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Research Article

## Butlerian Theory of Performativity in Kartini: Princess of Java

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### KEYWORDS

Kartini;  
 Gender Performativity;  
 Vulnerability.

### A B S T R A C T

This research examines Kartini in *Kartini: Princess of Java* through the lens of Judith Butler's concepts of vulnerability and gender performativity. Butler argues that cultural norms and power structures shape individuals' gender identities and render them inherently vulnerable to external influences. By applying Butler concepts to the stories in *Kartini: Princess of Java*, the article asserts that the characters not only conform to gender norms to gain recognition but also face vulnerability due to her position within societal structures. This research carried out in a qualitative framework. The analysis explored how the character performed gender roles and the implications of her actions in the social realm. The findings show that Kartini's performative acts involves breaking free from the normative scripts assigned to women of her time. She confronts gender expectations through her outspokenness, challenging practices like early marriages and polygamy that perpetuate inequality. Her advocacy for women's education is a performative act that aims to disrupt the conventional roles of women and to open new possibilities for their empowerment. This performative activism is intricately intertwined with Kartini's vulnerability. She shares her inner struggles, aspirations, and conflicts, transcending the boundaries set by her society. Her vulnerability becomes a catalyst for social change, inspiring other women to join her cause and challenge existing norms. Kartini's willingness to embrace her vulnerability demonstrates authenticity and sincerity, making her advocacy relatable and impactful.

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## INTRODUCTION

Kartini, also known as Raden Ajeng Kartini, was a prominent figure in Indonesian history and a pioneer of women's rights (Fatimahyah & Simanjuntak, 2022). Born in 1879 in Central Java, she was the daughter of a nobleman and received a traditional Javanese education, which was uncommon for girls at the time. She was able to learn to read and write in Dutch, and this gave her the opportunity to correspond with pen pals from Europe, which exposed

her to progressive ideas about women's education and rights. Ariawan, Gunardi, Lyston and Martono (2018) stated Kartini was passionate about advocating for women's rights, and she sought to break free from traditional cultural norms that restricted women's roles and opportunities. Despite her untimely death at the age of 25, Kartini left behind a lasting legacy. She was a writer and a feminist, and her letters have been published and widely read. Her efforts in advocating for women's education and empowerment laid the foundation for the women's movement in Indonesia. She is now regarded as

a national hero, and her birthday is observed as a public holiday in Indonesia, known as Kartini Day.

Kartini is widely regarded as a feminist icon and one of the earliest advocates for women's rights in Indonesia (Yuspin & Aulia, 2022). Her advocacy centred around promoting women's education and empowerment, which she believed was essential for women to gain independence and contribute to society. She recognized that women in her society were often confined to traditional roles and were denied access to education and opportunities outside of their homes. Kartini's vision for women's empowerment was grounded in the idea of equality between men and women. She believed that women had the same potential as men to contribute to society, and that it was important for women to be educated and empowered in order to achieve their full potential (Woodward & Bemmelen, 2015). She also recognized that women's rights were intertwined with broader issues of social justice and the struggle against colonialism and oppression (Kaptein, 2017). Through her advocacy, Kartini became a symbol of hope and inspiration for women in Indonesia and beyond. Her legacy continues to inspire women's rights movements in Indonesia and around the world, and her ideas on education, empowerment, and equality remain relevant and impactful today.

Gender performativity is a concept introduced by philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler in her book "Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity". According to Butler (2011), gender is not something that we are born with, but rather something that is constructed through repeated performances and behaviours that conform to societal norms and expectations. Butler argues that gender is not a fixed identity or category, but rather a fluid and constantly changing phenomenon that is created and reinforced through social interactions (Ainsworth, 2015; Fausto-sterling & South, 2011; Morgenroth & Ryan, 2018). These performances can range from the way we dress, speak, and behave, to the roles we take on in our relationships and careers. By emphasizing the performative nature of gender, Butler challenges the traditional understanding of gender as a biological and essential characteristic (Raju, 2021). Instead, she suggests that gender is a social and cultural construct that is produced and maintained through repeated acts of performance. Critics of Butler's theory have argued that it underplays the role of biology and essentialism in shaping gender identity, and that it does not fully account for the experiences of transgender and non-binary individuals. However, her ideas have had a significant impact on feminist and gender studies, and have sparked important conversations about the nature of gender and its relationship to power and identity.

Butler's theory of performativity is a key concept in gender studies and queer theory. According to Butler, gender is a social construct that is performed and enforced through repeated acts of socialization and cultural norms (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Haines, Deaux, & Lofaro, 2016). In other words, gender is something we learn and internalize as a result of our interactions with others and society at large. Butler contends that gender performativity is shaped and constrained by societal norms and expectations rather than being a matter of individual choice (Hough, 2010). Religion, the legal system, and the media are all institutions and power structures that enforce these norms and expectations. Butler also emphasizes the fact that gender is not binary. Butler also emphasizes that gender is not a binary, but a spectrum, and that individuals can perform gender in ways that challenge or subvert traditional norms and expectations (Butler, 2011; Gannon & Davies, 2014). Butler aims to challenge traditional notions of essentialism and to create space for a more fluid and inclusive understanding of gender identity and expression by focusing on the performative nature of gender (Olson, Key, & Eaton, 2015). Her work has had an impact on gender and sexuality debates, and she has been a valuable resource for feminist and queer theorists seeking to understand and challenge dominant cultural norms and power structures.

Butler's work focuses on gender and its impact on society, including women's issues and positions. In her writings, Butler (2011) has highlighted the ways in which women's experiences are shaped by gender norms and expectations, and how these norms can limit women's opportunities and freedoms. One of the key arguments in Butler's work is that gender is not a fixed or essential characteristic, but rather a social and cultural construct that is created and maintained through repeated acts of performance. This means that women's positions and experiences are not determined solely by their biology, but are also shaped by the cultural and social contexts in which they live. Butler has also emphasized the importance of recognizing the diversity of women's experiences and identities, and the ways in which these experiences intersect with other forms of oppression, such as racism, classism, and ableism (Thanem & Wallenberg, 2016). She argues that a truly feminist politics must take into account these intersections and work towards addressing the multiple and intersecting forms of oppression that women face. Overall, Butler's work highlights the importance of challenging gender norms and expectations, and creating a more inclusive and just society in which all individuals, regardless of gender or other social identities can fully participate and thrive.

Kartini lived during a time when traditional gender roles were deeply ingrained in Indonesian society, and women

had limited opportunities for education and advancement. While Kartini did not explicitly engage with Butler's theory of gender performativity, her advocacy for women's education and empowerment can be seen as a challenge to traditional gender roles and expectations. By advocating for women's education and encouraging women to pursue their interests and talents, Kartini sought to break down the social and cultural norms that confined women to traditional roles as wives and mothers (Muthoifin, Shobron, Hanif Wachidah, & Ab Rahman, 2020). In doing so, she encouraged women to perform their gender in new and unconventional ways, and to challenge the limitations that had been imposed upon them. Kartini's work also challenged the idea of gender as a fixed or innate characteristic, and emphasized the importance of education and socialization in shaping gender identity and expression (Sudrajat, 2003; Wolly, Sariyatun, & Sunardi, 2017). By providing women with access to education and opportunities outside of the home, Kartini sought to broaden the range of possibilities for women's gender performance and to create space for women to express themselves in ways that challenged traditional gender roles and expectations. While Kartini's work predates Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, her advocacy for women's education and empowerment can be seen as an early example of the kinds of challenges to gender norms and expectations that Butler's theory seeks to promote.

This article is to emphasize Kartini's struggle in challenging gender norms and expectations in the history of women's rights in Indonesia and beyond. Her legacy continues to inspire women's rights activists and advocates around the world.

## METHOD

This study used qualitative methods to explore gender performativity in the Kartini movie. Qualitative method is a research approach that focuses on exploring and understanding the subjective experiences, perspectives, and behaviours of individuals and groups (Tomaszewski, Zarestky, & Gonzalez, 2020). This method involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data, such as interview transcripts, field notes, and observations, to gain insights into the social and cultural phenomena being studied. Qualitative methods have been particularly useful in gender research because they enable researchers to explore complex and nuanced aspects of gender, including the subjective experiences and perceptions of individuals and groups related to gender identity, gender norms, and gender roles (Bamberg, 2012; Green & Thorogood, 2009; Mishler, 1995).

Using qualitative methods to explore gender performativity in the context of the Kartini movie would

be an interesting research approach, as it enables researchers to examine how gender norms and expectations are depicted in the film, and how the film portrays Kartini's struggles to challenge and reshape these norms (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Fraser, 2004). One of the strengths of qualitative methods in gender research is their ability to capture the complexity and diversity of gender experiences and identities. They allow researchers to explore the ways in which gender intersects with other social identities, such as race, class, and sexuality, and to understand the ways in which individuals negotiate and navigate gender norms and expectations in their daily lives. Qualitative research also enables researchers to use a variety of data sources and methods, such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of gender-related issues (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). This enables them to explore multiple perspectives and to generate rich and detailed data that can be used to inform policy and practice.

To conduct research on gender performativity in the Kartini movie using qualitative methods, several approaches can be taken. One possible approach is to use content analysis to examine the film's representation of gender performativity. Researchers can analyse the film's characters, dialogue, and visual elements to identify themes related to gender norms and expectations, and to explore how the film portrays Kartini's actions and experiences in relation to these norms (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This can include analysing the gendered language used in the film, the ways in which characters are represented visually, and the role of gender in the film's plot.

This research conducted content analysis to examine the movie's representation of gender performativity by using Kartini's characters, dialogue, and visual elements to identify themes related to gender norms and expectations, and to explore how the film portrays Kartini's actions and experiences in relation to these norms. Conducting content analysis to examine the film's representation of gender performativity is a valuable approach that can provide insights into the ways in which gender norms and expectations are portrayed in the Kartini movie, and how these representations relate to Kartini's struggles to challenge and reshape traditional gender norms and expectations in her society. To conduct content analysis, researchers typically use a structured approach to analyze the content of the film. It involves identifying key themes and categories related to gender performativity, such as representations of gender roles, stereotypes, and expectations. Researchers may also examine the use of language, visual elements, and other narrative devices to analyze how the film constructs gendered meanings.

In the context of the Kartini movie, researchers examine the ways in which Kartini is represented in the film, including her actions, dialogue, and relationships with other characters. They also analyze the representations of other characters in the film, including male and female characters, and how their actions and behaviors reinforce or challenge gender norms and expectations. Through content analysis, researchers can identify patterns and themes related to gender performativity in the Kartini movie, and use these findings to draw conclusions about the ways in which gender norms and expectations are portrayed in the film. This approach can provide a valuable contribution to understanding the role of media in shaping and reflecting gendered identities and expectations, and how these representations relate to broader social and cultural contexts.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. *Kartini's Characters Gender Performativity*

To comprehend Butler's notion of gender performativity, one must possess an understanding of the concept of "body." According to Butler, "body" is not an absolute physical entity; rather, it is a physicality that carries significance. As cultural power influences all bodies, there is no natural body that exists prior to its cultural inscriptions. In addition, the body serves as a location for specific cultural symbols that serve heterosexual purposes. Thus, Butler argues that gender is not an innate characteristic; rather, it is an action or, more precisely, a sequence of actions. Butler believes that gender reality is performative, meaning that gender is only real to the extent that it is performed.

The protagonist, Kartini, in "Kartini: Princess of Java" is faced with the challenge of conforming to regulatory norms and societal obligations that have influenced the cultural values and symbolic practices that have shaped gender and gender performativity.

#### a. **Kartini's thoughts about education**

Kartini was born into an aristocratic family in Central Java, Indonesia, in 1879. As a girl, she was expected to follow traditional Javanese customs and live in seclusion, away from the public eye. This practice was known as "pingit" and was common among Javanese noble families at the time. During her seclusion, Kartini was only allowed to socialize with family members and close relatives. She was also prohibited from attending school and receiving formal education, which was considered inappropriate for women at the time. Despite these limitations, Kartini was a voracious reader and educated herself through books and letters from her Dutch friends. Through her reading, she became aware of the limitations

imposed on women in her society and began to advocate for women's rights and education.

During Kartini's time in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, women's education was not a common practice in Javanese society. Girls were expected to marry at a young age and were often kept at home to take care of household chores. Kartini was fortunate to receive an education from her father, who was a regent, and from Dutch missionaries. Her education gave her the opportunity to learn about literature, languages, and other subjects that were not typically taught to Javanese women. Kartini saw the value of education for women and believed that it could help to break down the traditional barriers that prevented women from playing a more active role in society. She advocated for the establishment of schools for girls and worked to promote the importance of education among Javanese women.

Kartini's journey was an emotional one, and she had to face many challenges and obstacles along the way. She had to go against the norms of her own family and culture, which often placed strict limitations on women's roles and opportunities. Kartini was also confronted with a larger social and cultural context that perpetuated gender inequality and oppression, making her efforts to challenge these norms even more difficult. Despite these challenges, Kartini remained committed to her vision of a more just and equal society and she continued to fight for change in the face of opposition and adversity. For Kartini, education served as a means to advance society towards modernity and create a more advanced civilization where men and women work together to build the nation. She saw equal access to education as a form of freedom for women, enabling them to become independent and self-reliant individuals who are not dependent on others. Through education, women could gain the skills and knowledge needed to stand alone and contribute to society on an equal footing with men.

Kartini was passionate about advancing education for women, seeing it as crucial for their future role as caretakers of the household. With a strong determination and intelligent mindset, she started a school for small children, teaching them to read, draw, and write. In addition, she utilized her position as the Regent's daughter to access royal facilities to teach girls to discover their interests and talents, such as creating works of art and playing traditional musical instruments. In her writings, Kartini emphasized the need for girls to receive an education that was equivalent to that of boys. She believed that girls had just as much potential as boys and that denying them an education was a great injustice.

Kartini's advocacy for education was not limited to formal schooling but also included the development of personal

character, including the cultivation of a sense of self-reliance, independence, and responsibility. She believed that education was the key to unlocking women's potential and enabling them to contribute fully to their families, communities, and society as a whole.

#### **b. Kartini's thoughts about married**

Kartini had mixed feelings about marriage. On one hand, she recognized the traditional societal expectations for women to marry and become a good wife and mother. However, she also believed that women should have the freedom to choose their own partners and not be forced into marriage against their will. She wrote extensively about her views on marriage and relationships, emphasizing the importance of mutual respect and understanding between partners. She also advocated for the education and empowerment of women to enable them to make informed decisions about their lives and relationships.

Kartini believed that women should have a say in their own marriages and that they should not be forced into marriages against their will. She argued that women's voices should be heard and that they should have the right to choose their own partners based on their own preferences and feelings, rather than being married off for social or economic reasons. This was a radical idea at the time, as arranged marriages were the norm and women had little to no say in the matter.

Kartini strongly opposed the practice of polygamy and expressed her rejection of it in a forceful manner. In one of her letters, she even declared that she would not get married herself. Kartini was deeply upset when she learned that the grandson of the Priangan Regent, who was educated and wealthy, had married a man who had three previous wives. She felt empathy for the previous wives and understood their discomfort, as her own mother had experienced a similar situation. Kartini believed that polygamy was a violation of women's rights and should be abolished. In her letter, she expressed her desire to be independent and stand on her own feet, rather than being subjected to the will of a man.

Kartini believed that polygamy was a sin because it caused human suffering. She argued that any action that caused human suffering was sinful, and in the case of polygamy, women had no rights and had to accept their husband's other wives. Kartini opposed the Javanese laws and teachings that regulated marriage, which did not give women the right to choose their own husbands. However, she knew that her thoughts would not be accepted by her community, as the noble society in Java was patriarchal and feudalistic, with the family determining the marriage partner for their daughters. This male upper-class

hegemony led to gender-biased behavior, which Kartini was against.

Kartini's strong desire for the freedom and independence of indigenous women stemmed from the suffering she witnessed in the priyayi environment. Kartini vividly describes the life of her mother, herself, and her sister as "hell" due to the treatment they received from her father's two wives. She saw firsthand how her mother was treated as a messenger who had to care for her own children as well as her stepchildren. This caused Kartini to feel distinguished and unloved, and she witnessed similar treatment towards her brothers. Despite this, Kartini does not blame Raden Ayu, her father's other wife, and even tried to win her heart for her mother. Kartini's love for her father, who was otherwise a loving person that granted his children's requests, including his daughter's, reinforced her determination to fight for freedom and equal rights, including the right to choose one's own spouse.

#### **c. Kartini's thought on woman's social position**

In priyayi society, the role of women was primarily confined to the household and domestic sphere. Women were expected to fulfill their duties as wives and mothers, and were often discouraged from pursuing education or careers outside of the home. Meanwhile, men had greater freedom to move about in society and control their own sexuality. This gender disparity was reinforced by patriarchal cultural and religious values that perpetuated the idea that women were inferior to men and should be subordinate to them. The movement of women is further limited in Javanese priyayi society when their husbands or fathers hold higher positions. This is because economic factors are not the main consideration for Javanese priyayi, but rather the social rank and status of the woman's husband or father.

Kartini believed strongly in the equality of men and women, and she argued that women should have the same opportunities and rights as men. She believed that women should be able to pursue education and careers, and that they should have a voice in society and in the political process. In one of her letters, Kartini wrote: "Men and women have equal rights, and it is not fair to deprive women of the same opportunities that men have. Women are just as intelligent as men, and they should have the same chances to develop their minds and contribute to society." Kartini also believed that the traditional roles assigned to women, such as being a wife and mother, should not limit their potential or prevent them from pursuing their dreams. She believed that women should be able to choose their own path in life, and that society should support them in doing so.

## **2. Kartini's Gender Performativity**

Kartini's character and actions can be seen as challenging traditional gender roles and expectations, and can be viewed through the lens of gender performativity. Gender performativity is a theory that suggests that gender is not something that one is born with, but rather something that is constructed and performed through social and cultural norms and expectations. According to this theory, gender is not a fixed or inherent characteristic, but rather a dynamic and fluid aspect of identity that is constantly being negotiated and enacted through social interactions.

Kartini's actions, such as her pursuit of education and her advocacy for women's rights and empowerment, can be seen as challenging traditional gender norms and expectations. Rather than conforming to the traditional role of a Javanese woman, she sought to expand her horizons and pursue her own interests and goals.

Kartini's letters and writings also reflect her awareness of the performative nature of gender, and her belief that women should be able to perform gender roles in a way that allows them to achieve their full potential. She argued that women should not be limited by traditional gender roles and expectations, but rather should be able to shape their own identities and pursue their own aspirations.

Kartini did not see the performance of gender roles as an end in itself, but rather as a means of achieving greater opportunities and recognition in society. She believed that women should be able to achieve recognition and respect for their abilities and accomplishments, rather than being judged solely on their adherence to gender norms. Ultimately, Kartini's legacy is one of advocating for gender equality and empowering women to pursue their own paths in life, rather than being confined by traditional gender roles and expectations.

### 3. *Kartini's Vulnerability*

According to Butler, vulnerability plays a crucial role in the formation of the subject. She argues that the body is inherently vulnerable for two reasons. First, it is vulnerable due to its physical and material nature, with its basic needs and requirements for survival. Second, the body is made vulnerable by the social and cultural conventions and practices that shape it, which can have a significant impact on its condition and experiences. Furthermore, the degree of vulnerability experienced by the body varies depending on the context and environment in which it is situated. This vulnerability is not only influenced by the natural world and its violence, but also by social, political, and economic conditions that are imposed by broader social systems. Overall, Butler views vulnerability as a crucial aspect of human existence that shapes our experiences and interactions with the world around us. By acknowledging and addressing this

vulnerability, we can better understand the complex ways in which our bodies and subjectivities are shaped by the social and cultural systems that surround us.

Judith Butler's theory of vulnerability can shed light on Kartini's experience of vulnerability. According to Butler, vulnerability is an inherent aspect of human existence and is shaped by social and cultural norms and conventions. In the case of Kartini, her vulnerability can be seen as a result of her position as a woman in a society that restricted women's rights and opportunities. Despite her intelligence, strength, and determination, she also expressed feelings of sadness, frustration, and loneliness in her writings.

Butler argues that vulnerability is not simply a passive or negative quality, but rather a necessary aspect of human life that can foster a sense of connection and interdependence with others. Kartini's vulnerability, as expressed in her letters and writings, can be seen as a reflection of her deep empathy and concern for others, particularly women and children who were most vulnerable in Javanese society. Moreover, Butler suggests that vulnerability is a political issue, in that it is shaped and influenced by social and cultural structures of power and oppression. Kartini's advocacy for women's rights and empowerment can be seen as an attempt to address the structural inequalities and power imbalances that contributed to her own vulnerability and the vulnerability of other women in her society.

Overall, Kartini's experience of vulnerability can be understood through Butler's theory as a complex interplay of social, cultural, and political factors that shaped her identity and experiences as a woman in Javanese society. Her vulnerability can be seen as both a reflection of her humanity and compassion, as well as a call to action to address the structural inequalities and power imbalances that contribute to vulnerability in all its forms.

The idea of performativity and gender identity developed by Judith Butler has had a profound impact on feminist and gender studies. While Butler's work was published many years after Kartini's, her concepts can still be used to examine Kartini's contributions to women's rights and gender equality. Butler's theory proposes that gender is a performative act rather than an inherent or stable property. This means that people act out and fulfill their gender roles in accordance with cultural norms, language, and societal expectations.

Gender identity develops through repeated performances based on cultural norms and expectations. Kartini's activism and actions revealed a desire to question and challenge the rules that governed women's roles and behaviors in Javanese society. By openly voicing her displeasure with the limited prospects available to

women, she effectively called these conventions into question (Mustikawati, 2015; Pratidina & Pasaribu, 2023; Saraswati, Wiratomo, & Kristiono, 2019). Kartini's efforts to defy the constraints placed on women in her society can be interpreted as a type of resistance to these normative performances. Her campaign for education and empowerment could be interpreted as an attempt to change the prescribed roles that we allocate women. This is also consistent with Butler's belief that, on some level, all women should be able to use the term "feminism" to describe a theory that promotes personal self-esteem and the dignity of all women.

Kartini's correspondences with people from other backgrounds, particularly Europeans, revealed her interest in intellectual engagement outside of her immediate surroundings. This practice contradicted the conventional belief that women should be only concerned with home affairs. Kartini used her letters to voice her dissatisfaction with the status quo. She criticized the practice of forced early marriages, in which young girls were frequently married off against their will (Chotimah, Jambak, Zawawi, & Munjiyat, 2023; Coté, 2014; Fatihayah & Simanjuntak, 2022). Kartini's criticism of early marriages was more than just a personal view; it was a call to reimagine women's roles in society. She was pushing for a new script of womanhood that encompassed autonomy and the opportunity to make informed choices by opposing the practice. Butler's theory emphasizes how, via performative behaviors, individuals can create new opportunities for change. In Kartini's case, her condemnation of early marriages is consistent with this notion. She was challenging the expected script of womanhood that defined when and whom women should marry by questioning and criticizing the normative practice of marrying off girls at a young age.

Kartini was a pioneering lady who sought to challenge and modify social standards. Her passionate resistance to polygamy reflected her willingness to fight deeply ingrained customs that she saw as harmful to women's rights and well-being. Kartini's letters and writings helped her articulate her thoughts on polygamy and advocate for its reform. Her strong words were meant to inspire thought, spark debate, and ultimately drive change in public views regarding this practice (Coté, 2014; Wiranto, 2021; Wolly et al., 2017). Kartini considered polygamy as intrinsically unequal because it permitted males to have several wives but not multiple husbands. She believed that true marriage equality demanded that both parties be treated with dignity and have equal rights. The asymmetrical nature of polygamy violated Kartini's notion of equitable connections within marriage (Ali & Robingah, 2021; Bijl, 2017; Sundari, 2019). Kartini's objection to polygamy arose from her views on women's rights, autonomy, and the importance of equitable

relationships within marriage. Her observations of society dynamics and her desire for women's empowerment impacted her views on polygamy. Kartini's opposition to polygamy can indeed be aligned with Judith Butler's theory of performativity. According to Butler's idea, cultural norms are not set but rather shaped through performances. Kartini's anti-polygamy stance directly challenged the cultural framework that supported and normalized the practice. By dissenting, she was questioning the normative performance of accepting polygamy as an undeniable element of cultural standards.

Kartini's campaign for women's rights and gender equality was centered on her attempts to educate women. She saw that education could be a tremendous weapon for empowering women, broadening their perspectives, and challenging cultural limits. Despite the limitations of her time, Kartini was fortunate to obtain some education as a result of her family's openness. She took advantage of the opportunity to further her education and engage in intellectual activities. Her personal experience confirmed her confidence in education's transforming capacity for women. Kartini was a firm believer that women, like men, needed equal access to formal education. She saw education as a way to empower women with the knowledge, skills, and opportunities they needed to engage more fully in society (Handak & Kuswanto, 2021; Mustofa, Maemunah, & Kustanto, 2021; Sudrajat, 2003; Yuspin & Aulia, 2022). Kartini's advocacy for women's education can be seen as a performative act that challenged gender norms, resisted established power dynamics, and created new possibilities for understanding women's roles. Her unrelenting dedication to education as a vehicle for empowerment and societal change continues to inspire individuals and movements working to make the world a more equitable and inclusive place. Kartini's efforts align with Butler's theory by demonstrating the transformative potential of performative actions in reshaping societal perceptions of gender and identity.

Kartini's work for women's rights and education required her to confront deeply ingrained societal norms and traditional power structures. Her efforts to promote gender equality and enhance women's educational possibilities were inherently disruptive to the established order of her time. She yearned for education, intellectual engagement, and a broader role in society. This internal conflict between her personal aspirations and societal expectations created a vulnerability that she openly expressed in her letters (Chin & Bijl, 2020; Connell, 2010; Purwaningsih, Muchoiyaroh, & Biringan, 2020). Kartini's letters to her friends and pen pals provided a safe area for her to express her vulnerabilities openly. She expressed her emotions, concerns, and hopes in her correspondences, providing a glimpse into her inner world. Because of her sincerity, she was more relatable to

others who encountered similar issues. Kartini's vulnerability, as expressed through her letters and actions, aligns with Butler's theory by being a performative act that challenged gender norms, disrupted traditional scripts, and contributed to the transformation of societal discourses and power dynamics. Her vulnerability shaped her identity as a woman's rights advocate, as well as her influence on the trajectory of women's empowerment in Indonesia.

Kartini's life and advocacy can be summarized as a powerful embodiment of Judith Butler's theory of performativity and vulnerability. Kartini, a Javanese noblewoman in the late nineteenth century, engaged in a series of performance activities that challenged cultural conventions and traditional power dynamics. Her vulnerability, which she openly displayed in her writings and deeds, was crucial in creating her identity and pushing for women's rights and education (Anbiya, Juwita, & Arsyad, 2020; Chin & Bijl, 2020; Coté, 2014). Kartini's performative acts concerned her breaking free from the customary scripts that were ascribed to women at the time. Through her outspokenness, she challenged customs that promoted inequity, such as early marriages and polygamy. Her campaign for women's education was a theatrical effort meant to disrupt women's traditional roles and open up new avenues for their empowerment.

## CONCLUSION

Kartini's characters in *Kartini: Princess of Java* highlight the complex and diverse ways in which gender performativity is constructed and performed within a society that adheres to strict gender norms. These performances are shaped by both the social and cultural expectations placed upon the body as well as the individual's own agency in enacting these norms. Moreover, as Butler suggests, vulnerability is an inherent and socially constructed characteristic of the body. This vulnerability is shaped by the social and cultural norms and practices that surround the individual and can be experienced differently depending on one's position within society.

Kartini's experiences and characters in *Kartini: Princess of Java* can be seen as a reflection of the interplay between gender performativity and vulnerability. As a woman living within a patriarchal society, Kartini was subject to strict gender norms that limited her opportunities and agency. Her characters reveal the diverse ways in which she navigated and resisted these norms, while also highlighting the vulnerability that she and other women experienced within this context. Overall, Kartini's characters and experiences demonstrate the complex and interrelated nature of gender performativity and vulnerability, and the ways in which

these characteristics are constructed and experienced within a social and cultural context.

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