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### Representation of National Identity in Malaysian State Mosque Built Form as a Socio-cultural Product

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#### ABSTRACT

The formation of national identity is the essence for a multi-racial country like Malaysia because it can strengthen national solidarity, create a common aspiration, and sustain the continuity of a historical heritage with multiple ethnicity and background. Nevertheless, the characteristics of this national identity is still not fully dealt with from an architectural aspect. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to critically examine the problem of national architectural identity in Malaysia. This is vital to uncover the resulting design principles with national architectural identity characteristics by referencing to three typologies of local state mosque as case study. The finding outlines that there are six architectural principles that influence the formation of national identity. These are the understanding of built form detail elements, materials usage, local style composition and expression, application of organic theory, designing a regionalistic articulation of space and form as well as an understanding of democratic values form to reflect the characteristics of national identity. These established referential guideline design on national identity is of benefit for future designers, builders, developer and related authority to produce built form that symbolizes nation political values as well as responsive to the existing social culture context.

### 1. Introduction

The problem of finding and identifying a national identity is a requirement for each country whether it has achieved independence, or for countries governed by leaders whom are concerned with unity and national integrity. The search for an identity is one of the main factors towards the creation of an ideal nation because it has deep implications on the country's form of government. Although the infusion of cultural values and the advancement of modern technology plays an important role in resolving the issue of national identity, architecture is viewed by many scholars as a prominent entity due to its function in shaping the human built environment (Ismail, 2008). The search for a national identity from the aspect of built environment that suits the people's aspirations is an important effort especially in a multi-racial country because through the formation of a national identity, only then will the three main aspects in the

social life of a country can be achieved. These are the unification of the masses (Abel, 2012), the achievement and progress of the country as well as global acknowledgement (Avcioglu, 2007), all for the sake of giving birth to a society with own dignity and sense of self-worth may be accomplished (Abel, 2000).

Nevertheless, in the Malaysian context, emphasis on the existence of architecture with national identity characteristics is still lacking and not practiced in totality by designers, builders, developers and related authority (Ismail, 2010). Even though the parties involved have proposed a specific action plan to implement the drafted National Architecture Identity policy (refer to the 2016 Draft National Identity Architecture Policy, DASIK), the proposal is still new and have not been fully applied by the involved parties. Scholars highlight that the problem for the formation of a national architecture identity comprises of

six factors- the conflict of infusion of international architecture characteristics due to the mind-set and thinking of local designers that were educated abroad and externally influenced (Shamsul, 2001), developmental imbalance within the country (Shamsul, 1996), lack of concern by certain groups in society (Shamsul, 2001), drastic changes to living patterns in society (Shamsul, 2001) and material discovery as well as the lack of understanding in the utilization of modern technology (Smith, 1991). These problems have given rise to perceptions that are contradictory to a nationalistic identity requirement and spirit.

Thus, the objective of this paper is to survey and classify various approaches to resolve the questions with regards to the problem of searching for a national architecture identity by referencing existing case studies on the local mosque and outline problems in terms of the case study's design based on observation. From the findings, a guideline framework will be established supported by the ideologies of past architectural thinkers whom are considered successful in laying out the understanding of national identity to resolve the problem in the search of architectural built form with national identity. Before elaborating on the findings from the selected case studies, the next section will firstly describe on the meaning of identity in architecture followed by the typology, factors and developmental policy relating to the formation of a national architectural identity in the Malaysian context.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### ***2.1 Concept and factors for the formation of national identity in architecture***

The implementation and the formation of national identity in architecture involves a long process that requires extensive duration of time to attain (Lefavre, 2003). It can be considered as the remains of a civilization encompassing cultural life (Lefavre, 2003). Because it is a process, identity cannot be devised or forged. The method to shape and develop this identity can be fulfilled when we successfully solve the root of the real problem in daily life involving social culture, political and economic factors. Identity is not only something that is inclined to some political party's ideology but it also depends on individual perception that observes it. More importantly identity must reflect a compatible characteristic within the context of human life and society able to accept it logically (King, 2004). According to scholars (Lefavre et al., 2003), the formation of this national architectural identity is subjected

to two main factors. The first factor, is according to environmental conditions such as economic achievement, increasing in urban cultural life, conflicts in political system, perception and values of designers and clients as well as the capability of technology advancement and new materials (dynamic change characteristic). The second factor is dependent on permanent resources such as climate, nature of terrain, plant life landscape, architectural heritage, culture and customs as well as the perception of regionalism (permanent characteristic). In addition, there are scholars who emphasized that each produced design influences and shapes this universe in addition to human civilization. Thus, architectural principles that revolve around detail elements and ornamentation, the use of local materials, the formation of style and uniqueness, application of organic theory as well as concern towards democratic principles needs to be emphasized. This is vital to create an architecture that can fulfill the desires and needs of each individual in a multiracial society. In other words, to create an architecture with national identity to represent the nature and life of the community (Morgado, 2008).

### ***2.2 Identity Typology in Architecture***

According to Ismail (2009), there are three identity typologies that refer to the current context in Malaysia which is natural identity, forced identity and manufactured identity. These three typological types will be explained subsequently.

Natural identity in architecture as defined by many modern thinkers is related closely to the 'spirit of times' (Ismail, 2008). Postmodernists however outlines that natural identity is largely influenced by "spirit of place". Nonetheless, a design is considered successful when it is built based on both mentioned values. An understanding of this 'spirit of times' refers to the reaction of designers and users that depends on the change of technological ability, structure utilization and economic desires in a specific duration, but still respects and preserves the building's original design values. For instance, the construction of the traditional Malay home.

Forced identity can be defined as fulfilling the client's desires in producing a design and the users not having a say or opinion in the design (Ismail, 2009). The formation of this type of identity can also be influenced by national aspirations. Most are determined by the state political structure and certain groups whose adaptation of the identity is influenced by the ruling government. The most

notable example in Malaysia is the phenomena of modern homes construction in residential parks which has dragged on since its introduction forty years ago and still in existence till today. These residential parks are built using a grid system that is only more suitable for a parking lot without emphasizing the occupational aspects of its inhabitants.

Manufactured identity is a form of identity that is invented or created to fulfill the needs and desires of a society that lives in a globalized condition to take on the challenges of a turbulent world economically or politically (Ismail, 2009). According to most architectural scholars, the adaptation of this artificial identity is to signify dominancy and control; to evoke feelings of impressiveness in order to be remembered by its audience; to assert identity in the world; to lend visual prestige and symbolize dignity of the patron; to reinforce the patron's immediate authority and to project their influence in society. In the Malaysian context, from post-Independence until now, most architectural designs that have been produced belong to these three identity categories. These three type of identity typologies can be depicted through the architectural style approach such as revivalism, modernistic expressionism, metaphors, functionalism and primitive regionalism. These architectural style approaches will be explained subsequently in the following section.

### ***2.3 Architectural style approach that is interrelated with architecture identity typology***

Revivalism style approach means to give new breath or reviving back but in a different style and look concept (Rasdi 2005). The style approach possesses a direct relationship with the cultural heritage pattern display (Rasdi, 2005). The revivalism style approach also provides new exposure to old buildings' design aspects in order that it can be re-adapted to fulfill various function and aim. The use of this heritage based syntactic vocabulary facilitates the shaping of buildings from the point of aesthetics and conveying a clear message, and is also interrelated to "spirit of the times". Hence, the revivalism style approach can be said to resolve the question of fulfilling the context and taking on the challenge of the formation of a national architecture identity.

The modernistic expressionism style approach is quite different from revivalism (Rasdi, 2005). It not only creates a new appearance for a design but also conveys a positive message and concern towards the vernacular heritage aspects. It can be said as a school of thought that considers the role of aesthetics and symbolism. The characteristics of modernistic expressionism architecture not only revolve on

the use of metaphorical syntax as a message delivery idiom but it does not directly imitate the past age's design product. Other than that, buildings possessing this style approach utilizes a structural framework system and modern materials. This style approach is an effective presentation in highlighting a national identity architecture because it does not favour any cultural or ethnic or racial heritage, instead its school of thought is global and comprehensive.

The metaphorical style approach in architecture means the building design is shaped to have similar characteristics with an object or symbol to the thing that is being highlighted (Rasdi, 2005). A successful metaphorical style approach is a building that consists of a design that cannot be interpreted fully and is not imitative of the object being imitated. The adaptation of the metaphorical style approach is considered fully successful when its inhabitants or observers are unable to immediately guess the design object on display. Metaphorical combination is considered not very outstanding in this country, instead local designers prefer to use metaphorical style approaches in its 3-dimensional form and can only be felt through the exploration of interior planning layout and cannot be appreciated fully from the outer facade whereas meaningful architecture is an experience and appreciation that can be enjoyed by each individual.

Functionalism style approach is originally based on the phrase "form follows function" by Louis Sullivan (Rasdi, 2005). According to him, design is produced based on function. The philosophy of functionalism is divided into two traditions which is machine functionalism and organic functionalism. Building design using the machine functionalism style approach treats a building as a machine where the building should be able to filter the local climatic conditions. Buildings are built to function solely to fulfil human comfort from physiological aspects and also anthropometric movements only. The need for highlighting cultural elements and ornamentation are absolutely a form of waste and not given due concern. Buildings that use organic functionalism style approach emphasizes living characteristics such as culture and aesthetic elements in design and urban life.

Regionalism style approach is divided into two which is machine and primitive regionalism (Rasdi, 2005). Machine regionalism has similarities to machine functionalism as discussed previously. On the other hand, primitive regionalism is an approach that places importance on the search to produce design that emphasizes passive climatic

design. Primitive regionalism emphasizes humanistic ideology and understanding of environmental nature and the cultural past.

The explanation with regards to the above architectural style approach is important because it will be the reference and the basis of discussion in the next section. Nevertheless, to understand mosque design in terms of form and space, whether or not it symbolizes national architecture identity values based on the selected indicators, the following established indicators based on National Identity Architecture Policy will be referred to. To understand this, next section will elaborate on the derivation of the selected indicators followed by explanation on methodology used for this research.

### 2.4 National Identity Architecture Policy

The National Identity Architectural Policy aims to be a reference and guideline by architects, designers, planners and, policy makers and the authorities in terms of design preparation for architecture, interior design, urban design

and built environment with a high-valued, innovative and sustainable national identity (DASIK, 2016). This policy also guarantees the preservation of architectural heritage and local natural environment as outlined in the National Heritage Act 2005 (DASIK, 2016). The aims of this policy encompass seven important items as a framework and general goal in the design implementation by the government and private sector involving preserving architectural heritage and national built environments; incorporating sustainable design; preserving local natural environment; improving construction value and building maintenance and improving urban design values and in the existing and planning stage. Based on the principles of the National Identity Architecture Policy, five core elements are applied as a guideline to the formulation of the National Identity Architecture characteristics, which are (i) Society and culture (ii) Environmental and local conditions (iii) Environmentally friendly design (iv) Architectural handiwork with native roots (v) Provision of law, rules, and enforcement of the National Identity Architecture Policy. Nevertheless, from these five core elements, only four cores elements are appropriate for reference in this

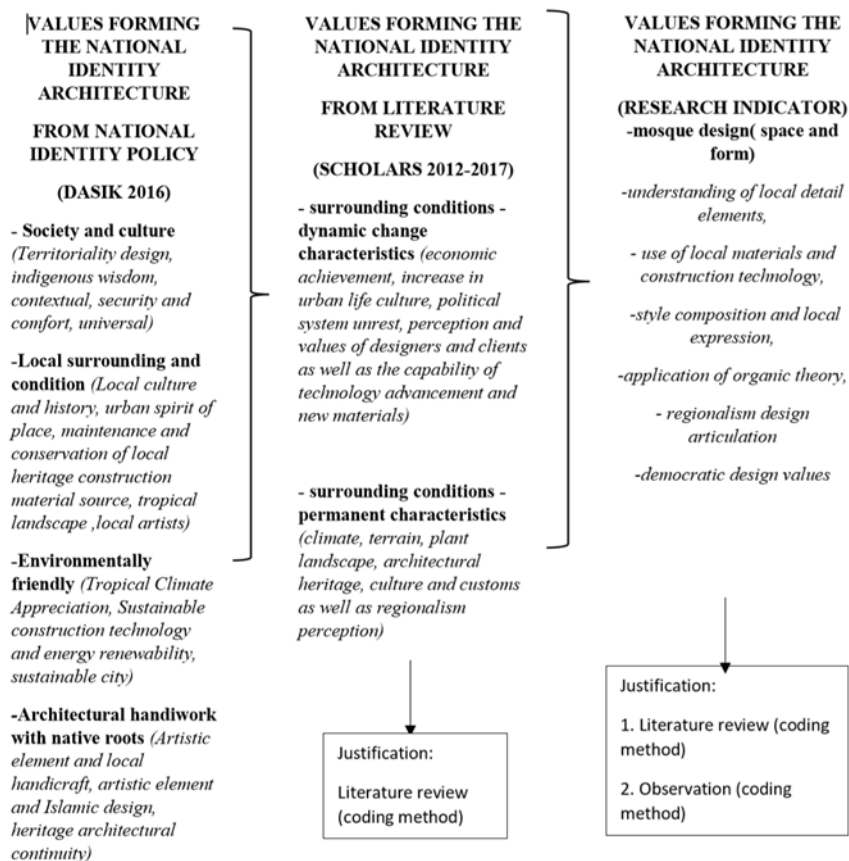


Figure 1: Formation of indicator of National architecture identity values

research (refer to Figure 1). Based on the literature review by past scholars, it clearly shows that there are inconsistencies in terms of architectural style that exists due to various architectural expression style giving rise to the problem of creating a specific criterion to outline an architectural approach that can be categorized as a national identity architecture. Due to the various perspective that is mixed up from various thinkers and an absence of a specific theory structure to shape a local architecture with a national identity, hence the research on the formation of identity in architecture needs to reference the National Identity Architecture Policy that was drafted by the Board of Architects Malaysia (LAM) (DASIK, 2016). The combination of literature review reference and the four core elements that are referenced from this National Identity Architecture Policy is important as it will assist in forming an indicator that can be used to study the case study of state mosque to determine whether or not it possesses an architectural characteristic with a national identity or not. The national architecture identity formation factor needs to be based on the understanding of identity typology in architecture because this understanding will support the indicator used to examine the selected case study. In brief, the selection method and indicator listing for studying the case study is selected as exhibited in Figure 1.

### **3. Methodology— semiotic as method in understanding building as a ‘sign’ of national identity**

Semiotics, or semiology, is the study of signs and symbols and how meaning is constructed and understood (Fiske, 2010). Semiotics covers three main areas of study. These are the study of sign itself, the codes and systems into which signs are organized and the culture within which these codes or signs operate (Van Leeuwen, 2005). A sign is defined as a display of structure, an act, gesture or something physical perceivable by human senses that conveys an idea, desire, information or command. However, things only become a sign when meaning is invested in them (Van Leeuwen, 2005). Since the study of a sign may not be divorced from the concrete form of social intercourse, and cannot exist, as such, without it, the theory of semiotics therefore is commonly applied to the fields of art, literature, anthropology, and architecture (Hodge & Kress, 1988). Semiotics is also widely applied in architecture to investigate how people project meanings onto the built form (Hawkes, 2003). There are two dominant models in the study of semiotics. The founders of these two schools were C.S Pierce and linguist,

Ferdinand Saussure. As Saussure’s work will benefit this present study, his ideas on ‘sign’ relations, how a ‘sign’ operates and the way it conveys meaning will be discussed in detail.

#### **i. The state mosque as a ‘sign’ - Ferdinand Saussure**

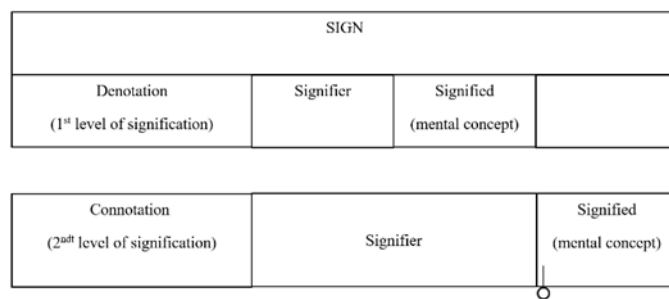
Ferdinand Saussure founded the structuralism school of thought, proposing a dualistic notion of signs. According to Saussure (1985:78), a sign “doesn’t exist in reality and it is formed by the associative link between the signifier and the signified”. In his linguist theory, the signifier is the sound and the signified is the thought. As put forth by Saussure (1985:66), “a sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept (signified) and a sound pattern (signifier)” - to form a meaning-imbued ‘sign’. Saussure (1985:128) also states that “signs too can exist only in opposition to other signs. That is, signs are created by their value relationships with other signs. The contrasts that form between signs of the same nature in a network of relationships is how signs derive their meaning”. Since the meaning of a sign is also determined by how a sign is differentiated from other signs, therefore it involves the mental concept (signified) to categorize meaning to help understand the sign better. For Saussure, this mental concept (signified) is constructed by people and is influenced by the culture or subculture to which they belong (Fiske 2010). Saussure’s model of signs is of value for this study, as there is a need to understand how three Western Malaysian state mosques operate as a meaningful sign as symbol of national identity.

To clarify this, the example of the sign MOSQUE can be used. As a sign, it is composed of the signifier - the word or sound pattern ‘mosque’, and the signified - mental concept of ‘mosque’, which one has of this particular type of building. The relationship between the mental concept of (mosque) - signified and the word or sound pattern (signifier) - ‘mosque’ is known as signification. Referring to the Saussure model, the mental concept (signified) is also a product of a particular culture. Therefore the mental concept (mosque) may be articulated differently by each individual or reader, who is influenced by the culture they come from and belong to. Since the mental concept which we articulate will be different for every one of us, Saussure also stresses the arbitrariness of the sign (Saussure 1985). On this matter, he states that the relationship between the signifier and signified is determined by conventions, rule and agreements among users (Fiske 2010). There are formal conventions that fix the meaning and enable one to

experience similar signs and communicate with each other. For example there is a formal convention which is agreeable to all within our culture that the sign MOSQUE refers to a building and not a platter of food. Because the relation that exists between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, codes are also developed and used to help us learn what some signs mean (MacGregor 1997). In addition, codes which are defined as, “sets of signs and rules for their use by semioticians also help to simplify phenomena in order to make it easier to communicate experiences” (Hurwitz 2012:53). Meanings, therefore, are activated within the repertoire which the code offers us (Fiske 2010). Saussure (1985:72) also states that “signs can be organized into codes in two ways. First is by paradigm and second is syntagm”. A paradigm can be defined as a set of signs from which the one to be used is chosen. It is a set of associated signs which are all members of the same category. A syntagm is the messages with which the chosen sign is combined (Fiske 2010; Hurwitz 2012). For example, the contents of one’s wardrobe = paradigm; what one is actually wearing = syntagm. Although Saussure’s work is best suited for the present research, as his model of signs forms the basis of understanding how signs work, nevertheless there are limitations to his study. He did not describe in detail the social cultural experience, expression and conventions when dealing with the understanding of signs. This is because Saussure's model of the sign only focused on denotation rather than at the expense of connotation (Fiske 2010). As also argued by Smith (2000:9), “one limitation of Saussure's approach was his understanding of a sign that an object x comes to have a meaning y within a certain structure. The process of meaning making thus, resembles 'pattern matching'. Due to this limitation, Roland Barthes’ work is referred to next, as he elaborates on Saussure’s model of signs in a more extensive way. Barthes stated that the bond between the signifier and signified (mental concept) is also dependent on social and cultural conventions. Furthermore, Barthes analysed the meaning of signs based on orders of signification. These are denotation, connotation and myth. His application in the material culture is known as socio semiotics (Hawkes 2003).

**ii. The state mosque as an ‘interactive sign’- Roland Barthes**

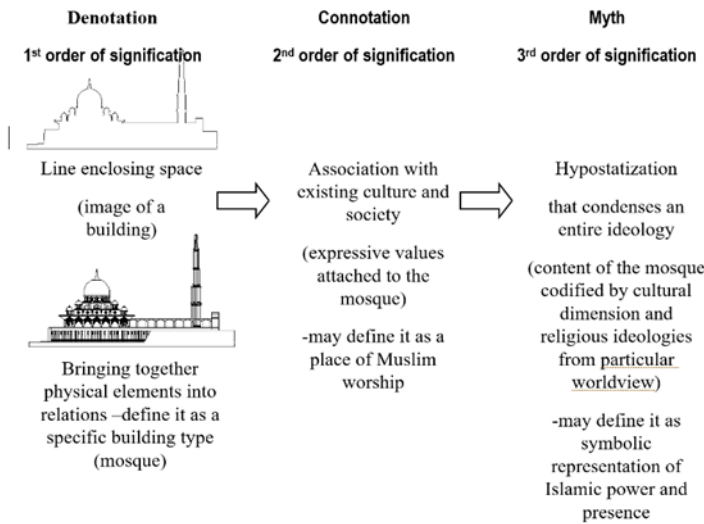
Socio-semiotics articulates the material context of daily life and the signifying practice within a social context, where all meanings arise from a more articulated codified dimension. Here, the systems of signification (relationship between the signifier and signified) are multileveled



*Figure 2: systems of signification (relationship between the signifier and signified)*

structures which not only contain denotative signs but also connotative signs when particular cultural codes are ascribed to these signs (Barthes 1994:182). The first order of signification is that of denotation: at this level there is a sign consisting of a signifier and a signified. Connotation is a second-order of signification which uses the denotative sign (signifier and signified) as its signifier and attaches to it an additional signified. In this framework, a connotation is a sign which derives from the signifier of a denotative sign (so denotation leads to a chain of connotations) (Barthes 1994:183) (Figure 2).

In other words, denotation, or first order of meaning can be described as the relationship between signifier and signified within the sign. This refers to the definitional, literal meaning of a sign. This relationship can extend further as a sign may also have additional values. Here, the sign can also become a signifier of another sign (connotation) or second order of meaning, which signifies cultural values such as status structure in society. The level of connotation may also develop further when it combines with denotation to produce ideology. The sign becomes its own referent as a third order of meaning (myth), where it becomes a hypostatization that condenses an entire ideology in a single word or image (Barthes, 1994). In other words, the function of myths is to help us to make sense of our experiences within a culture. Myth also expresses and serves to organise shared ways of conceptualising something within a culture (Barthes 1994). An example is a daily use object such as a ‘pen’. At the denotative level, this object is generally associated with its daily function as a writing tool. The ‘pen’ however may also be susceptible to other meaning when it is linked or being connoted by ideology of high status. At a connotative level, the pen may parade a certain sense of wealth, status or position. This meaning could also include other associations through condensation and hypostatization at the mythic level such as progress,



*Figure 3 :Barthes theory of order signification*

technology or intellectuality (Barthes 1994:182). The first (denotative) order (or level) of signification, therefore is seen as primarily representational and relatively self-contained. The second (connotative) order of signification reflects 'expressive' values which are attached to a sign. In the third (mythological or ideological) order of signification, the sign reflects major culturally-variable concepts underpinning a particular worldview, such as masculinity, femininity, freedom, individualism, objectivism, Englishness and so on (Chandler, 2017). To understand how Barthes' theory of orders of signification relates to the present study, the diagram below can be referred to as an example (Figure 3).

At the denotative level, the above is a diagram of an image of a building, and by bringing together all its physical architectural elements such as dome, minaret, arches, entrance portal, into relations, we then identify it as a mosque. At a connotative level, we then associate mosque with the existing culture and society. The mosque therefore is viewed as a place of Muslim worship, a religious learning center for the Muslim, a Muslim communal place and a spiritual place. At a mythic level, we understand the mosque as a sign, activating the myth of Islamic religion, status, identity, power and glory. In this case, the mosque may be a statement of national identity symbol, ideological representation of Islamic power and presence and so forth. Barthes' work, therefore, is of greater value for the current research, as the aim of this study is to read and interpret the meaningful nature and concepts that are embodied in the state mosque as a sign which is bound to a particular social context and cultural setting. In this regards, Barthes' interactive idea of meaning is relevant for this work because he clearly defined that signs work in order of signification, and,

during the process of signification, interaction occurs between the sign with the user's experience and his or her social cultural position. As a result, diversity of interpretations is obtained, instead of one defined or literal meaning. In order to understand further how socio-semiotics is applied in analyzing the built environment, the work by Mark Gottdiener will be referred to next, as the main reference for this study. This is because he explicitly focuses on the subject of socio-semiotics and its application to analyze the phenomena of material culture. Gottdiener uses the organization of signs for his research to understand how ideology articulates with material forms or, in other words, how material forms are encoded through ideological meanings which are engineered into form. By understanding this, one will be able to decode and 'read' the meaning of the material culture. Although his research focuses on Las Vegas as an environmental setting, his study provides methodological insights for the study of other settings such as state mosques which are also products of social and political contexts.

**iii. Work of Gottdiener - the relation between socio-semiotics and the material culture**

Gottdiener (1995) introduces the socio-semiotic model of the sign to describe the way ideology articulates with material forms. According to him, socio-semiotics accounts for a two way process to present symbolic interaction in daily life: first, is the articulation of ideology and second, is the material forms. The term 'ideology' here is defined as the value system of a social group. A value system is correlated to the content of a sign, whereas materiality is correlated to the expression of sign (Gottdiener 1995:27) (Figure 4).

The 'content' then can be divided further to 'substance' and 'form'. The contents of form and substance are determined by the ideological culture of the society. This ideology, which belongs to a particular cultural practice, may be codified or non-codified ideology (Gottdiener 1995). The 'expression' is also divided further by substance and form. Both of these, however, refer to the object. In the case of the object, it may refer to the specific

$$\text{Sign} = \frac{\text{Content}}{\text{Expression}} = \frac{\frac{\text{Substance}}{\text{Form}}}{\text{Substance}} = \frac{\frac{\text{Non-codified ideology}}{\text{Codified ideology}}}{\text{Morphological elements}}$$

Form Material objects

*Figure 4: Socio-semiotic model #1 by Gottdiener*

$$\text{Sign} = \frac{\text{Content}}{\text{Expression}} = \frac{\text{Substance Form}}{\text{Substance Form}} = \frac{\text{Social ideology Architectural ideology}}{\text{Morphological units Architectural object}}$$

Figure 5 : Socio-semiotic model #2 by Gottdiener

morphological elements or material existence of the object (Gottdiener 1995). In order to understand the way ideology relates to the built environment, Gottdiener also produces another type of socio-semiotic model using the same format as the above (Gottdiener 1995:84) (Figure 5).

To explain how this socio-semiotic model (Figure 4 and Figure 5) works for the built environment, Gottdiener carried out an analysis of the mall as his case study (Figure 6). In the study of the mall, Gottdiener (1995:84) outlined that the mall as a built form is best understood as the intersecting site of two distinct structural principles. These two principles are the mall ‘content’ and its ‘expression’. Since every sign is also a part of system of signification, which is structured by the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes, these two separate orders of meaning are also important in reading the sign system which can be found at the mall. Gottdiener (1995:84) also states that the paradigmatic axes of the mall can also be referred to as the ‘content’ of the mall which involves the mall design motif, while the syntagmatic axis is referred to as the ‘expression’ of the mall. This second axis consists of the way the separate elements within the mall produce meaning through metonymy and contiguity (Gottdiener 1995:84). (Figure 6).

Since the mall ‘content’ also involves the design motif of the mall which is to sell consumer goods, the codified ideology of the building hence articulates an ideology which is driven by the culture of the society that relates to consumption and consumerism (Gottdiener 2003:131). The mall ‘expression’, on the other hand, refers to the morphological elements of the mall that can stimulate consumer fantasies and at the same time attract shoppers, to promote purchasing. In this case, the ‘expression’ or syntagmatic axes of the mall involve the articulation of design elements within the built form such as the built

$$\text{Mall (sign)} = \frac{\text{Content}}{\text{Expression}} = \frac{\text{Paradigmatic (design motif of the mall)}}{\text{Syntagmatic (elements within the mall)}}$$

Figure 6 : Socio-semiotic model #3 by Gottdiener

form interior façade, its spatial layout and decorative features (Gottdiener 2003:132). For the purpose of this research, the decomposition of architectural signs proposed by Gottdiener seems suitable in describing the case study to elucidate the state mosque as an object of social culture. This is because by looking at the content and expression of the state mosque it is possible to describe the way national identity codes are articulated within the built form. This also includes an explanation of how the codified ideology of the state mosque articulates particular codes that relate to the formation of national identity.

#### iv. Indicators to read the case study -- the state mosque as a ‘sign’

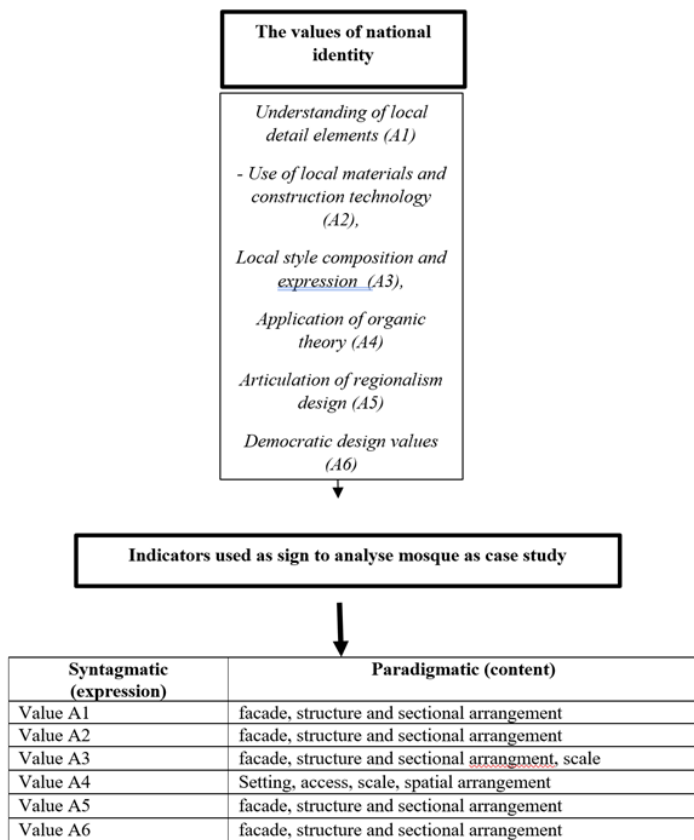
Since the present study involves the reading of the state mosque as a sign, there is a need to identify the architectural elements within the state mosque. This is because Gottdiener’s work focuses on describing the mall as a social product. Therefore, only two elements within the mall were identified by him. These are the spatial layout, and the facades and decorative elements of the mall. However, since the present research is about the state mosque as a symbol of national identity, the selection of elements within the state mosque should be more specific and appropriate. For that reason, the work by Holod and Khan, Hammoda and Mahrok on mosques is referenced as they generated the appropriate elements for reading state mosques found in Muslim countries (not including Malaysia) as a symbol of national identity. They identified four main elements. These are size, spatial organization and treatment, setting, and structural form and material expression. Therefore, by combining principles from both Gottdiener’s research and Holod and Khan’s, Mahrok’s and Hammoda’s study, a suitable framework for the current study was generated. These new indicators to read the state mosque as a sign are set out in the model below (Figure 7).

Based on the above model (Figure 7), the reading of the state mosque sign system is possible by recognising that signification that occurs with reference to two separate orders of meaning, - the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes. During the process of investigating the three state mosques in Western Malaysia, the design motif and elements within the state mosque will be read, to unpack their symbolic

$$\text{State mosque (sign)} = \frac{\text{Content}}{\text{Expression}} = \frac{\text{Paradigmatic (design motif of the state mosque)}}{\text{Syntagmatic (elements within the state mosque): scale, setting, access, spatial organisation, facades and structural arrangement}}$$

Figure 7 : Socio-semiotic model to read state mosque as a sign





**Figure 8 :** Justification pattern matching between syntagmatic and paradigmatic indicators

meaning. This is important to understand whether the design form and space of the selected state mosque represent the criteria of national identity or not. From this, proper guidelines that adhere to the principle of national identity for the design of state mosque can be outlined. To achieve this, six aspects that make up the components of the state mosque such as the state mosque setting, scale, access, spatial arrangement, façade, and structural and sectional arrangement were investigated to look for the representational meaning of the six elements of a state mosque that is also known as the first level of signification (denotation), by reading the surface structure of the state mosque as a building form (Figure 8). The findings then are correlated to find the link with the six national identity indicators developed from literature review. This is known as the second (connotation) and third level of signification (myth) to understand the associations (refer to Figure 3).

Since this study focuses on state mosques which were built during Malaysia’s post-independence era, the state mosques are categorised based on the year each building was constructed according to the administration period of each Malaysian prime minister from Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Abdul Razak, Tun Hussein Onn and Tun Mahathir

Mohamad. These periods of administration are considered important as during this time, the role of national identity architecture is greatly emphasised by the ruling authority to promote Malaysia as a newly developed nation to the masses and the global audience. The three state mosques which are the National Mosque (1965), the Penang State Mosque (1972) and the Putra Mosque (1999) are selected and discussed. Reasons as to why these particular three states mosques were chosen for this research are as follows. The Penang State Mosque was selected as it was the only state mosque built during Razak’s administration. An exception was given to Hussein’s (Malaysia’s third prime minister) administrative period as there was no state mosque constructed in the country during his time, due to his short ruling term from 1976 to 1980. Although there were other state mosques that were built during Tunku’s and Mahathir’s administrative period, the decision to choose and only discuss the National and Putra Mosque in this study is because these mosques are the most prominent state mosques in the Malaysian context. These state mosques furthermore, are also governed directly by the federal government of Malaysia and the Malaysian prime minister’s office. Their prominence and governance potentially amplifies ‘how’ the Malaysian government including the leaders may be involved in the building design and construction process, thereby enabling the research to identify the nature of the relationship between the state mosque and their mundane settings including the leaders intentions during the creation of the state mosques in post-independence Malaysia to portray the role of national identity in its architectural design form.

### CASE STUDY 1 – The National mosque (CS1)

The National Mosque is strategically located in a section of the government administration enclave in Kuala Lumpur. It stands diagonally opposite the Central Railway Station on 13 acres of low, flat land along Sultan Hishamuddin Road at the east, Young Road at the north and Lembah Venning Road at the south boundary. The mosque faces the main road where public facilities like schools and other prominent buildings such as the railway station, General Post Office headquarters and recreational parks like the Lake Garden are located.

### CASE STUDY 2- The Penang State Mosque (CS2)

The Penang State Mosque sits in the fringe town area of Georgetown, on 11 acres of low and flat land owned by the state government along the Ayer Itam Road at the north boundary and Masjid Negeri Road at the east boundar. These two main roads are busy thoroughfares linking the southern and northern part of the island to the city of Georgetown which is located at the eastern tip of the

island.

### CASE STUDY 3- The Putra Mosque (CS3)

The Putra Mosque located in Putrajaya holds the status as ‘a new state mosque model for Malaysia’. It was designed by the Kumpulan Senireka Sdn Bhd led by Dato Nik Mohamed Nik Mahmood. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 1999, the mosque was officially unveiled to the public and the first Friday prayer was conducted to inaugurate the opening of the mosque.

## 4 Discussion

The use of semiotics as the research methodology clearly indicates that *the state mosque* architectural elements have reflected national identity values and that the building patron has utilized the *state mosque* as symbol of the state to convey message to the masses. The six architectural elements, which are setting, scale, access, spatial arrangement, façade, and structural and sectional arrangement are used as indicator to analyse the state mosque. To spread the value of national identity, the state mosque is designed based on the six principles of national

identity indicators understanding of local detail elements (A1), the use local materials and construction technology (A2), local style composition and expression, (A3), - application of organic theory (A4), articulation of regionalism design (A5), democratic values (A6) as described in the following Table 1.

## 5 Conclusion and Recommendations

As a whole, the approach that is put forward which is understanding of detail elements, use of local materials, local style composition and expression, application of organic theory, designing regionalistic articulation of space and form as well as understanding of democratic architectural context can be used as an outline to create architecture that is able to give birth to a nationalistic identity. This basic understanding structure is needed because it is obvious our country's architectural appearance pattern is still lacking and there are many weaknesses that need to be overcome and resolved so that it does not become a permanent and continuous tradition. This means the architecture vocabulary is still lacking a common understanding between individuals and building design, the

Table 1 : Architectural Design of state mosque as symbol of national identity

National Identity Values	Architectural characteristics	Dominant Characteristic			Intention of portraying Values of National Identity		
		CS1	CS2	CS3	CS1	CS2	CS3
Understanding of local detail elements (A1)	setting, scale, access, spatial arrangement, façade, and structural and sectional arrangement	-Malay vernacular (parasol and traditional Malay house as <b>metaphor</b> ) -Communal design concept -Moderate expression and representation -Non-isolated context -Contemporary technology and material -Accessible representation	-Postcolonial identity (national floral as <b>metaphor</b> ) -‘Communal’ design concept -Moderate expression and representation -Non-isolated context -Contemporary technology and material -Accessible access, no gateway -‘Ringy’ spatial syntax - <b>Assymetrical</b> massing	-Foreign <b>historical revivalism</b> (Middle eastern referencing- Safavid dynasty) -‘Confined’ design concept - <b>Monumental grandeur</b> appearance -Palatial setting Contemporary technology and material - <b>Restrictive</b> access, massive gateway -‘Fanned’ spatial syntax -Symmetrical massing	To evoke nationalistic sentiment To unify majority ethnic group (Malay Muslims) To promote the idea of progress To gain acknowledgment from local and global audience (Muslim nations)	To consolidate feeling of nationalism To ensure solidarity among majority ethnic group (Malay Muslims) To present the idea of <b>modernisation</b> To gain recognition from local and global audience (Muslim nations)	Rebuilding Islamic imperial power and reviving past <b>civilisation</b> To enhance image as powerful Malay Muslim leader To secure political legitimacy and authority To portray material progress and achievement To gain acceptance from local and global audience (Muslim nations)
Use of local materials and construction technology (A2),							
Local style composition and expression (A3),							
Application of organic theory (A4),							
Articulation of regionalism design (A5)							
Democratic values (A6)							

absence and lack of equality between the government and the people, loss of basics or relationship to the surrounding context such as climate, technology, decorative elements, cultural arts, heritage identity and the most important are the values that symbolises the country's administration, which is parliamentary democracy. This approach process can only be achieved if everyone understands their role to produce sentimental aspirations and inspirations as well as emphasising the basic architectural criterion in designing a building. Basically, the understanding of creating an architecture with national identity does not only revolve around the architectural aspects but also is a balance of ideas and concerns towards the desires and wants of the people in creating a prosperous and stable country. However, it greatly depends on the understanding and expertise of architects themselves in applying the theory that can relate to the public. Failure to resolve this will result in damage to the image and dignity of local architecture. In Malaysia, we need to question about the function of each building that is constructed and have a deep understanding with regards to the building design's goals and aim. If all the above can be as a lesson, then there would not be problems or dissatisfaction between the government and the people. If this can be successfully implemented only then the desire and true meaning of the formation of an architecture with national identity will be achieved.

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