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Kartini in her historical context


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Recent publication in The Netherlands of the Letters to Mrs. R. M. Abendanon-Mandri and her Husband (Kartini 1987) briefly provoked debate in Indonesia over Kartini's role in the nation's life. A reading of previously unpublished letters shows us the same, essential Kartini: the crusader for personal liberty, for the rights of women and children, for a western education, for a national moral uplift, and for a career of usefulness to the common people, unhampered by claims of husband and family. The newly revealed correspondence with the Abendanon family changes none of this. What these letters do convey is the extent of the personal struggle inside the Jepara kabupaten. And they will foster more studies of this much analysed woman. Who was the second suitor? What was the attitude of the educated classes to guna-guna and so on? And perhaps, once President Soeharto's dictum on Kartini's national status recedes into memory, there may again be debates in Indonesian circles as to her usefulness or suitability as a national heroine and symbol for Indonesia's womanhood.1

Indonesians are often irked by the preoccupation of western scholars with Kartini, and are fond of saying that she is a creation of the Dutch.2 Others — these are the non-Javanese — point to female leaders from their own regions. Where, they ask, is the western interest in these early women leaders? A glance at bibliographies suffices to confirm how few studies, apart from those on Kartini, have yet been published. Even the Sundanese

1 See Tempo, 12 December 1987, on the recent controversy surrounding assessment of Kartini in the national life of Indonesia.
2 See, for example, the remarks of Professor Harsja Bachtiar as reported in Tempo, 12 December 1987, in the article 'Ayunda tidak pernah menyerah'.

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Raden Dewi Sartika, whose long and useful life is well documented, is rarely the subject of western research.3

The bibliographical lists printed in Monash University’s publication *Kartini Centenary* and the 1987 Abendanon letters are impressive as to number of editions and translations of Kartini’s writings, and commentaries and studies on her life and thought. Nevertheless, there is a lingering sense of the Kartini studies as rather thin historically. Some writers stress her feminism; others concentrate on the personal. Successive editors have cut, abridged and arranged the letters to present a Kartini matching their chosen image. Agnes Louise Symmers, for instance, saw in Kartini a ‘modern girl in love’ and so omitted from her English text the letters showing Kartini as broker placing orders for Europeans with Jepara’s woodcarvers and arranging sales (see Kartini 1920: Introduction). Some presented her as singular, different, representing a complete break with Java’s past. Pramoedya Ananta Toer offended surviving members of her family by elaborating on Kartini’s plebeian origins and connections (see Kartini 1976: Introduction; also Pramoedya 1962).

This essay attempts to place Kartini in her historical context, that is, to view her as a member of her own social class and time. To do this, I shall introduce another early leader, Pangeran Aria Achmad Djajadiningrat, the *bupati* of Serang and later of Batavia. Why select Djajadiningrat? Why not rather choose another feminist leader or another pioneer in education, such as Ki Hadjar Dewantoro, to illuminate Kartini as an historical figure? I believe there are unique parallels to be drawn between Kartini and the Pangeran, which best serve to explain her unusual upbringing and historical significance.4

First, both were members of the *priyayi*, the hereditary governing class of Java, born to fathers who were about to be appointed *bupati* by the Netherlands East Indies colonial administration. They were contemporaries of a sort. Djajadiningrat was born in 1877, Kartini in 1879. They were born and raised, not in the heart of the Dutch colony, but in small towns, she in Mayong in north central Java, he in Pandeglang in west Java. Another similarity is that both Kartini and Djajadiningrat were children of families known as ‘progressive’. Male members held senior appointments in the Indonesian arm of the colonial civil service. They valued a western education, and they sought social connections with members of the colony’s Dutch élite. Kartini and Djajadiningrat were themselves the products of a western education. Kartini attended the primary school for

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3 An example of a study of a feminist leader other than Kartini by a western scholar is that of Cora Vreede-de Stuers, ‘Kartini en Dewi Sartica: Twee Indoneesische vrouwen over de achterstelling van de vrouw omstreeks 1900’ (Vreede-de Stuers 1980).

4 E. du Perron has also compared Kartini and Djajadiningrat in his article ‘Pangeran Aria Achmad Djajadiningrat: Herinneringen’ (du Perron 1959:322-326), but his comparison differs in that it is chiefly concerned with literary and intellectual points.
Europeans in Jepara; Djajadiningrat was one of the first Indonesians to complete the Dutch high school.

Continuing our comparison, both Kartini and Djajadiningrat left a body of writings in the Dutch language, a literary legacy that distinguishes them from many of their contemporaries. They numbered among their acquaintance Dutchmen who were members of the colonial civil service, visiting Ethici and intellectuals from Holland, and their wives. Both sought and cultivated such acquaintance. Both drew inspiration from Dutch friends and shared interests in improving the lot of the common people of Java. They informed themselves on such matters as the revival of indigenous handicrafts, the modern training of midwives, new methods of irrigation, and the like. Both saw poverty and need in Java, and looked for improvement of the people's condition through the western education of Java's bupati class and through cooperation with the Dutch.

While they formed real friendships with Dutch immigrants to the colony, both Kartini and Djajadiningrat experienced slights from the race-conscious and protested such ill-treatment in their writings. They earned public reputations in their lifetime. Kartini was regarded as highly unorthodox by the Javanese priyayi; Djajadiningrat acquired the reputation of a 'troublesome regent' among members of the Dutch civil service.

It is instructive to compare Djajadiningrat and Kartini also in those points where they differed. Most obviously do they contrast in lifespan. Kartini's life was cut short at twenty-five years in childbirth, whereas Djajadiningrat lived until his sixty-sixth year, dying in 1943. Another obvious difference is gender and its implications for the lives they lived. For Kartini, being born a female into a noble lineage in the nineteenth century meant a life of semi-seclusion, restrictions on travel and personal conduct, and subordination of ambition to considerations of family, female propriety and husband's honour. This same noble lineage propelled the male child into the world. For Djajadiningrat it meant to live a public life. He started his career in the lower reaches of the Indonesian arm of the colonial civil service before receiving an appointment as bupati of Serang. He sat on many government commissions of enquiry, was a member of the Volksraad, served on the Council of the Indies, and represented the Netherlands East Indies as a member of Holland's delegation to the League of Nations in Geneva.

Quite naturally, then, their literary work differs. The writings of both are autobiographical, but Djajadiningrat's is an account of his moral and intellectual formation, his life as a public man. His Memoirs, published in 1936 (Djajadiningrat 1936a and b), were written in his retirement, from the vantage point of thirty-seven years' experience in the public service. And so he was able to choose what to say and what to omit. Kartini's writings, on the other hand, include short essays intended for publication, but consist chiefly of private letters to Dutch acquaintances. They were
written as part of a life being lived. Publication of an initial selection occurred only seven years after her death.\textsuperscript{5}

Djadiningrat tells us of his \textit{Lehrjahre} in considerable detail, but there is not so much about his years as regent. The original manuscript of his memoirs has not yet been recovered, so it is not possible at this stage to determine how far he had to submit to his editor’s control or to political pressure. There is evidence, however, that his first text was nearly double the length of the book Kolff published.\textsuperscript{6} Unlike the Kartini editions, however, there is little variance between the Dutch- and the Indonesian-language versions of the memoirs. Again, unlike the Kartini \textit{oeuvre}, Djajadiningrat’s \textit{Herinneringen}, published simultaneously in the Indonesian as \textit{Kenang-Kenangan}, remains in single edition only, and there have not followed translations into English and other languages. Today, in the national life of Indonesia, Djajadiningrat is all but forgotten, and he has been the subject of few scholarly studies.

By contrast, Kartini’s letters have been translated in part into many languages and undergone numerous editions and reprintings. She is the subject of articles and books by authors of several nationalities; her life has been recreated in novel and cinema. She is remembered, is honoured as a national heroine, and her birthdate is marked for public celebration. She has been introduced into the nation’s mythology as a precursor of the nationalist revolution. Schools are founded in her name.

Why should this be so? Perhaps it is because Kartini, in comparison with Djajadiningrat, is a more attractive figure. There is the empathy with a life of struggle that Djajadiningrat’s seemingly self-complacent record of accomplishment cannot inspire. The Kartini letters are rich in evocative passages. And there is the poignancy of the early death, the life cut short when barely begun. In this latter light Kartini is infinitely the more malleable as material for the national pantheon.

But the starting-point of this essay was to view Kartini as an historical personage in an historical time. We can approach this problem by asking a simple question: why did her father send her to school? Other writers have lamented an inconsistency in the \textit{bupati} of Jepara, perceiving that he broke with the past in sending his daughter to school, then abruptly and perversely to withdraw her and obstruct her plans for further public education.

Sosroningrat did not commit himself to paper, so we can only guess at his motives. This brings us back to Djajadiningrat. For he discusses at length, in the early chapters of his memoirs, the history of his family and his father’s choices for his children’s education. I propose, therefore, to summarize some parts of the \textit{Herinneringen}.

In examining Djajadiningrat’s early years, we learn a great deal about

\textsuperscript{5} See Kartini 1987:XIV-XV for a list of editions and translations of Kartini’s letters.
\textsuperscript{6} Personal communication of mevrouw Madelon Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis. See also du Perron 1959:322.
the life of upper-class Indonesians of colonial Java from the *Tempo Doeloe* period. We are indebted to writers such as Rob Nieuwenhuys for information on those forming what he terms the ‘*andere wereld*’, the servants and housekeepers whose lives were inextricably bound up with the colonial Dutch. But the upper circles of indigenous society kept their intimate lives strictly apart from the Dutch, and it is to such representatives as Kartini and Djajadiningrat that we must turn for insight.

Djajadiningrat’s early formal education was Islamic and took place in a *pesantren*. The *pesantren* was open to all Muslims who could afford to send their sons to study Arabic and the Koran. It was not exclusive of the well-off peasantry; nor did it require connections to the old Banten aristocracy for admission. The *pesantren* were formed in villages around a *santri*, or learned scholar, far off from the seat of colonial power, where secular and government schools were concentrated, far off from Dutch standards of taste and ideas, and far off from colonial supervision.

For worldly reasons a *pesantren* education seems an odd choice for the son of a *bupati*. Under European colonial rule, however, there were only two routes to social prominence within the Indonesian community for the son of an old family. One of those two routes was fame as an Islamic scholar and teacher. And it was this social position that the young Djajadiningrat first coveted — a social success entirely independent of the colonial power and one not requiring riches and colonial connections to attain.

This *pesantren* training exposed Djajadiningrat to previously unsuspected characteristics of the religiously fervent among his fellow-countrymen. One was disregard of rank, carelessness towards the lineage of his father, the Raden Bagus Djajawinata, son of Raden Adipati Aria Natadiningrat, *bupati* of Pandeglang, and so on. The second was the judgement made by *pesantren* members of the Dutch as *setan* and the contempt expressed by them toward Indonesians who worked for them.

The *pesantren* as experienced by Djajadiningrat, then, denied the claims of his family to leadership and social consideration by virtue of their descent from the Banten royal house and their historical service to the Dutch. He was offended by the assault on his class. The older Djajadiningrat, looking back, saw the *pesantren* community as composed of troublemakers, people cultivating superstition and ignorance in the population as a means of cementing their own power, and as blind opponents of rural improvement of any kind. As Djajadiningrat tells it, he was deeply offended by the prevailing views on the *priyayi* class in the *pesantren*, and therefore willingly followed his father’s choice of career. This was the

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7 ‘*Andere wereld*’ is the term used by Rob Nieuwenhuys to encompass the household staff of a Dutch family on Java and lower-class Indonesians in general with whom a Dutch family might come into contact, such as travelling musicians. ‘*Tempo Doeloe*’ is the term used to denote a period of colonial life roughly covering the years 1870 to 1900. See Nieuwenhuys 1940/41, 1961, 1981, 1982.
second route to power open to the well-born son of a subjugated people: service to the colonial ruler.

There now followed a period of training in his uncle’s household in the kabupaten of Pandeglang. Djajadiningrat studied Javanese and Sundanese, dance, etiquette, and history. Differences in rank among the many members of the household were stressed and the rules of etiquette strictly enforced. The bupati, however, held strong views on the usefulness of a western education. He set up a little school at his own expense and required the sons of all his relatives to attend and study Dutch.

The expense proved too great and the sympathy with its ideals from the local Dutch too slight for the school to continue for long. Djajadiningrat was now placed in a series of Indies households, that is, households formed around a Dutch man and his part-Indonesian wife, in order to learn Dutch language and manners with a view to eventual acceptance into a school for Dutch children.

The acquisition of the Dutch language propelled Djajadiningrat, as an Indonesian man in the late nineteenth century, into a half-way world that was neither Indonesian nor Dutch. And fluency removed him physically from sharing a room and meals with the Sundanese clerk to sitting at table with his host family. This move brought with it a change in costume. By the time Djajadiningrat was taken to meet the director of the Sekolah Menak in Bandung, he was dressed in a western suit and accustomed to the western form of greeting involving shaking hands, with a layer of Indonesian courtesy whereby the socially inferior extended the hand first. On this occasion, the European director of the school refused the proffered hand and treated Djajadiningrat with contempt. Djajadiningrat remembers the unease his suit caused the Indonesian pupils.

Djajadiningrat turns the moral around in an anecdote of a visit paid to his uncle, the bupati of Serang, by Raden Panneh, who had been chief Indonesian legal officer for the colonial justice system in Batavia prior to his new appointment as patih of Tjilegon in 1885. For this, his first meeting with the bupati, Raden Panneh dressed as a Batavian, that is, in a costume signalling his links to both the Indonesian and the Dutch worlds. He wore western trousers, an Indonesian sarong that fell to the knees, and shoes. In making his entrance at the kapubaten, he came as a European. Walking with head high, and showing no formalized sign of embarrassment or deference, he handed his visiting card to a servant and asked that it be sent in to the regent. The regent returned the card with the message that he would only receive Raden Panneh in proper Javanese dress, sans shoes.

We do not know if Raden Panneh returned, humbled, in a Javanese kain that fell to the ankles and crept before the offended bupati to perform his sembah. Djajadiningrat concludes this instructive anecdote by telling us

8 Sekolah Menak (Indonesian) or hoofdenschool (Dutch) was a type of school founded for sons of the Indonesian aristocracy with the intention of training them for leadership positions in a modern colony. It admitted Indonesians only.
that Raden Panneh promoted the use of Malay as the means of communicating with the many different ethnic groups and the Eurasians in the Indies, and as the language of conversation for Javanese persons. Speaking Malay, they could converse without resort to such traditional expressions of politeness and subservience as physically lowering oneself, keeping the eyes down and using elaborate speech forms.

Not all Dutch people opposed the acceptance of the Dutch language and Dutch manners in the same way as the director of the Bandung school. Djajadiningrat's family persevered in its efforts to penetrate the caste and colour barriers of late nineteenth-century colonial Java. Through its connection with Dr. Snouck Hurgronje, Djajadiningrat was placed with a Dutch family in Batavia, the colony's capital, and entered a private school for Europeans.

This event brings us to the third of the anecdotes about dress and behaviour that I find so instructive in the *Herinneringen*. Djajadiningrat was admitted into a school catering for Dutch and Eurasian children, not under his personal name Achmad, but as Willem van Banten. We have here the dreadful irony of a colonial society that found the scion of an old and respectable Bantenese family socially acceptable to Dutch parents only under the disguise of an illegitimate, acknowledged son of a Dutch man and an Indonesian mistress. At least, that is the implication of the name: the Christian name in its Dutch form, and the western surname, not that of the purported father, but rather a surname formed on a geographical place name, concealing his identity.

This is the reality of a colonial society which historically had restricted the immigration of women from Europe, while permitting immigrant men to form liaisons with indigenous women. The child of such unions had European legal status if it was recognized officially by the father. If not, the child was Indonesian and sent to live in its mother's village, to be reared as an Indonesian in speech, name, dress, religion, habits, occupation and aspirations. The recognized child was given European names, and the father was required to provide it with a western education and upbringing designed to make the child Dutch in language, Christian in religion, and trained for a European occupation. The Eurasian boy had always been legally and socially restricted, but by Djajadiningrat's time he was resolutely kept from high office by the increased flow of migrants from Holland and by the substitution of European standards of taste, fashion and manners for the old Batavian norms.

Despite these trials, Djajadiningrat went on to complete his secondary education in the Dutch government high school, which accepted as pupils only children with European status and a few Indonesians of aristocratic families who were fluent in Dutch. Preparations for a grand tour of Europe to complete his education were interrupted by his father's sudden death. Immediately, Djajadiningrat's family and friends began a campaign among the Dutch to have him nominated to succeed his father as *bupati*. 
The right of succession is a major theme — almost an obsession — in the memoirs, and it was a principal object of Djajadiningrat's public life. *Priyayi* status historically depended on office. The right to titles, honorifics and emblems of rank depended on male family members receiving appointment to an administrative post at one or other of the royal courts and sultanates. The penetration of the Dutch into Java and their acquisition of territorial power in the eighteenth century disrupted these arrangements. The Javanese kingdom of Mataram was divided in four, and now the Dutch East India Company (VOC) appointed *bupatis* in the areas under its control, not primarily because of their descent, but because of their ability to supply produce at mutually agreed prices while keeping the peasantry quiet.

The nineteenth-century colonial state recognized the hereditary claims of the *priyayi* and formalized these in Article 69 of the government edict of 1867. Increasingly, however, colonial administrators of the Ethical school came to view the *priyayi* as an obsolete category, unfit for governing in a modern state, and as obstacles to progress of all kinds. Conceptions of the *priyayi* as a group of religious fanatics, remote, unknowable, and inimical to the ways of the modern, civilized world, also found their way into the colonial novel. So it was that the *priyayi* had to exert themselves to secure succession for young family members, and saw in western schooling another weapon in this campaign.

Djajadiningrat's Dutch schooling was used by Dutch friends in arguing the case of his right to succeed his father. He should show in the performance of his official duties whether members of the *priyayi* class were, in fact, capable of becoming modern bureaucrats. The governor-general was thereby induced to appoint the *patih* as acting regent until young Djajadiningrat had completed his apprenticeship as a clerk in the civil service.

We learn a great deal of the views of young *priyayi* on the Dutch and the Indies in the early years of this century from Djajadiningrat. Young Indonesians who were graduates of Dutch high schools coveted the jobs to which young Dutch men with the same educational qualifications were routinely appointed. The reality for the Javanese was appointment as a *magang*, a position without pay as a lowly clerk, requiring of its holder that he wear traditional dress, walk on bare feet, and take his seat humbly on the floor before his Dutch colleague, speaking in Malay as the language of servitors. Two years later, as regent, Djajadiningrat, wearing a European suit and shoes, was to shake hands with Dutchmen and to be invited to take his seat on a chair and to converse in Dutch.

With like-minded young men, Djajadiningrat joined the *Regentenbond*, a professional association of *bupatis*. It was at first an association formed to promote the rights of its members vis-à-vis the Dutch colonial admin-

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9 For a history of the *priyayi* see Sutherland 1979.
10 See, for example, the portrayal of the Javanese aristocracy in Louis Couperus's *The Hidden Force* (Couperus 1922).
administration. But it also became a vehicle for opposing the pressure to pay homage to the Susuhunan of Solo. The young members of the Regents' Association were not protesting about their social inferiority to the Dutch in order to defer to the descendant of Mataram's rulers.

Young bupatis argued their right of succession on two grounds. One was the privilege of family; as descendants of Java's historical ruling caste, they claimed to know the people and to be able to induce their obedience because of the intimate connection and their tradition of leadership. But they did not want a return to the past. Their second argument was the claim to be modern men, equipped by their western schooling to be able administrators, rather than feudal despots.

The objective of the bupatis was to secure jobs, Dutch jobs. They did not want a sharp break with the Dutch, because they based their claim to Dutch jobs in part on their Dutch schooling and their association with Dutch people and ideas. But to rule, they wanted the Dutch in a safe, far-off position. Djadjadiningrat's vision was of himself and like-minded colleagues ruling Java, while continuing their validating association with the Dutch through a Netherlands Commonwealth of Nations. So it was not a struggle for independence, but a struggle to enforce Article 69 of the government edict of 1867 that preoccupied Djadjadiningrat's thoughts. He did not perceive a threat from counter-claims of Indonesians from other regions of the Indies, nor from the Muslim religious, nor yet from the masses.

The threat Djadjadiningrat saw came principally from members of the Ethical group, many of whom perceived the priyayi as relics of a feudal past, as being anti-intellectual and as having unsavoury morals. The senior functionaries in the Dutch colonial service by 1900 were likely to have a European-born woman as wife, a woman who saw herself as her husband's equal, who was educated, who expected to play a public role in the colony's life, and who shared her husband's view on the need for uplifting the Javanese. In particular, she would abhor polygamy and child marriage, and view these twin evils as characteristic of priyayi families.

This was a very different type of woman from the Eurasian wife, herself part-Indonesian, born on Java, raised by an Indonesian mother and servants, speaking the local language better than she did Dutch, and imbued with Indonesian notions of decorum, which kept a respectable woman out of public view, as head of a household that might include children fathered by her husband on junior wives. In the VOC period such women had formed the majority of the colonial élite. A pattern was established by the succession of the Indian-born Francoise de Wit to the position of first lady of Dutch Asia following on her marriage to Governor-General Carel Reyniersz. in 1648. Thereafter, until well into the nineteenth century, the wives of governors-general and other senior officials were all born and bred in Asia, of mixed birth, if not themselves Indonesian, and with no direct knowledge of Holland. This pattern started to alter in the early years
of the nineteenth century, but even well-known reformers such as Governor-General J.C. Baud married into old Indies families that were racially very mixed, while the mid-century Merkus officially recognized a daughter by his Ambonese mistress.

First ladies in the twentieth century were Dutch, with no Asian background. They came out to Indonesia only for the duration of their husband's term of office there, which was but a short interlude in a career focused on Europe. In Indonesia they distanced themselves from Eurasians and cultivated a European mode of life. They attempted to create Dutch enclaves, far removed from the sphere of what they deemed pernicious native customs.

To validate their claims to office, Djadjadingrat and his colleagues had to prove their westernness, not in schooling alone, but also in their home life. In the respectable priyayi family, secondary wives had always been kept discreetly in the background, enjoying a status akin to that of a high-class servant. Often they were the daughters of village heads in the territories under the bupati's jurisdiction. Marriage as secondary wife to a bupati was regarded as an honour for the woman, and it tended to promote loyalty to the ruling house.

The chief wife, or consort, was the social equal of the bupati. She ran the household, appeared on ceremonial occasions, and was official mother to all her husband's children. It was she who must be brought forward if the visiting European was accompanied by his wife. Thus, she had to be sufficiently confident to appear in mixed European company, to be familiar with Dutch manners, and able to converse in Dutch on topics of interest to her Dutch company. In the second half of the nineteenth century, priyayi men envinced their felt need to groom their wives and daughters for these new social duties through advertisements for Dutch-speaking governesses placed in Java's newspapers.

In Djadjadingrat's case, the girl selected as his future bride was sent to the Ursuline convent in Batavia. There she was to learn the Dutch language and Dutch customs from European nuns, at the same time sheltered by the seclusion of the boarding school.

There was no boarding school for Dutch girls in the vicinity of Jepara, and Dutch governesses were hard to find and retain. The solution found by Kartini's father was to send his daughters to the local primary school for Europeans. He did so as part of their general upbringing, an upbringing designed to prepare them to be consorts of high Javanese officials who wished to move in élite Dutch circles. Kartini was not raised to be a wife to a Dutch man, but to a Javanese official. And therefore it was entirely consistent for Sosroningrat to withdraw her from further western schooling on completion of her primary education and to prepare her for marriage in the seclusion tradition demanded of high-born women. Within the kabupaten, she would learn how to run a household, to conform to Javanese
notions of propriety, and thus become the chief wife of a *bupati* and an ally in his search for high appointments in the colonial administration.

We do not know what Djajadiningrat’s wife made of her convent schooling, for he did not conceive his autobiography as a personal record. In Kartini’s case we know from her letters that the impact of primary school was enormous, that it created a yearning for personal freedom and a commitment to social causes unacceptable in Javanese circles at that time. School and intimate friendships with Dutch women encouraged in her an opposition to child marriage and polygamy, and made her want to extend western schooling to all *priyayi* girls to make them enlightened wives and mothers of the leaders of Java.

Such an impact could not have been foreseen by Sosroningrat. Nevertheless, while conforming to the custom of secluding his single daughters from Javanese society, he continued to conduct cautious experiments in introducing them to the world of the colonial Dutch. Hence, Kartini attended a ball in Semarang to mark the coronation of Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, but she was powerless to prevent Kardinah or herself from being given in marriage to men who were polygamous. The climax of Kartini’s careful training in both traditions was the marriage with the western-educated *bupati*, P.A. Djojodiningrat, arranged for her by Sosroningrat. Here was a man like Sosroningrat, Dutch-speaking, decorated for service to the Crown, interested in improving living conditions for the people of Rembang by modern means, and, also like Sosroningrat, a member of the Javanese *priyayi* class and a polygamist.

Kartini was as strongly imbued as Djajadiningrat or Djojodiningrat with notions of what was due to her class and rank. Like them, she no longer exacted all the traditional marks of deference from her juniors. She, too, saw the *priyayi* as uniquely fitted for improving the lot of Java’s peasantry. She, too, regarded a western education as an appropriate instrument, and urged that this be extended also to the women of her class, that they might exercise a positive influence on their husbands’ work and become enlightened mothers.11

Because Kartini was confined to the domestic sphere and saw and personally suffered the evils of polygamy, she made polygamy her chief target. Djajadiningrat, who lived a life outside the household, naturally had the broadest interests; he did not use his memoirs to discuss the vexing issue of polygamy.12 Kartini’s yearning for a life outside the *kabupaten*, freed from the traditional restrictions on *priyayi* women, perhaps diverts our attention from her ambition to promote her own class.

Djajadiningrat was perfectly clear as far as his class goals were concerned. The closing lines of his memoirs read:

11 A summary of Kartini’s ideas and her proposals for reform may be found in her ‘Geef den Javaan opvoeding!’, appended to the 4th impression of the Abendanon edition of her letters and translated as ‘Educate the Javanese!’ by Jean Taylor in *Indonesia* 17, 1974.
12 In his public life, Djajadiningrat did crusade against child marriage.
Jean Gelman Taylor

‘One wish remains, namely that when a future Indonesian retires from the Council of the Indies and writes his memoirs, he will be able to include in them a portrait of a Governor-General above the legend “under whose regime article 69 [of the government regulation on hereditary succession by regents] was fully implemented”’ (Djajadiningrat 1936b:427).

This was written in 1936. Nationalism, a world war, the Japanese occupation, revolution — these swept away the Dutch colonial regime and with it the priyayi as a hereditary class of administrators. Looking back, we know that Djajadiningrat was already irrelevant in his own time. The struggle he conducted for improving popular welfare under the leadership of a western-educated and western-connected priyayi class was negated by history.

Djajadiningrat and like-minded priyayi needed girls like Kartini for wives. The provision of a Dutch education for Javanese girls did not spring from the whim of indulgent parents; it was perceived by parents as a historical necessity in their attempt to preserve and extend their position of privilege in colonial society. Kartini was equally loyal to her class, but because her struggle was focused naturally on the position of women, she could reach beyond the selfish confines of class and touch other hearts, Javanese and non-Javanese alike. In this way it was possible for the product of the priyayi’s struggle for self-preservation to become a heroine for independent Indonesia. It was also possible for Kartini’s ambitions for girls of her own class still to be deemed fitting for all Indonesians in a period when, despite war and revolution, women’s emancipation is not yet fully realized. If today some Indonesian circles feel uncomfortable with Kartini and wish to reassess her role in the nation’s life, it is not as a creature of the Dutch or a usurper of the place of other women leaders that she is the problem. The real problem is the necessity of coming to terms with Kartini as a product of her time and class.

GLOSSARY OF INDONESIAN TERMS USED

Bupati: Head of an administrative district in Java lower than a province. The Dutch used the term ‘regent’ for this official.

Kabupaten: Administrative district headed by a bupati; residence of a bupati.

Kain: Batik cloth wrapped around waist and reaching to the feet; costume worn by both Javanese men and women.

Patih: Chief assistant to a bupati.

Pesantren: Islamic school in Java formed around a santri.

Priyayi: Javanese bureaucratic elite.

Santri: Islamic scholar.

Sembah: Traditional Javanese form of greeting by an inferior to a superior.

Susuhunan: Title of ruler of the Javanese kingdom of Solo.
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