

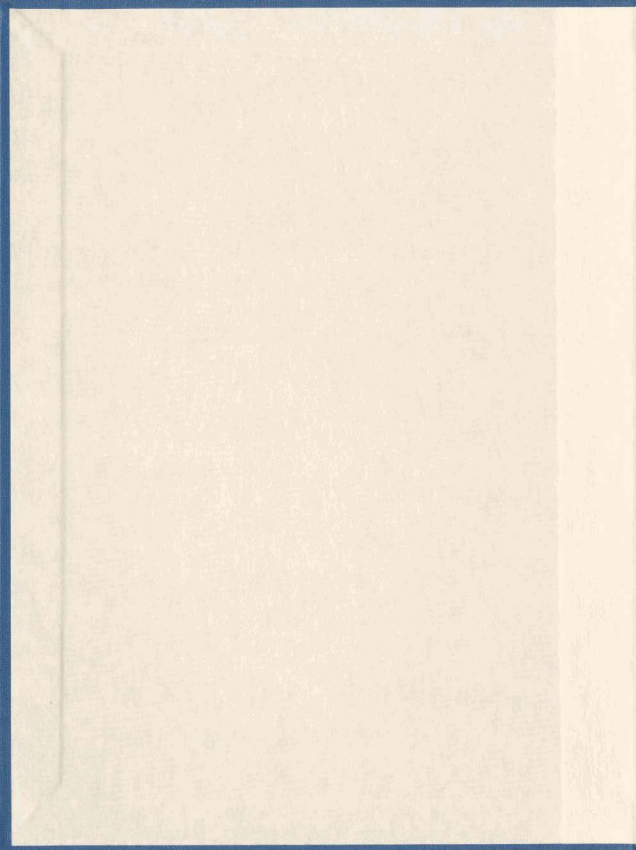
"WAYS OF KNOWING:"  
ISLAMIC CUSTOMS OF POLYGAMY, VEILING AND  
SECLUSION IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS  
OF HUDA SHAARAWI AND KARTINI

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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TITA MARLITA









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SECLUSION IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS OF  
HUDA SHAARAWI AND KARTINI**

**By**

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**A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
in Partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of  
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## ABSTRACT

This research was grounded in the writer's assumption that Islam--with its polygamy and veiling practice--and feminism were not compatible. Being a student of Women's Studies, who believes in feminism, and a Muslim woman, the writer experienced a conflict. In an attempt to resolve this conflict in a scholarly fashion, two personal writings by two Muslim feminists, which reflected their struggles against polygamy and veiling, by Kartini and Huda Shaarawi were selected for analysis. In this study, the writer analyzes how these two feminists approached the issues of polygamy and veiling, and their development as feminists. This study also aims to examine how Kartini's and Huda's writings reflected their struggles to define their own voices in both male-dominated and colonial culture.

This study employed textual analysis and a life history approach. As a theoretical framework in discussing the formation of Kartini's and Huda's feminism, and their approaches to issues of polygamy and veiling, Belenky *et al.*'s five epistemological categories of women's perspectives of knowing were utilized. These five categories are: silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge.

This study concluded that: (1) both Kartini and Huda contended that problems concerning polygamy and veiling lay in the interpretation of the Koran, not in Islam itself; (2) Kartini's and Huda's approaches to the issues of polygamy and veiling are contextually grounded; (3) the formation of Kartini's and Huda's feminism followed the five stages of women's ways knowing suggested by Belenky *et al.*; (4) both Kartini and Huda used autobiographical writings to assert woman's individuality and distinctiveness in male-dominated and colonial culture; (5) both Kartini and Huda refused to recognize their colonizers' language to define their identities.

Examining these two feminists' approaches to Islam in general, and to polygamy and veiling practices in particular, helped the writer to resolve her own conflict between feminism and Islam. The interpretation of the Koran becomes a key in understanding the position of women in Islam. Facts about women in the Koran had been selected and interpreted from the dominant androcentric position and discourse. The Koran became the established religious text in which male interests were vested. Hence, as Muslim feminists suggest, the interpretation of the Koranic verses dealing with women's rights and status should be based on the evaluation of Muslim women in the early years of Islam when the true Islam existed.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
Abstract .....	i
Acknowledgements .....	ii
Chapter I Introduction .....	1
Chapter II Theoretical Background and Literature Review .....	9
2.1 The Feminist Approach Toward the Issues of Seclusion, Veiling and polygamy .....	9
2.2 Women's Autobiography as a Theoretical Tool to Explore Women's Lives .....	27
2.3 About Language in Post-colonial Literary Theory .....	31
2.4 Methodology Statement .....	33
Chapter III Socio-cultural Background .....	43
3.1 The Status and Condition of Upper Class Women in Nineteenth-Century Egypt .....	43
3.2 Women and Islam in Nineteenth Century and Early Twentieth Century Egypt .....	46
3.3 Javanese <i>Priyayi</i> Under Colonial Rulers .....	50
3.4 <i>Priyayi</i> 's Etiquettes and Values .....	51
3.5 <i>Priyayi</i> 's Views of Women .....	54
3.6 Islam and Javanese Women .....	57
Chapter IV Biographical Background: Huda Shaarawi (1879-1947) .....	60
Chapter V Biographical Background: Kartini (1879-1904) .....	93

Chapter VI	Analysis of Kartini's and Huda Shaarawi's Personal Writings .....	124
6.1	Kartini's Approach Toward the Issue of Polygamy .....	124
6.2	Huda's Approach Toward the Issue of Polygamy and Veiling .....	134
6.3	Kartini and Huda Shaarawi as Writers .....	142
6.4	Kartini's and Huda Shaarawi's Relationship With Their Colonizers' Languages .....	158
Chapter VII	Conclusion .....	167
Bibliography	.....	176

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

My research is grounded in an assumption that Islam and feminism are incompatible. When I began this research I thought that it was impossible for someone to be a Muslim feminist without betraying her religion. My research was designed to help me explore and resolve this contradiction.

Like many other Muslim children, I received religious instruction and was taught how to read and memorize verses of the Holy Koran in Arabic (without knowing the meaning). If I wanted to know what the meaning was I usually read the Indonesian translation.

There are two important doctrines that must not be forgotten by every Muslim. First, the Holy Koran is the word of God that could not, should not, and will not be changed. Second, God is the Supreme Being who knows what is best for us.

These doctrines influenced my understanding of how Islam defines women's rights and status. For years I have been taught that Islam views men and women as spiritually equal before God. Islam also assigns separate roles for men and women. Islam designates women in the domestic sphere and men in the public sphere. Therefore, the Islam that I knew prescribed a woman's maternal and marital functions as divinely ordained roles. On the other hand, Islam requires a man to be the provider for his wife and children and thus the head of his household. The Islam I was taught also allowed men to be polygamous while requiring women to be monogamous.



I grew up with Islamic teachings that valued motherhood highly. I grew up observing how my mother gave all her respect and honor to my father who in return provided his family with material and spiritual needs. The Islam she received and handed down to her daughters decreed that a wife had to respect and obey her husband because he took charge of her and was the breadwinner. My mother has devoted herself to her children and her husband. I grew up watching every year on the *Idul Fitri* day (the day to end the thirty-day fasting in the Holy month) my mother formally asking my father's forgiveness for her misconduct or her disobedience (if any). I remember in my teen days how often I heard my mother say that a disobedient wife would never see God in His Kingdom.

I was also taught that the pious Muslim women were those who covered their bodies with veils and those who did not mingle with men. Not being too devout, my sisters and I did not wear the veil. However, I believed that those teachings were the words of God. I could not deny it. If in my teen years I had not yet worn the veil, it was not because I did not believe in it but because I was not ready to seclude myself. So a guilty feeling was always there in my heart even though I often observed religious duties such as prayers, fasting, giving charity and paying tax for the needy people. I would never feel as a real Muslim woman without wearing the veil. I determined some day I would wear the veil.

In later years as I grew older and was more exposed to different social realities, particularly the interaction between the two sexes, I began to see that polygamy, veiling,

and a woman's obedience and submissiveness to her husband, and a woman's confinement to the domestic sphere were disturbing beliefs and practices. With a strong belief that God knew what was best for us, I began to read books on women and Islam, which were mostly written by males. These male arguments about the issues had convinced me that all these "disturbing" practices were institutionalized to protect women.

One of the reasons given as to why men are allowed to have more than one wife was to prevent adultery and to give widows or single women protection. Women have to cover their bodies to prevent the desirous looks of men and thus prevent them from committing adultery which is an act against God. Women have to be obedient to their husbands because men take charge of their wives and men are the providers. Women's best roles are to be wives and mothers because biologically women are most fitted to these roles, and because they are the most honorable roles for women before God.

At the time these arguments seemed to satisfy my curiosity about the obligations and the rights of women in Islam. I had nothing against these arguments. They strengthened my belief that Islamic teachings grounded in the Koran and the Hadiths (the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad) should not be questioned or challenged. I believed that the Islam that I received preached justice for all. My Islam had become a single solitary rule that could not be challenged. Therefore, I did not pay much attention to the articles or works questioning the status of women in Islam written by Muslim women.

As far as I was concerned, to question the Koranic injunctions was to doubt the Koran as holy words: to doubt the Koran was to betray God and His religion.

Being a student in a Women's Studies Programme has enhanced my understanding of the various facts of inequalities between men and women under patriarchal society from a feminist perspective, and this began to affect the way I saw the Islamic teachings regulating women's rights and status. I was no longer satisfied with the explanations I had accepted years ago. I began to wonder what would happen to me if I married a polygamous man. Would I be willing to share my husband with other women? I certainly could not and would not do it. It was and is not fair. How could this unjust practice be legitimized by a religion which preached equality between sexes?

I also recognized the injustice in the practice of women's seclusion (including veiling and the harem) and in women's obligation to obey their husbands. If the veil meant to protect women from lustful and unlawful looks, why is it only for women instead of for both sexes, as Islam itself recognizes the capability of both sexes to experience sexual arousal? Why do women have to always obey and be submissive to their husbands just because their husbands are the providers? What if it is the women who are the providers? Should their husbands then be obedient to their wives?

I started to see the issues from a feminist perspective. I recognized that there were hierarchical and unequal relationships inherent in the practice of polygamy, veiling, women's seclusion, and women's obedience and submissiveness. However, this raised a problem for me as a Muslim woman since all these practices were and are encouraged

and legitimized by my religion. I began to experience a conflict within me. On one side, as a person who believes in feminism, which by all definitions is opposed to any forms of subordination and inequality, I reject all those practices. On the other side, I truly believe that my religion is right and the Koran is the holy words from God. My religion cannot be wrong. Is it possible that because God knows what is best for us He legitimizes these unjust practices? Or is there a better explanation that can satisfy me both as a woman who believes in feminism and a woman who believes in Islam?

These are the questions in which my research is grounded. I became interested in doing research that would explore how a Muslim feminist reconciles her feminism with her religion; in other words, how she approaches Islam. At the same time I was also interested in exploring women's writings through which I could see how patriarchal values embedded in its male-dominated culture define the status and roles of women. To satisfy both interests I decided to look into women's personal narratives written by Muslim feminists.

Personal narratives, which include diaries, journals, letters, autobiographies and memoirs, have been used in feminist research to analyze the role and meaning of gender in women's lives and in society (Personal Narrative Group, 1989). Personal narratives are also used to look into the dynamics of gender because "Women's personal narratives are... stories of how women negotiate their 'exceptional' gender status both in their daily lives and over the course of a lifetime" (Personal Narrative Group, 1989, p. 5).

I selected two Muslim writers: Kartini (1879-1904) and Huda Shaarawi (1879-1947). Kartini was from Indonesia, Huda Shaarawi from Egypt. Kartini wrote letters which have been compiled in a book entitled *Letters from Kartini: An Indonesian Feminist 1900-1904* while Huda Shaarawi wrote her own memoirs, *Harem Years: The Memoirs of An Egyptian Feminist (1879-1924)*. Both Kartini and Huda Sharaawi are renowned feminists. Kartini's struggles and efforts to improve Indonesian's women's condition made her one of the Indonesian heroines. Huda Shaarawi was a founder and a leader of the Egyptian Feminist Union. She was also awarded the highest state decoration by the Egyptian government for the same cause.

It was important for me to look into Kartini's personal writings because they might provide some insights into her struggle against the social and religious restrictions which circumvented her life and of her struggles to overcome the barriers. As an Indonesian Muslim, I was raised in a similar culture to Kartini's. I also found Huda Shaarawi's accounts useful as she was a Muslim feminist who was raised in a society in which people's ways of life were rigidly regulated by the Islamic teachings.

Kartini and Shaarawi were raised in different cultures with differing practices of Islam. Using these two feminists as sources would give me a more complete insight and picture of how particular women negotiate both feminism and their religion. Tomm (1989) explains that when a particular woman finds obstacles in her path in her domestic or public sphere, it can be assumed that other women encounter similar barriers. The way

she handles the barrier not only will show her own character and circumstance but will also reveal what is possible for other women from a similar class, or social situation.

The other reason I chose these particular writers is the fact that both writers, besides being Muslims who were subjected to Islamic practices such as polygamy and seclusion, were born to upper class families and colonized by foreign rulers as well. Being members of the upper class both were given privileges to have a western education and learn their colonizers' languages and cultures. Huda Shaarawi spoke and wrote French much more fluently than Arabic. Huda's memoirs were written in Arabic with the help of her secretary. The issue I want to explore then is how these two writers struggled to define their identities and find their own voices in their colonizer's language and culture.

Doing this kind of research will enhance my perception of the dynamic relationship between Islam and feminism. Examining how two Muslim feminists interacted with social and religious norms will provide me with a more comprehensive understanding about being a feminist and a Muslim. Simultaneously, the research on their personal writings will equip me with a better understanding of how culture and language have defined women writers.

This thesis will be divided into seven chapters. Chapter Two covers a review of the literature and of theories relevant to the problems raised in the introduction: how feminists interpret the Koranic revelations regarding veiling, polygamy, and women's seclusion, and how women's autobiography is used by feminists to explore women's

lives. The last two sections will deal with post-colonial theory, in particular as it relates to the importance of language as a key to power and culture, and a methodological statement. The section on methodological statement will include the theoretical framework on which discussions of how Huda and Kartini became feminists are based.

The context from which a life is narrated is very important in avoiding misinterpretation and misunderstanding. Therefore, it is significant to provide information about the socio-cultural backgrounds of these two writers. All information relevant to understanding how these Muslim feminists writers coped with cultural and social restrictions are included in Chapter Three.

Biographical background will be given in the two next chapters: Chapters Four and Five. Shaarawi and Kartini will be examined and analyzed separately. The descriptions and the analysis of their personal writings are given in Chapter Six which will focus on the issues around how these two writers approached polygamy, veiling, and women's seclusion, and how they struggled and coped with their colonizers' cultures.

In Chapter Seven, the conclusion, suggestions for dealing with the problems raised in the introduction will be offered, and the lessons I have learned from the two feminist Muslim writers in my own quest to reconcile feminism and Islam.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter will be divided into four sections. The first section discusses theories and arguments posed by feminists concerning the issues of polygamy, veiling, and women's seclusion. The discussion is crucial to my understanding of how the status and role of Muslim women are defined more by culture and society than by the original message of Islam brought by the Prophet Muhammad. The following sections will provide the theoretical background that will be applied in my analysis of how these two women writers are defined by culture and language, especially the language of their colonizers. The last section is my methodology statement. In this section I will describe the theoretical and methodological approach I have used in this research.

#### **2.1 The Feminist Approach Toward The Issue of Seclusion, Veiling, and Polygamy.**

Polygamy, veiling, and women's seclusion are probably the most controversial issues relating to the status and condition of women in Islam. Ideas dealing with these issues can be divided into two groups: (1) those, held mostly by men, which support Islam and these practices; (2) those, held mostly by women, rejecting these practices. This last group can be divided into two subgroups: those who totally reject Islam and those women who accept Islam but reject these practices. The discussion above will be



limited to those who support the practice and those, mostly Muslim feminists, who accept Islam but refuse such practices.

The practices of polygamy, veiling and women's seclusion are allowed in Islamic society because they are endorsed by the Koranic injunctions and the prophet's tradition.

Say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should not draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husband's sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O ye Believers! Turn ye all together towards Allah, that ye may attain bliss (24:31)<sup>1</sup>

If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two, three, or four; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or (a captive) that your right hands possess. That will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice. (4:3)

Those who advocate polygamy, veiling and women's seclusion base their arguments on the need to maintain a pious, just, and morally strong society. Do'i (1989), like many Muslim scholars, sees polygamy as a solution for a condition when a wife is found to be chronically ill, aged, insane, of unreformed bad behavior and disobedient (to her husband). Moreover, in the case of war when there are surplus women, polygamy is

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<sup>1</sup>Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Transl. & Comm. *The Holy Quran: Texts, Translation and Commentary*. Rev. Ed. (Brentwood: Amana Corporation, 1989)

encouraged because it will give unmarried women a chance to live respectably while being economically and socially secure. The last but most controversial condition for polygamy is when a strong man finds that he needs more than one wife to satisfy his natural desire. Thus, polygamy will prevent him from fornication and adultery which would lead to the moral degradation of society.

In the case of veiling (which overlaps with harem), those who favor this practice base their arguments on the biological difference between men and women. Although Islam requires both men and women to behave modestly, it is the women who are required to apply the dress code more strictly. This is because there is a difference between women looking at men and men looking at women. Maududi, a well-known Muslim scholar, as quoted in Do'i (1989, p. 17), said that a man

... is by nature aggressive. If a thing appeals to him, he is urged from within to acquire it. On the other hand, the woman's nature is one of inhibition and escape. Unless her nature is totally corrupted, she can never become so aggressive, bold, and fearless, as to make the first advances towards the male who has attracted her. In view of this distinction the Legislator (the Prophet) does not regard a woman's looking at other men to be as harmful as a man's looking at other women.

Based on this observation, a woman who let herself be unveiled and seen by men is consequently responsible for men's aggressiveness. It is important then for women to protect themselves by wearing veiling and hiding their beauty from the male gaze to prevent illicit sexual encounters.

Maududi even asserted that women have to be secluded in the four walls of the female compartment of the house (harem) which segregated them from all men except their closest male relatives (Khan, 1982). Maududi, as quoted in Khan (1982), suggested that woman is by nature a "tragic being" because her body is equipped with sexual functions allowing her to have menstruation, pregnancy, child suckling and rearing. Because of her "tragic being" she is no longer able to perform any other social activities except those of procreation and domesticity. Therefore, bodily and mentally woman is fitted into the domestic roles, motherhood and wifehood, while men can undertake the outdoor activities. Maududi writes, as quoted in Khan (1982, p. 23) that "A good (*saleh*) civilization is one which accepts this dispensation of Nature as it is."

Maududi adds that every attempt to promote equality between men and women in social, cultural responsibilities and tasks will ruin the natural functions of women. This eventually leads to the destruction of humanity itself. Do'i (1989) reaffirms that "It serves society's best interests if sex roles are assigned in accordance with natural aptitude and characteristics, and this is precisely what Islam does" (p. 3). In addition, he asserts that to procreate and to rear children are the roles assigned to women by Islam.

Another group of mostly Muslim feminists, reject these practices. These Muslim feminists, whose main objective is to struggle against the systemic oppression of women by a male-defined and male-dominated order, view polygamy, veiling, and women's seclusion as the extreme forms of patriarchal oppression. The patriarchal and feudalistic nature of Islamic societies are conducive to such practices by which women can be

controlled. Patriarchy itself in its wide sense is the systemic social, sexual, cultural and political oppression of women (Bruce, 1993). In its most literal meaning patriarchy may also refer to a traditional family or kinship group in which male members controlled women and children (Rowbotham, 1973).

Although the patriarchal elements of those Islamic traditions are undoubtedly recognized by Muslim feminists, a question remains whether Islam in its essential form is a patriarchal ideology (al-Hibri, 1982). Responses to this question can be divided into two opposite groups. There are some who believe that Islam is a variation of patriarchal ideology, and others who argue that Islam as the word of God transcends all ideologies including patriarchy (al-Hibri, 1982).

Many feminist studies, however, show that Islam basically has an egalitarian message and therefore is not sexist. Feminists such as Al-Hibri, "A Study of Islamic Herstory: Or How Did We Ever Get Into This Mess?" (1982); Hussain, *Muslim Women* (1984), Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991); Saadawi (1982), "Women and Islam"; and Ahmed (1992), *Women and Gender in Islam*, contend that only after the death of the Prophet Muhammad did patriarchy, once destroyed by Islam, coopt Islam.

Al-Hibri claims that Islam basically destroyed the patriarchal nature of pre-Islamic society and elevated women's status. According to her, Islam has improved the status of women by granting and defending women's rights. Among others are the right to be divorced after four months of the husband's absence (2:226; 2:227), the right to have her own choice in marriage (30:21), and the right to have a dowry (4:4 and 4:24).

Previously, during Jahiliyah (the dark age) a woman could not be divorced even if her husband had left her for years; a woman was married without her consent; and a woman did not receive the dowry as it went to her father or later her husband.<sup>2</sup>

However, Al-Hibri does not see these reforms as the primary reason behind the triumph of Islam over patriarchy. She contends that it was because Muhammad replaced the paternal bond with the religious bond within which every body was equal (1982, p. 213). Muhammad with his Islamic vision of an egalitarian Islamic society during his time allowed women to speak and express their opinions and take part in society. Muhammad treated his wives as equal partners and gave them the right to stand up to him, rebuke him, or tell him he had gone wrong (Mernissi, 1991, and Saadawi, 1982). However, as Al-Hibri (1982), Mernissi (1991) and Saadawi (1982) point out, the strong paternalistic nature of Arab society made it impossible for Muhammad to build a notion of society based on the equality between the sexes. The male members of the community were not ready to accept such dramatic changes and therefore organized an opposition movement under the leadership of the stern Umar ibn Khattab (Mernissi, 1991 and Saadawi, 1982). Mernissi contends that it was during the extended periods of military and political weakness (between the third and eighth year after the Hijra), the Prophet had to "sacrifice his egalitarian vision for the sake of communal cohesiveness and the survival of the Islamic cause" (1991: p. 130) for Islam to survive. Al-Hibri and others in *Women*

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<sup>2</sup>Kandiyoti describes these practices as classical forms of patriarchy. For details see Deniz Kandiyoti's "Islam and Patriarchy" in Nikki R. Keddi and Beth Baron (Eds), *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 23-41.

*and Islam* (1982) believe that the eventual restriction on women in public life may not have been intended by the Prophet who initiated many reforms that affected the status of Muslim women in his life time. Some feminists' assertions that the true Islam is not patriarchal is grounded in the Koranic verses that stipulate the equality between men and women. For example:

Their Lord hath accepted of them, and answered them: "Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you, be he male or female: Ye are members, one of another: those who have left their homes, or been driven out therefrom, or suffered harm in my cause, or fought or been slain, verily, I will blow out from them their iniquities, and admit them into Gardens with rivers flowing beneath: a reward from the Presence is the best of rewards. (3:195)

If any do deeds of righteousness, be they male or female, and have faith, they will enter Heaven and not the least injustice will be done to them. (4:124)

The believers, men and women, are protectors, one of another: they enjoin what is just and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practice regular charity, and obey Allah and his Apostle. On them will Allah pour His mercy: for Allah is exalted in power, wise. (9:71)

Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has Faith, verily, to him will We give a new life, a life that is good and pure, and We will bestow on such their reward according to best of their actions. (16:97)

For Muslim men and women: for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves:- for them Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward. (33:35)

In Islam women and men are socially and economically equal. The Koran says:

O mankind! reverence your guardian-Lord, who created you from a single person, created, of like nature, his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women, reverence Allah, through whom ye demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you): for Allah ever watches over you. (4:1)

And no wise covet those things in which Allah hath bestowed of His gifts more freely on some of you than on others: to men is allotted what they earn, and to women what they earn: but ask Allah of His bounty: for Allah hath full knowledge of all things. (4:32)

It can be concluded, based on the verses, that the Koran not only specifies equality between men and women before God, but the interdependency of men and women. The Koran does not endorse the hierarchical relationship between men and women in which the latter are subordinate to the former nor an antagonistic relationship between the sexes.

Saadawi interprets the sura 30 verse 21--

Among His signs...that he created for you mates from yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquillity with them, and he has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are signs for those who reflect--

as granting a woman the right to choose her husband, and to be separated from him if she no longer wishes to live with him, since love, mercy and cohabitation presuppose free choice rather than compulsion. In Muhammad's time, women were given the right to choose their husbands, and also the right to be separated from their husbands (Saadawi, 1982, p. 199).

However, these rights were taken away from women at a later stage through the status and laws declared on the basis of Islamic Jurisprudence. According to Saadawi "this proves that some of the laws and statutes pertaining to women are at variance with Islamic teachings and a reflection of what men of religion believed at different periods of Muslim history" (1982: p. 199).

The Islamic injunctions regulating gender roles as they are presented today are not only influenced by patriarchal values but are also feudalistic. Freda Hussain (1984, p. 2) argues that the feudalistic interpretations of the Koran place women under men.

The female role expectations of the men had emanated from the feudal structures that existed in pre-Islamic societies. Islam was subsequently used to legitimize and reinforce these expectations of female role performance. religious functionaries stunted the growth and development of Muslim societies by using pseudo-Islamic norms to resolve problems relating to women and other issues. (Hussain, 1984, p. 4)

Although most feminists believe that Islam is not a patriarchal religion and that it grants equality between men and women, many would argue that the practice of polygamy, veiling and women's segregation prescribed in the Koran prove that Islam is patriarchal.

Some feminists argue that the problem lies in the misinterpretation of the Koran, not the Koran itself. Feminists like Al-Hibri and Mernissi contend that many passages in the Koran are interpreted by male authorities, loosely and out of context, in support of a



patriarchal ideology. Mernissi in her investigation into Islamic religious sources such as the Koran and the Hadiths (the sayings and the behavior of the Prophet) discovers that:

It is neither because of the Koran, nor the Prophet, nor the Islamic tradition, but simply because those rights conflict with the interests of a male elite. The elite faction is trying to convince us that their egotistic, highly subjective, and mediocre view of culture and society have a sacred basis. (1991: p. ix)

According to Mernissi, the sacred texts in the hands of these males were manipulated to sustain their male interests.

Not only have the sacred texts always been manipulated, but manipulation of them is a structural characteristic of the practice of power in Muslim societies. Since all power, from the seventh century on, was only legitimated by religion, political forces and economic interests pushed for the fabrication of false traditions. A false Hadith is a testimony that the Prophet is alleged to have done or said such and such, which would then legitimate such an act or such an attitude. In this conjuncture of political stakes and pressures, religious discourse swarmed with traditions that legitimated certain privileges and established their owners in possession of them. (1991: p. 9)

Mernissi shows that this tradition was distorted by the male elites to support an image of inequality between the sexes, and "to keep Muslim women subordinated to male role expectations" (Hussain, 1984, p. 3). This inequality had no basis in Islamic law since in the Prophet's time women were treated as equal and given access to public affairs (Mernissi, 1991, p. 11). This distortion of the Koranic interpretation of women's status had begun after the death of Muhammad.

Regarding the verses that require a woman to wear the veil, Mernissi (1991) and Engineer (1992) argue that the meaning of the verses should be understood in its context: where and when it was revealed and, as Ahmed points out, "these are not necessarily binding on Muslim societies at all times in all places" (Ahmed, 1992, p. 88).

Engineer explains that women during the pre-Islamic period used to go without covering their breasts, and Islam "was born in an urban milieu and hence imposes certain sexual norms which are followed by town people" (1992, p. 88). He contends that the verse does not intend to confine women to their homes or to compel them to wear a traditional kind of veil, as required by most theologians, but to urge women to hide their adornments and sexual charms except before certain men. This will prevent them from becoming an object of lust that results in the loss of their dignity. Dr. Zaki Badawi, another Muslim scholar, even contends that veiling has no religious basis as the Koranic injunction requires women not to reveal "their adornment except what normally appears" and "what normally appears" can be left to custom (Goodwin, 1994, p. 30).

Based on her inquiry into early Islamic history, Mernissi (1991) concludes that in the Koran the verses regarding veiling and seclusion (which justify the practice of the harem) appear to protect the Prophet and his wives from the violence of a city in a state of civil war. Her argument is also shared by the modernists who contended that the sura of Hijab (veil) in the Koran is specifically addressed to the Prophet's wives as "mothers of the believers," and thus is not applicable to general believers (Stowasser, 1984: p. 84). Modernists and feminists argue that the obligation for Muhammad's wives to cover their

bodies is justified by the preceding chapters indicating that the wives of the Prophet are not like other women.

The Prophet is closer to the Believers than their own selves, and his wives are their mothers . . . (33:5)

O Consorts of the Prophet! If any of you were guilty of evident unseemly conduct, the Punishment would be doubled to her, and that is easy for Allah. (33:30)

But any of you that is devout in the service of Allah and his Apostle and works righteousness, to her shall we grant her reward twice: We have prepared for her generous sustenance. (33:31)

O consorts of the Prophet! Ye are not like any of the (other) women: if ye do fear (Allah), be not too complaisant of speech, lest one in whose heart is a disease should be moved with desire: but speak ye a speech (that is) just. (33:32)

And stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former times of Ignorance; and establish regular prayer and give regular charity; and obey Allah and his Apostle and Allah only wishes to remove all abomination from you, ye members of the family, and to make you pure and spotless. (33:33)

And recite what is rehearsed to you in your homes, of the signs of Allah and his wisdom: for Allah understands the finest mysteries and is well-acquainted (with them). (33:34)

Mernissi (1991 and 1987) sees the veil as a means of male social control which is rooted in the patriarchal system. According to her, Islamic patriarchy continued to regard women as powerful and dangerous human beings. Therefore, according to Mernissi (1987) veiling and seclusion (including the harem as the ultimate seclusion) along with

sexual institutions such as polygamy and sexual segregation can be understood as a strategy for restraining or containing their power.

Mernissi also views veiling and seclusion as a symbol of the private and public dichotomy that is used by males to resist the principle of equality between men and women mentioned in the Koran. The practice of veiling has indeed resulted in the spatial division according to sex that reflects the allocation of power and authority between the two sexes: men have power and hold authority while women do not (1991: p. 174).

Veiling is also:

A symbol revealing a collective fantasy of the Muslim community, to make women disappear, to eliminate them from communal life, to relegate them to an easily controllable terrain, the home, to prevent them from moving about, and to highlight their illegal positions on male territory by means of a mask. (1987: p. 189)

According to Ahmed (1992) and other feminists the practice of veiling was inherited by Islam from pre-Islamic society. It was during the Ummayyad period (in the seventh century) that the custom of veiling in Islamic society began. Today it is the practice in most Muslim countries (Engineer, 1992). Ahmed (1992) suggests three possible reasons behind Islam's adoption of veiling: the Muslim conquest of areas where the upper-class women were veiled, the influx of wealth, and Muhammad's wives being taken as models.

Based on Gerda Lerner's<sup>1</sup> analysis of veiling, Ahmed (1992) asserts that the veil served not merely to mark the upper classes but, more fundamentally, to differentiate the respectable women from those who were publicly available. The use of the veil accordingly classified women according to their sexual activity and signaled to men which women were under male protection and which were "fair game" (p. 15). The practice of veiling also signifies that women position themselves in the class hierarchy on the basis of their relationships to the men who protect them, on the basis of sexual activity, and on their occupations and their relations to production (Ahmed, 1992; p. 15).

It has been mentioned that Muslim traditions allow men to marry up to four women while this privilege of polygamy is not given to women. This privilege finds its justification in the Koranic injunctions and the Prophet's own polygamous marriages. Most Muslim feminists respond to this issue by using the same argument that a careful reading of the verses will result in a conclusion that Islam does not allow polygamy. The issue of polygamy is a matter of misinterpretation.

Al-Hibri (1982) contends that the Prophet was allowed by God to be polygamous only because he and his wives are not like others.<sup>2</sup> In the Koran Muhammad as the Prophet of God was given some privileges in the matter of marriages (33:50). We do not know exactly how many wives Muhammad had. Mernissi (1987) counts as many as thirteen while Ali Dashti (1985) suggests twenty. Muhammad was first married to a

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<sup>1</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 19-20

wealthy widow, Khadija. He remained monogamous for twenty-five years, until the death of Khadija. According to Mernissi many of Muhammad's polygamous marriages after the death of his first wife were motivated by political and religious considerations (1987). Muhammad's society was tribal and marriages could establish tribal alliances and bonds of kinship which would strengthen the cause of Islam. Muhammad also married widows or unmarried orphans whose husbands died during holy wars, so that they could be provided for and protected (Mernissi, 1987). By marrying these women Muhammad could "create a kind of responsibility system whereby unattached women were resituated in a family unit in which a man could protect them, not just as kinsman but as husband" (Mernissi, 1987, p. 80).

But, in addition to these political and religious reasons, Muhammad's polygamous marriages were because of women's beauty. According to Mernissi (1991), Muhammad showed himself as vulnerable to women and therefore human. Muhammad, attracted to the beauty of some women, married them to prevent any illicit sexual encounters. Mernissi cited his marriage to Aisha, who was beautiful and forty-one years younger than he was, and to the beautiful Juwaria as examples of this kind of marriage.

In response to the Koranic verses legitimizing polygamy for all the believers (quoted above on page 2) Al-Hibri argues that since men must treat their wives justly and equally, and men will never be just and fair (as stated by the consecutive verse), then it is impossible for them to have four wives. At the same time, the verses also say that if a man cannot be just and fair among women, then he must marry only one woman.

Ye are never able to be fair and just as between women even if it is your ardent desire: But turn not away (from a woman) altogether, so as to leave her (as it were) hanging (in the air). If ye came to a friendly understanding, and practice self-restraint, Allah is oft-forgiving, Most Merciful. (4:129)

Thus al-Hibri concludes that monogamy is the only kind of marriage allowed in Islam. Al-Hibri also recognizes the male vested interest in the whole issue of polygamy. She sees that the justification of polygamy by using the Koran was "the result of patriarchal attempt to distort the Koran in the male's favour" (p.217).

Mazhar Ul-haq Khan, another Muslim feminist, in her study of polygamy and purdah (1982) and Hussain (1984) share a similar argument that the *Ulema* as the religious authority has interpreted the verse in individualistic and personal terms. This happened particularly during the Abbasid Caliphate. In addition to that, the *Ulema*, as Hussain points out, had their own interest in maintaining their class as one of the ruling elites. As a result, the Islam that the *Ulema* propagated allowed Muslim to suppress women's rights and voices by confining them within the harems. Hussain contends that for centuries, the *Ulema's* interpretation of Muslim women's behavior, which suited the feudal rulers, has been treated as a religious tenet in a male dominated society (1984, p. 26).

In general, feminists' approach toward the issues of polygamy and female seclusion including veiling and harem is grounded in the argument that the Koran and the religious texts have been manipulated and misinterpreted in such a way that they will fit

into patriarchal and feudal ways of thinking. Islam's ethical vision, which stresses the equality between the sexes, has been distorted and submerged by the male ruling elites who intend to keep their superiority over women. As a result, for centuries the Koran and the Hadiths have been used as religious justification to oppress women. The practices of polygamy and female seclusion manifest this tendency.

The feminists' argument about the Koranic verses and religious texts being misinterpreted and manipulated according to male interest is in line with Dorothy Smith's concept of the relation of ruling (1987). She defines the relation of ruling as "a concept that grasps power, organization, direction, and regulation as more pervasively structured than can be expressed in traditional concepts provided by the discourses of power" (1987, p. 3). The interpretation of the Koran accordingly is a patriarchal practice.

According to Smith (1987) patriarchy controls everything that happens in society in a very complicated way, and culturally women are overpowered by the "relation of ruling." Smith observes that the relation of ruling is vested in the texts we write and read. The text functions as a constituent of social relations. The text mediates the practices of the ruling apparatus in which social organization intersects with the largely hierarchical structures of state, business, and other administered organizations. In short, texts are used to sustain the status quo of the ruling apparatus.

Since women are excluded from the relations of ruling, then women are also excluded from the making of historical texts and, especially in this case, from the making of the interpretations of the Koran. The interpretation of the Koran in this context may



function as the agent of relations of ruling that would sustain the interests of the male elite. The interests of the ruling apparatus are embedded in the interpretation of the Koran. Once Islamic law and Koranic injunctions are in conflict with male interests, then they were interpreted to accommodate male interests. With the organization of all power to become male privilege, the interpretation of the Koran becomes the discourse of power that should be accepted by Muslim men and women.

Having recognized these frameworks, in interpreting the Koran, we should, as many feminist Muslims suggest, go back to the historical facts of the status of Muslim women in early Islam where women enjoyed greater rights and a better position in society. Many Muslim feminists like Al-Hibri, Hussein, Mernissi, and Saadawi suggest that the interpretation of the Koranic verses dealing with women's rights and status should be based on the evaluation of Muslim women in the early years of Islam when the true Islam still existed. Kandiyoti (1991) says that a clear attempt has been made to revive early Islamic history and the holy text in order to formulate a feminist project, and to encourage more progressive reading of the texts than is usually done by traditionalists when they use them to justify the status quo.

The exclusion of women from the making of history and ideology is reflected in the way that women have been excluded from the literary canon. Women's experiences, women's lives and women's voices have been suppressed for centuries. It is, therefore, feminists who begin to search for works by women writers who voiced their own

experience. It is through women's auto/biography that feminists can explore women's lives.

## **2.2 Women's Autobiography as a Theoretical Tool to Explore Women's Lives**

Sidonie Smith in her 1987 study defines autobiography as any written or verbal communication that "takes the speaking 'I' as the subject of the narrative, rendering the 'I' both subject and object" (p. 19). By this definition, Smith includes memoirs, journals, letters and diaries as well as formal autobiography as autobiography. Other studies of women's autobiography also include any forms of women's personal narratives as autobiography (for example, Fowler and Fowler, 1990; Buss, 1993; Personal Narratives Group, 1989; Stanton, 1984).

The ideology of gender, which so carefully structures the way women and men perceive themselves, has influenced the way women reveal themselves in autobiographical texts, particularly formal autobiography, sometimes considered to be a male genre (Yuhasz, 1980). In her 1987 study Sidonie Smith mentions theories on the specificity of women's autobiography: that women's subordinate and prescribed status in patriarchal culture has encouraged them to write about domesticity and love. Other theories mentioned by Smith emphasize the importance of significant others such as husband, child, and God as women's ways of unfolding their stories. Some studies on women's autobiography stress the difference between women's autobiography and men's. Jelinek (1980 and 1986) identifies some of the characteristics of women's autobiography.

Because women are socially assigned to the private world as opposed to the public world that belongs to men, women's autobiography often emphasizes their personal lives instead of their public life or careers (if they have one). On the other hand, male autobiographies often mirror the establishment of the history of his times as his stories reveal "his connectedness to the rest of society" (Jelinek, 1980, p. 7).

Jelinek also proposes another characteristic of women's autobiography. In her studies of American women's autobiographies (1980) she observes that they accentuate their personal relationships rather than their professional careers or their connectedness to current political or intellectual history (Jelinek, 1980). According to Jelinek (1986), women, unlike men, are much more inclined to explore the self in relation to others. Besides, women are also socialized to see selflessness as identical to goodness, and women are "accustomed ...to believe in subordinating the demands of the self to those of others" (Spacks, 1980, p. 114).

A study by Spacks (1980) of prominent women autobiographers has shown that famous women, such as Eleanor Roosevelt and Golda Meir, tend to hide their achievements. Women, especially those who are/were highly successful in the public sphere, often have to make the choice between public success and being guardians of the home. At the same time, having been both in the personal and public world, women are likely to understand the merit of each. Women then have to seek a proper balance of commitment to themselves and to the value of womanhood. Spacks calls this conflict the "rhetoric of uncertainty" (1980, p. 131). Because of this uncertainty and conflict many

women are reluctant to display their accomplishment or self-satisfaction in their writings. Walters (1987) writes, "Women seldom present accomplishment in their life studies, they explore the process of living, seeking to understand, weighing the alternatives" (p. 88). This characteristic of women's autobiography according to Jelinek can be found from antiquity to the modern era (1986).

In another study of women's writing Spacks (1973) suggests that women autobiographers lack confidence in dealing with the public world. According to Spacks this is caused by women's being emotionally and economically dependent and by women's willingness to be defined and valued by others. Spacks concludes that while men's autobiographies suggest men's struggle to overcome their limitations, women's autobiography suggests "the struggle of women, often, to circumvent them, to operate so smoothly within limits that they seem to have no hampering affects" (1973, p. 27).

It is suggested that culturally women have been denied access to public speaking: women should be self-effacing, and self-subordinated. Jelinek and others believe that that this is why women have to apologize for their self-assertion in the act of writing (Jelinek, 1986). According to Jelinek (1986) women's autobiography often presents the conflict between affirmation and apology. Women apologize and make excuses for their daring act of entering the public sphere and of displaying themselves to public. There is certainly an ambivalence in women's texts: there is a drive to display self-accomplishment while at the same time this drive is contradicted by self-effacement.

Spacks identifies this type of ambivalence as being mostly found in women's (autobiographical) letters (Spacks, 1988).

This ambivalence raises the question of why women write. Jelinek argues that women see writing as a means to affirm their identity rather than to idealize themselves. Friedman (1988) drawing from the concept of selfhood proposed by Sheila Rowbotham (1973) theorizes that "women's autobiographical writings are motivated by alienation from the historically imposed image..." (p. 40). Friedman also suggests that when women can overcome this alienation and write their own self, they will break the silence imposed by male speech (Friedman, 1988, p. 41).

Walters (1987) based on Jelinek's study of women's autobiography argues that the reason behind women's drive to write about themselves is mostly for self-exploration. This contradicts men who often write to display themselves (Walters, 1987). It is also suggested that writing becomes a medium used by women to relieve pain, to cope with loneliness, and to confirm their existence, physically and intellectually (Walters, 1987). This relates to the fact that women have to deal with the conflict between feeling "what they naturally feel and what the culture expects of them" (Walters, 1987, p. 89).

The discussions above suggest a general notion that women's autobiographical writings are different from men's in terms of thematic content, and the way in which the self is portrayed. These differences are probably caused by the gender construction which in turn determined the way women experience their lives.

### 2.3 About Language in Post-colonial Literary Theory

Post-colonial literature is originally defined as any writing produced by those people formerly colonized by Britain. However, in its development, post-colonial literature expands its concerns to works in countries colonized by other imperial rulers such as France, Portugal, and Spain (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 1989). Although semantically “post-colonial” suggests a period after the departure of the imperial culture, it covers “all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 1989, p. 2). It is suggested that imperial oppression has left cultural impact on the colonized party (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 1989).

One of the major features in post-colonial literature is how the colonized subjects relate themselves to the colonizer’s language. Colonialism not only controls the social structures and economic wealth but also the mentality of the colonized people by means of culture. The process of colonization through culture according to Ngugi Wa Thiong’o (1986) involves two aspects:

the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people’s culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the coloniser. The domination of a people’s language by the languages of the colonising nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe colonised. (p. 16)

According to Fanon, as quoted in Fontenot Jr. (1979, p. 44), the destruction of people's culture is followed by their assimilation through acquisition of the colonizer's language. Said (1978) contends that it is through language and the act of writing that the West's (or colonizer's in this context) position of power and center is secured.

Fanon further explains that the process of colonization through culture then reaches the stage when the natives internalize the colonizer's values and finally imitate the colonizer's aspirations so that they are accepted by the colonizer. The imposition of the colonizer's values and customs through language results in the natives' alienation from their own tradition and values. Anxiety and uncertainty are likely to be experienced by an individual who is exposed to the traditional values in his/her family while at the same time she/he is constantly confronted with the alien culture and norms in schools, books, and publicity (Fontenot, Jr. 1979)

Colonialism, with its supposed superiority, has created the idea that the colonizing language is superior to the native's. We find this in the imperialist education systems that institutionalized the colonizer's language as the standard (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 1989). The language then becomes "the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth,' 'order,' and 'reality' become established" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 1989, p. 7). The colonized people see the language of their oppressors as giving access to power, authority, and enlightenment. In other words, to the colonized, language has become a means of social climbing. However, at the same time these people realize that

this language they acquire is an instrument of colonial rule: an instrument to dominate them. Therefore, as Fanon puts it, the relation of the colonized toward the language of the colonizer is ambivalent (Zahar, 1974).

In sum, the issues of language raised in post-colonial writings are rooted in the imperialist's concept of language: language as the means of controlling (others') cultures. To control one's culture is to determine how one perceives him/herself and others. This seems to be in line with what Dorothy Smith (1987) has described about how the dominant culture has been perpetuated by the dominated subjects. She believes that words and other symbolic terms are "ideologically structured mode of actions" (p. 17). By this she means that words, including images and vocabularies, are integral to the practice of power, of getting things done. She further argues that the way we see the world has long been shaped and organized by what she called the ideological apparatus of society. This includes universities, schools, newspapers. These are the institutions which perpetuate the function of language of the colonizer as a key to culture.

#### **2.4 Methodology Statement**

The objective of my study is to examine how Muslim feminists reconcile their feminism with Islam and how their writings reflect their struggles to define their identities and find their own voices both in male-dominated and in colonial culture by examining Kartini's and Huda Shaarawi's personal writings: memoir and letters.



Memoirs, a kind of autobiography, and letters as women's personal narratives may reveal more clearly the dynamics of gender. They also both present and interpret the impact of gender roles on women's lives. Thus, according to the Personal Narrative Group (1989), women's personal narratives can serve as documents for exploring aspects of gender relations, such as the contraction of a gender self-identity, the relationship between the individual and society in the creation and perpetuation of gender norms, and the dynamics of power relations between women and men. Fowler and Fowler (1990) also see autobiographical writings as a means to illustrate the transformation of women's place in society and other aspects of the private side of life.

In this research I am going to use the life history approach. One of the definitions given of life histories studies "is an account of how a new person enters a group and becomes an adult capable of meeting the traditional expectations of the society for a person of that individual's sex and age" (Marshall and Rossman, 1989, p. 96). According to Mandelbaum, as quoted in Marshall and Rossman (1989), "life histories emphasize the experiences and requirements of the individual--how the person copes with society, rather than how society copes with the stream of individuals"(p. 36).

The method I am going to use in this research is textual analysis. A textual analysis is a detailed analysis of the text itself, for example the writers' use of language, imagery, forms, structures, themes, and setting. In this research I will look for similar themes revealed in the two feminists' writings. I will also do text comparison of the same text but of different versions. This is particularly applicable to Kartini's letters. There are

several different versions of Kartini's letters and each version has been interpreted in different ways. Differences in versions and interpretations of the letters will provide me with rich information necessary to produce sharper analysis and interpretations on Kartini's letters.

There are four different versions of Kartini's letters used in this research: *Habis Gelap Terbitlah Terang* (When Darkness Ends Light Dawn) (1992) written and translated from Dutch into Bahasa Indonesia, by Armijn: *Letters of a Javanese Princess* (1964), translated by Agnes Louise Symmers, edited and introduced by Hildred Geertz with a Preface by Eleanor Roosevelt: *Surat-Surat Kartini: Renungan Tentang dan Untuk Bangsaanya* (Letters of Kartini: Reflections about and for the people) (1985) translated by Sulastin Sutrisno; *Panggil Aku Kartini Saja II* (Call Me Simply Kartini) (1962) a historical novel based on Kartini's letters by Pramoedya Ananta Toer: *Letters from Kartini* (1992), translated and with a preface by Joost Cote; and *Kartini: Sebuah Biografi* (Kartini: A Biography) (1986) by Sitisioemandari Soeroto.

Each version portrays Kartini from a different point of view. Pane highlights Kartini as a pioneer in women's emancipation and the struggle for universal humanity. Pane turned the letters into an autobiographical novel displaying Kartini's ideals, her struggles and her spiritual journey "while also retaining in translation her literary work" (Zainu'ddin, 1986, p. 251). Geertz constructs Kartini as an Eastern woman of an outworn civilization who perceived western education and culture as enlightenment. She also sees Kartini's internal struggle as the main interest of her letters. However, she contends that

finally Kartini found her peace after she “fell in love” and married a widower with six children.

Toer also shares this contention. But while Symmers and Geertz describe Kartini as a Javanese princess, Toer sees her as an ordinary woman who struggled against indigenous feudalism and Dutch colonialism. At the same time he also views Kartini as a writer.

Sutrisno provides a more complete version. She includes Kartini’s letters which are excluded from Geertz’s edition. Although the letters are translated into Indonesian, the writing style is still recognizably Kartini’s. In this version we can find words with Kartini’s emphasis (by underlining the words or the phrase). The emphasis will enable me to recognize which words are important to Kartini, and thus help me give a more accurate interpretation.

In Cote the same writing style can also be found in the most recent publication and the most complete version of Kartini’s letters to the Abendanons. Cote uses a different approach in interpreting Kartini’s internal struggle. In his preface Kartini is described as a “modern woman” who was trapped in a traditional culture and society.

Different interpretations and images of Kartini created by different editors to some extent will lead me to my own interpretation, which may be different from theirs. In addition, Cote’s most complete version will always bring my attention to Kartini herself, as author and historical agent who struggled against the oppressive male

dominated society. A rich text which presents Kartini as author and historical agent will enable me to make sharper analysis and more accurate interpretation.

The information gathered is then interpreted using relevant theories. In describing Huda and Kartini's journey into feminism I particularly use Belenky et al's *Women's Ways of Knowing* (1986) as a theoretical framework. .

*Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (1986) suggested five epistemological categories of women's perspective of knowing: silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge and constructed knowledge. I will briefly outline these stages.

#### 1 Silence

In the stage of silence Belenky *et al.* observe that women feel passive, reactive, and dependent on authorities, who they see and feel as being all powerful or overpowering. Silent women rely on the authority as the source of truth; nevertheless the authority seldom explains why something is right. Because silent women depend for their survival solely on the authority, they tend to be submissive to their authority. This blind obedience, as Belenky *et al* observe, will lead them to accept the stereotypes imposed by society and maintained by the culture.

In addition, Belenky *et al.* observe that silent women do not rely on the power of words for expressing or developing thought. Silent women are incapable of learning from their own experience and their knowledge is limited to matter-of fact things, i.e.,

to the present (not the past or the future); to the actual (not the imaginary and the metaphorical); to the concrete (not the deduced or the induced); to the specific (not the generalized or the contextualized); and to behaviors actually enacted (not values and motives entertained). (pp. 26-27)

## 2 Received Knowledge

At this stage women start to recognize their capacity to learn and thus to receive knowledge from others and pass knowledge to others. One important way of receiving knowledge is through listening, listening to the words of others. At this stage words are central to the knowing process. In most cases women find the power of their voice and mind most readily in relationships with friends; however many of them still regard authorities as the source of truth without realizing that authorities can construct truth.

Still relying on the authority, received knowers define themselves in relation to others and social expectations. They still accept the gender role imposed by the culture or the society. Belenky *et al.* point out that received knowers still maintain the cultural standard imposed on women, i.e. women should be listeners, subordinate, and not assertive. Moreover, as Belenky *et al.* observe, caring for others and being unselfish are still the attitude of received knowers.

## 3 Subjective Knowledge

At this stage women begin to listen and to trust their inner voice and internal instead of external authorities. Belenky *et al.* explain that the subjective knower has

undergone some changes "from passivity to action, from self as static to self as becoming, from silence to a protesting inner voice and infallible gut" (p. 54). Subjectivist women still act on behalf of others, but begin to assert their own authority and autonomy.

Leaving the authority and listening to their "still small voice" (Belenky *et al.*, 1986, p. 68) these women see truth as personal, private and subjectively known or intuited. Belenky *et al.* posit that the subjectivist knowers see truth as "something experienced, not thought out, something felt rather than actively pursued or constructed" (p. 69).

Belenky *et al.* further describe that for the subjectivist women, listening and observing events in their daily lives become the primary means of acquiring knowledge through articulation and the differentiation of self. They listen to and observe their own experience while drawing comparison from others'. They also analyze their past and their present relationship with others to produce their own perceptions of the world.

#### 4 Procedural Knowledge

At this point women begin to realize a need to compromise with the authority. They begin to trust authorities who are well informed and knowledgeable. They start looking at something called procedure to gain knowledge. They also require formal instruction or the presence of knowledgeable people as their informal tutors.

To acquire knowledge by means of a procedure, Belenky *et al.* discuss two contrasting epistemological orientations, i.e. a separate epistemology, based upon

impersonal procedures for establishing the truth, and a connected epistemology in which truth comes from experience. Separate knowers tend to be objective, impersonal, critical and suspicious--in a sense that everybody could be wrong instead of right-- towards the truth. On the other hand, connected knowers trust personal experience as a source of knowledge. Connected knowers use the capacity for empathy in gaining knowledge from other people. They try to understand other people's ideas by sharing their experience and try to put themselves into their position. They try to see things through the lens of the other.

#### 5 Constructed Knowledge: Integrating the Voices

Women at this stage, as Belenky *et al.* observe, begin to look for something authentic and unique, something beyond the given. The constructivists begin to "jump outside" (p. 134) the systems and frames provided by the authorities in order to find their own selves and voices (self reclamation) and thus create their own frames. Constructivist women try to integrate knowledge that they felt intuitively with knowledge they had learned from others. Belenky *et al.* also observe that because their behavior is still determined by social expectations, the constructivist women are likely to accept the status quo and "can end up accommodating the needs and ground rules of men out of the sad wisdom that change does not come easily" (p. 148).

Belenky *et al.* also point out that constructivist women will probably experience and accept contradiction and ambiguity. Unlike silent women, the constructivists prefer

to speak out about the contradictions they experience. They no longer suppress them in order to avoid conflict. They are also likely to be engaged in "conversation" (p. 144) which include "discourse and exploration, talking and listening, questions, argument, speculation and sharing" (p. 144).

In relation to moral conflict, these women would probably use a contextually-and-situationally-grounded approach. They avoid premature generalization which simply divides something into right and wrong. Constructivist women will consider others' needs and even be willing to suspend decisions or action they are going to perform. They try to balance and honor the needs of themselves and others. Therefore, Belenky *et al.* claim that the constructivist women will emphasize the action less than the context. Nevertheless, "constructivist women aspire to work that contributes to the empowerment in the quality of life of others" (p. 152), such as through activism in anti poverty legislation, and environmental issues. At the same time, these constructivist women will insist on having "a room of their own" (p. 153).

So far I have discussed certain women's issues in Islam, i.e. polygamy and veiling, and how Muslim feminists respond to the issues. This particular section is significant to my understanding about how a Muslim woman can reconcile with her own religion, which presumably was repressive and dominant. Enhanced by other sections discussing women's autobiography, women's relation to their colonised language and culture, such an understanding will provide me with rich tools to analyze these two feminist Muslim writers. In addition, I make use of some theories discussed in Belenky



*et al.*'s *Women's Way of Knowing* as a theoretical framework to analyze how these two Muslim women became feminists and how they negotiated with the repressive male dominated society.

Besides Belenky *et al.*'s theory, I am going to use the life history approach. The parameters of history and culture as contexts are significant in this research. Information concerning the social, cultural and historical conditions of the two writers is crucial to my understanding of how particular lives take the shape they do and how these two writers make sense of their world. Using history and culture as contexts will allow me to reconstruct the objective conditions of the situations in Kartini's and Huda Shaarawi's life. Thus, it also allows me to interpret the meaning that they attributed to their interaction with the Islamic or cultural tradition. At the same time, the use of history and culture as contexts will provide me with an analytical tool in studying how culture defines women writers. The production of a particular writing is likely to be influenced by the class, gender, race, nationality and culture of the writer. For that reason, in the next chapter I will describe the social, historical and cultural background of the two feminist writers, Kartini and Huda Shaarawi, most relevant to make a proper analysis and interpretation of their personal writings. The analysis of these writings will be discussed in Chapter Four, Chapter Five, and Chapter Six.

## CHAPTER III

### SOCIO-CULTURAL BACKGROUND

#### 3.1 The Status and Condition of Upper Class Women in Nineteenth-Century Egypt

Studies on the status and condition of women in nineteenth-century Egypt (Abdel Kader, 1987; Badran, 1988, 1995; Ahmed, 1992) show that there are at least two cultural practices involved (which often overlapped with religious practices): harem, and veiling. Adopting the customs of Ottoman royalty, most upper class women lived and were raised in a harem. The word harem itself has various definitions which might refer to the place, the system, or the status. Yehia (1983) defines harem as "a separate quarter for women within the household, or the women themselves and their children"(quoted in Abdel Kader 1987, p. 17). Badran (1988, p. 19) defines the term as the system of segregation and female seclusion. She also uses the term for the wife or wives of a man. In the context of the Egyptian upper class, the definition refers both to a place and the system.

A harem usually consisted of a large extended family, which was generally controlled by three women: the master's wife, his mother and his favourite concubine (Abdel Kader, 1981: p. 20). The intensity and the duration of the confinement and the seclusion of women differed according to their age. The master's grandmother and mother almost never left their house except for special occasions, like funerals or a visit to other homes. Younger unmarried women were allowed some measure of freedom, including mixing with male companions, until they reached the age of puberty, mostly at fourteen. As

soon as they reached this age, they were subjected to segregation and seclusion. Because they were no longer allowed to go outside, they usually quit school and continued their education at home with the assistance of a European female tutor (Badran, 1988).

Veiling requires women to cover their bodies from head to toe including her face, but this was only applied strictly to upper class women. Like seclusion and confinement, veiling was obligatory for such women once they reached puberty. Veiling, like harem, also functions as a mark of status and prestige. It differentiates urban upper women and upper middle class women from rural lower class or peasant women. The women are only allowed to lift their veils if they are amongst their own sex or among their brothers, father, and husband in their private home. If they go outside the home, which is rare, they have to put on their veils. This veiling practice is not only observed by Muslim women but also Jewish and Christian women in Egypt (Badran, 1988).

Due to seclusion and segregation, upper class women received their education at home by importing European tutors. These upper class women usually learned French, which was considered the language of the elite. Along with French, music and literature, Muslim girls also learnt to read and recite the Koran.

Under British rule (1812-1922) educational opportunities for young Egyptian women were limited. Only fortunate girls, who obtained admission to government schools or whose parents could afford the high tuition fees of foreign and missionary schools or the fees of private tutors at home, received an education.

In relation to the sexual division of labour and the gender system, the upper class women were regarded solely in terms of their sexual and reproductive functions. Women of the harem were not supposed to work outside the home for money. It degraded their class and their prestige if they were allowed to work. Their main functions were to be good wives and, more importantly, to procreate (Abdel Kader, 1987). Meanwhile, men were considered breadwinners and it was their responsibility to work in the public domain.

Egyptian society gave high value to children, especially male children. Therefore, it was considered a blessing if a woman could bear a male child. On the other hand, it was a sad story if a woman bore a female child. In this situation condolences from relatives and friends were to be expected. The worst condition for a woman was to be barren. It was a humiliating condition. She would lose her claims to status and prestige (Abdel Kader, 1987). Thus their well-being depended on their ability to produce a son.

The traditional values of patriarchal society embedded in Egyptians expected women as daughters and wives to be obedient, nurturing, and encouraging. The respected and loved wives and daughters were those who were obedient, gentle and docile. Showing feelings of discontent, anger, or frustration was discouraged.

In terms of marriage, women of all classes were commonly betrothed and married as soon as they reached the age of puberty. Marriage was considered to be a social and family affair and was mostly arranged by the girl's parents. Betrothal and marriage could be carried out even without their daughter's consent (Lane, 1973).

### 3.2 Women and Islam in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Egypt

Egypt is an Islamic country and Islam deeply permeates the life of the overwhelming majority of its inhabitants. Islam has fundamentally shaped the attitude of the Egyptian population, both female and male (Botman, 1991). The lives of Egyptian women were deeply affected by how Islam, based on the Koranic injunctions, regulates and defines women's lives (Abdel Kader, 1987). Veiling, sexual segregation, and polygamy applied in the harem system find their justification in those Islamic tenets which put emphasis on modesty. Modesty is one demand of the Koranic injunctions to be fulfilled by both Muslim women and men. However, since women are regarded as by nature sexually powerful beings, they are the ones who are subject to seclusion, confinement and veiling (Do'i, 1989). Most feminist Muslims reject these practices and use the same source, the Koranic verses, as their arguments.

Because women with their sexual power could lead to social chaos (Badran, 1995), it was necessary to put them in a separate place and seclude them from the public domain. Within this context the harem system found its basis in religious sanctions. One of the objectives of the harem system is to prevent women being seen by male domestics and other men without being covered in the manner prescribed by the Koran (24:31) (Lane, 1973: p. 176). This verse is used to justify the practice of veiling and segregation between men and women. It is universally held in Islamic society that when a woman and man are together alone this will lead to sexual relations (Badran, 1995).

In nineteenth-century Egypt, upper class Muslim women were not usually allowed to enter the public sphere. God had already assigned them to the divine sphere, i.e. to the domestic.<sup>4</sup> Women's domesticity --staying home, being a wife and being a mother-- thus bears "a golden halo of religious significance" (Stowasser, 1994, p.16). If women had to go outside the home on urgent domestic errands, they had to wear a veil. Veiling for upper-class women in Egypt included covering the face. The Koran also forbids women to mingle with strange men, and hence forbids their public appearance. This also suggests that women cannot work outside the harem.

Another social practice that affected women, including upper class women in Egypt was/is polygamy. Endorsed by other Koranic injunctions (IV:3) that allow men to marry up to four women and take slaves as concubines, polygamy was common in nineteenth-century Egypt.

Many upper class women were often co-wives (*durrah*) because financially and socially their status could be secured (Badran, 1995). Because Islam also allowed men to take slaves as concubines without legally marrying them, many Egyptian men kept slaves in their harem as well as their legal wives. Provided that the concubine bore children, men would often emancipate the concubine first and then marry her (Badran, 1995). However, by the end of the nineteenth century, because of the abolition of the slave trade and the advent of the British, only very few Egyptian harems included concubines (Badran, 1995).

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<sup>4</sup> This still affects the status and roles of Muslim women in many Muslim countries.

Even if there were concubines, they were no longer treated as objects for the sexual pleasure of their master but as unpaid servants (Badran, 1995).

Women's roles in Egypt are mostly prescribed by the traditional Islam represented by the *Ulema* (the learned men) who were mostly "socially conservative, politically anti-Western, and anti-secular" (Botman, 1991, p. 143). For centuries the *Ulema's* interpretations of the Koran had been considered as the most authentic and authoritative ones. However, their views and interpretations of the status of women in Islam were challenged by the modernists by the end of the nineteenth century. By the end of the nineteenth century, along with the reformation and modernisation that took course under the Egyptian ruler Mohammad Ali, questions of women's status and roles were raised within the context of the Islamic Reform movement which was pioneered, among others, by Syaikh Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) and by Rashid Rida (1865-1935) (Botman, 1991: p. 114).

These reformers and the so-called modernists believed that Islam was flexible and thus could be reinterpreted in accordance with the needs of the day. Abduh recognised that the traditional interpretations of Islamic doctrines were inconsistent with the original ethical and religious message of Islam (Vatikiotis, 1986: p. 194). Abduh even believed that Islamic faith was compatible with modern thought and relevant to modern life. According to him, "social practice could be amended to reflect the specificity of the times" (Botman, 1991, p. 114). He argued that although religious rules were unchanging, social conventions were open to modification. Within this context, Abduh demanded the right of Muslims to

interpret and reinterpret the rules of sacred law in the light of changed conditions. In other words, he suggested the practice of independent inquiry in interpreting the Koran, the *Ijtihad*, including the reinterpretation of the status of women in Islam (Badran, 1995).

With *Ijtihad*, Abduh insisted that people would find that the Koran regarded women and men as equal. He saw that the burden suffered by women was not due to the Koranic injunctions but to a misinterpretation of the Koran and later un-Islamic additions and traditions. He supported co-education, and criticised people who practised polygamy in the name of Islam.

The ideas and inquiries about the status of women in Islam were further expanded by Abduh's disciple, Qasim Amin. He wrote the controversial book *The Liberation of Women* (1899). In this book he argued that the cause of the degradation of Islamic society was the breakdown of the family and the backwardness of women. He insisted that women in Egypt were backward because they had been deprived of the legitimate rights accorded to them by Islam. He called for education, employment, and public involvement for women. Amin, like Abduh, maintained that Islam recognised the equality of both sexes and protected women's rights. He demanded the abolition of the veil and the social seclusion for women. He opposed polygamy and arranged marriages and condemned easy access to divorce (for men). Amin also emphasised the importance of education for women as the only means to enable them to properly fulfil their functions in society and the family (1992).



Botman (1991) observes that the book was widely criticised by both religious and secular readers, who accused him of being too much influenced by western thought, which at the time was identified with imperialism.<sup>6</sup> These people believed that western thought was not compatible with Islam. However, within women's agenda, this book transformed the woman question into "a full fledged feminist movement" (Abdel Kader, 1987: p. 8). In similar vein, Badran (1988) contends that works like Amin's and Abduh's led the way to a feminist approach to Islam. It is her contention that Egyptian feminists grounded their feminism in both Islam and nationalism.

### 3.3 Javanese *Priyayi* Under Colonial Rulers

Nineteenth-century Javanese society was divided into two socio-economic groups. The first group consisted of peasants or blue collar workers. The second group was called *Priyayi* (Magnis-Suseno, 1993). *Priyayis* were members of the Javanese aristocracy or commoners who held higher position in administrative office (Hatley, 1990). Originally and traditionally Javanese always considered members of the Javanese aristocracy and commoners who could claim to be descendants of Javanese Kings in the pre-colonial era as *priyayis* (Geertz, 1960).

During Dutch colonial rule, Javanese *priyayis* were employed as administrative instruments of their policy (Palmier, 1960). However, members of the Javanese aristocracy

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<sup>6</sup> By the time the book was published, Egypt was under British rule.

were usually given higher positions like regents or district assistants. Nobility were the most important and powerful group in the village sphere of Javanese society besides European civil servants (Palmier, 1960).

As the group which was constantly in contact with the colonial rulers, the *priyayi* were subject to acculturation influences, and this led to “the production of the highly secularized, Westernized, and commonly somewhat anti-traditional political elite...” (Geertz, 1960, p. 6). The process of acculturation was even stronger when the Dutch government started its “ethical policy.” This was intended to improve the condition of the colonized people. Under the “ethical policy,” western education was given to the indigenous people although access was still limited to a few children of the native nobility such as regents or equivalent native rulers (Palmier, 1960).

### 3.4 *Priyayi's* Etiquettes and Values

As members of the high class in Javanese hierarchical society, the *priyayi's* attitudes and behaviour were regulated by certain ethics. Geertz (1960) identifies four major principles in the *priyayi* etiquette. Namely, the proper form for the proper rank,<sup>7</sup> indirection, dissimulation, and the avoidance of any act suggesting disorder or lack of self-control. Indirection as one of the themes of *priyayi's* behaviour requires a person to be

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<sup>7</sup>The proper form for the proper rank involves the all important matter of the correct choice of linguistic form. Javanese language has several linguistic forms, and each form correlates with the rank of the speaker (Geertz, 1961).

always aware of subtleties and capable of "reading between the lines" of what people say. A high Javanese dislikes a direct and candid attitude because refined (*alus*) people do not like to say what is on their minds (Geertz, 1960).

As a straightforward attitude is not encouraged among refined people, *priyayi*s often employ dissimulation or pretense or in the Javanese term *etok-etok*. Sometimes this *etok-etok* is called "proper lying" (Geertz, 1960; p. 240). Dissimulation is mostly used as a means "to conceal one's own wish in deference to one's opposite" (Geertz, 1960; p. 246). This kind of etiquette requires a person to hide his/her own feelings (especially negative feelings) from others, especially from a guest. A person is expected to always be pleasant to people for whom they may have very little use. At the same time a positive strong feeling is not to be shown either, except in very intimate situations.

The fourth etiquette requires a person to be self-constrained and self-controlled. This etiquette was based on the Javanese philosophy of "order."

By order, the *priyayi* means constant awareness of himself as being an object of perception for others and therefore obligated to present a pleasing, *alus* picture. Spontaneity or naturalness of gesture or speech is fitting only for those not yet Javanese, i.e., the mad, the simple minded, and children (Geertz, 1960, p. 247).

In addition to the above etiquettes, *priyayi*s, like Javanese in general, consider the concept of *rukun* or "harmony" as a significant factor in social relationships. Mulder (1978) describes *rukun* as "soothing over differences, co-operation, mutual acceptance, quietness of heart, and harmonious existence" (p. 39). This value is mostly stressed at the level of

the family and community from which someone can derive the feeling of psychological security. Javanese ideology sees a person as a social being and an intimate part of a group in which she/he is accepted. In order to be accepted in such a milieu, a person should conform to expectations, cooperate, share, and be respectful (Mulder, 1978).

*Rukun* serves to maintain social solidarity and harmony (Geertz, 1961: p.148). Both *rukun* and etiquette prevented social conflict and thus social disorder caused by different opinions and disagreement. In order to maintain solidarity and harmony in the community, socially the individual is not allowed to express his/her own feelings, will, emotions, private wishes or ambition. Such behaviour is considered impolite, embarrassing, and an intrusion upon the order and the privacy of others (Mulder, 1978).

It is a moral duty for a person to maintain the harmonious order; therefore, in any circumstances a person is expected to seek for agreement. Agreement should be one's priority over one's own opinion even though it means that the individual has to sacrifice him/herself for the common good (Mulder, 1978). In addition, a person should not carry out his personal desires, ambitions, and passions because this might endanger the social harmony. A person should give him/herself up to the community rather than try to impose his/her will. According to Selosoemardjan, "sacrifice for social harmony will lead to the highest rewards."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Mulder, 1978: p. 40.

The value that accompanies the value of *rukun* is that of hierarchy. The Javanese believe that everything in the world is hierarchically ordered. Everything is assigned to its own order and its own place. This means that a person has to know his/her designated place in the social hierarchy. To know his/her own order, a person should conform to the prevailing circumstance. At the same time, s/he has to perform in a correct manner according to his/her place when s/he interacts with those who hold either higher or lower position. This will ensure social solidarity and harmonious cooperation (Mulder, 1978).

### **3.5 Priyayi's Views of Women**

Javanese society is patriarchal and feudalistic. Patriarchal and feudalistic values are mostly vested in the attitude and behaviours of the Javanese aristocracy (Soeroto, 1986). In such society, privileges and priorities are given to men. Women are merely second class citizens who have to follow rules set by males. There seems to be no great difference between the *priyayis'* and common Javanese's views of the status of women. However, Hatley (1990) points out that women of more privileged position in society such as *priyayi* have traditionally been more circumscribed in their social roles and activities.

In her studies on the relationship of Javanese ideology and theatre imagery, Hatley (1990) asserts that in Javanese society, ideologically women are assigned subordinate status in the Javanese hierarchical world. Women are defined as inferior because they lack the fine qualities which are more readily attributed to men. Keeler (1992) notes that Javanese

fine qualities included "judiciousness, patience, self-control, deliberate speech, spiritual potency, a refined sensibility, insight, and mystical capacity"( p. 131). Therefore, Javanese women tend to be "emotional, crude, uncontrolled, uncontrollable, and likely to be somewhat ill-bred" (p. 131). Other characteristics that should be possessed by noble Javanese women are fragility, dependence, grace, modesty and refinement.

In addition, Javanese ideology considers women to be deprived of the spiritual and learning characteristics which are possessed by men. Therefore, they are expected to be dependent on their men for protection and guidance. In return a wife should care for her husband's emotional and domestic needs, be submissive to his wishes and supportive of his endeavours. As an extreme example, a wife should not oppose her husband's polygamous marriage. Instead, she should accept this polygamous marriage as part of her duty as a good wife that will make her husband happy. Hatley asserts that polygamy among Javanese aristocrats was considered as a part of nature that must be accepted by every woman/wife.

Javanese feudalistic customs required women to be secluded when they reached the age of puberty. The seclusion (or *pingitan*) would end when the women got married. The seclusion system was different from that of the custom of harem as the former is only applicable to unmarried girls whereas the latter is imposed on women for the rest of their lives. During the seclusion (*pingitan*) period, a girl was cut off from the outside world and only allowed to be visited by people of the same sex. Men, including her male relatives even her own brother were not allowed to visit her (Soeroto, 1986).

Marriage was usually pre-arranged by the girl's parents. In many cases a girl of upper class would be married to an older married man of equal or higher status. In Javanese feudalistic society, polygamy is not an alien practice. Polygamy among this class is an old and well-established custom which existed long before Islam came and it was even more institutionalised by the coming of Islam in Java (Palmier, 1960). According to this custom, a male Javanese nobleman was entitled to have more than one wife.

Marriage among the Javanese nobility follows a certain pattern. Palmier (1960) found that there are two types of marriage. A marriage to a primary wife, or *Garwa Padmi*, and marriages to secondary wives *Garwa Ampil*. A man is only entitled to have one head wife, who is not necessarily the first wife. At the same time, he is allowed to have more than one or two secondary wives. Palmier further explains that a head wife must be a daughter of parents whose status was equal to the husband's while secondary wives can be women of lower status or commoners. However, their children retain the status of their father.

Although both kinds of wives are legally married in accordance with social customs and religion, a head wife and secondary wives are given different treatment and functions. A head wife is expected to control the running of the household and to accompany her husband in his social life. Secondary wives, although their status is automatically raised by the marriage, will still be treated like a common person, or worse, on the level of a servant (Palmier, 1960). Although secondary wives reside in the same house with a head wife, they occupy different buildings. A head wife resides in the main building whereas secondary

wives live in the back of the building. A head wife should also perform as a "mother" to all her husband's children. She is the one who is given all the authority to raise all the children --her own and those of the secondary wives. She is expected to treat them more or less equally.

### **3.6 Islam and Javanese Women**

Only a few works deal with Islam and women in Java. These studies mostly focus their discussions on contemporary Javanese society, for example a study by Berminghausen and Kirstan (1993) entitled *Forging New Paths: Feminist Social Methodology and Rural Women in Java*. In one section that describes Islam and Javanese women, they mention that Islam's teachings about the equality between men and women have brought about an emancipatory element into the strict feudal, hierarchical thinking of the Javanese (p. 48). Whether this is also applicable to Javanese women at the turn of the century is not described. However, studies of Javanese society suggest that Javanese women were subject to one of the most controversial Islam injunctions: polygamy. As has been mentioned earlier in the previous section, Palmier (1960) observes that the Javanese practice polygamy especially among the upper class, and it was strengthened and legitimized by the Islamic authorities.

In relation to the dress code, unlike women in most Islamic countries, the Javanese women are not obliged to wear veils. Religious teachers agree that there is nothing in the



Koran and Hadith which obliges a woman to veil her face. However, it is preferred that a woman covers herself from head to foot if she appears in public (Woodcroft-Lee, 1983). Indonesian Muslims in general regard the Islamic dress code as a "small matter" (Woodcroft-Lee, 1983).

In general at the turn of the century, gender roles in Javanese society, especially among the upper class, were more prescribed by custom than religion (Islam). Although Islam granted women a right to have education, only men were allowed to go to the religious schools. Women were kept at home and occupied themselves with domestic concerns as required by the prevailing customs. Only a very few women knew the Islamic teachings and mostly their knowledge was limited to reading the Koran in the Arabic without knowing the meaning (Dahlan, 1979). In the case of upper class girls, they were given some religious instruction and the Koran recitation, but not the meaning of the Koranic verses. This was not the case for men, who went to the religious school. Many men became respected religious teachers (*Kyai*), and had profound knowledge of the Islamic laws, and were able to read and write Arabic. As a result, the interpretation of the Koran in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was dominated by these male religious authorities (Dahlan, 1979).

I have highlighted some relevant social, historical and cultural background of the two Muslim feminist writers. Based on this information, in addition to what I have described in Chapter II, I will discuss Huda's and Kartini's biographical background in the

next three chapters and how as writers they are defined by their male dominated and colonised society.

## CHAPTER IV

### BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND:

#### HUDA SHAARAWI (1879-1947)

The following two chapters present the life histories of Huda Shaarawi and Kartini. The discussion will include the process of how they became feminists. In the discussion I hope to show to what extent the theories proposed by Belenky *et al.* can explain the formation of their feminism. I will use Belenky *et al.*'s theories on women's stages of developing their knowledge--"silent women," "receivist", "subjectivist", "procedurist" and "constructivist"--to explain some stages in these two feminists' accounts of their lives.

#### **Huda Shaarawi (1879-1947)**

Huda Shaarawi was a renowned Egyptian feminist. In 1923 she founded the Egyptian Feminist Union and she remained as the leader of the Union until she died in 1947. A few years before she died she wrote her memoirs that recorded her early years and her involvement in the women's movement in Egypt in the early decades of the twentieth century. Huda Shaarawi considered that the unpleasant experiences of her early years in the harem and in her marriage had led her towards the path of feminism (as recorded by Doria Shafik in her memoirs: Nelson, 1986).

In her memoirs we can see that her childhood in the harem, her forced marriage at a young age, her first-hand experience in a polygamous marriage, and her involvement with intellectual friends were parts of her life that led to her development as a feminist.

Therefore, the discussion of the process of Huda's becoming a feminist is limited to the first part of her account of her personal life. Huda told this part of her life with "an introspective, innocent voice: often lyrical, it flows in a stream of consciousness, caressing pain and pleasures" (Badran, 1995, p. 33).

The second part of her memoirs were not told in Huda's voice but in that of Margot Badran's as the editor. Huda died before she could finish her memoirs, which remained unpublished until Margot Badran decided to publish it two decades after Huda's death in 1947. According to Badran, most of Huda's accounts in the second part of her memoirs describe her later involvement as a feminist with Egyptian women's dual struggle, as nationalists and feminists (Badran, 1987).

Huda Shaarawi was born Nur al-Huda Sultan in 1879 in the town of Minyan, Upper Egypt (Badran, 1987). She was the daughter of Sultan Pasha, a wealthy and respected provincial administrator from Upper Egypt. An upper-class girl, Huda was raised in the harem and lived with two mothers: her biological mother, Iqbal, and her "Big Mother," *Umm Kabira*. *Umm Kabira* was the wife of Sultan Pasha whose son, Ismael, died at a young age.

In 1884 Huda's father died leaving Huda with her brother Umar, and her two mothers who started taking control over the harem. According to Egyptian custom, when a father died, his children came under the guardianship of his male relatives. When Huda's father died, his nephew, Ali Shaarawi, became the legal guardian of Huda and Umar. These are the three authority figures who played important roles in Huda's early life. They also

affected Huda's understanding of gender construction. Another important authority figure was the eunuch, Said Agha, who always watched over Huda and Umar, and had a great deal of power to control Huda's life even when she was grown up.

In her memoirs Huda recounted how people around her favoured her brother over her. Her mother, her maids and servants, her cousin, and Said Agha all did this. Among these people, her mother was the person who was most responsible for Huda's anxiety and insecurity. Huda used to have a recurring dream that she was not her mother's daughter:

I used to imagine that I was not my mother's daughter--that my real mother was a slave girl who had died, and the truth was being withheld from me. ...I was overcome by anxieties and frightening thoughts moved me to tears. I dreamed often that huge beasts were pouncing on me, baring their fangs in my face, and when I sought refuge with my mother I would find that she had taken my brother in her arms and turned her back on me. "I am not your child! I am not your child!" (*Harem Years*, 1987, pp. 34-35)

The dreams reflect Huda's anxiety and how she perceived the world. She felt rejected by her mother who "turned her back on me" when she was a frightened little girl and needed comfort and reassurance. She perceived the world as unfair and unjust to her because she felt "that as the elder I should receive more attention" (*Harem*, 1987, p. 36).

Huda, raised in the limited space assigned by her culture and class, depended on the available authorities for direction and thus for her survival; on how to live in a seemingly very unpleasant world. Feeling rejected by one authority (her mother) who also often hid the "truth", Huda started to seek another authority who would provide her with the direction and explanation needed to make sense of the world.

She turned to *Umm Kabira* (or *Habibah*) to seek comfort and answers for troubling questions about differences between herself and her brother Umar. In her Huda found both the authority and motherly figure on whom she could rely for comfort and love.

I loved *Umm Kabira* immensely, and she returned that love and showed compassion toward me. She, alone, talked frankly with me on a number of matters, making it easy for me to confide in her. She knew how I felt when people favoured my brother over me because he was a boy. (*Harem*, p. 34)

It was from *Umm Kabira* that Huda first learned about gender differences and gender roles. At this stage Huda can be considered as a "received knower" who has a capability to listen and store the information (Belenky *et al.*, 1986, p. 36)

I once asked *Umm Kabira* why everyone paid more attention to my brother than to me. "Haven't you understood yet?".... When I claimed that as the elder I should receive more attention she replied, "But you are a girl and he is a boy. And you are not the only girl, while he is the only boy. One day the support of the family will fall upon him. When you marry you will leave the house and honour your husband's name but he will perpetuate the name of his father and take over his house." (*Harem*, p. 36)

Apparently *Umm Kabira* acted as an authority figure on whom Huda relied as a source of the truth as "this straightforward answer satisfied me" (p. 36). However, because *Umm Kabira* had also been confined to the harem and lived in a segregated life and was thus cut off from internal and external intellectual sources, the answers she gave to Huda were probably the answers she herself had been given. Living in the harem she was likely to believe that it was a man who was supposed to run the family, that it was the man who

always upheld the honour of the family by being the breadwinner, and it was a man who took his father's name. These were the gender constructions which *Umm Kabira* accepted. So did Huda. Still listening and relying on the authority, Huda believed that this was the way things were supposed to be.

*Umm Kabira's* explanation made Huda's love for her brother stronger as she believed that her brother would carry on the name of her loving father. Huda cherished the figure of a loving and caring father who, unlike her mother, never discriminated against her. The only incident she remembered was when her father gave both Huda and her brother Ismael chocolate. Huda was impressed by her father's equal attention to both Huda and Ismael. This kind and just figure of a father is the figure that persists in Huda's mind. To Huda, her father is the male figure who is just and compassionate.

*Umm Kabira's* explanation apparently only satisfied Huda for a while because soon after she asked the same question to her mother. This time her mother explained that it was her brother's fragility, in contrast with Huda's strength and liveliness, that caused her to pay more attention to Umar than to her. Believing what her mother (authority) told her and still thinking in a dualistic way, she wished that she was ill, so that she would get more attention. Much to her gratification, she fell ill and her mother became greatly concerned about her. But, "unfortunately" when Umar got the same illness, all the attention was lavished upon him. Huda again felt neglected and rejected, and she "began to prefer death" (*Harem*, 1987, p. 37).

This rejection deeply affected the way she saw herself and the world. As a matter of fact this was the turning point for Huda. Not being able to cope with the reality which was beyond her comprehension she then decided to withdraw from "the world of others" and withdrew to her own world: the world of silence, as wordless as animals and nature.

...I withdrew into myself and resented those around me. I began to spend the afternoons in the garden amid the fruit and flower trees, and the birds, fish and pet animals. I preferred the companionship of these creatures to the company of humans who injured my self-esteem. I grew attached to a gazelle that followed me everywhere. It would climb to our room on the top floor, come over to my bed, and put its head on my pillow to rouse me with its sweet whine before proceeding to my brother's bed. If I was sick, however, it would remain loyally at my side like a cat or dog. This affection consoled me very much. I loved animals and believed they instinctively sensed my condition. (*Harem*, p. 37)

In a society where daughters were always less favoured than sons, it was understandable for Huda's mother to give more love and attention to Umar than to Huda. It was Umar who would later inherit her husband's name and estate and thus provide her with financial security. In *Umm Kabira's* case, because her son (Ismael) had died at a very young age, whatever treatment she gave to Huda or Umar, it would not make any difference to her.

The discrimination Huda received from her mother, however, did not make Huda hate Umar. Instead, she loved and cared about her brother deeply. Her affection and love for him were strengthened when her brother demonstrated his loyalty by refusing to betray Huda. Huda corrected the lies her brother had been told about the death of their father. Umar was previously told by her mother and others that his father was gone for a while and would return home someday. Umar had believed this for a long time until one day Huda



told the truth that their father died. The truth really upset him but Umar refused to reveal the reason to her mother. After her father's death, Umar became the authority male figure for Huda replacing her father.

Huda also benefited from having a brother because she could receive education at home with him. Like many upper-class families, Huda's mother hired foreign tutors to give various lessons to her children, especially to her son. An Italian governess taught Huda French and Turkish (as the language of the upper-class), history and culture, including how to play the piano which was a mark of an upper-class girl (Badran, 1995).

Although it was unusual for a girl in the harem, Huda managed to memorize the Holy Book completely when she was nine. This was, as Huda recalled, the first joy in their house since the death of her father. This event was also one of the rare moments in Huda's childhood which were not painful. Huda's accomplishment elevated her self-esteem: "I was happy at that occasion and later boasted to my friends of my success" (*Harem*, 1987, p. 40-41). Her own mother who usually rejected her held a celebration for Huda.

Although Huda was allowed to memorize the Koran, she was not allowed to learn Arabic, the language of the Koran.

Of all the subjects, Arabic was my favourite. One day when I asked the teacher why I was unable to read the Koran without making a mistake he said, "Because you have not learned the rules of grammar." I pressed him, "Will I be able to read perfectly once I have done so?" When he said yes I asked him to teach me. (*Harem*, p. 40).

The following day Huda's teacher brought her a grammar book but unfortunately it was seen by Said Agha, another authority in the harem, who ordered Huda's teacher to take it back. It was he who made sure that Huda would not learn Arabic because he believed that "the young lady has no need of grammar as she will not become a judge" (*Harem*, p. 40). The notion that a woman cannot be a judge is related to gender roles defined in religious teachings.

This refusal to allow her to learn Arabic frustrated Huda and led to feelings of self-hatred. "I became depressed and began to neglect my studies, hating being a girl because it kept me from the education I sought" (*Harem*, p. 40). Being a girl who was taught to be always obedient to the authority, Huda was forced to be silent. Many years later she recorded, "The memory and anguish of this remain sharp to this day" (*Harem*, p. 40). Later, Huda recognized the interconnectedness of gender, education, power, and freedom: "Later, being a female became a barrier between me and the freedom for which I yearned" (*Harem*, p. 40). This kind of experience encouraged Huda to become an advocate for women's education.

Huda's memoirs show us that although she was raised in a segregated and secluded environment, she was not completely cut off from all knowledge. Belenky *et al.* (1986) suggest that a silent woman is usually cut off from internal and external knowledge. Huda thus cannot be fully categorized as a "silent woman." To some extent she was indeed a "silent woman," although in other ways Huda in her childhood had already had the

capability for a "received knowledge" and could gain knowledge by listening and observing authorities or friends (Belenky *et al.*, 1986, pp. 36-39).

In her account of her childhood, Huda gives us the impression that as a little girl, she was observant and self-conscious. She loved knowledge. One day she threatened her brother that she would not speak to him if he neglected his lessons (*Harem*, p. 39).

Huda began to act like a "subjectivist" when she started to follow her inner voice rather than external authorities to learn more about Arabic and, eventually about Arabic poetry. Following her voice to satisfy her hunger for this knowledge, which was forbidden to her, she "began to buy books from peddlers who came to the door even though I was strictly forbidden to do so" (*Harem*, p. 41). She further recounted how she used to sneak into her father's room to find books that could satisfy her (*Harem*, 1987, p. 41). This suggests that Huda had started to take control of her life.

Her natural love for poetry grew stronger when a female itinerant poet, Sayyida Khadija al-Maghribiya, began to visit her house. Arab women have a long literary tradition, especially in the genre of poetry (Badran and Cooke, 1993). Huda liked to listen to her recitation of poetry. However, much to her disappointment, once again, she could not compose verses because she had to know the grammar first. Again, lack of education in the Arabic language prevented Huda from fulfilling what she wished to be. Language became a barrier for her self-fulfilment. "My ignorance pained me and I blamed Said Agha for it" (*Harem*, p. 42).

Despite her disappointment, Huda was able to see and begin to comprehend how language could give a woman power and authority like men; how through language women can be equal to men.

Sayyida Khadija impressed me because she used to sit with the men and discuss literary and cultural matters. Meanwhile, I observed how women without learning would tremble with embarrassment and fright if called upon to speak a few words to a man from behind the screen. Observing Sayyida Khadija convinced me that, with learning, women could be the equals of men if not surpass them. My admiration for her continued to grow and I yearned to be like her, in spite of her ugly face. (*Harem*, p. 42)

Through Sayyida Khadija Huda, who was raised in a world which emphasized female beauty, learned that a woman could be respected even if she was ugly.

When Huda reached the age of puberty, around eleven, she was subjected to veiling and segregation.

From the time we were very small, my brother and I shared the same friends, nearly all boys, most of whom were the children of our neighbours. The boys remained my companions until I grew up --that is, until I was eleven--when suddenly I was required to restrict myself to the company of girls and women. I felt a stranger being in their world-- their habits and notions startled me. Being separated from the companions of my childhood was a painful experience. Their ways left a mark on me. (*Harem*, p. 52)

Huda apparently was not prepared to enter this female world even though we might suppose that both her mother and Kabira would have told her about it. According to Belenky *et al.* (1986, p. 28) the two mothers were typically "authorities" who do not tell their subordinates what and why something is right. They expected her to know in advance. Huda herself did

not ask why because she still trusted them. Perhaps also Huda still saw her two mothers as models approved by their class and society.

Huda's reaction to her shrinking world may also suggest her initial rejection of these practices. She was not comfortable with seclusion as it would prevent her from seeking more knowledge and lessons. This triggered her awareness of women's oppression practiced by the society in the name of culture and religion.

Huda as a "silent woman" as characterized by Belenky *et al.* is obviously revealed when at the age of thirteen she was forced to marry her own cousin, who was also her guardian, a man in his early forties. Huda was subjected to a marriage prearranged by family members or guardians, as was the custom in Egypt.

One day Huda overheard her mother's intention to marry her to Ali Shaarawi instead of to a member of the royal family whose proposal could not be refused. At first Huda's mother did not want to marry Huda to Ali Shaarawi because of the differences in ages. However, she finally agreed when she was convinced that he was "'lord and master of all'" (*Harem*, p. 52). The marriage between Huda and her cousin, who was also an executor of her father's estate, would ensure that the property would remain in the family (Badran, 1995).

Huda recounted that soon after this her cousin began to visit her and her mother more frequently. Only now did she realize that the remarks of nurses and slaves, "Go and greet your husband" (*Harem*, p. 52) every time Ali Shaarawi visited her, were no longer a mockery as she used to believe. It is obvious that Huda was expected to marry her cousin

by her society (represented by the maids and servants). She should have known this long before she overheard the conversation. However, because the maid and the servants were not "authorities" she could rely on. Huda dismissed their remarks as mockery. She trusted her mother instead. Only after her mother mentioned the issues did Huda start to believe it. Huda felt angry and shocked. But, not being allowed to express her anger she just "wept long and hard, and the shock caused my illness to worsen and persist for a long time afterwards" (*Harem*, p. 52).

Although the truth was now revealed, Huda still trusted that her mother would do her best for her. Because her mother herself seemed not to like the idea, Huda came to believe that the marriage was not going to happen. Therefore Huda did not understand why her mother had given her jewellery. She believed it was a "fulfilment of a vow she had made for the recovery of my illness" but it was in fact some kind of dowry. Huda did not know this was a dowry as she did not have any sisters whose experience she could relate to. Afterward, a series of marriage preparations were conducted before Huda's eyes. Huda was told that it was the marriage of "the daughter of a pasha in whose household my mother's maid had once been employed" (*Harem*, p. 53).

Because Huda believed in her mother who did not say a word about this marriage, she failed to understand that the marriage was meant for her. The other authority from whom Huda sought the truth, *Umm Kabira*, unfortunately was no longer there for Huda. *Umm Kabira* died shortly before Huda's marriage. "If she had not passed away, I might have discovered certain truths but, as it was, there was no one to explain things I could not

understand on my own" (*Harem*, p. 53). In this context Huda was a "silent woman" described by Belenky *et al.* (1986, pp. 24-28). She could not trust her ability to understand and to remember what was said. Huda had depended *Umm Kabira* as the authority to guide her actions, so when *Umm Kabira* died, Huda lost her source of truth.

Huda discovered what had been planned for her only after she was asked formally to give her consent to the marriage, as was required by the Islamic law to make the marriage contract valid.

To my utter astonishment, Ali Pasha Fahmi announced, "The son of your father's sister wants your hand in marriage and we are here on his behalf."

Only then did I understand the reason for the various preparations underway in the house, as well as a number of other mysteries. With my back to the men, I cried without speaking or moving.... Eventually, Ali Pasha Fahmi and Saad al-Din Bey asked, "Whom do you wish to designate as your *wakil* to sign the marriage contract?" I said nothing, and after a long silence, Said Agha whispered in my ear, "Do you wish to disgrace the name of your father and destroy your poor mother who is weeping in her sickbed and might not survive the shock of your refusal?" Upon hearing these words, which pierced my heart, I replied, "Do whatever you want," and rushed immediately to my mother's room scraping my head on a nail on the side of the door in my haste. (*Harem*, p. 54)

Instead of speaking up to express her shock and her disagreement, Huda kept silent and simply wept. To her the only way to survive was to keep silent and obey the words of authority, i.e. her mother. In addition, Huda was trapped in the role of a dutiful daughter which was favoured and strengthened by society. A good daughter could save her mother's life and father's honour, but an evil daughter could destroy people she loved.

Therefore, when Said Agha reminded her of her capacity to destroy her mother by not marrying Ali Shaarawi, she could say nothing.

Finally at the age of thirteen Huda married Ali Shaarawi who was by then already in his forties. Nevertheless, despite her painful and silent rejection of this marriage, Huda perceived this day as a moment of joy.

On the night of the wedding ceremony, the rapt attention focused upon me, especially by my friends, increased my joy so that I almost leaped with delight while I donned my wedding dress embroidered in thread of silver and gold. I was spellbound by the diamonds and other brilliant jewels that crowned my head and sparkled on my bodice and arms. All of this dazzled me and kept me from thinking of anything else. I was certain I would remain forever in this raiment, the centre of attention and admiration. (*Harem*, p. 56)

The way she reacted to her wedding day shows Huda as a “silent woman” who could not see beyond the glamour of the day. It seems that finally she found the day when she no longer felt rejected and all the attention was centred upon her. This blinded her to what was to come. She failed to understand that this was the moment when her half-freedom would be taken away completely. Huda acted like a “silent woman” whose ways of knowing were limited to the present. She failed to learn from the past, when she saw how her mother, the concubine of an older married man, used to “keep her sadness hidden inside” (*Harem*, p. 25). She even “failed to understand the feelings of sympathy these women had for my marrying at such a tender age” (*Harem*, p. 56).

Only when the ceremony ended did she realize what kind of life she was going to lead. It was one of her most bitter moments as she realized she “would live cut off from



everything that had delighted me and consoled me in my melancholy childhood" (*Harem*, p. 58). Hence, she "wept for my childhood and for my freedom" (*Harem*, p. 58).

In describing how devastated her life would be, Shaarawi compared her life to her garden she loved. Huda was emotionally attached to the garden. She spent most of her childhood in the garden. The garden seemed to be a safe place or sanctuary for the wounded little girl who did not receive the attention from her mother she expected. As I described early in this chapter, she used to flee from the "cruelty of life" to the garden, where she could play with the silent animals and plants, and especially particular plants which always reminded her of her late loving and wise father she missed so much. The loss of the garden is the loss of her freedom and her memory of the beloved father who never discriminated against her. The memory of her father who never discriminated against her helped build her self-esteem. As the garden was destroyed to provide some space for the wedding guests, her self-esteem was also shattered. As the garden was "sacrificed at the call of a single night" (*Harem*, p. 36), Huda was also sacrificed to save her father's estate and thus the entire family.

How desolate I was when I saw the work of the hand of destruction! Nothing remained on the grounds where the tent had been raised--not a single tree of the many trees I loved, all of which held special memories for me. ...I loved all those trees--the big and small--and swung from their branches in my girlhood. They had been planted by my father who had loved them as I had, and who had cared for them and enjoyed eating their fruit. All had become the lost remnants of grandeur. All were sacrificed at the call of a single night, a night I had fancied would last in all its beauty and majesty forever, a night when my sorrows and agonies had vanished. But it faded like an enchanting dream. Bitter reality followed. I wept for my trees. I wept for my childhood and for my freedom. I saw in this barren garden a

picture of life--the life I would live cut off from everything that had delighted me and consoled me in my melancholy childhood. I turned from the window with a heavy heart and avoided the garden for a long, long time, unable to bear these aching reveries. (*Harem*, p. 58)

Huda's marriage seemed to work out for the first months. But this did not last long as Huda began to feel depressed by the restrictions imposed on her by her husband. She was not allowed to play the piano or to pay visits to her relatives and friends. This made her unhappy. A year later, it was discovered that Huda's husband had returned to his former wife because she was pregnant. He thus violated the agreement made with Huda's mother stipulating that Ali Shaarawi would divorce or leave all his present wives and slave concubines<sup>9</sup> upon marrying Huda. Huda decided to separate from him and managed to stretch the separation into seven years. These were the seven years when Huda started regaining autonomy and control over her own life.

During this time Huda received more knowledge and became stronger. She recounted that "The seven years I remained apart from my husband was a time for new experiences and for growing into adulthood" (p.62). It was during these seven years we can see Huda going through the stages of received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge.

After the separation, Huda felt more independent and resumed her lessons in Arabic, French, painting, drawing, and music, which had been interrupted during her marriage. Her French was much better than her Arabic, despite her love of Arabic as her

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<sup>9</sup>The exact numbers of Ali Shaarawi's wives are unknown.

paternal language. The social restriction that only men are allowed to master Arabic contributed to her failure. Apparently, Huda still could not go beyond the restriction despite her greater independence. This positions Huda in the stage of a "received knower" pointed out by Belenky *et al.* Although Huda already had the capacity to learn and to store information, she was still restricted to the sex roles imposed by her culture.

The process of "receiving knowledge" during the separation period was facilitated by her new friends and acquaintances. Belenky *et al.* (1986) point out that a woman can acquire knowledge through friends and by listening to them. Her friends exposed Huda to books and ideas. There were at least four women who were close to her who influenced her life in different ways. They were a French girl of her own age, Adila Nabrawi, Atiyah Saqqaf, and most important Eugenie Le Brun.

Huda described her French friend, who was the daughter of a French official posted in Egypt, as a strong-willed and well educated girl. With her Huda perfected her French by reading novels and poetry in French. Huda also found that, despite her own bitter life, she could offer her support in her difficult relationship with her dominant father and aunt. In other words, Huda strengthened herself through the empowerment of others. As Belenky *et al.* (1986, p. 47) contend, "received knowers" feel quite comfortable in advancing themselves by means of helping others. Huda wrote, "She often came to me for support to help her endure her life at home" (*Harem*, p. 63).

Adila Nabarawi was the daughter of a diplomat, who resided with her husband in Paris but occasionally visited Egypt. She was the one who accompanied Huda most in her

outdoor activities. It was quite unusual for upper class women like Huda to go outside the harem. Huda recalled one day when they went to the opera house with its separate entry for women leading to screened boxes in the balcony. So, Huda began acting according to her "infallible gut" (Belenky *et al.*, 1986, p. 56), to make herself comfortable without considering social customs. In Belenky *et al.*'s framework, Huda had become a "subjectivist."

As "subjectivist" Huda watched and listened very carefully to others, one of whom was her relative, Atiyah Saqqaf. She listened to and even recorded the sad story of Atiyah Saqqaf. Atiyah's story had a significant meaning for Huda because from her Huda learned about women's plight in polygamous marriages. It might be because of the similarity of their positions in polygamous marriages that Huda's affection and love toward her grew.

The journey into "subjective knowledge" actually had begun when she gladly accepted the fact that her husband returned to his former wife and decided to separate from him. Although many attempts at reconciliation were made, Huda still acted according to her will. She needed a space for growing. Her seven years of separation gave her this.

Huda also kept her subjectivism when she had to deal with authority figures who tried to be mediators between her and her husband. There were two elder family friends who were involved in the reconciliation. They were Zubair Pasha and Shaikh Ali al-Latihi. Ali Shaarawi himself also kept making pleas for reconciliation.

Zubair Pasha told Huda that her resentment was a disgrace to her family and that her husband had every right to force her to return to him. According to Egyptian custom, a

husband has a right to demand his wife's obedience. He even went farther when he used the figure of Huda's father to put pressure on her and told her that reconciliation was what her father would have wanted. Huda talked back:

"My father would not have permitted me to listen to such words! I have done no wrong. My husband is the guilty one. Yet, in spite of that, if I knew he needed me I would not hesitate for a moment to sacrifice myself to him, but in fact, he does not need me. He lives with his former slave who bears him a child every year. It is enough that I don't question him about the matter and am able to bear all of this. I am sure my father would not condone his daughter's suffering over this, for he was just and compassionate." With that I left him. (*Harem*, p. 65)

Huda reacted intuitively and "just knew" that her father would not say so, even though she could barely remember him. Leila Ahmed comments that the figure of the just and compassionate father is probably only Huda's creation (Ahmed, 1988), but it enabled her to counter Zubair Pasha's arguments.

Instead of being victimized and intimidated by the words of Zubair Pasha, Huda's own words became a weapon of self-empowerment. Breaking the silence by speaking up demonstrated to her that things could be better. Huda recounted that "the following day he sent his wife to ask Huda's forgiveness for his severity" (*Harem*, p. 65).

When her husband made his plea, Huda continued to act according to her inner feeling that she did the right thing for her, her husband and even her husband's other wife. At the same time we find that Huda is already acting with "procedural knowledge." She was able to reason with her husband in a controlled and measured tone. She was no longer

in tears. It is interesting to see how she was able to employ "patriarchal rule" as a weapon against the patriarchal authority. She writes:

I always spoke to him in a calm and reasoned way, *reminding him of his obligations to his children and their mother*. I told him, "there is nothing that ties me to you but the bond of kinship and gratitude for your service toward the family." adding, "I am certain you want me back to ease your conscience. You may think you have hurt me but *you have a duty toward your children that requires you to live with them. I can assure you that you contribute toward my happiness by remaining with them and their mother.*" (*Harem*, p. 66) (emphasis added)

Huda's resentment at the reconciliation attempts shows that she was no longer subject to the whims of external authorities. She no longer believed in external authority as the source of truth. She was disappointed with Zubair Pasha and Sheikh Ali al-Latihi, as friends of her beloved father, when they failed to defend her position. Huda's husband also failed to fulfil his role as a husband and a head of a family. She no longer had a stable male authority.

Having a picture of failed male authorities enabled Huda to resume her sense of freedom, a freedom to act according to what she believed was the truth. In this case the truth was still coming from her inner voice: the truth is still subjectively acquired. Nevertheless, as Belenky *et al.* (1986, p.54) point out, it is through subjective knowledge that women become more assertive and active. The period of acquiring subjective knowledge is the period where a woman begins to trust her inner voice as an inner source of strength. Listening to the inner voice is the hallmark of women's emergent sense of self and sense of agency and control. Huda listened to her inner voice and eventually she became

more assertive and more self-defined and gained greater autonomy and freedom. In other words, Huda discovered her personal authority. Huda even rebelled against Atiya, whom she loved dearly, when Atiya tried to control and dominate her.

I have mentioned earlier that during the process of acquiring subjective knowledge, Huda sometimes also acted as a woman of procedural knowledge. The process of procedural knowledge becomes more obvious with Huda's involvement with others, especially with Eugenie Le Brun and with her greater involvement in the public sphere. It was to Eugenie Le Brun, a Muslim French woman who was married to Husayn Rushdi, a wealthy landowner and future prime minister (Badran, 1995, p.37), that Huda owed some of the essential knowledge she had acquired. Eugenie Le Brun was "a dear friend and valued mentor" (*Harem*, p. 78). It was through her guidance that Huda could see her class and religion in different ways. I will discuss her approach towards Islam in Chapter Six.

Huda rediscovered an external authority who she could rely on. Her biological mother was, of course, still her maternal authority, but she could not trust her as the source of truth. In Eugenie Le Brun Huda found another authority to enable her to develop her mind and her voice. Badran contends that "Eugenie Le Brun became a surrogate mother to Huda and a counterpoise to her real mother" (1985, p.37). Badran further comments that her real mother had led Huda to the expected social role imposed by her society, where Le Brun provided "a different stimulus, constituting an important intellectual and feminist force in Shaarawi's life" (1995, p. 37). Huda wrote, "She guided my first steps in 'society'

and looked out for my reputation" (*Harem*, p.80) and "...Mme Rushdi not only guarded my reputation, but also nourished my mind and spirit" (*Harem*, p. 80).

During the process of learning and acquiring knowledge Huda was given a direction and instruction in how to learn in a systematic way. Eugenie Le Brun provided Huda with guided reading in French and other books. She also encouraged Huda to discuss the content of the books. Huda knew now how to acquire knowledge in a more objective way. In other words, Huda now acted as both a "subjectivist" and a "procedural knower."

Encouraged by Eugenie Le Brun, Huda sought knowledge in the external world. She began to attend discussions held by Eugenie Le Brun inside the harem. The discussions were mostly concerned with the condition and status of Egyptian women and veiling. Besides Eugenie Le Brun, Huda also owed her knowledge about women in Islam to Qasim Amin. Huda called him "The Defender of the Women." When Eugenie Le Brun died in 1908 Huda lost one of her knowledgeable authorities. Huda still acted like as a person with "subjective knowledge" who needed guidance and direction from the authorities. At this point she had not yet been able to construct her own way of knowledge as she still relied excessively on the judgement and evaluation of others.

I had come to rely heavily upon her good counsel but even after her death I felt her spirit light the way before me. When I was about to embark on something, I often paused to ask myself what she would think, and if I sensed her approval I would proceed. (*Harem*, p. 82)

In 1900 Huda reconciled with her husband. Huda claimed that her decision was mainly motivated out of her love for her brother. Umar begged her to come back to her



husband and swore that he would not marry if she did not do so. Huda still saw her brother as a male authority figure, replacing her absent father. So, she gave up her resistance to the reconciliation. Having gained on her own a sense of independence and autonomy, she did not give in easily as "I told him I was prepared to return to my husband only under certain conditions. I was sure my husband would refuse them, but he did not" (*Harem*, p. 83). Knowing that her husband needed her deeply, Huda was able to negotiate with her husband and was no longer as subject to him as she used to be. She had already developed her own autonomy and self-respect and this made her much more confident. It meant she could leave her husband whenever she wanted, whenever her husband failed to fulfil her demands.

Later Huda used this kind of bargaining power in matters relating to her daughter's illness. In the next five years, Huda had a son and a daughter, born in 1903 and 1905. During this time, Huda focused on domestic concerns. In her memoirs she carefully described the energy and attention she bestowed on her children, especially on her daughter, who had a health problem. Only after her daughter's health improved, could Huda see her friends again and become more involved in women's discussions and lectures.

Huda derived some power from knowing that her husband needed her and could not afford to lose her a second time. She used this power effectively when she decided to take her sick daughter outside Egypt for treatment despite her husband's disagreement.

....when her condition failed to improve, I lost patience and threatened to leave my husband if anything happened to her. Dr. Coloradi, our physician in Alexandria, insisted she would not get better without a change of climate, and so my husband granted permission for her to be taken to Turkey. (*Harem*, p. 88)

Huda's account of how she devoted her life to her ill daughter shows her subverting the notion perpetuated by society that a son is preferable to a daughter. This belief had victimized her when she was a child. Now being a mother of both a daughter and a son, she could go beyond this belief by paying equal attention to both her children. Huda even went further when she decided to suckle her own children, which was unusual for a woman of her class (Badran, 1995).

In raising her children Huda modified the pattern of authority she inherited from her mother. She would not let her children obey her blindly. She had learned from her own experience that blind obedience led to self-worthlessness.

In raising my children I tried to apply reason. If they did something wrong I explained what they had done, so they would not repeat it and to help them acquire a sense of right and wrong. I instilled in them a sense of responsibility and uprightness. When I found these traits in them as adults I was reassured I had done the right thing. (*Harem*, p. 92)

After her daughter became more robust, Huda resumed her outside interests. She started to make a second entry into the public world. This time it was without the guidance of her mentor, Eugénie Le Brun, who died in 1908. This loss made her realize that she could acquire knowledge without the help of others. "The death of my confidante, Mme Rushdi, had forced me to become self-sufficient and not to rely on help from others" (*Harem*, p. 92).

Later she met with Margaret Clement who helped her set up the first "public lecture" for women.<sup>19</sup> Attending and giving lectures were not common for Egyptian women, especially of her class. However, she decided to set up the lectures with Mme Clement as a speaker. The decision reflects Huda's determination to learn more and to acquire more knowledge from reliable and knowledgeable authorities. In addition, Huda had realized the need to acquire knowledge in an a more objective and scholarly fashion. After what she had received from Eugenie Le Brun, she developed more trust in "procedure" to seek or define the truth, for example, when she set up and attended lectures about women's issues.

The topics (which were suggested by Huda) discussed in this first lecture were the comparison of Western and Eastern women, and the practice of veiling. The lecture was well attended by women mostly of the upper and middle classes. Among the audience was Princess Ain-Al Hayat who was a wife to Husain Kamil who became Sultan of Egypt from 1914 to 1917 (Badran, 1987). This first lecture triggered other lecture forums in which women could speak out. One of those who was admired by Huda was the Egyptian woman writer and poet, Malak Hifni Nasif. Malak Nasif' wrote under the pseudonym 'Bahithat al-Badiya' (Seeker in the Desert) and in 1911 at the Egyptian Congress in Heliopolis she was the first woman to make public demands for women's rights. She also wrote articles and composed verse on the condition of women (Badran, 1987).

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<sup>19</sup>This "public lecture" did not include a male audience. The word "public" denotes a place outside private houses in halls for women only (Badran, 1987).

The topics suggested in the first lecture reflect the need for Egyptian women's needs, including the need to define their identity amidst the Western influences which had been strengthened in the era of modernization and reformation. Veiling had already become a hot issue between the traditionalists (traditional *ulema*) and the reformers under the Islamic Reform movement led by Shaikh Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) and others (Botman, 1991). Traditionalists held that veiling was a practice legally sanctioned by religion, while the reformers considered it a matter of custom.

Eugenie Le Brun had previously raised the issue of veiling. By suggesting this topic, Huda pursued what lay behind the concept of veiling. Her determination to seek more knowledge about this issue shows that Huda now had greater self-autonomy and self-authority. She was capable of doing something that came out of her own ideas and her own concern without waiting consent from others. At the same time, Huda realized the importance of experience in order to gain knowledge or truth. Therefore, although the issues were already much discussed by male scholars, Huda still saw the importance of listening to women, who were, after all, subject to the practice. This makes Huda as a "procedural knower" who uses procedure for systematically learning and analyzing experience (Belenky *et al.*, 1986, p. 95-96).

Sponsored by Princess Ain Al-Hayat, who had been impressed by the way Huda organized the lectures, Huda helped establish "the first women's philanthropic society, the Mabarat Muhammad Ali, to run a dispensary for poor women and children" (Badran, 1987, p. 20). In this project Huda also proposed the establishment of a school, infant care, family

hygiene, home management, and modern health-care. Setting up and joining social activities enabled Huda to go beyond her private and confined space. These kinds of social activities allowed Huda and other upper class women to break the social conventions imposed on their class and sex. It also provided them with a space for communication among women thus building women's solidarity. In addition, the idea of setting up a school for girls shows Huda's awareness that women's oppression resulted in part, at least, from lack of education. Huda was aware that education was no longer a privilege for women of her class, but a right for every individual. Huda considered education as a means through which women could be emancipated.

Huda's involvement with women's discussions and lectures expanded her own knowledge. Realizing the importance of knowledge for women, so that they could have self-respect and self-confidence, and having observed the intellectual awakening of Egyptian women shaped by lectures and discussions, she proposed "an association to bring women together for further intellectual, social and recreational pursuits" (*Harem*, p. 98). The association would further provide her and other women with a space for self-actualization through which women could gain a greater sense of independence and autonomy.

It is interesting to note also that although Huda and other women began to invade forbidden space (i.e. public space), they did not completely ignore the social conventions. In some ways they still followed the norms of their society. Huda did not dare to call the headquarters for their activities a club (*nadi*) because "...it was still not acceptable for women to have a place of their own outside private houses" (*Harem*, p.100). This,

according to Belenky *et al.* (1986, p. 127), will position Huda as "procedural knower." Huda also acted as a "procedural knower" when she dealt with the issue of veiling, which will be discussed in separate section.

Huda can be also categorized as a "connected knower," who, like a "subjectivist," acquired knowledge through personal experience rather than through the pronouncement of authorities. There are at least two points in her memoirs that reveal Huda's position as a "connected knower". Although women's status and condition had already been discussed by many male scholars, Huda still needed to set up lectures discussing women's issues and founded the women's intellectual association in order to get knowledge from personal experience.

Huda also learned the importance of having skills for everybody to earn money. During her journey back to Egypt after visiting Paris to find a cure for her son, Muhammad, she met with women who were worried about what would happen to them because of the declaration of the first World War. Although she knew that she had enough financial sources to support herself and her children, Huda determined to learn some skills. She realized the importance of having a profession or skills so that all women could have financial security.

I saw other women weeping.... they were worried about how they would earn a living during the war, for most of them had no profession... One said, "I am a good cook and if I am detained in Italy I can work as a chef in a pension or with a family." Another said, "I cannot sew or cook so what shall I do?...Maybe I could be a nanny;"...I asked myself what I would do in their position. I could neither cook nor sew nor leave my children to work in someone's home. It was a lesson for me and afterwards I learned how to

cook and sew. In later years, I admired the courage and ingenuity of the Russian women I met in Egypt after the war, some of whom were princesses but they were not ashamed to earn honourable livelihoods after migrating from their country. One of them...told me she found consolation and satisfaction in producing work that people appreciated...she had not fully understood the meaning of life until she had begun to be creative and take on responsibilities. (*Harem*, pp. 105-106)

Returning from her visit to Europe, Huda had to face the bitter news of her mother's death. She was profoundly affected by her death: "I cannot convey the impact of that terrible moment which will never leave my memory. How fate mocks us. How cruel fate is" (*Harem*, p. 106). We see the change in Huda's perception of her mother. In her early years, Huda described her mother as one of those who was responsible for her painful years. Yet, as Huda matured, she began to admire and appreciate her mother. With her capability of learning through empathy, Huda now saw her mother with different eyes by putting herself into her mother's situation. Both Huda and her mother had been rejected by mother figures (Huda was emotionally rejected by her mother, and Huda's mother was rejected by her mother who sent her to Egypt) and both had been married to much older men at a tender age. Perhaps such understanding led Huda to detect motherly love in her mother. At the same time she returned her mother's love when she needed it.

I grieved deeply at my loss of this dear woman toward whom I felt both the love of a daughter and the love of a mother. These two feelings commingled during the time I cared for her in her long illness...I felt like an orphan and a bereaved mother at the same time. It was a strange anguished feeling that rent me and I thought it was the greatest sorrow I would experience... (*Harem*, p. 107)

Shortly after her mother's death, Huda had to face the death of her beloved brother, Umar. Upon her brother's death, Huda wrote, "When my brother departed, my interest in life departed with him..." (*Harem*, p. 111). To Huda, her brother had long been the male authority figure Huda needed to replace her absent father. Ever since she was a child she had looked up to her brother as her male authority figure, who could assist and guide her to make sense of the world. When her brother died, Huda lost her last male authority figure.

He had been the joy of my life and a source of communication and consideration. With his passing I felt I had lost a link between myself and the world. If it were not for my children I would not have lived a single moment after my brother's death...My pain over the loss of my brother got worse. I missed his kindness. I had never known such kindness from anyone else... (*Harem*, pp. 110-111)

Although she had her husband, he did not fit Huda's picture of the ideal male authority figure, because she could not find in her husband the same kindness and compassion of her brother and father. Huda's husband had already failed as a male figure and Huda owed him no respect or fear. In her memoirs Huda described how her husband failed to give her the emotional support she needed after the death of her brother. Her relationship with her husband got worse when Huda would not agree to arrange the marriage of her fourteen-year-old brother's daughter, Naila, to Huda's husband's son, Hasan, who was in his twenties.

Huda admitted that if it had not been for the nationalist movement, she would have separated from her husband. Later, "The Egyptian national movement brought my husband and me closer to each other" (*Harem*, p. 111). Around this time, Huda had already been



involved in the women's movement but had not yet appeared in public. However, she did appear to a public audience in 1918 and made her first feminist public speech when she read a eulogy for the premature death of the accomplished feminist writer Malak Nasif. The loss of one feminist marked Huda's unveiling voice. Huda had finally broken with her private, confined world and revealed herself as an advocate for women's rights.

Huda had become a feminist who had been through the stages of a "silent woman," a "receivist," a "subjectivist," and a "procedural knower". However, the stages she had been through are not linear. In fact, the stages are like a spiral. There are times when Huda was in the stage of a "silent woman" although she had already been in other stages. In sum, once she had surpassed one stage, it does not necessarily mean she did not return to that stage. Like a spiral, she had to confront the stages again and again while at the same time she was also coming to other stages. This process continued until she could construct her own reality and her own knowledge. The stages of "procedural knowledge" and "constructed knowledge," however, become the stages that dominated Huda's later life as a feminist and a nationalist.

The Egyptian Revolution began in 1919 after the British Government refused to give independence to Egypt. Soon the issues of nationalism superseded issues of gender, class, and religion. At the same time, the Egyptian revolution made it possible for women to expand their scope of feminism from the harem to a public feminist movement (Badran, 1987). During the national struggle against British rule Huda Shaarawi led the first Egyptian women's nationalist organisation, the Wafdist Women's Central Committee.

In 1923 Huda founded the Egyptian Feminist Union which focused its concerns on education and social welfare to provide equality between the sexes (Jayawardena, 1986). In the same year Huda along with Saiza Nabarawi<sup>11</sup> and Nabawiya, a feminist teacher from Alexandria, attended a meeting of the International Alliance of Women in Rome. Upon their return from Rome, Huda and Saiza made the dramatic and controversial act of lifting their veils. Badran contends that this act signalled the beginning of the end of the harem system in Egypt (1987).

In 1924 Huda resigned as a President of the Wafdist Women's Central Committee (WWWC) following a difference of opinion between the WWWC and the Wafd, the Egyptian national party founded in 1919. The tension between the WWWC and the Wafd mounted when feminists' demands to have the right to vote and divorce were not included in the draft of the constitution of 1924 (Jayawardena, 1986).

Huda continued her activities in the framework of the Feminist Union. In 1925 Huda Shaarawi provided a space for women to speak out and write about women's rights. Together with Saiza Nabarawi she published a French Journal, *L'Egyptienne*. The issues discussed in this journal primarily focused on the status of women in Islam. Twelve years later Huda founded another journal in the Arabic language called *al-Misriyya* (Women). In 1935 Huda Shaarawi became the vice president of the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship. As President of the Egyptian Feminist Union, Huda gave many speeches in Egypt, the Arab East and at an Alliance conference in Turkey and Europe

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<sup>11</sup>She was the daughter of Adila Nabarawi

(Badran and Cook, 1990). Huda remained the leader of the Feminist Union and an international feminist until she died in 1947. Two years before her death the State decorated Huda Shaarawi with the highest possible state decoration, the Nishan al-Kama. The State awarded this honour to Huda for her great advocacy of women rights and for "the enormous transformation Egyptian society had undergone in the first half of this century" (Ahmed, 1988, p. 156).

## **CHAPTER V**

### **KARTINI (1879-1904)**

Today in Indonesia the name of Kartini is synonymous with the "emancipated woman." Her struggle for personal liberty and intellectual freedom, her success in gaining her intellectual voice, and her efforts for the rights of women have made her a national hero. In addition and most importantly she also struggled for higher education for women and for their moral improvement. However, her decisions to give up the opportunity to study in the Netherlands and to marry a polygamous man have divided public opinion about her, and especially about whether we should call Kartini a "feminist."

Kartini's ideas stemmed from her experience of a patriarchal and feudal culture and from her acute observation of injustice at home. Kartini's views were strengthened during her four year seclusion and during her adolescent years. Kartini had to face and struggle against both her own patriarchal society and that of her colonizers, the Dutch, which was no less patriarchal than her own.

Kartini was born at Mayong on 21 April 1879 to an aristocratic Javanese family. She was the fifth child and second daughter of Raden Mas Ario Adipati Sostroningrat, who could trace his lineage back to the King of Majapahit in the sixteenth century. Kartini's father was the Regent of Jepara and worked for the Dutch administration. When Kartini was born, Indonesia was still under colonial rule. The Dutch established their dominion in Indonesia in the late seventeenth century with the single intention of making the archipelago a territory for mercantile exploitation. However, boosted by liberalism which flourished in

the Netherlands and Europe in the late nineteenth century. Dutch policies underwent a change. At that time the liberal current of opinion in the Netherlands set up a new colonial "ethical policy". Under this new policy the Dutch wanted to create a multi-racial society which was self-governing but retained a relationship with the Netherlands. One of the consequences of the "ethical policy" was the spreading of Western educational opportunities to some Indonesians. These "fortunate" Indonesians were mainly from the urban middle classes, landowners, and native aristocrats. At that period only children of aristocratic and royal families, civil servants and clerics were given education.

Being a daughter of a civil servant, and a Javanese aristocrat as well, Kartini had some access to education. Although it was uncommon for a girl of her class to be sent to school at all (Soeroto, 1986), Kartini's liberal minded father allowed her, along with her ten siblings, to attend the local primary school established for Dutch and Eurasian children. Her father, Sostroningrat, had himself received a western education. Although he had gone beyond the limits set by his class by letting his daughters attend the school, he nevertheless was not radical enough to let his daughters continue their education past primary school. In accordance with Javanese custom Kartini's father made her quit school in 1891 at the age of twelve and a half to start the period of *pingitan*.

Intelligent, observant, critical, and determined, Kartini hated this custom. Although it is not known when exactly she began to feel uneasy about it, it seems that her years in school had an enormous impact on little Kartini. The period of school had "alienated" Kartini from the feudal tradition in which she was raised. During these years Kartini's

yearning for personal freedom and her commitment to social causes unacceptable in contemporary Javanese circles began.

Kartini's schooling positioned her as the young "received knower." She was able to learn and store the information gained by listening and observing. At school she first heard about Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922), an Indian woman who rebelled against Hindu traditionalism on behalf of women. She became Kartini's first role model. From her she learned about women's independence and the possibility that an Asian woman, like herself, could gain freedom from the restriction of traditional customs. In 1902 when she had been more exposed to feminist ideas through her correspondence with her Dutch friends, her interest in this role model became stronger.

Is there a Dutch translation of...the life and writings of Pudita Ramabai?<sup>12</sup> I was still going to school when I heard of this courageous Indian woman for the first time. I remember it still so well; I was very young, a child of ten or eleven, when, glowing with enthusiasm, I read of her in the paper. I trembled with excitement; not alone for the white woman is it possible to attain an independent position, the brown Indian too can make herself free. For days I thought of her, and I have never been able to forget her. See what one good brave example can do! It spread its influence so far. (*Letters*, 1964, pp. 177-178)

Pandita Ramabai is known as a female agitator in India at the turn of the century. She was born to parents who believed in the right of women to have education. Later she became a theologian who criticized Hinduism and attacked traditional customs. She used her knowledge to improve women's lives and campaigned for women's education and

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<sup>12</sup>This is how Kartini spelled the name

medical training. She also wrote books on women. In 1883 she became involved with Christian missionaries. She began travelling to Europe and America. A few years later she converted to Christianity. She was then involved in a series of girls' schools, orphanages and homes for widows (Jayawardena, 1986). Years later Kartini took a rather similar path. Like Pandita, Kartini also struggled against traditional customs and made sharp critiques of Islam. She also perceived education as a means of improving women's status.

Kartini's contact with European friends at school introduced her to the ideas of egalitarianism and democracy. She observed how her European friends could establish equal relationships despite their sex and age. Kartini also learned from them about women's rights to have choice and freedom. Kartini's European girlfriends opened Kartini's eyes to the idea that women could have some rights and even careers. Her conversation with Letzy, her Dutch close friend, about their futures became a hallmark for this young received knower. Letzy's determination to continue her education in Holland to be trained as a teacher provided her with an immediate comparison between the future of an educated western girl and that of an aristocratic and native girl like her. In her letter Kartini recalled how painful it was to know that she did not have a choice but to become a "Raden Ayu."

The first thing she did when she came home was to run to her father and put to him this significant question: "What will I be when I grow up?" He said nothing, only laughed and pinched her cheek. But she would not allow herself to be put off and continued nagging for an answer. An older brother came by and became aware of her question and her straining ears caught these words: "What young girls must become? - well, a 'Raden Ayu' of course!" (*Letters*, 1992, p. 29; letter to Mrs. Abendanon in August 1900)

Not knowing what "Raden Ayu" meant Kartini tried to find the meaning of the phrase by observing *Raden Ayus* surrounding her. With her sharp observation she finally knew that to be a *Raden Ayu* meant "girls must marry, must belong to a man without asking what-who-and how!" (*Letters*, 1992, p.29). The fact shocked this young "received knower," as this was contrary to her knowledge of the possibility that women could have choices and career.

When the time came for her to be secluded, she knew that it would deprive her of her passionate love of learning and her enjoyment in being around her Dutch friends to "see, experience, and admire what is beautiful, what is noble in life..." (*Letters*, 1992, p.27). For Kartini seclusion meant a surrender to "the traditions of her country which commanded that young girls stay in the home, to live strictly isolated from the outside world, until such a time as a man, of whom God had created one for each woman, should come to claim her and carry her away to his home..." (*Letters*, 1992, p.29). When she was asked by her teacher what she wanted to do, she bitterly answered back "Do not ask me if I want, ask me if I may!" (*Letters*, 1992, p. 30).

She pleaded with her father as the most powerful external authority, to let her continue her education. Sostroningrat knew very well how determined Kartini was but being attached to the feudal custom in which he was brought up, he rejected Kartini's request. He exercised his power to put Kartini into seclusion against her wishes. Being powerless Kartini could not say a word. "She jumped up--she knew what a 'no' from him meant--ran out and crawled under a bed to hide herself from others; she wanted to be alone with her grief, which vented itself in a torrent of uncontrollable sobbing"



(*Letters*, 1992, p. 30).

Kartini's reaction to the words of her authority, i.e. "external authority", reflected her subordination to male authority. However, the description of the "silent woman" suggested by Belenky *et al.* (1986) does not entirely fit Kartini's condition. With her ability to observe and store the information from other *Raden Ayu*s, Kartini herself found the reality behind the word "*Raden Ayu*". The way Kartini behaved was more like a "received knower", who was capable of listening, observing and storing the information given by others. Nevertheless, Kartini can be considered as a "silent" young woman in the way she obeyed the words of the authorities although she tried to rebel against them. Kartini's silence is more like an "imposed" silence. Kartini had to be silent partly because of her respect for her father and partly because of her powerless position against social constraints.

Although Kartini was forced into silence by her father, she did not hate or blame him for her condition. Being a dutiful daughter who loved her father very much, she tried to cope with her disappointment and convinced herself that no matter what happened she was blessed to have a progressive father who let her and her sisters have Dutch education. In many of her letters to Stella and to Mrs. Abendanon, Kartini clearly expressed her feelings for her parents, especially for her father.

The time she spent in school is likely the period when Kartini's feminist consciousness emerged. School led to her transformation, involving changes in behaviour and consciousness. According to Bartky (1977) this transformation was a crucial part in the process of "becoming feminist." By this time Kartini started to develop an altered consciousness of herself, of others, and of social reality. She was no longer satisfied with

her "privilege" of a limited education. She demanded more education and more freedom from the social constraints imposed by her class and sex.

Kartini's six-year seclusion also contributed to the development of her feminist consciousness. In line with Bartky's theory of the emergence of feminist consciousness, Kartini was able to see "ordinary" social reality with different eyes and turn these realities into contradictions. She perceived her seclusion, pre-arranged marriage, Javanese etiquette, and polygamy as a set of social realities that were intolerable, and which oppressed women. She saw her seclusion as a contradiction of her free and independent spirit, which she believed was given by God. She saw a contradiction between Western education which indulged her free-spirits and allowed her to gain her freedom and independence, and Eastern traditions which, intellectually, spiritually, and physically imprisoned her.

Kartini's feminist consciousness was strengthened by her increased capacity to listen, to store information and, later, by her capacity as "subjective knower," "procedural knower" and "constructivist." Although she was cut off from the external world during her seclusion, she was not completely cut off from knowledge. Knowing that his daughter was hungry for education, Kartini's father provided her with books, Dutch magazines, and western literature. In the books, especially in literature, Kartini found consolation for her painful condition. In her letters Kartini wrote that "literature not only provided her with pleasure but also taught her an infinite amount" (*Letters*, 1992, p. 36) It is likely, too, that she developed her sense of justice for her people and her sex from these books.

One of the books that greatly influenced her was Mrs. Geekoop's *Hilda van Suylenburg* (1897). This novel was about a woman who tried to be a sole-support mother

of a child in the face of social criticism. The book also emphasized the importance of woman's education (Geertz, 1964). It is likely that from this book Kartini learned about women's rights and duties to her family and her society, which later constituted her concept of marriage and motherhood. Reading the novel convinced Kartini that a vocation was the alternative to marriage. Years later Kartini also recognized the importance of education to enable women to be economically independent

Teach her a trade, so that she will no longer be powerless when her guardians command her to contract a marriage which will inevitably plunge her and whatever children she may have into misery. ..The only escape from such conditions is for the girl herself to learn to be independent. (*Letters*, 1964, p. 115; letter to Nellie Van Kol of August 1901)

Kartini's reading was not limited to feminist literature, but included writing which opened her horizons to the colonial reality. One book which impressed her was the novel *Max Havellar*, written by Multatuly, a Dutch civil servant, in 1860. Through this book Kartini was exposed to the Dutch exploitation of the Indonesian poor. Reading books such as this, coupled with her sharp observation and involvement with common and lower class people helped her develop a critical approach to poverty in Java and to colonial rule. To Stella she wrote:

The opium tax is one of the richest sources of income of the Government-- what matter if it go well or ill with the people?--the Government prospers. This curse of the people fills the treasury of the Dutch East Indian Government with thousands--nay, with millions. Many say that the use of opium is no evil, but those who say that have never known India,<sup>15</sup> or else

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<sup>15</sup>At that time Indonesia was still named Eastern India. Henceforth every time Kartini mentioned about India, it meant Indonesia.

they are blind. (*Letters*, 1964, p. 35: letter to Stella of 25 May 1899)

In another letter she wrote:

Why is it that the Javanese are so poor, they ask? And at the same time they are thinking how they will be able to get more money out of him. Who will that money come from? Naturally from the little man for whose woe and weal we express such extreme concern...when grass cutters who earn 10 or 12 cents a day are made to pay a trade tax. Every time a goat or a sheep is butchered a tax of twenty cents is paid. A *sate*-merchant who butchers two every day must pay this tax, which amounts to one hundred and forty-four florins in the course of a year. What is left for his profit? Barely enough to live on. (*Letters*, 1964, p. 243: letter to Mrs. Abendanon of 15 July 1902)

In this period Kartini's capacity as a "subjective knower," who no longer agreed with what people thought as a simple matter of right or wrong, had become more apparent. For Kartini who was always restless, alert and proud in nature, seclusion really imprisoned her. She felt oppressed by her family, her oldest brother and an older sister. These were authorities who demanded her conformity to the rigid etiquette required of younger persons toward their elders. In her letter to Stella of 18 August 1899 she described this etiquette.

A younger brother or sister of mine may not pass me without bowing down to the ground and creeping upon hands and knees. If a little sister is sitting on a chair, she must instantly slip to the ground and remain with head bowed until I have passed from her sight. If a younger brother or sister wishes to speak to me, it must only be in high Javanese; and after each sentence that comes from their lips, they must make a *sembah*; that is, to put both hands together, and bring the thumbs under the nose. ...If food stands on the table, they must not touch the tiniest morsel till it has pleased me to partake of that which I would (as much as I desire). Should you speak against your superiors, do it softly, so that only those who are near may hear. (*Letter*, p. 39)

For Kartini with her knowledge of what it meant to be free and equal, the etiquette was a violation of human rights. Although the three of them were "superior" to her, she dared to follow her inner feeling and rebelled against these authorities. She believed in the truth emerging from her inner feelings, her own conscience. She refused to follow the etiquette, even though she had to confront her oldest brother who might become her guardian if her father died (*Letters*, 1992, p. 33-34). In Belenky *et al.*'s terms, Kartini found her inner strength to become her own authority. Thus she was more independent in thinking (1986, p. 55). In other words, Kartini's orientation to authority began to shift from external to internal, which, according to Belenky *et al.* will lead a woman to a sense of control (1986, p. 68).

...If before she had suffered from the cool reception of nearly all the members of her household, from the spiritually deadening routine, from being locked up, from all sorts of customs, which she could not accept, now teasing and tormenting increased her suffering. Ni did not want to, Ni could not dance to her brother's tune. "The young owe obedience to their elders." ... "and especially young girls must obey their older brothers." But willful Ni could not see why this must be so. She could not help it, she reasoned... She owed no obedience to no one...only to her conscience, her heart. And she would concede *nothing* to her brother unless she was convinced that he was right. (*Letters*, 1992, p. 33-34; letter to Mrs. Abendanon in August 1900)

When her older brother and sister moved to another place, Kartini became the eldest sibling in the household and thus was entitled to have certain power and control over and respect from the younger siblings. Nevertheless, being loyal to her conscience, she eliminated these rules and etiquette when her two younger sisters joined in her seclusion. She replaced them with freedom and equality, a slogan she had learnt from the French

Revolution (Soeroto, 1986).

Our goal was freedom-equality. Away with the stupid etiquette, it suffocated one of the most beautiful human qualities--naturalness. We want to love in a natural way, not formally...Beginning with me all that nonsense about age difference will cease. The right of primogeniture has only this advantage remaining: removing hot irons from the fire for the younger ones. (*Letters*, 1992, p. 59-60: letter to Mrs. Abendanon of 12 December 1900)

Kartini did not have such an intimate relationship with either of her mothers as she did with her father. Kartini's freedom and modern thought had alienated her from her mothers who still held firmly to social and traditional Javanese custom. Kartini saw her mothers as ever-present obstacles to her ideals. However, the birth of a little brother made Kartini realize the value of a mother. She described this in her letter to Mrs. Abendanon of 13 August 1900.

...Mother had dark circles under her eyes, looked weak and worn out, and Little Brother was the cause of it...and yet, how much of a nuisance he might be, she never saw the slightest frown on mother's face: when baby brother screamed blue murder, she was by his side in an instant and she would gently pick him up and not put him down until he had gently drifted off to sleep again. Had she herself not been as small and helpless as her little brother? and had her mother not slaved and toiled for her?...That crust of ice around Ni's heart melted and once again beat warmly for the woman who had given her life! ...for the next three years the little one was ill, as it were in a constant struggle with death. And from this illness Ni...learned what it is to be a mother...Baby brother taught her to reflect, see things from all sides, taught her tolerance--gratitude and charity without asking anything in return.... (*Letters*, 1992, p. 37)

Kartini became aware of the need to value and understand others even when they were different from her. This kind of empathy, according to Belenky *et al.*, is the

characteristic of a "connected knower" and "constructivists." Later in her life this empathy became an ingredient in Kartini's own concept of motherhood.

And who can do most for the elevation of the moral standard of mankind?  
The woman, the mother: it is at the breast of woman, that man receives his  
earliest nourishment. The child learns there first, to feel, to think, and to  
speak. And the earliest education of all foreshadows the whole after life.  
(*Letters*.1964, p. 65: letter to Mrs. Ovink-Soer in 1900)

During her seclusion Kartini often thought about Javanese marriage. With her sharp observation, her extensive reading and her ability to analyze her experiences she drew her own conclusions about polygamy. She saw that women's ignorance and men's power would lead to women's oppression, as manifested in polygamous marriage, which was practiced by men of her class. She recognized that women had long been suppressed by their own ignorance, and submissiveness, as well as by male domination. Being a daughter of a polygamous father she saw the life her two mothers had. I will discuss how she dealt with polygamy in the next chapter.

Together with her younger sisters, Roekmini and Kardinah, Kartini continued searching for knowledge by reading books, which the sisters then discussed. For the next three years their knowledge about women's issues was expanded by their relationship with Mrs. Ovink-Soer, the wife of the assistant Resident in Japara. Kartini's biographer, Sitisemandari Soeroto, insists that Kartini already knew and had established a relationship with Mrs. Ovink-Soer before she was secluded. Their relationship became stronger when Kartini's father allowed his daughters to visit Mrs. Ovink-Soer. They traveled the short distance by closed carriage, thus avoiding a public break with the custom that forbade single

upper-class women from leaving seclusion.

According to Hildred Geertz (1964, p. 12), Mrs. Ovink-Soer became the first mentor for Kartini and her sisters. She was a socialist and a feminist. Besides giving Kartini and her sisters lessons about feminine handicrafts and piano, she also discussed her political opinions and attitudes. In her letters to Stella in November 1899 Kartini wrote how Mrs. Ovink welcomed her without barriers. From her she learned more about the kind of relationships that most western women had. With Mrs. Ovink-Soer she could develop an equal and intimate relationship with another woman despite the differences in their ages and despite her status in her own society, which constituted a barrier. Kartini was able to talk freely and to discuss her opinions. This strengthened her self-esteem, self-definition, and autonomy. In her letter to Stella in November 1898 she admitted that much of her intellectual development was derived from Mrs. Ovink Soer. "Intercourse with this cultured, well-bred Dutch lady had a great influence upon the little brown girls..."(*Letters*,1964, p. 46).

It is very likely that her ideas about marriage were also influenced by the open and warm relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Ovink-Soer. She contended that an equal relationship between husband and wife would be established if the wife was educated and had a monogamous husband. As a "subjective knower", Kartini compared her prospective (polygamous) marriage with their warm, open and monogamous marriage. The fact that she knew the nature of the polygamous marriage of *Raden Ayus* with no possibility for an equal relationship probably led to her radical decision to remain a spinster in order to retain her autonomy and her individuality.



Kartini's knowledge and ideas about marriage, polygamy, and women's education were derived from her everyday relationships and experience and also by observing herself, her own condition, as well as observing Mrs. Ovink-Soer. In Belenky *et al.*'s terms, then, Kartini was a "subjective knower." But, as a "subjective knower" Kartini also acted as a "procedural knower." Mrs. Ovink-Soer was the first mentor or the "knowledgeable authority" she needed to acquire knowledge in a procedural way. Kartini started to gain "the voice of reason" as suggested by Belenky *et al.*: "to achieve the voice of reason one must encounter authorities who are not only benign but knowledgeable..." (1986, p. 93). As a feminist and socialist, Mrs. Ovink must have communicated and tutored the ideas of feminism. Besides, this was the period of intensely militant feminism in Holland, in which feminists had attacked the institution of marriage (Geertz, 1964). Later Kartini developed her own understanding of the interrelatedness between women's oppression and their socialization.

Mrs. Ovink became the second role model for Kartini, and when she moved to Jombang Kartini expressed her anxiety about losing her only trusted authority and role model (*Letters*, 1964, p. 49; letter to Mrs. Ovink-Soer of November 1899). In addition, Mrs. Ovink-Soer offered Kartini and her sisters a trust, intimacy and support they did not get from their own mother and their step mothers who were inhibited by Javanese etiquette.

...I miss the intimate talks with you, when I used to tell my dear little mother all the rebellious thoughts that came into my head, and laid bare the feelings of my restless heart. When I was in a rebellious mood, I had but to see the love light in your face.... (*Letters*, 1964, p. 49; letter to Mrs. Ovink-Soer of November 1899)

In 1896 Kartini and her sisters ended their seclusion without being married (as they should have been according to Javanese custom). This was because of the pressure on their father by their Dutch friends, especially the Resident Sijthoff and Mrs. Ovink (Soeroto, 1986). Stepping beyond this "forbidden" wall, Kartini left her own society and its moral codes. Thereafter, the three sisters (or the three-fold clover leaf as they called themselves) became more involved in social activities and this involved Kartini in a period of procedural and constructed knowledge.

The period of seclusion was a period of moral and intellectual apprenticeship for Kartini. Her reading, especially about the feminist movement in the Netherlands, and her friendship with modern Dutch women developed her sense of autonomy. She became more interested in acquiring knowledge about the women's movement in order to facilitate her understanding and analysis of women's oppression in society. But at this point, merely reading no longer satisfied her. She needed a knowledgeable woman who had similar interests in improving people's and women's condition. She was aware of the need to acquire knowledge in a more procedural way, which strengthened her capacity as a "procedural knower." Therefore, she advertised for a pen-friend in a feminist magazine (one of the contributors was Mrs. Ovink-Soer). Her request was answered by Stella Zeehandelaar. Stella was five years older than Kartini and a member of the Social Democratic Worker's Party (Soeroto, 1986, p. 147).

In her correspondence with Stella Kartini expressed and discussed various issues of sexism, racism, and colonialism, and at the same time she received knowledge about modernism, socialism, and democracy from

Stella. Stella became Kartini's other mentor and friend to whom she could express all her wishes, dreams, and thoughts of what she and women could, would, and should be. In her letters Kartini told how much she gained knowledge and support from Stella.<sup>11</sup>

Your encouragement is a support--it strengthens me. I will, I shall obtain my freedom, I will, Stella, I will! Do you understand that? But how shall I be able to win it, if I do not strive? How shall I be able to find it, if I do not seek? Without strife there can be no victory. (*Letters*, 1964, p. 81; letter to Stella of 23 August 1900)

The above passage also shows that Kartini had changed from a passive girl who helplessly said "don't ask if I would like to...ask me if I may" (*Letters*, 1964, p. 72) to an assertive woman with free will.

Kartini also discussed with Stella the books she read. She often made critical comments about the books, even when the "authorities", i.e. the critics, had different views. Kartini was no longer subject simply to the judgment of "knowledgeable authority." Therefore, we can see Kartini challenging and asserting her own authority against an external authority.

I have read lately *Modern Women* translated from the French by Jeanette van Riemsdijk; disappointed, I laid the book down. I had seen so many brilliant criticisms of this problem novel, it was said to be in all respects finer than *Hilda Van Suylenburg*, to be powerful and without faults. ...But for myself I still think of *H v S*. [*Hilda van Suylenburg*]The Ratu (princess) of all that up to now has been written concerning woman's emancipation. I am on the lookout now for a critic (!!) to whom I may speak my mind about *Modern Women*, for to my thinking that book lacks the strength and inspiration of *H v S*. (*Letters*, 1964, p. 64; letter to Stella of 12 January 1900)

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<sup>11</sup>The part of the letter expressing Kartini's gratitude to Stella for giving her so much knowledge is not included in Symmer's *Letters of a Javanese Princess* but in the Dutch version which is quoted by Soemantri Soeroto's *Kartini: Sebuah Autobiography* (Jakarta: Gunung Agung, 1986), p. 148.

Her seclusion prompted her wish for her independence, freedom and autonomy by means of education. Around this time she met the Minister of Education and Religion, Mr. J.H. Abendanon and his wife, Rosa Abendanon-Mandri. Mr. J.H. Abendanon came to Jepara to discuss the possibility of opening a native school for girls. In Mrs. Abendanon Kartini found a motherly figure who understood, nourished, and appreciated her thoughts and her yearnings for freedom. With her parents' permission, Kartini proposed herself as a teacher, should the school be opened. Encouraged and supported by Mr. and Mrs. Abendanon, Kartini and her sisters were determined to pursue formal education in the Netherlands or Batavia<sup>15</sup> although they knew this would estrange them from their own people who still firmly believed in traditional gender roles. The Netherlands would provide Kartini with a free and more liberal environment. Kartini intended to step beyond the private world and began to invade the public world traditionally forbidden to her. It would have helped carve out the road which leads to freedom and emancipation of the native woman. "It would already be a great pleasure for me if parents of other girls who also want to be independent, would no longer be able to say: there is no one amongst us who has done that" (*Letters*, 1992, p. 47; letter to Rosa Abendanon of 7 October 1900).

In mid September 1900 Kartini followed the Abendanons to Batavia where they introduced her to the principal of a girls' school who offered her a place. She was also introduced to a number of influential Dutch people and came into contact with several Dutch-educated Indonesians. From this visit came the correspondence with Mevrouw (Mrs.)

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<sup>15</sup> Batavia is now called Jakarta

Abendanon-Mandri, from whom we can trace the intellectual and spiritual progress of the sisters. Kartini was greatly disappointed when she found out that her own people were not ready for the idea of a school for girls. A circular sent by Abendanon to regents indicated that there was not sufficient support from them for the school. So Kartini had to give up studying in Batavia, but she kept struggling for the liberation of women with her pen.

Shortly after this Kartini received a second blow. Kardinah, the youngest of the three sisters, was married off to the Regent of Tegal, her cousin, on 24 January 1902. Prior to the marriage Kartini experienced great internal conflict. She felt betrayed by her father who had promised them that the marriage would not happen, because it would be an obstruction for the "Three-sisters Plan." Kartini and two sisters planned to set up a school for girls after they successfully completed their studies. Kardinah's marriage would definitely destroy their plan. Kartini desperately fought against the marriage. In her letter to Rosa Abendanon (dated 29 November 1901) she bitterly told her how she finally surrendered to her parents' wishes. Kartini did not understand why her father had to listen to people who had "repressed, smothered" Kartini's desire and pushed her back into the darkness, instead of to his own conscience (*Letters*, 1992, p. 145). Kartini could not accept the fact that the opinion of the ignorant was much more important to him than that of the informed and intellectual (*Letters*, 1992, p. 144). It was only because of their great affection for their father, who was by then in bad health, that the three sisters finally gave up the plan. They surrendered to the role of dutiful daughters despite the conflicts they felt.

we are defenceless and delivered to the mercy of Fate!- There is a high duty named *gratitude*, there is a high, holy duty which is called filial piety, and

there is an evil, horrible and deeply detestable, its name is egotism! (*Letters*, 1992, p. 93; letter to Rosa Abendanon of 29 November 1901)

Father has a heart disease and cannot be involved and our little one has a weak constitution and must also not be troubled. I love both utterly-- I cannot do without either. Mevrouw, and they have given me a choice between two! ....Do you understand how terribly difficult it is being made for us? My poor... Father. What Destiny has given such daughters. Poor everybody, I cannot give in, no I cannot! And then, what then? Everyone, the whole family will curse me but I cannot do otherwise--nor can my sisters. (*Letters*, 1992, p. 131; letter to Rosa Abendanon of 20 November 1901)

There is nothing new under the sun--even in mama's time there were rebellious girls. We have been constantly lectured that we should *blindly obey* our parents. And the same was also said to a young woman who obeyed the command, followed the man to whom she had been married and felt unhappy with him: "Nonsense....why then did she *want* to marry? If you are married, you must want to. If you follow a man then you must have wanted to and if you have wanted to then you cannot complain." (*Letters*, 1992, p. 136; letter to Rosa Abendanon of 29 November 1901)

While Kartini and Roekmini were still recovering from the shock and trying to accept the "fate" and the role as "dutiful daughters" assigned by their society, an even more powerful advocate came.- Mr. Van Kol, a member of Social Democratic Labour Party of the Netherlands Parliament. Stella, to whom Kartini expressed all her secret wishes, had asked Mr. Van Kol to meet them on his tour to the Netherland Indies, to explore the possibility of giving them scholarships to study in the Netherlands. Convinced by the two sisters' determination to obtain education so that they could help their people, Van Kol made an approach to the Government to grant them the scholarships. Mr. Van Kol opened the path to Kartini to reach her life-long dream, and impressed her with his attitude toward women and his "ideal" marriage.

He must certainly be the last man to whom we had to demonstrate the *worth* of the *woman* to society. How he respects and honours his wife! With what love, regard, honour and appreciation he speaks about her, his leader, his advisor! We savoured it and it moved us! (*Letters*, 1992, p. 231; letter to Rosa Abendanon of 10 June 1902)

At the same time Kartini was also introduced to her new mentor, Mrs. Nelli Van Kol, who later had a great influence on Kartini's spiritual life. I will discuss this in the next chapter.

With these new possibilities Kartini and Roekmini began to weave their dreams to be teachers for their people and to help them fight against polygamy. But relatives and friends opposed their plans. At first Kartini resisted all the arguments against allowing single women to go abroad. People said the trip would ruin their parents. Her mother accused Kartini of not having filial feelings for her parents (*Letters*, 1992, p. 297; letter to Rosa Abendanon of 12 October 1902).

She and her sisters finally had to give up the scholarship when their most respected and admired authority, Mr. Abendanon, joined those people who opposed the plan. He convinced Kartini that such a long absence would alienate her from the very people whom she wished to help and thus would negate her future plans. He also argued that Kartini could open a girls' school right away as further education and teaching certificates were not necessary for that. If Kartini still wanted to continue her studies, she could do it in Batavia. To all these pressures and arguments Kartini finally yielded. She then submitted an application for another scholarship to study in Batavia as an alternative.

Kartini's submission seems to submerge her own authority and thus makes her subject to the whim of an external authority, which according to Belenky *et al.* (1986) is

like a "silent woman." But, Kartini, in fact, acted like a "connected knower" who was able to analyze and evaluate arguments while trying to understand people's point of view without judging (Belenky *et al.*, 1987, p. 117). She accepted Abandanon's arguments because as a "connected knower" she was able to see the matter from others' point of view and to see why they made sense. This ability to see from different perspectives was combined with her capacity to have empathy for others. These others were her parents and her people. In her letter to Stella dated 25 April 1903 Kartini explained the context she was in to justify her decisions.

Do not think that our feelings have changed, they have not...for the sake of our future pupils, education in Europe was an absolute necessity. But after that another truth was impressed upon us: "At this time, it would be far better for the cause if we remained in India." (*Letters*, 1964, p. 219)

The people for whom we wish to work must learn to know us. If we went away, we should become as strangers to them. And when after some years, we came back, they would see in us only European women. If the people do not like to trust their daughters to European women, how much less would they be willing to trust them to those who were worse in their eyes. Javanese turned European. (*Letters*, 1964, p. 219)

...We ought to strike as quickly as possible, and place before the public as an accomplished fact a school for native girls. ...we are known over the whole of Java. We must strike while the iron is hot. If we went away, interest would grow lukewarm and after a time dwindle away altogether. ...If we had their sympathy and their trust then we should be at peace. (*Letters*, 1964, p. 219)

While waiting for the Government's approval of the scholarships, Kartini and Rockmini set up a school in the Kabupaten (regency) for children of aristocratic families.



Two weeks later the Regent of Rembang, a "widower"<sup>16</sup> with six children, proposed marriage to Kartini. This proposal was a great shock to Kartini. She knew that her marriage to a polygamous man would betray her own fight against polygamy. However, after much consideration, she decided to accept the proposal.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Kartini's decision has divided public opinion about her feminism. This decision is often considered a crucial point in her life within the context of her feminism. Some people comment that Kartini was not "feminist" enough to reject her polygamous marriage. I would argue that it was the capacity of empathy which characterized Kartini as a "constructivist." It was this capacity that compelled her to accept the proposal of Regent of Rembang and thus defer her dream of further education in Batavia. She was well aware that her marriage would bring conflicts--the conflict of her ideal kind of marriage and the real marriage she would have--the conflict of loyalty to her own freedom, her people and her parents, but she decided to live with this. By doing this, I would argue that Kartini with her own authentic self tried to embrace all the pieces of the self to make a whole out of it. Kartini convinced her Dutch friends that being a wife to the Regent of Rembang would allow her to be an equal partner to her husband who had the same progressive thinking about education. She would be a nurturer, a mother and an educator for her step children.

At the same time, she could also be a good and devoted daughter, which was an important piece of her being. Kartini's decision to accept the marriage proposal involved

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<sup>16</sup>Although he married three other wives, he was considered as a widower, according to Javanese culture because the present wives were merely secondary wives coming from a lower class.

the action of taking a caring response which is a "constructivist's" moral response (Belenky *et al.* 1986, p. 149). Kartini's decision reflected her attempt to understand the "conflict in the context of each person's perspective, needs, and goals--and doing the best possible for everyone that is involved" (Belenky *et al.*, 1986, p. 149). In many letters to her Dutch friends she talked about her moral duties to her parents and to her people. For Kartini, making her parents happy was the greatest fulfillment of the duty of a daughter to her parents, especially to her father whose love and approval were necessary to her. Her moral response to her father was increased because of her father's health problems. The Javanese believe strongly that mental upset such as that caused by an unruly daughter, could bring about a serious disease. In her letter to Rosa Abendanon of 1 August 1903 she wrote:

...I have to repay a *great debt*. The debt to those who have raised me from a tender, fragile thing to what I am now. (*Letters*, 1992, p. 444)

I have taught others to know what the word 'mother' means, have taught them love and gratitude. Should I not be the first then, to set them an example?... It is not only the wish of my parents which is being fulfilled, but also of *many* others. (*Letters*, 1992, p. 444)

One can easily argue that Kartini's final surrender to the greatest enemy she had been fighting--polygamy--betrayed her own ideals and principles. Kartini's choice seems to position her as a powerless and dependent woman who had lost her voice of authority which she had gained as a "constructivist." Nevertheless, within the rigid gender roles in Javanese high society where the possibility of freedom for women like her lay only in becoming someone's wife, I would argue that Kartini's decision was indeed an act of self-determination and self-assertion. According to Agnes Heller there are two preconditions for

achieving self determination: "the choice of ourselves as 'good' persons, and ...our ability to cope with our context while giving priority to the satisfaction of the needs for self determination whether or not all our other needs are satisfied" (Robinson, 1990, p. 207). Kartini chose to be a "good" daughter to her parents, and at the same time she chose to put her quest for personal freedom in the high-class Javanese context. When she made the decision she was faced with two realities: that marriage was virtually unavoidable for every woman of her class and that she could get partial "freedom and power" by marrying a powerful man, like the Regent. In this context, Kartini saw that "partial" freedom was much more worthy than no freedom at all. This was the kind of "freedom" that she had to be satisfied with and live with. Kartini realized that any real sense of autonomy was only possible when expressed in action (Cote, 1992), and she would rather take the action by marrying a powerful man which would give her more power and freedom to educate her people. Although Kartini had to give up her physical freedom, she could finally have her own freedom by actualizing her talents as an educator. Agnes Heller asserts that

Freedom and life-choices result from actualizing our talents and endowments, exercising the rationality of intellect as constituting practical reason, and respecting the maxim of righteousness: the righteous person...is the person who prefers suffering injustice (being wronged) to committing injustice (doing wrong). (Robinson, 1990, p. 216)

"Practical reason" in Heller's terms, serves as the conscience, authorizing someone to decide what established norms must be applied. Kartini grounded her decision on her "practical reason" as she followed the traditional high Javanese custom demanding a *Raden Ajeng* to marry a man of an equal or higher status and then to be a *Raden Ayu*. In Belenky

*et al.*'s words, with this "practical reason" Kartini would be "accommodating the needs and ground rules of men out of the sad wisdom that change does not come easily" (1986, p. 148).

Now we shall not infringe too harshly upon the customs of our land.... The freedom of women is inevitable; it is coming, but we cannot hasten it. The course of destiny cannot be turned aside, but in the end the triumph has been foreordained. We shall not be living to see it, but what will that matter? We have helped to break the path that leads to it, and that is a glorious privilege. (*Letters*, 1964, p. 226; letter to Rosa Abendanon of 1 August 1903)

Kartini's emergence as a "constructivist" had already begun when she was still in seclusion. The period of seclusion had laid the foundation for her road to self-reclamation and intellectual freedom as she constructed her concepts of motherhood, socialization, marriage, and women's education. She combined knowledge derived from her own experience and her extensive readings of feminist literature with lessons from knowledgeable tutors or "authorities." She combined her subjective knowledge with knowledge she gained through "procedure" to construct her own knowledge.

Kartini's concept of motherhood was likely derived from her experience of childhood and in her seclusion. The story she told about the sacrifice of her mother and her instincts led her to knowledge that "a mother means a world of love and devotion" (Geertz, 1964, p. 180).<sup>1</sup> She later contended that women as socializers held great responsibility for their children's moral development. In early socialization a child was taught by its mother

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Stella of 3 August 1902

what was good and evil, and she or he remembered these lessons as long as s/he lives.<sup>18</sup> Kartini's thinking about women as the primary socializers was likely derived from Mr. Abendanon's words, which she often quoted in letters to Stella: "Women as the carrier of civilization." From this concept of women or mothers as primary socializers she developed other concepts of the interconnectedness of socialization and women's ignorance as crucial to gender construction. She concluded that gender was socially constructed, a process that began in early childhood socialization. Kartini contended that the socialization of children was a key element in women's present condition.

And in latter years... she could understand very well why that man was so egotistical. Was it not the case that all his life, from when he was a *child* he had been taught to be self interested, and in the first place by his *mother*? From childhood he had been taught to regard the girl, the woman, as a creature of a lower order than himself. Had she not heard her mother, her aunts, her female acquaintances so often say in a scornful and derogatory tone: "a girl, she's only a young girl!" It is therefore the woman herself who teaches a man to disdain women. Ni's blood boiled when she heard women speak about young girls in such a scornful and contemptuous manner. (*Letters*, 1992, p. 34; letter to Rosa Abendanon in August 1900)

"Women are nothing. Women exist for men, are created for their pleasure, they can do with them what they will," it rang mockingly in her ears, goading her like the laugh of Satan. Her eyes shot sparks, angrily she clenched her fists and in powerless rage pressed her lips together. "No! no!" it screamed and shouted in her loudly beating heart-- "We most certainly are something, we are people just the same as men. Oh! let me prove it! Loosen my chains! Give me the opportunity, I shall prove that I am a person, a human being as good as any man." And she twisted and squirmed, she pulled and wrenched, but the chains were strong and closed tightly around the slender wrists and ankles. She hurt herself on them, but they would not break. (*Letters*, 1992, p. 34-35; letter to Rosa Abendanon in August 1900)

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<sup>18</sup>Letter to Mr. and Mrs. G.K. Anton of 4 October 1902 in *Surat-surat Kartini: Ronungan Tentang dan Untuk Bangsaanya*. Trans. Sulastin Sutrisno (Jakarta: Penerbit Djembatan, 1985), p. 272.

Kartini's concept of motherhood was not limited to biological mothers. She also had a concept of a social mother. This concept was probably derived from the intimate relationship she had with Mrs. Ovink-Soer and Mrs. Rosa Abendanon. Mrs. Ovink-Soer was childless yet able to shower Kartini with maternal love and care. Later she also developed a daughter's deep love and appreciation of her "spiritual" mother, Mrs. Rosa Abendanon. It is interesting to see how Kartini tried to subvert the concept of marriage and motherhood within the traditional Javanese context. While traditional gender roles in her society affirmed marriage as the ultimate fulfillment for women, Kartini, who perceived marriage as the barrier to self-fulfillment and authority, offered the concept of social mother as an alternative route to women's fulfillment.

Could it really be that a woman can exclusively and only come into her own through marriage, only in this way attain the complete fulfillment of her nature? because woman's highest and greatest glory is motherhood! But must a woman then absolutely *have children of her own* to be 'mother', in the true meaning of that word: a being of love and devotion?— If that were true, at what a pitiable low level are the standards of the world, that one can only give oneself completely when one loves *a part of oneself!* How many mothers are there not who are only called 'mother' because they have brought children into the world but, who, apart from that, are not worthy of the name, mother. A woman, who gives herself to others with all the love which is in her heart, with all the devotion of which she is capable, is in a spiritual sense of a 'mother'. (*Letters*, 1992, p. 269; letter to Rosa Abendanon of 2 September 1902)

Although in the end Kartini had to subject herself to the demands of the authorities, it did not make her less feminist than before. In fact, letters describing her anger, her frustration, her empathy with others prior to her decision to give up the scholarship to Holland revealed a facet of her feminist consciousness: a "consciousness of victimization"

as Sandra Bartky (1977, p. 26) puts it. According to Bartky a "consciousness of victimization" is one of the four facets of feminist consciousness. "A consciousness of victimization" involves an awareness that one has been a victim of sexist and unjust treatment caused by an alien and hostile force. She realizes that women's oppression has become intolerable both for the individual woman who experiences the particular aspect of it and for other women.

Kartini was well aware that she had become a victim of "sexist" and "unjust treatment", from an alien and hostile force represented by traditional Javanese society. In one of her letters to Rosa Abendanon-Mandri (dated 12 October 1902)<sup>19</sup> Kartini wrote that she found herself a "victim" of a conspiracy between the patriarchal Javanese society represented by her uncle, the powerful Regent of Demak, and paternalistic colonialist society represented by the Resident of Semarang, Sijthoff. Kartini was aware that those parties had their own vested interests in preventing her studying abroad, that she was caught in a "web of intrigue" (*Letters*, 1992, p. 298).

...what idiots we are, how could we have seriously expected help from our poor brothers and sisters! - And why did they promise us help? In this affair, men of standing, respect and influence are involved--they might be able to use the sisters as ladders to realize their pathetic ideals. ...why do they all long to become Regent? Is it to have a greater opportunity to be of service to the country and its people? Is it to be in a better position to achieve something grand and good? (*Letters*, 1992, p. 299; letter to Rosa Abendanon of 12 October 1902)

Status, swank and sparkle--there is your socially uplifting ideal! And to what we must be sacrificed? To satisfy a petty-minded public we will have to be sacrificed? One's greatest possession--one's conscience --is offered to

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<sup>19</sup>In this particular letter Kartini labelled the letter as "strictly confidential."

public opinion. (*Letters*. 1992. p. 298: letter to Rosa Abendanon of 12 October 1902)

This patriarchal conspiracy echoes what Dorothy Smith describes as the "relation of ruling."<sup>20</sup> The Regent of Demak and the Resident of Semarang were members of a ruling class whose vested interests were to sustain their power and their status quo. The Regent of Demak perceived Kartini's plan to go abroad as a threat to his powerful position, as he expressed it "... a family government would develop in the Residency: 'we would divide the Regencies amongst ourselves.' " (*Letters*. 342). As a member of the elite class and a leader of a traditional Javanese society which respected his Priyayi status, his people's concern about Kartini's going abroad had always been his priority. Kartini's plan to pursue education abroad was considered even more scandalous than her breach of her seclusion and her being single at the age of twenty-four.<sup>20</sup> If the Regent of Demak allowed his nieces to go against the wish of the people, he would lose their respect and thus their submission to his authority. Therefore, to sustain his power he would do everything within his power to stop Kartini's plan.

Kartini's father married her to a polygamous husband despite his acknowledgment that this would destroy Kartini's ideals. This betrayal of her ideals seemed to be a part of a "patriarchal conspiracy." Kartini's father was liberal enough to let his daughter have a measure of freedom without marriage after being secluded for six years. However, he would not go so far as to let her retain her autonomy by remaining single and going abroad. As a

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<sup>20</sup> See previous chapters describing women's status in traditional Javanese society.



member of a ruling class which is the basis of "an active process of organization, producing ideologies that serve to organize the class itself and its work of ruling, as well as to order and legitimize its domination" (Smith, 1987, p. 57). Kartini's father exerted his power and control over his daughter to save his status as regent. This may be particularly true when we consider the fact that Kartini's plan to go abroad might involve conflict of interests among the Dutch officials. Stella believed that "Kartini was sacrificed for the interests of the Netherlands Indies Government" (Zainu'ddin, 1990, p. 12). As Haryati Soebadio speculates (1978), Kartini's inclination to her socialist friends, like Stella and Mr. and Mrs. Van Kol, would likely have strengthened when she went to the Netherlands, and this may have threatened her position and the colonialist policy in the Netherlands Indies (Indonesia).

In 1903 Kartini married and became Raden Ayu Kartini, a *garwa padmi* of the Regent of Rembang. She started playing her roles as a wife and as a mother to her six step-children. Her new role as mother and nurturer of these children helped her regain her self-confidence and self-esteem. Further details will be presented in the next chapter. In 1904 Kartini died tragically at the age of twenty-five shortly after the birth of her first child.

Despite Kartini's final surrender to the authorities, she successfully broke the silence of her native sisters and spoke out loud in her own authentic voice amidst the oppressed and male-dominated society in which she was raised. Kartini's feminist consciousness emerged from her embeddedness within the reality of traditional Javanese society which denied women's self-autonomy and independence. It was through stages of imposed "silent", "received knowledge," "subjective knowledge," "procedural knowledge," and "constructed knowledge" that Kartini gained her authentic voice and thus strengthened her feminism.

Kartini's marriage did not diminish her feminism. It would take great self-assertion and strength, power and self-confidence to be able to choose one of the two alternatives, neither of which would satisfy her: being single but destroying her parents and family, and being married but losing her physical freedom and her Dutch friends' confidence in her. When she finally decided to marry she exercised her self-autonomy and power to choose.

## CHAPTER VI

### ANALYSIS OF KARTINI'S AND HUDA SHAARAWI'S PERSONAL WRITINGS

#### 6.1 Kartini's Approach Toward the Issue of Polygamy

The previous chapters have shown that, to some extent, the way both Kartini and Huda developed their feminism follow stages described by Belenky *et al.* (1986): "silent women," "receivists," "subjectivists," "procedural knowers," and "constructivists". Their knowledge about polygamy, female seclusion and veiling (in the case of Huda) can also be explained in Belenky *et al.*'s framework. Both Kartini and Huda had first-hand experience of polygamy. They were born to polygamous families and married to polygamous men. Kartini was married to a married man with six children while Huda was married to a polygamous husband at the age of thirteen.

Kartini's perception of marriage and polygamy derived from her reality. Her knowledge of marriage and polygamy stemmed from her observation of her surroundings and her own experiences. This seems to me to have positioned Kartini mainly as a "subjectivist." Belenky *et al.* (1986) contend that for a "subjectivist," truths are grounded in the first-hand experience of others who are most like themselves (p. 60). Kartini's early perception of marriage and polygamy was grounded in her observation of how her biological mother, Ngasirah, suffered from her polygamous marriage.

I have come to know this bitterness [polygamous marriage] at very close quarters, have deeply shared the experience and the suffering. I have two mothers...I have known *hell* from personal experience...I have lived

there. A whole world of deep suffering lies buried in the years that are behind me. From my youngest years suffering was my close companion. I have been suffering and have suffered myself because of the suffering of my mother and...because I am her child. Oh, the *heartache* of that suffering in hell. There were days, so pitiless and sad with my whole being I prayed for an end to my earthly existence and I would have ended it myself-if I had not so utterly loved...my father. (*Letters*, 1992, p. 58)

This first-hand experience influenced how she perceived marriage. As a "subjectivist" Kartini refused the idea of marriage although she knew that she was expected to marry a man of equal or higher class. It was almost impossible among Javanese *priyayis* to have a monogamous marriage. Kartini did not want her life to end up like a granddaughter of a Regent in Prianger. Kartini heard that although the granddaughter was cultured and educated, she was forced to marry a man with three or more wives. This marriage killed the girl's talent and aspiration. Kartini wrote: "Will I ever marry? I cannot. I do not want to. I will not do it even if the whole world were to stand on its head! What will become of me...but *Raden Ayu*--never-never!..Must the women be humiliated downtrodden forever?" (Letter to Mrs. Abendanon of 7 October 1900) (*Letters*, 1992, p.46)

Kartini's subjective knowledge about polygamy was augmented by her knowledge of the polygamous marriage of Kardinah, her little sister. Kardinah was married off to the Regent of Pematang, a married man with six children. It was by observing Kardinah's plight in her polygamous marriage that Kartini began to trust her inner feeling as the source of truth concerning polygamy. Thus, she rejected the words of authority, which also characterizes Kartini as a "subjectivist."

When Kartini acted like a “receivist” she is so far as she searched for the truth from authoritative figures, like Snouck Hurgronje, the famous Dutch orientalist. Hurgronje believed that polygamy could be good for women. Women could accept polygamy and economically women would benefit from this kind of marriage. Observing and learning from the plight of her mother and sister, Kartini refused this opinion. In one of her letters to Mr. Abendanon she expressed her disappointment and disagreement with Hurgronje. She countered his opinion by presenting facts viewed from a woman’s perspective. She grounded her arguments in women’s daily personal experiences.

...We honestly maintain that what we are striving for is *good*. Does Dr. Snouck know all of Java, thoroughly. Everyone knows that generally the Javanese girl is *not considered* when the arrangements for the marriage her guardians are organizing for her, are made. While in the Sundalands it may be the case that engaged couples *know, see, and meet* each other, just enquire in what other areas of Java that occurs! And if this fact is not *known*, would everyone (Europeans) then ask if our sister had ever seen her husband before she married? .... It is a Kabupaten<sup>21</sup> with many children including an adult daughter, a Raden Ayu, a Regent’s daughter, who as a result of her ‘happiness’ had become half-insane and another woman, who is also a mother. The owner of this harem recently married. I do not ask what the women think of this, what they feel, but what about the daughters who have received a European education, how had they reacted to it....And, if they cannot express an opinion, they will at least have feelings....Will Dr. Snouck still say, in cold blood, “They are contented after His honour has seen everything that we have seen, knows everything we know?” (*Letters*, 1992, pp. 206-207; letter to Mrs. Abendanon of 27 March 1907)

I had once transcribed an address by Professor Max Muller, the great German scholar of Eastern languages, history, etc. It goes something like this: “Polygamy as practiced by Eastern peoples is to the advantage of women and children who could not live in their country without belonging to a man, without having a protector, and that tradition is not the product of

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<sup>21</sup> Kabupaten is a Regent’s residence

a morality as such as is the case with the Salomo." ....Max Muller is dead. we cannot call him here to show him the *benefits* of this tradition. (*Letters*.1992: p. 207; letter to Rosa Abendanon of 27 March 1902)

Kartini's approach to polygamy and marriage in Islamic tradition was a subjectivist approach. Kartini as a "subjectivist" saw these men who tried to influence her towards polygamy as failed male authorities. She no longer trusted these knowledgeable authorities. In the absence of such authorities Kartini shifted her source of knowledge to women's experience. On Kardinah's plight she commented:

...Oh my poor, poor, sister, in what kind of a hell has she found herself! She told Mama a few things and ma listened to her with tearful eyes. Everything could have been anticipated and what sister experiences in her daily life is only natural. ....Again I thought of Dr. Snouck Hurgronje! Of Prof. Max Muller! Could they but read sister's heart, take a peek into her daily environment, could they then still say in cold bold what they had asserted....She has become so indifferent she told me and from time to time she is so cold that it is as if she is made of stone. Sometimes she so regrets that she agreed to this. And when her old pride rears its head then she is so cold!... . She fears she might one day turn into a statue, or become imbecilic. From outside she has much support and that helps keep her sane...Dr. Snouck, my sister is so contented, so contented!...We had foreseen everything! (*Letters*. 1992, pp. 219-221; letter to Rosa Abendanon of 22 April 1902)

Kartini's conviction that women's experiences were a source of truth influenced how she approached the issue of polygamy and marriage in particular and Islam in general. In her letter to Stella Zehandellar dated 6 November 1899 she expressed her opinion about her religion and Islamic laws concerning the practice of polygamy.

I shall never fall in love. To love, there must first be respect, according to my thinking, and I can have no respect for the Javanese young man. How can I respect one who is married and a father, and who, when he has had enough of the mother of his children, brings another woman into his house, and is, according to the Moslem law, legally married to her? And who does not do this? And why not? It is no sin, and still less a scandal. The Moslem law and doctrine, I shall forever call it a sin. I call all things sin which bring misery to a fellow creature. Sin is to cause pain to another, whether man or beast. And can you imagine what hell-pain a woman must suffer when her husband comes with another--a rival--whom she must recognize as his legal wife? He can torture her to death, mistreat her as he will; if he does not choose to give her back her freedom, then she can whistle to the moon for her rights. Everything for the man, and nothing for the woman, is our law and custom. (*Letters*, 1964, pp. 41-42)

This letter shows the interconnectedness of polygamy and the way Kartini perceived Islam. In her letter to Mrs. Van Kol of August 1901 Kartini wrote:

The only road which lies open to a Javanese girl, and above all to one of noble birth, is marriage. From far and near we know of the horrible misery of woman caused by certain Islamic institutions that are so easy for the man, but oh, so bitterly hard and miserable for her. ...And it was the misery that I saw, even in my childish years, that first awakened in me the desire to fight against these time honored customs, and substitute justice for old tradition. (*Letters*, 1964, p. 114)

Another protest against polygamy was expressed in her letter to Rosa Abendanon-Mandri of 27 March 1902: "Is it not denial of the natural order where wives of the same man must endure each other?...Truly a child of people herself, a woman, must let her voice be heard!" (*Letters*, 1992, p. 207).

Kartini's maternal grandfather was a prominent religious teacher. During her childhood she was taught how to read the Koran in Arabic. However, as Kartini admitted

this lesson did not mean anything to her as she did not understand a single word of the Koran. Within this context Kartini raised the problem of language in the reading the Koran. This created a distance between Kartini and her religion. Kartini's correspondence with European people helped her see her own religion more critically. As a "subjectivist" she believed more in her intuition than the words of authorities. As she wrote in her letter to Mrs. Rosa Abendanon, dated 15 August 1902, she no longer observed the fast during ramadhan and had stopped learning the Koran because it was meaningless to her.

Although she was raised in a relatively religious environment, Kartini's knowledge of Islam was limited. She hardly discussed Islam with her religious instructors or her father. None of her letters mentions this. However, she raised the issue of language and of translation and the interpretation of the Koran. In Chapter II I discussed the interpretation of the Koran as a crucial factor in understanding the way Islam positions women. By Kartini's time the Arabic language was regarded as "too holy" to be interpreted and only religious men were allowed to learn Arabic. Kartini recognized the importance of language in learning Islam. At the same time she also recognized women had been denied access to this language. It is interesting that Kartini with all her limitations was able to see the issue which was also raised by contemporary Muslim feminists, whose knowledge of Islam was far beyond Kartini's.

I would not do things mechanically without knowing the reason. I would not learn any more lessons from the Koran, saying sentences in a strange language, whose meaning I did not understand. ... "Tell me the meaning and I am willing to learn everything. I was wrong, the Book of



Books is too holy to be comprehended by our poor intelligence.” (*Letters*, 1964, p. 182; letter to J.H Abendanon of 15 August 1902)

As a subjectivist, she followed her inner feeling as the source of truth. As a subjectivist she approached her religion with her own conscience. By that time she refused to follow any religious rituals that were senseless. She also refused to acknowledge the concept of God described by any religion. “Our God was our conscience, our hell and our heaven was our own conscience: if we did wrong our conscience punished us, if we did good, our conscience rewarded us” (*Letters*, 1964, p. 182)<sup>22</sup>. For Kartini, God or Allah was only a “word—a sound without meaning” (*Letters*, 1964, p. 183).<sup>23</sup>

In another letter to Stella Zehandellar dated 6 November 1899 she expressed her concern about the language of her religion:

I cannot tell you anything of the Islamic law, Stella. Its followers are forbidden to speak of it with those of another faith. And, in truth, I am a Moslem only because my ancestors were. How can I love a doctrine which I do not know—may never know? The Koran is too holy to be translated into any language whatever. Here no one speaks Arabic. It is customary to read from the Koran, but what is read no one understands! To me it is a silly thing to be obliged to read something without being able to understand it. ... If I wished to know and understand our religion, I should have to go to Arabia to learn the language. (*Letters*, 1964, p. 44)

Despite her critical approach towards the practice of polygamy within Islam, Kartini did not see Islam itself as a primary cause for the misery of woman in particular and of man in general. In her letter to Stella of 6 November 1899 Kartini wrote: “Religion, which is

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<sup>22</sup>Letter to J.H Abendanon of 15 August 1902

<sup>23</sup>Letter to J.H Abendanon of 15 August 1902

meant to save us from our sins, how many sins are committed in thy name?" (*Letters*, 1964, p. 45). Kartini was convinced that it was man not the religion that brought misery to human beings. Kartini kept searching for the truth of God and religion. In line with her feminist development, Kartini's approach towards Islam also developed. Her correspondence with other people of authority, such as Mrs. Van Kol who acted as her spiritual mentor for years, helped Kartini reembrace her religion, Islam. Kartini's approach towards her religion shifted from a subjectivist to constructivist position over the years. As a constructivist she combined her subjective knowledge with knowledge she learned from others. With the guidance of Van Kol and using her personal experience she finally found the God she had sought for.

One of the crucial moments in her journey towards God was when she met an older woman who taught her to see the essence instead of the form. From her Kartini learned about the meaning of fasting.

"Fast a day and a night and pass that time awake and in solitude."

Through night to light, through storm to peace, through strife to honor, through sorrow to joy.

The meaning behind the words of the old woman is: Fasting and waking are symbolical; "Through abstinence and meditation, we go towards the light." No light, where darkness has not gone before. ...Fasting is the overcoming of the material by the spirit; solitude is the school of meditation. (Letter to J.H. Abendanon of 15 August 1902) (*Letters*, 1964, p. 182)

Kartini's spiritual awakening led her to another rediscovery. The day she found God was the day when she discovered her mother as her spiritual guide.

Now we have found Him for whom unconsciously our souls had yearned during the long years...it was always with us, that it was in us....It had been working in us unconsciously for a long time; but she who opened the door for which we had sought, was Nelli Van Kol. And who leads us now, and shows us the way towards Him? It is Mama. We have been so stupid all our lives; we have had a whole mountain of treasure under our hands and we have not known it. (*Letters*, 1964, p. 183; letter to J.H. Abendanon of 15 August 1902)

With this new spirit Kartini was willing to study the Koran for the second time with "pure joy" and "...we are going to study Arabic so that we can read and write it" (*Letters*, 1964, p. 183).<sup>24</sup> Studying Arabic, the language that few people get access to, was certainly an act of self-determination for Kartini to step beyond the gender barrier and to master the language. Only by mastering the language could Kartini understand and get access to the interpretation of the Koran from which she had been excluded. Kartini determined to learn and interpret the Koran with her own "language" and refused the interpretation of the authorities; the interpretation which was determined historically and in accordance with the prevailing dominant system.

The interpretation of the Koran, as has been described in Chapter II, is the crucial factor in understanding the position and status of women in Islam. As Muslim feminists contend, it was because women's experience has been excluded from the making of history, and the making of the interpretation of the Koran for so long that women are subject to patriarchal practice in the name of religious practices, such as polygamy, segregation and veiling.

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<sup>24</sup>Letter to E.C. Abendanon of 17 August 1902

The issue of language is also raised by Huda Shaarawi. Like Kartini she too memorized the holy Koran without knowing the meaning. She was excluded from the language of her father, Arabic. When she decided to learn Arabic as the only way to read and understand the Koran properly, she was refused. Until the end of their lives both Kartini and Huda were not able to master the language. Yet, Kartini's case is rather different from Huda's. Kartini could not master Arabic because of the unavailability of an Arabic teacher. Besides, it was unusual for a woman of her class or any class to learn Arabic. On the other hand, Huda could not master the language because she was forbidden to learn it; because Arabic was reserved for men. Huda was allowed to read Arabic in the Koran passively and imitatively, but when learning the language became an act to gain power, she was forbidden. The incident with Said Agha (described in Chapter IV) suggested that the only roles suitable for women were those of wife and mother. Said Agha implied that literacy for a female was irrelevant, or even improper. Said Agha believed that a woman would never be an arbiter and thus no grammar should be learned. The notion that a woman cannot be a judge in court had been perpetuated by the Koranic injunction that counted women's witness as only worth half of men's. This kind of thinking perpetuated the view of women as creatures who were senseless, emotional, and irrational, and thus incapable of becoming judges.

## 6.2 Huda's Approach Toward The Issues of Polygamy and Veiling

Huda's approach to the issue of polygamy and veiling, like Kartini's, changed from largely a "subjectivist" to a more "constructivist" position. From the beginning she observed her mother's plight as a second wife (or even a concubine) of an older man. "My mother was a strong woman, a private person who had firm control over her emotions. She seldom complained and kept her sadness inside" (*Harem*, p. 25). Huda knew that despite her strong appearance her mother suppressed her misery about marrying a much older man and about sharing her husband man with another woman. She saw her mother's pain masked with silence.

Huda's mother would not allow her own daughter to marry a polygamous man. She made Ali Shaarawi sign the agreement to divorce his wife or wives before he married Huda. Huda herself hated this marriage and when her husband broke the agreement, following her inner feeling she determined to separate from him.

Huda's involvement in discussions with other women and her intellectual friends changed her approach towards polygamy from subjectivist to constructivist. As has been described in Chapter IV, Huda expanded her knowledge of women's issues by attending discussions and listening to the opinions of intellectual Egyptian women. Having first hand experience of leaving her polygamous husband and returning to him only if he promised to be monogamous, observing others, and gaining deeper knowledge of the status of women in Islam in a procedural way, Huda found her authentic voice when she spoke about the practice of polygamy. Being a constructivist woman, she used a contextual-grounded

approach towards the issue. According to Huda polygamy “constitutes an attack on the dignity of the wife and mother and is an obstacle to (creating) a harmonious home, generating the moral force able to form and guide the good citizen” (Badran, 1995, p. 128). However, unlike some contemporary Muslim feminists who perceive polygamy to be unacceptable (see chapter II), Huda saw polygamy as permissible as long as it acted as a remedial law, i.e. polygamy can be legally practiced under certain conditions. One of her demands which was included in the constitution of the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) was a restriction on men’s practice of polygamy. Huda demanded that a man should be allowed to take a second wife only if first wife failed to procreate or suffered incurable illness (Badran, 1995, p. 128). Huda believed that in principle marriage in Islam was monogamous. Bigamy, not polygamy, was permissible only in Islam in case of urgent needs, with due regard to the rights of the wife, both the first and the second.

While the Koran allows men to take four wives at a time, Huda and other feminists in the EFU accepted only two under the above-mentioned condition. This was an attempt to control patriarchal practice by reinterpreting the Koran. Although according to the Koran polygamy is conditional upon equal treatment to all wives, Huda and other feminists believed that it was impossible for a man to be polygamous based on the verse of the Koran that a man would never be able to be just and fair to all his wives in spite of his efforts. Besides, as Badran points out (1995), Huda and other feminists argued that although the Koran mentioned four wives, the verse should be understood within the context of pre-Islamic Arabia when a man could take as many wives as he wanted to. In line with the

argument posed by the contemporary Muslim feminists as described in chapter II. Huda believed that a gradual approach towards the practice is understandable in such conditions. Contemporary feminists believed that it would be impossible for Islam to immediately introduce the idea of monogamy in Arabic society with its unrestricted polygamy. In order to survive, Islam had to have some flexibility and adaptability in its teachings including restricting polygamous marriage to four wives. Feminists believe that a careful reading and interpretation of the Koran would clearly show that Islam is in spirit monogamous.

Reinterpretation of the Koran then became a crucial point in understanding the status of women and Islam concerning polygamy. One of the demands of Huda and other feminists was an "attempt to reform certain legal practices concerning marriage, the false interpretation of which is against the spirit of the Koran, and thus preserve the woman from the injustice which causes the practice of bigamy to take place without reason..."(Femea and Bezirgan, 1977, p. 200).

Huda also stressed the importance of reinterpreting the Koran in her approach towards the practice of seclusion and veiling. Huda had extensive discussions of veiling and seclusion, with the Islamic reformists, Eugenie Le Brun<sup>25</sup> and other intellectuals, when she discovered that those so called Islamic practices were not ordained by Islam as she had been led to believe. Huda observed that seclusion, segregation and veiling were not imposed on rural women. If such practices were Islamic, they must have been imposed on

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<sup>25</sup>In her memoirs Shaarawi notes that Eugenie Le Brun often spoke and discussed these issues with Qasim Amin and Mohammad Abduh, leading intellectuals who called for reform of the position of women, including unveiling and abolition of segregation and polygamy.

all Muslim women without exception. The interpretation of the Koran conducted by Huda's feminist colleagues who knew Arabic, such as Bahithat al-Badiyah and Nabawiyah Mussa, helped Huda perceive the practice of domestic confinement and face veiling as patriarchal, not Islamic, control over women. A strict segregation was a patriarchal attempt to define the separate roles for the two sexes. Segregation then became a means by which a woman would never be able to invade the public sphere, which was almost identical with power. Feminists' reinterpretation of the Koran found no justification in Islam for the construction of sexuality and sex roles that prevailed in the society. For example, there was no Koranic justification for the separate roles which positioned women in the house and men in the public sphere as the breadwinners. Bahithat al-Badiyah contended that "the division of labor is merely a human creation" (Badran, 1995, p. 67).

In the case of veiling, Huda perceived this practice as a means to control women's sexuality. It was a "powerful symbolic affirmation of fundamental sexual difference" (Badran, 1995, p. 67). However, according to Badran (1995) Huda took a gradualist approach towards the process of unveiling. Although she knew that veiling was not endorsed by the Koranic injunctions, Huda still insisted on wearing the veil. She argued that veiling was still needed in a society where women were still considered as sexual beings. Men had to control their sexual behaviour before women could unveil themselves. On the other hand unveiled women also needed to learn how to behave properly (Badran, 1995, p. 67).



Huda's approach towards veiling, in Belenky *et al.*'s terms, is a procedurist and constructivist approach. As a procedurist Huda learned and gained knowledge from Eugenie Le Brun who often relayed the content of her discussion with Qasim Amin and Mohammad Abduh on the issue of veiling and the status of women in Islam. Coupled with her own observation of the situation and condition in her society, she constructed her own knowledge about veiling. She integrated personal and intuitive knowledge with the knowledge of others. She combined rational and emotive thought and integrated objective and subjective knowing. Raised in a harem and veiled at an early age, Huda must have felt intuitively that all women in the harem were seen as sexual objects by men of the house. On the other hand, she objectively knew that segregation and veiling were patriarchal customs, established to maintain rigid sex roles that would keep women uneducated, powerless and jobless. Trying to combine this intuitive, subjective knowledge with rational thought she voiced her own thought that women should keep veiled until men changed their attitude towards women. Belenky *et al.* (1987, p. 152) point out that a constructivist "learns to live with compromise and to soften ideals that they find unworkable. Nevertheless, they set an example of a refreshing mixture of idealism and realism." Ideally Huda wanted to unveil, but realistically veiling had to be kept for the time being considering the situation and condition at that time when men still viewed women as sexual beings.

However, Huda and other feminists managed to manipulate that patriarchal tool into a feminist tool. According to Badran (1995, p. 67) veils were used to help women to gain access to public space without triggering chaos. With veiling upper and middle class could

create a women's space, "a room of their own" (Belenky *et al.*, 1986, p. 152) in a male-dominated society. This enabled them to construct the knowledge that their gender and sexuality had long been socially, not divinely, defined. In 1923 Huda finally unveiled herself in the Cairo station returning from an international women's conference in Rome. At that time Egypt was already an independent nation and national movements flourished. For Huda this was the right moment physically and symbolically to end the prevailing construction of sexuality which she and other feminists had been refuting by throwing off her veil. The veil had long been "a symbol of the harem culture designed to keep women contained and subordinate" (Badran, 1995, p. 69). The independence of Egypt enabled women to gain more freedom and rights both as women and as citizens. Huda's unveiling marked the beginning of feminists' forays into the public sphere. In the same year Huda founded the Egyptian Feminist Union to crystallise a set of demands for political, social, economic, and legal rights including the right of women to be educated and to have jobs.

Huda's call for unveiling was intended to give women the opportunity to have education and jobs. This was a very difficult task for Huda and other feminists especially when this happened in a society which believed the roles of mother and wife were divinely prescribed in the Koran. However, when a male authority, such as Prince Umar Tusun, voiced his opposition, Huda defended women's work within the context of Islam:

Your Royal Highness, in your view half the nation is composed of creatures without abilities and rights! However, Muslim law preaches the equality of the two sexes and has not assigned the domain of work to one more than the other...It is as if your highness has forgotten that our religion had accorded the woman free and entire right to dispose of her goods. She is able to sell,

secure a mortgage, to bequeath, and to testify...The Great lawgiver has high regard for the woman but man in his egotism does not wish to take this into account. He wishes unjustifiably to limit her (field of) action. (Badran, 1995, p. 170)

Huda used the early history of Muslim women, such as Khadija, a successful entrepreneur, who had been the Prophet's employer before she married him. Huda and other feminists made an attempt to revive early Islamic history and the holy text to formulate an indigenous feminist project. Huda's approach towards veiling and polygamy is in line with the spirit of the Koran. Through careful reading and reinterpretation of the Koran she constructed the truth that veiling and polygamy were patriarchal practices designed to keep women subordinated apart from the centers of power. This is in line with contemporary feminists' arguments about polygamy and veiling. Contemporary Muslim feminists contend, as described in Chapter II, that the Koranic verses legitimizing polygamy and veiling are contextually bound, that they are no longer relevant in present conditions, that veiling is only intended for Muhammad's wives, and that polygamy is not allowed.

While Huda had an opportunity to learn and reinterpret the Koran with the help of her feminist friends, Kartini was not as fortunate. Kartini's approach towards polygamy is more subjective. She did not have a knowledgeable mentor with whom she could discuss the matter. The only knowledgeable authority, Snouck Hurgronje, advocated the practice. Kartini had to rely on her conscience and her own experience. Later, following her spiritual awakening, she attempted to learn Arabic in order to understand and reinterpret the Koran properly. Unfortunately, she died before she could master the language. Until the end of

her life she intuitively rejected the practice of polygamy. Although she had not yet reached the conclusion that polygamy was not endorsed by the Koranic injunctions, she believed that polygamy as practiced by men of her class was more of part of patriarchal Javanese culture than of Islamic practice.

Although Kartini and Huda had different approaches towards polygamy due to their socio-cultural background, both feminists challenged the dominant Islamic ideology legitimizing the practice of polygamy. In their approach towards this particular practice, they both tried to negotiate with the context. While Huda refused polygamy in her own marriage but allowed bigamy under certain conditions, Kartini had to accept her polygamous marriage as part of the patriarchal conspiracy which she found too strong to challenge and reform. Raised and living in a rigid patriarchal and feudal society Kartini had to admit that there were things that she could not do despite her desire to make a difference in the world. Within this context then Kartini can be called a "constructivist." (Belenky et al., 1987, p. 152). However, in terms of acquiring the truth of polygamy, Kartini acted like a "subjectivist", while Huda managed to be a "constructivist."

The different approaches towards polygamy of these two women are also probably caused by the different cultures in which they were raised. Huda was raised in a society where Islam permeates the life of its inhabitants. Huda and Egyptian women have been deeply affected by the way Islam, based on the Koranic injunctions, regulates and defines women's lives. On the other hand, Kartini was raised in a society where Islamic norms and teachings were still integrated with animistic and Hindu elements. Moreover, Kartini was

born to an aristocratic family with its particular religious philosophy, which is not necessarily grounded in the Koran. Kartini did not deal with the issue of veiling as Huda did. Even though there was female seclusion imposed only for upper-class Javanese women, like Kartini, it was more prescribed by custom than by religion. Kartini's approach towards polygamy is more ethical and humanist.

### **6.3 Kartini and Huda Shaarawi as Writers**

The socio-cultural background not only influenced the way Kartini and Huda negotiated their feminism with their religion, but also the way they situated themselves as women writers (or rather as women who produced writings). Critics have agreed that women's writing should not be considered in isolation from social, economic, political and psychological facts that dictate much of women's conditions. Huda and Kartini lived in repressive male dominated and colonized societies. How these two women struggled and defined their identities in these particular societies to some extent is reflected in their writings.

Huda and Kartini both lived in repressive societies which imposed female seclusion on upper class women. In such societies there were few ways for women to exercise their emotional, intellectual and physical energies except through their writing. However, the act of writing itself could be considered as breaking the barrier, a foray into the public sphere especially when it was published.

In Kartini's case it is obvious that letter writing becomes the only medium sanctioned by society for women to reveal themselves emotionally and intellectually. Kartini had to be in seclusion for six years. As Kartini's voice reached out to other people, she protected herself from the loneliness, the isolation, and the distance between human beings she recognized and feared. Exchanging letters allowed Kartini to establish female relationships which were full of love and emotion. In Javanese society, where the expression of emotion and love were discouraged, Kartini's friendship with non-Javanese people served as an emotional outlet. Kartini could release and share her emotions, including her sorrows, anxieties, and joys as well as confiding in other women who might have similar emotions.

Through correspondence with her intellectual friends Kartini expressed and discussed her ideas and thoughts about women's liberation and emancipation. Kartini also made use of letter writing as a medium to gain knowledge from others. Discussion in Chapter V has shown that correspondence with her intellectual friends helped Kartini to expand and construct her own knowledge about women's position in her society. As described in Chapter III, a harmonious society would be achieved when everything is placed according its designated place in the social hierarchy. In the Javanese social hierarchy women were assigned subordinate status and were considered lacking in spiritual and learning characteristics. Letter writing then provided Kartini with a space where she could develop her intellectuality and intelligence.

For Kartini, who lived in a nineteenth-century patriarchal and feudal society, the notion of self-revelation and self-assertion would be certainly in conflict with ideas about femininity and the *priyayi*'s proper conduct, which were deeply inscribed in Javanese culture. Letter writing helped Kartini escape the limitation of her membership of the *Priyayis*. A woman of high class should possess refinement, which meant concealing and hiding overwhelming feelings such as sadness, unhappiness, disappointment, anger or frustration. Under such conditions, letters became the only private medium that would enable Kartini to reveal and expose herself to others without radically stepping beyond those norms.

Through writing letters Kartini could release her anger and emotion. At the same time she could express her wishes, ideas, and thoughts to other people without breaking her confinement. Within a society where women's voices were silenced, the act of writing, as opposed to speech, seemed safe and it was the sign of on going life. Within this context Kartini's letters must be seen to represent both Kartini's silence and its implicit strength: her silent refusal to lose her identity, despite her seclusion. The private nature of letter-writing provided an overflow valve for her anger and frustration, as well as her ambition. As Walters (1987) contended Kartini used letter writing to cope with loneliness and to confirm her existence, both physically and intellectually. In one of her letters to Rosa Abendanon in August 1902 Kartini clearly expressed her anger and her frustration concerning polygamy. Letter writing enabled Kartini to express her abhorrence of polygamy. Kartini had

difficulties in expressing her stand publicly as polygamy was a forbidden topic of discussion among the *priyayi*s. Besides, her own father practiced polygamy.

Helpless in bitter grief, I wring my hands and feel myself powerless to fight against an evil so gigantic! And which, O cruelty! is under the protection of Islamic law, and is fed by ignorance of the women themselves, the victims of the sacrifice. Fate allows that cruel wrong which is called polygamy to stalk abroad in the land "I will not have it," cries the mouth vehemently and the heart echoes the cry a thousandfold, but alas --to will! Have we human beings a will? It is always, we must, *must* do everything, from our first infant cry till our last breath. (*Letters*, 1964, p. 69; letter to Rosa Abendanon in August 1900)

Another letter to Stella on 23 August 1900 revealed Kartini's constant clash between the necessity to assert and the need to apologize. Kartini tried to resolve her conflict with what her culture expected of her. Kartini was trapped in Javanese norms of duty: duty to her parents and duty to her society.

Your encouragement is a support--it strengthens me. I will, I shall obtain my freedom. I will, Stella, I will! ..But how shall I be able to win it, if I do not strive? How shall I be able to find it, if I do not seek? Without strife there can be no victory. I shall strive, and I shall win. I am not afraid of the burdens and difficulties: I feel strong enough to overcome them, but there is one thing I am afraid to face squarely. ...Stella...I love Father dearly. I do not know whether I shall have the courage to carry my will through, if it would break his heart.... And if one of us should be condemned to unhappiness, let me be the one. Here lurks egoism, for I could never be happy, even if I had freedom, even if I gained my independence, if in attaining them, I had made Father miserable. (*Letters*, 1964, p. 81)

Kartini experienced what Spacks called the "rhetoric of uncertainty" (1980). In many of her letters Kartini expressed her deep convictions and her thoughts and ideas of



women's liberation. Yet she often viewed them as illusions and madness. Kartini's rhetoric of uncertainty was also augmented by her culture.

The Javanese society and culture in which she was raised expected Kartini to play the role of a dutiful daughter. Kartini knew that her father would not be happy if she was not married as he determined. On the other hand, Kartini also knew that the only marriage she could have was a polygamous marriage which was exactly the enemy she had been fighting against: "...If Father should marry me off in this manner [polygamous] then I should find a way out at the beginning, one way or another. But then Father would never do that" (*Letters*, 1964, p. 82; letter to Stella of 23 August 1900).

Kartini's uncertainty was also heightened by Javanese ethics which forbade this "egoistic" manner, which would sacrifice others. Within this context Kartini's ego would not sacrifice her father. Moreover, the Javanese believed that a disobedient daughter would cause her parents misery.

Kartini's relationship with her father was also one factor preventing her from becoming a published writer. In her letters as a medium of self-expression she could reveal her wish: to be a writer. She believed that as writer she could voice the unspeakable misery of women's condition, and improve women's status in particular and her race in general (Letter to Stella of 11 October 1901). However, living in a patriarchal and feudal society Kartini's voice as a writer was silenced by a male dominant figure, her father. In her letter to Stella of 23 August 1900 she told Stella how her father hampered her wish.

“What would you like to be yourself?”

I felt all eyes are fastened upon me: those of my parents burned into my face. I cast down my eyes. There was a buzzing and roaring in my ears, but above it I seemed to hear the words “Kartini be brave, do not waver.”

“I know you wish to become a writer; but you do not have to be educated especially for that. you can become that for yourself.” Alas for study I am too late; but at least I may raise my eyes on high and go humbly and quietly forward. (*Letters*. 1964, p. 88)

Stella, call me a coward, call me weak, for I cannot be anything else; if Father is set against this dedication of myself, never mind how my heart may cry out. I shall hold it still. (*Letters*. 1964, p. 91)

Kartini wavered between self-assertion and care for others. In Virginia Woolf's terms Kartini acted like “the angel in the house” who “must charm, sympathize...flatter...conciliate...be extremely sensitive to the needs and moods and wishes of others before her own...excel in the difficult art of family life” (Olsen. 1978, p. 34).

Kartini's role as “angel” before her father always stood between her and her paper. Although her father once allowed Kartini to publish some articles anonymously about marriage customs among the Kojas, he forbade Kartini to write about profound matters, especially *priyayi*'s marriage and polygamy. Kartini had a secret wish to publish a book dealing with polygamy but she chose to obey her father. Besides, Kartini's wish would destroy the *rukun*, or harmony, so highly valued in Javanese society. Being an angel for her father and her society she maintained social solidarity and harmony. In her letter to Rosa Abendanon of 21 August 1901 she wrote:

The idea of publishing *everything I think about and feel* relating to the terrible conditions in our Mohammedan female world has been with me for a long time. I had considered presenting it as a book in the form as [*sic*]

an exchange of letters between two daughters of Regents, one Sundanese and one Javanese. I have already written several letters by way introduction and made notes. I will *not* give up the idea although it might be several years before it can be published... The great difficulty is that Father will *not allow me* to publish such a book. That I have a command of the Dutch language is very nice. Father says, but I cannot make use of it to express my opinions. We girls cannot have opinions--we have just to accept everything and say "yes" and "amen" to everything others consider is good. (*Letters*, 1992, p. 168)

Years before she was once asked by a woman editor of the Indies' women's magazine *De Echo* to publish her letters concerning polygamy and also to publish the articles about the status and condition of native women. Although Mrs. Van Kol promised Kartini's father not to reveal Kartini's identity, permission was still not granted: "...before I could do anything it was revoked. For the time being, I could not voice my opinion, it was a case of later..." (Letter to Rosa Abendanon of 13 December 1901) (*Letters*, 1992, p. 169).

The external censorship continued to silence Kartini and eventually this led her to self-censorship. Elaine Showalter, as quoted by Robyn Rowland in *Women Herself* (1989, p. 68)) mentioned self-censorship as one of the obstructions faced by women writers that sometimes ended in self-hatred. Tillie Olsen in *Silences* (1978) also includes self-censorship as another form of women writers' "silence." Kartini was well aware that matters concerning marriage, polygamy and women's education were very serious and sensitive issues in her society. She could not write and publish about them due to the external censorship imposed by her father. Her letter to Rosa Abendanon of 21 December 1901 revealed her frustration:

So much happened I could not get down to writing, and after that I was becoming so desperate with one day being allowed to and the next day not that I tore up my writing. Really silly of me—I can be so bad tempered sometimes. I despaired. I was only allowed to write nonsense, serious things I was not allowed to mention. (*Letters*, 1992, p. 169)

Yet in the same letter Kartini tried to defend herself following her decision not to write and publish the articles. It seems that again Kartini made an attempt to maintain harmonious order by sacrificing herself for the common good.

And then I started thinking, if I wrote about those things then no doubt I would get the whole of Native society against me and then what would become of me as a teacher—*who would* entrust me with their children? I would simply be declared crazy. And yet, the idea of serving our objectives by means of writing is so attractive to me. Imagine, a school with no children, a teacher with no pupils! (*Letters*, 1992, p. 169)

Besides external and internal censorship, Kartini's talent as a writer was submerged by her marriage. In *Silences* (1978) Olsen mentioned that marriage can be a major threat to women writers. As wife of a Regent, Kartini was no longer able to find her own space and free herself from domestic affairs. She could not deny all the duties expected of a woman in her social position: the duty of a wife of a public figure and the duty of a mother of six children. After her marriage, Kartini's letters were shorter. Social restrictions and obligations imposed on a married woman destroyed Kartini's talent as a writer.

Before marriage Kartini was an angel to her father, and after the marriage, she was an angel to her husband and family. She changed her role as a dutiful daughter to a good wife and mother. Kartini's relationship with her husband also changed the way she

perceived herself. Kartini's self assertion was no longer voiced in her letters. Kartini seemed to be trapped in the value of goodness which according to Spacks is identical to selflessness. Kartini's self subordination was also reinforced by Javanese ethics which discouraged a woman from self glorification. In Kartini's post-marriage letters, she revealed more about her husband's good qualities rather than hers. Kartini even admitted her husband's claims to superiority over her.

I consider myself privileged above thousands of others to be allowed to stand in life beside such a *noble* man. ...He is someone who commands respect and admiration, whom one must hold in high degree. ...I have met my equal--no in many, many aspects my superior. How small and insignificant I feel beside him. If all Regents perceived their duty and life in general as he then the island would be the most flourishing and the most prosperous in the whole world. (*Letters*, 1992, pp. 483-484; letter to Rosa Abendanon of 11 December 1903)

It seems strange for Kartini to suddenly change from self-esteem (before marriage) to self-subordination or self-effacement (after marriage). I would argue that this self-subordination was Kartini's way of concealing what she really felt about her husband and her polygamous marriage. Kartini tried to convince her intellectual friends that she was happy and contented. However, her letter to Rosa Abendanon of 8 June 1904 revealed her true feelings. She mentioned about how she enjoyed the *gamelan*, which often "carries me back to times which I may no longer think about" and "makes me weak and melancholy." (*Letters*, 1992, p. 506). If Kartini was contented with her husband and her marriage, she did not need to feel weak every time she heard the *gamelan*. To her, the *gamelan* was part of her past and always reminded her of the time when she was vibrant and determined to

liberate herself and her sisters from the gigantic enemy, i.e. polygamy. In her own polygamous marriage, she would not let herself "think about it." In the same letter she revealed her true feelings about her marriage.

If the child which I carry under my heart should be a girl what would I then wish for her? I would wish that she may *live!* a rich, full life. That the life her mother begun she may fulfill. She will not be made to do anything against her innermost feelings. What she will do, she will do of her own *free will*. She will have a mother who will guard over her spiritual welfare and a father who will not force her to do anything. For him it will make no difference should her [*sic*] daughter never marry. What he values is that she will always retain our respect. That he respects women such as I hope my daughter will become, he has shown in marrying me. (*Letters*, 1992, p. 506; letter to Rosa Abendanon of 8 June 1904)

Although Kartini tried to reassure her correspondents of her happiness in her marriage as shown in the last sentence, she could not conceal what she truly felt about her condition. If she was contented, she would not emphasize the word "live." It suggests that she was no longer alive after what her father did to her. What she wished her daughter to be is what she used to wish for herself. This part of the letter contained what critics call a "double voice" often found in nineteenth-century women's texts (Gilbert and Gubar, 1980). This double voice originated from what has been determined as appropriate or inappropriate for women to write about. Women had difficulties in exploring their own truth while also concealing it from others (Rowland, 1988). This double voice might be strengthened by *priyayi*'s etiquette which encourages *etok-etok* or "proper lying", as I have described in Chapter III. While seemingly Kartini's identity and existence were submerged

by her husband and her father, she still retained her self-definition: to be a lively, single independent woman with free will.

While Kartini struggled for her self assertion and self definition in the act of writing letters, Huda had already conquered her limitations in her patriarchal, religious, and harem culture. Huda's act of writing the memoirs itself is an act of self-assertion. In contrast with letters which are private, memoirs are intended to be read publicly. In a society where women's body and voice were veiled, writing memoirs telling about her journey into feminism was a final unveiling for Huda. Badran views this as Huda Shaarawi's final act of unveiling (1987, p. 1).

When Huda unveiled her body, she also unveiled her voice. Soon after being unveiled Huda secured her and other women's voices politically by establishing the Egyptian Feminist Union. Huda wanted her body seen, her voice heard, her individuality asserted, after her voice had been silenced by her mother, husband, and the eunuch. In her memoirs Huda wrote about private ideas, feelings and personal experiences. By textualizing the variety of female experiences, by saying "I" in a written and potentially public text, Huda lifted the veil of secrecy. Through her memoirs we know how socially prescribed practices such as segregation, veiling, arranged marriage, and polygamy affected a woman's life.

Writing about her own personal experiences, Huda refused to subordinate the authorial voice to traditional stereotypical characterization, nor did she maintain the socially prescribed values and attitudes. This is particularly true when she told intended readers

how she refused to return to her husband despite her husband's rights which were sanctioned by society. There is an institution called "the house of obedience" by which a husband can force his wife by Judge's order to return after leaving him without his permission. Under this institution such a woman is not eligible to obtain a judicial divorce. When Huda wrote her memoirs the institution was still firmly established and was finally abolished only in 1967, long after Huda's death (Badran, 1995, p. 132). Another example is when she depicted her feelings about her daughter's illness and how she devoted her life to her daughter. With her voice, Huda rejected the traditional stereotypical characterization of a mother who devoted her life to her son.

In a culture where a woman is expected to veil her body and suppress her voice, writing about self is indeed a real challenge to the man's world. While female silence and restraint seemed to be the major obstacles to the full development of female public personal narratives, Huda stepped beyond the barriers and constructed her selfhood by writing her memories of the most private part of her life: living in the harem, forcibly married at a young age to a polygamous husband, and leaving her husband to live on her own.

When Huda began to write her memoirs she was already a public figure, a self-declared feminist. Huda did not experience what Kartini had to face as a woman writer. Writing her own story is a gesture of strength: a strength needed to be able to speak in her authentic voice amidst the dominant male voice. Therefore it is unlikely that Huda experienced a "rhetoric of uncertainty." Huda's self-assertion and determination dominated her accounts of her daring acts and public achievements in her memoirs, such as leaving her



husband, organizing and leading the first Egyptian women's demonstration against the repressive acts and intimidation of the British authority, and unveiling herself in public.<sup>26</sup>

This absence of a "rhetoric of uncertainty" might also be caused by the absence of male authorities in her life. Huda's father, brother, and husband were already dead when she began to write her memoirs. Huda did not have to choose between public success and being "the angel in the house." All the authorities who once controlled her life, including her mother, had died and this allowed Huda to enter the public sphere completely and to record her achievements without showing the ambivalence Spacks (1988) finds usual in women's texts. Another fact that might contribute to Huda's assertive voice was that her editor re-wrote parts of her account. This replacement interweaved the part of how Huda became a nationalist and started the feminist movement into a historical epilogue. Dividing her memoirs into two parts (firstly, her formative years and secondly, her public appearance as a nationalist and feminist) Huda made a deliberate effort to amalgamate the personal and the political, the private and the public.

We can conclude then that while Kartini used texts (letters) as a medium to relieve pain, to cope with loneliness, and to confirm her existence, physically and intellectually, as Walters (1987) suggests, Huda used the text to assert her authorial voice, to reaffirm her self-identity to break the "cultural hall of mirrors" (Friedman, 1988, p. 38) which reflected women as silent, passive, and veiled creatures. However, both Kartini and Huda saw writing as "breaking the silence imposed by male speech." (Friedman, 1988, p. 24).

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<sup>26</sup> In the "unveiling" part, Huda's voice is replaced by Margot Badran's voice as the editor.

It is interesting to investigate other resemblances between Kartini and Huda. In terms of their texts, Kartini's letters and Huda's memoirs reveal strong women's cultures. Both Kartini and Huda described in detail their relationships with women friends and how they built a loving and supportive female world: reading novels, discussing books, attending opera (in Huda's case), playing the piano, painting, sewing, and making crafts (in Kartini's case), and learning foreign languages.

Other resemblances lie in how they related to a particular space to cope with their feelings of being a woman in a patriarchal society. Kartini often associated herself with the beach and the Javanese orchestra when she was in a state of deep emotion while Huda related to the garden. Music often became consolation for the restless and often disappointed Kartini.

There is one thing in which I become totally involved, in which I completely lose myself and I do so regularly: beautiful music. One can get us to do anything as long as we are filled with music. And if we have to do something which necessitates much courage, then we would first want to saturate ourselves with some heavenly music. (*Letters*, 1992, p. 346; letter to Rosa Abendanon of 14 December 1902)

It is Friday evening gamelan evening, they are playing our favorite pieces! The ice around our hearts has melted, the pale sun has warmed our cold hearts with kisses. Now they are again able to be involved. Our souls once more soar up to the blue heavens of our imagination on the sweet, serene tones which the soft evening breeze brings us from the *pendopo*. (*Letters*, 1992, p. 197; letter to Rosa Abendanon of 28 February 1902)

Kartini also turned to the *gamelan* (Javanese orchestra) when she was betrayed and deeply hurt by her father when he married off Kardinah.

It was the morning for the *gamelan*. in the *pendopo* the *gamelan* was playing softly and one did not want to know, one wished to *forget* that something terrible was hanging over our heads. Father could not bear to see his child suffer in this manner and betook himself to an isolated corner of the *pendopo*. There they sat, the two brothers, uncle and father. ...Opposite them the *gamelan* played and in our room a young life wrestled with death. Cries of physical suffering mingled with cries of moral pain and interposed between them, making fun of all this misery, were the sounds of the *gamelan*—the bitter irony of the reality of life. (*Letters*, 1992, p. 144; letter to Rosa Abendanon of 29 November 1901)

Besides *gamelan*, the beach and the sea often appear in Kartini's accounts of her daily life. The sea seemed to be a place where Kartini found peace and consolation for her ever restless spirit. She turned to the sea when she realized that she could not possibly go to Holland because of a financial problem. In her letter to Professor and Mrs. G.K Anton of Jena, Germany in June 1901 she described how the sea and the beach always gave her a sign to live on.

When we are at Klein Scheveningen, that idyllic spot by the sea, where everything breathes quiet [*sic*] and peace [*sic*] and watch the sun go down, then we know that we cannot be grateful enough that we have good eyes to enjoy the beautiful light which plays upon the golden water and in the heaven above it! and a still prayer of thanksgiving toward the invisible Great Spirit who created everything and governs everything. (*Letters*, 1964, pp. 108-109)

The sea is also a constant reminder for Kartini of one of the happiest times in her life when she met Mrs. Rosa Abendanon. At Klein Scheveningen she discovered that Mrs. Abendanon was a great supporter of the emancipation of women. Ironically it is exactly the same spot where her spirit and ideals were "killed" by Mr. Abendanon. It was at the beach

where Mr. Abendanon persuaded Kartini to give up her long dream of pursuing further education in Holland. After that, Kartini hardly mentioned this beach in her letters because this time the beach would be a constant reminder of her failure.

Huda used the garden to describe metaphorically her hopeless and devastated condition as a woman. She mentioned the garden in her accounts of her lonely and painful days in the harem when everybody except *Umm Kabira* rejected her: "I began to spend the afternoons in the garden amid the fruit and flower trees, and the birds, fish and pet animals..." (*Harem*, 1987, p. 37).

As I have described in Chapter IV, Huda also associated her situation with the garden when she recalled the morning following the consummation of her marriage. It was the morning when she found out that she lost everything she loved: the garden, her childhood, and her "father." The garden always reminded her of her loving father. It was her father who planted the trees. In this garden Huda used to find *daqn al-basha*, 'the pasha beard.' She lost all the things that could bring happiness to her.<sup>27</sup>

Leila Ahmed (1988) comments that gardens "often form the background against which a foreground pain is achingly juxtaposed (and always it is the pain of being female). Gardens seem to bespeak the wealth of loveliness and possibility inhering in life, which human arrangements stupidly and wantonly waste, abridge, or destroy" (p.165).

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<sup>27</sup>I have quoted Huda's accounts on the garden in Chapter IV page 79 .

#### 6.4 Kartini's and Huda's Relationship with Their Colonizers' Language

Kartini and Huda were not only subject to patriarchal society but also racist society. Both Kartini and Huda were colonized subjects whose identities had to be "voiced" in the language and culture of their colonizers. Unlike most colonized writers whose relation to their colonizer's language is ambivalent, Kartini was unequivocal. This position was due to the Dutch attitude towards their language. Unlike the British or French colonials who imposed their language and culture on their subjects, the native people, the Dutch did otherwise. The Dutch discouraged native people from using Dutch. Kartini recorded in her letters that:

With heavy hearts, many Europeans here see how the Javanese whom they regard as their inferiors, are slowly awakening, and at every turn, a brown man comes up, who shows that he has just as good brains in his head, and a [*sic*] just as good heart in his body as the white man...there are also others who dislike us, for no other reason than we are bold enough to emulate them in education and culture. ...In many subtle ways they make us feel their dislike. "I am a European, you are a Javanese" they seem say, or "I am the master, you are the governed." Not once, but many times, they speak to us in broken Malay: although they know very well that we understand the Dutch language. ...Why do many Hollanders find it unpleasant to converse with us in their own language? Oh yes, now I understand: Dutch is too beautiful to be spoken by a brown mouth. (*Letters, 1964*, p. 61; letter to Stella of 12 January 1900)

In the same letter she told a story of smart young boy who had to end up as clerk to a Dutch controller who was not as bright as him because he dared to address the Resident in Dutch. He learned that "one cannot serve a European official better than by creeping in the dust before him, and by never speaking a single word of Dutch in his presence" (*Letters*,

1964, p. 59) This particular letter illustrates what Homi Bhaba called "mimicry." Mimicry, as quoted by Sally McWilliams (1991) is the discourse in which the colonized mimics the colonizer. Mimicry with its "almost the same but not quite repetition" can threaten the colonial power.

By trying to enforce a role that the colonized should mimic, the colonizer puts in jeopardy his own authority because the mimicry (or metonymy of presence) reveals the discriminatory power of the colonizer. The colonizer's seemingly "natural" state of superiority and authority is questioned by the mimic's "almost but not quite" repetition. Since there is no "pure essence" or "absolute presence" behind the mimic's mask, the mythmaker's own myths and mythmaking abilities are threatened. (1991, p. 109)

The Dutch maintained their superiority on the basis of native ignorance. The use of the so-called "educated and elite" language by the "brown mouth" would diminish the gap between the "master" and the "governed," the superior and the inferior. The Dutch language served, as Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin suggest, as the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power was perpetuated.

Because of this particular function of the language Kartini perceived Dutch as giving access to power and authority, especially a writer's authority.

If I could learn the Dutch language thoroughly, my future would be assured. A rich field of labor would then lie open to me, and I should be a true child of humanity...I feel powerless all too well...what a crazy idea of mine, is it not? That I who know nothing, have learned nothing, should wish to venture, upon a literary career? It is indeed a desperate undertaking. (*Letters*, 1964, pp. 42-43; letter to Stella of 6 November 1899)

For Kartini, learning Dutch was a conscious act. Kartini knew that only by mastering the master's tools, could she dismantle the master's house (Javanese feudalism and patriarchy, and colonialism). Dutch became the only available tool for Kartini to freely express her anger, her frustration, and her thoughts on women's subjection to Javanese feudal and patriarchal tradition and colonialism.

I do not know the modern languages. Alas! We girls are not allowed by our law to learn languages; it was a great innovation for us to learn Dutch. I long to know languages, not so much to be able to speak them, as for the far greater joy of being able to read the many beautiful works of foreign authors in their own tongue. Is it not true that never mind how good a translation may be, it is never so fine as the original? That is always stronger--more charming. (*Letters*, 1964, pp. 35-36; letter to Stella of 25 May 1899)

However, the linguistic segregation established by the Dutch prevented Kartini from internalizing the oppressor's language as an instrument of domination. She also did not internalize her colonizer's values. Therefore, unlike what Fanon suggests, Kartini's relationship towards the language is far from ambivalent. As a critical observer and participant in the two cultures, Javanese and European, Kartini was able to syncretize the merits of each culture. Although Kartini was committed to Western culture with its enlightenment tradition (especially with its tradition concerning monogamous marriage and women's education), she did not go so far as to unconditionally accept the colonizer's values so that she could be accepted by her colonizer.

We believe that you *have to* know what we think of aspects of your society because you seem to think that we consider the European world an ideal. What we consider the *true ideal* you have known for some time, and we

know you have similar views: *true civilization* is by no means yet generally to be found in the civilized countries. It is possible to find the *real thing* amongst the peoples whom the *mass* of the white race, convinced as it is of its own excellence, regards with *contempt*. (*Letters*, 1992, pp. 310-311; letter to Rosa Abendanon of 27 October 1902)

Truly, we do not *expect* that the European world will make us happy. The time has long since passed when we thought that 'European society was the only true, the foremost, the unsurpassable one'.... beside the very beautiful, the grand and the lofty in your society, there is much that often makes a mockery of the name, civilization?. ...We really do not imagine Holland to be an ideal country, on the contrary, going on what we have seen and experienced of Dutchmen here, we can be certain what we will see and experience in their small, cold country much that will cause us, as sensitive people, pain and which will *sorely grieve* us. (*Letters*, 1992, p. 308; letter to Rosa Abendanon of. 27 October 1902)

She made an attempt to glorify her own cultural tradition to counter the colonizer's negations of native culture. About Javanese language and culture she wrote in a letter addressed to E.C Abendanon (the son of the Abendanons) on 17 August 1902.

We are reading now a lovely poem in the flower tongue. How I wish that you knew our language. ...Have you any desire learn the Javanese language? It is difficult-certainly... but it is beautiful. It is a sentient language; often the words seem to be conscious, they express so much. We are astonished sometimes, own children as we are of the country, at the cleverness of our fellow countrymen. Things of which one could never imagine anything could be made, they express charmingly. Name something in the dark, give out a subject at random, and a simple Javanese will immediately make a rhyme that astonished by its aptness and clearness. This facility belongs peculiarly to our Eastern people. (*Letters*, 1964, p. 184)

In another letter to Stella of 15 August 1902 Kartini tried to convince her western, educated and "civilized" audience of how proud she was to be a Javanese. Kartini did not



fall into self-denigration about her own tradition, culture, people, and language. She challenged the superiority of the so-called civilized and educated Europeans with the superiority of the supposedly “uncivilized and uneducated” Javanese people. She firmly believed that the simple-minded Javanese people in reality could be more civilized than the educated Europeans.

I wish I could teach you my language, so that you could enjoy its beauties in their original freshness. The deeper I penetrate the soul of our people, the finer I think it. Among you wise men and poets are drawn usually from a certain station, and only the upper classes are educated...but...let us visit the small huts of the poor submerged tenth...They are unschooled people always, but music comes welling from their lips, they are tender and discreet by nature, simple and modest. ...There are so many poets and artists among them, and where a people has a feeling for poetry, the most beautiful thing in life, they cannot be lacking in the instincts of civilization....The least, the very humblest Javanese, is a poet. (*Letters*, 1964, p. 179; letter to Stella of 15 August 1902)

Although Kartini admitted that she might have been permeated by European ideas and feelings, she refused to be called a Europeanized Javanese. She believed that her Javanese blood flowed warmly through her veins and could not be silenced. Kartini’s love of the Dutch language and European culture with its enlightenment tradition did not result in alienation from her own tradition and values. Kartini was too attached to her own language, Javanese music, homeland, and the graceful and beautiful spirit of her people to be simply claimed as “more European than Javanese” (*Letters*, 1992, p. 99) (Letter to Rosa Abendanon of 1 August 1901). In the same letter she wrote: “We can feel it (the Javanese blood) with the smell of incense, and the perfume of flowers, with the sound of *gamelan*,

with the rustling of wind in the crowns of coconut palms, with the cooing of the turtledoves, with the whistling of the wind through padi, or the sound of the rice on the block" (*Letters*, 1992, p. 99).

Like Kartini, Huda tried to be loyal to her own tongue, Arabic. Having been colonized by the French, who imposed their language on their Egyptian subjects, French, as the language of the elite, was widely spoken among the upper-class Egyptians, including Huda. Although in Huda's time the British replaced the French as rulers, the French language was still considered the language of the elite and was still fashionable among the educated upper-class. Huda then was taught French which she quickly learned as her language.

Huda loved to speak and write in French. However, like Kartini, Huda's feeling towards the language did not necessarily mean that she had internalized the language as being all powerful and dominant. Since she was a child Huda had loved to learn and master the language of her loving father. Her wish to master the language grew stronger when she knew that she would never be able to read the Koran correctly if she did not understand Arabic grammar. Unfortunately she was not allowed to learn Arabic grammar as "she will not become a judge!" (*Harem*, p.41). Huda's desire to learn her paternal language became her obsession when her inability to master the language prevented her from composing poetry in Arabic, and most importantly from empowering herself. As I have described in chapter IV, the poet Khadija made her realize the importance of mastering Arabic, the language of men, to gain access to power and authority.

Having no access to Arabic did not make Huda give up her obsession. She turned to Turkish, her maternal language. Learning Turkish grammar and writing Ottoman Turkish in two scripts had helped Huda write in Arabic. Huda's fondness for Arabic grew stronger, so that she had begun to buy books in Arabic from the peddlers though she was forbidden to do so. She would even sneak into her father's room to "read those [books] of my father who loved literature and had been surrounded by poets and learned men" (*Harem*, 41). Apparently Huda perceived her paternal language as more powerful than the colonizer's language, i.e. French. Unfortunately, because the Arabic language was regarded as too "sacred" for a woman of her class, Huda did not succeed in mastering this language. She was much more fluent in French, both in speaking and writing, than in Arabic.

Huda used French in her journey to being a feminist. With her upper-class colleagues she published a monthly journal in French, *L'Egyptienne*, in 1925 which voiced women's issues. The target audience was upper-middle class women who were familiar with the ideas of women's emancipation. However, though Huda and other feminists used French when they wrote, they still retained their Arabic in speaking and in mass meetings. According to Badran (1995) Huda and other feminists used Arabic when they spoke publicly. Huda herself never lost her interest in promoting Arabic. In 1929, she asked a girl, Aminah al-Said, to give a speech in classical Arabic at a charity ball. After that, Aminah became an assistant to Huda and read the public speeches on behalf of Huda for the last seven years of Huda's life (Fernea and Bezirgan, 1976, p. 199). In 1937 Huda published another women's magazine in Arabic, *al-Majalah al-Misriyah* (The Egyptian

woman). Within this context, Arabic became a means of strengthening solidarity among all classes of the nation. In her introductory editorial on February 15, 1937 Huda dedicated the magazine: "To all the sons and daughters of my country, religion, language, and race I introduce *Al-Majalah al-Misriyah* in its wonderful national dress" (Badran, 1995, p. 105).

Huda's persistence in using Arabic on every possible occasion suggests that she did not perceive French as politically and socially superior to Arabic. This is reaffirmed when she decided to write her memoirs in her father's tongue and the national language despite her inability in written Arabic. She dictated her memoirs to her secretary, Abd al-Hamid Fahmi Mursi (Badran, 1987, p. 1). Writing her memoirs in Arabic was an act self-assertion by a woman in patriarchal society. At the same time it was also an act of self-definition as an Egyptian in colonized culture.

Contrasting and comparing how Kartini and Huda approached the issue of polygamy, female seclusion, and veiling (in the case of Huda Shaarawi), how they, as writers, struggled to define their own voices in the patriarchal and colonialist culture, a conclusion can be drawn that both feminists, especially Huda Shaarawi, could reconcile their feminism with Islam. Both feminists recognized the importance of mastering the language (in this case, Arabic) as a crucial factor in order to properly understand women's rights and status in Islam. Both Huda Shaarawi and Kartini were convinced that women's experience and history should be taken into account in the reinterpretation of the Koran.

In terms of Kartini's and Huda Shaarawi's relationship with the colonizer's language and culture, they both found their identities within their own language and culture.

Although they both used foreign languages to express their thoughts and ideas, they did not perceive the languages as overpowering their own cultural identities as Egyptian and Indonesian.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

As I discussed in the Introduction this research was grounded in my personal assumption that Islam and feminism were incompatible. Interested in feminism and later being a student of Women's Studies I began to question the religious prescriptions about the relationship between men and women with which I have been raised. Polygamy, veiling, and female seclusion were "Islamic" practices that most bothered me as a Muslim woman. Doing research on two Muslim feminists' personal writings I hoped to gain some enlightenment as to how these two feminists reconciled their feminism with Islam as reflected in their writings. At the same time I hoped I could learn from them how a Muslim woman becomes a feminist.

While conducting the research there was a process within me, a process towards a better understanding of how a free and liberated Muslim woman approaches the injustice of practices conducted in the name of the religion. Like Huda and Kartini I carefully thought about polygamy, veiling, and female seclusion. Like a "silent" and "receptivist" woman, I relied heavily on the words of authorities to find the answer to troubling questions about such practices. I believed the words of my religious instructions, and I accepted the words of Muslim male scholars.

Unlike Kartini and Huda, I was not subject to female seclusion. However, I was intellectually "confined," by my own way of thought. According to Smith's concept

(1987), the way I see realities in my society originated in a special position of dominance, which was occupied by male Muslim scholars and my religious instructors. I read the male texts that mediated the practice of the ruling apparatus. Even though I claimed myself as a liberated and independent woman, I was unconsciously culturally overpowered by the male texts. I unconsciously became a part of the patriarchal conspiracy which sustained the status quo of male domination.

My way of thinking was then challenged when I entered the Women's Studies programme. I began to waver between what I believed and what I saw. Feminist literature eventually helped me to reconsider my way of thinking. Like Kartini and Huda I began to see women's experiences as a source of truth. I no longer believed that polygamy, veiling and female seclusion were institutionalized for the common good of women. There was a growing conflict in me between being both a Muslim and a woman who advocates feminism. I was convinced that my religion preaches equality. I also believed that certain practices are unjust to women. I determined to resolve this conflict in a procedural way. I began to do research that investigated the ways in which Muslim women attempted to reconcile feminism with Islam.

A "procedurist". I started to read and analyze Muslim feminist literature discussing women's rights and status in Islam. I tried to have a "dialogue" with these knowledgeable authorities represented by their texts. I kept confronting Islamic norms I used to believe in concerning the status of women, with those of these feminists. Eventually I was convinced the problem lay in the interpretation of the Koran, not in

Islam itself. Facts about women in the Koran had been selected and interpreted from a dominant position and discourse. The Koran became the established religious text in which male interests were vested.

I contend, then, that polygamy, veiling, and female seclusion were patriarchal practices institutionalized to control women. I no longer kept a "secret" wish that some day I would veil myself in my attempt to be a good Muslim woman as prescribed by the religious instructions. Veiling, which was intended to guard the purity of women, not men, is not necessary for a society where men and women are used to seeing each other, walking, and working together. Nineteenth-century Javanese and Egyptian society imposed sexual segregation, although in different intensity, because women were seen as sexual beings. I believe that both men and women are sexual beings. Therefore, if one sex should be veiled, the other should be too. However, having been socialized that men and women can expose themselves to each other to a certain extent, without causing chaos in society, I, like Huda, am convinced veiling is not necessary as long as we know how to properly conduct ourselves. To me veiling then becomes a matter of choice, not a must.

In terms of polygamy, Kartini and I share a similar view. Like Kartini, I insist that polygamy serves to maintain men's ego. Polygamy was an institution in which a man could legally release his sexual drives. Polygamy certainly brought women misery. Yet, learning from the way Kartini and Huda approached the issue, I, too, try to perceive the practice within its context. I do not believe in polygamy, although maybe bigamy



under certain conditions, as Huda suggested. The Koranic verses justifying polygamy can be considered a remedial law. Islam is as monogamous as Christianity. However, Islam does not block the possibility of having another wife should the first wife fail to procreate or suffer from an incurable disease. Within this context Islam guarantees the rights of both wives.

At the end of my research, I have become content to be both Muslim and a woman who advocates feminism. It seems that my research helped me to resolve the problems I have as a Muslim woman. At the same time, analyzing how Huda and Kartini became feminists has enhanced my understanding of how society circumscribes women's lives. It is interesting to see how these upper class, secluded women had undergone similar stages proposed by Belenky *et al.* to become, or to be called, feminists, in a repressive and dominant society.

Class is certainly a crucial factor enabling them to become feminists. Being upper-class women Huda and Kartini had some privileges. They both had the opportunity to have an education and to be around intellectuals. They had enough time to think, to observe, and to analyze women's condition because they did not have to work. The problems they raised and the solutions they offered clearly indicate the interests of upper-class women. They argued for female education to gain employment while emphasizing that better education would make women better wives and mothers.

Huda's and Kartini's feminist ideas mostly came from their embeddedness in the interrelationship of their experiences and others' in traditional Egyptian and Javanese

society. This is most clearly reflected in the way they constructed the ideas of marriage and of women's education. Huda and Kartini were subject to the practice of female seclusion. Huda's experience in the harem helped her recognize the fact that sexual segregation and female seclusion (veiling and harem) excluded women from education and self-empowerment. One of her feminist demands was to call for the end of female seclusion and veiling. Kartini's experience in *pingitan* led her to believe that women's ignorance and man's ego caused women's subordination. Both Huda and Kartini were exposed to the sufferings of their mothers from polygamous marriages. Huda herself was subjected to a polygamous marriage at the age of thirteen. As for Kartini, her mothers' suffering caused Kartini's abhorrence against polygamy. Later she developed the concept of marriage grounded in love and respect.

Kartini's own experience with her mothers and the distance they developed due to Javanese etiquette, and her relationship with Rosa and Mrs. Ovink-Soer contributed to her ideas about motherhood. She believed that a woman could be either a biological mother or a social mother. From Ngasirah and Mrs Ovink-Soer, Kartini learnt about women's capacity to give unconditional love to both her own and others' children. This female capacity convinced Kartini that mothers should become a prime socializer for their children. Therefore, as Kartini contended, women needed a better education to make them better socializers.

While Huda's feminism is widely recognized because of her long-life commitment to improve women's condition, Kartini's feminism is often challenged due

to her final surrender to the practice of polygamy. As far as I am concerned Kartini was a feminist in her own historical and cultural context. In this context, the concept of a "gendered cultural relativism" (West, 1992, p. 563) might be useful to understand Kartini's feminism. "Gendered cultural relativism" is "a methodological and theoretical perspective that puts women at the centre of knowledge but contextualizes women's experiences to their culture" (West, 1992, p. 563). In this method, as West contends, we have to "incorporate a greater self-awareness of how cultural beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours shape our world views" (p. 563).

Kartini's decision to compromise her ideals and marry a polygamous man should be understood in its cultural context. Kartini was raised always to respect, love and obey her parents. Kartini was also led to believe that personal interest should always be submerged to that of family. Kartini's love and respect for her father were too great to be surmounted by her own wishes. Kartini's deep love and respect for her father, and also her concern for her society finally made her give up her wish to pursue her education and surrender to the enemy she had been fighting against, polygamy.

However, her final submission does not prevent me from calling her a feminist. I believe that Kartini was a feminist in the way that she exercised her power to choose. Kartini's challenge to the oppressive patriarchal society had already given her credit as a feminist because she had gone beyond woman's pure and simple lamentation of her oppressed condition as intolerable. In her time when traditional Javanese society collided with modern European society with its enlightenment traditions, she foresaw that there

was a possibility for women like her to break her restrictions. Enabled by the "ethical policy" manifested in the Abendanons' support, Kartini saw education as a means by which women could be liberated, by which women could escape from seclusion and arranged marriages. Kartini's perception of her condition and that of other women and of the possibilities she had, positioned her as a feminist. Sandra Bartky contends that "feminist consciousness is the apprehension of possibility...the very meaning of what the feminist apprehends is illuminated by the light of what ought to be" (1977, p. 25).

Huda and Kartini lived in a repressive society where silence, dependence, and passivity were the ideal of femininity. Huda and Kartini had to find the medium by which they could actualize themselves as vocal, independent, and assertive women. Kartini used letters as a medium to affirm her identity when she was in her seclusion. This suggests Kartini's refusal to be silenced. Letter writing helped Kartini find her own voice. Through letter-writing she could escape the limitations set by her class. Letter-writing had become a "fire escape" for Kartini in a suffocating repressive society. As for Huda, writing her own memoirs was an act of unveiling her voice and her selfhood. Her memoirs become an act of self-representation which unveils hidden and suppressed women's experiences. Writing her own memoirs was a final act for Huda to completely break the silence that had been imposed on her as a woman raised in a harem. Both Huda and Kartini used themselves as text and context, as a medium through which to break the silence that concealed them culturally. Both Kartini's letters and Huda's memoirs were

assertions of a woman's individuality and distinctiveness in an age that demanded nothing less than conformity and anonymity from its women.

In terms of their relation to their colonizers' languages, both feminists refused to assimilate the language as their identities. They did not internalize the supposed superiority of their colonizers' culture. Kartini used Dutch in all her letters, not because she was alienated from her own language, but because all her confidants and addressees used Dutch as the social language. In the case of Huda, even though she was more fluent in foreign tongues, she used Arabic in her memoirs to express her selfhood and to assert her identity both as a woman and an Egyptian. Despite Huda's and Kartini's fondness for their colonizers' languages, Huda and Kartini refused to subordinate their native tongues to those supposedly superior languages. Both were well aware that their colonizers' language and thus culture were not ideal and superior.

Examining how the life of two feminist Muslims took shape within a repressive male dominated society and among colonizers with their supposedly "superior values and cultures" has helped me define my being as a Muslim woman who believes in feminism, and my being as an Indonesian woman who has been educated, and lived for two years, in Western country. Believing in feminism is not easy for me, coming from an Eastern Muslim country where feminism is often considered to be dangerous Western thoughts. Feminism is seen as a threat to the institution of the family, which is so highly valued in Indonesian society. I could easily be accused of being an Eastern woman who tried to be Western by adopting Western values and ways of thinking. I could also be accused of

betraying my own religion by questioning polygamy and veiling. However, studying the lives of these two feminist Muslims provides me with a solid ground on which I can stand to declare that I can be both a Muslim and a feminist.

Living for two years in an English-speaking country was yet another struggle for me. It has been extremely difficult for me to think, speak, read and write in a totally different system of language. There were times when I experienced displacement in my daily interaction with my Canadian peers and professors. I was "colonized" by English and my Canadian peers and professors are my "colonizers." I was compelled to use academic English as the only access to higher education. The language imposition sometimes made me feel alienated from my own tongue. However, this alienation did not go so far as to make me feel inferior to English. As a matter of fact, speaking Bahasa Indonesia among my Indonesian peers has secured my identity as an Indonesian woman amidst the Western culture and values I have encountered for the past two years of my life. Indeed, almost everywhere, English nowadays seems to be the key to enlightenment. Thus I benefit from knowing the language, but, like Kartini and Huda, I contend that one does not have to depreciate his/her own language just because the language does not happen to be widely recognized and used by the so-called ruling elites.

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