

## Being Kartini: Ceremony and Print Media in the Commemoration of Indonesia's First Feminist

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### Introduction

1. Raden Adjeng Kartini (1879–1904) was an extraordinary young Javanese intellectual whose letters to her Dutch correspondents were published following her early death.<sup>[2]</sup> These letters outlined her thinking on a number of issues including oppressive feudal traditions, the tragedy of forced marriage and polygamy for upper-class Javanese women, and the importance of education for girls. The letters reflected Kartini's own life experiences as the daughter of a relatively progressive Javanese *bupati* (district chief) who had allowed Kartini and her sisters to attend a local



Dutch primary school. However, from the age of twelve, following the tradition for high-born unmarried girls, Kartini and her sisters were secluded at home. Nonetheless, they continued to self-educate and form opinions on the social processes affecting their lives. Some years later the sisters were permitted to break with tradition and occasionally appear in public. They also founded a small school for young girls at their home. In 1903, Kartini's plans to pursue further study in Holland or Batavia were abandoned when her father arranged a marriage for her to the Bupati of Rembang—a much older widower with three lesser wives. For a short time after her marriage, Kartini ran another small school for her step-children, but died a few days after the birth of her first child. A collection of her personal correspondence was first edited and published in 1911.<sup>[3]</sup>

**Figure 1.** One of the often reprinted photographs of Kartini. This image was used on the Five Rupiah note issued by Bank Indonesia in 1952.

2. Inspiring later generations of nationalists and feminists, Kartini is acclaimed as the pioneer of the Indonesian women's movement, a champion of education and as a national heroine. In 1964, Kartini was officially included in Indonesia's pantheon of national heroes (celebrated collectively on *Hari Pahlawan* Heroes' Day, on 10 November),<sup>[4]</sup> but is the only hero to have an annual national day solely in her honour. Kartini Day is commemorated every year on her birthday—21 April.
3. Kartini Day has become perhaps the most complex and peculiar of the many commemorative events on the Indonesian national calendar. It is a time of the year when competing concepts of women's citizenship, rights, femininity and tradition come to the fore.<sup>[5]</sup> The legend of Kartini has been maintained through essays, biographies, film, official school history books and academic interest,<sup>[6]</sup> but mostly lives on through Kartini Day events. Present day modes of commemorating Kartini Day include both government and non-government events, ranging from ceremony and speeches recounting Kartini's life story, workshops on gender responsive development, women's health initiatives such as free mammograms, pilgrimages to Kartini's grave in Rembang in Central Java, women's art exhibitions and performances, volunteer social service (*bakti sosial*) events and even to requiring male Jakarta train passengers to give up seats to female passengers. Kartini Day is sometimes used for government policy announcements and also by protestors to promote women's rights messages. Special Kartini Day Friday sermons are often delivered on Islamic interpretations of Kartini's thinking.<sup>[7]</sup> Domestic skills competitions on Kartini Day, particularly cooking and flower arranging, are also very common. These are usually for women contestants and are organised in many places including government and private sector offices and local neighbourhoods.<sup>[8]</sup>
4. The most distinctive Kartini Day events are the Kartini lookalike competitions (variously called *lomba mirip Kartini*, *lomba busana* or *lomba kebaya*) held around the country. Here, women dressed in the Javanese *kebaya* (blouse), *kain* (sarong) and *konde* (fake hair piece) parade one by one and are judged (often by a panel of older women) not only on their resemblance to Kartini according to their clothing, makeup and hairstyle,<sup>[9]</sup> but also on their manner of walking and holding their hands clasped together. The winner may be the contestant judged to be the most '*anggun*' (elegant and graceful) and not to have overdone her makeup and jewellery or overplayed the little mincing steps thought required by some of the other contestants. There are also many similar Little Kartini (*Kartini Cilik*) competitions held for young girls in schools and elsewhere. Other Kartini Day traditions also revolve around traditional dress. Women attending official events usually wear a *kebaya*. State offices and private companies often require women employees to wear a *kebaya* to work on Kartini Day. School parades usually require children to dress either in Javanese costume or the traditional costume from another Indonesian ethnic group. Mock sporting events where women exercise while wearing a *kebaya* are also common.
5. Much Kartini Day commemoration is also played out in the print media.<sup>[10]</sup> Major Indonesian national and regional newspapers tend to publish descriptions of ceremonial events, speeches and competitions often accompanied by prominent colourful photographs. Many articles also recount details of Kartini's life story and letters and relate them to present day conditions of women in Indonesia. Particularly since the fall of Suharto in 1998 and the ensuing reform era, Kartini Day usually inspires a number of opinion pieces and editorials ranging from policy-driven articles highlighting, for example, gender equality in development, domestic violence and maternal mortality, to critical opinion

pieces from a feminist perspective on how Kartini Day is celebrated. These latter articles tend to argue that Kartini Day has become a national ritual of the subjugation of women in forcing them to dress in the confining *kebaya* and promoting domesticity while the real feminist meanings of Kartini's writings have been lost. They argue that Kartini Day needs to be reinvigorated or perhaps replaced with a more generic women's day.<sup>[11]</sup>

6. These feminist arguments have tended to focus on the role of the Kartini Day ceremony in shaping ideals of femininity in Indonesia. In this article I argue that this conception should be widened to include the parallel role of the print media, which has its own Kartini Day traditions, in understanding how the Kartini legend has been shaped and its implications for present day Indonesian women. Using a large collection of newspaper and journal articles relating to Kartini Day, ranging from after Kartini's death during the Dutch colonial era through to the present, I trace both change and continuity in the commemoration of Kartini's birthday through both ceremony and print media. I argue that print-media continuities such as publishing Kartini-related articles on or around Kartini day, constant reiteration of the question 'have Kartini's aspirations been realised?' and the linguistic use of the word 'kartini' as a uncapitalised noun to denote both high-achieving women and women victims, have all contributed to the strength of Kartini Day messages over time. Critical articles are not yet addressing the Kartini Day textual traditions and the messages they contain about Indonesian women. Further, Kartini Day has survived many critiques in the past, and the recent publication of feminist critical essays on Kartini Day appear themselves to be located within some Kartini Day print media traditions, such that their message may have less impact than that intended by the authors.

### Nationalism, Hero Commemoration and Print Media

7. The generation of national memory—of an imagined sense of shared history and destiny between people who will never meet one another—is often sited around symbols and rituals such as flags, parades, national anthems and the veneration of heroes. National commemorative traditions usually seek to establish a connection between the present generation and a suitable historic past.<sup>[12]</sup> The chosen version of the past is often as much about forgetting as remembering and what is remembered usually reflects the objectives of the dominant elite. The selection of national heroes serves to personify history and to give the myths of the nation's origin a human face. Heroes come to symbolise certain desirable characteristics that should be emulated by the current generation. Women are often forgotten in national commemoration<sup>[13]</sup> and there are usually far fewer national female heroines given the emphasis on military valour and patriarchal values in the creation of the nation. Where individual women are remembered as heroines, they often take on particular gendered connotations such as an emphasis on virginity or motherhood.<sup>[14]</sup> The particular connotations given to the lives of heroes are not fixed over time and are subject to ongoing innovation, usually where a stable image has new elements intermittently superimposed.<sup>[15]</sup>
8. Collective memory making can occur through ceremonial mechanisms for those people present at a particular event, either as participants or spectators. However, national collective memory relies on publicity. As Benedict Anderson demonstrated, the spread of print media was a key factor that enabled the development of nationalist sentiment by bringing together dispersed populations within the same imaginative space. Newspapers in particular acted as meeting spaces for articulating nationalist views.<sup>[16]</sup> Media accounts are required to give a commemorative event effect beyond those few people who were actually present. Media reports may in turn inspire others to commemorate the event in similar ways. The print media may also include opinion and editorial pieces relating to the event. Media accounts are not necessarily objective reporting—they can be pieces of nationalist rhetoric,<sup>[17]</sup> and I acknowledge here that my use of media descriptions as evidence for past commemorative practices must be understood within its political context.
9. Kartini Day in Indonesia, and the creation of Kartini as a national heroine, is a product of complex parallel performative ceremony and print media traditions and the interactions between them. These interrelated processes carry gendered messages. The following section of this article traces the evolution of the ceremonial aspects of Kartini Day from their beginnings during the Dutch colonial era through to the present as documented in the media. The subsequent section focuses on Kartini Day print media traditions.

### The Evolution of Kartini Day Ceremonies

#### *Dutch Colonial Era*

10. The legend of Kartini began to grow not long after her death when Mr. J.H. Abendanon, a former Director of Education, Culture and Industry in the Dutch East Indies, published an edited compilation of Kartini's letters under the title *Door Duisternis tot Licht* (Through Darkness to Light) in 1911.<sup>[18]</sup> The story of Kartini was adopted by the Dutch *Ethici* movement which was promoting a more benevolent attitude towards natives of the colony particularly by encouraging formal education. The proceeds of the book, along with other private funds, were used to establish a series of Kartini Schools for girls in Java. Kartini's ideas also provided inspiration to the generation of young nascent nationalists and members of the women's movement in pre-Independent Indonesia. W.R. Supratman, a young journalist who also composed Indonesia's national anthem and was later proclaimed a national hero himself, composed the song 'Raden Adjeng Kartini' in 1929 and the song spread along with the nationalist movement.<sup>[19]</sup>
11. The earliest documented celebrations of Kartini's birthday I have found are in *De Locomotief* in 1929.<sup>[20]</sup> On the fiftieth anniversary of her birth, a celebration was held at the Van Deventer girls' school in Solo.<sup>[21]</sup> The event was attended by various noble guests, school board members and R.A. Santoso, one of Kartini's sisters.<sup>[22]</sup> A large portrait of Kartini in a wide gold frame was presented to the school. A passage from *Door Duisternis tot*

*Licht* was read accompanied by gamelan music and the students performed songs. R.A. Santoso shared short anecdotes from significant people from Kartini's youth. The article remarked that all were overwhelmed by the significance that Kartini had and still has to her people.[23]

12. Other events held in honour of Kartini's birthday throughout the 1930s in various towns in Central Java were covered in short articles in *De Locomotief*. These were mostly evening meetings with speeches about Kartini organised by the women's branch of *Jong Java* and other usually unnamed 'native women's groups'. [24] Some events were more festive and included Javanese dance and *wayang* performances. [25] Other sources also suggest that Kartini's birthday was also being celebrated in schools as early as the 1930s in Sumatra and probably elsewhere. [26] In April 1939 in Medan, the women's movement group, Keotamaan Isteri, held a Kartini evening with ceremony and speeches. A very large portrait of Kartini was placed on the stage. A special edition of the magazine *Keotamaan Isteri* followed containing references to her as a heroine with the claim that 'every April, her birthday is being celebrated everywhere.' [27]
13. During the Dutch colonial era, there was yet to be any mention of dressing as Kartini as a mode of commemorating her birthday. However, Sujatin Kartowijono, who became a prominent figure in the Indonesian women's movement, recalls in her autobiography having been inspired by a copy of Kartini's letters. Sujatin became active in the nationalist youth group *Jong Java* in Yogyakarta and in 1923, for a parade to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Queen Wilhelmina's coronation, she suggested *Jong Java* present an episode in the life of Kartini. She herself was chosen to play Kartini for the tableau on a truck. She wore a pink *kebaya* and her mother styled her hair like that of Kartini as she appeared in photographs. Sujatin described her pleasure in their performance being awarded first prize. [28]

#### *Independence and the Sukarno Era (1945–1965)*

14. In Independent Indonesia, 'Kartini Day' emerged long before Kartini was officially acknowledged as a national hero in 1964. [29] Independence was declared in August 1945 and on 21 April 1946, 'Kartini Day' emerged without any reference to it being a new development. It was presented as a national day with a focus on women's issues and commemoration by the Revolutionary government was given prominent coverage in the news. The events were organised by the women's movement and were marked by speeches given by leading members of the women's movement. Mrs Mangoenpoespito spoke on Kartini and the importance of education for women who now have responsibilities to the nation, and President Sukarno proclaimed that a free collectivist nation was being built where women are free too. [30] Sports demonstrations and women's brigade marches were also reported in the following year. [31]
15. By the early 1950s, while Kartini Day political speeches were certainly still being made by the President and by women's movement leaders, [32] media coverage began to place increasing emphasis on handicraft competitions and displays. These appeared to begin as a means of fund-raising for the women's movement and were also coupled with literacy programs and the like. It seems likely that there was no particular initial intention on the part of the women's movement to associate Kartini Day with domestic skills competitions, but it started a tradition that continues through to the present.
16. There was also a discernable increase in reporting on dress as a mode of commemoration on Kartini Day. Jean Gelman Taylor has noted that while men such as Sukarno deliberately adopted Western dress as a sign of modernity, women's dress at national occasions tended to draw on Javanese tradition. [33] During the 1950s, the exclusive wearing of the *kebaya* for Kartini Day was increasing, but had apparently not completely solidified, as a tradition. In 1953, *Harian Rakjat* described Mrs Sukarno as wearing Lampung regional dress to the official commemoration of Kartini Day in Jakarta. At a separate event that year, women medical students staged an exhibition of regional dress from the different ethnic groups of Indonesia. [34] In 1957, *Harian Abadi*, reporting on Kartini Day celebrations in the Women's Building in Jakarta, described the top officials in their 'extravagant clothes' but also lamented that there were fewer *kebayas* in evidence than there had been in previous years. [35] In 1964, *Berita Indonesia* featured a photograph of women wearing *kebaya* and *kain* in a 'fast walking race'. [36]





**Figure 2.** Kartini Day fast walking race, Gelora Bung Karno Complex, Jakarta.  
Source: *Berita Indonesia*, 21 April 1964, p. 2.

17. The early 1960s also saw a coupling of Kartini Day with communist objectives, at least in the communist newspaper *Harian Rakjat*. This paper describes Kartini Day celebrations in Indonesian embassies in socialist countries around the world.<sup>[37]</sup> Gerwani, the women's branch of the Indonesian Communist Party, was also organising its own Kartini Day events including, in 1964, a reception with speeches regarding the confrontation with Malaysia followed by drama and dancing.<sup>[38]</sup>

#### *Suharto's New Order (1966–1998)*

18. The so-called Communist Coup of late September 1965 was a pivotal point in Indonesian history and had important implications for state constructions of femininity. The New Order promulgated the myth that members of Gerwani had mutilated the bodies of the six generals murdered at Lubang Buaya in Jakarta on 1 October 1965 and danced around naked with the generals' amputated genitals. The subsequent propaganda campaign linked communism with the fear of women's potential sexual powers should they be unleashed.<sup>[39]</sup> The New Order, under President Suharto, explicitly defined the ideal Indonesian woman as a submissive wife and devoted mother.<sup>[40]</sup> This was partly done through the development of 'wives of civil servants groups' such as Dharma Wanita and PKK.<sup>[41]</sup> Kartini Day and Hari Ibu also became vehicles for this state gender ideology<sup>[42]</sup> and modes of dress on these days, particularly for the wives of officials, became a more exaggerated version of the *kebaya*, with high heels, heavy make-up and fancier buns.<sup>[43]</sup>
19. I did not discover any definite media coverage of the beginning of Kartini lookalike competitions during the New Order, although dress was still often mentioned in the news. In 1967, *Kompas* ran an editorial stating that girls and young women, at school and at work, would wear the *kebaya* that day. It argued that women's emancipation had allowed women to become doctors and engineers but they must also be good wives and good mothers. It also argued that there was no conflict between wearing the traditional *kebaya* on Kartini Day and emancipation, stating that it was symbolic of an Indonesian style of emancipation.<sup>[44]</sup> Another article in the same edition drew a link between denying the type of behaviour displayed by Gerwani by returning to Kartini's aspirations.<sup>[45]</sup> Articles throughout the New Order continued to report on school ceremonies, fashion parades, art exhibitions, wearing the *kebaya*, singing the Kartini song and reciting her life story. Dharma Wanita and PKK became the main organisers of official government Kartini Day events.
20. Towards the end of the New Order, some challenges to Kartini Day symbolism emerged. On Kartini Day in 1995, more than one hundred female activists from Yogyakarta staged a demonstration near Kartini's grave in Rembang. They demanded that the Ministry of the Role of Women be dissolved for having failed to defend Indonesian women's interests. Under the heavy presence of security officers they protested against Kartini Day being characterised by cooking and Kartini lookalike competitions. The protesters read poems, chanted slogans and held a mass prayer for Kartini.<sup>[46]</sup> Female protestors also marked Kartini Day by holding street demonstrations in 1998 as part of the rallies that eventually led to the fall of Suharto.<sup>[47]</sup>

#### *Reformasi Era (1998–present)*

21. Following President Suharto's resignation in 1998, Indonesia underwent a period of intense reform including democratisation, relaxation of media censorship and decentralisation. Many reforms have specifically affected women including the introduction of a 30 per cent quota for women representatives in the National Legislature. There has been a proliferation of NGOs and generally more space for public discussion on diverse issues including those affecting women. Democratisation also opened up spaces for reinterpretations of Indonesian

national history. This has allowed more diversity in Kartini Day commemorations with apparently more space for creativity such as in women's art exhibitions and performance.[48] and for women's rights' NGOs to organise their own versions of commemoration activities. There are no longer explicit instructions from the government on celebrating Kartini Day in schools and some schools have dropped celebrations because they are too busy or because parents have complained about the obligation for their daughters to wear the *kebaya*. [49] Kartini Day has also continued to be used for protest such as opposition to the anti-pornography bill.



Figure 3. Kartini look-alike competition organised by a women's NGO for Kartini Day, Sangata, East Kalimantan, April 2007. Source: *Kaltim Post*, 17 April 2007, p. 36.

22. Kartini Day is still marked by government ceremony and speeches. Interestingly, since decentralisation, there appears to be far more emphasis on Kartini Day at some regional levels than there currently is at the national level, although this is only an observation based on news coverage. There are of course some regional differences as space has been opened up for the revival of regional identities. Kartini Day is now pointedly ignored in Aceh,[50] for example, but judging by coverage in the *Cenderawasih Pos*, is apparently still quite popular in some urban parts of Papua. Other areas prefer to promote their own regional heroines such as Rohana Kudus in West Sumatra or Dewi Sartika in West Java. Despite these changes, prominent coverage of Kartini Day events in papers like the *Kaltim Post* in East Kalimantan suggests that those districts with active PKK and Dharma Wanita groups continue to celebrate Kartini Day according to New Order era modes complete with Kartini look-alike and flower arranging competitions. Various regional leaders sometimes use the occasion to warn against women's emancipation being taken too far and the abandonment of women's roles as wives and mothers.[51]

### Kartini Day in Print

#### *Publishing Newspaper and Journal Essays on Kartini in April*

23. A single newspaper article may not have much lasting effect but repetition over time may create tradition within itself. The earliest writings about Kartini by both Dutch *Ethici* and nationalists were published at any time of the year.[52] Along with the gradual development of Kartini's birthday as a day of commemoration, writing about Kartini also slowly coalesced around late April. By the late 1930s, nationalist groups were publishing special Kartini birthday editions of their magazines. *Poedjangga Baroe* had a special Kartini edition in April 1938 as did *Keoetamaan Isteri* in April–May 1939. One of the earliest post-Independence Kartini Day articles was by S.K. Trimurti in 1947.[53] From then onwards, essays on Kartini have almost always been published in newspapers and journals only in relation to Kartini Day, with some exceptions including Gerwani's magazine *Api Kartini* (Kartini's Fire), which had special Kartini Day editions but also published on her occasionally at other times of the year, and a media response to Prof. Harsja Bachtiar's December 1987 challenge to Kartini's status as a national hero.[54]
24. The content of Kartini Day essays has of course changed over time and there has been a mix of adulatory and critical articles. This is not to suggest that the content is uninteresting or unread, but that even criticism of Kartini Day seems to form part of the tradition, and has not dramatically affected the strength of the commemoration itself. Many voices through the years have asked or defended the question of 'why Kartini?' and 'what did she do that merits being commemorated this way?'[55]
25. As early as the mid-1950s, essays published on or around Kartini Day have questioned the superficial way that it was being celebrated. An editorial in *Harian Rakjat* wrote in 1954:

Too often Kartini is remembered in a so-so way. Today there is a ceremony, tomorrow it is as if it has all disappeared, there is no impression, no remainder. This type of ceremony is not only incommensurate with Kartini's greatness, and maybe even does not respect her, but it is useless. There has been an opening up of opportunities for women but the shackles of feudalism that restrain women are still the same. What does this mean? It means that Kartini's aspirations have not been



materialised. We must put Kartini's thinking into practice. Only in this way will Kartini commemoration be satisfactory [author's translation].<sup>[56]</sup>

26. In April 1976, Bambang Sulistomo wrote an early version of present day feminist critiques. He argued that Kartini Day had become an empty routine of mothers sending daughters off to school in traditional costume, then putting on their own costume and makeup and singing the Kartini song. He noted that the New Order's PKK and women's organisations were all led by women with the highest social status gained through their husbands and argued, 'This is the very foedalism that Kartini rebelled against! This needs to change.'<sup>[57]</sup>
27. As outlined in the Introduction, there have been many voices similarly critiquing Kartini Day in Post-Reformasi Indonesia. Most seem to be doing so primarily within the Kartini Day print media tradition of publishing articles about Kartini only in relation to her birthday in late April.

#### *Have Kartini's Aspirations Been Realised?*

28. One of the print media traditions that has developed on Kartini Day is the constant reiteration of the question, 'Have Kartini's aspirations been realised? Or in other variations, 'What has changed since the time of Kartini?' and 'What would Kartini think about the situation of Indonesian women if she were alive today?' Many examples of these questions have been posed since the late 1930s.<sup>[58]</sup> While these questions are certainly a means of triggering discussion about change, they also set up a relational dialogue that operates in a similar way to modernity-tradition discourse, where one has to be able to look back on tradition in order to conceptualise modernity. 'Tradition' tends to lose its value save as a reference point for modernity. The time of Kartini, defined very broadly in relation to Kartini's life story, as a time when women were confined to the home and denied education, has become the benchmark against which change in women's status is measured—at least on Kartini Day. These questions reinforce the idea of a shared historical trajectory for all women in Indonesia which precludes discussion of diversity.
29. The questions are answered in various ways. Writers are sometimes very positive about change and sometimes very negative, but they have in common the use of sweeping generalisations. The time of Kartini was so long ago, and so vaguely defined, that only broad statements about more women now being educated and in the workforce seem to be possible in these articles. This appears to inhibit more detailed discussion of contemporary issues and developments. For example, on Kartini Day, it is difficult to ask what has changed for women in the last few years when the time of Kartini is used as the reference point. This is, of course, not to say that all writers fall into this pattern, but it does form a discernable tradition within print-media articles on Kartini Day.

#### *Being 'a' kartini*

30. Just as the time of Kartini has become a benchmark for what conditions were like before the women's movement, Kartini herself has been set as a benchmark aspiration for Indonesian women. The idea that one can be 'a' kartini (often uncapitalised) has made its way into the Indonesian language. One can be a 'modern kartini', or a 'little kartini', or 'kartinis' in the plural. The word 'kartini' can replace the word 'women' in certain contexts but only around the time of Kartini Day. The earliest example I have found of this linguistic usage comes from the newspaper *Merdeka* in April 1946. A photo of a row of eight little girls has the caption, 'How sweet and pretty these little kartinis are. The reader can see the light of independence in their happy smiles. They will follow in the footsteps of their beloved mother.'<sup>[59]</sup>



**Figure 4.** 'How sweet and pretty these little kartinis are,' Kartini Day, 1946.  
Source: *Merdeka*. 22 April 1946. p. 2.

31. A kartini can mean a woman in general, but the term more usually means an exceptional, modern woman, a leader in her field. This is framed not just as particular women continuing Kartini's aspirations—but as having become kartinis themselves.<sup>[60]</sup> For example, Siti Rohana Kudus, a journalist and women's movement activist from West Sumatra was nicknamed 'the little Kartini from Minangkabau'.<sup>[61]</sup> A number of compilations of modern day 'kartinis' have been published.<sup>[62]</sup> These are usually lists and biographies of women at the forefront of their fields. For example, the Kartini Day edition of weekly magazine *Gatra* on 21 April 2010 provided profiles of prominent living Indonesian women.
32. Also running through Kartini Day print media is a less conspicuous, but nonetheless very important, counterpoint to the equating of kartinis with exceptional Indonesian women. In these articles and photographs, kartinis are sufferers and victims. This tag has been variously used for women agricultural labourers,<sup>[63]</sup> sufferers of domestic violence,<sup>[64]</sup> women in jail for drug offences<sup>[65]</sup> and women suffering from poor health.<sup>[66]</sup> In a similar vein, newspapers sometimes print biographical portraits of poor women for whom life has been far more unfortunate, and for whom Kartini's messages have had little impact on their everyday struggles to survive.<sup>[67]</sup> Interestingly, the male equivalent 'kartono'<sup>[68]</sup> is also occasionally used to describe poor men in similarly difficult life circumstances, but apparently never for exceptional men. A kartini, then, can be either a (modern) heroine or a (traditional) victim. This sets up problematic representations of women through Kartini Day news publications—representations that are far from the reality of Indonesian women's diverse and complex lives.

### Conclusion

33. The phenomenon of Kartini and how her legacy has been interpreted on Kartini Day has changed through time according to the political objectives of the dominant elite of the day and the relative strength of critics. A core symbol remains steady—that of the young clever aristocratic woman who championed women's education and emancipation from tradition, but many reinterpretations of the symbol have occurred over time. This research has demonstrated that Kartini Day, and the construction of ideals of femininity in Indonesia that occur around this national day, is a product of both ceremonial and print media traditions. This suggests that in order to successfully overhaul Kartini Day both traditions need to be addressed, not only the ceremonial aspects. The print media traditions appear to be part of the glue holding Kartini Day together. The media both describes ceremony and events for those who were not present and also lays a linguistic and representational framework for reproducing generalised constructions of Indonesian femininity; most problematically with women being portrayed dichotomously as either heroines or victims.

### Endnotes

[1] The research for this article was supported by a Seymour Summer Research Scholarship at the National Library of Australia.

[2] Raden Adjeng is a Javanese title for an unmarried noble woman. Kartini is sometimes also referred to as Raden Ayu to emphasise that she had been married for about a year before her death. In Independent Indonesia she has often been referred to as Ibu Kartini or Mother Kartini to de-emphasise any feudal connotations associated with her name. For the argument that this change of name marked the rearticulation of Kartini from a rebellious young woman to a domesticated wife and mother, see: Sylvia Tiwon, 'Models and maniacs: articulating the Feminine in Indonesia,' in *Fantasizing the Feminine in Indonesia*, ed. Laurie J. Sears, Durham: Duke University Press, 1996, pp. 47–70.

[3] Raden Adjeng Kartini, *Door Duisternis tot Licht: Gedachten Over en voor Javaanse Volk* (From Darkness to Light: Thoughts about and for the Javanese People), S'Gravenhage: Van Dorp, 1911.

[4] The list of Indonesian national heroes is not closed and the government can inaugurate new heroes. There are no living heroes; all are named after their death. As at the end of 2011, Indonesia has 156 national heroes. Of the total only twelve are female. On 2 May 1964, Kartini became the twenty-third national hero declared by President Sukarno. This was the same day that Cut Nyak Dhien and Cut Meutia, two Acehese women who had fought against the Dutch in the Aceh war, were also proclaimed national heroes. This appears to have been a response by President Sukarno to criticism that no women heroes had yet been named.

[5] The other day on the Indonesian national calendar dedicated to women is *Hari Ibu*, or Women's Day, held annually on 22 December. *Hari Ibu* commemorates the First Indonesian Women's Congress held in 1928. Although *Hari Ibu* presents many of the same sorts of issues of gendered symbols of nationalism, this particular study focuses on Kartini Day.

[6] Kartini has long been a topic of fascination and even obsession amongst generations of Indonesianists, historians and feminists. Academic work on Kartini includes the various editions and translations of her letters, writings concerned with uncovering facts about her life and interpreting and contextualising her letters according to the times in which she lived. For studies which take note of the symbol of Kartini and how it has travelled through time, see:

Harsja W. Bachtiar, 'Kartini dan peranan wanita dalam masyarakat kita' (Kartini and the role of women in our society), in *Satu Abad Kartini, 1879–1979: Bunga Rampai Karangan Mengenai Kartini* (One Century of Kartini, 1879–1979: Collected Essays on Kartini), ed. Aristides Katoppo *et al.*, Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1979, pp. 71–83; Danilyn Rutherford, 'Unpacking a national heroine: two Kartinis and their people,' in *Indonesia*, vol. 55 (April 1993): 23–40.

[7] M.B. Hooker and Virginia Hooker, 'The construction of individual Muslim women as iconic representatives: Southeast Asia, Indonesia, Raden Ajeng Kartini,' in *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures*, Supplement I, Brill Online, 2010, online: [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopedia-of-women-and-islamic-cultures/construction-of-individual-women-as-iconic-representatives-indonesia-raden-ajeng-kartini-COM\\_0651](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopedia-of-women-and-islamic-cultures/construction-of-individual-women-as-iconic-representatives-indonesia-raden-ajeng-kartini-COM_0651), accessed 6 March 2012.

[8] Men are sometimes given the task of cooking fried rice (*nasi goreng*) in such competitions, while women contestants cook more complicated dishes, particularly cakes and other snacks.

[9] Kartini's image is very well known. A number of photographs of Kartini survive and these are often reprinted in articles about her and in school history books. A portrait of Kartini is also usually hung on the wall during Kartini Day events.

[10] Kartini Day also attracts some television and other media coverage. Emphasis in this article is on print media given that it is easier to access print sources over time.

[11] See, for example: Umi Lasmina, 'Renungan Hari Kartini: jangan sembunyikan Kartini' (Reflections on Kartini Day: don't hide Kartini), in *Jurnal Perempuan*, vol. 6 (February–April 1998): 63–68; Rahman Arge, 'Melawan mitos perempuan makhluk kelas dua,' in *Gatra*, 29 April 2000, p. 47; Kho Junsim, 'Why feminism is still a dirty word for us?,' in *Jakarta Post*, 23 April 2000; Rina Asih Triadmi, 'Emansipasi, 1 hari dalam 365 hari' (Emancipation, 1 day out of 365 days), in *Kaltim Post*, 20 April 2007, p. 4; Maria Hartiningsih, 'Cita-cita Kartini dikuburkan' (Kartini's aspirations are buried), in *Kompas*, 23 April 2007, p. 35; Gede H. Cahaya, 'Dunia lain Kartini' (The other world of Kartini), in *Pikiran Rakyat*, 23 April 2007, p. 22; Julia Suryakusuma, 'Kartini, Meutia and the country's big boys,' in *Jakarta Post*, 23 April 2008, p. 7; Meutia Hatta Swasono, 'Kartini, busana dan teladan nyata' (Kartini, fashion and real examples), in *Singgalang*, 23 April 2008, pp. 1 and 7.

[12] Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: inventing traditions,' in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 1–14.

[13] See, for example: Jean Allman, 'The disappearing of Hannah Kudjoe: nationalism, feminism and the tyrannies of history,' in *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 21, no. 3 (2009): 13–35.

[14] See, for example: Judith Tydor Baumel Schwartz, 'Female icons of the Zionist movement: the making of a national heroine in Israel,' in *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, vol. 11, no. 3 (2010): 249–70; Colin M. Coates and Cecilia Morgan, in *Heroines & History: Representations of Madeleine de Verchères and Laura Secord*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002.

[15] See, for example: Barry Schwartz, 'Social change and collective memory: the democratization of George Washington,' in *American Sociological Review*, vol. 56, no. 2 (1991): 221–36.

[16] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London and New York: Verso, 2006 [2001].

[17] David Walstreicher, 'Rites of rebellion, rites of assent: celebrations, print culture, and the origins of American nationalism,' in *The Journal of American History*, vol. 82, no. 1 (1995): 37–61; Yoram Peri, 'The media and collective memory of Yitzhak Rabin's commemoration,' in *Journal of Communication*, vol. 49, no. 3 (1999): 106–24.

[18] The book went through several editions and translations including: Agnes Louise Symmers (trans.), *Letters of a Javanese Princess*, New York: A.A. Knopf, 1920. The first Malay version was published in 1922 under the title *Habis Gelap Terbitlah Terang*. For a full list of early editions see: Claudine Lombard-Salmon, 'Essai de bibliographie sur la question féminine en Indonésie' (Bibliography on women's issues in Indonesia), in *Archipel*, vol. 13 (1977): 23–36.

[19] There are slightly varying accounts of where W.R. Supratman found the inspiration for the song. The official government biography claims that Supratman was working as a journalist for the newspaper *Sin Po* when he covered the First Women's Congress held in Yogyakarta in December 1928 and was inspired to write the song. See B. Sularto, *Wage Rudolf Supratman, Pahlawan Nasional* (Wage Rudolf Supratman, National Hero), Jakarta: Proyek Biografi Pahlawan Nasional, Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1977, pp. 118–19. Another version claimed that he had read the Malay translation of her letters, *Habis Gelap Terbitlah Terang*, and was inspired to write the song about Kartini. See Anthony C. Hutabarat, *Wage Rudolf Soepratman: Pencipta Lagu Kebangsaan Republik Indonesia 'Indonesia Raya' dan Pahlawan Nasional: Meluruskan Sejarah dan Riwayat Hidup* (Wage Rudolf Soepratman: Creator of Indonesia's National Anthem 'Indonesia Raya' and National Hero: Straightening History and his Biography), Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2001. The words of the song were later changed from Raden Adjeng Kartini to Ibu Kita Kartini (Our Mother Kartini). This change was apparently made by Sukarno in an effort to remove the feudal connotations associated with her traditional title.

[20] It appears that some early commemorations may have also been held in September for the anniversary of Kartini's death, but that this did not continue as a strong tradition. See C. Frans, 'Peringatan hari maulid jang kelima



poeloh dan hari wafat jang kedoea poeloh lima dari almarhoem R.A. Kartini, pendekar associatie-politiek' (Commemorating the fiftieth birthday and twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of the late R.A. Kartini, pioneer of political associations), in *Oedaya*, no. 76 (September 1929): 140–45.

[21] Conrad Van Deventer was one of the Dutch *Ethici* most active in promoting the Kartini example in colonial Java. Rich and childless he established a foundation which in turn opened schools in his name.

[22] On the role of Kartini's sisters in continuing the Kartini legend, see: Joost Coté, *Realising the Dream of R.A. Kartini: Her Sisters' Letters from Colonial Java*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008.

[23] 'De geboortedag van Wijlen R.A. Kartini' (The Birthday of the Late R.A. Kartini), in *De Locomotief*, 23 April 1929, p. 5. There are also photographs of this event contained in the archive: Women in the Netherlands East Indies Part 2: The Kartini Schools for Girls: The Archive of the Kartini Fund 1912–1960, The Hague: Nationaal Archief, 2004, item 186.

[24] 'Herdenking van R.A. Kartini' (Memorial of R.A. Kartini), in *De Locomotief*, 22 April 1929, p. 6; 'Kartini Herdenking: bijeenkomst in den sobo–Kartti Schouwburg' (Kartini Memorial: meeting in the sobo–Kartti Theatre), in *De Locomotief*, 22 April 1937, p. 2. 'Kartini-Avond: Een druk bezochte bijeenkomst' (Kartini Evening: A Well-Attended Meeting), in *De Locomotief*, 22 April 1938, *Derde Blad*, p. 2.

[25] 'Feestelijke herdenking R.A. Kartini' (Festive commemoration of R.A. Kartini), in *De Locomotief*, 21 April 1939, p. 3.

[26] Coté, *Realising the Dream*, p. 314, note 36; Ny. Aisyah Dahlan, 'Inspirasi Kartini di kalangan wanita Muslimat' (Kartini's inspiration among Muslim women), in *Satu Abad Kartini, 1879–1979: Bunga Rampai Karangan Mengenai Kartini* (One Century of Kartini, 1879–1979: Collected Essays on Kartini), ed. Aristides Katoppo *et al.*, Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1979, pp 47–57, p. 57.

[27] Armijn Pane, 'R.A. Kartini: dipandang dari djoeroesan kesoesasteraan' (R.A. Kartini: viewed from the discipline of literature), in *Keoetamaan Isteri*, April 1939, pp. 9–10.

[28] Sujatin Kartowijono, *Mencari Makna Hidupku: Bunga Rampai Perjalanan* (Looking for the Meaning of My Life: an Anthology of Journeys), retold by Hanna Rambe, Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1983, pp. 25–28; Susan Blackburn, 'Suyatin Kartowiyono, an anti-colonial leader of the Indonesian women's movement,' paper presented at the Tenth International Women in Asia Conference, Australian National University, 29 September–1 October 2010

[29] A common mistake found in writings on Kartini is to place the origins of Kartini Day in 1964 when Kartini was officially recognised as a national hero by President Sukarno.

[30] 'Hari Kartini dizaman Indonesia Merdeka' (Kartini Day in the era of Independent Indonesia), in *Kedaulatan Rakjat*, 22 April 1946, p. 1.

[31] 'Hari R.A. Kartini: kita rajakan dan kita teroeskan perjuangannja' (Kartini Day: we celebrate and we continue her struggle), in *Merdeka*, 21 April 1947, p. 2.

[32] Saskia Wieringa, *Sexual Politics in Indonesia*, New York: Palgrave, 2002, p. 160.

[33] Jean Gelman Taylor, 'Official photography, costume and the Indonesian revolution,' in *Women Creating Indonesia: The First Fifty Years*, ed. Jean Gelman Taylor, Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 1997, pp. 91–126.

[34] 'Wanita<sup>2</sup> ibu kota memperingati pendekar wanita Indonesia R.A. Kartini' (Women of the capital city commemorate the pioneer of Indonesian women R.A. Kartini), in *Harian Rakjat*, 22 April 1953, p. 2.

[35] 'Hari Kartini diperingati dengan atraksi kemewahan' (Kartini Day commemorated with grand attractions), in *Harian Abadi*, 23 April 1957, p. 2.

[36] *Berita Indonesia*, 21 April 1964, p. 2.

[37] 'Hari Kartini di Moskow' (Kartini Day in Moscow), in *Harian Rakjat*, 25 April 1964, p. 2; 'Hari Kartini di Bukares' (Kartini Day in Bucharest), in *Harian Rakjat*, 25 April 1964, p. 2; 'Hari Kartini di Kuba' (Kartini Day in Cuba), in *Harian Rakjat*, 25 April 1964, p. 2.

[38] 'Gerwani ranting Menteng Pulo rajakan Hari Kartini' (The Menteng Pulo Branch of Gerwani celebrates Kartini Day), in *Harian Rakjat*, 25 April 1964, p. 2.

[39] Wieringa, *Sexual Politics in Indonesia*, p. 75; Jacques Leclerc, 'Girls, girls, girls, and crocodiles,' in *Outward Appearances: Dressing State and Society in Indonesia*, ed. Henk Schulte Nordholt, 1997, pp 291–305.

[40] Wieringa, *Sexual Politics in Indonesia*, pp. 70–72.

[41] During the New Order, PKK stood for *Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga* or Family Welfare Guidance. The name of the organisation was changed in 2000 to *Gerakan Pemberdayaan dan Kesejahteraan Keluarga* or Family

Welfare Empowerment Movement.

[42] Kathryn Robinson, *Gender, Islam and Democracy in Indonesia*, London and New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 72.

[43] Robinson, *Gender, Islam and Democracy*, p. 121.

[44] 'Tadjuk Rentjana: Hari Emansipasi Wanita' (Editorial: Women's Emancipation Day), in *Kompas*, 21 April 1967, p. 2.

[45] 'Ladang' (Field), in *Kompas*, 21 April 1967, p. 3.

[46] 'Women's Affairs Office protested', *Jakarta Post*, 24 April 1995, p. 2; 'Diamankan, 4 aktivis perempuan,' (4 Female activists arrested), in *Jawa Post*, 22 April 1995, p. 6.

[47] 'Housewives, prostitutes, nuns join protests,' in *Jakarta Post*, 22 April 1998, p. 1.

[48] Barbara Hatley, 'Hearing women's voices, contesting women's bodies in post new order Indonesia,' in *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, issue 16 (March 2008), online: <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue16/hatley.htm>, accessed 2 March 2012.

[49] Damar Harsanto, 'R.A. Kartini, a bygone heroine for the younger generation,' in *Jakarta Post*, 20 April 2002, p. 2; 'No more 'kebaya' on Kartini Day,' in *Jakarta Post*, 22 April 2003, p. 8.

[50] There had long been antagonism towards the symbol of Kartini in Aceh due to the perception that it represented Javanese domination over the Acehnese. See Jacqueline Aquino Siapno, *Gender, Islam, Nationalism and the State in Aceh: The Paradox of Power, Co-Optation and Resistance*, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002, p. 151.

[51] For example: 'Jangan tuntutan emansipasi berlebihan' (Don't demand too much emancipation), in *Kaltim Post*, 24 April 2007, p. 31. 'Bupati minta perempuan berperan aktif' (Bupati Asks Women to Take Active Roles), in *Kaltim Post*, 25 April 2007, p. 11.

[52] For lists of early essays on Kartini see: Armijn Pane, 'Batjaan tentang R. A. Kartini' (Readings on R.A. Kartini), in *Keotamaan Isteri*, April (1939): 18–19; Lombard-Salmon, 'Essai de bibliographie,' pp. 30–32. Clippings and pamphlets on Kartini are also included in *Women in the Netherlands East Indies, Part 2, The Kartini Schools for Girls: The Archive of the Kartini Fund, 1912–1960*, The Hague: National Archief, 2004.

[53] S.K. Trimurti, 'Kartini dan pergerakan wanita diwaktu ini' (Kartini and the women's movement in these times), *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, 19 April 1947, p. 2.

[54] 'Harsja: Kartini bukan contoh yang baik' (Harsja: Kartini is not a good example), *Suara Pembaruan*, 1 December 1987, pp. 1 and 12; 'Ayunda tidak pernah menyerah' (Elder sister never surrendered), *Tempo*, 12 December 1987, pp. 22–31. Another exception is: Ashadi Siregar, 'Perjuangan Kartini: ideology kekerasan dan perempuan' (Kartini's struggle: the ideology of violence and women), *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, 31 July 1997, pp. 8 and 15.

[55] Wartawan "I.R.", 'Apa sesungguhnya jasa<sup>2</sup> Kartini?' (What were Kartini's real services?), *Indonesia Raya*, 21 April 1969, p. 7.

[56] 'Editorial: Hari Kartini' (Editorial: Kartini Day), in *Harian Rakyat*, 21 April 1954, p. 1.

[57] Bambang Sulistomo, 'Yang mana cita-cita R.A. Kartini sekarang?' (Which are R.A. Kartini's aspirations now?), in *Kompas*, 22 April 1976, p. 5.

[58] For example: Soesilowati, 'Tjita-tjita R.A. Kartini jang mana sudah tertjapai?' (Which of Kartini's aspirations have already been achieved?), in *Poedjangga Baroe*, no. 10, tahun V (April 1938): 222–26.

[59] *Merdeka*, 22 April 1946, p. 2. The original caption reads: 'Alangkah manis dan jelitanya kartini-kartini kecil ini. Dan dapatkah pembaca melihat sinar kemerdekaan pada wajah tersenyum ria ini. Mereka pun akan mengikoeti djedjak Iboenya yang disayanginya.'

[60] This linguistic usage follows the same pattern of 'Srikandi' to denote a heroine or exceptional woman. Srikandi was Arjuna's warrior wife in the Javanese version of the Mahabharata. The term 'srikandi' was often used by President Sukarno. The use of 'srikandi' as a term for a heroine seems to have decreased over time, while 'kartini' remains more common at least around the time of Kartini Day. Kartini herself has sometimes been referred to as a Srikandi. For example, 'Kartini, Srikandi sejati kita' (Kartini, our true Srikandi), in *Kompas*, 20 April 1995, p. 4. There are also official government 'Srikandi' compilations of prominent Indonesian women, for example: Badan Pembina Pahlawan Pusat, *Srikandi Bangsaku: Heroines of Indonesian History*, Jakarta: Republic of Indonesia, 1974. Further, G.G. Weix observed a similar mode of discourse applied to the use of the word 'Marsinah' (the name of the female labour union leader who was most likely killed by the military in 1993 and subsequently became a symbol for the labour movement), where other women following her example were labelled 'a second Marsinah' or a 'Marsinah from Medan'. See: G.G. Weix, 'Resisting history: Indonesian labour activism in the 1990s and the 'Marsinah' case,' in *Gender Politics in the Asia-Pacific Region: Agencies and Activisms*, ed. Brenda S.A. Yeoh and Peggy Teoh, Hoboken: Routledge, 2002, pp 120–36, pp. 121 and 125.

[61] John Legge, *Intellectuals and Nationalism in Indonesia: A Study of the Following Recruited by Sutan Sjahrir in Occupied Jakarta*, Singapore: Equinox Publishing Asia, 2010, p. 51; Rudolf Mrázek, *Sjahrir: Politics and Exile in Indonesia*, Studies on Southeast Asia no. 14, Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1994, p. 21; 'Kartini Ketjil dari Minangkabau: Sitti Rohana binti Maharadja Sutan dari Kota Gedang Sebagai Perintis Jalan Bagi Poetri di Minangkabau' (Little Kartini from Minangkabau: Sitti Rohana binti Maharadja Sutan from Gedang City as a groundbreaker for Women in Minangkabau), in *Pandji Islam*, vol. 12 (May 19 1941): 9054–80.

[62] For example: Setya Yuwana Sudikan (ed.), *Kartini-Kartini Jawa Timur* (Kartinis of East Java), Semarang: Cipta Sarana Megah Utama, 1997; Kartiko and Sardi A.K., *Kartini-Kartini Jawa Tengah* (Kartinis of Central Java), Semarang: Cipta Sarana Megah Utama, 1997.

[63] For example, *Jawa Pos*, ran a picture of a group of women working in a rice field with the caption: 'Para Kartini yang berjuang di sektor pertanian' (Kartinis who struggle in the agricultural sector), 23 April 1997, p. 6.

[64] 'Kekerasan terhadap Kartini terus terjadi' (Violence towards kartinis continues to occur), in *Serambi Indonesia*, 22 April 2007, p. 20.

[65] 'Kartini-Kartini dari balik bui' (Kartinis from behind prison bars), *Suara Pembaruan*, 21 April 2004, p. 11.

[66] Pribakti B., 'Kartini dan isu kesehatan wanita' (Kartini and women's health issues), in *Jawa Pos*, 21 April 2000, p. 4. This article refers to 'Kartini-Kartini loyo' or 'weak Kartinis' as a euphemism for women with poor health.

[67] For two oddly similar examples, see: 'Aminah mengayuh becak demi 10 anaknya' (Aminah peddles a becak for the sake of her 10 children), in *Kompas*, 21 April 2007, p. 1 and p. 15; 'Demi 10 orang anaknya: Nurjidah banting tulang siang malam' (For the sake of her 10 Children: Nurjidah works herself to the bone morning to night), in *Singgalang*, 20 April 2008, p. 12.

[68] One of Kartini's brothers was named Kartono (Raden Mas Sosrokartono).

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