



JOURNALISM AND POLITICS IN INDONESIA

A critical biography of Mochtar Lubis (1922-2004)
as editor and author

David T. Hill

ROUTLEDGE



Journalism and Politics in Indonesia

Mochtar Lubis was one of Indonesia's best-known newspaper editors, authors and cultural figures, with a national, regional and international prominence that he retained from the early 1950s until his death in 2004. This book traces the major events in the life of Mochtar Lubis, a prism through which much of Indonesia's postindependence history can be interpreted.

This book is also the story of Indonesia in the second half of the twentieth century, when the people of the archipelago became an independent nation and when print media and the influential figures who controlled and produced newspapers, played a pivotal role in national political, educational and cultural life, defining Indonesia. Editors with strong personalities dominated the industry and sparred with the nation's leadership. Lubis was a vocal critic of the abuse of power and a thorn in the side of the country's first two presidents, becoming synonymous with combative journalism. Under both Sukarno and Suharto, Lubis had his newspaper closed down and was imprisoned.

As the only comprehensive biography of this towering figure, the book provides a unique insight into the history and development of media, literature and the political system in Indonesia.

David T. Hill is Professor of Southeast Asian Studies and Fellow of the Asia Research Centre on Social, Political and Economic Change at Murdoch University, Western Australia. His publications include *The Press in New Order Indonesia*, and (coauthored with Krishna Sen) *The Internet in Indonesia's New Democracy* (published by Routledge) and *Media, Culture and Politics in Indonesia*.

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**To the late Mochtar Lubis,
who would, no doubt, still see things differently;**

**To Atmakusumah Astraatmadja,
who has made much of this story possible;**

**To Harry Bhaskara,
who has helped me from the beginning.**

Three generations of Indonesian journalists.

We can only hope that our society will become more and more open, so that our historians and biographers can write honest histories and biographies from which our nation, and perhaps other nations, can learn where we go wrong and where we go right.

I believe that history and biographies written honestly can and will contribute to a better understanding of our own society's ills and mistakes, and that we may learn valuable lessons for the future of our society.

Mochtar Lubis
Hawai'i
January 1995

The art of biography is a despised art because it is an art of things, of facts, of arranged facts.

A.S. Byatt,
The Biographer's Tale Vintage,
London, 2001, p. 5

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Since this book draws on some of my previously published articles, I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to the editors of the publications in which the following appeared:

- 'Mochtar Lubis: The Artist as Cultural Broker in New Order Indonesia', *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs (RIMA)*, Vol. 21, No. 1, Winter 1987, pp. 54–88.
- 'Press Challenges, Government Responses: Two Campaigns in *Indonesia Raya*', in Paul Tickell (ed.), *The Indonesian Press: Its Past, its People, its Problems*, Annual Indonesian Lecture Series, No. 12, Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1987, pp. 21–38.
- 'Revolusi dan Kepemimpinan: Gambaran yang Berubah dalam Tiga Novel Mochtar Lubis' in Atmakusumah (ed.) *Mochtar Lubis: Wartawan Jihad*, Penerbit Harian Kompas, Jakarta, 1992, pp. 298–332.
- 'The Objectification of Mochtar Lubis: Personalizing the Process of Biography', in Angus McIntyre (ed.) *Indonesian Political Biography: In Search of Cross-Cultural Understanding*, Monash University Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Clayton, 1993, pp. 263–89.
- '"The Two Leading Institutions": Taman Ismail Marzuki and *Horison*' in Virginia Matheson Hooker (ed.) *Culture and Society in New Order Indonesia*, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1993, pp. 245–62.

‘Interpreting the Indonesian National Character: Mochtar Lubis and *Manusia Indonesia*’ in D.M. Roskies (ed.) *Text/Politics in Island Southeast Asia: Essays in Interpretation*, Ohio University Monographs in International Studies, Southeast Asia Series No. 19, Athens, Ohio, 1993, pp. 288–321.

‘Leadership, social order and democracy: The novels of a “secular modernizing intellectual”’, *Indonesia Circle*, No. 69, 1996, pp. 102–21.

David T. Hill
Fremantle
2 May 2009

Notes

- 1 *Referencing*: For clarity, repeat citations of books by Mochtar Lubis will be referred to by *title* (abbreviated if appropriate) and date, rather than the more common format of author and date.
- 2 *Indonesian names*: Indonesians may be known by single (e.g. Sukarno) or multiple names which may not include a ‘surname’ or ‘family’ name (e.g. Brentel Susilo). The initial (or sole) common name has been used for bibliographical purposes since this reflects the common Indonesian practice.
- 3 *Indonesian spelling*: The Indonesian language has used various spelling systems, with the remnants of former systems still reflected in some personal names. Where individuals appear to have indicated a preference for a particular spelling of their name, this is respected in the text. Readers who are not familiar with these previous orthographic systems, may note that ‘oe’ is commonly pronounced ‘u’, and ‘j’ was formerly pronounced ‘y’ (e.g. ‘Soemitro’ may be pronounced ‘Sumitro’; ‘Sjahrir’ is pronounced ‘Syahrir’). In quotations, the bibliography and endnotes, however, the spelling used in the source is maintained. Elsewhere, Indonesian terms (such as political organisations or newspaper names) follow the current post-1972 orthography.

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Part I

Early life

1 Introduction

Since Indonesia unilaterally declared Independence in 1945, the nation has experienced an – as yet unresolved – struggle between competing ideologies over the form and content of its political system, over the very idea of what Indonesia will become. Although on occasion marked by horrendous physical violence and military force, it has been most consistently a battle in the realm of ideas. Within this struggle to formulate the foundations of nationhood, the role of public intellectuals, artists, authors and cultural figures has been both highly critical and far more influential than may have been the case in much of the contemporaneous West. Since the 1950s, national politics in Indonesia has often been under the heel of the military, and political parties have been highly fluid, frequently unstable, and commonly dominated by a relatively narrow clutch of functionaries. Yet, cultural figures and public intellectuals, often at arm's length from, or at most on the fringes of, formal party politics and outside the corridors of academe, have articulated both dominant and oppositional ideologies in vibrant and sustained debate down through the decades. This clash of ideas is nowhere more evident than in the media, where such contestations are played out between concepts of nationalism and communalism, secularism and sectarianism, traditionalism and modernity, liberal democracy and authoritarianism.

This book examines the development of a secular modernising tradition within Indonesian journalism and media practice since 1945, through a critical evaluation of the life of one of its most significant and controversial exponents, Mochtar Lubis (1922–2004). This exploration of Mochtar Lubis's life and work – his social context, political base, those interests aligned with, and opposed to, him – tracks the transmission of democratic, secular and modernising values through the media and society during Indonesia's turbulent post-Independence history. Mochtar Lubis was not a party politician, power broker, or ideologue. Nor was he an academic or scholar. Yet, as an articulate cultural broker, award-winning author and internationally renowned journalist – a 'man of letters' in the broadest sense – he was one of the most influential spokespeople in the country, sustaining such public prominence for most of his adult life. He was one of only a handful of Indonesians of his generation whose ideas, sustained over decades, contributed to the identity of his nation, the character and practice of its media and the heights of its literature.

4 *Early life*

As editor of the feisty *Indonesia Raya* daily newspaper, he established his reputation as a symbol of press freedom in Indonesia, as the country's best-known and most opinionated editor, unflinching in his combative style and preparedness to criticise anyone from the president down. For nearly half a century, he was a vocal critic of the abuse of power. During both the presidencies of Sukarno and Suharto, his paper was closed down, and he was detained, under house arrest or in jail, on three separate occasions. This fate of being incarcerated by both governments in power during his active public life he shared with but a tiny handful of political figures. His preparedness to endure long detention for his principles elevated him to hero status amongst younger generations of journalists who regarded him as the embodiment of the crusade for 'freedom of the press'. As author of more than ten novels and short story collections, available in at least six world languages, Mochtar Lubis was Indonesia's most translated *litterateur* for over 15 years. His first major novel, *A Road with no End*, was widely regarded, by both Indonesian and foreign literary critics, as one of the high-points of Indonesian creative fiction of the time, establishing his reputation as one of the nation's great writers of fiction. His indictment of political corruption, the acclaimed *Twilight in Jakarta*, written during detention, was the first Indonesian novel published in English translation.

He was, however, a bundle of contradictions. A passionate, self-confessed 'democrat', his antagonism towards the Left made him a reluctant opponent of Suharto's incarceration of members of the Indonesian Communist Party. A committed nationalist, his outspoken manner and embrace of democratic liberalism was seen by many as more fitting in the West than in Indonesia. Critics interpreted his editorial bravado and public 'grand-standing' as ultimately exacerbating rather than reversing the erosion of press freedoms. Yet, he remained a passionate advocate for a free and democratic media – even while the very definition of what this might mean in the Indonesian context was hotly debated, as much by its supporters as by those who opposed it. During Indonesia's first half century, it was through such debates that the form of the Indonesian state, with its particular political system and institutions (like the media), was envisioned. Thus, Mochtar Lubis contributed significantly to the development of civil society and to the shaping of Indonesia's (still malleable) political system.¹

The tour de force

When Mochtar Lubis rose to the podium in the prestigious Jakarta Cultural Centre on 6 April 1977, few realised the impact his address would have on the national psyche. Standing over six feet tall, the fifty-five-year-old author, newspaper editor and former political prisoner towered over most of his compatriots literally as well as figuratively. He was ruggedly handsome and exuded a lithe sensuality. His audience was here to listen to one of the country's leading dissidents at the zenith of his career and public influence. It was a little over three years since his outspoken daily newspaper had been banned, and two years to the month after his release from subsequent political detention without trial. His public profile was undiminished, as the large crowd, exceeding capacity, attested. The audience,

which spilled out of the seating across the floor of the Arena Theatre, listened intently for more than two hours before responding with a battery of questions. That it was less than one month before the May 1977 General Elections only enhanced the *frisson* between the dissident critic and his audience.

Despite the rather subdued title – ‘The State of Present-day Indonesians, viewed from the Perspective of Culture and Human Values’ – the talk provoked a boisterous polemic both in the theatre that night and for weeks in the national press. As a measure of its impact, three decades later, it was still being cited in Indonesian weblogs and Internet sites – and by foreign observers – as the landmark analysis of the national character.² Couched in the provocative style that was Mochtar Lubis’s trademark, it was the opening fusillade in a debate, not a guarded academic study. When published as an 80-page monograph, it quickly became a best seller, with four reprints within three years.³ A quarter of a century later, it was still in print.

In his address, Mochtar Lubis relentlessly dissected the traits of the Indonesian national character. He identified rare positive qualities, describing Indonesians as artistic, gentle, peace-loving, quick to learn, dexterous, endowed with a sense of humour and patient to a fault. Nevertheless, such praise was submerged in a barrage of criticism. Pulling no punches, he slammed his fellow Indonesians as hypocritical, feudalistic, superstitious, weak-willed, indecisive and always evading responsibility. They had been made lazy and impecunious by their lush environment. He decried Indonesians’ ‘intellectual prostitution’, and the media’s submissiveness. Even rational, highly educated Indonesians, he claimed, often surrendered to mysticism at times of crises. Traditional beliefs in talisman and *mantera* had their modern equivalent in symbolic political slogans, which encouraged people to place faith in the oft-repeated ‘new magic formulae and slogans’ of the Suharto government rather than any tangible achievements. Mochtar Lubis was scathing of those in power who claimed to be servants of the people, defenders of justice and the rule of law; in practice, they were egotistical, malicious, power-hungry and avaricious. ‘As the years go by we allow this elite of ours to enrich itself exponentially by corruption and theft of the rights and property of the people’, he argued, stressing Gandhi’s dictum, ‘Earth provides enough for everyone’s need, but not for everyman’s greed’.⁴

To maximise the benefits from Indonesia’s natural resources, ‘we must control science and technology. But we must be careful’, he warned his audience, for ‘Science is power, and power is never neutral’.⁵ While attacking piecemeal approaches to the problems created by ‘economic development’, he lambasted the West (particularly America) for seeking ever-greater opulence without thought for the developing world. Common goals should be the alleviation of hunger, the provision of adequate clothing, housing, equal educational opportunities and the guarantee that neither life nor death would be too expensive, he urged. This was achievable if wealthy countries adopted a simpler lifestyle and within Indonesia if development shifted to small-scale appropriate technology and agricultural industries, producing food, the most vital commodity for the future. ‘The more we are drawn along in the currents of consumerism of the rich countries’, he exhorted,

6 *Early life*

‘the more we make ourselves dependent upon their aid, whether in the form of their capital or technology, the more we make our safety dependent upon their weaponry, the more we weaken our ability to protect our individuality as a nation and as people and the more we fall further and further into dependence upon them’. It was an impassioned call for his compatriots to strive for an Indonesia that was democratically based, rationally governed, environmentally responsible, internationally independent and proudly egalitarian.

The lecture, which became known simply as ‘The Indonesian Character’ [*Manusia Indonesia*] (or by the title of the English translation, ‘The Indonesian Dilemma’), was Mochtar Lubis’s intellectual *tour de force*, delivered with characteristic brashness and encapsulating his particular analysis of his society and its politics. Even more than in a newspaper editorial or a literary work, in this lecture he distilled for his audience in a single presentation the breadth of his concerns about the direction he saw society heading and the struggle that would be necessary to rectify it.

The polemic

Public lectures in the Jakarta Cultural Centre rarely generated much press coverage. Occasionally reported in the literary or cultural columns of the inner pages, few made the headlines or opinion pages. Yet, Mochtar Lubis’s talk triggered a wave of front-page reports, detailed summaries and a polemic that peppered the prestigious ‘features’ pages and ‘letters to the editor’ for weeks.⁶

Most respondents praised his frankness, recognising Mochtar⁷ for the iconoclast he was. Others sought to correct his assumptions. There were many critics. One aging Javanese aristocrat was offended by Mochtar’s criticisms of feudalism, his ‘misunderstanding’ of *noblesse oblige* and his representation of Javanese culture.⁸ Another chided Mochtar for blaming the nation as a whole for the shameful behaviour of those who had exploited their powerful bureaucratic and military positions for financial gain. Mochtar’s approach was likened to foreign ‘Orientalists’ whose depreciatory assessments of local people supported the colonial power. There was no justification, the correspondent argued, in thinking that ‘the attributes of the Indonesian character are different from the attributes of people anywhere else in the world’.⁹

Subservient behaviour in the community does not mean Indonesians are characteristically feudalistic, a respected social psychologist argued, for such behaviour arises from the pattern of power relations into which people are pressured, responding to structural causes. He argued that Mochtar had not looked beyond ‘those who, in their daily lives, had the opportunity to come directly face to face with influences coming in from outside, in relation to development and modernisation. They live in the large cities and consist of government officials, wealthy businesspeople, intellectuals and others of the elite, as well as their families’. Mochtar had also failed to recognise that the ‘vast majority of Indonesians are farmers, and workers who are industrious, persevering, resolute in the face of the challenges of nature, appreciating moral values, upholding religious

values and respecting honesty and courage'.¹⁰ Other respondents recognised that 'the common people could not possibly be corrupt, laze about, not take any responsibility and the like', arguing instead the political system was the root cause of the characteristics Mochtar described.¹¹

Mochtar's propensity for overstatement appeared partly intended to provoke debate, but to a degree public responses exposed biases inherent in Mochtar's perceptions of his society. He was a middle-class, urban, cosmopolitan professional, whose experience as an investigative journalist and editor had earned him considerable social capital and prestige, while also laying bare for him the excesses of the Indonesian political elite. A secular humanist, he believed in the power of the individual, striving for a common good, to bring about social change. Despite the strength of the criticisms he directed at his fellow Indonesians, his was a fundamentally positivist and individualist analysis of his nation's challenges. Not known for his subtlety or restraint, Mochtar's composite 'national character' was largely devoid of such variables as class, religion, ethnicity and gender.

Such an analysis – and its unproblematised assumptions about the character of Indonesians – contrasted starkly with more inquiring contemporaneous academic critiques of dominant Western perspectives on Asian societies.¹² While Mochtar was attacking the Indonesian 'straw man' in Jakarta, across the Straits of Malacca Indonesian-born Malaysian scholar Syed Hussein Alatas was critically dismantling the prejudices upon which Europeans had based their colonial 'myth of the lazy native' in Southeast Asia. The following year such ideas would be at the centre of intellectual debate globally with the publication in 1978 of Edward Said's seminal dissection of Orientalism. As is now well known, Said identified key elements in the view of 'the Orient' held by non-'Orientals', which propounded fundamental dogmas: that there is an absolute and systematic difference between the (positive) West and the (negative) Orient; that abstractions about the Orient were preferable to direct evidence; that the Orient was eternal, uniform, incapable of defining itself, and was therefore defined by the 'scientifically objective' West; that the Orient was to be feared and controlled.¹³ Said warned that, in large measure, the intelligentsia in 'the modern Orient ... participates in its own Orientalizing'.¹⁴

While the systematic difference in Mochtar's lecture is not between West and 'Orient'/Asia, such categories are assumed. More evident is an implied discontinuity between contrasts such as tradition and modernity, between superstition and rationality (while, as a secularist, Mochtar distinguishes between conventional institutionalised religion and mysticism without conveying any Islamic conviction). The approach is essentially ahistorical and abstract, and critics, such as Simon Philpott (in his study of the perpetuation of the 'lazy native' myth into post-World War Two American social science), continue to regard Mochtar as having reproduced 'the [colonial] characteristics of the "lazy native" in the present'.¹⁵

When measured against the insights of Alatas or Said, Mochtar Lubis does not emerge as a more capable intellect, but the lecture and its impact illustrates his undoubted strength as one of the great cultural translators of his generation in Indonesia, readily able to assimilate currents of thought abroad – often

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complex and highly nuanced – then distil, pare back and communicate them to his Indonesian constituency in a manner which is articulate, accessible, straightforward and often controversial.

Mochtar describes the goal of economic ‘modernisation’, for example, as a new ‘superstition’ propounded by Western economists, and argues that Indonesians must be able to define for themselves what is meant by ‘developed country’, ‘rich country’, ‘poor country’ (p.58). Yet, he advocates modernisation as ‘a certain mental attitude and rationality’ (p.61), implicitly contrasted with traditional superstitions. His overall analysis draws heavily on the modernisation theory of the 1960s, which inherited aspects of the intellectual tradition of Orientalism, positing that traditional societies required a cultural transformation to develop into modern states (modelled on a Western paradigm) in order to become capable of achieving First World levels of economic success. While adopting aspects of radical dependency theory to criticise the directions of Indonesia’s growth, Mochtar’s lecture retains undercurrents of this modernisation theory, arguing that a cultural transformation of negative (traditional) values and characteristics (such as the feudalistic mentality, superstition, avoidance of responsibility) will result in a more desirable rational (modern) culture.¹⁶ This perspective also locates culture (and largely ‘national character’) as autonomous of the political system and power relations which govern the community. Such perspectives pervade much of his life’s writing and his analysis of his society over the decades.

The context

Despite vocal detractors and fiery polemics, the resilience of Mochtar Lubis’s critical characterisation of the Indonesian national character suggests his ideas found fertile ground. From what stock might such ideas have sprung, and what then might have been his constituency? As journalist, writer and political commentator, Mochtar Lubis was strongly associated with those secular intellectuals aligned to the thinking of Indonesia’s first prime minister, Sutan Sjahrir.¹⁷ When asked in 1981 to describe his own ideological position, Mochtar responded hesitantly, ‘I would like to see democracy practised politically, socially, economically’, adding rhetorically after a pause, ‘democratic socialism?’¹⁸

In their insightful exploration of Indonesian political thinking, Feith and Castles regarded the ‘democratic socialists’ as one of the five major ‘streams of political thinking’ in Indonesia between 1945 and 1965.¹⁹ The Indonesian Socialist Party (PSI), founded by Sutan Sjahrir in February 1948 and banned in August 1960, was always small but was Indonesia’s most vocal promoter of democratic, liberal socialism.²⁰ Its members, generally urban and highly educated in the Western tradition, demonstrated their ‘concern for individual freedom, their openness to world intellectual currents and their rejection of obscurantism, chauvinism and the “personality cult”’.²¹ Although Mochtar was never a member of the Indonesian Socialist Party – or any other political party for that matter – he frequently acknowledged the influence of Sjahrir and the ‘democratic socialist’ stream upon him.²² He was widely regarded as a ‘Sjahririan’, although he was personally

uncomfortable being described as ‘liberal’, because this had become ‘a dirty word in Indonesia’ after Sukarno used it as a virtual synonym for ‘free-fight capitalist’ and ‘imperialist’.²³

Sjahrir, his colleagues and protégés were articulate and industrious in promoting their ideas and interpretations. Apart from Sjahrir’s major (and translated) works produced during his lifetime, his followers, many of whom rose to intellectual and political prominence, kept his reputation alive by publishing (or reprinting) his works and ideas.²⁴ Sjahrir’s followers, who extended well beyond PSI members, had an ongoing influence on the way they were perceived far beyond that determined by their own writings. They provided the *entrée*, the point of personal and intellectual contact, for numerous foreign scholars and journalists seeking to understand Indonesia.²⁵ Their view of Indonesia and its politics has been privileged in a mainstream tradition of English-language scholarship on Indonesian politics, which generally presents the democratic socialists positively.

George McTurnan Kahin, founder of the dominant liberal tradition of Indonesian political studies in America, was deeply impressed by Sjahrir, judging that ‘[f]ew Indonesians have done as much thoughtful writing about Indonesia and her problems as ... Sutan Sjahrir’.²⁶ Returning from Indonesian fieldwork in 1949 Kahin collaborated enthusiastically with members of Indonesia’s United Nations mission including Soedjatmoko, later ‘widely regarded as the most outstanding of the young intellectuals of Sjahrir’s Indonesian Socialist Party’, to promote the Indonesian Republic’s cause in America.²⁷ Foreigners and Indonesians recognised Kahin’s ‘principal identification ... with Sjahrir’ and his group both in the perspective of his study of the Revolution and in his personal relations.²⁸ Kahin’s view that Sjahrir and his group were ‘as progressive as they were practical and moderate’ and that they embodied the greatest potential for socioeconomic change, was shared by many of his students, including Australians John Legge and Herbert Feith.²⁹ The secular, democratic socialist intellectuals provided such Western academics with a sense of companionship, guidance and community.³⁰

Widespread questioning of liberalism (and especially ‘Cold War liberalism’) at the time of the Vietnam War changed perceptions of the Sjahrir group. A student of Kahin, Benedict Anderson, then pointed out the limitations of the Kahinian approach: ‘[The] liberal-democratic concerns of the Kahinians led to a pronounced focus on constitutional politics and parliamentary institutions. In a narrower sense, it was particularly the Westernized political leaders of Sjahrir’s Indonesian Socialist Party and Mohammad Natsir’s wing of the Islamic Masyumi party whose ideas and programs were treated with the most sympathy and respect’.³¹ The foreigners’ identification had been with these sections of the ‘postrevolutionary political and intellectual elite’³² (rather than groups with competing nationalist credentials or those dubbed ‘traditional’), a phenomenon Anderson traced to ‘the paradigm of American liberal culture [which had] shaped the contours of American research on Indonesia in the most basic sense’.³³

Taking up Anderson’s critique Australian Rex Mortimer, author of the seminal study of the Indonesian Communist Party, challenged liberal scholarship’s

'sympathies with Westernised elites of the pragmatic kind [and] its uncomfortable reaction to nationalism, militarism and novel communist strategies of development'.³⁴ The role of the modernising intellectuals as 'technocrats' within a US-fostered military government was a principal theme of David Ransom's analysis of American educational programs which had prepared the ground for Indonesia's big rightward turn of 1965–66.³⁵ The aim of funding organisations such as the Ford Foundation, operating in Indonesia throughout the 1950s and 1960s, was the creation of a 'modernizing elite' whom Ransom accused (along with the American 'modernizers') of being 'paid to protect' the resource-potential of Indonesia for foreign investment.³⁶

In a 1973 essay, R. William Liddle assessed the achievements of a 'group of power seekers, active in Indonesian politics since 1965, who have attempted to articulate and to act upon an ideology (although they would not call it that) of modernization'.³⁷ He dubbed his subjects 'secular modernizing intellectuals'. Their characteristics included a commitment to imposing their particular conception of 'modernisation' upon policy makers, 'their articulateness, their command of elite newspapers and their self-proclaimed role as conscience of the regime', and their 'inability to unite organizationally'. However, Liddle saw the primary characteristics of these nonstate actors as the 'intensity of their activities both in ideological formulation and dissemination and ... their willingness to act upon their beliefs'. It is this ideology and its intellectual antecedents which primarily occupied Liddle, who argued that though 'their views have dominated public political discussion since 1967 ... their influence – in the sense of success in achieving their objectives – has been minimal'.³⁸ Nonetheless, they comprised a significant component of what Aspinall identifies as the 'alegal opposition' to the New Order, 'bold and outspoken "exemplary individuals", especially artists, intellectuals, student activists, religious leaders and the like' who, as dissidents, were 'frequently disillusioned supporters of or participants in the regime or the coalition that established it'.³⁹ Despite Liddle's negative assessment of their political influence in the 1970s, the persistence of such secular modernizers contributed to the backbone of the reformist movement which ultimately succeeded in removing President Suharto from power, albeit after three decades.

Despite that achievement, the resurgence of Islam as a powerful political force after Suharto's fall in 1998 may be interpreted as a demonstration of the failure of secular modernism to take root beyond a core of urban intellectuals. Yet, the Indonesian media continues to be dominated nationally by those newspapers, radio stations and television channels which reflect the values of secular modernism. While their representation within parliament and their consequent political influence upon government may be moderated by a variety of Islamic forces within the community, it is the public intellectual proponents of the secular modernizing stream of Indonesian political thinking that have exercised the greatest influence on the shape of the nation's media. Liddle noted that one way these secular modernizing intellectuals attempted to influence national politics was as prominent and outspoken individuals, who declared themselves nonpartisan