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### Kartini Muljadi [Indonesia, Judge, Lawyer]

Kartini Muljadi

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Interviewee: **KARTINI MULJADI**  
Interviewer: Nancy Chng  
Date: 14 January 2015  
Location: Jakarta

0:00:19  
[Nancy](#)

Ibu Kartini, thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed and sharing your stories. Could you share some of your recollections about your childhood, about your parents, and how you grew up in those colonial days under the Dutch?

0:00:37  
[Kartini](#)

I have lost my mother when I was about two and a half years old so... I have a stepmother. She is maybe... third generation Chinese. Her parents are coming from China, and they are traders, but I know they are brought up as very industrious persons and my stepmother is a very good businessperson. She... during the Japanese period where we have no school, she asked us to be awake by three, four o'clock in the morning, because that is the time when the sellers come with the produce - the fresh produce from the villages. They come in and so we have to learn to handle the Berkel scale, which is much too big for us, but we have then to stand on some wooden platform to put the scale...

0:02:05  
[Nancy](#)

To weigh things...

0:02:06  
[Kartini](#)

... to weigh the, yes, if it is the... and she taught us, "Look what to buy... buy always the produce of the season, that is the lowest price you can get. But then you have also to think and be prepared how to maintain the produce as fresh as possible, or to produce other products, like from cassava, we make also, powder or powder for cookies, powder for starch... That is how I learnt the trade from the early, early beginning.

0:02:51

Nancy

And from your father who was an accountant? What values did he...

0:02:56

Kartini

My father was an accountant. From him we were taught how to keep track of what we... of our small pocket money, and how to spend it well, or otherwise, how to save it well.

0:03:10

Nancy

But you also mentioned that he taught the values of education, and how to behave professionally, and you learnt those, you remember those qualities.

0:03:22

Kartini

Yes, he put us always in the best possible schools. My brother and I went to the First, we say... the First European School – that's what the name was... European School and we, both of us, and the two children of the Regent - that is, the head of the area, were the only non-Dutch children... students at the school.

0:03:54

Nancy

So, you had a privileged education. When you were in secondary school you were made to learn languages...

0:04:02

Kartini

Yes, the secondary school is five years. From the start we are taught of course Indonesian, Dutch, German, French and English, five languages throughout five years, but then we are split in the mathematics department and the languages department, history and languages department. My brother and I have chosen to be in the mathematics department. My father said that although I aspire to be a lawyer, but he said, "For lawyers, you need logic, and with mathematics, you get logic."

0:04:45

Nancy

I see, so you aspired to be a lawyer from a very young age. How did that come about? What made you want to become a lawyer?

0:04:56

[Kartini](#)

Is maybe... as I see also in the day-to-day happenings many injustices, and that is what I want to fight against.

0:05:13

[Nancy](#)

You actually managed to get into law school, and you also said you wanted to be independent from your father's financial help, and all that, so you...

0:05:25

[Kartini](#)

Yes, because at that time my father was... he was what we called in the Dutch system, "equalised" with the Dutch. So, you can be naturalised as a Dutch, you are entirely Dutch citizen, or having the equal rights as the Dutch. That is the second possibility, and he opted that in order to be able to send us to the best schools.

0:05:56

[Nancy](#)

But at one time he was also offered the chance to become a Dutch citizen, but he turned it down.

0:06:03

[Kartini](#)

It is not that he was offered, but it was possible legally.

0:06:08

[Nancy](#)

Oh legally, ok, but he chose...

0:06:10

[Kartini](#)

And he has a... he has thought about this, but he said to us, "No, one day I still wish Indonesia can be independent."

0:06:21

[Nancy](#)

He already had that feeling before.

00:06:23

[Kartini](#)

He had that feeling, yes.

0:06:24

[Nancy](#)

So, you grew up also supporting the idea of an independent Indonesia, and you wanted to become...

0:06:30

[Kartini](#)

That is what we discussed between the young, between my young friends.

0:06:37

[Nancy](#)

You were already an independent-minded person, not just financially but also in your nationalistic spirit.

0:06:47

[Kartini](#)

Yes, that is because we were only with two or three non-Dutch pupils in one class, and I have felt the unfair treatment sometimes. Not all Dutch people are that way, but there are Dutch persons... but I think later on, when I grew up... maybe that is not because of the Dutch. Between Indonesians, we have also people who are not nice to others.

0:07:25

[Nancy](#)

Can you tell us about the period of the Japanese Invasion?

00:07:30

[Kartini](#)

At that time, it is not only that the allied forces won against the Japanese, but also that we then felt, we Indonesian people, felt that we have to fight for our independence. It is now or never. Since I was in the student army, so I can appreciate what is independence. Yes, but then we have not fully realised in our young years that independence brings also duties and obligations. Sometimes, in our eagerness for independence we forget that, but then we feel

there is a lot of responsibility coming along with independence. But that is also because of my years of growing up.

0:08:27

[Nancy](#)

Which changed with independence, and all that. Can you tell me what you were doing during that time in the 50s and you were studying law, and after you graduated, you were appointed as a judge?

0:08:44

[Kartini](#)

I was lucky to be accepted at the University of Indonesia. But I don't want to burden my parents, so I try to earn... enough to pay for all my personal expenses. Somebody then invited me to join them for a meeting in the city... that is we called the business centre... in the city. There is an organisation. It is called Candra Naya. Every two days in the week they have a... they are advocates, practising advocates... who gave free legal advice. People who come there are the ones who can't afford lawyers of course, and then the law students are there to assist. Then the senior lawyers will say, "Well, if somebody...." There was a lady who complained about her husband being detained already for several months, and there is no solution in how to free him. Then the advocates will assign one of us to investigate with the Police, what are the reasons of the detention.

0:10:26

[Nancy](#)

To follow up the case.

0:10:27

[Kartini](#)

To follow up and then, what is then our opinion as to how to free them, or to find a solution?

0:10:34

[Nancy](#)

So, this is a pro-bono?

0:10:36

[Kartini](#)

Pro-bono service, that is called Candra Naya. Candra Naya is in fact set up by the Chinese community as a community house, where like all... there are many... that is a common practice of the Chinese to have an association, where they can come together. Number one

is what they speak is about education. Then help for the poor, also medical help and we have schools for... schools from the elementary school, until high school, and also courses.

0:11:31

[Nancy](#)

So, that is the start of your philanthropy?

0:11:35

[Kartini](#)

To be frank, it is not only my philanthropy, but how to earn my living as a student.

0:11:42

[Nancy](#)

Right, yes, because you had a position that was paid for.

0:11:45

[Kartini](#)

Yes.

0:11:46

[Nancy](#)

You said you stepped down from being a judge to earn more money to support my family, and because you have a reputation of not being corrupt, and you want to have a decent financial support for your own family. "I feel the salaries of judges cannot meet my family needs, so instead of corruption, I better earn enough as a notary with honour." So, that's why you became a notary.

0:12:12

[Kartini](#)

Yes, because the notary system is different than the notary system in Singapore, or the British system. It is more the European, the Dutch, French, German system as a notary public... yes. Because it has something to do with the quality of evidence, notarial deeds - they have full value as evidence in court.

00:12:43

[Nancy](#)

Can I ask you how difficult was it for you to stay incorruptible when the legal system in Indonesia has always been criticised as being corrupt?

0:12:56

[Kartini](#)

Yes, but in my time, maybe not so corrupt yet. Because there are still old judges with strong and steady principles of honesty and justice.

0:13:18

[Nancy](#)

What happened down the road that it became more corrupt?

0:13:24

[Kartini](#)

Maybe because of the salary system. Of course, that is an excuse, but at the time I became a judge, the salaries were also not adequate to form a living, but it is a matter of principle, whether you want to be corrupt or not.

0:13:45

[Nancy](#)

Was it difficult for you to operate... like if clients said, "I can pay you this amount of money, and can you help handle or persuade the judge to look favourably on my case?" Did it happen to you?

0:14:02

[Kartini](#)

No, but beside being very much afraid, of what the consequences could be frankly, yes, the second is, we are not used to just trespassing the law.

0:14:21

[Nancy](#)

How do you teach values and principles, in schools or in the family home?

0:14:27

[Kartini](#)

By firstly, by example. I show that even though I'm not corrupt, I eat well, I live well, I dress well. I'm happy, and not afraid every minute that the Police will come to pick me up.

0:14:54

[Nancy](#)

And you have a clear conscience...



0:14:56

[Kartini](#)

Clear conscience.

0:14:58

[Nancy](#)

Right. Yes, Ibu Kartini, can we move a little bit to the area of how you got involved in business as well. Because I think it had its roots in having to support yourself, and not relying on your father.

0:15:15

[Kartini](#)

That is also my father's recommendation always. Not to be easily content by what you know and what you have. But try to improve every time, and that is how I like to dress properly, and to maintain your health and skin. I have been working during my student time. I was working in a beauty salon owned by... that is a Dutch lady, but she is married to an Indonesian doctor here, and she has taught me how to make cosmetics. Yes, and that is how I took over her cosmetics when she went back to Holland, and so I bought the trademark. It is called Vilya Figuer. I made the products, and I'll have my own beauty salon from hair and body.

0:16:44

[Nancy](#)

And that was the foundation that became Tempo...

0:16:48

[Kartini](#)

Tempo, and then there was a pharmaceutical company, cosmetic company, that's PT Tempo. The owners, they planned to move to Holland. So, it was for sale, and since we were friends, the price was not cheap, but I could pay it in installments, so I can earn with the proceeds. I earn from the proceeds of the company, and I repaid them the price for the shares. So that it is now majority owned by my family.

0:17:26

[Nancy](#)

Right, and it's a big pharmaceutical company, and is listed. Now because of that, Forbes ranked you as one of the... wealthiest twenty...

0:17:39

[Kartini](#)

No, but that is not right, that is not right, that is not right.

0:17:43

[Nancy](#)

Yes, but coming back to this Tempo. It has the markings that you have some entrepreneurial instincts in you as well. You wanted to become a businesswoman...

0:17:55

[Kartini](#)

Yes, maybe because the situation that I'm brought up in, and not financially strong family environment, yes? Where I know how my father works very hard - he is an accountant, but he gives also lessons, and he comes home sometimes only at five o'clock in the afternoon. But then six o'clock before dinner-time, he has two or three students to teach accounting. He has also classes in several other schools for accounting.

0:18:42

[Nancy](#)

He worked long hours.

0:18:44

[Kartini](#)

Long hours, yes.

0:18:46

[Nancy](#)

You probably felt you understood what it was like not to have money. So, it was a motivation for you as well.

0:18:53

[Kartini](#)

Correct, correct, yes, correct

0:18:55

[Nancy](#)

You had some interest in real estate. You were buying some properties...

0:19:00

[Kartini](#)

Yes, that is... that comes along if there are good deals, that is my commercial instinct, then I bought little by little.

0:19:12

[Nancy](#)

Just borrowed from the bank, and sold it when the money was there...

0:19:15

[Kartini](#)

I hardly borrowed. I just buy it in installments, and pay it off from salary, and from other income.

0:19:23

[Nancy](#)

During your long years in the legal field, do you reflect on it? What were the most difficult cases, or the most difficult time that you had to deal with?

0:19:35

[Kartini](#)

Every case is difficult. There is no easy case. Every case is difficult, but you have to try in good faith, and in an honourable way to reach a solution. This decision making, positive decision making, you get by training and then you get a sixth sense in which direction you have to think. But you have to set your directions, that this is a professional, correct decision and that is it, an honourable decision.

0:20:20

[Nancy](#)

Can I just ask you, since you talk about how young you are, Ibu, how do you keep this demanding schedule? You'll be turning eighty-five in May this year, in 2015.

0:20:37

[Kartini](#)

I thank God for the training during my earlier years, and maybe that keeps me going. Because the principle, what I have begun, I have also to finish properly.

0:20:58

[Nancy](#)

Can I ask you about the field of being a woman in Indonesia? As Asian societies are very male-dominated, and you were one of the woman pioneers in your area. Were you... ?

0:21:13

[Kartini](#)

No, no, not me. But there are many women who are also very productive, very strong in their fields.

0:21:22

[Nancy](#)

But you share a similar name with the Kartini years ago, and she's held up as the model of... the mother of Indonesian...

0:21:34

[Kartini](#)

My original name... my father has given me is Pauline Fannie. When there is an opportunity for us to change our names in Indonesian names, my entire family has done the same. My father has changed his name, Koh, or in Chinese "Xu" into Budi Tjahjono. But after I married, I followed my husband's name.

0:22:13

[Nancy](#)

The Kartini name, how did that come about?

0:22:17

[Kartini](#)

My father was always setting her as my example. Kartini is born in a rather privileged family, as the daughter of the regent and she has her own... the regent has usually, privileges. Among others, a good house... and so since the husband has many other wives... and that is... so she was fighting against this polygamy. Yes, and what she was fighting for was education for women, for the girls and women. Therefore, that was very logic [logical] that I took this name.

00:23:15

[Nancy](#)

Can I ask you about the leadership in Indonesia? You have Soekarno, as president and then he was very leftist leaning, then he was taken over by Suharto who was thirty-two years in power. Then you had a series of presidents since then. What are the qualities, the good qualities of the different presidents?

0:23:40

[Kartini](#)

I very much admire Bung Karno. If you think that now our whole nation is based on Pancasila, the five norms, the five fundamentals. That is genius. To be able to pick up, and to elaborate on those five is really a genius. Until today, I admire it very much. When I see this, I'm moved that God has given us such a spiritual leader. Until now, Pancasila is the motif, why we are still together despite differences, despite...

0:24:32

[Nancy](#)

The diversity

0:24:33

[Kartini](#)

... diversity. That is really, really very farsighted, and he was an engineer, mind you.

0:24:41

[Nancy](#)

Right, and what about President Suharto, he was in power for a long time? Were there any good qualities as a leader?

0:24:49

[Kartini](#)

We would say... we should thank God for such leaders. Suharto, as a human being, he has his weaknesses, but in other ways he has helped the nation to stay together, to unite...

0:25:13

[Nancy](#)

To progress.

0:25:15

[Kartini](#)

Yes, and to progress, yes, despite all the disturbances like the Communistic trials to come back. Yes, he was a military man, but he tried to also enhance, promote our economy and finance. During these endeavours, there are assistants and helpers, who have done things, which we afterwards can say, "but that was corruption". Yes, he is just a human being.

0:26:09

[Nancy](#)

What do you think that you can teach the young generation for Indonesia? What kind of advice would you be giving them, and some of them may grow up to be leaders?

0:26:19

[Kartini](#)

Yes, equip yourself with knowledge. But choose that kind of knowledge, what you really like to do. If you are interested in some field, develop it, and how to make the best product of it, so that it can be successful. But number one, stay honest, don't be...

0:26:57

[Nancy](#)

Tempted by...

0:26:58

[Kartini](#)

Tempted by bribing, by paying or receiving bribes... and stay as much as possible within the truth.

0:27:13

[Nancy](#)

Can I ask you as a final question, what legacy you'd like to leave behind for your children and for the new generation of young Indonesians?

0:27:27

[Kartini](#)

Yes, that either male or female, we can be good professionals, and nothing can impede on us to live properly, provided that we can equip ourselves with the means to get a good occupation, and to have a family life, where all the members of the family are respecting each other properly.

0:28:10

[Nancy](#)

Alright, thank you very much, Ibu Kartini.

0:28:14

[Kartini](#)

Welcome.

0:28:15

Nancy

Very helpful.

0:28:16

Kartini

Thank you, thank you for the patience.