

Article

Whose Kartini? Historiographical Shift and Ideological Contestation in Post-Independence Indonesia

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ABSTRACT ENGLISH:

This article argues that the intellectual legacy and historiography of Raden Ajeng Kartini have never been neutral. Her figure functions as a key site of ideological contestation, originating in the Dutch colonial era and continuing, particularly since Indonesia's post-independence period, up to the present day. During the New Order period (1966-1998), for instance, the state ideology of *Ibuisme* Negara (State *Ibuism*) portrayed Kartini with maternal characteristics, reducing her to a symbol of obedient domestic womanhood to reinforce the patriarchal state's authority. However, Kartini's image shifted dramatically post-*reformasi* (Reform Era). She has since been reconstructed as an anti-colonial icon and a rebellious intellectual, a shift which culminated in the contemporary era with her reimagining as a cosmopolitan Islamic intellectual. This transformation of her image demonstrates the highly dynamic interplay between gender, nationalism, and religious discourse in shaping post-independence Indonesian identity. Methodologically, this study employs a qualitative systematic literature review of 50 interdisciplinary sources spanning history, feminist theory, postcolonial studies, and media analysis. Through multi-tiered screening and citation chaining, the selection bridges foundational nationalist texts with contemporary critiques. The compiled data are analysed both thematically and chronologically to enable a comparison of her representation across different political eras and cultural media. This critical review concludes that Kartini's legacy and image continue to undergo significant historiographical contestation and shifts, moving from a maternal narrative toward contemporary interpretations that emphasize Kartini's intellectual autonomy.

Keywords: Kartini, Historiography, Gender, Contestation, State *Ibuisme*.

ABSTRACT INDONESIAN:

Artikel mengkaji narasi sejarah dan warisan pemikiran Raden Ajeng Kartini sebagai arena utama kontestasi ideologi, yang akarnya bisa dilacak sejak era kolonial Belanda dan masih terus berlanjut, khususnya sejak periode pasca-kemerdekaan Indonesia hingga hari ini. Selama periode Orde Baru (1966-1998), misalnya, ideologi negara tentang *Ibuisme* Negara menggambarkan Kartini dengan karakteristik keibuan. *Ibuisme* mereduksi Kartini sebagai simbol kepatuhan domestik perempuan demi memperkuat otoritas negara yang patriarkal. Namun secara perlahan, citra Kartini bergeser secara dramatis pasca-Reformasi (Era Reformasi). Sejak saat itu, imej Kartini direkonstruksi sebagai ikon antikolonial dan intelektual subversif, yang berpuncak pada era kontemporer dengan interpretasi dirinya sebagai intelektual Islam yang kosmopolitan. Transformasi citra ini menunjukkan interaksi yang sangat dinamis antara wacana gender, nasionalisme, dan agama dalam membentuk identitas Indonesia pasca-kemerdekaan. Secara metodologis, studi ini menerapkan tinjauan pustaka sistematis kualitatif *Systematic Literature Review* terhadap 50 sumber interdisipliner yang mencakup bidang sejarah, teori feminis, studi pascakolonial, dan analisis media. Melalui penyaringan bertingkat (multi-tiered screening) dan penelusuran sitasi (citation chaining), seleksi sumber ini menjembatani teks-teks nasionalis mendasar dengan kritik kontemporer. Data yang dihimpun kemudian dianalisis baik secara tematik maupun kronologis untuk memungkinkan perbandingan representasi dirinya di berbagai era politik dan media budaya yang berbeda. Tinjauan kritis ini menyimpulkan bahwa warisan dan citra Kartini terus mengalami kontestasi serta pergeseran historiografis yang signifikan, bergerak dari narasi keibuan menuju interpretasi kontemporer yang menekankan otonomi intelektual Kartini.

Kata Kunci: Kartini, Historiografi, Gender, Kontestasi, *Ibuisme*.

Introduction

Raden Ajeng Kartini (1879–1904) holds a prominent position in the academic and gender strata in Indonesia. She is an icon of gender equality whose legacy is perpetually debated. Shortly after her death in the early twentieth century, scholarly engagement with her letters became a central battleground where the complexities of gender, nationalism, and colonial modernity converged (Bijl 2017; Coté 2014). Therefore, as this study will demonstrate, the ‘Kartini’ known to the wider public is rarely a static or fixed historical entity. Rather, her image is perpetually shifting, continuously reinterpreted through various socio-political lenses over time. In this light, this study aims to map the contesting trends in the construction of Kartini's image, primarily from the second half of the 20th century up to the present day.

To understand the urgency of explaining this contestation, it is prominent to grasp the context of Kartini's life from the late 19th-century colonial Dutch East Indies. This era is historically defined by the implementation of the Ethical Policy (*Ethische Politiek*). Far from stemming from altruistic notion of benevolence or moral mission to export European civilization to the archipelago, this policy emerged from a Dutch sense ‘imperial responsibility’ —a strategic imperative to justify direct intervention in Indonesian society (Dutch East Indies) and strengthen administrative control (Coté 2014). In this context, Kartini's position, as the daughter of the Jepara Regent, was caught between the cultural expectations of the aristocratic Javanese *priyayi*—maintaining the *pingitan* (seclusion) tradition for young noble women—and the promises of the ‘Western Enlightenment.’

When her letters were first published in 1911 under the title *Door Duisternis tot Licht* (Out of Darkness, Comes Light), the text was immediately co-opted by Dutch Liberal elites. Figure such as H. Abendanon selectively edited Kartini's correspondence to align it with prevailing Dutch imperialist narrative, transforming the volume into a testament to the success of the Dutch civilizing mission. Yet, the Dutch colonial government could not have a single authoritative claim, as Javanese nationalists also adopted the text as a proto-feminist cornerstone for the burgeoning national ‘movement.’

The appropriation of Kartini's ‘enlightened’ narrative was not limited to the Dutch East Indies but extended far to the United States. There, Kartini's writings were initially translated and published in the prestigious journal *Atlantic Monthly* between 1919 and 1920. The journal's editors selectively framed her letters to align with discourses of “American exceptionalism” and the domestic “Americanisation movement”. By highlighting Kartini's desire to educate her people to become “better Javanese” rather than “pseudo-European”, Bijl continues, the journal implicitly reinforced a racialized hierarchy that suggested a Javanese woman could never truly be European due to her skin colour, thus silencing here explicit critique of colonial racism and paternalism (Bijl, 2020).

This pattern of appropriation continued when her letters were compiled into a book titled *Letters of a Javanese Princess* by publisher Alfred A. Knopf in 1964. To appeal to elite American readers, Knopf heavily commodified Kartini's writing as exotic *Books Deluxe* and deliberately attached the noble title “Princes” to the book, a striking irony that glared against Kartini's own written plea on the opening pages to “call me simply Kartini” (Bijl 2020). When

Eleanor Roosevelt penned the preface for the UNESCO edition of Kartini's letters, she also paternalistically framed Kartini's figure as a vehicle through which the "West" could guide "Eastern" nations—perceived as merely "arising from ancient traditions," toward modernity. Consequently, within the Euro-American colonial imagination, Kartini's narrative was weaponized to perpetuate racial inequality between the East and the West, neglecting the anti-racist and anti-feudalism critiques that permeated Kartini's letters (Bijl, 2020).

Thus, since the initial publication of her narrative, Kartini's figure has been a "floating signifier"—an ever-shifting image—where the meaning attributed to her is continually contested and reconstructed by various political interests (Robinson 2020). During the Old Order era, for example, Sukarno's government and novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer reconstructed Kartini as a populist, anti-colonial figure pioneering the nationalist movement and striving alongside the people (Rutherford 2020). However, a few decades after independence, particularly during the New Order era, Kartini's image changed. Under Suharto, Kartini's 'radical' image, which championed intellectual freedom, was reframed through the ideology of 'State *Ibuism*.' This ideology defined the primary role of women as mothers and caregivers whose status was secondary to the interests of the patriarchal state (Suryakusuma 1987; Curnow 2007). She became an icon of domestic courtesy and obedience (an ideal mother and wife conforming to the female *kodrat* or nature), thereby perpetuating the patriarchal state's status quo (Chin 2021, 91–92). Yet, since the close of the twentieth century, followed by the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998, a multi-polarization of voices and representations of Kartini has proliferated. Earlier academic works between 1986 and 1997, such as Jayawardena (2016) and Martyn (2005), further strengthened the focus on Kartini's fundamental role as an anti-colonial fighter and feminist nationalist. They aimed to deconstruct the state's maternalistic appropriation of Kartini's image. The contemporary era, especially in the last decade, has seen scholars reposition and "de-secularize" Kartini as a Muslim 'feminist' adept at framing Islam, nationalism, and nation-building (Yulius 2016; Firdaus et al., 2025; Robinson 2020).

Literature Review

This trend of interpreting Kartini shows the extensive nature of studies dedicated to her, ranging from analytical-critical reviews to literature driven by the ideological interests of political regimes, cultural hegemony, and feminist discourse. Nevertheless, efforts to chronologically map this historiographical evolution remain very limited. One significant publication exploring this appropriation phenomenon is the edited volume *Appropriating Kartini* by Bijl and Chin (2020). This book is a compilation of case studies spanning colonial, national, and transnational landscapes, providing rich contextualization on the history of appropriation. However, a significant gap remains to trace and map how contested Kartini's legacies are studied chronologically within Indonesian historiography, particularly within the critical transition period from the New Order to the Reform Era.

Method

This study conducts a qualitative systematic literature review (SLR) of 50 interdisciplinary sources, encompassing history, feminist theory, postcolonial studies, and media analysis. The selection of these sources was conducted through multi-tiered screening and citation chaining to connect fundamental nationalist works with contemporary critiques. The initial algorithmic retrieval and broad thematic categorization were facilitated by the *SciSpace* research platform. This screening began with targeted keyword searches across academic databases using terms such as "Kartini historiography," "gender contestation," and "State *Ibuism*" to build the initial corpus.

Following the generation of the initial publication list, the literature was manually filtered, validated and refined to ensure strict methodological rigor. Each entry was critically appraised, irrelevant or invalid suggested publication were systematically excluded from the final corpus. The resulting validated publications were then chronologically listed to trace the contestation of Kartini's legacies across three primary eras. This tracing of Kartini's image was executed by utilizing citation chaining as a core technique. Backward chaining was used to identify foundational, early-era primary sources (such as original letters or edited volumes) by examining the reference lists of secondary critiques, and forward chaining was used to trace the chronological evolution of contestation by identifying contemporary works that cite these foundational texts. Where direct access to primary sources was possible, they were prioritized; otherwise, the analysis relied on established secondary source interpretations. The data was analysed thematically and chronologically to enable a comparison of her representation across the New Order (1966–1998), the post-*reformasi* era (1998–2019), and the Contemporary Era (2020–present).

Results and Discussion

Constructing the maternal subject: State *Ibuism* and new order hegemony

Along with the coming of the New Order under Suharto's regime was the institutionalization of "State *Ibuism*" (*Negara Ibuisme*). This was confirmed by the scholarship covering the New Order documenting a systematic and pervasive effort to align Kartini's image with the state's paternalistic authority. State *Ibuism* was not merely a residual cultural preference but a calculated political apparatus that defined women primarily as mothers, supportive wives, and compliance subjects (Suryakusuma, 1987). Its primary structural function was to fill the ideological vacuum left by the violent suppression and subsequent demonization of radical women's movements like *Gerakan Wanita Indonesia* (*Gerwani*) following the events of 1965 (Martyn, 2005). Therefore, the emergence of state *ibuism* was intricately related to the polarized climate of the Cold War. Closely aligned with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), *Gerwani* actively engaged in international Cold War geopolitics.

Affiliated with the socialist Women's international Democratic Federation, *Gerwani* stationed a permanent representative in East Berlin, openly lauded the Soviet Union and China as paragons of gender equality, and actively participated in the anti-imperialist advocacy

(Martyn 2005). Consequently, during the 1965 anti-communist purge, the Suharto regime targeted *Gerwani* not only as a political adversary, but more importantly as a moral and sexual aberration. The state apparatus disseminated myth framing *Gerwani* activist as *anti-kartinis* militant, sexually uncontrollable, atheistic (*kafir*), and dangerously rebelling against the *kodrat wanita*. As the ‘cure’, therefore, the Suharto regime positioned Kartini as the “correct” and “noble” alternative hence systematically erasing Kartini’s agency from her letters and replacing her with a symbol of aristocratic refinement. By establishing a “new type of elite womanhood” rooted in Javanese *priyayi* (the hereditary nobility, aristocracy, or gentry class) compliance, the state successfully domesticated the Indonesian female citizen to ensure patriarchal and anti-communist stability (Chin 2021; Suryakusuma 1987; Wieringa 2003).

As Wieringa (1995) argues, the New Order systematically stripped Kartini of her radical, anti-feudal edge, re-imagined her as a compliant wife and mother to anchor the tenets of state *ibuisim*. The institutional evidence of this domesticating project resides in the 1974 Dharma Wanita Bylaws and Organizational Guidelines “Panca Dharma Wanita” (Five duties of Women). The state mandated that a woman’s social status was solely derived from her husband’s civil service rank. Here, stripped of her intellectual agency, Kartini was reframed as a silent nurturer whose primary duty was to maintain domestic harmony for the benefit of the state. Such a maternalistic image was performatively reinforced every April 21st, known as Kartini Day celebration. *Kebaya* (a traditional women’s garment worn throughout Indonesia) fashion shows and cooking contests were the main events stripping her letters of their radical anti-colonial and anti-feudal content. This reductionism had profound consequences, as it essentially taught generations of Indonesian women that their “emancipation” was limited to the domestic sphere. Eventually Kartini was reimagined as “mother of nation” (Curnow 2007).

Government official documents were not the only medium to spread and justified state *ibuisim*’s version of Kartini. It also reached to the popular or cultural lens of cinema, the 1982 biopic *R.A. Kartini*, directed by Sjumandjaja. This film serves as a critical benchmark of this era’s portrayal. Although there is a slight version of anti-colonial, Kartini was mainly depicted as a figure of “quiet strength” (*alus*), focusing heavily on her internal struggle but simultaneously emphasizing her resignation to Javanese etiquette (*unggah-ungguh*) and parental authority. The final phase of the film asserts Kartini’s acceptance of a polygamous marriage as a “sacrifice” for the nation, a concluding remark which perfectly captures the New Order’s vision of the non-confrontational, domesticated woman (Chusna et al., 2023).

Certainly, such a clean narrative was not without challenges, which largely comes from international observers. Among them was Kumarti Jayawardena’s “Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World”. In her Indonesian section, she notes these constraints that while Kartini was a proto nationalist, her agency was effectively “captured” by the aristocratic and colonial structures the New Order sought to emulate (Jayawardena 2016). This led to a ‘sanitized’ historiography where her anger and frustration were carefully edited out to maintain the facade of Javanese harmony. Much later, Taylor (1989), while joining Jayawardena in rejecting the state’s narrative of Kartini’s “sacrifice” for nations, attributes this choice to class strategy rather than merely patriarchal subjugation. She argues that

Kartini's marriage was actually a calculated, rational decision for class survival. It was not a submissive surrender to Javanese etiquette, but a deliberate move to secure the institutional power and funding necessary to strengthen her educational reforms, Taylor wrote. Ultimately, both Jayawardena and Taylor dismantle the New Order's myth of the compliant, self-sacrificing nationalist heroine.

Post-Reform Era (1998 - 2019): Pluralization and the archival turn

By the second half of 1998, the collapse of the New Order led to the dismantling of Suharto's authoritarian regime's "military-backed monopoly over the production and interpretation of the nation's history". This then created openings for divergent and critical perspectives that had long been stifled. Consequently, the monolithic doctrine of State *Ibuism*—which had domesticated Kartini into an apolitical, submissive icon of the ideal wife and mother—was aggressively challenged. During the intense 1998 street protests, Kartini was actively reclaimed by women activists to articulate demands for economic justice and political reform. Her legacy was radically re-equated with contemporary, working-class resistance figures, such as the murdered labour activist Marsinah, directly contradicting the New Order's elite, aristocratic framing (Robinson 2020).

This period witnessed a reclamation of Kartini as an anti-colonial national heroine by Umi (1998), alongside the timely republication of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's (2003) *Panggil Aku Kartini Saja*. Concurrently, a structural deconstruction of the state's historical manipulation appeared in the wide dissemination of Suryakusuma's (1987) seminal text, *State Ibuism*. Locher-Scholten (2000), Martyn (2005), Curnow (2007), Coté (2014) are among the well-known scholars on gender and nationalism in Indonesia. They collectively initiated a critical deconstruction of how both the Dutch colonial state and the Indonesian New Order selectively appropriated Kartini's image to justify their respective political interest.

Locher-Scholten (2000) contextualized Kartini during the period of late colonial administration and the implementation of the Ethical Policy. She argued that colonial officials and early compilers strategically highlighted Kartini's appreciation for Dutch culture to validate the state's paternalistic 'civilizing mission.' In doing so, they reframed her proto-feminist advocacy for education as a justification for colonial tutelage rather than an independent nationalist endeavour (Locher-Scholten, 2000). Martyn (2005) continued the investigation on Kartini's image in the context of post-independence Indonesia. She illustrated that the New Order deliberately utilized a 'sanitized' representation of Kartini as an ideological instrument to marginalize and erase the heritage of radical women's movements, most notably the *Gerakan Wanita Indonesia* (Gerwani) (Martyn 2005). By emphasizing the restrictive concept of *kodrat* —a New Order-imposed feminine nature anchored in domesticity—Curnow (2007) assert, the Suharto government reduced Kartini's political mobilization and weaponized her domestic image to mandate social stability and political passivity within organizations like Dharma Wanita

The definitive moment in challenging the layers of New Order and colonial intervention hence reclaiming her narrative came with the comprehensive translation efforts led by Joost Coté. The work of Coté (2014) in *Kartini: The Complete Writings 1898–1904*

restored the various editorial excisions and ideological omissions originally executed by Abendanon in 1911 (Coté 2014, v–vi). By providing an unexpurgated archive, Coté (2014) revealed that Kartini was not a submissive student of Western ‘enlightenment,’ but a sophisticated intellectual who offered sharp critiques of colonial hypocrisy and feudal structures. Thus, these international scholarly contributions have repositioned Kartini from a symbol of domestic compliance into a subversive historical actor whose true voice challenged the systems attempting to mute her legacy.

Following such a pursuit, began applying new theoretical frameworks to Kartini’s agency, moving beyond the simple binary category of “Western” versus “traditional.” Subsequently is a publication by Bijl (2017). He introduced the concept of ‘Legal Self-Fashioning’, to argue that Kartini’s correspondence with Dutch officials was a sophisticated platform to demand recognition within the colonial legal framework. Here, rather than a victim of her circumstances, Kartini was reimagined as a legal strategist who utilized the colonizer’s own tools—such as the Enlightenment language of human rights—to argue for Javanese sovereignty (Bijl 2017). This perspective suggests that Kartini’s act mimicking the West was not an act of surrender, instead a subversive tactic intended to dismantle the colonial hierarchy from within.

Almost two decades after the *Reformasi* Era, the shift of Kartini’s image compelled by the socio-political evolution in Indonesia was reflected in the popular cinematic 2017 biopic Kartini under Hanung Bramantyo direction. In stark contrast to Sjumandjaja’s 1982 iteration—which emphasized traditional Javanese containment, domestic gentleness, and passive resistance—Bramantyo’s adaptation reframed Kartini as physically dynamic and deeply collaborative. The 2017 film depicts her actively subverting the architectural confinement of Javanese *pingitan* (seclusion) tradition. By trading passive submissiveness for productivity and playfulness, the 2017 film consciously reshapes the national heroines as an energetic, rebellious millennial archetype who claim her own agency (Chusna et al., 2023).

Moreover, this model of reimagining also often highlights how Kartini’s early feminist was not exclusively an inspiration from Western values but was consciously fusing Javanese culture, Islamic roots and nationalism. This fusion was probably inspired by the famous Islamic scholar K. Saleh Darat as-Samarani. Unlike modern feminism, however, Kartini’s vision of empowerment and nation-building was fundamentally tied to morality and traditional family structures, emphasizing that a woman’s advancement could not be separated from her harmonious role as a wife and a mother preparing the next generation (Yulius, 2016).

The contemporary era (2020 – today): Polycentric modernity and digital backlash

As the decolonial perspective gain academic prominence, contemporary study of Kartini has transitioned beyond simple counter-state’s histories into a ‘polycentric’ phase. Scholars increasingly analyse her legacy through a global, horizontal gaze that bypasses traditional Eurocentric axis. While earlier literature assumed a top-down, vertical transfer of ideas from the Dutch metropole to the Javanese periphery, contemporary scholars utilize broader transnational frameworks to contextualize her intellectual horizon. The most direct evidence

of this trend is Bijl's seminal volume edited, *Appropriating Kartini: Colonial, National and Transnational Memories of Indonesian Icon*. Bijl and Chin (2020) argue, must be studied beyond national boundaries to capture the "transnational and transcultural memories" that circulate horizontally across Southeast Asia.

Scholars have welcomed Bijl and Chin's (2020) work warmly. Yulianto and Simatupang (2021), Hawkins (2022), for instance, argue that the book has successfully "decentred" both Dutch colonial and Javanese-centric hegemonies by showing that Kartini's memory now exists in a multidirectional, transnational space. This academic shift does not stand alone; it is theoretically supported by the comparative lens of transnational histories. Shehabuddin's (2022) *Sisters in the Mirror*, for instance, provides a vital macro-theoretical model for this shift despite mainly evaluating the history of global politics of Muslim women's activism rather than Kartini directly.

Crucially, while this conceptualization of a polycentric and horizontal "gaze" has theoretically celebrated today, the institutional and activist seeds of this intra-Asian alignment were already planted much earlier in the post-Reformasi period. A pioneering milestone occurred in the Manila, the Philippines, with the formal establishment of the Kartini Asia Network in May 2003. Nursyahbani Katjasungkana, a prominent Indonesian lawyer and human rights activist, and Dutch gender studies scholar Saskia E. Wieringa, alongside a steering committee of leading South and East Asian feminist scholars, co-founded the network to deliberately operationalize Kartini's legacy of resistance on a regional, cross-border scale. Following its establishment, the network held subsequent major conferences, such as the first in Dalian, China in 2004 and the second in Bali in 2008 (co-organized with the University of Dhaka). These conferences demonstrated the "sideways" looking and intra-Asian solidarity championed in contemporary theory that had already been structurally and programmatically initiated in activist-scholarly spaces nearly two decades prior (Doneys et al., 2022).

This theoretical shift in the literature is not a new construction out of abstract data, rather it deeply aligned with historical evidence from the early 20th-century print media climate. Historical records from the Malay-language newspaper *Retnodhoemilah* (1901) demonstrate that the broader Javanese public sphere during Kartini's lifetime was already deeply engaged with non-Western modernities, including Japanese military modernization and anti-colonial movements in the Arab world (Nagazumi 1969). By evaluating the literature against this polycentric context, modern scholars can deconstruct the "Western gift" narrative, demonstrating that Kartini's intellectual evolution was part of a decentralized, regional awakening that valued South-South exchange as a legitimate alternative to colonial tutelage.

Paradoxically, alongside these progressive academic gains, the contemporary digital landscape also exhibits a clear counter-current of "digital re-domestication". Utilizing critical discourse analysis, Ahlstrand and Maniam (2025) demonstrates that mainstream Indonesian online media, particularly during the second term of the Jokowi presidency, discursively dilutes Kartini's radical feminist legacy to align with dominant political and conservative ideologies. Kartini's credentials were filtered through a conservative lens that anchors women's public and professional advancements directly to the domestic responsibilities of

motherhood, marriage, and *kodrat* (biologically determined roles). Furthermore, the media discourse also intersects with neoliberal "self-help" and state-aligned Islamic narratives, shifting the burden of socio-economic development and pandemic recovery onto individual women while subtly reinforcing state authority and traditionalist family values (Ahlstrand and Maniam 2025).

The latest scholarship, such as by Chusna et al. (2023) and Husna and Adiyuka (2025), continues to benchmark these contests by analysing the 'memory wars' surrounding her historical representation. By comparing her changing archetypes across different media platforms, these studies conclude that the modern Kartini is a highly fractured, pluralized figure. Among this contestation, the persistent tension between the "Javanese-centric" Kartini and militant regional heroines like Cut Nyak Dhien from Aceh remains a major point of scholarly friction. Critics in the literature argue that the state's continued elevation of Kartini as the absolute national heroine marginalizes the history of more aggressive, armed resistance found in the outer islands, thereby reinforcing a "Central Javanese" hegemony over the national narrative "*#TrenSosial: Mengapa Kartini, bukan Cut Nyak Dien?*" (2015); for broader discussion, see Abubakar (2024). This ongoing contest ensures that Kartini's legacy is not a settled historical fact, but a living, breathing discourse used to continuously negotiate the boundaries of Indonesian gender and national identity.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that the historiography of Raden Ajeng Kartini is not a static record of the past but a perpetual site of ideological contestation. Her image has undergone significant transformations, shifting from the New Order's institutionalization of 'State *Ibuism*' which reduced her to a symbol of domestic obedience, to the post-Reformasi 'archival turn' that reclaimed her radical intellectualism and anti-colonial agency. In the contemporary era, this evolution has moved toward a 'polycentric modernity,' where her legacy is viewed through a transnational gaze, though this progress faces a counter-current of 'digital re-domestication' in conservative media. Ultimately, Kartini's legacy remains a living, breathing discourse that continues to serve as a primary site for negotiating the complexities of gender, nationalism, and Indonesian identity.

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