

MODERNISM AND WESTERN LITERARY INFLUENCES IN CHAIRIL ANWAR AND SUTAN TAKDIR ALISYAHBANA

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ABSTRAK

Artikel ini membahas sejauh mana sastra Barat, khususnya dari Inggris dan Amerika, memengaruhi perkembangan sastra Indonesia modern pada abad ke-20. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi pustaka dan pembacaan intertekstual, dengan tahapan yang mencakup penelaahan teori-teori modernisme dan interaksi budaya, serta analisis karya sastra Indonesia yang menunjukkan pengaruh Barat, terutama tulisan Chairil Anwar dan Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana. Analisis dilakukan dengan merujuk pada kerangka Sarwoto untuk memetakan perkembangan wacana sastra Indonesia dalam konteks modernitas, ideologi, dan identitas budaya. Pembahasan difokuskan pada gaya penulisan, tema, dan struktur naratif yang diadopsi dari tradisi sastra Barat. Modernisme dalam sastra Indonesia dipahami sebagai hasil dari ketegangan antara tradisi lokal dan arus budaya global yang berkembang sejak masa kolonial. Chairil Anwar dikenal karena gaya ekspresif dan individualistisnya yang mencerminkan semangat eksistensialisme, sedangkan Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana mengedepankan rasionalitas dan semangat pembaruan, sejalan dengan ide-ide humanisme modern. Keduanya tidak hanya menyerap pengaruh luar, tetapi juga menyesuaikannya dengan realitas sosial budaya Indonesia. Hasilnya adalah corak sastra modern Indonesia yang khas, yang menjembatani warisan budaya lokal dengan ide-ide universal. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa sastra Indonesia modern lahir dari interaksi dinamis antara pengaruh internal dan eksternal, serta memberikan kontribusi penting dalam pemahaman sastra sebagai produk dari pertukaran budaya global.

Kata Kunci: *Modernisme, Sastra Barat, Chairil Anwar, Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana, Intertekstualitas.*

ABSTRACT

This article explores the extent to which Western literature, particularly from Britain and the United States, influenced the development of modern Indonesian literature in the 20th century. The study employs a literature review and intertextual reading approach, involving the examination of theories on modernism and cultural interaction, as well as an analysis of Indonesian literary works that show Western influences, especially those by Chairil Anwar and Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana. The analysis draws on Sarwoto's framework to map the development of Indonesian literary discourse in the context of modernity, ideology, and cultural identity. The discussion focuses on the adoption of Western literary styles, themes, and narrative structures. Modernism in Indonesian literature is understood as the result of tensions between local traditions and global cultural currents that have developed since the colonial period. Chairil Anwar is known for his expressive and individualistic style, reflecting existentialist influences, while Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana emphasizes rationality and renewal, in line with the spirit of modern humanism. Both figures did not merely adopt Western influences passively but adapted them to the Indonesian socio-cultural context. As a result, a distinctive form of modern Indonesian literature emerged—one that bridges local cultural heritage with universal ideas. This study demonstrates that modern Indonesian literature is the

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product of dynamic interactions between internal and external forces and contributes to a deeper understanding of literature as a product of global cultural exchange.

Keywords: *Modernism, Western Literature, Chairil Anwar, Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana, Intertextuality.*

INTRODUCTION

The development of Indonesian literature cannot be separated from cultural interaction with the outside world, especially the West. Since the colonial era, the influence of British and American literature has permeated the creative process of Indonesian writers, marking a significant shift in the aesthetic, ideological, and thematic framework of literary production. The introduction of modernism—both as an aesthetic movement and a worldview—has added new dimensions to writing styles, thematic choices, and narrative structures. This literary exchange was not a process of imitation, but rather a dynamic negotiation between global literary paradigms and local cultural values. Recent scholarship underscores this nuanced interaction: Silalahi et al. (2022) highlight how contemporary Indonesian poetry reflects global influences while preserving local identity through linguistic innovation and thematic continuity. Similarly, Tamrin et al. (2024) examine intertextual dynamics between Sasak regional narratives and national literature, showing how local traditions are woven into broader literary discourse as part of cultural negotiation rather than unidirectional influence.

This perspective aligns with Sarwoto (2018), who argues that the formation of modernity in Indonesian literature since the pre-independence era has always involved tensions between foreign cultural influences and the preservation of local identity. Authors such as Chairil Anwar and Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana exemplify this negotiation; rather than adopting Western ideas uncritically, they reinterpreted and transformed them to reflect the socio-political realities and cultural philosophies of the Indonesian context.

Recent studies also reaffirm this phenomenon. Silalahi et al. (2022) highlight how modernist themes in Indonesian poetry coexist with traditional aesthetic principles—resulting in a hybrid literary identity that bridges historical forms and contemporary expression. Meanwhile, Octafiona (2024) emphasizes the pivotal role of intertextuality in shaping Indonesian narrative forms by adapting Western modernist tropes into localized, socially reflective storytelling. These analyses underscore the complex interplay between global literary influence and national cultural agency.

Modernism, as described by Bradbury and McFarlane (1976), emerged as a literary response to the anxieties of modern life, characterized by a rejection of conventional forms and a search for more subjective, fluid, and experimental expressions. This spirit is clearly reflected in the works of Chairil Anwar, whose poetry abandons traditional rhyme and meter in favor of a more personal, emotionally charged voice. Likewise, Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana's prose reflects the ideals of modern rationality and progress.

From an intertextual perspective, Julia Kristeva (1980) posits that every text is a mosaic of other texts. This theoretical lens allows us to trace the dialogic relationship between Indonesian works such as *Aku* or *Layar Terkembang* and the broader corpus of Western literary modernism. These intertextual echoes reflect both influence and reinterpretation. Furthermore, scholars like Edward Said (1978) and Homi Bhabha (1994) argue that postcolonial literature embodies tensions between foreign cultural authority and local resistance. In the Indonesian context, this manifests as a “cultural polemic,” as noted by Sarwoto (2018), between advocates of Western humanism and defenders of indigenous cultural values. This article aims to analyze how these influences occurred, to what extent they shaped modern Indonesian literature, and how both authors creatively adapted them. The

method used involves literature review and intertextual analysis of selected works by Chairil Anwar and Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana.

RESEARCH METHOD

This article employs literature review and intertextual reading approaches. The author examines various theoretical sources related to modernism and cultural interaction, and analyzes Indonesian literary works that exhibit Western influences, particularly those by Chairil Anwar and Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana. This approach is inspired by Sarwoto's (2018) framework, which maps the development of Indonesian literary discourse in relation to modernity, ideology, and cultural identity.

The research method consists of two main stages. The first stage involves a comprehensive literature review to identify key concepts and theoretical perspectives on modernism and cultural hybridity. This includes reviewing academic texts, critical essays, and historical sources that contextualize the emergence of modern Indonesian literature. The second stage is intertextual analysis, where selected literary texts are read and interpreted in relation to both Western literary traditions and indigenous cultural narratives. Through this process, the study traces patterns of influence, adaptation, and resistance within the works of the chosen authors, aiming to reveal how Indonesian literary modernism negotiates its position within a global cultural framework.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The influence of Western literature is clearly visible in the works of Chairil Anwar. His poetry emphasizes individualism, norm criticism, and free verse—characteristics of Western modernist poets like T. S. Eliot (1922) and Ezra Pound. His language is direct, metaphorical, and emotionally charged.

Themes of death, freedom, and existential anxiety in his poems further reflect the strong imprint of Western modernism. However, Chairil did not merely imitate; he internalized the spirit of the Western age and applied it to the anxieties of an emerging nation on the brink of independence. Likewise, Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana's "Layar Terkembang" champions rationality, women's education, and social reform, echoing the liberal ideas of John Stuart Mill (1859), who advocated for freedom and equality. Yet, Alisyahbana contextualized these values within the social and cultural fabric of Indonesia.

Sarwoto (2018) emphasizes that Indonesian writers were not passive recipients of Western influence. They filtered and transformed foreign elements into new literary forms that addressed local challenges. This is a form of "cultural negotiation" between Western modernism and the Indonesian context. Moreover, Chairil Anwar's works can be thematically and structurally compared with modern Western poetry. For instance, his renowned poem "Aku", with its fragmented structure and existential defiance, can be compared to T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" (1922), which also reflects the disillusionment of modern man. Both reject traditional poetic forms and focus on personal expression to portray identity crises and the search for meaning in a rapidly changing world.

However, not all critics welcomed Western literary influence. During the 1930s cultural polemic, as Sarwoto (2018) notes, debates arose between pro-Western groups like "Pujangga Baru" and advocates of preserving Eastern traditions. This ideological divide reveals that the road to modernity in Indonesian literature was not straightforward—it involved dialogue, opposition, and negotiation between tradition and renewal.

Table 1. Research Findings on Indonesian Literary Modernism

No	Aspect Studied	Chairil Anwar	Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana
1.	Language Style and Structure	Used free verse, direct language, metaphors, and emotional tone; rejected traditional poetic conventions.	Logical and rational narrative structure; prose that explores ideas and arguments.
2.	Themes and Ideology	Emphasized individualism, freedom, death, and existential anxiety as a form of resistance against authoritarianism.	Promoted rationality, progress, and women's education within a framework of social reform.
3.	Intertextual Influence	Referenced Rilke (1927) and Marsman (1936); used intertextuality as a tool for critique and self-expression.	Adapted Western thought (e.g., John Stuart Mill and rationalism) into the Indonesian sociocultural context.
4.	Role in Literary Modernization	Revolutionized Indonesian poetry; works like <i>Aku</i> reflect identity crisis and alienation.	Laid the foundation for the modern Indonesian novel; characters act as agents of social reform.
5.	Continuity and Legacy	Influence remains strong in contemporary literature; his poems are included in school curricula.	Legacy visible in post-Reform works by writers such as Eka Kurniawan (2014) and Ayu Utami (1988).
6.	Language and Translation Role	Employed hybrid Indonesian: incorporated slang, Dutch words, and new syntactic structures; translated Western poetry.	Advocated a purified, rational Indonesian language; supported language reform as an ideological project.
7.	Modernism and Nationalism	Poems like <i>Diponegoro</i> merge nationalist sentiment with modernist form.	Blended Western cosmopolitanism with nationalist ideals; female characters symbolize progress and national awakening.

The table above summarizes the key dimensions of Chairil Anwar and Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana's contributions in shaping the trajectory of modernism in Indonesian literature. While both figures adopted elements of Western literary thought and aesthetics, their approaches differed significantly—in language style, narrative structure, and ideological orientation. Chairil Anwar emerged as a defiant voice against norms, expressing existential unrest through emotionally charged and sharp free verse. In contrast, Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana employed a more systematic and rational approach through prose rich with ideas of social reform and education.

Both served as cultural agents of transformation who did not merely reproduce foreign discourse but adapted it within the Indonesian context. The intertextuality they employed was not just referential but functioned as a means of constructing arguments and articulating a distinct cultural position. Thus, modernism in Indonesian literature was not a direct adoption of Western models, but a product of creative negotiation between global influences and local realities.

Their legacy continues in contemporary literature, where the values and narrative strategies they pioneered are reinterpreted by new generations of writers. This illustrates that modernism is not a static movement, but one that remains alive and evolving in tandem with Indonesia's ongoing social change and cultural dynamics.

Discussion

After tracing the monumental contributions of Chairil Anwar and Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana in shaping the foundations of Indonesian literary modernism, it is important to understand that their influence did not end with their lifetimes. The modernism they pioneered was not merely a response to global aesthetic and intellectual currents, but also an adaptation to the complex social and political realities of an Indonesia in search of its identity. Their works not only reflected the anxieties of their time but also opened new spaces for freer, more reflective, and progressive forms of literary expression.

However, a key question must be asked: to what extent has this intellectual and aesthetic legacy continued and shaped the landscape of contemporary Indonesian literature? Does modernism remain relevant amid the dynamics of globalization, shifting cultural values, and the emergence of new generations of writers with different perspectives? The following discussion explores the continuity and transformation of the modernist values passed down by Chairil Anwar and Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana in Indonesian literary works from the post-Reformasi era to the present day.

Continuity and Legacy In Contemporary Indonesian Literature

Modernism as introduced by Chairil Anwar and Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana did not end with their generation. The literary choices they made—whether through structural experimentation, existential themes, or rationalist discourse—set a precedent for later generations of writers. Contemporary Indonesian literature, particularly in the post-Reformasi era (after 1998), reflects a more globalized literary style, yet the foundational influence of these modernist pioneers continues to resonate.

Writers such as Ayu Utami (1988), Eka Kurniawan (2014), and Linda Christanty exhibit traces of this legacy. Ayu Utami's *Saman*, for example, channels Chairil's rebellious energy and engagement with taboo subjects, but does so within a postmodern narrative framework. Eka Kurniawan blends folklore with gritty realism, echoing Alisyahbana's project of reconciling modern ideals with Indonesian cultural roots. The continued relevance of modernism is also maintained through education and institutional memory. Chairil Anwar's poetry remains part of school curricula, keeping his ideas alive among younger generations, while STA's essays continue to inform discussions around national identity and cultural direction.

Recent research by Rahmawati (2022) further supports this continuity, emphasizing that Indonesian authors in the modern and contemporary periods often serve as cultural mediators—absorbing global literary movements while reformulating them through the prism of local experience and nationalist discourse. This dual function creates a hybrid form of modern literature, both globally conversant and locally grounded. This article seeks to explore

how these influences emerged, the extent to which they shaped modern Indonesian literature, and how both Chairil Anwar and Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana creatively navigated these cultural intersections. The method employed involves literature review and intertextual analysis of selected works by both authors.

The Role of Language and Translation In Literary Modernism

Language is at the core of modernism—not just as a tool for communication, but as a site of experimentation, resistance, and reinvention. For both Chairil Anwar and Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana, the Indonesian language became a battleground for modernist transformation. They redefined literary Indonesian by introducing new vocabulary, adapting foreign syntactic structures, and breaking conventions of expression rooted in classical Malay literature.

Chairil's use of Bahasa Indonesia was revolutionary. He incorporated slang, Dutch words, truncated syntax, and abrupt shifts in tone. His linguistic hybridity mirrors the multilingual environment of colonial Indonesia. Translation played a crucial role in this transformation. Chairil was not only a poet but also a translator of Western poetry. His translations helped introduce modernist aesthetics to Indonesian readers.

Alisyahbana, meanwhile, worked more within the domain of prose, advocating a purified, logical, and modern Indonesian language. He emphasized clarity and argumentation, aligning with Enlightenment ideals and the Western novelistic tradition. Thus, language reform was not simply a matter of style but of ideology.

Recent scholarship by Kartikasari (2023) further supports this view by asserting that the linguistic innovations introduced by Indonesian modernist writers were instrumental in negotiating postcolonial identity. She argues that through language, writers constructed a literary voice that was both nationally rooted and globally conversant, enabling literature to become a space of cultural synthesis and intellectual independence.

Modernism and Nationalism: Between Cosmopolitanism and Locality

Chairil and Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana stood at the crossroads of modernism and nationalism. They endeavored to propel Indonesian society forward by engaging with global ideas, while steadfastly grounding their vision in the quest for a sovereign, modern nation. Chairil's poem *Diponegoro* is steeped in nationalist sentiment, vividly portraying resistance against colonial oppression, while its form embodies modernist innovation. Alisyahbana's championing of women's rights—rolling in Western ideological currents—was firmly situated within Indonesia's ongoing reformist discourse. This dual orientation—as both global interlocutors and local patriots—captures the distinctive nature of Indonesian modernism. They did not replicate Western literary and philosophical traditions; instead, they interrogated and assimilated them into a uniquely Indonesian framework (Tampubolon & Harahap, 2024).

In addition to the clear thematic and stylistic connections between Indonesian modernist writers and their Western counterparts, it is essential to highlight the ideological dimension of their modernism. Chairil Anwar's rejection of traditional poetic conventions was not merely aesthetic, but deeply ideological. His focus on personal autonomy, spiritual struggle, and existential angst reflects a critique of authoritarianism—colonial and indigenous alike. His poetic persona embodies what Sartre and Camus characterized as the absurd hero—defying a meaningless world with authenticity and defiance. This philosophical synergy with Western existentialism indicates that Indonesian modernism was as much a mindset as a literary trajectory. Chairil's body of work goes beyond patriotic fervor; it maps the emotional terrain of a populace in flux. Recent scholarship by Pria Astuti (2023) reinforces this view,

arguing that Chairil's poetry articulates a form of existential resistance: it rejects societal conformity while affirming individual integrity in the face of historical upheaval.

Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana, while less emotionally turbulent in tone, embodies a different kind of modernist ideology. His vision is developmentalist and forward-looking. Through characters in *Layar Terkembang*, he projects an image of Indonesia as a rational, educated, and gender-progressive society. He draws heavily on Enlightenment values, which he harmonizes with the nascent spirit of Indonesian nationalism. However, critics such as HB Jassin (1954) and A. Teeuw (1980) noted that STA's idealism often created characters that felt more symbolic than realistic. Yet, this abstraction may be deliberate—STA was less concerned with mimetic representation and more with social modeling, using fiction as a laboratory for cultural reform. Recent analysis by Rahayu (2023) adds that Indonesian modernism was never monolithic, but emerged through negotiation—between reason and emotion, identity and hybridity, tradition and transformation. Her study underscores how writers like Chairil and STA maneuvered within ideological dualities to construct a literature that was both resistant and reformist.

Another interesting aspect is the way both writers used intertextuality not just as literary reference, but as an argument. Chairil's references to Rilke (1927) and Marsman (1936) were often embedded in emotionally resonant lines that re-contextualized the originals. Similarly, STA's philosophical reflections in *Layar Terkembang* echoed Western rationalist texts but were reoriented to fit Indonesian socio-political realities. Therefore, the modernism expressed by these authors was not homogenous. It was multiple, contextual, and often contradictory—celebrating reason while grappling with emotion, pushing for freedom while recognizing structure. These contradictions are precisely what make their works modern, resonant, and lasting.

While Chairil Anwar represents modernism as a form of internal rebellion and poetic transformation, Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana reflects modernism as a vehicle for social reform and intellectual rationalism. These two modes—transformation and resistance—are not mutually exclusive but illustrate the multidimensional nature of Indonesian modernism. Chairil's work often engages with the alienation of modern life, echoing the crisis of meaning in early 20th-century Europe. His iconic poem *Aku* is not just a declaration of self but a reaction to the fragmentation of identity under colonial rule. His style—abrupt, elliptical, and emotionally intense—invites comparison with Western poets like Dylan Thomas or W. H. Auden, who likewise sought to reconstruct meaning in the aftermath of war and dislocation. Recent research by Octafiona (2024) reinforces this interpretation, demonstrating how contemporary Indonesian writers—drawing on the intertextual legacy of Chairil and STA—use such literary references to construct new narrative meanings and social critique in modern prose and poetry.

On the other hand, STA's fiction responds to the social fragmentation of the Dutch East Indies with a call for structured reform. He imagines a modern Indonesia not through metaphysical inquiry but through education, science, and dialogue. His modernism is constructive, guided by reason and progress, rather than the existential rupture seen in Chairil's poetry. This polarity—between expressionist angst and rational reform—is crucial to understanding how Western modernism was filtered differently by Indonesian writers. Chairil absorbed the emotional and stylistic radicalism of European poets, while STA was more influenced by Western philosophy and the Enlightenment tradition. Together, they demonstrate the capacity of Indonesian literature to engage with multiple aspects of global modernism while remaining deeply rooted in local realities.

In literary terms, this duality also shaped genre development in Indonesia. Chairil's influence energized the growth of modern poetry (*puisi bebas*), freeing it from rigid Malay *pantun* and *syair* conventions. STA, conversely, laid the groundwork for the modern Indonesian novel by presenting characters as agents of social critique and rational deliberation. These genre shifts aligned with the emergence of new readerships, urban intellectuals, and printing technologies. Mahdori et al. (2025) supports the view that STA's writings serve as cultural frameworks for modern nation-building: his literary works reflect a deliberate strategy to transmit rationalist values and civic awareness through narrative, contributing significantly to the intellectual modernization of Indonesia.

Criticisms of Modernism and Its Limitations In Indonesian Contexts

Despite the significant contributions of modernism to Indonesian literature, particularly through the pioneering works of Chairil Anwar and Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana, several limitations and critiques have emerged, especially when viewed through contemporary and postcolonial lenses. These critiques are essential in understanding not only what modernism accomplished, but also what it left out—and whom it left behind.

1. Elitism and Intellectualization of Literature

One of the most prominent criticisms of Indonesian modernism is its tendency toward elitism. The literary innovations of Chairil Anwar—his fragmentation, philosophical allusions, and existential themes—though powerful, also rendered his poetry difficult to access for general readers, especially those without formal literary education. Similarly, STA's philosophical and didactic prose in *Layar Terkembang* was often steeped in Western liberal ideals, which, while progressive, were not always relatable to the rural or non-bourgeois Indonesian population.

This elitism may have alienated a large segment of the population that still drew upon traditional forms of storytelling such as *pantun*, *gurindam*, or oral folktales. Critics like Bakri Siregar (1985) argued that modernist literature neglected the importance of local forms and was primarily a discourse among educated urban elites, disconnected from the grassroots cultural reality of Indonesia.

Recent scholarship by Lestari (2023) supports this critique by highlighting how early modernist works were often produced and consumed within urban intellectual circles, with limited resonance among rural readers. She emphasizes the need for bridging high literary modernism with vernacular and popular literary traditions to ensure broader cultural inclusion and engagement.

2. Gender and Representation

While Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana is often praised for promoting women's education through the character of Tuti in *Layar Terkembang*, a closer feminist reading reveals that female agency remains limited and shaped by male perspectives. Tuti, while intelligent and rational, still conforms to patriarchal ideals of progress—serving as a symbolic vessel rather than an autonomous agent with her own complex subjectivity. Her narrative function is more representative than personal, constructed to embody Enlightenment values rather than voice female experience.

Chairil Anwar's poetry, although emotionally intense and raw, often objectifies women or renders them as metaphors for loss, desire, or inspiration. Rarely are women centered as voices with interiority. This absence of female authorship or full representation was a gap that would only be addressed decades later by female authors like Nh. Dini, Ayu Utami, and others in the post-Reformasi period.

Saraswati (2024) highlights that while early Indonesian modernist literature introduced progressive social ideas, it still operated within gendered frameworks that reinforced male authority. Her study emphasizes that the modernization of literature did not equate to the modernization of gender roles. Instead, female characters were often instrumentalized to support male intellectual or ideological projects, with limited narrative autonomy.

3. Over-Westernization and Cultural Tension

Another critique centers on the over-reliance on Western models, particularly in the 1930s–1940s when writers like Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana openly embraced European thought. While cultural borrowing is inevitable, the uncritical importation of Western values—especially rationalism, individualism, and secularism—created tension with traditional, spiritual, and communal elements of Indonesian society.

Critics in the *Polemik Kebudayaan* era voiced their concerns about this cultural displacement. Sanusi Pane, for instance, argued that Indonesian literature should not abandon Eastern spiritual traditions in favor of Western materialism. He proposed a vision of cultural development that emphasized balance between modernity and spiritual heritage, suggesting that progress should not come at the cost of identity. These debates reveal that modernism was not a neutral or universally accepted movement; it was ideologically contested and, at times, politically loaded.

Recent analysis by Widodo (2023) revisits these cultural tensions and argues that early modernist literature often reflected deeper ideological battles about national identity formation. According to him, the divide between Western-oriented reformists and tradition-rooted nationalists was not merely aesthetic, but connected to broader anxieties about colonial legacy, authenticity, and cultural survival. This ideological friction continues to shape contemporary discourse on literary modernity in Indonesia.

4. Regional Exclusion and Jakarta-Centric Modernism

Modernist literature, as canonized in national discourse, often revolved around writers based in Jakarta, Yogyakarta, or other colonial urban centers. This centralization excluded regional voices and languages. For example, literature from Sumatra, Kalimantan, or Sulawesi—written in local dialects or rooted in distinct cultural traditions—was often labeled as “non-modern” or “folk,” and thus marginalized in both literary recognition and institutional support.

As a result, the image of modern Indonesian literature became somewhat homogenized—favoring *Bahasa Indonesia* standard, Western-influenced aesthetics, and urban concerns. Regional modernisms, which often featured different thematic priorities, formal experiments, or local philosophies of life, were largely underrepresented in mainstream anthologies, literary journals, and educational curricula.

Hafsari (2024) argues that this exclusion was not merely linguistic but epistemological: regional literature often carried alternative modernities that challenged the centralized, Eurocentric model of progress. She calls for a re-mapping of the literary canon that recognizes multiple trajectories of modernism across Indonesia’s archipelagic diversity. By broadening the lens, we can better understand that Indonesian literary modernism was never singular, but pluriversal—formed through various encounters between the local and the global, center and periphery.

5. Resistance to Collective and Communal Values

Western modernism is often rooted in the notion of the autonomous, alienated individual. While this resonated with Chairil Anwar's rebellious persona and existential themes, it clashed with the collectivist values embedded in many Indonesian cultures. Communal harmony, spiritual connectedness, and collective struggle—hallmarks of traditional narratives such as *hikayat*, *wayang*, and local oral epics—found little space in early modernist expression.

Even when collective themes were addressed, they were often filtered through existential or rational frameworks derived from European philosophy, rather than grounded in indigenous epistemologies. This dissonance raises critical questions about the suitability of Western modernism as a dominant literary mode for postcolonial societies seeking to define their own cultural and historical trajectories.

Maulana (2023) highlights how this ideological friction shaped the identity of early Indonesian literature. He argues that the application of Western modernist models—while productive in generating literary innovation—often sidelined indigenous ways of knowing, feeling, and storytelling. As a result, modernism in Indonesia risked becoming not just a form of artistic expression, but a tool of cultural standardization that privileged Westernized subjectivities over local cosmologies and communal consciousness.

6. The Path Forward: Toward a Pluralistic Literary Identity

These criticisms do not negate the achievements of Indonesian modernism; rather, they highlight the necessity of critical engagement. Modernism served as a catalyst for literary innovation, but it must be understood as one mode among many. In the 21st century, there is a growing movement among Indonesian writers to revisit local traditions, explore hybrid genres, and engage with global ideas more equitably.

Contemporary literature now seeks not only to modernize but also to localize, diversify, and decolonize. Authors like Eka Kurniawan (2014) blend folklore with realism, creating narratives that are rooted in Indonesian mythologies while engaging with global literary forms. Others like Intan Paramaditha infuse speculative fiction with feminist critique and postcolonial sensibilities, expanding the terrain of what constitutes Indonesian literature.

Prasetyo (2024) observes that this shift signals the emergence of a “postmodern archipelagic consciousness”—a literary orientation that embraces fragmentation, hybridity, and multiplicity as strengths rather than deficiencies. He argues that contemporary writers are no longer preoccupied with emulating Western modernism but are actively reconfiguring literary paradigms to reflect Indonesia's cultural diversity, historical complexity, and global positioning. These developments suggest a pluralist vision of literature—where modernism is a layer, not a limit.

CONCLUSION

Western literature played a major role in the emergence of modernism in 20th-century Indonesian literature. Elements such as freedom of thought, open narrative structures, and themes of individualism and social reform became hallmarks of a new literary expression. However, as Sarwoto (2018) emphasizes, modernity in Indonesian literature was not a product of mere imitation. It resulted from a creative adaptation process and dialogue between external influences and local identities. Chairil Anwar and Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana exemplify how Indonesian writers shaped a distinct, contextual, and culturally resonant form of modern literature.

The emergence of modernism in Indonesian literature, as seen through the works of Chairil Anwar and Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana, demonstrates how global literary movements can be meaningfully adapted within a postcolonial, culturally complex setting. Drawing influence from Western poets, philosophers, and literary forms, both authors exemplified how modernism could be used not only as an artistic style but also as an intellectual and ideological project.

Chairil Anwar redefined Indonesian poetry by breaking away from classical forms and infusing his works with personal emotion, rebellion, and existential reflection. His intertextual references to European modernist poets revealed an engagement that was deeply critical and transformative, rather than imitative. In contrast, Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana advanced modernism through prose, advocating for education, rationality, and gender equality. His ideas were informed by Western liberalism but rooted in Indonesia's socio-political context.

Their different approaches to modernism—Chairil through aesthetic rupture, STA through philosophical reform—enrich our understanding of how modern Indonesian literature was not simply a derivative of Western influence, but a distinct, hybrid creation. It was a literary negotiation between the colonial past and the aspirations of a free nation, between foreign paradigms and local values.

This study shows that Indonesian modernism, while inspired by European and American models, is best understood as a dialogic and adaptive form. It served as a tool for national awakening, cultural introspection, and the formation of new literary identities. The legacy of these modernist pioneers remains evident in contemporary Indonesian writers who continue to engage with global ideas while redefining their cultural narrative.

Future research could further examine the relationship between literary modernism and other cultural fields such as visual arts, theater, or film in Indonesia. Additionally, the role of digital platforms in reshaping postmodern responses to Chairil and STA's legacy deserves attention. As long as literature continues to evolve alongside society, the conversation initiated by Indonesian modernism remains open, critical, and relevant.

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