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### Full Issue


[View or download the full issue](#)

[VOL NO 1, MARCH 2019 \(PDF\)](#)

### Table of Contents


#### Articles

##### NOVEL AND REFIGURING LIFE

 *Wawan Setyadi*


PDF  
114-122

##### HAWAII ECOLOGICAL IMPERIALISM: POSTCOLONIAL ECOCRITICISM READING ON KIANA DAVENPORTS SHARK DIALOGUES

 *Kristiawan Indriyanto*

PDF  
123-133

##### THE LONGING FOR THE BELOVED: MYSTICAL JOURNEY BEHIND THE HOMECOMING TRADITION ON EID AL-FITR IN INDONESIA AND SONGKRAN IN THAILAND

 *Sri Hariyatmi*


PDF  
134-140

##### THE MYTH OF FEMALE BEAUTY: STUDY OF REPRESENTATION TOWARD POST-NEW ORDER NOVELS WRITTEN BY MALES

 *Lelu Dina Apristia*

PDF  
141-157

##### ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH INTERVIEWEES LEVEL OF TRUSTWORTHINESS IN GIVING INFORMATION DURING THE MAKING OF INVESTIGATION REPORTS: A CASE STUDY IN SITUBONDO POLICE STATION

 *Ahmad Firdaus, Firqa Amalia, Sufil Lailiyah*


PDF  
158-166

##### MADURA LANGUAGE VARIATIONS IN CHILDREN AND ADULTS IN MANDURO VILLAGE SEEN FROM PHONOLOGICAL CHANGE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH LANGUAGE CHANGE AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

 *Ety Setiawati, Wahyu Widada, Warsiman Warsiman, Sony Sukmawan, Dany Ardhan*


PDF  
167-178

##### JAVANESE REDUPLICATION: A STUDY ON PANGKUR JENGGLING TV PROGRAM

 *Agustinus Hardi Prasetyo*


PDF  
179-185

##### THE LEXICONS OF ANIMAL CLASSIFICATION IN JAVANESE: A COGNITIVE SEMANTICS APPROACH

 *Danang Satria Nugraha*


PDF  
186-195

##### LITERARY TEXT CONVERSION AS A FORM OF WRITING LITERACY ACTIVITIES

 *Katarina Retno Triwidayati*

PDF  
196-203

##### THE ROLES BUDI UTOMO IN WOMENS ORGANIZATION MOVEMENTS IN 1928-1940

 *Intan Printina Brigida*

PDF  
204-214

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#### Author Guidelines

#### Editorial Team

#### Peer Reviewers

#### Focus and Scope

#### Publication Frequency

#### No Author Fees

#### Publication Ethics

#### Originality Screening

#### Review Process

#### Copyright Notice

#### Online Submissions

#### Indexing and Abstracting

#### IJHS Contact

#### IJHS ISSNs


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#### JOURNAL CONTENT

Search

Search Scope

All 

[Search](#)

Browse

- » [By Issue](#)
- » [By Author](#)
- » [By Title](#)
- » [By Sections](#)
- » [Other Journals](#)

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All

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## **THE ROLES BUDI UTOMO IN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION MOVEMENTS IN 1928-1940**

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### **Abstract**

This article is the result of research on the role of Budi Utomo as the driving force of women's movement. The article attempts to describe the track records of women and their organizations during 1928-1940 which were inspired by Budi Utomo youth movement as a reformation movement of Indonesian people. The type of research is a historical research, i.e. the description of the roles of Budi Utomo as a motor of women's movements during 1928-1940. The method employed in the research is a library study using historical analysis. The findings revealed the development of Budi Utomo movement and its roles in mobilizing women during 1928-1940.

**Keywords:** Roles of Budi Utomo, movement, women's organization

### **Introduction**

Budi Utomo was the pioneer of women's movements in Indonesia. At the beginning, woman emancipation movements were initiated by a personal transformation such as Kartini and Dewi Sartika. Later on, the movements found a clear direction after the reformation done by Budi Utomo. Women created a new tradition of not excluding themselves but exploring the outside world, so that Indonesian women could voice their wise reformation according to the character of the nation. One of the challenges is the Indonesian tradition, which made women curb themselves under the stigma of self-limitation as they had to follow their predestination. Thus, the nature of being women should not become the limitation which curbed themselves. In this way, young people nowadays would be able to uphold their dignity with their character without considering status and gender (Printina, KR: 2017).

Discrimination against women during the colonial era could be observed in the way the Dutch colonial recruited women to become *gundik* (a term used for sexual workers during the colonial era). Moreover, they often got pregnant and gave birth to mixed-breed Dutch-Indonesian babies who were not accepted legally as either Dutch or Indonesia citizens. Therefore, they built a diaspora community in Papua and create their new tradition of "Tong-Tong Fair" in order to secure their identity and gain acknowledgements (Marlene voor de, 2009:368).

Budi Utomo focused its movements on the equality of social people, and it could be seen in women's movements in Indonesia. Some women's organizations were established in 1915 by Dewi Sartika (1884-1947), among them was *pengasah budi* (Mind Sharpener) in Bandung and Semarang established by Budi Wanito (Women's Mind), which aimed at fighting for women's progress and emancipation.

Women's movements did not stay silent seeing injustice to women. Therefore, some women's movements were established after Sumpah Pemuda (Youth Pledge) in October 1928. The commemoration of Mother's Day in 22 December 1928<sup>1</sup> in Yogyakarta, which took place at presently known as Wanitatama Building, was the evidence of reformation in women's movements in Indonesia (Soewondo, 1955:128). One of the issues raised in the Indonesian women's congress was the living condition of Indonesian women, which were curbed by patriarchal culture which were based on feudal values (Suryochondro, 1984). Some women's organizations participating in the congress were Wanita Oetomo (Outstanding Women), Aisyah, Poetri Indonesia (Indonesian Gentlewomen), Wanita Katolik (Catholic Women), Wanito Moeljo (Noble Women) and women in Sarekat Indonesia (Indonesian Sarekat), Jog Islamienten Bond and Wanita Taman Siswa (Wieringa, 1988:12). Some prominent figures of women movements were Nyi (Mrs., Javanese) Hadjar Dewantara from Wanita Taman Siswa, Mrs. Soekonto from Wanita Oetomo and Sujatin Kartowijono from Poetri Indonesia (Prasetyo, 1998:17).

These women's movements were no longer observed after the domestication of the New Order regime. Thus, young generation now could learn the lesson that although women could not voice their aspirations revolutionarily, they were able to inspire young generation through the character they possessed and it will be discussed further in this paper. Besides, women's roles could not be separated from the struggle of Budi Utomo movements, which were dominated by men.

## Methods

The research method of this article was a library study with historical analysis, in which the writer collected data by means of source criticism, analyzed them by interpreting the sources and historical writings, and also implemented feminism approach to strengthen historical writings (Syamsuddin, 2007:86).

The stages of historical method cannot be rearranged or reversed by putting forward criticism interpretation, or historiography. All kinds of historical writings or historical research put forward historical sources as absolute requirements which must be available. Without historical sources, stories of the past cannot be reconstructed by historians (Hamid, et al., 2011:43). Stages in writing this article were: heuristic or data collecting, verifying or source validation, interpreting, and historiography (Abdurrahman, 1999:55). In the last stage (historiography), the data were merged to explain the role of Budi Utomo in the development of organizations during the national movement era, in this case women's organization (Voeger, 1997:4).

## Findings and Discussion

The Indonesian revolutionary young people in the twentieth century realized that the only way to fight against colonialism and imperialism was simply by recognizing the capabilities they had, namely politics. However, in order to do so, they were required to have sufficient knowledge and experience to be able to find out the weaknesses of the opponent. An understanding of nationality began to grow in Indonesia, which was initiated by scholars who received educational opportunities. Ethical politics had an influence on efforts to improve the colonies, although in practice it was still aimed at dredging up colonies' resources. The Dutch also had a role in introducing the nationalism to the indigenous people (inlanders) by establishing schools for the people. In 1893 *Eerste Klass Indlandsche Scholen* was founded (Sekolah Bumi Putera Angka Satu), which was devoted to the indigenous people of the nobility and priyayi, and *Tweede Klass Indlandsche Scholen* (Bumiputera Angka Dua School) for poor indigenous people (Ricklefs, 2008:37).

This strategy was also carried out by Budi Utomo movements which were initiated by Dr. Wahidin Sudirohusodo, a scholar who felt responsible for any forms of colonialism that happened to his country. He realized this when visiting the STOVIA School (one of the educational institutions that produced low Javanese priyayi). Together with his colleagues at STOVIA (Soetomo and Goenawan Mangunkusomo), Dr. Wahidin conducted an exploration on the island of Java to raise educational funds. Budi Utomo believed that gathering educated people would enable them to free their country from all kinds of imperialism and colonialism. Kurniadi (1987: 12) confirmed that young people were the national asset with the capabilities to build the country through education. The establishment of the Budi Utomo organization was inseparable from the role of Dr. Wahidin Sudirohusodo, who gave advice to Soetomo to form a movement-based organization (Komandoko, 2008: 8).

Budi Utomo gave an opportunity for Indonesian youth to participate in educational activities as one of the visions of the organization. One of the reasons for the establishment of Budi Utomo was that the growth and development of educated groups in the regions, which at that time was very late compared to the central government (Soedarto, 1978:26). The development of education in the past time was much influenced by the Dutch because at that time the Dutch came to the archipelago in a cooperative manner with the kings, later on the Dutch influence on education in Yogyakarta was systematically applied like trade, culture, agriculture, language, culture and law. To date the existence of Dutch heritage schools in Yogyakarta were well maintained and sustained, for examples SMA Negeri 3 Yogyakarta, SMA Negeri 11 Yogyakarta, SMP Negeri 5 Yogyakarta (Bambang Soewando, 1977:140).

After successfully raising enough funds to build a movement, on May 20, 1908, on the 26th street Abdulrahman Saleh Jakarta, they established a community called Budi Utomo, which was chaired by Soetomo. At the beginning of the formation of the Budi Utomo was the organization intended only as a cultural organization limited to Javanese and Madurese communities. However, in the early development of the organization, the membership had already covered all Indonesian people regardless of their ethnicities and religions. In addition, Budi Utomo organization was the first organization for indigenous Javanese

which was established in modern system, so that the first congress attracted much attention from the press throughout the Indies (Nagazumi, 1972:73).

The nationalism movement in the 20th century in Indonesia was pioneered by national figures, one of whom was Budi Utomo (Suwarno, 2011: 1). The same feelings and ideals experienced by the countries in Asia because of the various rebellions which happened to their countries made the natives feel being treated unfairly. Some of the influences that moved the community towards nationalism were the Boxer rebellion in China and the Philippines resistance against Spain (Wiharyanto, 2015:19). The nationalist movement had the same awareness of placing the highest loyalty of individuals towards their nation and homeland. The principles that they are upheld were togetherness, unity and democracy (Mangunhardjana, 1985:33). Young people who had the opportunity to enter the Dutch East Indies school were called the educated class.

Budi Utomo was a national movement organization founded on May 20, 1908 and the organization stimulated scholars be involved. Some newspapers affirmed that there was a growing desire among the indigenous elite to fight for their own interests. However, since the presence of Dr. Wahidin, there had been some reforms to promote education and awareness among the Javanese, and it became the main advocate for the establishment of Budi Utomo. Sutomo also emphasized the term Budi Utomo when responding to Dr. Wahidin's explanation stated in Javanese, saying '*puniko pedamelan ingkang sae, mbutekaken budi ingkang utami*' (It is truly a good deed, showing a noble character.). Upon hearing Dr. Wahidin's words, Sutomo's friend Suraji named the newly established organization Budi Utomo (Tirtoprodjo, 1984:12).

Budi Utomo organization was not only known as one of the first national organizations in Indonesia, but also as one of the longest lasting organizations until the proclamation of Indonesian independence (Suhartono, 1994: 32).

From Budi Utomo records, it was very obvious that there were some reforms introduced by Budi Utomo in the form of local awareness which was formulated in a modern organization, especially women's organizations which caused social political reformation in Indonesia. The visions and missions of Budi Utomo were aimed to make standard of living and gender equality become clear visions of women's movements which were to be founded in that era.

The women's movements (organizations) gave rise to feminists who understood women's issues and various feminist ideologies. Feminist ideology contains ideas that describe sexism in a society and how this condition can be eliminated in the future. One example of sexism is the idea of women's domestic roles. The idea about women's domestic roles has been attacked by feminists because it refers to the conservative image of women's social conditions (Jurnal Perempuan: 1998). The bases of every feminist ideology were values and targets that will allow the achievement of ideal social conditions for women. Feminist ideologies consist of various kinds of ideologies, including; liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist feminism, and social feminism. In Indonesia, liberal feminism and social feminism were known to respond to issues of colonial policy and their influence on women and society (Fakih, 1997:73).

Several years after the establishment of Budi Utomo, in 1912 the first women's organization was established in Jakarta, which was called Putri Mardika. This organization fought for education for women and encouraged them so that



women gained recognition in public, freed themselves from fear and placed them in equal positions with men terms of employment (Wieringa, 1999:105).

Prior to the establishment of Budi Utomo, leaders of women movement focused the mission on fighting for women's position in marriage and family life, improving their skills and knowledge to strengthen their roles as decision makers in family life (Pringgodani, 1970: 20-21). This was made clear by the great ideals of Raden Ajeng Kartini (1879-1904) that Indonesian women at that time had to be free from the problems of forced marriage and polygamy. This appeal was also caused by her own painful experience as Kartini was forcibly mated with a polygamous regent named RMAA Djojodhiningrat. Indeed, Kartini also had a big wish in her mind to free Indonesian women through education. It was proven as Kartini wrote twice about education. In her letter dated October 11, 1901, she wrote (Kartini:1987:76):

According to my father, becoming teachers was the best option for me...Where else would I be able to spread my dream in a better way other than it, as an educator for young girls who would be mothers in the future?...

Later in her letter to Mrs Abendanon on Januari 21, 1901, Kartini wrote: It is from women that humans received their first education... and it is getting clearer for me that the education we first receive is not something meaningless for entire lives. And how could local mothers educate their children if they themselves were not educated?... Not only to women but also to all Indonesian people would education give benefit to girls.

The same thing was also felt by female pioneers who struggled after the movement from Budi Utomo. It was proven by adding teaching fields and enhancing skills of women. Hence, the new vision of education was born after the reformation of Budi Utomo which was continued by Dewi Sartika.

The second role of Budi Utomo which was very prominent was seen in the women's movement including the Women's Congress. Initially the congress was held to strengthen a movement which started from the Youth Congress which had been carried out earlier before the Indonesian Women's Congress. The Youth Congress, which is currently known as the Youth Pledge day, held on October 28, 1928 was the forerunner of the Indonesian Women's Congress which was established on December 22, 1928 (the date is celebrated as Mother's Day). It was not surprising that the renewed mindset of progressive women of Indonesia was also from the merit of the Indonesian male movement Budi Utomo.

Since then more women's organizations whose vision was almost the same as the organizations of the national movement in general, namely social politics and culture, emerged. After the establishment of the first women's organization named Putri Mardika (Independent Women) *Pawiyatan Wanito* was established in Magelang in 1915.

The influence of the Indonesian women's movement in politics had been proven since the period of national revival. They designed plans and programs starting at the national level to local areas. They also gave an insight to small groups of women on how to participate in an organization, so that their members



were ready to carry out their duties. For example, it was shown by Indonesian Women's Union or Persatuan Perempuan Indonesia (PPI), which embraced small movements into a single unit within the women's movement federation (Kartini:1987:76).

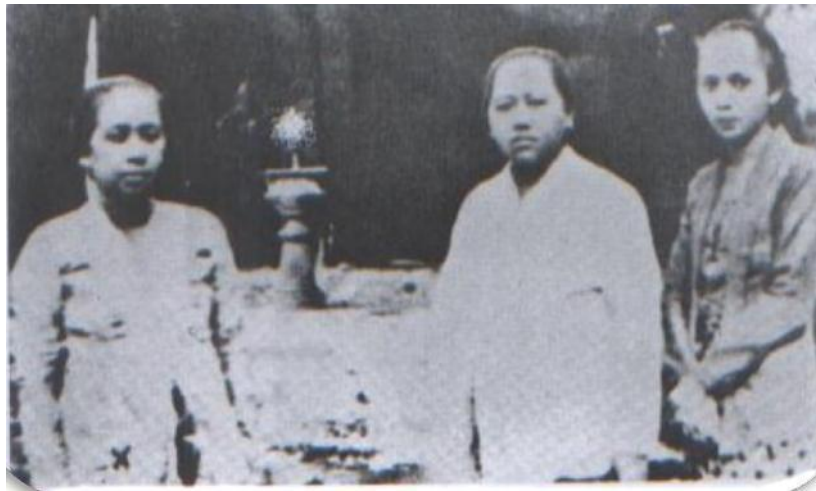
In its program, the women's movement made all members active and sensitive to political problems, established a committee to abolish women's trafficking, solved problems within the women's movement, maintained their respective movements, built good relations with other movements, and played many roles in women's movement during the national revival era.

Along with the establishment of various national organizations and political parties, the women's movement in the form of organizations began to be established, either as a wing (part of existing women's organizations) or forming a separate organization carried out by women's struggles in one sector at a certain level.

The spirit of women's organization also appeared several months after the Youth Pledge was read in the Youth Congress in 1928. This was proven by the holding of the First Women's Congress in Yogyakarta. About a thousand people attended the official reception of commencement of the Women's Congress which was held for the first time in Yogyakarta (Pusat Pengembangan Sumberdaya Wanita:124) on December 22, 1928 (the date is celebrated as National Mother's Day as starting from at this moment Indonesian women gained awareness of promoting their status in society). There were various issues originating from various organizations that were raised as the topics of discussion, such as Aisyah, Wanita Utomo, Wanita Taman Siswa, Catholic Women, and other small organizations at that time (Blacburn, 2007: 11).



Picture 1: The spirit of the Indonesian women's movement in the first Indonesian Women's Congress on December 22-25, 1928, in Yogyakarta. Source: [http://: artikel\\_kolomkitajurnalism.org](http://artikel_kolomkitajurnalism.org). October 28, 2011



Picture 2: Desember 15, 1928. The Core Committee of Indonesian Women's Congress from left to right: Nyi Hadjar Dewantara (Wanita Taman Siswa), Ibu Soekonto (Wanita Oetomo- Congress Chairperson), Nn. Soejatin (Putri Indonesia) now known as Ibu Kartowijoyo. Source: Foto rep. Idayu (Susan Blackburn, op.cit.)



Picture 3: Desember 22, 1928. The first Indonesian Women's Congress. From left to right: Ny. B. Goelarso, Ny. S. Kartowijono, Ny. Hardjodiningrat, Nyi Hadjar Dewantara, Ny. Soekonto (Congress chairperson), Ny. Sonearjo Mangoenpoespito (writing), Ny. Ismoediati Saleh, Ny. Moendijah, Ny. Anwar, Ny. Dirdjowongso. S: Foto rep. Idayu (Susan Blackburn, op.cit.)

The influence of the Women's Congress in 1928 gave rise to other organizations of wives; one of the most prominent one at that time was the Sedar Wives. The organization struggled to make Indonesian women play an active role in politics, improve good working conditions for women workers and support national education for women workers.

National actions which had been carried out by the women's movement since the early 20th century include the education of women, paying attention to the condition of orphans and widows, child marriages, reformation of the marriage rules in Islam, raising awareness of the importance of self-esteem among women,

and paying attention to the negative impacts of forced marriage. There was also a campaign against the children marriage.



Picture 4: Barisan Laskar Putri (Female Army Ranks). Source: Ruth Indiah Rahayu

The struggle did not stop there; in 1930 a congress was held in Surabaya. The congress created new discourses such as women's trafficking and women's voting rights (Kowani, 1978: 38), also established work information offices for women and initiated research on sanitation in the villages and on high child mortality rates.

In 1930's many women's organizations fought against coercion from concubines who exploit minors. Putri Budi Sedjati Organization built a dormitory for women and girls who were "abandoned" and trained them to be skillful in sewing, cooking, and other skills so that they could become skillful domestic helpers (Indisch Vrouwenjaarboek 1936:12).

One of the agreements of the first women's congress at that time was the determination of Mother's Day on December 22, and since 1950 it was recognized as the National celebration day. This was a historic momentum that can be felt by the Indonesian women's movement to date (Blacburn, 2007:12).



Picture 5: The celebration of Mother's Day. Source: Ruth Indiah Rahayu

The first congress produced a federation of women's organizations called Indonesian Women's Association (Persatuan Perempuan Indonesia - PPI). A year later the PPI was changed to PPII (Perikatan Perhimpunan Isteri Indonesia - Affiliation of the Indonesian Wife Association). PPII was very active in the field of education and efforts to eradicate women trafficking. At the Congress in 1932, PPII raised the issue of the struggle against women trafficking and one of the important decisions was the establishment of the Association for the Eradication of Women and Children Trafficking (Perkumpulan Pemberantasan Perdagangan Perempuan dan Anak - P4A) (Sekretariat Negara Republik Indonesia, 2011: 1).

After the first national Indonesian Women's Congress, the next national congresses were held in three cities, namely in Jakarta (1935), Bandung (1938), and Semarang (1941). The frequently conducted national congresses had increased nationalism spirit of other Indonesian women's organizations (Blacburn, 2007:12).

At the 1935 congress, the Indonesian Women's Congress (Kongres Perempuan Indonesia - KPI) was formed, and PPII was dissolved. Although their focus of attention was on poor women, their membership still consisted of the upper class, and the demands they voiced mostly revealed the interests of upper class women (Weirenga, 1998:12). Since then, national movements, especially the women's movements, had developed rapidly, and there were also signs of a growing spirit of nationalism. The enthusiasm was apparent at the beginning of the Japanese occupation. There were several women's movements namely the Women's Union of the People (Perempuan Serikat Rakyat - PSI) and the Sedar Wives (Sedar Isteri) which opposed the Dutch colonial government. They also paid attention to the anti-capitalism struggle (Blacburn, 2007:13).

In 1935 the issue of women's suffrage demand was raised for the first time in the congress. This was due to the colonial government policy which opened the opportunity for Indonesian women without voting rights (Vreede-de Stuers, 1960: 95). For this reason a campaign was carried out and women were involved in Volksraad. At that time, the first woman to study in the Netherlands as a lawyer was Maria Ulfa. Since then the voting rights for women was opened (Locher-Scholten: 2000).

In the later development, a group of observers of female workers emerged, which was chaired by Mrs. Sujatin. With her group, Mrs. Sujatin went to Lasem to investigate the conditions of the batik laborers, who were actually hostage workers. This group of women protested against the working conditions of women workers, and also discussed the fate of the comfort women and concubines of the male owners of batik business (Rambe, 1983: 43).

In 1940 for the first time, an association called *Perkumpulan Pekerja Perempuan Indonesia* (the Indonesian Women Workers Association) was formed in Jakarta. The members of the association consisted of women who worked in offices, both government and private sectors, such as teachers, nurses, office employees, and so on. However, judging from its activities, these organizations could not be regarded as a professional organization, because in general their activities focused on female skills education and promoting of nationalism. These

activities were not very much different from the activities carried out by other women's movements.

### Conclusion

Budi Utomo played significant roles in promoting Indonesian women's movements, among them are 1) motivating the birth of the first Indonesian women's movement, Putri Mardika (Independent Women) ; 2) transforming the women's vision by means of raising the women's status in the social, cultural and political fields; 3) promoting the fast growth of women's organizations which were established between 1928 and 1940, starting from Putri Mardika (Independent Women) to the Indonesian Women Workers Association in Jakarta.

From the discussion we can learn the meaning of being spectacles of the life of the nation, and that the responsibility to build society and the state is our common task regardless of our status, gender or anything else. Therefore, it is difficult for the nation to grow without learning deeper or recognizing youth movements during the national movement. Without youth and without Indonesian women, this nation would never have existed.

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