

Can't Catch a Break is a critique of neoliberal policies and would be a valuable addition to courses on criminal justice, social problems, inequality, and gender. It should also be of interest to both scholars and policy makers, in any branch of the "institutional circuit" represented.

Letters from Kartini. By Raden Ajeng Kartini. Translated by Joost Coté. Monash Asia Institute: Clayton, Victoria, Australia. 1992.

On Feminism and Nationalism. By Raden Ajeng Kartini. Translated by Joost Coté. Monash Asia Institute: Clayton, Victoria, Australia. 1995.

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For this last of our series, we read the letters of a young woman whose reflections on her life and country breathe hope of human renewal and growth. First partially published in 1911, Kartini's letters brought her undying fame, both at home and abroad.

Raden Ajeng Kartini was born in 1879, daughter by a secondary wife of Raden Mas Adipati Ario Sosroningrat, a noble who was regent of Japara on the north coast of Java, about 150 miles east of Batavia, the colonial capital of what was then the Dutch East Indies. In office from 1880, Kartini's father was one of 80 such native regents who held office through the Dutch colonial system, which in turn exercised effective power through Dutch assistant regents who "advised" the regents. Kartini's grandfather had given his sons relatively liberal educations, and her father was himself liberal on most matters. Kartini was therefore among the first Javanese women to receive training in a Dutch school, where she remained until she was 12, developing close relations with several Dutch playfellows. But long-standing tradition held that noble girls must be confined to the household compound from menarche to marriage. ("Raden ajeng" was simply the title of such an unmarried noble woman; Javanese did not use lineage names.) On this matter of confinement, Kartini's father proved at first inflexible. From 1891 to 1895, Kartini (along with a varying number of sisters) remained in strict confinement in the household compound. Once she turned 16, her father became more liberal and allowed his daughters occasional trips outside the home compound to properly protected sites. Moreover, in the years 1894–97, her father also allowed his daughters to have direct contact with the wife of his assistant resident (Kartini and her sisters went to the woman's house in a closed carriage). Through this welcoming woman,

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through visitors to her own household, and above all through her knowledge of Dutch and her voracious reading, Kartini came into extensive contact with culture beyond her father's compound and indeed beyond Java itself. As might be expected, her outside contacts were nearly all women, and, as it happened, many were active participants in the then rising Dutch feminist movement.

Passionate and curious, Kartini was an assiduous correspondent. She wrote to many people, but her most important interlocutor was probably Rosa Abendanon-Mandri, the Spanish wife of J. H. Abendanon. (Kartini had met Abendanon-Mandri in the summer of 1900, when the latter visited Japara with her husband, one of the leaders of the new Dutch "ethical policy"—a late and quixotic effort to move a highly exploitative colony in a more socially enlightened direction.) In her letters to Abendanon-Mandri and others, Kartini conducted a lengthy and emotional self-examination, canvassing every possible aspect of who she was and who she could become. Although the meaning and sometimes even the content of her letters continue to be controversial, the overall trend is clear. The earliest letters evince a direct if sometimes superficial embrace of what were then considered radical Western ideas about the place of women. The letters then move steadily if erratically toward a more comprehensive engagement with both Western and Indonesian culture, retaining a strongly feminist position but embedding that allegiance within a profound appraisal of cultural difference and of the dignity and worth of Javanese culture as Kartini knew it.

Even as she explored her consciousness and cultures in letters, Kartini also began writing for some of the local Dutch-language journals, gradually becoming a publicly visible figure in ways that her parents found uncomfortable. She agitated for women's education and petitioned to go herself to Holland for further education. (I use "Holland" throughout, that having been the name used for the Dutch homeland by most English translators of Kartini's works.) But although the petition was eventually allowed, she decided in January 1903 not to accept it, in part because J. H. Abendanon had argued strongly to her that going to Holland would make her so Dutch that her impact in the Indies would be lessened, because of the inevitable suspicion that would arise against her among conservatives.

In July 1903, Kartini was told by her father that she was to marry the resident of Rembang, Raden Adipati Djojo Adiningrat (a man with three living wives and six children, but who had recently lost his chief wife). She married in November of that year, and the letters became less frequent, for she was now the head of an important household, with many children to raise. (The chief wife [raden ayu] of a household raised all the children, biological motherhood irrespective.) On September 17, 1904, four days after delivering a baby boy, Kartini died of complications of childbirth. She was 25.

Kartini's story did not end with her death. In 1905, J. H. Abendanon retired from the Dutch civil service, returned to Holland, and became a full-time advocate for change in colonial policy. He collected a group of 106 of Kartini's letters to his wife and a few of her letters to others, abridged and edited them, and published the result in 1911 as *From Darkness to Light*, preceded by his own introduction about Kartini and her dreams of education for Javanese women. The book was immensely popular. An English translation of 78 of those letters appeared in 1920 under the title *Letters of a Javanese Princess*. (It was reissued in 1964 with a new preface and introduction.) Translations from the original Dutch into Javanese, Sundanese, and Malay appeared in the 1920s. Kartini became a visible symbol in Indonesian politics, and in the 1960s her birthday, April 21, became a national holiday. She has been celebrated by some as a radical feminist and by others as a conservative nationalist. She also has detractors, who decry what they regard as a Kartini cult that obscures other figures, possibly more important in Indonesian (or women's) history.

As noted earlier, Abendanon carefully selected the letters for publication and removed much material he called "improper." When the full letters were published in 1987, the removed material proved to have concerned personal and family affairs, which might have been a distraction to Abendanon's practical aim of furthering education for girls within an existing colonial system, but which was, however, central to understanding Kartini's very personal vision of social life. We therefore here read an English translation of the full Abendanon correspondence (*Letters from Kartini*). A useful contrast to these letters to a settled older woman are Kartini's letters to Estella ("Stella") Zeehandelaar, a young Dutch feminist she found through an advertisement for pen pals in a Dutch feminist newspaper. So we also read *On Feminism and Nationalism*, which translates the complete texts of the 14 letters to Zeehandelaar that appeared in abridged form in Abendanon's original collection in Dutch. Unfortunately Zeehandelaar never released 11 other letters of the 25 she told Abendanon she had received. The series ends in 1903 and thus the missing letters may well include those concerning Kartini's marriage, of which Zeehandelaar disapproved and which she assumed must have been unhappy. Among the letters that are included, the two longest gaps (seven months each) reflect crucial events that may have divided the young correspondents. The first gap includes Zeehandelaar's own marriage in May 1900, a fact almost unmentioned in Kartini's subsequent letters. The second covers Kartini's decision in January 1903 not to go to Holland, thus turning down an opportunity largely created by Zeehandelaar's efforts. (Kartini frankly acknowledges this "cowardly" and "unforgivable" delay.) In sum, we read two bodies of work: a small group of letters to Zeehandelaar canvassing the big issues broadly for a distant friend facing some of the same issues, and a large group of let-

ters to Abendanon-Mandri covering everyday life in extraordinary detail for an older woman outside the household who could give Kartini practical advice and quasi-maternal support, but from a position uninfluenced by immediate family considerations.

The Zeehandelaar correspondence is interesting particularly for its portrayal of the early Kartini: wide-eyed and rebellious, but oddly happy. The great issues of her life are only distant potentialities, not onerous, pressing realities:

Nothing can be done about it, one fine day it will happen, must happen, that I will follow along behind an unknown husband. Love is a fairytale in our Javanese world. How can husband and wife love each other if they only see each other for the first time when they are already well and truly bound in marriage? (*On Feminism*, p. 16)

Kartini sounds almost insouciant here, as if this cultural rule she finds so oppressive is distant and unreal. Yet even this was mere appearance. Discussions of novels in these same letters show that Kartini had by this time already moved beyond Paul and Victor Margueritte's popular but highly romanticized feminist novel *Femmes modernes* (*On Feminism*, p. 43), whose dutiful gallery of struggling women cannot redeem a plot in which a wealthy heroine predictably discovers the right man after narrowly escaping a succession of the wrong men. From the beginning Kartini has known that no such possibility exists for her, even though her own life has much in common with that of the Marguerittes' heroine: a wealthy and privileged French girl with a loving and much-loved (but quite paternalist) father, conventional mother and aunts, feminist friends and acquaintances in both her own and her mother's generation, and a surrounding gallery of predatory men. Within a year, Kartini had come to admire Marcel Prevost's much bleaker (but commercially very successful) *Femmes vierges* (*On Feminism*, p. 64), with its unsparing and somewhat one-sided portrayal of the internal contradictions and difficulties of the strong feminist program. (That both works had been translated almost immediately from French into Dutch shows the importance of feminist fiction—even by men—at this time.) Indeed, reality seized Kartini quickly. Within two years of the "fairytale" remark quoted above, she would be asked by her parents to convince her younger sister Kardinah—also a feminist—to accept an arranged marriage for the sake of family and tradition (*Letters from Kartini*, p. 128; one suspects that Kartini's parents involved her in order to break down her resistance to the eventuality of such a marriage for herself).

In the later Zeelandehaar letters, Kartini seems to be preparing Stella—and perhaps herself—for the marriage she dreads. Kartini's father and his precarious health loom larger; he would die in February 1905, but his

illnesses—like those of many in Kartini's family—seem strategic. He knows they will make her less willing to upset him. More pressing, too, is Kartini's practical problem of personal education and work, a problem by which, one suspects, she tried to hide from herself the larger and inevitable choice (as she saw it) between the tradition of arranged polygamous marriage and her own desire to work for her people in her own way. The final letter Zeehandelaar released—the letter in which Kartini confesses the refusal of the now authorized trip to Holland—closes on an ominous note: "It is just one year ago that I wrote you so joyously happy about the visit of Mr. van Kol [whom Stella had urged to help arrange the Holland visit]. And exactly a year later, you have to get this. Stella, love me a little still: out of loyalty for the great love you once had for me, I beg you. Love me just a little still." (*On Feminism*, p. 116). She fears the Stella who would indeed later write to van Kol's wife, another of Kartini's correspondents, "Kartini gave the lie to her whole being. . . . Someone such as she who is one of 'the chosen' may not give up her life's goal for the sake of one person." (Quoted in *On Feminism*, p. x; of course, Stella knew well that the one person for whom Kartini gave up her life's goal was not her husband, but her father.)

One sees in these letters, too, the way in which Zeehandelaar's Europe is quite as exotic for Kartini as Kartini's Java—explained with such humor and insight in the first few letters—is for Zeehandelaar. Europe is exotic modern, rather than exotic traditional, and it is perhaps partly for this reason that Kartini devours feminist fiction from the West. Yet by December 1900 she was worried about her own "lost soul" in that exotic Dutch world—her beloved brother Kartono, who had gone to Holland for education but wasted his time in "honors" and "celebrating" (not, Kartini noted happily, in drink, women, or gambling; *Letters*, p. 64). Kartini had steeled herself to marriage, if necessary, to give Kartono another chance by freeing up family resources ("My life for his life," as she puts it; *Letters*, p. 60). But there is no hint of this intense decision in her letter only a few weeks later to Zeehandelaar, in which she gives a witty and insightful spoof of the exoticism of a visiting German professor:

The professor imagined we were still half wild and discovered us to be just ordinary people; the only thing which was foreign was the color of our skin, our clothing, and the surroundings, and these gave a certain cachet to the ordinary. Do we not feel ourselves honoured if we see our own ideas reflected in the thoughts of others? And when the other is a stranger, someone of another race, from another part of the world, of different blood, colour, morals and customs, then this increases even more the fascination of the spiritual bond. I am convinced that not one quarter of the attention would have been paid to us if, instead of sarong and kabaya, we wore dresses; if,

instead of Javanese names we had Dutch names; and European blood rather than Javanese blood flowed through our veins. (*On Feminism*, pp. 63–64)

Yet even in the Zeehandelaar letters, filled as they are with the striking similarities of young women's positions in the two societies, one senses the enormous cultural distance evident in Kartini's complete immersion in her own culture: her love of the gamelan (*On Feminism*, p. 24), her respect for her own high position (and the obligations it entails, as in the long discussion of Javanese administrators in the letter of January 13, 1900), her immersion in Javanese craft culture, even the sheer intensity of her emotional life. To Zeehandelaar, it would ultimately seem that Kartini chose a merely personal allegiance over gender solidarity. After all, how could the woman who wrote "I will never, never be able to love" (*On Feminism*, p. 16) announce herself happy in an arranged marriage less than four years later? But the choice was not at all about personal allegiance. It was about the relation of self and culture, and it is her implicit analysis of that relation that makes Kartini a social theorist worthy of our last essay.

That analysis is found in the much richer and more serious letters to Rosa Abendanon-Mandri. (The *Letters of Kartini* collection includes not only the many letters from Kartini to Abendanon-Mandri, but also a few from her younger sisters Roekmini and Kardinah, letters that sometimes reveal Kartini's frame of mind in a way she herself does not see.) The 151 letters included are loosely organized around four great events: Kartini's first meeting with Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri in August 1900; the marriage of her younger sister Kardinah in January 1902; Kartini's attempt to go to Holland for education and her ultimate decision not to do so; and the negotiations culminating in her own marriage on November 8, 1903.

Three characteristics of the Abendanon letters should be understood. First, they are not formal analyses, laid out in a logical structure. They are a chronicle of discovery, not an exposition of abstractions. As such, they mix issues of daily life with profound spiritual, social, and philosophical questions. They are for the most part passionately analytic letters, combining intense introspection with an unsparing if at times curiously laconic analysis of family relations. (No one can read these letters without recognizing the overwhelming importance of the unsaid.) But they also contain news reports, extensive discussions of family illnesses (which play a pervasive role in family relations), and, as time goes by, an increasing amount of business information. (Kartini became a broker of traditional craft goods for Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandri and later for the craft organization Oost en West. She designed, measured, and commissioned all kinds of woodcarvings, which were made in workshops she helped organize as a charity.) It is this analysis of family life that Abendanon removed in his published edition

of 1911. Yet from a theoretical point of view, it is precisely the family analysis that establishes the centrality of personal and social emotion that is one of Kartini's most important insights as a social theorist. It is also here that Kartini shows exactly how the personal could be political, although she did not draw from that insight the same conclusion as did the later feminists who would establish that phrase as a slogan in the United States.

Second, the letters are unified by having a single recipient, Rosa Abendanon-Mandri, whose character we see only through the adoring eyes of the young letter writer herself, and whom she met personally only three times—twice at the beginning of the relationship (in Japara and in Batavia shortly thereafter) and once in early 1903 when J. H. Abendanon came to Japara to persuade Kartini not to go to Holland. The return letters are not present, so readers must either accept the analyses and speculations of the many Kartini scholars about Abendanon-Mandri or, more productively, try to imagine for themselves the woman who could merit the extravagant love that pervades Kartini's letters. (The few letters to Abendanon himself are more formal and restrained.) The reader, that is, finds him- or herself identified as the "you" of these letters. And the you of these letters is Kartini's mother—"dearest," "my angel," "*moedertje*," "kindest friend," "dearest *Moeke*." Kartini already has two mothers, of course: her biological mother Ngasirah ("*moeder*," in the translation), who bore Sosroningrat eight children in 20 years, and the (younger, but noble) female head of household, Raden Aju Moerjam ("ma" or "mother" in the translation) who bore Sosroningrat three children over six years and who plays a key role in Kartini's emotional and marital fortunes. Javanese kinship language routinely uses terms like mother, father, sister, and brother for whole classes of individuals that are generation- and gender-equivalent to the named nuclear family member, and the reader is thus presumed female and maternal and is trusted in an absolute way that is both very Javanese (because the trust is so utter and complete and even at times submissive) but also very unusual (because the reader is presumed to be an outsider, and hence can be trusted with doubts and fears and hopes that cannot be voiced to the actual mother[s]).

As this presumption of "reader as mother" suggests, the third crucial fact of these letters is that they and their world are utterly female. These are letters written by a woman, to a woman, from a household divided into men's and women's areas, about women's place in the social world. Kartini and her two near-age-mate sisters Roekmini and Kardinah are closest friends and allies. Their mothers (and elder sister) are their nearest interlocutors, their fiercest disciplinarians, their great examples of how—or how not—to behave, to think, to emote. Their external supporters are all women (mostly of superior status): wives of Dutch civil servants plus Kartini's young correspondent Stella Zeehandelaar. Men enter the sisters' lives only

as incidental figures. Their brothers appear only occasionally, as oppressors or supporters or incomprehending outsiders, and although the sisters follow their brothers' vagaries with avid emotion, the vagaries most often followed are education (denied to women) or advancement in the noble civil service class in which the brothers serve (but the sisters cannot). The husbands of the sisters' correspondents are often powerful Dutch men, but Kartini is for those distant men a pawn in their own games, a fact that she can see only dimly. The one exception to this separation of male and female is the intense relationship between Kartini and her father. It can be read in many ways, and one of the greatneses of the work is precisely this multivalence. That makes it all the more important that we see the principal male character of the book only through the eyes of the daughter whose life he determined and whom he outlived by only a few months.

In practical terms, the central issue of *Letters* is marriage. In Kartini's society the one formal relation to a male that is permitted for a noble woman is marriage. (She notes unflinchingly that the only other truly independent role for a woman is that of courtesan.) Not only is that marriage unfounded on affection or even acquaintance, it is also typically polygamous, and the young raden ajeng who becomes the new raden ayu will find herself head of household over older wives as well as the mother of their children. Men thus not only oppress women but also force them to oppress other women. Kardinah's marriage in January 1902 is, in Kartini's word, an execution. And of course the great puzzle of Kartini—canvassed in dozens of books and articles and conversations over the 150 years since her time—is why she herself chooses such an execution: "Roekmini will tell you everything, for me it has been forbidden. Our Gethsemane approaches. Moeder, pray for us" (*Letters*, p. 420).

But rather than lose herself in the intensity of the marriage question, Kartini turns that very intensity toward the analysis of all the particularities that place her in this intolerable position. Her gender is of course always central in her consciousness. But her love and sympathy for her father force her to see the ways her father is under Dutch orders, and her male relatives' experience teaches her the wanton irrationalities of bureaucratic colonialism. At the same time, she is well aware that the notion of women's freedom comes to her more from the West than from her own tradition, and she has open admiration for much that is modern and Western. So she rapidly confronts the ambiguities of the colonialism that oppresses her people even as it has brought her the notions of freedom she employs.

So too with her race and ethnicity, which were for her one thing, a combination of what would later be separated along the lines of culture and biology. For while on the one hand she can conceive of Javanese women so utterly Europeanized that they could marry Dutch men, her experience with Dutch visitors teaches her quickly that most Dutch see her race as charac-

terologically weak, devious, and labile. While her earlier letters treat "race" as meaningless and irrelevant, she moves quickly toward a deep consciousness of Javanese culture. Much of this consciousness derives from her gradual discovery—particularly through her work brokering between woodcarvers and their elite Dutch clients—that she and her family are from a tiny elite class and that the people of Java are not simply problems for her father to administrate or little people for him to protect and save, but also living humans with the same emotions and dreams as herself, but crushed by obligations and fatalities whose real origin she does not begin to understand. Her desperation also drives her towards deeper readings of religion: the strong Christianity of some of her correspondents, the Buddhism endemic throughout Java, and the Islam that is her official but largely (by her class) unpracticed religion. There, too, her progress is from an initially "everything is equal" position towards frank recognition that while different religions or races or classes or countries ought to be in some sense equal, one is oneself always from a particular religion and race and class and colonial status. And the intellectual recognition of equality pales before the difficulties of the practical reconciliation of such particular differences. She comes rapidly to an understanding of herself as truly Javanese. Indeed, this is the only possible interpretation of her decision not to go to Holland. She is choosing to remain what she "is." Among other things, she has discovered that she "is" her tradition: her very emotions and judgments and desires stem in large part from the position she occupies.

It is this discovery that underlies her rapid passage away from the simple feminism of the earliest letters. Like her first letters to Zeehandelaar, her early letters to Abendanon-Mandri evince a straightforward liberal understanding of the emancipation of women: women should have choice of marriage partners, women should be allowed in all occupations, women should be allowed the interactional liberties customary for men, and so on. But from the start, the letters are themselves written in a way unthinkable for individuals who truly live such freedoms. For such individuals, there would have been no real decision to make. Father's health and social reputation, Mother's sense of tradition, Kartini's own potential role as intercultural broker: all would pale before her necessity to live her own life as she saw fit.

That said, Kartini does take some things about women for granted. Like most Western feminists then and for a long time afterward, she believes that women are characterologically different from men in some essential fashion. She is from the beginning committed to motherhood and the management of emotional life as a peculiar province for women, despite her repeated statement that her bond with her father is the central emotional pillar of her life. But she also sees from the start that such attitudes do arise in social structure. She notes several times that boys become egotistical men

because they are taught to be so, in part by the female world itself. She quickly arrives at the point of pitying rather than despising them. This insight too is produced by family affection, for she is driven to this argument by Kartono's defalcations in Holland. And one imagines, although she nowhere states it, that she drew the comparable conclusion that women's commitments to motherhood and to emotional life derived from the same kinds of experiential sources. It is clear throughout the Abendanon letters that she suspects that the long-term price of women's having the liberty to prioritize personal values and rewards would eventually—not within individual women's life courses, but over the rapidly succeeding cohorts—create among women the self-centered subjectivity long thought to be peculiarly male. This was a dangerous conclusion for her, for she herself had been accused of that quality of self-centered subjectivity, an accusation that would continue long after her death. Indeed, she was one of her own first accusers, as these letters show again and again.

Although the reader learns many things from Kartini, the reader can also see many things that she does not. At various ceremonies and visits, for example, Kartini encounters the senior Dutch administrator Piet Sijthoff, Resident of Semarang. Sijthoff is plainly captivated by the young woman. But although Abendanon-Mandri must have read this attraction between the lines, Kartini herself has no clue of it and indeed no idea that the Western liberation of women will inevitably produce men who are attracted to intelligent and challenging women. Or again, she never allows herself to suspect that any of the family illnesses might be weapons in the emotional battles that rage between mother and mother, mothers and daughters, father and mothers. But the reader sees that the rigidities of Javanese etiquette force the family into a surrogate politics of health that is invisible to Kartini herself.

We have throughout this series encountered many different forms of thinking about society: ethnography (Donovan, Kenyatta, Srinivas, Fei); treatise (Saffioti, Mukerjee, Ghurye); epic (da Cunha, Sarmiento); fiction (Rizal, Ba); meditation (Thoreau); poetry/criticism (Senghor); history (Flores Galindo, Plaatje, Noer); textual analysis (Hussein). With Kartini, we have letters, as we had fictional letters in Bâ. Of these many genres in which theory can be written, treatises are the most familiar and are often thought to be the most prestigious. But treatises are more rewarding to write than to read. Herbert Spencer was a great and profoundly learned man. But his work is unreadable. By contrast, one can read *Letters of Kartini* straight through and immediately start over from the beginning. The mixture of story and insight, of passion and restraint, of fate and triumph are such that the work is instantly and repeatedly compelling.

But Kartini's correspondence is not simply attractive reading. For this presentation of life in letters—a form of presentation that after all provided

the original structure for the Western realist novel—can accomplish theoretical moves impossible in other forms. These moves involve the interweaving of the particularities that are Kartini's continual theme, especially as they relate over time: age (which changes steadily in one direction), biological sex (which changes never), ethnicity (which is ever changing in many directions), colonial status (which for these texts is entering a period of sudden change), class (which is similarly entering transition), and religion (which, as we saw in our reading of Deliar Noer, was about to see striking change in Indonesia). Because of their complex relations to the passage of time, there is no axiomatizing such a gallery of differences, no mathematical separation of their effects on life, no isolation of one from another. In that sense, no treatise can ever study their interaction. That interaction is visible only in the unfolding of a life, where it can be revealed to the reader by careful reflection. Kartini's letters are compelling precisely because they let us see the interaction of these different kinds of particularities in her stepwise creation of her richly examined life. They "generalize," but in a manner different from the treatise or the ethnography. They give every reader a chance to occupy the multiple positions of the family so carefully analyzed by this brilliant and loving daughter. There is no one meaning to the Kartini letters: there are, rather, a plethora of possible meanings from which readers can take new ways of imagining human life.

In a sense, this plethora is both the pride and the curse of liberal society, a society which prolongs the stage of possibility throughout the whole of life, leaving only death as the ultimate unchangeable achievement. To begin life not knowing how it is going to unfold is a privilege indeed, but it is also a burden. It is freedom, to be sure, but freedom only to make oneself in a world of sudden changes and transformations, and in a world where what was once meaningful and important may become trivialized and irrelevant, leaving millions of lives becalmed or depreciated. The price of such freedom has long been evident in the many "nervous" problems of liberal bourgeois society and in the many chemicals used to assuage them. So also came a fear of new experience that by the early twenty-first century had become evident in the vast structures liberal societies created for the protection of their young people from even the most minor negative experiences: bad grades in school, difficult relationships with peers, faintly hostile remarks in public settings, and so on.

But Kartini sees that there is no avoiding experience. One must live life, even if it is hopeless and difficult. Better to become an actual person than to dream in idle potential, and better to confront difficulty head-on than to avoid it altogether. Kartini made a reasoned decision to marry. We don't know why and perhaps, in the last analysis, neither did she. But she made it with full knowledge of all its possible consequences and with the deepest knowledge of all the social forces that had gone into making both her and

the situation she faced. Others may have seen her as a figure in a “larger” battle, as did Zeehandelaar. But in that sense it was Kartini who was the true liberal. For she lived her own life as she chose, in full knowledge of all the consequences.

Surely no writer has captured more perfectly the transitions of dying tradition. Kartini’s elder sister married unthinkingly under the old regime, yet came eventually to sympathize with her juniors. Her youngest sisters were protected by their elder siblings (who hid the knowledge of Kardinah’s sadness from them) and were to escape tradition almost completely. Only the three middle girls faced the full transition, and Kartini has captured not only their dilemma but also that of her relatively liberal parents, caught between their love for their children, their sense of tradition, their economic and political dependence on the Dutch, and their worries about public opinion, notoriety, and the censure of relatives. Like most historical crises—a pogrom, a war, a takeover, an expropriation—this one fell on a narrow generation, marking them with particular experiences and emotions they would carry to their graves.

In Kartini’s writings—as indeed in her life—are visible all the limitations and all the possibilities of both particularism and universality. As the youngest writer in our series, she sees those things with the unsparing clarity of those who are for the first time experiencing the change from possibility to actuality, from the omniscience and ambivalence and flux that characterize what is only potential to the immediacy and focus and precarious stability of being someone in particular, of becoming the stuff of actuality. Her death deprived us of a lifetime of insight into such moments. I cannot suggest what those insights might have been, for my own term is done, and I too, Barbara Celarent, must disappear. The duty and the pleasure of continuing our inquiry fall now to the reader.