Translating Modern Ideas into Postcolonial Mosque Architecture in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This paper tries to narrate the story of translation practices on the ideas and forms of modernity in the history of mosque architecture design development in Indonesia. The allow interactions to produce various approaches wider beyond religious context. The translation theory in postcolonialism field offers an alternate history on how postcolonial subjects define and take a significant role for their own culture in compromising the overcoming globalism and modernities. This attitude will question our historical narratives socio-political postcolonial subjects engage through such essential elements. In that way, a previous common image of mosque design thus ought to be reinvestigated, as well as a notion of "modern" in Indonesia history would be redeveloped while layering mosque architecture periodization. The mosque architecture types which were inspired from both Western—Eastern styles inevitably involved colonial-postcolonial contextuality in how dynamism of interchanges since Independence period interlinked to Dutch-Indies colonial times, Old and New Order regimes, to the Post-reform era interwoven present. Understanding this modernity translation transformation on each period following the spirit of the age may conclude that modern mosque architecture in Indonesia is not in a stagnant or linear but rather a complex flow periodization of its development. This also indicates the notion of "modern" has multiple intentions to culture and socio-political factors that always never solidify to any single universal definition.

Keywords: architecture, modernity, mosque, postcolonial, translation

1. Introduction

Modernity, Cultural Translation and Mosque Architecture

First of first, one should note that any "modern" experience or any quality of modernity in the postcolonial world might be conceived in entirely different of what was based on the first phenomenon of modernization in 18th-century European historiography in the first place. The experience of modernity by colonial subjects was seen as two debates matter whether it was totally constructed and transferred by the colonizer, or it was a set of interrelation that incorporated a process of translation throughout the rooted local experiences [1].

Modernity itself had presented in Indonesia as a postcolonial nation primarily since their very initial contact with the European colonies including in architecture and engineering field, which many of the Dutch architects, urbanists, and academics. Petrus Berlage, Thomas Karsten, Wolff Schoemaker, Henri Maclaine Pont or Vincent van Romondt had introduced the paradigm and experimented to conform with the local traditions, especially during the early period of Dutch-Indies colonial state in the 20th century [2]. By focusing the word "modernity" that I refer in this writing as an architectural discourse, the modern idea does not always manifest in a concrete physical object such as style, technology, or material type the subjects might function, but instead it is expanded to non-physical forms that lay the background of the building designs and its subject's philosophy and political culture, either client or architect, to yield a more in-depth understanding in modern culture of postcolonial nation [3].

Abidin Kusno as one of Indonesian postcolonial scholar in architecture field once gives us a comprehension (which is strongly reflected from Soekarno understanding) that the notion of "modern" in Indonesia was related to a "movement" (pergerakan), that is a spirit of change in terms of independence and freedom, to cutting out the relationship with the historical elements of the past [4], and taking inspiration from the international modernity instead. The idea was growing up during the struggles against Dutch colonial and each of their influences in social, political and culture until the late of Old Order (Sukarno) regime in the 1960s, even though the actual modernity we are living nowadays is not appearing in that similar forms. Modern experience or experiencing the modernity is not something historically universal every local of colonial-postcolonial subjects in worldwide had perceived.

In that dynamic context in understanding the flow of modernity, the translation theory offers a more mutual understanding to explain how the modernity enters and has been transferred in our history. Many postcolonial scholars in architecture have introduced this theory, such as Esra Akcan and Ken Tadashi Oshima [5]. The translation theory tends to find a balance in postcolonial debates, expressing awareness to raise voices and roles of the colonial subjects who experienced their own culture during the colonialization process, to change the dominating global perception that only displays the colonized subjects as the only one being vulnerable "modernized." The translation is the result of cultural dialogue in dealing between both sides: the colonizer and the colonized; the West and the non-West; the Global and the Local; or the Center and the Periphery.

Referring to its etymology, the word translation word refers to as translātus or transfer, which originally means 'to carry across', or 'to transfer' [6]. Translation, like in the linguistic field, involves two active equal subjects whose their role to replace one language word to another [7]. The architects also tacitly involve a kind of translation practice into their design works: translating the textual concepts into the visuals, from the diagram to the plan, and from the plan to the site. According to that process, the discourse of modernist architecture comes from a 'system' of form and design, and it is the language that plays the role to describe it. Both linguistic and visual appearance as the metaphor of the idea, it is used to explain reciprocal relations between visual sense and mind, since nothing is able to 'translate' more objective a work than work itself [8].

The cultural studies in postcolonialist framework have been developing the translation as an explanatory metaphor to explain the intercultural exchanges in every cultural production, as a simultaneous production through a long-term cultural transmission in the community [9]. The translation practice, of course, engages within the socio-political realm of the locals which automatically creates a non-neutral process in its reciprocal activity. The practice of "translation" is not the same as the practice of "modernization," and it is exactly inclined against it. Translation is the non-West active intention to conform with the Western standard model of "modern". European or any other Western modernism have to appropriate with the local culture before it finally manifests to a concrete design form.

Akcan also mentioned in her book, Architecture in Translation [10] the example about the cultural gap between West and Islam (that is considered "non-West") to depict the two separated poles or subjects. Aside from that, the term "Islam" can be perceived the Global or the center as well as Western modernity, while Local remains periphery. Furthermore, in the case of mosques architecture design, there are three subjects involving the condition: 1) the influencing modern ideas or a quality of modern aspect, which is considered secular, 2) Islam, and its teaching regarding prayer space, and how mosque as the global cultural product of Muslim world nonetheless, and 3) the postcolonial Indonesian as the local agency.

Indonesia as a country with the largest Muslim community in the world would likely produce many kinds of design styles and innovations, regarding many ethnics and particular traditional elements are elected to the mosque design. The urban grammar such as Masjid, mushala, or langgar has been popularly used to indicate such Muslim prayer buildings without any strict design requirements. Since the Islamic teachings generally do not limit the design innovation over the sacred space except few things, this allows every individual to find their preferred design. If so, the mosque as an architectural product has the potential to translatability in its elements or materials and is able to avoid overwhelmingly imported raw

elements from the Middle East, Turkey, Europe, African and/ or other Islamic world influences. Roof, which is not limited to a dome or kubah, body (façade, ornamentation) and/ or other like the minaret.

The cultural translation which appears in the process of designing architecture could represent a new spirit of society or nation by reflecting their preferences or ideas (primarily their political actors or State as a patron) in a complex kind of archetypes, and this positioning could be useful to comprehend and reveal a new historical narrative from it. The main question after all, is whether there is any attempt to show a kind of translation process during the history of architectural development in postcolonial Indonesia, especially for the cases of mosque architecture.

2. Translation in Architecture as Method

This paper searches for the cultural flow involving many agencies primarily by the State, architects and/ or clients. This paper also questions how historical narratives of architectural ideas and forms are put while socio-political factors engage throughout the design elements. In that way, it tries to rethink previous common images and perception towards mosque architecture, as well as a notion of modernity in Indonesia history that would be refined while layering mosque architecture periodization through the twentieth century. It is about to question the significant role of the non-West agencies, scholars and architects instead as the passive spectator of modernity. They, in fact, act as the foremost translators whose conform Western epistemological knowledge, language and experience their modernity.

This paper argues that processes in translating such "modern" terminology into mosque architecture forms allow patron as a client—architect thoughts to produce various approaches and perspectives. In a process to mosque design, despite about remembering and forgetting process to colonial memory and "battle" between the past and the present, the Indonesian historiography always develops different translation of "modern" idea present. [11]. It is suitably related to how Indonesians as "non-West" society have a different paradigm to see architectural history and progress instead of linearity in which Western tradition does. Its constraint also appears when facing local

community, which is, generally speaking, prefer to design a mosque building merely by way of its practicality and functionality instead to explore what previous design has progressed in history.

Education as one of the channel to Indonesian's colonial modernity improves the middle-class natives to access educational institution provided by Dutch-Indies colony at the time. The established economics then raised the awareness and spirit of movement idea and changed the people to free themselves from colonialism. Translation of modernity in Indonesia is indeed seen as "modernization of local architecture" and not "Indonesization of European modern architecture" [12]. One of the other modernity channels was also translated practically from a method and European technologies of construction, structure, and the using of concrete, iron, glass, or steel materials.
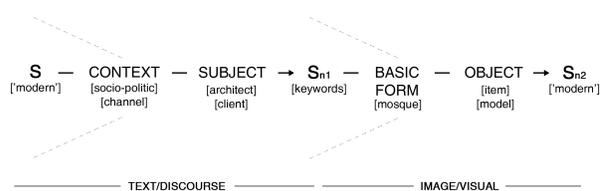

Figure 1: Mental map of Translation. The (S) abbreviates a 'Signum' to represent an "idea" or a "notion"

To clearly understand the translation process, I create a model example of a mental map of modernity translation into mosque design (Fig. 1) as my approach to read the postcolonial history of Indonesian mosque architecture. This mental map is based on the principle of Cultural Appropriation in postcolonial studies [13] and also The Items and Channel in translation [14]. The mental map explains that any notion or concept of modern (S) will meet the contextuality of the postcolonial subjects, like socio-political factors and also the channels of translation (education, literature, technology, travels, objects, or economic activities).

After that, the subject will subconsciously translate the (S) within the current given context that brought it and will produce (Sn1) as a translated (S), which indicates a new particular subject's understanding regarding the (S). The modernity of (Sn1) will meet again the abstract set of mosque basic form to conform and become the visual object(s). Finally, the new object itself will represent a new kind of

modernity towards what shapes a "modern mosque" (Sn2).

As a method to read the history of the non-Western, there are two processes in mental map of translation: 1) Translating the idea of West "modern"/modernity by local subject (non-Western) and, 2) Translating the later concept into mosque architectural form, which generally does not strictly its form into any particularly sacred symbolism that I have narrated in Paragraph 5-6 above in Chapter 1 Introduction. This research approach uses a qualitative method that involves postcolonial literature reviews and analysis, a study on historical archives, and observation related to the objects of translation. The objects are modern mosques in Indonesia that are subjectively selected by considering the influential postcolonial patrons (architect, client, government) and their interactions within the Modern Western ideas, the uniqueness and innovation, the year it was initially built and general contribution to the development of mosque architecture in the nation.

I do not look mosque in this paper in a sacred or religious spatial context, but rather a product of subject's socio-political vehicle towards their action of translation of their ideas or symbolism and power. I also argue that mosque architecture can specifically reflect the development of modernity in Indonesia. It potentially represents what G.W.F. Hegel phrase Zeitgeist, or, "the spirit of the age," in years it were built or developed. Mosque types which are also selected from both Western—Eastern style involve colonial-postcolonial dynamism since Independence era interlinked to the Dutch-Indische colony, Old and New Order regimes of the State, until the Post-reform era interwoven present.

3. The History of Postcolonial Mosque Architecture in Indonesia

In the postcolonial times of Indonesia, I divide into three phases of mosque history, using the linear model of Cartesian historiography regarding the shift of regime of the State, to depict how one political power defines its era. However, the main purpose of this periodization is not fully to represent universal history towards the development, but rather to ease of the periodical tracings due to the complexity of mosque design stories. Any defined phases here are not strictly shaped and the narratives are open for debate. Mosque architecture in Indonesia, in fact, tends to differentiate their form in its surrounding urban fabric. It is a place where all major mosque style worldwide might affect and are adopted, imported, fabricated or popularised, which comes to a condition that refers to what Hasanudin Khan said "a degradation of design value" of sacred space [15].
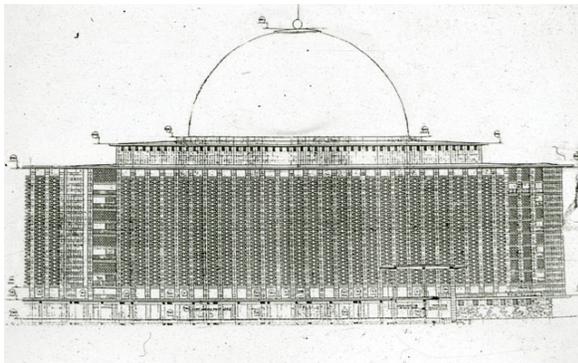
Aside from that, the condition brings positive highlight to trace the design development in the mosque objects. The stereotypical trace of Moorish or Byzantium dome elements in Indonesian mosque was firstly done by colonial practice in Muslim society of Dutch-Indies with representing Middle-Eastern style to form cultural symbols. Cynically as a language of Orientalism how the West generally sees Islam and non-West [16], as it was manifested in Masjid Raya Baiturrahman Aceh, designed by a foreign architect in last of the 19th century. As Kurniawan and Kusumawardhani (2012) suggested in their research, this was the first dome-shaped Indonesian mosque introduced by Dutch colonies during the late of the 19th century [17].

3.1. New Modern Nation & Sukarno Era

In regards with the using of Dome element in mosque design, Sukarno as the postcolonial subject and the first president of Indonesia was totally indifferent view with the colonialists. He translates the modernity to the dome-shape to represent a monumental, strong and grandiose image of Muslim symbolical building that he intended to leave off any old traditionalism. Sukarno argued that the three-tiered roof style which originated from the Javanese mosque did not represent modern Indonesia at all.

Sukarno chose to forget both the precolonial tradition and the Dutch colonial modernism and was remembering a new kind of universal modern national identity to unite regional ethnic differences in archipelago [18]. Purist modernist architecture (which was inherently inspired by the Le Corbusier's times) then played a universal language to represent and to stand on the postcolonial nation as equal as Western nations, in which the age of motion (Zaman Pergerakan) also had influenced Sukarno in his political desires and ambition.

The channel of modernity translation of Sukarno was clearly based from his academic background in civil engineering under Dutch academics and traveling experiences to the Western countries. One of that he was inspired the most was the urbanism and architecture complex of Brasilia Oscar Niemeyer's works. As many new independence countries, postcolonial modernist architects in the same era seemed to have a shared structure of feeling to explore particular national architecture to solve a problem of diversities, many of them by using the International Style approaches [19].

Source: (Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 1988)
Figure 2: Black/white architectural drawing of Masjid Istiqlal's elevation by Friedrich Silaban

The solid structure, grandeur construction, tectonic expressions and new materiality gave an opportunity to translate the idea of modern and nationalism, reflected in its geometrical facades with tropical climate consideration in Indonesia. The example of this building was Masjid Istiqlal (1951), a national mosque located at the center of Jakarta. It was designed by Protestant architect, Friedrich Silaban after his winning design competition awarded by Sukarno himself (Fig. 2).

Aside from that, the university as educational institution becomes another channel of translation which played role to penetrate the "modern mosque" ideas reflected in the campus mosque building, as can be seen in Masjid Salman in Institut Teknologi Bandung (1963) and Masjid Attauhid Arif Rahman Hakim in Universitas Indonesia (1968) at Salemba. Masjid Salman was officially signed by Sukarno during the opening ceremony and designed by Achmad Noe'man, a modernist architect who was popularly known as "The Architect of a Thousand Mosques."

Noe'man [20] argues that doing design is indeed doing ijtihad (struggle) to reinterpret architectural forms to gain a new innovation of knowledge and solve the contemporary problems. Salman mosque design shows a quality of simplicity, with its plain teak wood facade, wood parquets floor, minimal ornaments usage, wide space with no columns inside the building, and glass walls showing the tectonic expression which was inspired by Mies van de Rohe. The best part is the flat roof that radicalizes mosque design, denying both the dome and traditional roof model (Fig. 3). In another occasion, Sukarno also agreed with Noe'man that the most important in the design is the "modern spirit" that lays behind the mosque, and not about the dome, the roof or any material and shapes whatsoever.

Source: (Salman ITB, 2016)
Figure 3: Masjid Salman, Institut Teknologi Bandung

Despite Noe'man was much influenced with the purist modernism, he did not merely become an anti-dome or anti-ornament architect. The reason he designed the Masjid Salman without internal columns, for example, was based on Hadits or prophet saying to create a prayer space which accommodates fast and continuous row line (shaf) for prayers (jama'ah), since the presence of columns in the middle of the mosque room potentially break the rows. He also took examples from Bauhaus' anti-ornament manners and International Style, which is, according to him, suitable with Islamic values. He translated a modernist way of thinking, primarily its form-follows-function oriented aspect that he claimed is coherent with Islamic principles.
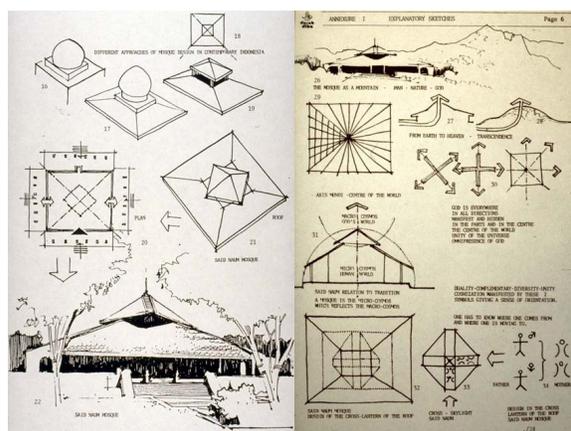
3.2. New Order, Soeharto and Postcolonial Traditionality

Soeharto, in contrary with his former founding father of the nation, was trying to remember the Indonesian (or his) tradition to translate the modernity into architecture building. With his military background, Soeharto had preferred the rebirth of 'Pancasila,' the five moral principles of the republic, and the idea of regionality of architecture to design rooted from the postcolonial traditionality of Indonesia [21]. In fact, it was a particular local culture of Javanese that overcomes the national discourse in culture. This expression of tradition was initially aimed to preserve the national stabilities besides the vast market imperialism at the same time, also foreign investment policies and global forces that openly imported foreign cultures to the state. The interactions held between Soeharto and postcolonial modernity seems to be in a complementary way that was only for supporting traditional ideas.

The familiar mosque examples that refer to Soeharto's ideal were the mass-produced mosques built by Yayasan Amal Bakti Muslim Pancasila during the reign. The foundation had created a mass-production of 999 mosque units (1982-2009) to manifest the prototype of a so-called "national mosque." The aspect of modernity here was translated merely in the construction and concrete materials, while its three-tiered roof and the original building plan still represents the idea of Javanese philosophy of Joglo architecture. Another architect's work that regionalism movement in worldwide also influenced was the Adhi Moersid's Masjid Said Naum (1977), which still inherited the traditional roof structure, but now with a touch of Moersid's brilliant design innovation (Fig. 4). The mosque was even registered as a recipient of Aga Khan Award of Architecture, a prominent and prestigious recognition for the cultural production in Muslim world.

Hence, the architects in different mosque projects during the New Order period of Soeharto might reduce their role in design creativities and be subconsciously under the traditionality ideas of the State as patron. According to what Kusno said, the design was no longer created but Soeharto's re-inventing "tradition" to be modern. This conflicts controversial cultural violence on how "modern Indonesia" was translated somehow recklessly into "modern Java" while ignoring other

cultural diversities and widely context across the archipelago. Besides, different alternative designs such as common Middle Eastern mosque styles were still found in remote regions, villages or the outers where the State hegemony was lesser than in the center of the state.

Source: (Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 1977)
Figure 4: Masjid Said Naum's worksheets by Adhi Moersid (Atelier 6) in 1977 after winning to "showing the traditional character of Indonesia"

3.3. Post-reform Modernity: New Paradigm of Contemporary or A Repeating Modernism?

Capitalists and liberal market systems in Indonesia inevitably help the society, especially the middle-class individuals to choose every of their lifestyle preference and let them explore/exploit more designs. The independent consciousness was growing as the appearance of leniency of the center following the policy of Otonomi Daerah (Regional Autonomy) in the later period of New Order and is continued to the Post-reform regimes. Now in present times, the translation becomes a more kind of individual activity. The overcoming channels, however, appear in some multilayers and complexities.

The ambition to explore architectural design concerning developing national identity is no longer necessary since the post-reform generation is in really different time and space continuum and their relationship have distanced too far with modernism spirit in early of the postcolonial period. They are growing in the era of private capitalism, and market modernism when the government does not intervents any lifestyle design with particular political or cultural hegemonies in a social formation, and

the focus has changed the way to individuals' or privates' creativities and design autonomies.

In parallel with the development in style, entering the era of Post-reform di Indonesia and 21st century, technology brings a change of modern paradigm with vast innovation to structure and construction development thanks to modeling software, decentralizing network and culture with internet to help the global progress sharing architectural discourse lesser distance to each other. This modernity blurs the way it flows, and somehow it repeats the early period of modernism brought Sukarno and Noe'man, although it does not derive from any political motivation the early period had done. The community develops the mosque design based on their needs and convention. Most of them have used various dome old styles, but with technological renewal.

Figure 5: Masjid Al-Irsyad Kota Baru Parahyangan in Bandung, designed by architect Ridwan Kamil (2009)

The high technology of pre-fabrication provides to choose every kind of their own style, either vernacular, dome, or others. New modernism concepts emerge, such as hybridity that becomes a trending style of a mosque, to the influence of a minimalistic approach. Masjid Raya Jawa Tengah (Grand Mosque of Central Java) designed by Achmad Fanani (2006) implements a hybrid technique between Middle Eastern style and Javanese style. Many modern mosque buildings are also based on personal client preference, like Masjid Dian Al-Mahri or the "Golden Domes" (2007) in Depok. Dian as the client tends to express 'Islamic mosque' by way of translating modernity specifically from the simulation of the Middle Eastern mosque. For the architect like Ridwan Kamil (URBANE) has the similar mosque built designs' signature which approaches and characterize a simplistic form of prayer space,

equipped by the minaret, and often negate the dominance of roof shape. (Fig. 5).

Source: (Public domain)
Figure 6: Masjid Raya Sumatera Barat in Padang city, designed by architect Rizal Muslimin (2015)

Another fascinating example is the design development of Masjid Raya Sumatera Barat (Great Mosque of West Sumatra) in Padang city (2008). It offers an alternative mosque discourse by the complexity of its design metaphor precedented from "Rumah Gadang," an ethnic Minang traditional house. The architect, Rizal Muslimin asserts that the design expresses not only a single but a "double coding" (a term in postmodern discourse) meaning: to resemble a shape of Minangkabau roof, and also to represent a metaphorical image of Prophet Muhammad wisdom's story about a shape of cloth that lifted up the The Black Stone (Hajr Aswad) in Kaaba by Mecca tribes' representatives.

4. Conclusion

The historical findings above have led to conclude that the attempts of translation practices in mosque architecture buildings of postcolonial Indonesia assert that the actions appear primarily were done by the dominant roles of the individuals who represented or closely related to the State. In recent times, this argument may be considered invalid and has been replaced by the crowd translations of every postcolonial subject in Indonesia. Nevertheless, both of these conditions show a similarity that the act to translate in culture initiated more by individuals, which means it does not rule out the possibility that the flow modernity is only translated to the superficial personal tastes of the patron, architect, clients or any other individuals.

The practices of translation are not clearly visible in a concrete way, however, designing mosque building basically involves a lot of

International Journal of Built Environment and Scientific Research
Volume 01 Number 01 | June 2017
e-issn: 2580-2607 | Pg. 39-46

localizations of form, due to the absence of any mandatory design basics from Islamic teachings (if not from the repeated culture or tradition). In addition, other unique findings are the translations of the mosque's design in Indonesia based on its physical aspect, especially the roof, which were shown more often. This indicates that the consideration ethic toward designing a mosque is actually a secular approach one, although, in the case of Noe'man, modernity was meant for functional purpose in supporting prayer performance.

Finally, translation by the perspective of the non-West is a useful metaphorical tool to define their own culture autonomously in adapting the idea of modernity. Understanding this "modern" translation transforming each period and following its spirit of an age may conclude that modern mosque architecture in postcolonial Indonesia is not in a stagnant or linear, but rather complex flow periodization during the times of its development. This also indicates the notion of "modern" has multiple intentions to political culture and social realms which always never solidify to any single definition.

Acknowledgement

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