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Nilai-nilai kekartinian pada Perempuan diaspora dalam novel Luka di Champs Elysées oleh Rosita Sihombing

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Abstract

This study uses a corpus of novels by Rosita Sihombing entitled *Luka di Champs-Elysées* to discover the local cultural values promoted by Kartini. These values are represented through the negotiation of global values and Indonesianness by the main character, Karima. The study uses a qualitative, structural approach based on the work of Robert Stanton (2007) and Burhan Nurgiyantoro (2018), as well as transnational feminist theory (Mohanty, Yuval-Davis, and Grewal & Kaplan). These are linked to Kartini's values, as reflected in her letters (Djojonegoro, 2024), and the results of field interviews conducted by the Gender, Identity, Culture and Diaspora Research Group at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Indonesia (2025). The research findings suggest that Karima represents Indonesian women in the transnational world who negotiate their identities while maintaining their cultural roots. Kartini's values manifest in Karima as reflective actions grounded in morality, existential courage, and social responsibility. Karima's spiritual and religious dimensions enrich our understanding of Kartini's values in a modern context. Her religious experiences form part of her process of empowerment and recovery. Thus, *Luka di Champs-Élysées* offers a reinterpretation of Kartini's Indonesian values in the global era, presenting courage, faith, empathy and social responsibility as concepts that remain relevant for contemporary Indonesian women in a transnational world.

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Introduction

Over time, Indonesian women have proven that they play an important role in society at large, transcending the boundaries that have traditionally constrained them. Globalisation has made this possible by providing them with extensive opportunities to leave their home regions



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and work in other areas, both domestically and abroad. The contribution of Indonesian female workers to the economies of their families and Indonesia as a whole is undeniable. In 2004, 83% of documented migrant workers were women (World Bank, 2020). The foreign exchange sent by Indonesian migrant workers reached 14 billion dollars, accounting for around 1.1% of GDP, in 2024 (United Nations Indonesia, 2025).

The experiences of Indonesian women abroad can certainly be viewed from various perspectives. Amidst the onslaught of foreign cultures and the various limitations they face as immigrants, their stories can also be seen as an arena for negotiating identity and cultural values. The theme of diaspora in this case, the diaspora of women working abroad reveals contact between tradition and modernity, and between the cultural values of their homeland and global culture. In her novel *Luka di Champs Élysées*, Rosita Sihombing illustrates this negotiation process through the life story of an Indonesian migrant worker in France who encounters various life difficulties and struggles to find her way home.

Several studies on Indonesian diaspora literature have been done by different scholars, showing how experiences across borders help shape identity and awareness of womanhood, especially for women who are also involved in the economy. One example is Suryadi's (2018) article titled *"Diaspora Literature and Transnational Identity: Notes on Indonesian Literature Abroad"*. This piece explains that diaspora literature helps Indonesian writers deal with having two identities one tied to Indonesian traditions and the other connected to global culture. Meeting new cultures often encourages these writers to re-affirm their Indonesian identity, whether through a sense of longing for home or as a way to stay connected to their cultural roots.

Another study looks at works by women writers like Leila S. Chudori and Dewi Lestari, as discussed by Arifin (2022). This article points out that the female characters in these stories aren't just trying to fit into foreign cultures. Instead, they are looking for a way to mix modern Western ideas with more traditional and spiritual Eastern values. The goal is to create a global identity that can work across borders. These diasporic women are shown as active people who connect two different sets of values without giving up their original culture.

The idea of transnational feminism can be seen in the work of Grewal and Kaplan (1994). They argue that women from the Third World shouldn't just be seen as part of globalization. These women have their own power and ability to negotiate culture, power, and values across different countries. This suggests that even as they face new modern influences, women don't step back or get left behind. Rather, they expand what it means to be a woman in a global context.

Meanwhile, if we look closely at the figure of Kartini as a woman who is strong in her economy, spirit, knowledge, and social life, and consider the focus of the Gender, Cultural Identity, and Diaspora research group at the Department of Area Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Indonesia, we can see how female characters in different diaspora literary works highlight important social issues and women's empowerment. This idea is shown in Rahmah's (2021) article, *"Kartini and the Spirit of Indonesian Women's Social Entrepreneurship."* The article shows that Kartini goes beyond the usual view that only sees her as a symbol of women's freedom. The values she stood for include strong social support, standing up against unfair treatment, and a spiritual and intellectual life that helps others, while still respecting traditional Indonesian values.

The studies mentioned above show that women in diaspora literature are people who adjust to Western culture but also keep their original cultural traditions as part of their global identity. So, research on the novel *"Luka di Champs Elysées"* will help build on the existing studies about how global and Indonesian values are shown in the identity of diasporic women who keep Kartinian values in today's world. The goal of this study is to show how the local cultural values that Kartini promoted are expressed through the way global and Indonesian values are balanced and negotiated.

METHODOLOGIE

This study uses the novel *"Luka di Champs Elysées"* by Rosita Sihombing as its main

source. It uses a qualitative approach to discover the ideas and cultural messages that are present in the text. Qualitative research, as explained by Creswell (2010), is a way to explore and understand the meanings that people and groups create about social issues. To support the study, other sources include field research in the form of reports based on interviews with the directors of the Kartini Museums in Rembang and Jepara, as well as the letters of Kartini collected by Wardiman Djodiningrat.

The text is examined using Nurgiyantoro's (2018) theory of analyzing fictional works. This theory looks at how different parts of a story, like theme, character, plot, and setting, are connected to show what the work means. Additionally, the analysis by Abrams and Harpham (2015) supports the idea that these elements act as representations of ideology, showing characters as complex people within society.

The findings from the structural analysis will connect to Mohanty's idea of transnational feminism, as discussed in **Feminism Without Borders**. This idea says that women's real-life experiences are closely connected to the history of colonialism, social class, and local culture. This viewpoint matches what Grewal and Kaplan (1994) argue, which is that women play an active role in creating solidarity across borders and in forming new ideas about freedom. Using this approach, we will look at how female characters in the novel challenge Western cultural influence while still holding onto values from Indonesian culture. This method will also show how gender values are balanced and changed in spaces where people live away from their home country.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The story begins with an Indonesian woman named Karima, an immigrant worker in Paris, who is pregnant and ill. Karima, or Kari, lives with her partner, an Algerian immigrant named Hamed. The novel is divided into three parts: Beginning, The Past, and The Present. The Beginning recounts the circumstances that form Karima's background her pregnancy and the period before she gives birth. The Past narrates Karima's life working in Saudi Arabia as a babysitter for a wealthy Arab family. This section also tells how the family eventually invites Karima to vacation in Paris, which becomes her opportunity to flee the cruelty and oppression she suffered. The Present is the final section that takes the reader to the end of the story when Karima finally returns to Indonesia.

Representation of the Indonesian Diaspora Woman

Karima's life in France is a continuous negotiation between Western individualistic values and the communal Eastern culture of her origins. Karima's solitude in France forces her to make independent decisions to survive. On one hand, the French environment demands independence, courage in decision-making, and self-reliance. This is evident when Karima must go to the hospital and give birth to the child she had with Hamed. She passes through the difficulty of communication and unfamiliarity with French childbirth procedures alone, without her partner or friends. Furthermore, when she has to register her child with the civil registry, Karima quickly decides to use her own name as the child's family name, Maharani. This is shown in the quotation below:

"Yeah, I gave my family name as my name. I was tired of getting no news from Hamed. He only informed me a few hours ago. Well, it's already too late." (Sihombing, 2008: 92)

Karima, as a diasporic female character in this story, demonstrates her ability to stand on her own as an agent of the choices she makes for her life. Karima does not need male recognition or legitimacy, in this case Hamed's. Naming her child with her own name is a realization of Western values of independence that recognize a woman's authority over her life and body. It also shows that Karima vulnerable, newly postpartum, and an undocumented immigrant can stand independently without relying on patriarchal structures. This aligns with Mohanty's (2003)

transnational feminist context, which describes such acts as symbolic claims to power over women's bodies and lives. This excerpt not only displays the woman's resilience but also represents the active Indonesian diasporic woman who can make decisions and be self-reliant within her constraints.

The Empowerment Process: From Oppression to Self-Sovereignty

In the novel, the plot demonstrates the stages of empowerment experienced by the protagonist, Karima. Her significant life experiences form the basis for the development of self-awareness and dignity as a human being, particularly as an Indonesian woman.

The first stage begins when she works in Riyadh as a babysitter for Mr. Alkahtani and Mrs. Haifa. The harsh working conditions and the remittances she must send home show that Karima is an active female figure striving to improve her and her family's situation. Working abroad with all its risks is an economic and strategic step taken by Karima. This is apparent in the following excerpt:

"Because it is common knowledge that Arab employers are known to employ domestic workers almost 24 hours a day. Meanwhile, the salary of female migrant workers in Arab countries is typically no more than 750 to 1,200 riyals per month, or equivalent to 1 to 1.5 million [rupiah]." (Sihombing, 2008: 24).

Karima endures the risky work conditions and meager pay to contribute to her family. However, these same conditions become the motive for seeking an escape from the abusive employer. This becomes Karima's second stage of empowerment. When invited to Paris by her employers, Karima escapes, leaving the employer's child, Omar, in his baby carriage. Her brave action is a form of refusal against the violence and oppression she faced.

"Mr. Alkahtani said that Place des Droits de l'Homme itself can be interpreted as the square of human rights. After I learned the meaning of that place, once again I steeled myself to run away. I, too, have the right to live anywhere, including in this country. Isn't this universe God's?" (Sihombing, 2008: 52)

Inspired by the human rights monument, Karima realizes she has the right to freedom and a decent life like others. Her decision becomes firmer and shows that her action is reflective based on awareness of human rights and also spiritual, because Karima feels that the world belongs to God. Her initial motivation to work for her family in the homeland is outweighed by the awareness that grows while in France. Awareness of dignity and the right to freedom from oppression gives her the courage to leave a dangerous situation.

The third stage of empowerment is when Karima names her baby, Maharani, using her own name.

"Yeah, I gave my family name as my name. I was tired of getting no news from Hamed. He only informed me a few hours ago. Well, it's already too late." (Sihombing, 2008: 92).

Again, this quote symbolically marks a crucial moment in which Karima claims authority over herself and, as a parent, determines her child's lineage and future. Karima becomes the determiner of her own and her child's future. This stands in stark contrast to the patriarchal values commonly held in Indonesian society.

The final stage of women's empowerment in the novel is when Karima applies for a Travel Document in Lieu of a Passport (SPLP) at the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia to return home. Despite numerous obstacles fear of going to the police to report missing documents, repeated visits to the Indonesian Embassy, and severe financial pressure Karima achieves what she fought for.

“A week after my first visit to the embassy, I was finally informed that there were still requirements I had not fulfilled. I briefly despaired along the way. But Enah kept encouraging my efforts. Therefore, I had to go back and forth to meet the embassy officers several times. And my struggle was not in vain. Finally I was given a temporary replacement passport by the embassy.” (Sihombing, 2008: 168).

Administrative problems are a major impediment for migrants, especially women. According to data from the Council of Europe, the administrative situation of migrant women in France often depends on guarantors who are usually men husbands, family members, or recruiters. This vulnerability can lead to other difficulties such as restricted access to health services, domestic violence, difficulty finding work, and so on (Council of Europe, 2020). Karima proves that her awareness of freedom enables her to act as her own administrative agent. Her effort to return home is proof of her determination to direct her own future. These stages of empowerment show that becoming an empowered subject in Karima is not instantaneous, but occurs through moral and spiritual reflection as emphasized by Mohanty (2003).

Karima and Transnational Feminism

Mohanty (2003) states that global migrant women build strength through affective, spiritual, and social networks they maintain across geographic borders. Women in this context do not sever ties with their originating cultures and communities; rather, they preserve them as the basis of their strength. Meanwhile, Yuval-Davis (2015) notes that women’s experiences cannot be confined by the logic of nationalism. In Karima’s story, her struggle is not an embodiment of feminism specific to any single culture. Karima demonstrates the values of transnational feminism, which render her an agent across borders.

As a migrant domestic worker in the Arab world, Karima demonstrates economic responsibility to her family at home. Sending money to family is not a burden but an effort to preserve communal solidarity in the home country. Karima’s economic participation transcends national borders. This is evidence of Indonesian values of mutual aid and *gotong royong*. The empowerment Karima undertakes does not mean abandoning family or communal ties; rather, it is a way to strengthen them. The value of *gotong royong* reflects an orientation toward social harmony and mutual care among individuals (Arief & Yuwanto, 2022).

In Paris, Karima also maintains good relationships with Enah and Icha as fellow diasporic women. The closeness of their friendship is evident from Enah and Icha being present at the hospital when Karima gave birth (Sihombing, 2008: 91), Enah taking Karima in after her child died (Sihombing, 2008: 141), and Icha accompanying her to the airport when she departed to return home (Sihombing, 2008: 169). The following is one of the quotes:

“As good friends, Enah and Icha are my faithful confidantes. I even spoke frankly with them about my situation back home, including about Pardi and Tari.” (Sihombing, 2008: 98)

Women’s mutual support in this story becomes crucial because these relationships are sources of Karima’s strength and resilience in Paris. They exchange information about job opportunities, immigration laws, and ways to cope with loneliness in a foreign land. Although Karima often makes decisions alone, the support of other women in the community abroad is a source of her strength in surviving and addressing various problems.

Next, Karima also demonstrates the importance of spiritual identity in decision-making. Her visit to the Paris mosque during a low point is an expression of tangible spirituality. The headscarf that covers her hair and head becomes protection that guides her back home. Karima decides to continue wearing the head covering after leaving the Paris mosque and returning to Enah’s home. (Sihombing, 2008: 163).

“After the fourth *rak’ah* was finished, I poured out all my grievances to God. I cried convulsively,

regretting my actions while I had been in this country.” (Sihombing, 2008: 161).

Her decision to return to Islam is voluntary and emerges from deep reflection as a spiritual way out she finds necessary. Religion in Karima’s story is a healing remedy and a source of inner strength and self-rediscovery.

Karima is a diasporic woman who remains connected to the traditional values of her homeland. She is empowered within social networks that give strength, empathy, care, and ultimately a spirituality that is her source of power. Karima’s independence shows that Indonesian diasporic women do not abandon their cultural roots to seek new strength; rather, they negotiate their values within a global space. Western individualism does not transform Karima into a figure detached from her culture; instead, her relational agency becomes a tool for cultivating independence grounded in values such as empathy and social responsibility.

Kartini’s Legacy and Diasporic Women

Kartini’s values, though originating in a different era, find new forms in the character of Karima. Through interviews with the staff of the Kartini Museums in Rembang and Jepara, it was found that Kartini’s significance is broader than commonly understood. She is not merely a heroine of women’s emancipation but a national figure who embodies independence, progressive thinking, social concern, and deep religiosity. Karima as the protagonist of *Luka di Champs Elysées* demonstrates that these values live on among diasporic women. Kartini’s ethical values in the present day and in the global sphere can be seen in Karima’s portrayal as a hard worker, critical thinker, caring for family, and steadfast in spirituality and humanity (Interviews report, Rembang–Jepara).

In her letters, Kartini wrote that she wished to live according to “love, mercy, and the law of justice” (Letter to Mrs. R.M. Abendanon-Mandri, 20 November 1901). (Djojonegoro, 2024, p. 260). Kartini advocated for local artisans through just trade networks and gave an important position to empowered women so they could lift their surrounding communities. Privilege must play a role in the greater good for collective progress. In Karima’s story leaving Indonesia to earn a living for her family we see the same spirit: working not only for oneself but for the welfare of family and community in the homeland.

Kartini’s spirit of “entrepreneurial womanhood” is found in Karima’s character in this novel. Karima is not a representation of individualistic feminism but an empowered woman who cares for others and maintains social networks as both a source of strength and an objective of her struggle. Work that provides independence for women is a path to empowerment that has individual value and social impact.

Finally, Kartini’s humility and devotion to the Creator an important part of her life are also found in the episode where Karima returns to the mosque and prays to find peace and strength before deciding to return to Indonesia. Kartini’s close ties to *kyai* (Islamic scholars) and the Muslim community made her a modest person. This is visible in her simple and unobtrusive dress. Karima is also described deciding to keep wearing a head covering after leaving the Paris mosque and pouring out her sorrows in the *Asr* prayer.

Luka di Champs Élysées becomes a rereading of Kartini’s values within the diasporic space preserved through transnational networks: freedom of thought, women’s empowerment, social participation, and spirituality. Kartini appears in the figure of Karima, who, although far from her homeland, still upholds the traditional values of her origin as both a source of strength and the purpose of her struggle.

Conclusion

This study found that the protagonist, Karima, represents Indonesian women in a transnational world who continually negotiate without being severed from their cultural roots. In Karima, Kartini’s values appear as concrete, reflective actions grounded in moral values and existential courage in an unfamiliar country. Karima leaves her family to seek a better life for herself and her relatives. Simultaneously, her successive positive and negative experiences

motivate both her survival and her efforts to free herself from the oppression and violence she endured so she can return to her family.

Gotong royong (mutual cooperation), care, simplicity, and communal kinship are Indonesian values that Karima does not abandon during her life in Paris. Solidarity with fellow Indonesian women in Paris is her source of strength to persevere. Karima's agency grows within social relations, not as a result of individualism.

A full rereading of Kartini's values is achieved when observing Karima's spiritual and religious values. Karima's religious experience is an important part of her empowerment. Thus, Karima's story in *Luka di Champs Élysées* reflects Kartini's values empathy, social responsibility, faith, and courage that remain relevant in the lives of Indonesian women today.

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