

Negotiation national identity of characters in Mochtar Lubis's *Maut dan Cinta* a postcolonial study

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Article Info	Abstract
Keywords: ambivalence; hybridity; nationalism; identity negotiation; postcolonialism Article History Received: 2026-05-18 Reviewed: 2026-06-07 Accepted: 2026-08-15  License: CC BY-SA 4.0	This study aims to examine the negotiation of nationalism in Mochtar Lubis's novel <i>Maut dan Cinta</i> through Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial perspective. This study used a qualitative approach with content analysis methods. The data consist of quotes from narration, dialogue, monologues, and events in the novel that represent the process of negotiating the characters' nationalistic identity. Data were collected through intensive reading (close reading) of the entire novel, followed by identifying and marking excerpts for analysis. The data were analyzed in stages, namely through open coding to identify identity phenomena that emerged in the text, axial coding to connect excerpts with Bhabha's conceptual categories, and selective coding to formulate the subject's crisis and the patterns of negotiation of the characters' nationalistic identity based on the concepts of ambivalence, mimicry, hybridity, and third space. The results show that the characters' nationalistic identity is negotiated through two interrelated mechanisms. First, a subject crisis emerges when the character faces a conflict between personal interests and collective responsibility toward the nation, resulting in national identity being in an ambivalent and liminal condition. Second, the formation of the national subject takes place through the appropriation of colonial knowledge, mastery of foreign languages, communication technologies, international diplomacy, and journalistic practices that are transformed into strategies for national struggle. The findings affirm that nationalism in <i>Maut dan Cinta</i> is represented as a dynamic and hybrid identity continuously constructed through psychological, ideological, and cultural negotiations.
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INTRODUCTION

Nationalism in the context of a colonial society is no longer understood as a fixed and singular identity. Instead, it is a construct continuously shaped through various processes of encounter, confrontation, and negotiation between the colonial experience and the ever-changing reality of nationhood. Literature is a medium that records and represents the process of national identity formation (Chechi, 2024; Furqon & Busro, 2020; Diannita, 2021). Literary works are not only understood as autonomous aesthetic structures, but also as cultural products that represent various social realities, values, and worldviews of society, as well as serve to understand the process of national identity formation in a postcolonial context (Luxemburg et al., 1986; Foulcher & Day, 2008). Literary works not only present narratives of the nation's struggle but also reveal the inner struggles of characters when confronted with various conflicting values, ideologies, and interests.

Literary works serve as spaces where national values are negotiated, questioned, and reinterpreted in line with the dynamics of the time. One Indonesian author who has consistently addressed these issues is Mochtar Lubis. His novel, *Maut dan Cinta*, depicts nationalism as a space of negotiation, highlighting the tension between loyalty to ideology and the vulnerabilities of humanity. Its characters experience crises in determining their positions as individuals and

members of a nation in the process of building a national identity. This makes *Maut dan Cinta* a relevant text for analysis from a postcolonial perspective, particularly in understanding the crises and patterns of national identity formation. In postcolonial studies, Homi K. Bhabha views identity as dynamic and always in a process of negotiation. The concepts of third space, hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence, and identity negotiation indicate that postcolonial subjects never occupy an entirely stable identity. Identity negotiation continuously reconstructs itself through the interaction among various value systems that both converge and conflict with each other. This perspective allows nationalism to be understood not only as an ideology but also as the result of an ongoing process of subjectivity formation through experiences of crisis, conflict, and identity negotiation.

Colonialism is a complex and traumatic historical experience. The nation as an imagined community was born alongside the collapse of feudalism and the development of capitalism (Anderson, 1991; Pratomo et al., 2022; Salam, 2020; Loomba, 2020; Novianti, 2026). Colonialism not only oppressed the physical aspects of life but also dominated the social, economic, intellectual, psychological, and cultural aspects. Colonialism has implemented various strategies and methods to control colonized nations (Farhana et al. 2025). Furthermore, Sul-toni & Utomo (2021) and Chakkarath & Weidemann (2023) state that colonization occurs due to intentional elements. Political maneuvers through trade were first implemented in the colonies and later applied elsewhere. Such practices continue today, as evidenced by the actions of capitalists. There exists a contradictory cultural construction between colonial culture and that of Indigenous societies. The liminal space becomes an intermediary area where cultural negotiation and interaction take place, making intercultural boundaries blurred. This space enables symbolic resistance and interactions, thereby giving rise to patterns such as hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence in postcolonial culture (Lestari 2019; Munaris 2023).

Homi K. Bhabha explains several key concepts, namely ambivalence, mimicry, hybridity, and third space. Ambivalence refers to a situation in which a person has conflicting feelings or attitudes towards both local and colonial cultures. Mimicry means adopting the colonizer's culture but never being able to fully replicate it. Hybridity describes the amalgamation of local and foreign cultures, producing new identities (Bhabha, 1996; Amaruzaman et al., 2022; Berghuis et al., 2022; Park, 2024). Meanwhile, the in-between space provides a meeting place for various cultures that allows for the emergence of new meanings and identities to be created.

Several studies are relevant to this review, namely Yuniani, Yuwono, and Mardiana (2022) Conducted a Postcolonial Analysis in the Novel *Back to the Village* by Tri Budhi Sastrio's Works. The results show that in the novel *Kembali ke Desa* by Tri Budhi Sastrio, based on Edward Said's thinking from the political aspect, the Dutch government colonized Indonesia by utilizing Dutch collaborators such as village heads and indigenous women, including the character Putu Larasati, as shields for Dutch colonial politics. From a cultural perspective, the indigenous society is portrayed as upholding etiquette and politeness in behavior and speech, as seen through the character Putu Larasati. As for resistance, the indigenous community continues to fight for and defend rights that have been colonized by the Dutch. This is reflected in the character of Putu Larasati, who fights for her rights as a woman and upholds her family's dignity.

Second, the study by Nensilianti et al. (2025), titled *Identity Politics and Colonial Legacy in Leila S. Chudori's Novel Pulang: A Homi K. Bhabha Postcolonial Perspective*. The results show that the novel *Pulang* by Leila S. offers important insights into various aspects of the social, cultural, and psychological lives of its characters and provides in-depth reflections on the role of identity and life in the context of societal change. Chudori depicts the identity politics of Indonesian exiles as unstable, constantly questioned, and negotiated. Through the characters, it is apparent that identity is formed as a blend of two cultures, resulting in feelings of doubt and alienation in the characters. Furthermore, the acts of imitation or copying by the characters in this work do not lead to full recognition but, rather, reinforce their position as different individuals or "the other." This study also shows that the impact of the colonial period is still felt today through forms of limiting and repressive power by the government. Accordingly, this novel functions as both a form of criticism and an act of resistance to the dominant narratives regarding the concepts of nationalism and history.

Third, the study by Novianti (2026) is entitled *Relations of Power and the Formation of Indigenous Identity in the Novel Bumi Manusia* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer: A Homi K. Bhabha

Postcolonialism Study. The results show that the influence of colonial culture has never fully produced equality but has instead reinforced racial hierarchies. Hybridity creates a dual identity that exists in the in-between space (third space), while ambivalence can be seen in the acceptance and rejection of colonial values. Amid an unbalanced power structure, the local characters also display symbolic resistance through mastery of knowledge and economic autonomy. Similarly, products obtained through cooperation with partners demonstrate efforts to increase local independence and empowerment. *Bumi Manusia* represents colonialism as unstable and perpetually open power. Similarly, products obtained through cooperation with local parties possess a dynamic identity from a postcolonial perspective.

Fourth, the study by Farhana et al. (2025) is entitled Colonialism and Nationalism in the Novel *Bumi Manusia* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. The results show that there are various forms of colonial actions, including acts of humiliation perpetrated by colonizers against the colonized to degrade and insult the dignity of the colonized people. Moreover, everything related to the colonized is considered disgraceful in the eyes of the colonizers. The forms of resistance by the colonized against the colonizers are admirable, not by waging war with weapons or other means. The colonized struggle by studying in European schools and continuing to uphold their ancestral culture. The colonized engage in acts of resistance by publishing various written works.

Based on a review of previous research, there remains a gap in studies on the process of negotiating national identity that centers on the subjectivity of the characters. Earlier research has tended to explain nationalism through heroic acts, political consciousness, or ideological conflicts of the characters, but has yet to elaborate on how a crisis of subjectivity becomes the starting point for the formation of national identity in Indonesian novels, particularly *Maut dan Cinta* by Mochtar Lubis. Therefore, this study offers a different focus by using the subject's crisis as an entry point to understand the pattern of the formation of character nationalism. The novelty of this study lies in its shift in analytical focus. While previous studies have used Homi K. Bhabha's theory to explain hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence, or colonial representation, this research instead centers on the process of crisis and the pattern of national subject formation through identity negotiation. With this focus, the study is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of postcolonial studies, particularly in the application of the concepts of subjectivity and identity negotiation in reading Indonesian literature, while also enriching the study of Mochtar Lubis's novel *Maut dan Cinta*, which has rarely been examined from this perspective.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a content analysis method oriented toward the interpretation of textual meaning. Theoretically, this research refers to the concepts of Homi K. Bhabha's theory. This framework is used to understand the negotiation of character identity that emerges from a crisis of subjectivity, which subsequently forms the character's identity patterns as a process of negotiation between colonial legacies, local values, and modernity. The data object is not manipulated; rather, emphasis is placed on naturalistic observation and interpretation (Mappasere et al., 2019). The data consist of narrative quotations, dialogues, monologues, or events that represent the process of negotiating the character's nationalistic identity. The data source is the novel *Maut dan Cinta* by Mochtar Lubis, 2018 edition, republished by Yayasan Obor Indonesia, which has 304 pages. Data were collected through intensive (close) reading of the entire novel, followed by the identification and marking of quotations to be analyzed. Data analysis was conducted in stages, namely: (1) open coding to identify manifestations of identity in the text, (2) axial coding to link quotations with Bhabha's conceptual categories, and (3) selective coding to formulate the subjectivity crisis and the character's nationalist identity negotiation patterns.

Quotations are categorized as a subject crisis when characterized by identity instability or the character's internal conflict, doubt about self-identity, shifts in ideological stance, or contradictions between thoughts, speech, and action. Conversely, quotations are categorized as patterns of national subject formation if the character demonstrates the process of developing national consciousness or transforming their identity toward the national subject. This is indicated by the emergence of national awareness, alignment with the national struggle, rejection

of colonial domination, and the formulation of identity as an ideological choice. Data were analyzed by positioning the formation of the national subject as a process unfolding across three analytical dimensions: identity position, negotiation mechanisms, and the results of these negotiations. Identity position refers to the subjective status or placement of a character when facing a particular event. This position reflects how a character understands their identity in the context of their relationship with the nation, colonialism, and personal experience. In this study, the characters' identity positions include journalist, intelligence agent, revolutionary fighter, fragmented subject, and national intellectual, each providing a distinct perspective on nationalism.

The negotiation mechanism explains how identity formation encompasses mimicry, ambivalence, hybridity, and third space. This mechanism elucidates how one constructs and asserts their identity when confronted with colonial power, the influence of modernity, traumatic experiences, and intercultural interactions. Furthermore, the outcome of the characters' negotiation process reveals the new identity formed as a result of the agreements reached. Outcomes identified in the negotiation process include strengthening national identity, a shift in the direction of the struggle, emergence of dual-faceted nationalism, formation of a hybrid national subject, and failure to maintain certain identity positions. Data validity was reinforced through theoretical triangulation, applied at the interpretative level of findings in accordance with Bhabha's concepts. Additionally, the interpretation of the quotations is linked to nationalism studies and previous research on Indonesian postcolonial literature. Theoretical triangulation supplements the theoretical foundation and serves as a mechanism to confirm interpretative consistency, prevent singular readings of the data, and strengthen the validity of research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Crisis of the subject in the formation of nationalism

The crisis of the subject in the formation of nationalism represents an initial stage that illustrates how the protagonist's national identity is shaped through a process of negotiation triggered by various experiences of crisis. This section focuses on identifying the forms of subject crisis experienced by the protagonist as well as the contested positions of identity. This is illustrated in the following excerpt.

Ali Nurdin terkejut dan tiba-tiba kehebatan dan kedahsyatan pukulan nasib membantingnya lagi. Jika pesawat Belanda tidak diserang tadi, maka dia akan membawa Nani dalam pesawat itu dan mereka berdua akan terbang ke Singapura. Dan sekarang dia diminta berangkat, meninggalkan Nani yang masih belum sadar di rumah sakit. Dapatkah dia meninggalkan Nani demikian? Tidakkah kini harus mendampingi dan menjaga Nani hingga dia sembuh kembali? Dia akan menjawab bahwa dia tidak dapat berangkat, tapi tiba-tiba timbul pikiran lain dalam kepalanya. Ini revolusi, ini peperangan (Lubis, 2018, p. 349).

This quotation shows that Ali Nurdin experiences a subject crisis when he is confronted with the clash between his personal identity as Nani's lover and his national identity as a journalist involved in the revolutionary struggle. Ali has an emotional attachment to Nani, who is in critical condition due to the Dutch attack. However, at the same time, as part of the revolutionary struggle, he receives orders to immediately carry out his duties in the intelligence service. This situation places Ali in a liminal position, in the space between two equally legitimate identity demands. The questions that arise in Ali's mind indicate that his national identity has not yet emerged as a fully formed awareness but is instead experiencing a fracture due to the conflict between love, loss, and duty to the nation. The condition experienced by Nurdin represents ambivalence as the main mechanism of the subject's crisis. He does not directly choose one identity; rather, he first experiences a tug-of-war between his desire to maintain his personal life and the demands of the revolution. Such ambivalence indicates that Ali's nationalism does not function as an ideology that automatically erases personal interests but is always negotiated through emotional experience.

The subject crisis is also evident in another character, Umar Yunus, who undergoes a shift in nationalistic orientation due to the allure of the comfortable life offered by another country, as illustrated in the following quote:

Kalau mengikuti kata hati sendiri, saya lebih suka tinggal di tanah air. Berjuang bersama rakyat. Memikul senjata bersama pemuda-pemuda kita. Di sini ..." dan tangannya berputar menunjuk ke halaman besar di luar beranda belakang yang penuh dengan bunga-bunga indah, menunjuk pada perabotan di dalam beranda yang serba mewah, termasuk Rita Lee yang sedang memasak di atas sebuah kompor listrik kecil di ujung beranda, termasuk makanan mewah yang terhidang di atas meja, termasuk seluruh rumah, termasuk kedua mobil di halaman depan, termasuk seluruh kota Singapura, yang meskipun, masih menderita luka-luka perang, tetapi telah mulai bangun kembali, siap memberikan kesenangan dan kemewahan bagi siapa yang berani dan pandai merebutnya. "Di sini kita kehilangan semangat revolusi. Kehilangan clan revolusi. Kehilangan setia kawan, persatuan, kegairahan berjuang," dia mengeluh, menyatakan penyesalannya (Lubis, 2018, p. 45).

The above quotation illustrates how material security, comfort, and better opportunities gradually erode Umar Yunus's idealistic struggle. Umar Yunus displays a stark contrast compared to Sadeli's steadfast attitude. This is a form of absolute national pride. As a captain suspected of using revolutionary funds for personal interests and his relationship with Rita Lee, Umar experiences an identity crisis as a fractured and incomplete postcolonial subject. In this context, the subject experiences uncertainty about his identity: on one hand, he still has memories and attachments to his nation, but on the other, he is driven to abandon the struggle for personal interests. The choice to betray his nation shows that nationalism is not fixed and is easily influenced by personal desires, power, and individual interests. Umar Yunus's identity position is presented as a national subject in a divided state. Umar still possesses an awareness to fight alongside the people and maintain loyalty to the revolution, but at the same time, he enjoys the comfort, luxury, and stability of life offered by Singapore. This demonstrates that his national identity is no longer whole because it stands between conflicting goals, namely, commitment to the national struggle and his own personal interests.

Umar Yunus's negotiation mechanism takes place through ambivalence as he repeatedly weighs the idealism of the revolution against the desire for a comfortable, safe, and prosperous life. Singapore becomes a third space that brings together the values of nationalism and material modernity, thus requiring Umar Yunus to renegotiate the meaning of struggle and his position as part of the nation. The results of this negotiation show that he has not yet achieved a stable national identity. In fact, the crisis he experiences illustrates nationalism as an identity that is continuously contested and easily influenced by changes in social space, life experiences, and individual interests. From this quotation, it is clear that Umar Yunus's nationalism does not manifest as established loyalty but as a process of negotiation that exposes the fragility of the boundary between loyalty to the nation and the lure of personal interest.

Dia bertanya pada dirinya—jika engkau dihadapkan pada dua pilihan: menyelamatkan dirimu atau melakukan kewajiban yang membawa maut, yang mana engkau pilih? Engkau akan lari? Atau akan terus melakukan kewajibanmu dan mati? Dirinya di dalam ragu menjawab. Ia mengetahui bahwa apa yang dilakukannya di waktu yang lampau, seperti menyerang markas Jepang untuk merebut senjata, bertempur melawan marinir Belanda di rawa-rawa pantai Sumatera, adalah perbuatan-perbuatan tanpa pertimbangan dingin antara melakukan kewajiban yang membawa maut dan melarikan diri. Apalagi, dalam kedua kejadian itu tak ada keharusan memilih demikian. Akhirnya, Sadeli menghela napas karena dia tak dapat memutuskan dengan pasti pilihan mana yang mesti dilakukannya. Kemudian, karena tak dapat lagi menahan kegelisahannya, dia membuka mata dan berpaling pada David Wayne. "Dave, pernahkah engkau merasa takut?" Tanpa membuka mata, David Wayne menyahut, "Sering ... mengapa engkau bertanya?" "Karena tiba-tiba aku merasa, aku tidak dapat menentukan sekarang, apa yang harus aku lakukan jika dihadapkan pada pilihan, melakukan kewajiban tetapi mati, atau melarikan diri tapi selamat!" (Lubis, 2018, p. 258).

This quotation illustrates Sadeli's identity crisis from a psychological and existential perspective, which differs from the identity crisis experienced by Umar Yunus. Sadeli's inner struggle does not focus on pleasure or comfort in life, but rather on his courage and loyalty to the revolution. Sadeli's questions in this quotation indicate a fracture in his national identity. While

the revolutionary struggle was previously conducted spontaneously and heroically, Sadeli now begins to question the meaning of sacrifice and the limits of his loyalty to the nation. This awareness marks the onset of an identity crisis because he no longer has a strong conviction in his ideological choices. He begins to feel doubt, fear, and uncertainty in determining his position between his instinct for self-preservation and his national duty.

Sadeli's identity position is represented as a national subject shaped by his experiences as a revolutionary fighter. When faced with the choice between preserving his own life or carrying out duties that risk death, this identity begins to fracture. Sadeli no longer sees himself as a fighter always certain of sacrifice but rather as a human being with fear and a survival instinct. The negotiation mechanism evident in Sadeli unfolds through his ambivalence between the ideological demands of the revolution and the human impulse to avoid dying. Sadeli's internal struggle demonstrates that loyalty to the nation is not absolute but is continually renegotiated when confronted with existential experiences that threaten life.

Sadeli menarik napas. Dapatkah dirinya memperpanjang waktu tinggal di Macau? Untuk lebih mengenal Maria. Berhakkah dia berbuat demikian? Memberi kesempatan kepada benih cinta yang mulai tumbuh untuk mengejar panas matahari, Kasih Maria? Pikirannya mengatakan tidak! Dia tak berhak berbuat demikian. Dia adalah seorang agen rahasia, seorang mayor dinas intelijen Republik Indonesia. Kewajibannya yang pertama ialah pada revolusi bangsanya. Untuk ini dia mesti bersedia mengorbankan nyawanya. Dan kini ada kemungkinan bahagia, kasih dan cinta dengan Maria. Kini Sadeli dapat memahami mengapa Umar Yunus dapat tergoda untuk melakukan apa yang telah dilakukannya. Hati manusia adalah sesuatu yang pelik yang kerap kali tidak dapat dikuasai oleh manusia sendiri (Lubis, 2018, p. 270).

This quotation illustrates the position of Sadeli's national subjectivity beginning to fracture between his identity as an intelligence agent bound by the obligations of the revolution and as an individual who is starting to experience an emotional attachment to Maria. This position places Sadeli in a crisis between love as a personal need and nationalism. Here, the mechanism of negotiation is evident through the ambivalence between the desire to live a personal life and loyalty to the Revolution. Macau becomes a third space where Sadeli renegotiates the meaning of sacrifice, as this space brings him face-to-face with human experiences he had previously dismissed due to ideological demands.

The subject's crisis becomes increasingly apparent when Sadeli begins to understand Umar Yunus's feelings. "Hati manusia merupakan sesuatu yang kompleks dan sering kali tidak bisa dikendalikan sepenuhnya oleh manusia itu sendiri." This statement reflects the outcome of his negotiation: national identity cannot be separated from the emotional experiences that shape the character's subjectivity. The subject's crisis does not erase Sadeli's commitment to the struggle, but it changes the way he interprets nationalism. Sadeli continues to carry out the tasks of the revolution; this decision arises from his awareness of human complexity, not solely from ideological compliance. This quotation clarifies that Sadeli's nationalism is represented as an identity formed through the continual negotiation between collective responsibility and human needs. This demonstrates that the national subject from a postcolonial perspective is always dynamic and never entirely stable.

Pattern of national subject formation

The pattern of national subject formation in this context explains the mechanism of negotiating figures as a strategy of resistance. It positions the figure not as a subject experiencing inner conflict but as a subject shaped through an a priori process and transformation as a strategy of resistance.

Kini segala kemahiran membunuh yang diajarkan orang Jepang mereka pergunakan untuk membunuh orang Jepang. Segala kebencian dan rasa sakit hati, dendam dan kemarahan terhadap keganasan Jepang selama masa pendudukan kini meledak di tengah malam itu. Tiap tembakan dan tusukan adalah balasan terhadap penghinaan, tempelangan, tendangan, perkosaan pada wanita Indonesia, kezaliman pada romusha Indonesia yang ditipu dan

diperas, yang tulang-belulanganya berserakan di pulau-pulau Lautan Teduh dan di Asia Tenggara. Malam itu pula pertama kali Sadeli membunuh manusia (Lubis, 2018, p. 8).

This quotation demonstrates that Sadeli was shaped by the transition from being a subject within the Japanese colonial power structure to becoming a national subject capable of assuming the role of a resistance actor. This indicates that Sadeli's national identity was not formed solely through the rejection of colonialism but through a process of reconstructing colonial legacies into resources for struggle. The experience of colonial violence and the military knowledge acquired during the Japanese occupation became part of his development as a national fighter. Sadeli's strategy of appropriating colonial elements became his mode of negotiation in forming his national subjectivity. Proficiency in killing, using weapons, and techniques of violence, which had previously served as instruments of Japanese control, were renegotiated and redirected as tools of resistance against Japanese power. This pattern illustrates a form of subversive mimicry, as revealed in Bhabha's concept, namely, when the colonized subject not only imitates the colonial system but also adopts and transforms the function of colonial knowledge for the sake of his own struggle. The experience of collective suffering among the Indonesian people served as the foundation for constructing a shared narrative that reinforced Sadeli's position within the national community. Colonialism did not merely result in oppression; paradoxically, it also provided space for the emergence of resistance strategies. The outcome of negotiating this pattern resulted in Sadeli's national identity as a fighter subject shaped by the ability to transform the colonial legacy into political and military strength. The pattern of forming Sadeli's nationalist subjectivity was built through a process of negotiation with colonial power—appropriating, modifying, and redirecting colonial apparatuses into strategies for national liberation.

Tuan sedang berperang melawan Belanda. Di Singapura banyak singgah pasukan Belanda. Di Singapura juga ada sebuah tangsi tempat menampung orang-orang Belanda yang selama perang dibawa kerja paksa ke Siam dan Birma. Kami tak dapat mengizinkan tuan-tuan menyerang mereka di sini. Sadeli tertawa kecil. "Ah, jika itu yang tuan khawatirkan, senangkan hati tuan. Tujuan saya kemari bukan untuk menyerang orang Belanda ataupun tangsi mereka. Meskipun kami tahu di tangsi itu mereka melakukan latihan-latihan militer. Dan kemudian mereka dikirim untuk berperang ke Indonesia. Inspektur Hawkins mengangkat tangannya. Saya datang ke mari untuk kemenangan revolusi kami. Saya datang ke mari membawa gula. Hasil penjualan gula kami perlukan untuk dana perjuangan kami di luar dan di dalam negeri kami. Kami harus menjelaskan kepada dunia mengapa kami berperang melawan Belanda (Lubis, 2018, p. 32).

Based on this quotation, Sadeli's negotiation pattern is one of diplomacy, representation, and third-space strategies. This means that Singapore becomes a site of negotiation, where Sadeli interacts with British colonial authorities without relinquishing his national identity. Sadeli did not choose armed confrontation but instead established the legitimacy of the struggle through diplomatic language, the sugar trade as a source of revolutionary financing, and conveying narratives regarding the reasons Indonesia fought against the Dutch to the international community. This strategy demonstrates that the formation of the national subject is achieved not only through physical resistance but also through the ability to articulate national interests in the international arena. Sadeli did not merely preserve national identity outside the territory of Indonesia; in fact, he forged it through practices of negotiation, communication, and representation, so that nationalism emerged as an adaptive and strategic identity, gaining recognition through interaction with global actors. Such an attitude is in line with Bhabha's view that national identity is formed through narratives of struggle that are continuously created and negotiated. In this quotation, Sadeli can be said to embody a national subject because he brings the ideas, interests, and objectives of the Indonesian revolution to the international stage.

Dinas intelijen memerlukan pengetahuan Anda, terutama kemahiran Anda dalam berbahasa asing. Sadeli memang terkenal di antara kawan-kawannya sebagai seorang yang gemar mempelajari bahasa asing. Di samping bahasa Belanda, Inggris, Prancis, dan Jerman, serta bahasa Jepang, ia pun pandai bahasa dan huruf Cina (Lubis, 2018, p. 13).

Kiriman senjata dan alat-alat radio telah sampai dengan selamat pelayaran tak diganggu oleh musuh. Tiga kapal gula telah masuk pula. Sadeli merasa gembira. Dia telah melakukan hubungan radio rahasia dengan kolonel Suroso. AURI telah dihubungi (Lubis, 2018, p. 163).

Di dalam pesawat terbang menuju Hong Kong, Sadeli membawa kawat yang diterimanya kemarin dari David Wayne. "Anak lahir, harap datang cepat, Dave. Sadeli mengerti bahwa yang dimaksud Dave adalah pesawat Catalina yang diperlukan (Lubis, 2018, p. 230).

Ali Nurdin menyampaikan kepada Sadeli kawat-kawat sandi yang diterimanya dari Yogyakarta. Sebuah memerintahkan Sadeli meneruskan usaha mendapat senjata dan Jenderal Kuomintang. Memerintahkan Sadeli untuk membeli perlengkapan komunikasi radio dan secepatnya membawanya ke Indonesia. Sadeli paham arti kedua perintah itu. Pikirannya ini diperkuat oleh laporan mengenai gerak-gerik kapal laut dan pesawat udara militer Belanda yang meningkat sekali sejak bulan Mei dan selama bulan Juni (Lubis, 2018, p. 299).

Several of the quotations above indicate the position of the figures that the national struggle was carried out not only by fighters on the battlefield, but also by figures capable of maneuvering in the realm of politics and modern technology. These quotations demonstrate that the formation of the national subject takes place through the strategies of mimicry, hybridity, and a third space. Mimicry is evident when Sadeli master's foreign languages, intelligent communication systems, radio technology, ciphers, and international diplomacy, all of which are products of colonial modernity. Sadeli does not utilize such mimicry to reinforce colonial power but instead renegotiates it as an instrument of the national struggle. Hybridity is formed through the encounter between Indonesian nationalist values and global knowledge and technology systems, while the third space is realized through transnational spaces such as Singapore, Hong Kong, and international networks that enabled Sadeli to build cooperation, obtain logistical support, and broaden the legitimacy of the Indonesian revolution. This pattern shows that national identity is shaped by Sadeli's ability to adapt, modify, and redirect modern devices into strategies for national struggle. This reinforces Sadeli's nationalism, which is not built through the rejection of global modernity, but through his ability to leverage language, technology, diplomacy, and intelligence systems as means to strengthen the revolution. These findings show that the pattern of the formation of the national subject in Mochtar Lubis's novel *Maut dan Cinta* occurs through a process of negotiation that produces an adaptive, professional, and hybrid national identity for the Indonesian people. Nationalism is represented as the ability to connect national interests with the dynamics of the international world without losing sight of the struggle for independence.

In contrast to Sadeli, the pattern of national subject formation for the character Ali Nurdin can be seen in his perspective as a journalist regarding the encounter between the two cultures of Indonesia and foreign countries, as depicted in the following excerpt:

"Saya mulai merasa betapa pentingnya peranan uang di negeri asing ini," kata Ali Nurdin padanya. "Lain dari di negeri kita. Di Indonesia kita dapat bekerja tanpa uang. Semua orang menolong kita. Tetapi di sini hubungan-hubungan saya dengan wartawan-wartawan saja memerlukan dana khusus. Mereka selalu mengajak kita makan dan minum. Kita tidak dapat menjadi tamu mereka setiap kali. Malu kita. Dan lama-lama, jika kita hanya makan dan minum dari mereka, hubungan baik bisa putus. Saya juga bermaksud untuk sekali sebulan menyiarkan semacam 'newsletter' di sini dan ke luar negeri mengenai revolusi kita. Tapi kandas karena tak ada uang (Lubis, 2018, p. 37).

This data illustrates Ali Nurdin adapting to the professional culture of a foreign country, which situates social relations and journalistic activities within an economic framework, without relinquishing his orientation toward the national struggle. Ali Nurdin observes that social life and working relationships in a foreign country are vastly different compared to conditions in Indonesia. Ali explains that in Indonesia, one can still work without being entirely dependent on money, as Indonesian society is accustomed to a culture of mutual assistance and cooperation. Conversely, abroad, professional relationships—including interactions with foreign journalists—require financial support to maintain such connections. This perspective demonstrates the protagonist's awareness that the encounter between cultures compels him to understand a new

social system beyond the national identity he knows. The pattern of negotiation employed by Ali Nurdin in forming his national subjectivity takes place through adaptive strategies for international communication and diplomacy practices. Ali Nurdin's efforts to build networks with foreign journalists and plan the publication of a newsletter about the Indonesian revolution demonstrate how nationalism is negotiated through information production and the shaping of international public opinion. Modern communication practices are not positioned as a form of passive adaptation to the global system but as a means of broadening the legitimacy of Indonesia's struggle at the international level.

Ali Nurdin's national identity is that of a communicative national subject who builds nationalism by connecting national interests with the global communication sphere. His nationalism is manifested not only through involvement in the revolution but also through mastery of communication strategies, media diplomacy, and the construction of Indonesia's image before the international community, so that national identity emerges as a result of negotiation between national values and the dynamics of modern communication. Bhabha states that national identity is not fixed; culture never exists in isolation but always interacts and negotiates with other cultures. This process leads to cultural change connected to identity formation. Mimicry is evident in the adoption of international communication patterns and modern propaganda strategies, while ambivalence is reflected in the protagonist's unease when idealistic national values confront the realities of global capitalism. Ali Nurdin is ultimately represented as a hybrid postcolonial national subject who continues to uphold Indonesia's national identity while simultaneously internalizing modern international logic to sustain the revolution's existence in the eyes of the world.

Aku ingin sekali mendapat tugas ke luar negeri, sambil aku belajar memperluas pengetahuanku dan kemahiranku sebagai wartawan. Ke Eropa atau Amerika. Untuk dua atau tiga tahun. Kemudian kita pulang, dan aku akan bekerja sepenuhnya menjadi wartawan. Jika mungkin, aku ingin menerbitkan surat kabar sendiri. Menjadi wartawan kantor berita cukup menarik dan merupakan sekolah yang baik untuk mengumpulkan pengalaman. Tetapi aku merasa hanya dapat berkembang menjadi wartawan sesungguhnya jika bekerja di surat kabar. Aku akan menjadikan surat kabarku alat untuk mendidik rakyat kita supaya mengetahui hak-haknya sebagai rakyat merdeka. Jangan sampai mereka ditipu oleh orang yang mengaku jadi pimpinan rakyat..... Singkatnya, aku ingin membuat surat kabar sebagai sebuah alat untuk memodernisasikan manusia dan masyarakat Indonesia (Lubis, 2018, p. 333)

Next, this excerpt illustrates that the negotiation pattern employed by Ali Nurdin is characterized by a strategy of appropriating modernity for Islam. Ali's desire to study journalism in Europe or America was not to fully adopt Western values; instead, he sought to acquire knowledge and skills that could then be adapted to the needs of Indonesian society. Knowledge, mass media, and modern journalistic practices were negotiated. From Bhabha's perspective, this process reflects the formation of national identity through a space of negotiation (third space), wherein Western knowledge is not wholly accepted but is reworked according to societal needs. The pattern of national subject formation is also evident in the transformation of Ali Nurdin's professional orientation. Becoming a journalist is not understood as a personal occupation but as an act of service to the Indonesian nation. Ali Nurdin's aspiration to establish his own newspaper indicates a shift in subject position from an individual pursuing a career to a social agent seeking to build national consciousness. Ali Nurdin's goal to modernize Indonesia and its people demonstrates that national identity is constructed through a synthesis of modernity and national interests. Modernization is not an imitation of the West; rather, Ali utilizes modern knowledge to strengthen the Indonesian nation. In Bhabha's framework, this condition is called hybridity. National identity is formed in a hybrid manner, that is, by blending global experiences with the values and needs of the nation. Western knowledge is rearticulated as an instrument of emancipation for Indonesian society, not as a new form of dependence on the colonial culture.

Saya ingin bicara dengan Bapak. Dalam pertempuran hari ini saya mendapat pelajaran besar. Pengorbanan Yahya mengubah jiwa saya. Saya ingin terus berjuang bersama Bapak. Sebagai

apa saja. Kini saya sadar kesalahan dan dosa saya pada revolusi. Bapak benar. Semua yang dapat saya serahkan kepada Bapak akan saya serahkan kembali (Lubis, 2018, p. 210).

This quotation reflects Umar Yunus's regret over the betrayals committed against his people. Umar's transformation from a would-be traitor into a fighter who rejoins the nationalist ranks illustrates that nationalism is often forged through a process of negotiation rife with pain, shame, and failure. He realizes that, aside from his national identity, he has no permanent place in the world of the postcolonial era. His demotion and return to intelligence duties signify a form of "re-translation" of his identity, from an individual of selfish disposition to someone who recognizes his ties to a larger community. The formation of Umar Yunus's national subjectivity follows a pattern of ideological consciousness transformation born from revolutionary experience. The awareness of his mistakes and the prayers he offers for the revolution mark the end of a more self-centered orientation and the emergence of one more oriented toward the collective interests of the nation. In Bhabha's framework, this moment represents ambivalence as a phase of transitional identity—the point at which Yunus leaves behind his old, uncertain position and constructs a new one as part of the national struggle. This ambivalence is not seen as a weakness; rather, it is understood as a process that enables the formation of a more mature national identity.

The research findings show that the negotiation of nationalistic identity in Mochtar Lubis's novel *Maut dan Cinta* takes place through two interrelated stages. The crisis of the subject becomes the initial phase when the characters experience instability of identity as a result of the clash between personal interests and collective responsibility toward the nation. Ali Nurdin experiences a crisis after losing his beloved; Sadeli faces fear, love, and a moral dilemma in carrying out the tasks of the revolution; while Umar Yunus experiences a split between the idealism of the struggle and the temptations of a comfortable life in Singapore. Therefore, from Homi K. Bhabha's perspective, such conditions indicate that national identity is not a fixed and essential category but rather an identity that is always in the process of negotiation through ambivalence and liminality. Traumatic experiences, spatial displacements, and changes in social conditions place the characters in the third space, where the meaning of nationalism is once again questioned, negotiated, and rearticulated. Nationalism in *Maut dan Cinta* is not represented as absolute loyalty from the outset, but rather as an identity that is continuously shaped through historical experience, inner conflict, and ideological struggle faced by each character.

Unlike in the crisis phase, the pattern of constructing the national subject shows how these figures succeeded in transforming their ambivalent experiences into strategies for shaping a stronger national identity. Sadeli formed his identity by appropriating military knowledge, mastery of foreign languages, international diplomacy, and modern communication technology as a form of subversive mimicry, so that colonial instruments were no longer tools of domination but rather means to strengthen the Indonesian revolution. Then, Ali Nurdin built his national identity through hybridity, namely by merging global journalistic experience with the mission of enlightening Indonesian society through mass media, while Umar Yunus reconstructed his identity through ideological awareness born out of revolutionary experience, ultimately placing national interests above personal ones. This aligns with Bhandari (2022) view, who proposed the concept of third space, which rejects the notion that identity is singular and essential. In contrast, identity is in a process of change because it is shaped by cultural encounters that blur binary oppositions such as East–West or colonizer–colonized. Bhandari also asserts that the hybridity emerging from the third space functions as a strategy to undermine colonial authority. Through the processes of appropriation, adaptation, and transformation of local and colonial cultural elements, the colonized do not simply imitate the culture of the colonizer but create new forms of identity capable of challenging colonial domination.

Cultural negotiation in a neutral sense describes the direction of postcolonial discourse, which has evolved towards the principle of multiculturalism since the 1990s. While early postcolonial criticism still contained binary ideological concepts—such as the East–West model proposed by Said and the Elite–Subaltern hierarchy analysis articulated by Spivak—Bhabha's postcolonial critique moves more towards a multicultural idea that emphasizes justice in difference. Furthermore, the word "negotiation" has a shifting, rather than fixed, meaning,

indicating that cultural interaction is a two-way process involving incursions and disruptions from one side and responses and resistance from the other. This complex negotiation process can reveal genuine cultural events and actual cultural flows (Wang, 2023).

Next, according to Bhabha, the third space is a place where a process of negotiation between various identities occurs. This negotiation is a process in which individuals from different cultures seek to accept and combine their cultural values within a society without any single culture dominating or overpowering the others. The coexistence of multiple cultures ultimately produces a mixed culture, which, according to Bhabha, is referred to as “a space that lies between the pointed edges of translation and negotiation, an in-between space that carries complex cultural meanings.” For Bhabha, the significance of hybridity does not lie in the effort to seek out two original moments that form a third, but rather in the understanding that hybridity itself constitutes the third space that enables the formation of new identity positions. Hybridity indicates a merging of cultures that reflects a syncretic perspective on the world in which notions of stability or essentiality of identity are continually questioned. Thus, hybridity is not merely a fusion of material or cultural identities but also an intercultural space characterized by “in-betweenness” and liminality, where identities are shaped through processes of negotiation between various cultures (Bhabha, 1996; Bhandari, 2021).

These findings show that the concepts of mimicry, ambivalence, hybridity, and third space in Bhabha’s theory do not function separately but are interconnected as mechanisms for negotiating national identity. The novel *Maut dan Cinta* represents nationalism not as a total rejection of modernity or foreign influence but as the postcolonial subject’s capacity to appropriate, adapt, and transform colonial experience and global knowledge into strategies of resistance and nation-building. Therefore, the main contribution of this novel lies in its portrayal of nationalism as a dynamic, hybrid identity continually shaped by cultural negotiation, historical experience, and practices of struggle in the postcolonial context. In addition, this study both strengthens and expands the study of nationalism in Indonesian literature. Yuniani, Yuwono, and Mardiana (2022) show that nationalism is represented through various forms of indigenous resistance to Dutch colonialism, whether through the struggle to defend rights or the preservation of local cultural values. Nensilanti, Ridwan, and Pratidina (2025) further developed this perspective by demonstrating that the national identity of exile figures in the novel *Pulang* is fluid, hybrid, and constantly negotiated through ambivalence, mimicry, and colonial legacies. Novianti (2026), in *Bumi Manusia*, asserts that Indigenous identity is formed through the third space amidst colonial relations, while Farhana et al. (2025) emphasize that nationalism is manifested through intellectual strategies, mastery of Western education, and the publication of written works as forms of resistance against colonialism.

Unlike previous studies that have focused more on representations of colonialism, power relations, or forms of resistance, this study offers the finding that nationalism in Mochtar Lubis’s novel *Maut dan Cinta* is constructed through two interrelated mechanisms: the crisis of the subject and the pattern of national subject formation. Nationalism emerges not only as a form of resistance to colonialism but also as a result of identity negotiation that occurs psychologically, ideologically, and culturally through traumatic experiences, transnational spaces, diplomacy, modern technology, and journalistic practices. Thus, this study enriches Indonesian postcolonial literary studies by demonstrating that K. Bhabha’s concepts—mimicry, ambivalence, hybridity, and third space—explain postcolonial formation and illustrate how the national subject is constructed through dynamic processes of negotiation that give rise to adaptive, reflective, and transnational nationalism.

CONCLUSION

The negotiation of nationalistic identity in Mochtar Lubis’s novel *Maut dan Cinta* takes place through two main mechanisms: the crisis of the subject within the formation of nationalism and the pattern of subject formation in nationalism, which are interrelated in shaping the characters’ subjectivities. The crisis of the subject arises when the characters experience a clash between personal interests and collective responsibilities toward the nation, so that national identity does not emerge as an essential loyalty but as the result of psychological, ideological, and cultural struggles occurring within a liminal space (third space). Meanwhile, the pattern of national subject

formation indicates that the experience of crisis is negotiated as a strategy of resistance through the appropriation of colonial knowledge, mastery of language and modern technology, international diplomacy, and journalistic practices directed at strengthening the nation's struggle. These findings assert that the concepts of mimicry, ambivalence, hybridity, and third space from Homi K. Bhabha's perspective function integratively in explaining the process of character nationalism formation as a continually constructed dynamic and adaptive identity.

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F. was responsible for the conceptualization of the research, conduct of the study, data collection, literature review, and preparation of the initial manuscript draft. I.S. contributed to guiding the conceptualization and methodology of the research, supervising the study, interpreting the findings, and critically reviewing and editing the manuscript. R. contributed to guiding the research methodology, supervising the study, interpreting the research findings, and critically reviewing and editing the manuscript. E.T.P contributed to research supervision, validation, and the review and editing of the manuscript.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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