

Deconstruction of Masjid Architecture

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ABSTRACT

Masjid are the basic architecture the place of Moslem. Westerns often calls it a Mosque. Ideally, with different context and era, there should be different Masjid architecture, with still guarding the main principals and values of Muhammad's era Masjid. Different area should be different interpretation of a Masjid. Indonesia is the largest Moslem Country in the world. A good news for all Moslem in Indonesia is that the quantity of Masjid are increasing. While the bad news is, with the increasing numbers of Masjid, it does not followed with contextual designs. Most of them are just copy paste of Classical Arabic style of Masjid. Thus making the Masjid, architecturally "out of place". Today, we live in a modern era with dynamic advance in technology and information. Moslem now required thinking differently while guarding their values. An idea emerges in Masjid Architecture, which required being different also. Thus hoping to attract more Jamaah, especially the young generation (who tend to think modern and contextual) to use the Masjid. This paper examined the steps needed to designs and applied a Deconstruction of Masjid Architecture, but keeping its values sacred. Hoping to create a more diverse and contextual Masjid architecture. An idea worth trying for applications in Masjid Architecture.

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I. INTRODUCTION

During the early years of the 18th century, Masjid tend to have contextual-traditional architectural style. With the development of the world and the emergence of new generation architects, most new Masjid tend to have Arabic style architecture. Masjid designs has evolved typically the same in most of the globe region, even though the world consist of different countries with different cultures. The thematic and visual characteristic of Masjid architecture in the world is typical Arabic style. This trend happens until today.

As a holy place of Muslim world, a Masjid represents Islam in their community. Islam is a world's religion, however, General society still think that Islam is Arabic religion. Thus making its architecture, tend to mimicking Arabic traditional architecture. With domes, ornamentations, arch, and Middle Eastern characteristics.

Despite stylistic features that vary. Most of the Masjid built in the last decade, are with this three main characteristic [1]:

1. Arabic (Middle Eastern) Design.

There are Masjid that embody an Arabic or Middle Eastern that transplanted in to the Masjid. This approach has been widely used by Muslim and Non Muslim builders / architects alike. A favorable way in Masjid Architecture in most region in the world.

2. Adapted Designs.

This method used by most early Masjid architecture built in the 16th to the early 20th century. The Masjids represents a reinterpretation of tradition, sometimes combined with the culture of pre Islam era. This method used decreasingly, parallel with the rise of the "new" era and modernism.

3. Innovative Designs

There are designs that heading to innovative ideas and designs. Like Masjid Iran and Masjid Al-Irsyad, Bandung, Indonesia, with new paradigm and got people rethinking about Mihrab. Alternatively, Masjid Agung Sumatra Barat, Indonesia, with combinations of traditional and modern manifestation, especially in its roof.

This method is often unusual and brave approach confronting public perception and interpretation of masjid and Islam. Thus still the number of built Masjid with innovative designs like those, is far less than Arabic style Masjids. Most people are architecturally un-educated, especially in developing countries, with low desire to learn or care about architecture or designs and its effects in their lives.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This is a literature review on deconstruction and its application on Masjid architecture as the basic idea of development in its architecture. The review starts from issue based that occur in Asia and the world, also the importance of it to be discussed. Then the review are done with outlining the basic form of architecture of Masjid. Outlining the original masjid and the functions of its elements. Then the analysis conducted by Review of deconstruction on masjid architecture are done with maintaining and preserving the basic elements of the original masjid. The results of the analysis are ideas of Masjid Architecture with deconstruction as basic design philosophy.

III. DISCUSSION

The first Masjid in the world is not at all like Arabic architecture today. It does not have any dome, or Islamic ornamentations. It was vernacular and contextual. Simple and functional. Prophet Mohammad PBUH built the first Masjid in Madinah in the year 622, with a simple rectangular structure constructed of palm logs and adobe bricks.

Islam Spread around the world in the 6th century and in 11th century, it spread through India and China and to Indonesia. However, the first Masjid built in Asia and Europe and America was undetected [2].

The term Masjid in Arabic means “the place of Sujud”. Sujud is a form of action of worship to God Almighty. Sujud is the ultimate movement in Islamic Pray or Shalat. While the word Masjid as a space, a place, and its meaning start with this Hadits;

Prophet Muhammad SAW said:

‘for me, the World is Masjid’... (HR Bukhari).

The hadits above shows that Muslim’s place of worship covers all where humans lives. It does not give any specific spot to do it. In addition, it does not give any physical boundaries. This gives us the basic idea that the foundation of the word “Masjid” is actually un-boundaries-able. No walls, no roof, not even floors.

Then masjid specifically become inclusive to perform shalat when there is a building addressed to accommodate it. It has basic architectural elements, such as clean floor, a roof for the heat protections, and walls for privacy and segregation. The basic purpose of a mosque at first is political. To gather the society, to perform shalat as a community, to learn together, to be a colony (jama’ah).

Islam is a religion that emerged in the Arabian Peninsula in the early seventh century. Nevertheless, there are no Islamic Literature or Quranic verses and hadits shows that a Muslim must follow Arabic culture. Thus making the Masjid Architecture to adapt a rich set of architectural forms that varied across cultures of the world, and reflected different historical periods.

The spread of Islam follow the spread of its people. Some by wars but many by trader and spiritual walker (musafir). The people often did not have any basic architecture literature of masjid, so wherever they want to built a Masjid, they only hold to the basic principal of a mosque then adapt to a local context of architecture. This making the development of the Masjid varied across the world.

Masjids in Indonesia, for example, in the 19th century in general have so much in different stylistic elements. They are local and contextual [4]. All the remaining majisd from that time remains as a focal form of masjid. And still a big attractions for people to do shalat there. Hence, also enhancing the quality of the shalats.

Nevertheless, building a traditional-contextual masjid today, is one of the options rarely chosen by modern architect or by the societies. To create new paradigm to confront Arabic Style Masjids, architect needs new ideas. Like the ideas of building with post modern principals. And the most challenging ideas is deconstruction, as the philosophical ideas of a masjid.



Picture 1. Masjids form in Indonesia [3]

Against Stagnation : Preserve and Change

Innovations and transformations have always marked the history of Masjid Architecture. Starts from the first mosque in Madinah City in the 6th century to today there always be architectural elements which preserved and changed.

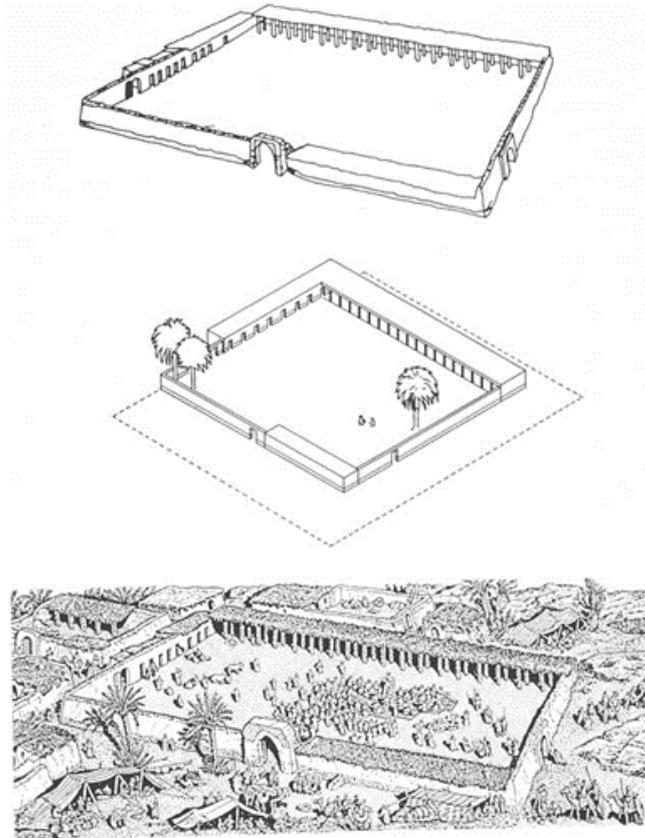
The existence of thus a variety of Masjid typologies in the world, shows that many features were relative to a particular region and time. Such as domes, and falt roof, as seen in Arabian and African region. Some region in asia are having pyramidal pitched roofs, a courtyard, as developped in iran and central asia, a more than one domes, as seen in india. The minaret, as seen in almost all middle east Masjid but not in china. The layers of walls, as seen in china. All above features are dynamic and relatively but not a primary element of architecture in a masjid.

There are some debate about ornamentations the importance of it. Nevertheless it is also not a primary features or a must have in a Masjid.

Different regions, different times, will create different masjid. But some features remains the same and preserved. According to the first masjid built by the prophet Mohammad PBUH, masjid must have three main requirements:

1. Harm. The shalat space.
2. Mimbar. The imam's place in the front of the shalat space.
3. Wudhu. The ablutions place

With these three, it is clear that even the roof is not a prominent requirements. As the first masjid did not have fixed roof, it only use the leaf of dates plants in tiny area of the whole masjid. So if it is raining the floors will surely wet. And the sun will heat the shalat space directly.



Picture 2. Reconstruction of the first Masjid. [3]

Deconstructing masjid : keeping the values

After the Second World War, the tectonic and ornamental evolution of architecture in the world came to a more dynamic movement. Modernism killing itself with the fall of Pruitt-Igoe in the city of St. Louis, Missouri. Architectural historian Charles Jencks called its destruction "the day Modern architecture died" [5]. Since then, architects did not know where to go. Some turn back to classical architecture, some goes questioning, what next?

In came Jaques Derrida, a 20th century philosopher, he wrote about signs and meaning and to a conclusions of all, that he called "deconstruction". Derived from re-thinking structuralism as a "construction".

Deconstruction is a school of philosophy that originated in France in the late 1960. It upends the Western metaphysical tradition. It is a critical outlook concerned with the relationship between text and meaning.

According to Derrida, language is just a system of signs and words. Words connected to meaning through system of signs. Words have meaning because it cannot be independent or non-linguistic. Therefore, meaning is never present, but rather differed to other signs. [6]

Derrida with basic of literature, then, refer to all writings ever made. Including philosophy and religion. Therefore, for people to develop further, all must be deconstructed to find new signs and then new meaning. Alternatively, to find the basic signs and to find the true meaning.

He indicates that the conception between words and signs can never fully summon forth what they mean. Because each words can only defined through the appeal of additional words, from which they surely differ. This, make the meaning to always postponed through and endless chain of signifiers. This is the pinpoint of deconstruction. He called it "Différance" [7].

However, Derrida in later of his life find out that somethings are "undeconstructible". Like the signs of Justice, Law, and deconstruction it self. Everything, which experienced to be a signs, are undeconstructible. [8]

In Masjid, we can divide it in to two area of deconstruction. One is the deconstructible elements and the other is the undeconstructible. Any physical element of masjid architecture are deconstructible. Starting from the main requirements, like harm, mimbar, and wudhu, to the dynamic features like wall, roof, even the floor.

While the experience of Masjid, which is undeconstructible. The main use of a masjid is for shalat, which done together (jamaah). Other use of masjid is relative and contextual. Nevertheless, the uses always in context of Islamic activity. Here are the undeconstructible elements in a masjid.

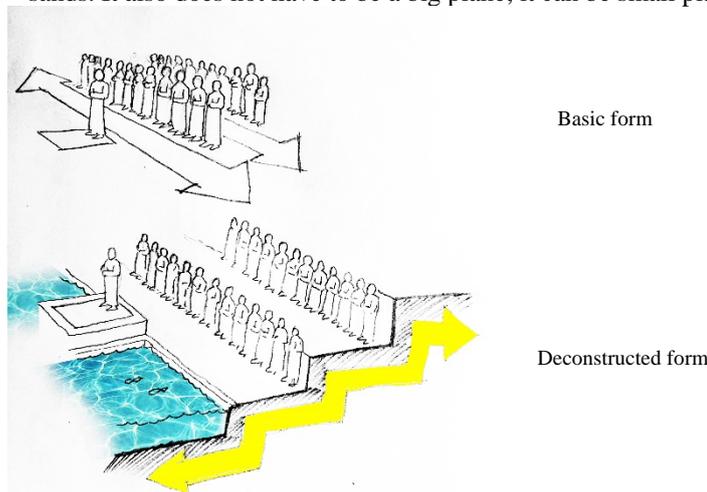
1. The feeling of togetherness (jama'ah). Muslim one another engage in close activity that results an intimate relationship with one another. As the Hadits said, that one Muslim is a family to other Muslim.
2. The divine feeling (the khusyu'). When a Muslim perform Shalat, he should disconnect any thought from the world and focus on the thought of the God. This difficult activity, as people tend to think about worldly utilities or problems all the time, usually enhanced by the environment.
3. The clean feeling (suci). Before and after performing the ablutions, muslim need to walk in the clean state of architecture. There should be no "najis" in the Masjid. A najis is dirty element like scattered blood, feces, urine, dirt, puke, and any excrement.
4. The lead and leadership (imam). If Musllims performs a Shalat Jamaah, there is the feeling of followers and leaderships. Everyone can be a leader, while everyone else is just an equal follower.
5. The purity in the segregation of men and women. This involve with lust and sanctity. To support the Khusyu', human must deleted any worldly and sexual lust. Also, If someone touches other sex (not related), then his/her Wudhu result (body purity) will fail. Which the person should take another wudhu.
6. The discipline of even and straight of jamaah. The even and straight arrangement of Jamaah create the feeling of discipline community. Because, the life of a muslim is based on discipline and order. Jamaah Support the values correctly.

All above are the values that exist in the Masjid. According to the Quran and Hadits those are obligatory elements in the activity in masjid. The values based on experience. The experiences must not change in any circumstances, in any context or in any time. Except if there an emergency, such as difficult situation or life threatening.

Deconstructioning Masjid : Ideas

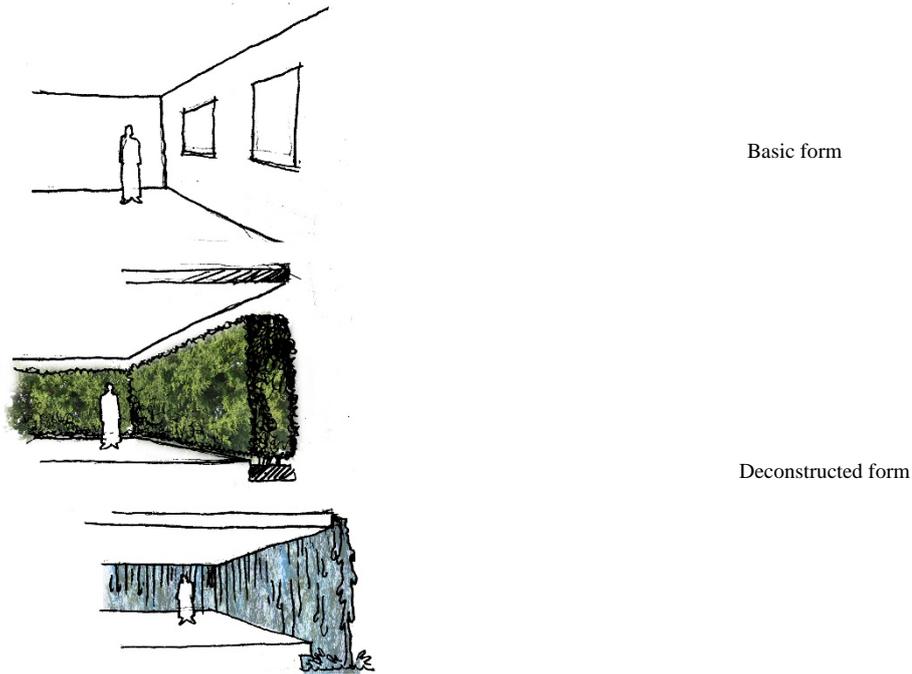
All physical element in masjid architecture are deconstructible elements. Nevertheless, the architectural design intention in deconstruction element must preserve the undeconstructible elements above. The deconstructible elements are:

1. Harm. The sense of straight of jamaah while doing shalat, can still be achieved with a deconstruct floor. As the basic meaning of a floor is bottom – base – where people stands – where shalat held. It did not have to be a carpet, or even a real floor. Some ideas of using glass with water bellow it, or a grass or sands. It also does not have to be a big plane; it can be small planes for personal shalat planes.



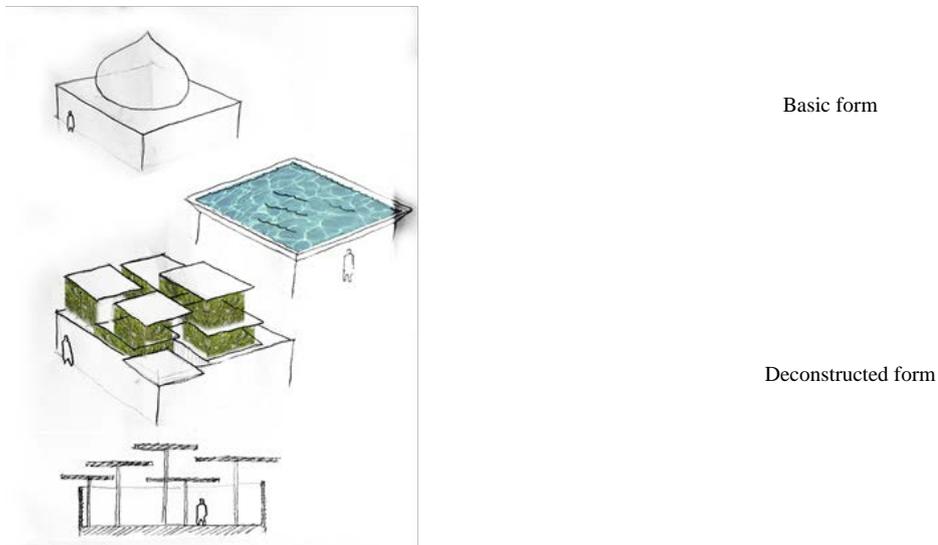
Picture 3. Masjid's Floor deconstruction ideas.

2. Wall. The meaning of the wall in Masjid is a divider of the holy place for shalat and segregation tools. Another type of seperation tools, perhaps like a river or a waterfall, can replace this. Plants and shrubs will also functions as the same idea. The freedom of choosing different alternative works best especially in tropical area.



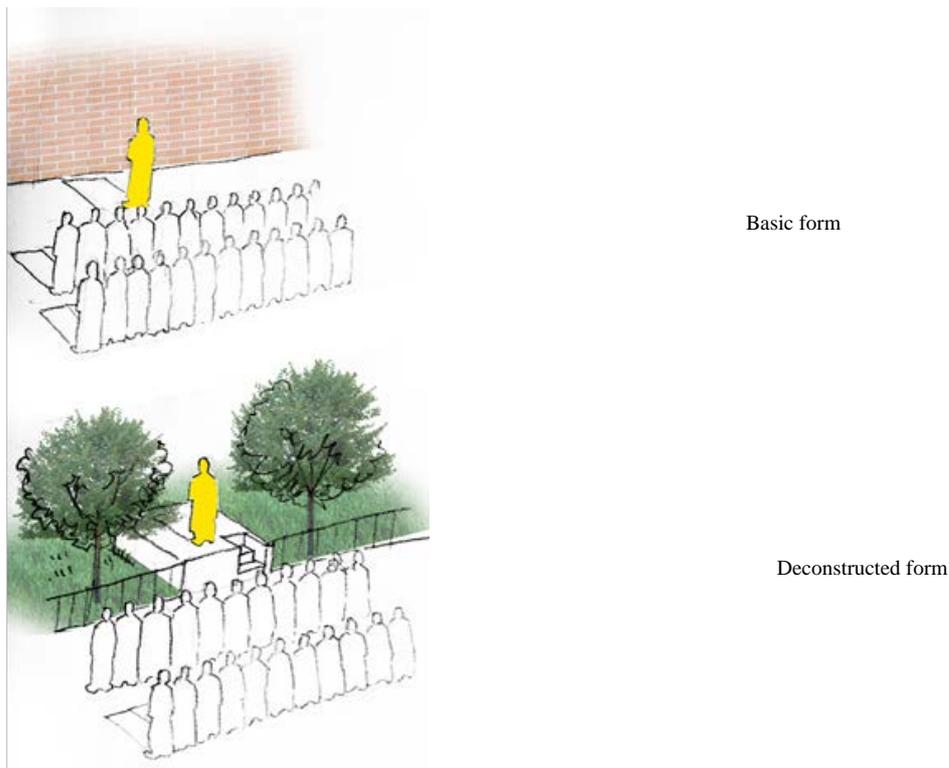
Picture 4. Masjid's wall deconstruction ideas.

3. Roof. Like before the roof is actually not an obligatory element. Therefore, the meaning of the roof is actually for protection against rain, snow or heat. It does not need any specific form or material.



Picture 5. Masjid's roof deconstruction ideas

4. Mihrab and mimbar. The meaning is for the place of imams while leading a shalat or preaching a khutbah. For where the imam of shalat, the requirements is need to be in the front of the jamaah. It can be above or bellow the jamaah level. While for khutbah, it can above the head of the jamaah, using technology as an optimizing element of the khutbah.



Picture 6. Masjid's Mihrab deconstruction idea

5. Wudhu. Like shalat, Wudhu is an act of observance. The basic act of wudhu is that it uses water to replenish the dirt and najis before perform shalat. As wudhu are using water, then it can be from any source like a river, waterfall, or a pool. Any flow clean water would do fine.

IV. CONCLUSION

In many countries, architects are advocating Arabic style architecture flocking the world with Arabic style masjid. It is considered a usual and old paradigm. However, to create new energy in Muslim society, architects must perform new paradigm. This polemical practice has not yet penetrated in the thick skin of architects and even academics. No more direct cut and paste from Arabic or Middle Eastern identity.

On reviewing the new ideas in deconstructing Masjid Architecture, it is evident that the method used could create new paradigm of Masjids while keeping the values of the original Masjid in their place.

The method of deconstruction must first looked in the undeconstructable elements in Masjid Architecture. Keeping and guarding them first, then deconstruct the deconstructable elements.

This method creating new form of masjid architecture. A deconstruction based Masjid. Post modern Masjid. With hope attracting young and new jamaah in Masjid, also creating new way of thinking facing this technological era. Thus creating innovation in Masjid architecture and its activities while still guarding its values.

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