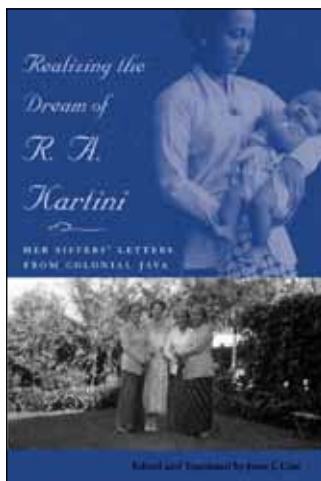


Joost J. Coté (editor and translator), *Realizing the dream of R.A. Kartini; Her sisters' letters from colonial Java*. Athens: Ohio University Press, Leiden: KITLV Press, 2008, xii + 397 pp. [Southeast Asian Series 114.] ISBN 0-89680-253-1, 978-0-89680-253-7. Price: EUR 29.50 (soft cover).



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Joost Coté, in this translated and edited work, presents the reader with the letters of Kartini's younger sisters: Roekmini, Kardinah, Kartinah, and Soemantri. These letters were dedicated, in particular, to members of the Abendanon family and to various other friends. The sisters wrote the letters since 1901, three years before Kartini's death. They stopped writing at different periods: Kartinah in 1919, Roekmini in 1921, Soemantri in 1936, and Kardinah in 1951.

Their letters were formerly collected by members of the Abendanon family but are currently in the collection of the KITLV in Leiden. The letters were handwritten in excellent Dutch although, according to Joost Coté (p. xi), the language was typically "Indisch". He edited and translated the letters into English but tried to present them as they were in order for the public to be able to hear the voices of these women who so far had been submerged by the voice of their very famous sister, to whom they often refer in their letters dedicated to Jacques Abendanon and Rosita Abendanon-Mandri.

The book is quite substantial in volume and contains notes on the letters and an introduction which explains the production context while simultaneously reviewing the letters. The four chapters, each containing letters written by one of Kartini's sisters, begins with an introduction which explains the uniqueness of the letters. Finally, at the end, there is a Javanese, Malay (Indonesian), and Dutch glossarium of words, which - in order to retain the mood of the period - have been retained by the translator in the English versions. The work contains complete annotations which will make it easier for present readers to understand the writings of Kartini's four younger sisters.

Kardinah and Soemantri were Kartini's siblings from the same mother, Ngasirah, who was a concubine whereas Roekmini and Kartinah were siblings born of the consort, R.A. Moeryam. They all lived in an urban cultural environment and were educated under the Dutch educational system by attending formal school, as well as through readings provided by their father. In terms of their points of view, Kartini can be considered as the precursor of modern ideas, Roekmini represents continuation and at the same time provides the transition to Soemantri and who can be considered as symbols of modernity. Kardinah, who lived until 1971 and who died at the age of 90, is the

only one who kept writing letters after Indonesia's independence. Therefore, the letters of Kartini's sisters, which relate the realization of Kartini's ideals, can be considered as the educational history of Indonesian women.

At a glance, it seems that Kartini and her sisters still retained the colonial spirit; even the school Kartini founded was considered a construction of the colonizers (p. 317). However, if we consider the context of that period, it is clear that they were living in an era when nationalism was on the rise throughout the world. They were feminists of their time: Roekmini, for example, had to face the patriarchal colonial system which refused her to become the manager of the village bank only because she was a woman. She also defended Dutch women in their fight for the right to vote in general elections. However, and more important, is that they are nationalists: they wanted the Javanese to progress in education, health, and entrepreneurship because they were Javanese themselves. However, they are not opposed to the West: in a letter to Jacques Abendanon, specifically, it is clear that they were involved in the *Oost en West* (1898) movement by supporting Soekartono.

It is, therefore, not surprising that their letters often discuss the progress made by the Indonesian people; not only in Java, but also in communities outside of Java (letter to Ety Wawo Runtu in the Minahasa). And finally, they not only helped to develop women but also men by means of the Jepara woodcarving industry.

It is interesting to discuss in general the writings of each sister. Roekmini wrote the most and her letters are long. She wrote to Rosita and Jacques Abendanon when they were still in Batavia until their return to the Netherlands. She also wrote to Ety Wawo Runtu who managed a school in the Minahasa. Initially, in her letters, Roekmini, addresses Rosita as "Mevrouw" (Madame). But after Kartini's death and Kardini's marriage she seemed to have lost a mother figure and in her following letters addresses Rosita as "Moedertje" (little mother). Of the sisters, Roekmini was most involved in social political activities and her letters most often give reports on the progress she achieved.

Although Kardinah kept up her correspondence the longest, she ceased to correspond with Rosita in 1924 and further wrote to Hilda de Booy-Boissevain and H.G. de Booy. Although weak and sickly when young, she lived the longest. In a letter to Hilda de Booy-Boissevain and H.G. de Booy dated 25 May 1951, she relates the loss of her husband but realized that at the age of 70 she would soon be reunited with him. Her early letters reflect the crisis of the three sisters who were initially very motivated by reformation. She was the youngest to be wed to a distant cousin. Her crisis increased when Kartini married two years later (p. 184). Evenso, her letters continue to reflect her activities in education (the women's school in Tegal). She and her husband even dared to criticize the Dutch colonial policy on education.

Kartinah wrote the least but disclosed humanitarian elements (p. 215). She was married at the age of 32, considered old at that time, because she nursed her ageing mother. "I was constantly so busy! Because here at home I am master and mistress of the house. Moeder has earned the rest that she

needs. [...]” (letter to Lien van den Berge-Kelder, 6 December 1912). She was also the first to cease correspondence because she married a Wedana and did not want to oppose her husband’s politics. Besides corresponding with Rosita Abendanon-Mandri, she also corresponded with a same-aged friend, Lien van den Berge-Kelder, who was a teacher who had worked in Jepara and then moved to Padang with her husband.

Soemantri most reflected the modern side in her letters which ceased in 1936. She was the youngest of the sisters and lived in a different era than the others, especially Kartini. In 1936 there were Indonesian women who had become doctors and lawyers. She was most involved in public activities and the modern world, as though she no longer had to fight against the tradition that had enslaved her sisters, because she felt liberated. Soemantri’s husband also wrote letters so that they were seen as the representatives of a new middle class in Indonesia which developed in the first decade of the twentieth century (p. 238).

To close, I quote Joost Coté (p. 49), “Certainly in this early period, before the major geographical, cultural, and discursive separations hinted at in this correspondence became more evident, much still linked Javanese and colonial reformer, Muslim and secular nationalist”.

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Keith Foulcher and Tony Day (eds), *Sastra Indonesia Modern: kritik postkolonial; Edisi revisi 'Clearing a space'*. With foreword by Manneke Budiman and translated by Koesalah Soebagyo Toer and Monique Soesman. Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia and KITLV-Jakarta, 2008, xxiii + 468 pp. [Original title: *Clearing a space: postcolonial readings of modern Indonesian literature*, Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002.] ISBN: 978-979-461-561-7. Price: IDR 85,000 (soft cover).



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This book wants to say that critical thinking in literary analysis can begin by questioning forms of utterances in modern Indonesian literature as we have understood it so far. This, as cited by some of the writers in this book, poses “a potential for ambiguity”, “repeated restlessness”, copying of “stripes”, “rejection of old assumptions”, and “a hybrid identity”. All of this is an inescapable process caused by the direct confrontation of different races and their views when presented