direct challenges to agency, cause inner conflicts and alternative discourses for women leaders whose values are incongruent with masculine discourses (Isaac et al., 2009). Women, therefore, have to act communally, with nurturing, caring attitudes, and with interpersonal sensitivity, reducing negativity towards them (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Jogulu & Ferkins, 2012; Omar & Davidson, 2001).

In Asia, people are more influenced by position, age, and power gained from family status and connections (Collard, 2007). A female leader's social position and status, generally acquired through higher education, could offer her different amounts of power that shape her consciousness and experiences (Martin, 2003), and provide her credibility as she embarks on complex leadership roles. Conversely, if she has lower status (and less power), she is expected to adopt a 'self-in-relation' stance to anticipate (and accommodate) the needs of the more powerful others, sometimes without any expectation of reciprocity (Fletcher, 2004).

Agentic female leadership in higher education requires resource instrumentalities that are efficiently and effectively allocated through supportive leadership practices, policies, and internal systems, including collegial support and human capital development (Floyd & Lane, 2000; Giles, 2013; Mantere, 2008). Access and control of resources result in meaningful leadership roles (Stets & Burke, 2000), and enable greater levels of choice for leaders in resource allocation to empower leadership (Yukl & Becker, 2006). The absence of instrumentalities restricts leaders from exercising wider autonomy to deal with expanding responsibilities and resolving quality problems that often plague higher education institutions (Schendel & McCowan, 2016).

Social control schemas vs. Female academic leaders

Leadership is often equated with masculinity (Fitzsimmons et al., 2013; Jogulu & Ferkins, 2012) which potentially constrains women from attaining and progressing into such roles in organizations. The study proposes three social control schemas that have an impact on academic leaders' identity and salience: gender roles (Zhu et al., 2016), social positions and status, and organizational capital. The first schema, *gender roles* are individual, normative gender expectations imposed by socio-cultural edicts that compel women to be compliant to stereotypical roles so as to be liked, and yet entail them to be agentic (Zhu et al., 2016) to be regarded as competent for which they are rebuked. When female leaders show assertive behaviors in enacting leadership responsibility, they are expected not to violate the stereotypes associated with their gender; if they do, they are evaluated negatively and regarded as violating their feminine attributes (Fitzsimmons et al., 2013; Young, 2005).

Another study found that female administrators had to appear tougher, become more decisive, and adopt the characteristics of male leaders—a tendency occurring in academic environments that warrants and rewards masculine leadership traits—effectively forcing female leaders consciously to adopt masculine traits (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007). Gender role expectations of this nature pose a direct challenge to agentic leadership (Murniati, 2012; Robinson, 2009). Examples of power differentials affecting gender can be found in academia where research has documented women's experience of the 'chilly climate' otherwise known as the 'glass ceiling'—a situation where women are informally excluded from board memberships, they experience devaluation and marginalization of ideas, and intellectual capital. The 'chilly climate' has been cited as a key impediment to women faculty members' achievement and advancement (Maranto & Griffin, 2010). Another situation is similarity attraction that results in the tendency of organizations to choose people who are similar to the leaders they are replacing (Maranto & Griffin, 2010). Similarity attraction has also been argued as one reason why few women carry out leadership roles (Gallant, 2014). These conceptions were empirically tested in a quantitative study of 500+ tenure track faculty members at an American university, where Maranto and Griffin (2010) found that demographic dissimilarities make women feel they are a minority, and thus they feel more excluded from the informal networks than do men, including in matters related to voice and decision-making.

Displaying agentic leadership conflicts with society's expectations because these two roles are not aligned with femininity (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Women behaving incongruently with the stereotype could be penalized for violating the gender norms, and could be socially-rejected and personally directed with negativity, which is detrimental for career advancement. Women have to act in a communal manner with interpersonal sensitivity in order to be liked and to reduce negativity towards them (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Omar & Davidson, 2001).

Socially and culturally, women are encouraged to show warmth, caring attitudes, and be neither competitive nor aggressive, to be accepted within the leadership practice even though it diminishes women's potential to be seen as successful leaders (Ely et al., 2011; Kaufman & Grace, 2011). Mitigating the effects of gender roles would see women trying to conform to social role expectations by internalizing and verbalizing communal and 'softer' attitudes/approaches—which could be regarded as signs of weakness (Blackmore, 2002) and as lacking self-confidence (Cubillo & Brown, 2003), or being too accommodative to the demands of others (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001). As a result, very often women are made to think less of themselves believing they are less competent to be leaders compared to their male peers (Ely et al., 2011). Women could translate this lack of self-confidence by believing that men are more suited to leadership posts, and as a result women had a tendency to 'lead from the middle', aspiring to smaller promotions and avoiding clear career planning. Believing that men deserve to be leaders prevents women from reporting any knowledge of perceived discrimination in the hiring process, or talk about it as a form of inequality (Coleman, 2007). On the whole, scholars argue that these same traits, attitudes, and behaviors work to limit women in aspiring to leadership (Yukongdi & Benson, 2005).

This second schema, *social position* and *status*, are conditions related to how powerful social actors offer FALs access to power which shapes how they perceive their roles as leaders (Fletcher, 2004). An example is how much access to resources each FAL has if they work in a system of perceived inequities because of their educational qualifications and academic ranking.

The third schema, *organizational capital*, occurs at the organizational level because academic leaders' agency becomes salient (White, 2002) with the presence of organizational capital, or made difficult without it. *Organizational capital* refers to sufficient resources being efficiently and effectively allocated to FALs through supportive leadership practices, policies, and internal systems. They also include the presence of collegial support and institutional efforts for the development of people (Floyd & Lane, 2000; Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000; Mantere, 2008). Organizational capital provides FALs with the instrumentalities or apparatus that support administrative, institutional, or material elements (Gillies, 2013) that help sustain leadership. In Indonesia, leadership is God-given responsibility or '*amanah*'—these behaviours relate to: (a) having a high sense of commitment; (b) dedication to duty; (c) devotion to the job; (d) readiness for service to institution and country (Arquisola et al., 2020) which is deemed a sacred duty to those entrusted to deliver it (Teguh & Zakhyya, 2020). Therefore, leaders need to implement this responsibility with duty and care, and doing so requires organizational capital and access to resources. Much of the meaningful activity within FALs' roles as leaders revolves around access and control of resources (Stets & Burke, 2000). Supportive organizational capital enables leaders to exercise greater levels of choice in resource allocation to empower leadership (Yukl & Becker, 2006). Higher education institutions with resource constraints are restricted from expanding, encounter endangering quality problems, and do not have latitude for autonomy (Schendel & McCowan, 2016), confronting FALs with complex challenges in exercising agentic leadership.

Sensemaking

In this study, we examined how FALs used sensemaking to help them navigate the social control schemas and constraints that bear heavily on their roles as leaders. Sensemaking is a process that actors in a social context engage to understand on-going circumstances from which they extract cues and make plausible sense retrospectively (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). There are three motives for sensemaking: (i) self-enhancement; (ii) self-efficacy, and (iii) self-consistency. *Self-enhancement* concerns a FAL's need to maintain a positive cognitive construction of self, and to selectively interpret events that support positive self-concept despite various ambiguous complexities. *Self-efficacy* describes the FAL's need to feel, and present themselves as competent. *Self-consistency* is a FAL's need to feel some form of coherence and continuity in their identity as leaders. The sense of continuity and consistency helps FALs to connect events in their current social life to past experiences and to maintain a coherent view that enables them to operate effectively in the environment.

Factors known to influence sensemaking are contexts, language, identity, emotion, politics, technology, and cognitive frames (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2014). The immediate social and broader institutional contexts are crucial in sensemaking efforts; context provides the norms and expectations that justify people's actions (Weick, 1995). For example, academic leaders derive cues from the contexts, e.g. who they are dealing with, or who they represent, and try to understand what the situation means to their identity and act on what is most appropriate (Weick, 1995). The work by Degn (2014, 2018) about how department heads construct identity in the face of changing circumstances, showed that structural demands, institutional scripts, and personal cognitive frames resulted in identity dilemmas for these department heads, e.g. some show defiant compliance or express dissatisfaction, others hide their resistance to obtain legitimacy and recognition. A review by Sandberg and Tsoukas (2014) provided a comprehensive itemization of the areas where sensemaking has been used, and under-researched. One under-researched area is higher education.

Method

Guided by a critical realist informed methodology, the research explored at a deeper level of the mechanisms and power asymmetries that accounted for the complexities that FALs experienced in academic leadership practice in

context (Kempster & Parry, 2011; Mueller, 2014). Specifically, the study examined the causal powers behind complexities in social relationships—either transitive or intransitive—that produce the rules and practices, as well as the material conditions that motivate leaders to act. Doing so enabled the researchers to ‘speculate about the potential consequences of social phenomena on given conditions’ (Newton et al., 2010). In this study, the context referred to was Indonesian higher education institutions where different entities interfere with each other, leading to ‘multiple determination’ or varied outcomes (Leibowitz et al., 2015). Academic leaders are integral to institutional identity, and their actions as leaders are consciously or subconsciously influenced by the sub-entities that operate within this bigger context.

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants from five state universities and two private universities. Participants were chosen who provided richness of experience rather than seeking a representative sample. In the qualitative tradition of Kempster and Parry (2011), the study was researching a phenomenon and not a population. Hence, richness of data was the main criterion for acceptance, rather than representativeness of a population. The participants represented the middle management positions at the university level, but are the top executive positions at the faculty level. These academic leaders at the faculty level were tasked with designing the implementation strategies, and guidance for the university mission to be realized, as well as bringing together the key frontline human and technical resources to fulfill the three pillars of Indonesian higher education: teaching, research, and community engagement.

Due to their important functions, the participants were the most relevant focus of this study. In the interviews, participants were able to express how they felt about their identities as academic leaders. Issues emerged from the data that were found to be salient to academic leaders’ lives and how they affected their performance as academic leaders. Because the participants owned the experience, they were considered reliable sources. Therefore, the approach taken gave the research authenticity.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in the Indonesian and English languages over a three-month period. Prior to the actual field interviews, the researcher conducted a pre-test of the interview protocol with academic leaders who volunteered to support the activity. The pre-testing also allowed the researcher the opportunity to learn in advance about what interview techniques would work to support the research objectives, and what techniques would detract from those objectives. Six academic leaders between aged between 37 to 67 years old participated in the pre-test.

The semi-structured interviews consisted of open-ended questions that represented the research sub-questions, which were in the areas of a) *roles as an academic leader*—this section contained questions aimed at understanding how the participant perceives their role as academic leaders, what leader roles they perceive to be important, and how they understand the importance of those roles in light of changing contextual conditions in Indonesian higher education; b) *institutional conditions for role performance*—this section contained questions aimed at exploring the institutional factors perceived to be helping them perform their roles and, conversely, what institutional factors impede and hinder these roles from being performed; and c) *gender and its impact on role performance*—this section contained questions related to how they perceive gender has an impact on their roles as leaders, and in what areas in their personal lives have they experienced such impacts. Out of eleven questions, one question related to supportive mechanisms on role performance was invalidated because it was considered redundant.

Interviews were conducted on-site, allowing understanding of events and experiences as they were described in context (Brinkman & Kvale, 2005). The interviews were conducted by researchers who are fluent in both English and Indonesian (*Bahasa Indonesia*). Hence, there was no need for back-translation because the interviewers could converse in the language of the interviewee, then write up the analysis and the findings in English.

Data from the interviews were analyzed using a retroductive process consistent with critical realism where the researcher tried to uncover and explain the underlying causes and the generative mechanisms responsible for the problems perceived by FALs in Indonesian higher education. The themes presented are the most vocalized perceptions emerging from interpretation and analysis of the data. Important and meaningful statements are presented highlighting the individual accounts/experiences investigated. Some participants were articulate in voicing their views, or had performed the role longer than others and so were knowledgeable about the processes under discussion. Thereafter, the researcher then creatively constructed the frameworks of the conditions that enable and inhibit FALs’ leadership.

To validate the findings, a series of member-checking activities—for instance, focus group discussions, face-to-face interviews, phone interviews, and email exchanges—were conducted with 8 out of the 14 participants. These activities enabled participants to express their views on the findings. Through dialogue, misinterpretations were ironed out, enhancing the validity of the findings. With these activities, the researcher enhanced the plausibility of the findings, as suggested by Kempster and Parry (2011).

Participants

There were 14 senior female academic leaders who participated in the study from five state universities and two private universities. All of them were married, except for one. They were aged between 35 and 55 years old, with Islam

as the dominant religion for all participants. The participants represented mostly the majority ethnic groups, the *Javanese* and *Sundanese*. In terms of highest educational qualifications, nine had a PhD degree; five had a Master's degree, (but were currently undertaking PhD studies). In terms of position, eleven were heads of department. None of the female participants was a Dean or Vice-Dean.

In terms of academic ranking, only five were associate professors, although most had more than ten years of academic experience. The majority of the participants, ten of them, had previous leadership experience as either department secretary, or head of another department between three to five years, and between three years to more than ten years.

Findings

The three significant constraints in leadership that FALs had to navigate were in the process of (1) gender role expectations; (2) in the power-plays in bridging differences due to social status and positions; and (3) struggling to be heard in securing organizational resources.

Gender roles: Challenges and complexities

The belief that 'men are leaders at home and in political life' extended itself into the hallowed halls of higher education. Many FALs reported experiencing institutional bias in their rise to the top ('we had to struggle really hard, by ourselves, to advance in our career'). Using a metaphor, another FAL described her rise to leadership as fraught with difficulties, similar to climbing a mountain. Using such metaphor, she described the obstacles she faced along the way:

I am a leader. I perceive myself as [climbing] a mountain. It looks tough. It looks strong. People who have climbed the mountain feel great. What a big achievement this is. But seriously, if you look at the mountain from afar, it looks beautiful, doesn't it? But try to climb it, there are so many obstacles.

Her observation implied that FALs encounter discriminatory treatment and gender imbalance in their rise to the top, due in part to the lack of acceptance that women can aspire to leadership positions. One FAL said that her ethnic Javanese culture views that '*women are in secondary position because men are the heads*'. She described that in her department, '*men could not earnestly and whole-heartedly accept that a woman could be a leader*'. One FAL said that when there was a leadership vacancy in her department, men would scramble to apply for the top position, quoting one male colleague as saying:

For you it is alright not to have any position, but for me, it is not. I feel ashamed. My society demands that I have position. My society demands I have to achieve. It is the way of things.

Another stereotype FALs encountered was the perception that women are perceived to be emotional, hence they cannot be leaders. This belief influences females' minds; if a leadership vacancy arises, it is implicitly offered to males. Hence, to prove she is capable for the role, her female colleagues urge her to be firm and assertive: '*I have a message: A woman can do what a man can do. It is the definition of justice*'.

Social positions and status: Power-plays in bridging collegial differences

FALs show agency in the way they try to bridge differences between inter-generational ranks. Disagreements arise between ranked senior academics and newer younger academics during team-teaching assignments because of age differences, levels of competence, teaching styles/methods of instructions, and attitudes towards learning ('everybody is right, relativism reigns supreme'). In this discourse, senior academics are likely to resist changing teaching methods, causing predictable tension between them and the younger academics who have many initiatives, are technology-savvy, and eager to learn. Most team-teaching assignments fail ('only 60% are successful because of gaps in academic levels'), and FALs must navigate through these power relations.

If they are confronted with contentious issues related to managing daily operations, FALs organize formal meetings to discuss these issues openly without threat to ascribed authority. Formal meetings shield them from the air of superiority, subtle if not direct, shown by ranked, senior colleagues. However, if issues are sensitive, e.g. grievances and complaints from staff that might embarrass a senior lecturer, FALs take a more direct approach, organizing discussions privately. This strategy avoids 'loss of face'—a strategy of 'subtle deference' when confronting ranked, senior academics. However, closed-door experiences like this are often laced with power-plays or the tendency of ranked senior academics to show subtle, if not direct, overt displays of displeasure that their competence or rank is being questioned by a younger academic. A FAL described the experience as 'uncomfortable because seniors are not easy to talk to, they dictate what I have to do.' FALs construct their response to interpersonal conflicts in the social milieu with a good understanding of socio-cultural, political, historical, economic, and religious influences on academic leaders' roles ('we need to deal with arising contexts and to think strategically'). Furthermore, the many ethnic groups comprising Indonesian university staff cause extraordinary diversity; therefore, they have to approach each individual problem in different ways.

The struggles with senior academics' reluctance to collaborate, and the power-plays caused by ascribed social status

have been taxing and exhausting experiences for FALs in this study. For younger FALs, cultural edicts of *'sopan santun'*—being polite and respectful hinder them from being assertive enough to reprimand erring or uncooperative senior academics ('how can you tell your former professor that he is wrong?'). For younger FALs, these situations are dilemmatic because intergenerational gaps inhibit them from being assertive as it might offend senior male colleagues. Thus, on a personal level, FALs experience the negative effects of gendered power-plays that studies suggest result in stress and lower levels of life satisfaction for female leaders (Karelaia & Guillen, 2012; Petriglieri, 2011).

Access to organizational capital: Struggling to be heard

The third schema occurs at the organizational level. The foremost pressures confronting FALs are the lack of funding, the lack of adequate infrastructure and facilities, staffing problems related to low compensation, and delayed salaries for contract lecturers. These are major problems that most Indonesian universities face, due in part to government's decreasing role in providing state universities with needed funding. FALs find it difficult to enact their roles and 'maneuver freely because funding problems are controlling' them. This comment shows how FALs perceive the bureaucratic hurdles rigmarole and lack of access to funding were a consistent source of headache, crippling effective operations management and delivering satisfactory education services to faculty and students.

FALs believe that being sensitive to the needs of staff, and advocating to resolve to staff welfare issues are some important aspects of agentic leadership. FALs, therefore, have taken the cudgels of grievances and voicing their concerns to management, ('I have to negotiate with people with power what I would like done, that is, to have my staff paid on time'). The study documented that many FALs actively lobbied and negotiated with top management for scholarship funds, used their international networks outside to look for scholarships for their female staff, or helped support a candidate financially with travel expenses for overseas scholarships. Other FALs looked for mentors for continuing advice and inspiration. Previous mentors provide the experience and expertise in many project collaborations and research. But to win their support, FALs must show intellectual credibility or reliability in previous collaborations. FALs recognize that mentor support is one of the most effective ways for them to gain patronage in the pursuit of their department programs. A FAL recounted her story of working with a previous mentor who regarded her as his protégé:

I used to be the assistant of a senior lecturer when I was in school, the first time I went to my university. I graduated cum laude. When he became head of school of the Masters of Management program, he did not invite me to work with him, yet we continued to do research. Then in the second year of his tenure, he asked me to manage the program. I worked with him from 2009, and now I have replaced him.

FALs' response to staff issues reflects a nurturing, caring, pastoral approach to leading which is at the core of the FALs' self-constructed view of leadership. However, some are ridiculed for this nurturing style and are ridiculed in the process. Some, however, remain defiant, arguing that they are 'proud of being a mother to my staff. I must work towards their welfare'.

FALs act vigorously to obtain support and to negotiate assertively, giving rational reasons for their actions, while facing an uphill battle to be heard. However, in being assertive to obtain needed resources, some FALs recounted that it is difficult when they are criticized for 'trying to be better than others'. A FAL believes that being part of a collective society makes her desirous to share the burden of staff, saying, *'we should struggle together with our colleagues, staff, and students'*. The way they let top management recognize their struggle is through intensive communication:

We have to communicate intensively with our Dean to relay the suggestions we have received. We cannot relay these suggestions in the formal forum or meetings with top university leaders. There are roadblocks; we are restrained from doing so.

Other FALs use more tactical strategies like positioning themselves in the midst of powerful people because 'bureaucratic institutional policies can hurt the employee and students'. FALs find the bureaucratic waiting game arduous and a waste of time, and thus resort to funding the programs themselves, 'digging into our pockets first to get through the hurdles fast'. This is a 'stop-gap' measure that takes months for reimbursement because FALs have to contend with 'asking the approval of this and that person, a lengthy bureaucracy'. There is a labyrinth of bureaucratic rules that governs the disbursement of funds ('yes, it is not easy, but there are interconnected regulations and circuitous routes for how the funds are used'), Therefore, if internal structures still prove unsupportive, FALs raise exposure levels to strategic, external networks by undertaking research collaborations with industries outside the HEI to bring in needed fiscal resources.

One factor evident in this study is the limited capability of FALs to enact agency because the required instrumentalities are hampered by debilitating structural conditions. FALs are forced to accommodate the 'burdensome' restrictive structures in their daily practice as leaders, emasculating their capabilities to deliver role expectations. As a result, they find it necessary to elevate salience externally. Examples are speaking at conferences, becoming resource persons or trainers, undertaking consultancy work, and engaging in public dialogues. Maintaining such exposure elevates their reputation and image. Importantly, external networks give FALs the visibility necessary to bring their intellectual value to the attention of parties interested in their area of expertise (Fitzsimmons et al., 2013).

Discussion

University leaders need to develop concrete policies promoting greater female participation in academic leadership, but this effort requires more than increasing the number of women in leadership positions. Scholars suggest there has to be greater understanding of, and responsiveness to, how female leaders negotiate the personal, professional, and organizational landscapes, both informally and formally, for career advancement (Airini et al., 2011).

Findings in this study align with a previous study in the Middle East—with traditionally patriarchal societies similar to Indonesia—reporting that two of the top challenges facing female academic leaders are the lack of decision-making power, and the lack of access to resources which create a burden on effective leadership practices (Vogel & Alsliman, 2018). Findings suggest that FALs' agency was frequently curtailed by the lack of fiscal resources, a lack of top leadership support, and debilitating bureaucratic systems. Indonesian HEIs need to focus more attention to reduce the institutional impediments needed by FALs to perform their roles. As shown in this study, despite these limitations however, FALs consider themselves as *'in loco parentis'* and feel obligated to create a climate of support and protection for those under their care (Sadri et al., 2011). Showing such concern creates positive motivation for staff which results in increased loyalty for academics and lower intentions to leave their organizations (Ahmad et al., 2018).

Resources are at the crux of being an empowered academic leader because they increase the leader's degree of choice (Yukl & Becker, 2006). FALs appear to be tossed between a rock and a hard place in terms of wanting to achieve their goals with limited resources, and limited authority to dispose of these resources. If FALs have access to resources, they will experience a more elevated and favorable sense of identity salience and heightened self-belief in their capability to lead (Stets & Burke, 2000). Studies show that having access to resources develops academic leaders' decision-making capabilities, enabling them to assess which of the resources at their disposal would create an impact on the work, and subsequently feel confident in resolving issues beneficial to the interests of the organization (Floyd & Lane, 2000; Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000; Mantere, 2008).

Addressing the challenges through sensemaking

Indonesia's patriarchal society dictates institutional consciousness and behavior, and the titles and position given to men and women leaders impose gendered expectations, which are also warranted in cultural and religious scripts, for example, Islamic scripts that position women as subservient to men (Nurmila, 2011, 2013). Women, therefore, have to work harder to break the 'glass ceiling' be regarded as leaders (Murniati, 2012). This means that they must be assertive in male-dominated and strongly hierarchical, and bureaucratic structures like Indonesian universities.

FALs in this study used strong networking capabilities to obtain needed resources, for example, identifying alliances who recognize their credibility, and whose functions and prominence could support leadership (Elliot & Stead, 2008; Kelemens & Rumens, 2008). In their efforts to advocate assertively for satisfying working conditions for their staff, they must act in non-stereotypical ways, especially in the course of negotiating the resources they require. Previous mentors proved to be useful in securing needed resources and coaching. The advantage of mentors for female academic leaders has been studied widely, with research concluding that they provide the emotional encouragement, camaraderie, and affinity needed by those experiencing the stress and burdens of the job (Higginbottom & Robinson, 2019).

However, as revealed in this study, FALs tend to be socially-disliked for being 'masculine'. Regarded as a form of aping (Gallant, 2014), some FALs were viewed as too assertive, to the point of being pushy which are masculine traits set up as standards for male leaders (Blackmore, 2002). Because of this, FALs encountered social disapproval. Therefore, to avoid being socially-disliked, FALs have to adjust their behavior to accommodate social edicts, while at the same time show caring and nurturing behavior, as expected of motherly behavior in Indonesia's collectivist society. Their experience is consistent with studies suggesting that when women adjust their behavior to lead like men they face disapproval because they should not act in non-stereotypically feminine ways (Gallant, 2014; Heilman, 2012).

Women in leadership, in many contexts, face a *'double bind'* because of the negative attributions given to female leaders who act and behave like males to rise above the stereotyped role of being the 'weaker gender', and for not possessing the leadership traits of male leaders (Omar & Davidson, 2001; Arquisola et al., 2020). They are normative gender expectations imposed by socio-cultural edicts that compel women to be compliant to stereotypical roles so as to be liked, and yet entail them to be agentic to be regarded as competent, for which they are rebuked. The role expectations of this nature are especially difficult for female leaders in complex cultural contexts where social interactions are influenced by socio-cultural values and religious beliefs; if women are given the opportunity to break through the perceived 'glass ceiling' they could gradually erase the stereotypes about female leaders. (Arquisola et al., 2020). In Malaysia, females' participation in economic life is hampered because most jobs are segregated to agriculture and trade; they are believed weaker and need to be protected from a competitive industrial world (Hirschman, 2016), even though Malaysian higher education is seeing a rise in female participation that bodes well for higher labor force participation (Sakariyau & Zakuan, 2017).

FALs in this study attempted to bridge differences caused by intergenerational and academic status between colleagues, and had to endure the ramifications of restrictive interactions caused by high power-distance. A high

power-distance relationship gives no guarantees of equal opportunities (Sadri et al., 2011), and FALs response to this dilemma also subject them to a bind. In their effort of reduce social status differences, FALs had to be receptive to cultural edicts requiring deference to authority—no matter how wrong these seniors were—even if such encounters with ranked senior academics are uncomfortable.

Understanding such prevailing cultural scripts, FALs' ability to read the context correctly (sensemaking) and adapt the leadership action or strategy (Hallinger, 2011) determined the strength of leader salience and agency. Adopting such a stance, however, might be psychologically costly as it can undermine their self-esteem and make them question their competence as leaders (Martin, 2003).

In Figure 1, the study presents a conceptualization of the control schemas—or triple binds—the researcher argue as the outcome of the challenges posed by gender roles, social position and status, and organizational resources, that have been identified from the literature as complicating leadership practices for female academic leaders. To be specific, the triple binds are the sum of gender challenges that derail leadership for women, including vestiges of prejudice, resistance to female leadership, and lack of supportive institutional conditions.

Findings in this study suggest that the constraints imposed by gender roles reflect how Indonesian society tends to continue to view the role of women, not in terms of leadership capacity, but in their social and communal roles. These findings also confirm existing cross-cultural research in Asia alluding to the great influence and challenges that culture and tradition play for female leaders in this context (Yukongdi & Benson, 2005).

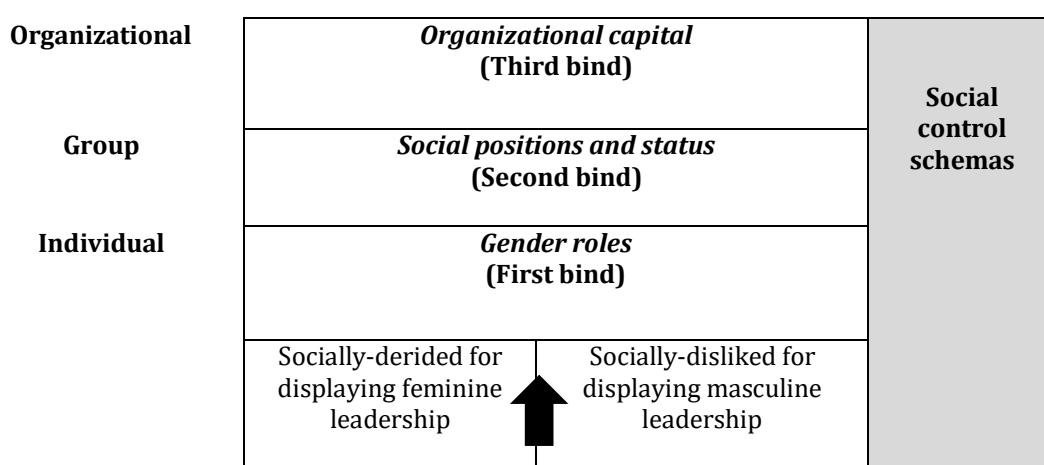


Figure 1. The Triple Binds Framework on Constraints in Female Academic Leadership Roles

The conceptual framework of the triple binds may be applicable in examining the barriers to women's leadership in Asia, and in countries with similar socio-cultural traits. Examples are countries with diverse religio-ethnic characteristics and strong patriarchal values that research shows undermine women's aspirations to leadership (Shah, 2006, 2010). Even in the context of Western tertiary institutions, the concept of the triple binds can be applied to examine the challenges and complexities faced by academic leaders who undertake assignments in complex cultural contexts. Beyond analysis alone, the framework provides an understanding of how to build constructive social relationships and networks in gendered professional bureaucracies like universities.

Conclusion

This study has identified the various conditions that enable and constrain FALs from performing their roles as academic leaders. These conditions, called triple binds, have implications for the way universities must create supportive structures for academic leadership practice. The study identified that gender roles, social status, and access to organizational resources play a crucial role in FALs' agency and role performance. Studies have indicated that without such resources academic leaders in Indonesia will find leading a daunting responsibility. Indonesian FALs use sensemaking to analyze how FALs navigate through the complexities of leadership practice. By identifying the triple binds, this study contributes a new frame of analysis in the study of gender and academic leadership in Indonesia. This is, however, very much a starting point and more studies are needed to better understand the dynamics within the Indonesian higher education sector and to extend the examination to countries outside Indonesia.

Recommendations

The research recommends creating better 'gender congenial contexts' that consider equalizing gender composition in leadership positions, and emphasizing how to equalize power distribution in that context as well. One way to do this is that university leaders could offer female leaders opportunities to avail of higher qualifications and academic tracking

opportunities (e.g., professorships). The low number of females taking doctoral programmes in Asian countries, including Indonesia, which currently stands at 37% compared to males (63%), shows that more efforts need to be in place to gradually close the gender parity index for higher post graduate education (UNESCO, 2014). Furthermore, Indonesian higher education management should encourage more intra-generational cooperation and communication e.g. through research collaborations, projects, and interactive team teaching, to reduce dissensus currently characterizing relationships between younger and senior academics in many Indonesian universities. These interventions will help FALs to focus attention on effective academic management rather than spending time resolving intra-generational conflicts between peers. Another way is to encourage senior academics to voluntarily initiate mentor-mentee relationships with younger academics. Senior academics can draw upon their experience to support younger academics in their career progression in academia. Furthermore, the study identified that organizational resources play a crucial role in academic leaders' role performance, and without such resources academic leaders in Indonesia will find leading a daunting responsibility. Therefore, if Indonesian universities can decrease the bureaucratic and circuitous system of funding approvals and fund disbursements, academic leaders could somehow manage even with inadequate resources, rather than spend their time wondering when funds will come, or when it will be approved. Improvements in the financial management system is long overdue to enable Indonesian higher education to respond quickly to the changing demands in higher education.

This study found that the agency of FALs as academic leaders was enabled by the network of social systems such as their family, closest peers and mentors. It would be interesting to undertake a social network analysis of how FALs' social networks helped (Horak & Taube, 2016) make it bearable for them to perform their roles under restrictive social controls. It would also broaden understanding of the role of networks in leadership practice in a non-Western context, especially the role of mentors in female academic leadership progression. Even though close family support was a driving force for women's aspirations to leadership positions (see Cubillo & Brown, 2003), the role of mentors to enhance female career progression (see Fitzsimmons et al., 2013) is little explored in studies on academic leaders in non-Western contexts.

Limitations

This qualitative study has several clear limitations. First, the sample size was relatively small (14 female academic leaders), reducing the generalizability of the findings. The study covered FALs in the three largest universities on the island of Java. The FALs in this study represent the largest ethnic groups in Indonesia (Javanese and Sundanese). To accumulate wider documentation of equity issues, future studies could examine the gendering practices experienced by FALs elsewhere in Indonesia, and in other countries in the Asian region where the role of women is viewed as social and not in leadership.

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