



Representation of Women in the Film *Kartini* (2017): Mary Wollstonecraft's Liberal Feminism on the Issues of Education and Women's Autonomy

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses how Mary Wollstonecraft's liberal feminism is represented in the film *Kartini* (2017). It specifically examines the portrayal of educational equality, women's rationality, and women's autonomy within Javanese feudal culture. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, the research draws on dialogues, scenes, character expressions, and visual elements from *Kartini* (2017). Data were gathered through observation, note-taking, and documentation, and analysed through identification, classification, interpretation, and description, all grounded in Wollstonecraft's liberal feminist perspective. The findings show that *Kartini* (2017) portrays liberal feminism through three core elements. First, educational equality is highlighted by depicting women's struggles to access education within a restrictive feudal culture. Visuals such as books, journals, letters, seclusion rooms, and relevant dialogues illustrate the clash between modern education and Javanese tradition. Second, women's rationality emerges through *Kartini* and other women who critically challenge traditions such as seclusion, arranged marriage, and prescribed social roles. Third, women's autonomy appears in their efforts to assert control over their life choices amid familial and societal expectations. The film presents liberal feminism as an ongoing negotiation with, rather than a full rejection of, Javanese feudal values. Thus, *Kartini* (2017) frames education, rationality, and autonomy as key tools in women's fight against patriarchy and feudalism.

Keywords: women, film, issue of education, women's autonomy

Representasi Keperempuanan dalam Film *Kartini* (2017): Feminisme Liberal Mary Wollstonecraft dalam Isu Pendidikan dan Otonomi Perempuan

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis representasi feminisme liberal Mary Wollstonecraft dalam film *Kartini* (2017). Fokus penelitian ini meliputi representasi kesetaraan pendidikan, rasionalitas perempuan, dan otonomi perempuan dalam konteks budaya feodal Jawa. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode deskriptif kualitatif. Data berupa dialog, adegan, ekspresi tokoh, serta unsur visual dalam film, dikumpulkan melalui teknik simak-catat dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis melalui identifikasi, klasifikasi, interpretasi, dan deskripsi berdasarkan perspektif feminisme liberal Wollstonecraft. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa film *Kartini* (2017) merepresentasikan feminisme liberal melalui tiga kategori utama. Pertama, kesetaraan pendidikan direpresentasikan melalui perjuangan perempuan memperoleh akses pendidikan di tengah budaya feodal. Representasi ini dibangun melalui simbol visual seperti buku, jurnal, surat, ruang pingitan, dan dialog yang memperlihatkan konflik antara pendidikan modern dan budaya feodal Jawa. Kedua, rasionalitas perempuan ditampilkan melalui kemampuan *Kartini* dan tokoh perempuan lainnya dalam berpikir kritis terhadap tradisi pingitan, perijodohan, dan posisi perempuan dalam masyarakat. Ketiga, otonomi perempuan direpresentasikan melalui perjuangan perempuan mempertahankan kebebasan menentukan pilihan hidup di tengah kontrol keluarga dan sistem feodal. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa representasi feminisme liberal dalam film *Kartini* tidak ditampilkan sebagai penolakan total terhadap budaya Jawa feodal, melainkan melalui proses negosiasi antara gagasan kesetaraan perempuan dan nilai-nilai budaya yang hidup dalam masyarakat. Dengan demikian, film *Kartini* (2017) merepresentasikan pendidikan, rasionalitas, dan otonomi perempuan sebagai sarana perjuangan perempuan dalam menghadapi budaya patriarki dan feodalisme Jawa.

Kata kunci: keperempuanan, film, isu pendidikan, otonomi perempuan

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INTRODUCTION

Women in patriarchal social structures have historically been placed in subordinate positions, particularly through restricted access to education and decision-making spaces. In patriarchal societies, women are often positioned as passive subjects, while men are considered the primary actors in social life (Ngaté in Damayanti et al, 2022:85). This condition is also evident in the context of Javanese feudal society during the colonial period, when customary norms and aristocratic structures limited women's freedom to obtain education and express their opinions. In the Javanese feudal system, women tended to be positioned as subjects who must follow family rules and established social norms (Sugiharti et al, 2002:22-23). These restrictions resulted in women's low access to knowledge, narrow social mobility, and hindered ability to make decisions about their own lives.

In this situation of structural oppression, Raden Ajeng Kartini emerged as a historical figure who challenged these restrictions on women through her ideas about education and freedom of thought. Through her letters, Kartini asserted that education is an essential means for women to build awareness, rationality, and independence in determining their lives. Kartini's ideas about women's education were not only emancipatory but also became the foundation for the Indonesian women's movement in subsequent periods.

Kartini's intellectual struggles were later re-represented in the film *Kartini* (2017) directed by Hanung Bramantyo. This film does not merely present a biographical story of a national figure but also functions as a cultural text that reinterprets Kartini's thoughts through the ideological perspective and contemporary cinematic aesthetics. As a medium of representation, film has the ability to construct meaning through narrative, visual, and audio elements that can shape the audience's understanding of social reality. Therefore, *Kartini* can be read as a medium for representing women's emancipatory values

negotiated within the context of Indonesian culture and nationalism.

In this analytical context, Mary Wollstonecraft's liberal feminism becomes relevant as a theoretical framework. Wollstonecraft asserts that women's oppression stems from unequal access to education and the denial of women's rational capacity. Through her work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Wollstonecraft presents a sharp critique of the social structures that constrain women and calls for equal rights between men and women (Ilaa, 2021:212). She emphasizes that education is the primary foundation for the formation of women's autonomy and independence. The goal of this liberal feminism is to transform established social norms to create a more just society where men and women can develop equally (Irawan et al., 2025:48).

However, the application of Western liberal feminism to reading the Javanese feudal context cannot be done literally. Western liberalism, which emphasizes individualism and personal freedom, confronts Javanese culture, which upholds social hierarchy, family obedience, and collectivist values. The film *Kartini* (2017) exists within this tension: on one hand, it portrays Kartini as a rational subject fighting for autonomy; on the other, it continues to frame her within the norms of harmony and Javanese aristocratic structure. This tension demonstrates that the representation of women in film is never neutral but is saturated with ideological negotiations between modern values and local traditions. Thus, *Kartini* can be read not only as a representation of women's emancipation but also as an ideological text that mediates Western liberal feminist values within the space of Javanese feudal culture.

Several previous studies have examined the film *Kartini* (2017) from the perspectives of gender representation, patriarchy, and women's emancipation. However, most of these studies have not specifically linked such representations to the framework of Mary Wollstonecraft's liberal



feminism. There are still few studies that highlight the epistemological tension between Western liberal feminism and the Javanese feudal context in this film. This research not only identifies the representation of Mary Wollstonecraft's liberal feminism in *Kartini* (2017) but also demonstrates how Western liberal feminist ideas are negotiated with Javanese feudal culture. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by analysing the representation of women in *Kartini* (2017) through the perspective of Mary Wollstonecraft's liberal feminism, specifically in the issues of education and women's autonomy.

Based on this background, the research questions in this study are as follows: (1) How is the representation of women's educational equality portrayed and what is the role of cinematic strategies in it? (2) How is the representation of women's rationality portrayed and how does it reflect the idea of women's rationality according to Mary Wollstonecraft's liberal feminism? (3) How is the representation of women's struggle for autonomy portrayed and what are the ideological implications of this representation in the context of Javanese feudal culture?

Based on these research questions, the objectives of this study are: (1) To analyse the cinematic strategies used in the film *Kartini* (2017) to represent women's educational equality based on Mary Wollstonecraft's liberal feminism. (2) To reveal the construction of the representation of women's rationality in the film *Kartini* (2017) and its connection to Mary Wollstonecraft's liberal feminist thought. (3) To analyse the representation of women's struggle for autonomy in the film *Kartini* (2017) and its ideological implications in the discourse of Indonesian feminism, specifically in the context of Javanese feudal culture.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of liberal feminist studies, particularly regarding gender equality and women's education. Practically, the findings of this research can serve as a reference for filmmakers, educators, and women's activists in raising issues of gender equality and women's education through

media that are easily accessible to the wider public. This research uses Mary Wollstonecraft's liberal feminism as an analytical tool. Liberal feminism is a school of thought that originates from the liberal tradition, emphasising the importance of individual rights and freedoms (Irawan et al, 2025:46). This school of thought views that women's welfare can only be achieved when women obtain equal rights and opportunities with men in various aspects of life (Tong in Ahmadi, 2019:142).

Wollstonecraft is a key thinker in liberal feminism who firmly criticised gender injustice in the 18th century, particularly in education and women's civil rights. Wollstonecraft (1792) in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* states that women's oppression stems from a lack of access to education equal to that of men. According to Wollstonecraft (Wollstonecraft, 2025), women are not naturally inferior to men; rather, this inequality is the result of a social system that limits the development of women's intellect. She emphasises that education is the key for women to develop reason and achieve moral and intellectual independence (Mary Wollstonecraft, 1792/2025 edition:45). Wollstonecraft rejects the perspective that treats women as beings valued only for their charm and obedience, as women should be understood as rational creatures, not placed in a condition of dependency like perpetual childhood (Wollstonecraft, 2025).

To apply Wollstonecraft's theory operationally to the film *Kartini* (2017), this research uses three main indicators. First, educational equality is defined as the representation of women's access to learning, reading, writing, and opportunities to develop their abilities (Ilaa, 2021:213). Second, women's rationality in Wollstonecraft's perspective refers to women's capacity to think critically, deliberate, and not merely act due to emotional pressure or obedience to tradition (Iqbal, 2026:6). Third, women's autonomy refers to women's freedom to determine their own life choices, whether in education, work, or personal relationships such as marriage (Iqbal, 2026:6).

In addition to these three indicators, this research also uses the concept of representation as articulated by Stuart Hall. Hall (1997) states that representation is the process of producing meaning through language and signs within a cultural system. Film is positioned as an ideological text that has narrative structure, symbols, and visual language that can be read like literary works (Bordwell, 1985). Rengganis et al. (2025:5) state that film is a space of representation that is never neutral because various ideologies, including gender ideology, operate within it through narrative, characters, and visual strategies.

Previous research on *Kartini* (2017) and liberal feminism has been conducted by several scholars. Research by Rinjani et al. (2025) focuses on the critique of patriarchal education systems in the film *Enola Holmes* (2020) using Mary Wollstonecraft's liberal feminism. Research by Sulastri and Masri (2024) focuses on the representation of liberal feminism in the character of Lady Diana in the film *Spencer*. Research by Kesuma and Susilowati (2023) focuses on the characterisation of Belle and the liberal feminist values represented in the film *Beauty and The Beast* (2017). Research by Kango et al. (2025) focuses on liberal feminist values in the film *Suffragette*. Research by Fitriana (2025) focuses on the representation of liberal feminism in the film *Educating Rita*. Unlike previous studies that focus more on Western culture, this research specifically examines the film *Kartini* (2017) as a representation of Mary Wollstonecraft's liberal feminism in the context of Javanese feudal culture, highlighting the cinematic strategies used to represent educational equality, women's rationality, and women's autonomy.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research focuses on understanding the meaning and context contained in the film *Kartini* (2017) as a cultural text. According to Bogdan and Taylor in

Abdussamad (2021:30), qualitative research produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words and observable behaviour. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method to describe and interpret the representation of women's educational equality, women's rationality, and women's individual autonomy in the film *Kartini* (2017).

This research was conducted through several procedural stages. First, the preparation stage: the researcher determined the research focus, formulated the research questions, and reviewed various literature related to Mary Wollstonecraft's liberal feminist theory and the study of representation in film. Second, the data collection stage: the researcher watched the film *Kartini* repeatedly using the observation and note-taking technique. Dialogues, scenes, and situations that represent the values of educational equality, women's rationality, and women's autonomy were then recorded as research data. Third, the data analysis stage: the collected data were analysed through several stages (Imasa et al, 2025:112-118), namely: (a) preparation phase: determining the unit of analysis and initial codes based on liberal feminist indicators; (b) organising phase: reducing data and grouping data into categories; (c) reporting phase: presenting the results of the analysis in an interpretive narrative. Fourth, the validity and reliability stage: research validity was maintained through thoroughness in the data collection and analysis process and the use of a consistent theoretical framework; research reliability was conducted through intra-coding techniques. Fifth, the conclusion stage: the results of the analysis were compiled in the form of a narrative explaining the representation in the film. This research uses a qualitative research design with a content analysis approach. Content analysis is used to identify and interpret units in the form of dialogues, scenes, and situations that represent liberal feminist values in the film *Kartini* (2017). The data source in this research is the film *Kartini* (2017) directed by Hanung Bramantyo, produced by Legacy Pictures, with a duration of 122 minutes.



Data collection was carried out through repeated viewing and recording of data to ensure completeness and accuracy.

The main instrument in this research is the researcher themselves. In qualitative research, the researcher acts as an interpreter and the main instrument (Ahmadi, 2019:8). Data collection techniques in this research use the observation-note-taking and documentation methods (Sari, 2023:18; Waruwu, 2023:2901).

The data analysis technique uses content analysis with a qualitative descriptive approach through four stages: (1) identifying data units in the form of dialogues, scenes, and situations; (2) grouping data based on the EE, WR, and WA indicators; (3) interpreting the meaning of representations using Mary Wollstonecraft's liberal feminist perspective; (4) presenting the results of the analysis in an interpretive narrative.

RESULTS

1. Educational Equality

Data 1

Kartini gives books she received from Kangmas Sosrokartono to Roekmini and Kardinah.

Kartini: "Now. Read! This is a good book. Read it!"

Roekmini and Kardinah then read the books given by Kartini. (K2017/07/00:24:03 6 00:24:40/EE.1).

Data 2

The Jepara pendopo receives a visit from Dutch officials. Pak Atmo immediately asks Yu Ngasirah to prepare food and drinks.

RM. Sosroningrat: "How is your daughter, Mr. Baron?"

Mr. Baron: "She is studying in France, at a teacher training school. That has been her dream since she sat in school with your daughter. And Kartini, where does she study now?"

RM. Sosroningrat: (stammering) "She is still in seclusion."

Mr. Ovink-soer: "Seclusion? You confine your daughters at home?"

From the expressions shown, Mr. Ovink-soer appears incredulous that RM. Sosroningrat would do such a thing to his daughters. (K2017/08/00:26:24 6 00:26:55/EE.2).

Data 3

When RM. Sosroningrat gives the published writing of Kartini to Kartini, Roekmini, and Kardinah, the three of them are overjoyed. Unlike her children, from the expression shown, RA. Moeryam appears to strongly disapprove of Kartini's writing being published. (K2017/10/00:35:05 6 00:35:37/EE.4).

Data 4

When Kartini, Roekmini, and Kardinah are about to deliver food and their writings to Nyonya Ovink-soer, they are stopped and forbidden by the pendopo guard.

Kartini: "Open the gate, Sir."

Sir Atmo: "Wait! Close it!"

Kartini: "What is it, Sir?"

Sir Atmo: "Forgive me, Ndoro Ajeng. I have been ordered by Ndoro Slamet that Ndoro Ajeng may not leave the pendopo."

Kartini: "I want to deliver my writing, which will be published tomorrow, to Nyonya Ter Horst's house."

Sir Atmo: "Let me deliver it, Ndoro Ajeng."

However, in reality, Sir Atmo gives Kartini's writing to Slamet and Busono instead of to Nyonya Ter Horst.

Slamet: "Burn it! Don't let the aristocrats know that the daughter of the Sosroningrat family has become a wild girl with her thoughts."

Sir Atmo: "Yes, Sir." (K2017/11/00:36:45 6 00:38:44/EE.5)

Data 5

At the Jepara pendopo, a Quranic study session is held, led by a Kyai. Kartini listens intently to every word the Kyai says. After the session, the Kyai is about to leave but is stopped by Kartini.

Kartini: "Is there a verse in the Qur'an, Kyai, that explains knowledge?"

Kyai: “*Iqro’ bismirobbikal ladzii khalaq.* Read in the name of your Lord who created. That is the first verse that descended on earth, commanding Prophet Muhammad to read.”

Kartini: “Does that verse state that reading is only for men?”

Kyai: “All humans, men or women, are obligated to read.” (K2017/16/01:05:01 6 01:05:40/EE.9).

Data 6

Kangmas 1: “No matter what, if you give permission for Kartini to do such a thing, it is wrong.”

RM. Sosroningrat: “Why, is it because Kartini is a daughter?”

Dimas 1: “It’s not that, Kangmas. Your daughters have damaged tradition. Hiding behind the name ‘Het Klaverblad’ to slander the ancestors.”

RM. Sosroningrat: “Brother! Change will surely come. I believe that. Let us all introspect, be honest, and improve ourselves.”

Kangmas 2: “If you grant your daughter’s request for higher education, later they will ask to become regents. Then it will be imitated by the poor. If this happens, brother, the carpenter’s son could become king. It will be chaos!”

RM. Sosroningrat: “Change will surely come. The question is who will start it. If you brothers don’t want to start it, don’t use my children’s names as a shield. That is cowardice.”

Kangmas 2: “Now it is increasingly clear, very clear. That you have intentionally drawn the sword from its sheath.”

A. Moeryam, Yu Ngasirah, and Slamet can only listen to the debate from outside. No one dares to enter the room in such a situation. After the debate, the relatives immediately leave the Jepara pendopo. (K2017/22/01:17:40 6 01:20:03/EE.12).

2. Women’s Rationality

Data 1

Sosrokartono: “Wait! Sit down! Sit down! Do you want to leave the seclusion room or not?”

Kartini’s eyes widen, surprised and confused by her brother’s words, but she continues to listen.

Sosrokartono swings a key.

Sosrokartono: “Do you want to?! Go into my room. There is a door there to leave the seclusion room.”

He gives the key to Kartini.

Sosrokartono: “That’s it.”

Kartini: “Brother...”

Sosrokartono: “Don’t let your mind be imprisoned, Ni. I’ll wait for you in the Netherlands.”

After being given the key to a door, Kartini goes to Kangmas Sosrokartono’s room to find the door her brother mentioned. Inside that door, Kartini finds many books. Kartini reads all the Dutch-language books. The first book she reads is titled *Hilda Van Suylenburg* by Cecile Goekoop de Jong. The stories from these books inspire Kartini to pursue higher education. (K2017/04/00:11:42 6 00:17:09/WR.1).

Data 2

Set against the backdrop of Soelastris’s wedding, Kartini says: “There is nothing more valuable than freeing the mind. The body may be shackled, but the soul must fly as freely as possible. Once the soul is surrendered, we will never have it back. Ni will not surrender this soul to anyone. It must bear witness to Ni’s suffering and happiness in the future.” (K2017/05/00:17:34 6 00:18:33/WR.2).

Data 3

Roekmini: “I understand, Mbakyu. But this is the first time I’ve experienced bowing until it hurts like this, Mbakyu.”

Kartini: “What did you say? Hurts? Well, you will hurt continuously. Becoming a Raden Ayu means you have to serve a man who is not your own choice. Do you want that?!”

Kardinah: “Isn’t there any other choice, Mbakyu?”

Kartini: “There is none. But we can become a different kind of Raden Ayu.” (K2017/06/00:20:53 6 00:24:02/WR.3).



3. Women's Autonomy

Data 1

RM. Sosroningrat: "What is this?"

Busono: "Little Kartini wants to sleep in the servant's room, Dad."

Kartini: "Yu Ngasirah is not a servant! She is our Mom!"

RM. Sosroningrat approaches Kartini, leading her towards Yu Ngasirah.

Kartini: "Ni wants to sleep with Mom, Dad."

RM. Sosroningrat allows Kartini to sleep with her Mom.

RM. Sosroningrat: "Tell to Ni. This is the last time."

Yu Ngasirah: "Yes, Kanjeng Bupati." (K2017/01/00:03:21 6 00:04:15/WA.1).

Data 2

Yu Ngasirah: "Ni listen to Mom. Ni must call Mom 'Yu'. And Mom must call Ni 'Ngoro Ajeng'. Just like 'Ngoro Ajeng Kardinah'. That is the district rule, dear."

Kartini: "Ni doesn't want that, Mom. Ni wants to go back to Mayong."

Yu Ngasirah: "Ni wants to see Mom happy? This is the only way Mom knows. So that you and your siblings become respected. Just like Ngoro Ayu Moeryam."

Kartini: "No, Mom. Ni doesn't want to become a Raden Ayu."

Yu Ngasirah: "Ni doesn't want to go to school, Mom. Ni wants to learn from you."

Yu Ngasirah: "But Mom cannot read Dutch letters. Mom cannot, dear. Listen to Mom, Dear. Starting tomorrow, no more being lulled to sleep. You must sleep in the same room as Ngoro Ajeng Soelastri." Kartini's crying grows louder, audible even outside the room. Outside, RM. Sosroningrat remains still, listening to the conversation between Kartini and Yu Ngasirah. (K2017/02/00:05:22 6 00:07:32/WA.2).

Data 3

Naration:

Jepara in the late 1800s was led by a Regent from aristocratic lineage who married an aristocratic

woman called 'Raden Ayu'. The Regent's daughters, whether from an aristocratic wife or not, had to become a 'Raden Ayu'. When a woman was to become a Raden Ayu, she had to undergo seclusion. Confined in the house from her first menstruation. Waiting for an aristocratic man to propose. Becoming a first, second, or even third wife. (K2017/03/00:07:44 6 00:08:58/WA.3).

Data 4

Sir Atmo: "Sir! Where are you going, Mr. Mulyono?"

Mulyono: "Delivering this package."

Sir Atmo: "To whose house?"

Mulyono: "To Nyonya Ovink-soer's house."

Sir Atmo: "I will deliver it myself."

Servant: "Hey, that's not your business."

Sir Atmo: "Don't interfere!"

Pembantu: "What is wrong with you?"

Sir Atmo: "Come back. Return home."

On the other side, Kartini, Roekmini, and Kardinah watch from afar.

Kardinah: "This is bad!"

Roekmini: "It's all ruined."

Sir Atmo goes to deliver the package to Nyonya Ovink-soer's house.

Pak Atmo: "Excuse me... Excuse me... Forgive me, Mrs. There is a delivery from Raden Ajeng Kartini."

Ny. Ovink-soer: "Thank you. Wait a moment, I will return this container."

Pak Atmo: "Yes, Mrs."

While transferring the food to her own container, Nyonya Ovink-soer finds a piece of paper wrapped in a banana leaf inside the food. The letter reads: *Mother, please help me. I am being confined by my brother.*

On the other side, Mulyono is brought by Busono to see Slamet. Slamet searches Mulyono's clothes and finds a piece of paper hidden by Kartini. However, the letter turns out to be just a blank piece of paper. (K2017/12/00:38:45 6 00:41:33/WA.4).

Data 5.

Kartini: “What should I be grateful for from a man who already has three wives?”

RA. Moeryam: “It’s good enough that a regent proposed to you, not a lower official.”

Kartini: “I will still wait for the response to my proposal to the Netherlands.”

RA. Moeryam: “Your proposal may not be approved. It might even be rejected. This proposal must be answered within three days. You should...”

Kartini: “I don’t want to disappoint Dad. Forgive me, Mom.” (Kartini leaves RA. Moeryam and Slamet).

RA. Moeryam: “Kartini! Kartini!” (Standing up from her seat, wanting to stop Kartini).

At the same time, Slamet intervenes.

Slamet: “Wait, Mom. Forgive me. Allow me to speak with my sister.”

Slamet pulls Kartini and pushes her against the wall, slightly away from RA. Moeryam.

Slamet: “You can ask Dad to cancel that proposal, right?”

Kartini: “I don’t want to, Brother.”

RA. Moeryam: “Now it is all clear. You are only thinking of yourself.”

Then, RA. Moeryam roughly pulls and pushes Kartini into her room.

RA. Moeryam: “You stay here until the Regent of Rembang takes you away.”

RA. Moeryam locks Kartini’s door. She even asks Pak Atmo to cross wooden planks over Kartini’s window so Kartini cannot go anywhere.

Hearing the commotion, RM. Sosroningrat can do nothing; he can only be sad and lie weakly on his bed. On the other hand, Yu Ngasirah is devastated to hear the commotion. In the middle of her ironing, Yu Ngasirah sobs and breathes heavily hearing the sound of hammers used to close Kartini’s window with wooden planks. Kartini can do nothing. She is trapped again. In her room, Kartini can only cry. (K2017/23/01:22:43 6 01:26:50/WA.8).

Data 6

The day arrives for Kartini to give her answer regarding the proposal from the Regent of

Rembang. RM. Sosroningrat, RA. Moeryam, Slamet, and Busono gather to hear Kartini’s answer. On the other side, Roekmini listens from behind the wall.

RM. Sosroningrat: “So? Are you ready to bear the title of Raden Ayu?”

Kartini: “I... am able. I accept the proposal of Kanjeng Adipati Joyoadiningrat from Rembang. But, there are conditions.”

RA. Moeryam: “What else?!”

RM. Sosroningrat: “Enough, enough... Please continue.”

Kartini: “The first condition, I do not want to wash Kangmas Joyoadiningrat’s feet at the wedding. The second condition, I do not want to be burdened with complicated courtesies, and I want to be treated like an ordinary person.”

Hearing only part of Kartini’s conditions, everyone in the room is shocked, unable to believe Kartini dares to ask for such things as conditions.

Kartini: “The third condition...”

RA. Moeryam: “Enough, Ni! You are only thinking of yourself! I will not allow all your conditions to be fulfilled.”

Suddenly, the sound of a door opening is heard. Lastri enters the room, she comes with her child and nanny, surprising everyone inside.

RA. Moeryam: “Lastri?”

Lastri: “Ni is right, Mom...”

RA. Moeryam approaches Lastri. Lastri immediately cries and kneels at her mother’s feet.

Lastri: “My husband married again, Mother. Lastri understands, Mas Cokro loves his younger, smarter wife more. A more educated woman. Lastri cannot bear it, Mom. Kartini is right, Mom. Ni, continue. Continue. Your sister supports you.”

Hearing that, Roekmini can only cry silently behind the wall. RA. Moeryam’s gaze becomes empty.

Kartini: “The third condition, I require my future husband to help me establish a school for women and the poor.”

RM. Sosroningrat: “Is that all?”

Kartini: “One more, Dad. I want Yu Ngasirah to no longer live in the back house. But to live in the front house. And I want all Father’s sons and



daughters to call Yu Ngasirah ‘Mas Ajeng’ not ‘Yu’ anymore.”

Hearing this, Slamet, Busono, and RA. Moeryam bow their heads, as if feeling guilty. With a stammering voice, RM. Sosroningrat approves all the conditions proposed by Kartini.

RM. Sosroningrat: “Alright. If so, immediately write down those conditions. Then send them to the Regent of Rembang. Busono, call Atmo.”

Busono: “Yes, Dad.”

At the same time when Busono is about to leave, Slamet stops him.

Slamet: “Forgive me, Dad. Allow me to write Kartini’s letter. I am the first son, it is my duty as an older brother to protect my siblings.”

Behind the door, Roekmini cries with emotion, still silently. RM. Sosroningrat also smiles slightly, indicating that he is proud of Slamet’s words. (K2017/25/01:37:03 6 01:44:11/WA.10).

Data 7

Joyoadiningrat: “Before she died, she expressed that if she were to leave, she very much wanted our children to be raised by a mother with a strong heart and intelligence like Jeng Kartini. I sincerely accept your conditions. I will help guard your dreams. What do you say, Diajeng?”

Kartini, RM. Sosroningrat, RA. Moeryam, and Slamet are surprised by Joyoadiningrat’s answer, but they also feel relieved. Kartini thinks for a moment, then nods her head. (K2017/26/01:44:16 6 01:53:17/WA.11)

DISCUSSION

Representation of Women’s Educational Equality and Its Cinematic Strategies

Educational equality is one of the main principles in liberal feminism that emphasises women’s equal right with men to access education. According to Wollstonecraft (2025), education is not only understood as a means of acquiring knowledge but also as a foundation for developing rational capacity, building self-awareness, and achieving individual freedom. In the film *Kartini* (2017), the representation of educational equality

is portrayed through the struggle of Kartini and her sisters to gain access to learning amidst a feudal culture that restricts women. This representation is constructed through cinematic strategies such as visual symbols, argumentative dialogue, narrative conflict, and social contrasts.

First, visual symbols such as books, journals, letters, and published writings are used to represent education as a source of knowledge and freedom of thought. In the scene where Kartini gives books to Roekmini and Kardinah (K2017/07/EE.1), the book functions as a symbol of educational access for women. Kartini’s command, “Read! This is a good book. Read it!” shows an encouragement for women to acquire knowledge and develop their thinking abilities. The presence of Dutch-language books indicates access to the modern intellectual world. This symbol demonstrates that knowledge can be a means for women to escape the limitations of the seclusion room. This finding aligns with Wollstonecraft’s view that education is the key for women to develop reason and achieve moral independence. Research by Rinjani et al. (2025) also found that women who gain access to education tend to develop critical thinking skills and the courage to voice their opinions. However, unlike the individualistic context of Western education, this film places reading as a collective activity involving fellow women, showing a negotiation between liberal values and Javanese collectivist culture.

The visual symbol of Kartini’s published writing (K2017/10/EE.4) becomes a marker of women’s educational success in producing intellectual work. However, RA. Moeryam’s disapproving expression shows rejection of women’s intellectual recognition. This aligns with Wollstonecraft’s critique (1792/2025 edition:14) of societies that create artificial weakness in women, so that when women begin to show intellectual ability, it is considered a threat (Wollstonecraft, 2025 edition:16). Research by Sulastri & Masri (2024) also found that women who try to break free from traditional boundaries face symbolic and psychological violence.

Second, cinematic strategies such as contrastive dialogue and narrative conflict are used to show inequality in educational access. In the scene of the Dutch officials' visit to the pendopo (K2017/08/EE.2), the conversation between Baron and RM. Sosroningrat shows the difference in educational opportunities between the Baron's daughter, who could continue her education to France, and Kartini, who is in seclusion. Mr. Ovink-soer's surprised expression reinforces the critique of seclusion as a practice that hinders women's development. The most intense narrative conflict occurs in the scene of the seizure and burning of Kartini's writings (K2017/11/EE.5), showing that women are not only restricted in obtaining education but also in expressing their thoughts. Slamet's statement calling Kartini a "wild girl with her thoughts" shows that women who think critically are considered deviant from traditional norms. This finding aligns with Fitriana's research (2025) that education is the dominant theme in forming women's awareness and life changes, but in the Javanese feudal context, the struggle for education is always accompanied by structural conflict.

The ideological conflict reaches its peak in the family meeting scene (K2017/22/EE.12) opposing RM. Sosroningrat's decision to allow Kartini to study in the Netherlands. The concern that women's higher education would threaten the social order, even that "the carpenter's son could become king," shows the feudal culture's fear of changes in women's social position. Research by Kesuma & Susilowati (2023) found that in societies that highly uphold tradition, women often become the ones who defend traditional values. However, Kartini critiques this position by showing Roekmini's tears as a symbol of suffering caused by educational restrictions.

Third, the film also uses argumentative dialogue and normative legitimation to strengthen the representation of educational equality. In the religious study scene (K2017/16/EE.9), Kartini questions whether religious teachings only require men to read and seek knowledge. The Kyai's

answer that both men and women are obligated to read shows that religion does not differentiate educational rights based on gender. This finding shows that the film not only uses secular rational arguments but also religious legitimation to strengthen the idea of educational equality, aligning with Wollstonecraft's view (2025) that education should be directed to build human thought and dignity. However, in the Javanese context, this legitimation must also rely on respected local values.

Fourth, the film shows that educational restrictions do not only come from men but also from women who have internalised feudal values. In the scene where Roekmini begs permission from RA. Moeryam (K2017/21/EE.11), RA. Moeryam's refusal is based on the sacrifices and values that aristocratic women have upheld. This shows that the feudal system does not only work through male domination but also through the reproduction of patriarchal values by women themselves (Rengganis et al, 2025:20-22).

Overall, the film *Kartini* (2017) constructs education as an instrument of women's liberation from feudal limitations. Education is represented as a means that allows women to enter intellectual spaces, gain critical awareness, and negotiate their social position. These findings reinforce the research of Rinjani et al. (2025) and Fitriana (2025) that education is an important foundation for women to achieve gender justice and independence. However, unlike previous studies that focused on Western culture, this research specifically shows how women's education in *Kartini* is represented as a form of resistance against Javanese feudal culture through the system of seclusion, aristocratic family hierarchy, and patriarchal social rules.

Representation of Women's Rationality and Its Reflection of Rationality in the Film *Kartini* (2017)

Women's rationality in liberal feminism is understood as women's ability to think logically, critically, and independently. Wollstonecraft



(2025) rejects the assumption that women are naturally intellectually weaker. Women's limitations in critical thinking are more caused by minimal access to education and social restrictions. In the film *Kartini* (2017), women's rationality is represented through three stages: intellectual awareness, self-awareness, and collective awareness.

First, intellectual awareness emerges from access to knowledge. In the scene between Kartini and Sosrokartono (K2017/04/WR.1), Kartini shows rejection of the status of Raden Ayu and life in seclusion. Kartini's statement about Pandita Ramabai who "was not confined in a seclusion room" shows that Kartini begins to compare her condition with other women outside Javanese feudal culture. Sosrokartono encourages Kartini to realise that her mind does not have to be imprisoned. The statement "Don't let your mind be imprisoned" and the symbols of the key and the room full of books show that knowledge becomes the path for women to build rational awareness. This finding aligns with Wollstonecraft's view that education is the key for women to develop reason. Research by Rinjani et al. (2025) also found that rational education is an important means for women to fight the patriarchal system.

Second, self-awareness encourages women to understand their identity and freedom. In Kartini's monologue (K2017/05/WR.2), the statement "the body may be shackled, but the soul must fly as freely as possible" shows the awareness that women cannot be fully controlled by feudal culture as long as they still have freedom of thought. The visual contrast between the wedding atmosphere and Kartini's thoughts constructs the meaning that Kartini has rationally recognised the injustice in the social system. This finding aligns with Wollstonecraft's view that autonomy in liberal feminism is closely related to individual freedom as a subject who has the right to choose. Research by Kesuma & Susilowati (2023) also found that intelligent and independent women have the ability

to determine their own life choices, including rejecting social pressure.

Third, collective awareness encourages women to raise awareness among other women. In the scene where Kartini is with Roekmini and Kardinah (K2017/06/WR.3), Kartini explains that becoming a Raden Ayu means women must continually serve men who are not their own choice. The symbol of the door called "the boundary of the outside world" constructs the meaning that women live in a space bounded by tradition. Kartini's rejection of Javanese krama language and the address "Mbakyu" shows rejection of the Javanese feudal social hierarchy. This finding strengthens Wollstonecraft's argument that women not only have rational ability but also a moral responsibility to spread knowledge to fellow women. Fitriana's research (2025) found that education is the dominant theme in forming awareness. However, this research shows that in feudal culture, rational awareness develops through a collective process in which women raise each other's awareness.

Overall, women's rationality in *Kartini* is represented as a gradual process that begins with access to knowledge, self-awareness, and collective awareness. The film shows that even though women live in a restrictive feudal system, women still have the capacity for critical thinking. This aligns with Wollstonecraft's view that rejects the stereotype that women are naturally inferior. This research places women's rationality in the context of Javanese feudal culture that restricts freedom of thought through seclusion and aristocratic marriage, where rationality does not always appear as open resistance but more often as negotiation, reflection, and a gradual process of awareness.

Representation of the Struggle for Women's Autonomy and Its Implications in the Context of Javanese Feudal Culture

Women's autonomy in Mary Wollstonecraft's liberal feminism is understood as women's right to determine life choices, obtain individual

freedom, and make decisions about themselves free from social or patriarchal domination (Iqbal, 2026:6; Wollstonecraft, 2025). In the film *Kartini* (2017), women's autonomy is represented through three stages: (1) restrictions on autonomy, (2) women's struggle to maintain their will, and (3) negotiation of autonomy.

First, restrictions on autonomy through family control and feudal hierarchy begin from childhood. In the scene where Kartini is forced to sleep in the main house (K2017/01/WA.1), Kartini is forced to leave her mother because of the family's aristocratic social status. The command to call Yu Ngasirah with the address "Yu" shows an attempt to separate personal relationships based on social hierarchy. The use of the term "Regent's child" confirms that women's identity is more determined by family status than personal will. This finding aligns with research by Sulastri and Masri (2024) on the marginalisation and subordination of women in royal environments; however, this research shows that control begins from an early age through the regulation of domestic space.

Control over identity and personal relationships is reinforced in the scene where Kartini and Yu Ngasirah are in the room (K2017/02/WA.2). Kartini refuses to be called "Ndoro" and wants to maintain her identity as Yu Ngasirah's child but must confront district rules. This finding strengthens Wollstonecraft's argument that women are maintained in a condition of dependency and considered natural to be restricted. The seclusion and feudal arranged marriage system—the expository narration in the film (K2017/03/WA.3)—shows women's position as passive subjects who have no power to determine their lives. In the arranged marriage scene of Kardinah (K2017/17/WA.5), Sosroningrat's statement that "as an aristocrat, one cannot break a promise" shows family honour placed above women's freedom. Research by Kango et al. (2025) shows resistance to women's struggles, and this research shows that this resistance is cultural and religious because arranged marriage is considered part of ancestral tradition.

Second, despite facing restrictions, the film shows women's struggle to maintain their will. In the scene where Kartini hides a letter (K2017/12/WA.4), the letter becomes a symbol of the attempt to maintain freedom of communication. The scene of Kartini and her sisters sitting on the boundary wall constructs the visual meaning of women's position between confinement and the desire to escape feudal boundaries.

The struggle for autonomy is also evident in Kartini's rejection of the Regent of Rembang's proposal (K2017/23/WA.8) in order to continue her education. The closing of the window with wooden planks becomes a symbol of confinement when women try to maintain their choices. This finding strengthens Wollstonecraft's argument that women's autonomy is related to the right to choose, not to be chosen. Research by Sulastri & Masri (2024) also found symbolic violence against women who break away from traditional boundaries, and this research shows that this violence is carried out through family mechanisms and aristocratic hierarchy.

Third, autonomy can be achieved through negotiation as a compromise between individual will and the demands of feudal culture. In the scene where Kartini proposes marriage conditions (K2017/25/WA.10), Kartini accepts the proposal but puts forward several conditions: rejecting the tradition of washing the husband's feet, rejecting complicated courtesies, asking to be treated as an ordinary person, establishing a school, and changing Yu Ngasirah's status. The appearance of Lastri, who experiences polygamy, reinforces the truth of Kartini's thinking. The film builds the idea that women can become agents of change without fully leaving the cultural structure. Emancipation is represented as the result of negotiation between individual will and the boundaries of feudal culture. Rinjani et al.'s research (2025) shows open resistance, but this research shows that in Javanese feudal culture, the struggle for autonomy is more often conducted through negotiation and compromise from within the system.



The negotiation of autonomy is also seen in the scene of Kartini's meeting with Joyoadiningrat (K2017/26/WA.11), who accepts all the conditions and is willing to support Kartini's ideals. The folder containing Kartini's writings and photos becomes a symbol of recognition of her intellectual ability. However, this representation also shows a paradox of emancipation because women's freedom still depends on the approval of men who hold greater authority. Joyoadiningrat's support allows Kartini to establish a school, so the film shows that women's space for movement is still within the boundaries of the patriarchal structure.

Overall, the film *Kartini* (2017) represents women's autonomy as a dialectical process between restriction and struggle, between obedience and negotiation. The film does not present freedom through total rejection of feudal culture but through acceptance with the condition that ideals can be carried out. This aligns with Wollstonecraft's view that autonomy is related to the freedom to choose but also acknowledges that freedom must often be fought for through compromise. This research also shows that in the Javanese feudal context, the struggle for autonomy does not always take the form of open resistance but more often appears as negotiation, compromise, and efforts to create space for freedom within a limiting system. This finding is novel because it shows a more complex form of women's struggle in the context of Javanese feudal culture, where emancipation is not represented as total rejection of tradition but as an effort to create space for freedom amidst limitations.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research on the film *Kartini* (2017) directed by Hanung Bramantyo, it can be concluded that the film represents Mary Wollstonecraft's liberal feminism through three main categories: educational equality, women's rationality, and women's autonomy. These three categories demonstrate women's struggle to obtain the right to education, build critical awareness, and

maintain the freedom to determine their own lives amidst Javanese patriarchal feudal culture.

First, the representation of women's educational equality is portrayed through the struggle of Kartini and her sisters to gain access to education in a culture that restricts women. Education is represented as a means of liberating women to develop intellectual abilities. The representation is built through cinematic strategies such as visual symbols of books, journals, letters, seclusion rooms, closed gates, and dialogues that show the conflict between modern education and Javanese feudal culture. This finding answers the first research question.

Second, the representation of women's rationality is shown through the ability of Kartini and other female characters to think critically about the traditions of seclusion, arranged marriage, and women's position in feudal society. Rationality develops through three stages: intellectual awareness from access to knowledge, self-awareness as an individual who has the right to freedom of thought, and collective awareness to raise awareness among other women. This representation reflects Wollstonecraft's liberal feminist idea that women have the ability to think rationally equal to men. This finding answers the second research question.

Third, the representation of women's autonomy is portrayed through various forms of restrictions such as seclusion, arranged marriage, limitations on living space, and family control. However, it also shows efforts at negotiation through education, the courage to express opinions, and the struggle to defend rights. Autonomy is not represented as absolute freedom but as a process negotiated with social structures through three stages: restriction of autonomy, struggle to maintain will, and negotiation of autonomy. This representation shows criticism of Javanese feudal culture that limits women's freedom. This finding answers the third research question.

This research shows that the representation of liberal feminism in the film *Kartini* (2017) is not

presented as a total rejection of Javanese feudal culture but through a process of negotiation between the idea of women's equality and the social values that exist in Javanese feudal society. Women's struggle is carried out through education, the development of rationality, and efforts to expand self-autonomy without fully releasing family relationships and existing social structures. This finding is novel because it shows how Western liberal feminist ideas are represented and adapted to the context of Javanese feudal culture, so that women's struggle is not only understood as resistance to patriarchy but also as a process of negotiation with cultural values that limit women.

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