

Literati Writing History: Mochtar Lubis' Thoughts on History, Development, and Significance in Post-Colonial Indonesia

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Abstract

Mochtar Lubis, a prominent Indonesian writer and journalist, highlighted humanitarian concerns through his works amid Indonesia's unstable post-independence political and social conditions, shaping his stance on humanity, where corruption, injustice, and lingering colonial mentalities eroded individual moral integrity and freedom. This research analyzes Mochtar's significant work, *Indonesia: Land under the Rainbow* (written in Dutch in 1971 and translated into English in 1987), composed after his release from prison (1965–1971) for political subversion under the New Order regime, and during his invitation to the Netherlands for a writing program—this book introduces Indonesian history from feudal times to the contemporary era. Mochtar's interpretation corrects colonial misconceptions while critiquing nationalist narratives silent on authoritarianism during the Old and New Orders. The study employs qualitative analysis with an intellectual history framework from Johan Huizinga and Howard Zinn; Huizinga emphasized intellectuals' ethical stances, while Zinn interrogated history's politics through power dynamics. By analyzing Mochtar's works, it views literature as a historical source and assesses how writers like him provide alternative perspectives. He challenges romanticized traditions and elite-driven stories, exposing Javanese aristocracy's manipulation to sustain authoritarianism and inequality, and highlighting lessons like self-restraint against colonial greed—relevant to today's environmental challenges. His thought offers a skeptical humanist view of post-colonial power, urging reflection on literature's role in building historical and ethical consciousness in Indonesia.

Keywords:

Mochtar Lubis, Intellectual History, Humanism, Post-Colonial Critique, Indonesian Literature.

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Introduction

By the early 20th century, Indonesian literati had gained a significant role in tackling society's most pressing issues. Much of the early political sentiment was

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conveyed through literature, awakening national consciousness among the elite and intelligentsia, and rallying their support for Indonesia's independence movement.¹ Many of these works were socially engaged, addressing the immediate concerns of their audience, including writers like Mochtar Lubis. He rose within this tradition of socially engaged literature, growing political and historical awareness. Born on March 7, 1922, in Padang, West Sumatra, into a prosperous Mandailing family, Mochtar had many talents and accomplishments.² He was highly respected and admired by writers, journalists, scholars, activists, and the public. Over a decade after his death, his legacy continues to be celebrated. As a professional, he was a leading journalist and publisher.³

More significantly, Mochtar is remembered as one of Indonesia's foremost authors and a dissident public intellectual of both national and international stature. His bravery in challenging the establishment as a journalist earned him prestigious honors like the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1958 and the title of World Press Freedom Hero in 2000.⁴ Due to his critical stance,⁵ Mochtar was imprisoned for nine years under Sukarno's regime, and later for nearly three months during Suharto's rule.⁶ He passed away on July 2, 2004, in Jakarta at 82. This study analyzes Mochtar's significant works, including "*Indonesia: Land Under the Rainbow*," originally written in Dutch in 1971 and later translated into English in 1987. This book was written after Mochtar's release from prison, where he was held from 1965 to 1971 under the New Order regime for political subversion. After his release, he was invited to the Netherlands for a writing program, where he penned this book as an introduction to Indonesian history, spanning from feudal times to the contemporary era. Published in 1979.⁷ Mochtar's interpretation aimed to correct colonial misconceptions in history while critiquing nationalist historical narratives that were silent on authoritarianism during the Old and New Orders.

¹ Showcased among others by Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana and his associates in *Pujangga Baru*, who convincingly used literature to discuss the cultural directions to be embraced by Indonesians

² David T. Hill. *Journalism and Politics in Indonesia: A Critical Biography of Mochtar Lubis (1922-2004) as Editor and Author* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 14.

³ "Mengenang Mochtar Lubis". *Kompas*, May 21, 2016, 2; "Sudah waktunya kita mengingat Mochtar Lubis". *ANTARA News*, May 20, 2016, <https://www.antaranews.com/berita/562143/sudah-waktunya-kita-mengingat-mochtar-lubis> (accessed February 2, 2024).

⁴ "IPI [International Press Institute] Heroes", <https://ipi.media/ipi-heroes> (accessed August 22, 2024).

⁵ *Banjarmasin Post*, no 0584, 16 July 1992), 11, column 1-7.

⁶ Mochtar Lubis, "Setelah Keluar Tahanan: Mochtar Lubis Akan Menulis Novel dan Beberapa Buku" in Mochtar Lubis *Bicara Lurus Menjawab Pertanyaan Wartawan*. Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 1995, p.1

⁷ Kratz EU. "*Indonesia: Land under the Rainbow* by Mochtar Lubis. pp. xvii, 218, 8 Pl., Map (on End Papers). Singapore Etc., Oxford University Press, 1990." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3, no. 2 (1993): 303. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186300004673>

Mochtar's works highlighted humanitarian concerns. Indonesia's unstable political and social conditions shaped his stance on humanity, especially during the post-independence era. Mochtar was critical of corruption, injustice, and the lingering colonial mentality in society, emphasizing moral integrity and individual freedom.⁸ He mentioned that “the writer and literature are witnesses to human history, and are part of a nation’s memory.”⁹ By analyzing Mochtar's works, the study views literature as a historical source and assesses how writers like Mochtar provide alternative perspectives.¹⁰

In his article “Intentions of History and Literature”, Williams asserts that the relationship between literature and history should not be confined to mimetic representation but reconceptualized as a medium for transformative awareness.¹¹ Critiquing the Western tradition's rigid separation of these domains, he argues that such compartmentalization neglects the holistic dimensions of human experience. He contrasts the Western focus on ideological analysis and linear causality with Eastern intellectual traditions – particularly those found in the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* – which integrate historical, literary, and spiritual dimensions within a unified narrative framework. In this alternative paradigm, history is not merely a chronicle of past events but a reservoir of lived experiences reactivated through memory and meaning. At the same time, literature becomes a vital conduit for accessing emotional, social, and spiritual truths.

Silasudjana's thesis offers an in-depth analysis of Mochtar Lubis as a post-war Indonesian literary figure, journalist, and leading intellectual. It focuses on his courage in challenging authority and his contributions to social justice and liberation issues.¹² This research highlights that literature can serve as a medium to understand the dynamics of Indonesian society, including the perspectives of elites, culture, and development. Additionally, the article underscores the importance of recognizing Mochtar as an intellectual who stood against injustice, raised awareness, and inspired social change. It also calls for further studies on prominent Malay-Indonesian literary figures to uncover their intellectual

⁸ T. Mulya Lubis, “Mochtar Lubis dan Universalitas Hak Asasi Manusia” in *Mochtar Lubis Wartawan Jihad* (Jakarta: Penerbit Harian Kompas, 1992), 107.

⁹ Mochtar Lubis, “Literature and Social Justice” in Paper presented to the second Asian Writer Conference, International P.E.N. Cultural Center of the Philippines (Manila, December 14-17, 1981), p. 3

¹⁰ Edd Winfield Parks, “Literature as Intellectual History.” *College English*, Vol. 3, No. 6, (1942), 574-577, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/370949>

¹¹ Mukesh William, “Intentions of History and Literature.” In *Facts, Distortions and Erasures: Literature as History; History in Literature*, ed. Manpreet Kang (Delhi: Mellow, 2017), 23-31. <https://www.melow.in/public/assets/uploads/volume/fullpdf/17.pdf>

¹² Miranti Silasudjana, “The Wretched Under The Rainbow: Mochtar Lubis’ Thought. As an Upstanding Intellectual on Liberation and Social Justice in Post-War Indonesia.” *Dissertation*, (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2018).

contributions.

Wuryandari uses the concept of nationalism as proposed by Benedict Anderson and the structuralist approach of Rosa Luxemburg.¹³ The findings show that the novel displays nationalistic values through its revolutionary-era setting, the attitudes, behaviors, and ideas of the main character Sadeli, and narrative descriptions that reinforce themes of patriotism, sacrifice, and solidarity. Nationalism is manifested through personal sacrifice for the nation's sake, unity regardless of ethnicity or religion, moral awareness characterized by honesty and simplicity, and the mastery of science and technology as part of national self-reliance. *Maut dan Cinta* successfully illustrates the spirit of nationalism through its narrative structure and serves as an effective medium to instill national values and shape national character. Therefore, it remains relevant as educational material for younger generations to understand and apply the nationalistic spirit in daily life.

Another relevant study is by Lupi Saepul et al.¹⁴ This study analyzes Mochtar Lubis's novel *Tak Ada Esok* through a postcolonial lens, focusing on colonial dominance, resistance, and ambivalence themes. The study reveals how the novel critiques colonial exploitation—particularly labor discrimination between native Indonesians and Dutch colonists—and illustrates dual forms of resistance: direct rebellion through guerrilla warfare and passive resistance through mimicry. The novel also reflects the shifting perceptions of Japanese occupiers, initially seen as liberators but later recognized as oppressors. Ultimately, *Tak Ada Esok* demonstrates literature's capacity to expose colonial contradictions and articulate the complex interplay of domination and subversion within colonial encounters, highlighting the ongoing relevance of postcolonial critique.

Fitriansyah analyzes Mochtar Lubis's *Senja di Jakarta* using Gramsci's theory of hegemony to explore the dynamics of social, political, and economic power embodied by the character Raden Kaslan.¹⁵ Raden Kaslan's manipulation of market systems through fictitious companies, control of media, and suppression of dissenters like Halim reflect capitalist greed and authoritarian strategy. At the

¹³ Nurweni Septa Wuryandari "Menelusuri Maut dan Cinta Karya Mochtar Lubis: Nasionalisme dan Karakter Bangsa." *Jurnal Bébasan* 8, no. 1 (June 2021): 1–17, <https://jurnalbebasan.ppjbsip.com/bebasan/index.php/home/article/view/112>

¹⁴ Lupi Saepul Nordin et.al. "Analisis Poskolonial pada Novel *Tak Ada Esok* Karya Mochtar Lubis" *Media Bahasa, Sastra, dan Budaya Wahana* 27, no. 1 (2021): 1-15, <https://doi.org/10.33751/wahana.v27i1.4128>

¹⁵ Haicdil Fitriansyah, "Hegemoni Tokoh Raden Kaslan dalam Novel *Senja di Jakarta* Karya Mochtar Lubis Tinjauan Hegemoni Antonio Gramsci," *Ilmu Budaya Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra Seni dan Budaya* 5, no. 3, (2021), 200–215. <https://e-journals.unmul.ac.id/index.php/JBSSB/article/view/4061>

same time, his alliances with elites like Suryono and Halim illustrate feudal exploitation of public office. In contrast, Hermanto, Bambang, and Udin represent socialist resistance, advocating for workers' rights and exposing systemic oppression. The narrative highlights the role of intellectuals in disseminating dominant ideologies and the dual function of the state – both civil and political – in reinforcing elite interests. Ultimately, the novel portrays the complex interplay of ideological hegemony and class struggle in 1950s Jakarta, offering a critical reflection on moral decay and structural injustice within postcolonial Indonesian society.

Mayriskha et al. examine Mochtar Lubis's social critique of universities and student activism through *Harian Indonesia Raya (HIR)* editorials from 1968 to 1974.¹⁶ The findings reveal that Mochtar used the HIR editorials to voice moral and social critiques, particularly addressing student issues, institutional corruption, abuse of power, and military dominance in national politics. He positioned students as a moral force capable of holding the government accountable. While the 1966 student generation had emotional ties with the military, the early 1970s cohort was perceived as more independent and critical of state institutions, sparking new waves of protest that became central to Mochtar's critique. The study concludes that Mochtar's editorial writing served not merely as personal expression but as a vital instrument of social control, highlighting journalism's role in promoting justice and democracy. This article contributes significantly to Indonesian press historiography by framing editorials as historical documents that trace the intersection of media, intellectuals, and power during the New Order.

Febbriza examines Mochtar's editorials in *Harian Indonesia Raya (HIR)* from 1968 to 1974, focusing on his social criticism of campuses and student movements during the early New Order era.¹⁷ The study analyzes how Mochtar's editorials reflect a moral and intellectual critique of political power, corruption, and authoritarianism. Contrasting the student generation of the 1970s with that of 1966, Mochtar portrayed the former as more independent and critical of the state, viewing them as a moral force resisting the political injustices of the regime. This study reveals how Mochtar's texts functioned as resistance to dominant power narratives and as a form of social control exercised by the press. His editorials challenged government abuse and held wider social institutions – including the

¹⁶ Diva Mayriskha et.al "Konteks Sosial dan Konteks Sejarah Dalam Novel *Senja di Jakarta* Karya Mochtar Lubis: Tinjauan Sosiologi Sastra Georg Lukacs." *Jurnal Kabastra* 3, no. 1 (Desember 2023), 91-112, <https://doi.org/10.31002/kabastra.v3i1.934>

¹⁷ Abdurakhman Febbrizal, "The Discourse of History Writing: Mochtar Lubis' Social Criticism of Campus and Students through 'Tadjuk Rentjana' *Harian Indonesia Raya (HIR)* in the Early New Order Period" *Jurnal Sejarah Indonesia* 7, no 2 (2024): 123–145. <https://doi.org/10.62924/jsi.v7i2.33059>

press—accountable. The article concludes that Mochtar’s writings in HIR served as a vital historical and moral record of the socio-political climate of the early New Order, positioning journalism as a key driver of public discourse and democratic accountability. It calls for further scholarly attention to the role of the press in shaping social change and political consciousness in Indonesia.

Kasiyun et al. discuss the theme of anti-colonial struggle as reflected in selected Malaysian and Indonesian novels.¹⁸ Mochtar’s *Maut dan Cinta* is chosen for discussion. The study affirms that both novels go beyond portraying physical resistance to explore anti-colonialism’s ideological and emotional dimensions. *Maut dan Cinta* offers a personal, emotionally driven vision of Indonesian nationalism, and proposes a more inclusive and regional perspective—both contributing meaningfully to youth awareness of sacrifice, solidarity, and historical identity in the postcolonial context.

The above articles reviewed are mostly discussed within literary studies, alongside related literary theory and criticism. This paper, however, puts a premium on Mochtar’s historical thought as reflected in his various works, especially his nonfiction work. This research sees the need to re-emphasize Mochtar’s significant contribution as a writer who narrated, envisioned, and evaluated history. Through fiction and editorials, Mochtar blends emotional, ideological, and historical dimensions to challenge power structures and inspire public awareness.

Method

This research adopts a qualitative methodology to explore and interpret the historical and intellectual dimensions of Mochtar Lubis’ *Indonesia: Land under the Rainbow*.¹⁹ This study uses interpretive analysis to uncover how Mochtar’s thoughts on history, development, and significance are influenced by social and political contexts, drawing from Johan Huizinga’s and Howard Zinn’s theoretical frameworks. Huizinga’s work in *Man and Ideas* emphasizes that intellectual history should be understood within its broader social and cultural context.²⁰ His concept of social intellectual history provides a lens to examine how ideas are not only shaped by intellectual traditions but also by the social realities in

¹⁸Suharmono Kasiyun et al., “Kajian Bandingan Resepsi Pembaca Ideal Novel Perang Karya Pengarang Indonesia dan Malaysia dalam Upaya Menanamkan Sikap Cinta Tanah Air,” *Lingua Franca: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, dan Pengajarannya* 6, no. 1 (2022): 85, <https://doi.org/10.30651/lf.v6i1.12035>

¹⁹ Mochtar Lubis, *Indonesia: Land under the Rainbow* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990).

²⁰ Johan Huizinga, “The Task of Cultural History,” in *Man and Ideas* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), 28.

which they are embedded.²¹ This framework is particularly relevant to understanding how Mochtar's perspectives are influenced by Indonesia's intellectual currents and social challenges. Zinn's concept of the politics of history²² suggests that ideological biases and political motivations often construct historical narratives.²³ Applying Zinn's perspective enables an analysis of how Mochtar's historical writing may reflect or critique political power structures, giving voice to underrepresented perspectives or challenging dominant narratives in Indonesian history.

The study draws on primary data from Mochtar Lubis' *Indonesia: Land Under the Rainbow*, focusing on his discussions of historical development, intellectual thought, and socio-political issues. Secondary sources, such as critical analyses of Mochtar's work and historical records relevant to his context, supplement the study to provide background and support for interpreting Mochtar's perspectives within his cultural and political environment. The data will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes and patterns in Mochtar's work that reflect Huizinga's and Zinn's frameworks.

The analysis will focus on three main dimensions: 1) Intellectual influence: how Mochtar's historical perspectives align with or diverge from intellectual and cultural traditions, as suggested by Huizinga's social intellectual history; 2) Political reflection and critique: how Mochtar addresses or challenges political ideologies and power structures in his narratives, reflecting Zinn's notion of the politics of history; 3) Historical significance: Mochtar's contributions to Indonesian historiography and how his work engages with, revises, or resists dominant historical narratives, shedding light on overlooked or marginalized perspectives.

The study cross-references Mochtar's writings with secondary analyses and historical records to ensure validity. However, the interpretive analysis may be subject to researcher bias, a standard limitation in qualitative studies. Recognizing this, the study approaches Mochtar's work with an awareness of subjectivity and strives for balance by engaging with diverse sources and perspectives.

Result and Discussion

Johan Huizinga's intellectual framework centers on the role of culture and art in shaping historical narratives. In his *Men and Ideas* and other works,

²¹ R. L. Colie, "Johan Huizinga and the Task of Cultural History," *The American Historical Review* 63, no. 3 (1964): 607-616, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1845780>

²² Howard Zinn, *The Politics of History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press), 1990.

²³ Donald M. Scott, "Review of *The Politics of History*, by H. Zinn," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 5, no. 2 (1974): 343-348, <https://doi.org/10.2307/202524>

Huizinga suggests that social and cultural practices influence how history is interpreted and written.²⁴ His work expanded the scope of historical inquiry beyond the traditional focus on political and economic factors, delving into the cultural, emotional, and symbolic dimensions that shape human history.²⁵ His most famous work, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, exemplifies this approach by exploring how deeply ingrained ideas, such as chivalry and courtly life, continued to resonate in people's minds long after the political and social realities that birthed these ideas had faded. Huizinga argued that these cultural forms' symbolic and aesthetic power allowed them to persist, influencing medieval societies' mental and emotional life despite the changing material conditions.²⁶ Mochtar, understanding these influences, would require an examination of his engagement with Indonesian culture, particularly how he interprets historical events within the framework of pre-colonial traditions, Islamic scholarship, or even Western historiography that was introduced during colonial periods.

In "*Indonesia: Land Under the Rainbow*", Mochtar Lubis emphasizes the deep intertwining of Indonesian culture with its history, particularly in how traditional customs and beliefs persist even in modern times. This reflects Huizinga's notion that social and cultural traditions are crucial in shaping historical narratives. Mochtar writes about how Indonesian society continues to be shaped by the values of adat (customary laws) and religious beliefs, even as the country modernizes. He acknowledges that these cultural traditions provide a framework for understanding the Indonesian people's response to historical events like colonialism and the struggle for independence. However, unlike Huizinga, Mochtar goes beyond identifying these traditions—he critiques how elites manipulate them to maintain power. As he writes:

“More than anything else, the Kultuurstelsel had plunged the priyayi class into great degeneration in the eyes of the population. The nobility collaborated with the Dutch to exploit the masses of farmers in Java. Instead of protecting their own people, they willingly allowed themselves to become the instruments of exploitation and oppression by their Dutch masters. Of course, it must also be said in fairness that the seed of the degeneration of the Javanese priyayi class had been planted long before the arrival of the Dutch, during the rise of feudalism in Java under the old Mataram kingdoms. Thereafter, the priyayi had been nothing but instruments of the kings to see to it that the people paid their tributes and carried out all their obligations to the king. The Javanese's own concept of kingship guaranteed the emergence of a corrupt and absolutist priyayi class, a mirror-image

²⁴ Johan Huizinga, “The Task of Cultural History,” in *Men and Ideas* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), 28.

²⁵ Huizinga.

²⁶ William J. Bouwsma, “The Waning of the Middle Ages by Johan Huizinga,” *Daedalus* 103, no 1, (1974): 37, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20024184>

of the king. Such abuses of power by the Indonesian priyai had inspired the Assistant Resident of Lebak, D. Dekker, using the pen name 'Multatuli', to write his novel, *Max Havelaar*.²⁷

While Huizinga celebrates the role of culture and tradition, Mochtar critiques it, mainly when cultural norms oppress or marginalize certain groups. For example, Mochtar points out how Javanese aristocratic traditions influenced post-colonial politics, perpetuating authoritarian rule to maintain social harmony. Mochtar Lubis writes:

“He had great dreams and ideals for Indonesia. But his actions did not support these dreams and ideals. He often spoke of the need for rationality, for men to conquer nature, to use science and technology. But he himself became irrational, and to enhance his grandeur, resorted to the old Indonesian concept of power, of kingship, and used the old Indonesian symbols of power and legitimacy in Java to justify his personal rule. He spoke against the evils of feudalism, but he himself acted as the great feudal lord, and the presidential palace was made into a keraton with all the keraton intrigues... The measure of his failure as a leader was the state of the Indonesian economy he left after he was ousted from power. Inflation was rampant at 650 per cent a year, the foreign debt was more than US\$3 billion; infrastructures-roads, railways, harbour facilities-were destroyed; production for export had greatly declined; rice production went down; and the whole administration was demoralized: That was the legacy which he left to Indonesia after a long time of full authority and power. He had set back the development of Indonesia by at least 20 years. Had he used all his brilliant leadership and personal magnetism to rally a great national effort for constructive policies of development, the course of history would have been very different for Indonesia.”²⁸

Mochtar wrote history, intending to uncover the realities experienced by the people, particularly in relation to the actions of the elite towards ordinary citizens. For this reason, he approached history from the perspective of the Indonesian people themselves, so they could clearly understand the phenomena affecting them and, in turn, reflect on what actions needed to be taken moving forward. Mochtar Lubis is also known for his strong political critiques, especially against corruption, authoritarianism, and the military's role in politics,²⁹ much like Howard Zinn's critique of power structures in historical narratives. In *Indonesia: Land Under the Rainbow*, Mochtar does not shy away from addressing the failures of the Sukarno and Suharto governments. Mochtar exposes Sukarno's

²⁷ Mochtar Lubis, *Indonesia: Land Under the Rainbow* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990), 148.

²⁸ Lubis, 191-192.

²⁹ Mochtar Lubis, “Harus ada Kekuatan Bersama untuk Membanteras Korupsi,” in *Mochtar Lubis Bicara Lurus Menjawab Pertanyaan Wartawan*, ed. Ramadan K.H. (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 1995), 63.

tacit support for communist cultural policies; this conflict led to polarization and repression. This aligns with Zinn's idea that history is often written by the victors and powerful elites, leaving out the suffering of ordinary people. Mochtar frequently focuses on how the state uses propaganda to maintain control, particularly through the literature and the media. He notes how official history glorifies the elites' role in restoring order, while the voices of the victims are silenced. In this, Mochtar reflects Zinn's insistence on telling history from the perspective of the oppressed.

"The 1945 generation of young writers calling themselves Angkatan 45 (Generation 45) in 1950, proclaimed that they were the legitimate inheritors of the culture of the world, a culture they wanted to extend and develop in their own way. This philosophy of universal humanism was immediately challenged by the communist Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat, Lekra (People's Cultural Institute), which said that the people are the one and only source for the creation of culture, and therefore, a new Indonesian culture can only be created by the people. This conflict went on under the Sukarno regime, which gave its tacit approval to the communist idea. Time has proven that both the Generation 45 and the communist Lekra have failed in their cultural ideas. Many of the Generation 45 members became fascinated with Sartre and Albert Camus, and became irrelevant to the real needs of their own people and society, while the communists became mere propagandists. Under pressure from the Sukarno regime, some exponents of the Generation 45 joined the Lekra, and others joined Lesbumi, a Nahdlatul Ulama-sponsored cultural organization."³⁰

Mochtar advocates for a fundamental cultural and political transformation in postcolonial and developing societies, such as Indonesia, by emphasizing the adoption of modern democratic values. It underscores the importance of rationality, respect for human dignity and rights, individual freedom, and the rule of law as foundational principles for a just and progressive society. Mochtar critiques traditional power structures—particularly the premodern notion that rulers derive authority from divine sources (divine kingship)—and instead calls for a shift toward democratic legitimacy, where the people grant political authority. This vision aligns with Enlightenment ideals and reflects a broader call for decolonizing power structures and embracing civic modernity.

"The Indonesians and others in developing societies will gain by learning the value of rationality, of human dignity and rights, human freedom, and the rule of law. The rational application of these principles in a pure society will enrich our culture and civilization. We need to lose our ancient conception of kingship and of power. In our modern-day society, the kings should not receive their power from the gods, but from the people."³¹

³⁰ Lubis, *Indonesia*, 203-204.

³¹ Lubis, 209.

Mochtar Lubis' *Indonesia: Land Under the Rainbow* significantly contributes to Indonesian historiography because it presents a more nuanced and critical view of Indonesian history. His work challenges the Eurocentric bias found in historical writings by Western authors. Colonial and Eurocentric historians often asserted dominance in historical narratives, particularly concerning the colonial period. Mochtar critically addressed this issue in his book, explaining that the history written was not entirely truthful. He wrote:

“Many Dutch historians wrote of 300 or 350 years of Dutch colonization. Many Indonesians believed this, too. In reality, however, the colony called the Netherlands East Indies lasted no more than 30 to 35 years. It all depends on when and where one begins the year-count. The last independent Indonesian state, the kingdom of Aceh, was conquered by the Dutch in 1913. Even thereafter, intermittent resistance flared up on a smaller scale, and attacks against individual Dutchmen took place. When the Japanese overran Indonesia in 1942, Aceh had been colonized by the Dutch for 29 or 30 years at the most. On the other hand, the oldest Indonesian territory which fell into Dutch hands was a very small enclave in Ambon where the Portuguese had built a fort; it was captured by the Dutch and was colonized for about 337 years except for a short interregnum, when the British were in the Moluccas...in other places, Dutch colonial power was present only in the coastal areas. The interior of Kalimantan and West Irian, for example, and many other islands in the archipelago were hardly touched by the Dutch colonial administration.”³²

Mochtar also critiques the way the Indonesian Revolution is often romanticized, arguing that the post-colonial elites replaced the Dutch as the new oppressors. Mochtar critiques President Sukarno's shift from a revolutionary figure advocating for egalitarian principles to a leader who embodied authoritarian and neo-feudal characteristics. The phrase "counter-revolution" highlights that Sukarno's actions reversed the democratic and populist ideals of Indonesia's early independence movement. His adoption of excessive and symbolic titles reflects an increasing centralization of power and a cult of personality, signaling a departure from collective revolutionary values toward self-glorification. Sukarno's dismissal of the principle of *trias politica* (separation of powers) and his assertion that the judiciary should serve the revolution, rather than function independently, illustrates the erosion of democratic governance and the rule of law. This analysis underscores how revolutionary rhetoric was co-opted to justify autocratic rule under the guise of nationalism and ideological purity.

“In fact, his revolution was a counter-revolution, from the egalitarian revolutionary years to neo-feudalism, from Bung Karno (Brother Karno) to Bapak Sukarno

³² Lubis, 193-194.

(Father Sukarno). He grew positively reactionary with his ridiculously grandiose titles as 'Supreme Leader of the Indonesian Revolution', 'the Great Farmer', 'the Great Fisherman', and down to the most absurd statements, such as 'inflation is good as long as it is for the Indonesian revolution' (which drew enthusiastic applause from Indonesian economists gathered in the hall of the University of Indonesia). He abolished the trias politica principle and said that the judiciary must become a tool of the Indonesian revolution."³³

Mochtar also revises the dominant narrative by including the perspectives of ordinary Indonesians, particularly women, whose struggles against the central government's policies are often ignored in official histories. Mochtar was deeply disappointed with women's leadership, which had shifted from being the people's voice to merely conforming to their husbands' wishes—ultimately, women would disappear from history.³⁴ This approach is similar to Zinn's goal of bringing marginalized voices to the forefront of historical writing.

"A special mention must be made of the role of the Indonesian women in the nationalist movement and in the emancipation not only themselves but for the whole nation. The Indonesian women deserve appreciation for the very constructive role they played in the great national struggle, during the Dutch Colonial Period, the revolution, and afterwards, during the months of struggle which led to the downfall of Sukarno...of political parties and other organizations. The Anjiah, for example, was the organization of the Muhammadiyah. Others organized independently. The Aisjiah, the Thawalib in Minangkabau, Wanito Utomo, Puteri Indonesia, Wanito Katolik, Wanito Mulyo, Isteri Sedar, Taman Siswa, and Kaoetamaan Isteri Minangkabau are but a few of the women's organizations existing in Indonesia today. Raden Dewi Sartika was one of the first women leaders in West Java. Soewarsih Djojopoespito, one of the first women writers, was well known in Holland for her book, *Buiten het Gareel*. Rasuna Said in Sumatra was a fiery speaker, and she became deeply involved in politics. The Indonesian women held their first congress in December 1928, at which no less than thirty organizations were represented. The theme was the improvement of the position of Indonesian women. They complained that the Indonesian woman had no right to speak. She was chosen, married off, and divorced. The Isteri Sedar (Women Who Are Aware), with its first leader Soewarni, campaigned aggressively for women's liberation. It aimed for the achievement of human dignity and liberation for Indonesian women and fought against the abusive adat and religious practices, which denigrate the position of women in society. Maria Ulfah Subadio, Erna Djajadiningrat, Trimurti, S. Kartowijono, Jetty Noor, and Jo Paramita Abdurrachman were among the most active during and after the war for independence."³⁵

³³ Lubis, 183.

³⁴ Mochtar Lubis, "Wanita Indonesia Masih Terbelenggu," in *Mochtar Lubis Bicara Lurus Menjawab Pertanyaan Wartawan*, ed. Ramadan K.H. (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 1995), 49.

³⁵ Lubis, 206-207.

Conclusion

In examining Mochtar Lubis' *Indonesia: Land under the Rainbow* through the lens of Johan Huizinga's cultural history and Howard Zinn's political critique, it becomes evident that Mochtar challenges both the romanticization of tradition and the historical narrative crafted by the political elite. While Huizinga emphasizes the enduring influence of cultural traditions in shaping history, Mochtar critiques how such traditions, particularly in the Javanese aristocracy, have been manipulated to perpetuate authoritarianism and social inequality. This critique aligns with Zinn's notion that history is often written by the victors, silencing the struggles of the marginalized. Mochtar underscores the role of elites in exploiting cultural norms for political gain, reflecting his skepticism towards the dominant power structures of post-colonial Indonesia. His narrative offers a revisionist perspective on Indonesia's history, rejecting both colonial and post-colonial myths and highlighting the experiences of ordinary people, especially women and the rural poor, who are often overlooked in mainstream historical accounts. Through this, Mochtar reshapes Indonesian historiography, urging a more inclusive understanding that challenges colonial narratives and the post-independence elite's distortion of democratic ideals. Mochtar also leaves hope in history in the final part of his writing:

"There are many useful lessons to be learned from such a long history and a close, mutually shared history. The first, which is also most relevant for the World, is the need for self-restraint. The Portuguese and the Dutch came to Indonesia to trade for spices. But their voracity struck them with blindness toward the cultures and values and the human dignity of the Indonesians, and they wrought destruction and death, like men possessed by evil demons, to everything they touched. With global natural resources fast diminishing, we must learn this lesson and develop the wisdom of self-restraint in our relationship with our environment."³⁶

Mochtar Lubis is an Indonesian writer whose literary imagination brings us a critical understanding of and vision of history. History with critical imagination makes literature meaningful, and Mochtar has demonstrated his best in this craft. This aligns with the study conducted by Allan H. Pasco: "Raw facts of history can be revitalized with a human touch when historians have a better understanding of the fantasies, beliefs, fears, and loves of the people."³⁷

³⁶ Lubis, 209-210.

³⁷ Allan H. Pasco, "Literature as Historical Archive," *New Literary History* 35, no. 3 (2004): 389, <https://doi.org/10.1353/NLH.2004.0044>

Author Contribution Statement

All authors discussed the results and contributed to the final manuscript. All authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of this work.

Statement of Interest

All authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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