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Reimagining West Sumatra's Architectural Identity: Is the Pointy Silhouette Enough?

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Abstract

Since the New Order era, the Indonesian government, at both the national and the local levels, has advocated traditional architecture as a display of the country's cultural richness and diversity. In West Sumatra, the traditional house known as the rumah gadang *has become an essential signifier of identity representation, especially since it possesses a* bagonjong*, a unique saddle roof with pointy horn-like ends that distinguishes it from other traditional architecture in the country. In local identity politics, the bagonjong is an essential feature of identity representation. It leads to extensive reproduction as replicas or silhouettes, both in the vernacular and modern design languages. With the current government's mission to preserve the identity imagining of the area and with the plan to incorporate this imagining into the tourism industry, traditional architecture regains its significance in the community, to be preserved, even rebuilt, despite the many questions surrounding its motivations.*

This paper scrutinises the position of traditional architecture in the current identity politics of the local government of West Sumatra. It traces the socio-political background that led to the 'bagonjongisation' of the government buildings in the area and how the imagining is manifested in a contemporary context. This paper also investigates the opposing voices to understand the contestation of identity representation in West Sumatra. It intends to

contribute to the discussion of the identity politics dynamics at the local government level in Indonesia and emphasises that identity construction is not an innocent process of cultural preservation, as it is openly narrated.

Introduction

Indonesia's identity imagining has long been dominated by the presence of cultural narrations and artifacts, from which the country derives inspiration for its national identity imagining. Diversity, which once posed a threat of disintegration to the country, is now seen as a wealth and potential asset. The urge to preserve the disappearing traditional culture, including its architecture, then came to the fore, especially since the time of Indonesia's second President, Suharto. Alongside his ambitious *pembangunan* (development) through a series of *Repelita* (*Rencana Pembangunan Lima Tahun*, or Five-Year Development Plan), he highlighted culture and tradition as unifiers of the diverse country and as a remedy for the intricate social problems of the time.[1] Culture also became the main tool for creating a national image and orchestrating a sense of pride and belonging in the country, despite the underlying agenda of pacifying people amidst the oppression and inequality of his order.

Suharto pushed to search and "inventorise *(inventarisasi)* traditional practices, in part through a process of rediscovery."[2] Not only displaying traditional architecture through the initiation of Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (TMII), which was highly criticised due to the then severe national economic conditions, he also ordered regional governments to gather information about traditional cultures, beliefs and practices under the supervision of the Department of Education and Culture.[3] Further, he spread a traditionalist view by pushing regional governments to revive the presence of traditional culture at the local level, which was then widely translated as incorporating traditional roofs into the designs of local government buildings. This uniformised how local authorities represented their identity, creating traditionalist waves – or New-Historicists in Kenneth Frampton's terminology – that promote "the tradition-modernism mixture that leads to kitsch."[4] The long enactment and heavy reproduction of this regulation have shifted how local government understood identity representation, as this method is still widely practised and hitherto considered the 'right way,' even long after the end of the authoritarian era.

Similarly, in Padang, the capital city of West Sumatra, the peculiar shape of the bagonjong roof, a traditional saddle-shaped roof with sharp upward-pointed ends,

dominates the skyline of the primary arterial road where government and public buildings are located. With their massive scale relative to the buildings, the presence of these roofs is visually significant, if not overpowering. Interestingly, although its literal traditionalisation has been criticised, the pointy silhouette is still considered crucial in the identity imagining of the area. But how and why is it important? Whose identity is being represented by the presence of the bagonjong? Who directs this identity translation? What is the motivation for continuing to present this shape and silhouette in the public sphere? Is this symbol enough to make people feel that they 'belong' to a local cultural community?

This paper discusses the identity politics dynamics in Padang, West Sumatra, by looking in particular at how local identity is imagined by local stakeholders, including architects, academics and the government, and how this imagining is manifested in built forms. The paper begins by discussing contemporary identity translation at the national scale, which includes the urge to return to the so-called 'authentic' culture and tradition of the country. It continues by analysing the dynamics and contestation among layers of identities and local characters in Padang, briefly outlining the history that led to this traditionalist trend in the area to understand how and why the perception of identity grows and is nurtured. The next part investigates the opposing voices that problematise the extensive reproduction of certain cultural artefacts and analyses the problems that this reproduction entails. The paper concludes with a discussion of the intersection of local identity politics and its contemporary architectural manifestation and the question of 'being local' in the twenty-first-century context.

The Contemporary Traditionalisation of Identity

Indonesia's national identity narrative has been dominated by the glorified story of local culture and tradition. This direction was seen rather literally in architecture in the 1970s when the New Order directed identity representation towards the adoption of traditional shapes and decorations.[5] Various regulations were enacted to ensure the use of traditional roofs and decorations as semiotic symbols in public and government building designs, and regional governments had no other option but to implement them. The impact of this regulation is rather long-lasting and massive. The enduring and repeated reproduction has shifted the perception of cultural identity representation, particularly for the people at the government level. Attaching traditional roofs and decorations to a building has been considered the 'good' and 'right' way to display local architectural identity. According to our interviews with current regional decision-makers in Indonesia,

the presence of these roofs and decorations is still considered a 'must,' and they expect the design translation to be easy to see and visually recognisable, if not literal.[6] Although they were unsure whether any current regulation directed this identity representation, they echoed the need to display this representation for the public as part of their duty to preserve the local culture. This shows that New Order traditionalism persists and the similar glorifying narrative behind this ongoing practice lives on.

In the era of President Joko Widodo, the cultural preservation agenda has been pushed towards economic purposes. Attempting to lessen the national economy's dependency on oil, gas and coal exports, Widodo aims to attract new tourism investments, making local culture one of the main attractions. The emergence of the terms '*Nusantara*' and 'Nusantaran Architecture' gave momentum to the re-packaging of traditionalism in architecture.[7] Behind the benign intention to preserve disappearing cultures and traditions, tourism is narrated as one of the reasons why local people should preserve their culture. The latter's potential to be commodified is highlighted as it can become a source of income for the locals, and people's dependency on this source of income is expected to motivate them to preserve their culture.

Although the terms 'Nusantara' and 'Nusantaran Architecture' reappeared in the national discussion relatively recently, in the 2010s, the Nusantaran narrative has often been used by people in the regional government to glorify their culture.[8] Linking local culture to the Nusantaran narrative somehow evokes a sense of pride and ownership, although they realise that the 'imagined' Nusantaran culture they glorified is not the one they are currently living in. Despite this distance between the ideal and reality, the urge to revive what they can claim as 'theirs' persists, and it needs to appear in a concrete form in the public sphere, especially through architectural design. A cyclical pattern thus emerges as the more this representation is reproduced, the more familiar the public is with it and the more it is further reproduced due to over-familiarity.

Identity Politics: National Plan, Local Implementation

Before *Reformasi* in 1998, power was centralised in Jakarta, and the country was governed authoritatively under the pretext of national unity. The central government heavily controlled local politics, including local identity politics.[9] At the time, the only recognised identity was the one constructed and approved by the central government, creating what Kathryn Robinson terms the "authorised versions of what constitutes

authentic cultural traditions, an important aspect of which is the differentiation of presumed discrete cultural groups."[10]

After Reformasi, a new democracy emerged in Indonesia, with wider political participation.[11] In the context of the central-local relationship, decentralisation was implemented in Indonesia and marked by "the rise of the local."[12] Decentralisation gave authority to the local governments at the city level to define and direct themselves, including what and how to present their local identities. With this new liberation, new forms and varieties of local identities mushroomed, including identities that were previously not considered 'official' by the political regime.

In line with this, the law on village government was also in place, recognising varieties of almost 75,000 village identities in the Indonesian archipelago. Unlike the uniformised village government that followed the model of the *desa* (village) in Java during the New Order era, Reformasi allowed the other local form of village governance to flourish. This included Nagari, the smallest administrative unit in West Sumatra, which was revived and became another form of West Sumatran local identity.[13] A movement called 'the return to Nagari' *(kembali ke Nagari)* exemplified the strength of the reconstruction of local identity in the democratic era. What made Nagari different from other Java-based model villages was its local custom *(adat)* and religion (Islam), which became two foundational values of the Minangkabau people. Nagari's *tungku tigo sajarangan* philosophy also based village governance on three pillars: the knowledgeable, the religious leaders and the *adat* leaders. Aside from this philosophy, Nagari was also traditionally acknowledged for its particular ornaments. The policy to uniformise Indonesian villages has caused the disappearance of these ornaments due to prolonged lack of use and made the knowledge and skills associated with this symbol fade away. With decentralisation, the Nagari movement and the recent tourism boom, local stakeholders now have the authority to revive this culture, even though only a few Nagari remain who inherited the knowledge and skills.

This illustrates the significant changes in how identity politics were imagined and implemented post-Reformasi. Referring to Ruth and David Collier's perspective on Paul A. David's path-dependency theory, Reformasi can be seen as a 'critical juncture' that entirely flipped and redirected the way local identity was constructed and imagined.[14] People's liberation from the suppressing authoritarian regime allowed local governments to break free from the identity mould. Interestingly, not all directions taken after this

critical juncture were distinct from those imposed by the previous authoritarian regime. However, with the post-Reformasi freedom allowing local governments to construct identity representation based on how they understand their local culture, any contemporary representation of local identity relies heavily on the preference of people in power at the regional level. In other words, any new identity representation built post-Reformasi represents local governments' inclination in their identity politics.

Minangkabau's Local Identity and the Strong Passion for Tradition in West Sumatra

As mentioned earlier, in the context of West Sumatra, the Minangkabau's identity comprises *adat* and Islam. Although they fuse harmoniously in contemporary society, merging the two into one cultural identity of the tribe was far from easy as it involved prolonged civil conflicts that cost the lives and wealth of its people. The Padri War (1803-37), which involved the Padri (Islamic group), the Adat (traditional group) and the Dutch, became the critical juncture of the Minangkabau's identity imagining. After the war, the Padri's and Adat's leaders reconciled their visions and initiated the wisdom of '*adat basandi syara', syara' basandi Kitabullah',* translated as 'tradition founded upon Islamic norms, and the Islamic norms founded upon the Qur'an.' This reconciliation led to the discussion of identity among the Minangkabau people. This fusion was written in Tambo (Nagari's historical record); during the writing, the Dutch chose the *rumah gadang*, with its bagonjong roof, as the representative of the Minangkabau culture. This decision was followed by the incorporation of the rumah gadang's silhouette into coins and other aesthetic objects. This was the starting point for the rumah gadang's and the bagonjong's status as prominent icons of West Sumatra Province.[15]

Not long after the country's independence in 1945, there was strong dissatisfaction with Sukarno, Indonesia's first president, and his centralised and authoritarian government. Some of West Sumatra's local activists voiced their disapproval of Sukarno's *Nasakom* or '*nasionalisme, agama dan komunisme*' (nationalism, religion and communism) and started to resist the central government.[16] On 15 February 1958, Ahmad Husein, one of the key people of this movement based in Padang, formed *Pemerintahan Revolusioner Republik Indonesia* (PRRI), the Revolutionary Government of Republic Indonesia, as the counter-power of the official central government. Seeing the PRRI as a separatist movement that threatened the country's existence, the central government mobilised its army to West Sumatra to purge this illegal organisation and anyone connected with it. This incident was recorded as the biggest military aggression in the history of the

Indonesian army.[17] This aggression caused a considerable number of victims, mostly from the PRRI side. The killings extended to local people with no direct connection with the PRRI. Many innocent people were killed during the aggression, and some became victims of torture, robbery, rape and massacre.[18] The recorded number of dead, injured and lost victims in the entire West Sumatra during the PRRI incident (9,080 people) was double that of the victims in the fight against the Dutch aggression (4,730 people) in the same region.[19]

The PRRI incident brought the Minangkabau people to the lowest point as they lived under terror.[20] This caused a big exodus out of West Sumatra, with people changing their children's names to more Javanese-like names to disassociate themselves from the Minangkabau.[21] This unprecedented event caused a severe rupture in the social fabric of the Minangkabau people. When the conflict eased off, the first West Sumatra Governor, Kaharoeddin Dt. Rangkayo Basa, who was in power from 1958 to 1965, tried to revive people's sense of identity and belonging to the region by bringing symbols of the tribe back into the public realm. He initiated the construction of the new West Sumatra Governor's office, which incorporated Minangkabau cultural representation. The initial design for the building was created by Biro Oerip, the oldest architecture bureau in Bandung, West Java.[22] Following the modern architecture trend of the time, the building was designed "prioritising technology, functionality, man-made comfortability, anti-ornament and symbol, elitists, and did not have the value/ element of the traditional architecture of the region."[23] Dissatisfied with the design, the governor hired a recent Institut Teknologi Bandung graduate, H. Syamsul Asri, to adjust it and add the element of Minangkabau traditional architecture. After a discussion with Miral Manan, a Minangkabau humanist, the governor decided to incorporate the bagonjong roof in place of the concrete deck roof of the initial design. This four-storey building became the first modern building to use the Minangkabau traditional roof in the region and the first to use Minangkabau traditional carving in the interior. This building, which is now called Rumah Bagonjong, was the pioneer that successfully set the trend of using traditional roofs as an architectural identity representation in West Sumatra and was once considered "the most magnificent *(termegah)* governor office in Indonesia" (Figure 1).[24]

Figure 1. The West Sumatra Governor Office, or Rumah Bagonjong, was the first modern building that adopted a Bagonjong roof in the region (Photograph by Rr. Diah Asih Purwaningrum, 2022).

Employing a traditional roof subsequently became a popular method of conveying identity through architecture in the region. Because this was considered successful in reviving the sense of pride and belonging of the Minangkabau people in the aftermath of the PPRI incident, the second governor, Harun Zain, encouraged his staff to build their offices using the bagonjong roof. The third governor, Azwar Anas, who was in power from 1977 to 1987, issued a circular letter requiring all government buildings to incorporate the bagonjong.[25] This initiative aligned with Suharto's traditionalist movement, and Anas' strategy was thus approved and appreciated by the central government. West Sumatra became the first province outside Java to receive the Charter of Parasamya Purnakarya Nugraha for its successful development. For this reason, Anas was praised not only for fixing the central-local government relationship that was damaged post-PRRI but also for reviving the local honour and pride of the Minangkabau people in their culture. His time as governor was considered the peak of regional development in West Sumatra as it marked the end of the discrimination against the Minangkabau people and opened a new era for the West Sumatra province.[26]

Figure 2. The pointy skyline on one side of Jalan Sudiman street, Padang, as the governmental street corridor (Photograph by Rr. Diah Asih Purwaningrum, 2022).

A New Expression of Identity

With the trend of using bagonjong, the skyline of Padang's Jendral Sudirman street, where government offices are located, is full of massive roofs with pointy edges on both sides (Figure 2). Although no-one in today's government may have read Anas' circular letter, this practice has become a habit and has been considered the 'appropriate' way to build government offices.[27] The new Regional Police Headquarters building is an interesting case as it did not incorporate a bagonjong in its initial design. However, a small bagonjong was later added to the drop-off canopy after governor Irwan Prayitno criticised the absence of the Minangkabau identity symbol (Figure 3).[28] The urge for a literal representation of bagonjong, in this case, was the governor's, whereas other stakeholders involved in the construction of the building did not feel the same need to visually present the bagonjong as part of the façade. This shows that, in line with Lawrence Vale's argument, some leaders imposed the direction of the country's or a region's representation.[29]

Figure 3. The new Regional Police Headquarters of West Sumatra. Bagonjong roof was added to the drop-off roof as requested by the governor (Photograph by Rr. Diah Asih Purwaningrum, 2022).

It is also important to note that there is contestation in local identity imagining. Although it was suggested by the governor, the bagonjong trend in Jendral Sudirman street did not continue when the new city hall was built, away from the governmental street corridor. The design for the city hall adopted the *kajang padati* roof, another roof shape for Minangkabau traditional houses (Figure 4). Unlike the bagonjong, this gable-like roof is visually less 'catchy,' lacking sharp pointy ends. Incorporating this roof can be seen as a rebellion against the bagonjong stream in official identity representation. The modification to make the roof smaller than the building's width and put a frame outside the roof offers an alternative translation modernising the otherwise traditional look. Some might appreciate the effort to make the look more contemporary, but others who are used to more literal translations may not enjoy the modification. Among those, some have called it a 'superman' roof because it puts the frame, which should be inside, outside.[30]

Figure 4. The new city hall incorporates the Kajang Padati roof shape (Photograph by Amalinda Savirani, 2022).

Another example, the West Sumatra Grand Mosque, also represents the new translation of architectural identity in the region (Figure 5). Although the architect's inspiration was the Islamic Holy Black Stone *(Hajar Aswad)* story, its resemblance to the pointy bagonjong is the basis for considering it one of the identity buildings of West Sumatra. Having become used to seeing a dome as a signifier for a mosque, people initially questioned the design for its peculiar shape. However, the five jurors managed to convince the local government of the contemporaneity of this building, justifying it as a balance between the Minangkabau tradition (through its bagonjong-like form and traditional lattice decorations) and Islamic philosophy (through the Hajar Aswad story). The government agreed to build it through a massive investment of 330 billion rupiahs (22,000 USD) over 12 years (2007-19).[31] This shed light on the contestation of representations as part of local identity politics dynamics. It showed that despite being the decision-maker, the local government's choices might be influenced by the persuasion of other stakeholders with different interests.

Some people appreciate the mosque as it becomes the icon of the province, despite the massive cost of its construction.[32] Yet, for some others, the necessity of another mosque in this area is questionable as there are already two on this very block. Maintaining and occupying the building is another issue because few people want to visit for everyday prayers due to the long walk from the parking lot to the *wudhu'* and prayer area. The passer-by might choose a smaller mosque to pray in given that it will require less time.[33] Therefore, to ensure that the mosque is utilised, the government set up various events that 'coerce' civil servants into taking part, such as *Absen Subuh* (daily morning prayer)

and *Subuh Mubarokah* (monthly morning preaching).[34] The government plans to formalise these events by issuing a circular letter, with consequences for employees who disobey it. This phenomenon shows that creating a mosque as an icon is one thing, but making sure that it is needed is another issue. Yet, regardless of the problem, the grand mosque is currently seen as exemplary in transforming and contemporising the bagonjong in the region. This building is also considered one of the country's most successful designs that innovatively abstracts and modernises the traditional form. Interestingly, public acceptance of this building is primarily due to the pointy silhouette that has become a familiar design language for the Minangkabau people.[35]

Figure 5. The West Sumatra Grand Mosque is an identity building that becomes a new icon of the province (Photograph by Rr. Diah Asih Purwaningrum, 2022).

Opposing Voices and Questions about 'Bagonjongisation'

This incorporation of the bagonjong into the design has been criticised. The first criticism concerns the bagonjong's cultural misfit in Padang. The rumah gadang is an identity house for a clan located in the *darek* (highland) area, which is considered the birthplace of the Minangkabau people. With the *rantau* (migration) tradition, people moved from the *darek* to the *pesisir* (coastal) area and developed new livelihoods away from their home clan. As the rumah gadang is the symbol of the home clan, it belongs in the darek area, not in the pesisir – hence, not in Padang.[36] The rantau or pesisir area itself has its own type of house, the kajang padati house. The city hall design incorporating the kajang padati roof can be considered part of this critique by showcasing the 'appropriate' traditional element for Padang as the *rantau* area.

Aside from cultural fit, the rumah gadang – and, thus, the bagonjong – is a type of home. Therefore, appropriating the bagonjong for offices or other modern functions is deemed improper by some. Additionally, in the cultural community, the rumah gadang is not built as a sole architectural object since it is related to long cultural processes, rituals and customs, community engagements, the identity of the clan and so on. Roxanna Waterson argues that traditional architecture is a product of complex historical and cultural weaves, and the form it takes relates primarily to local people's rituals and the community's social customs, not aesthetics. Traditional houses have a robust social and symbolic function, and every part possesses cultural meaning for the inhabitants. She emphasises that "ritual functions are inseparable from the house's identity."[37] Further, Barry Dawson and John Gillow underline that traditional architecture was built "to cope not only with the climate and the natural hazards of the land but also with the intangible realms of animistic mythology."[38] The absence of this layer of spirituality would leave a void in the people's attachment to their cultural tradition as the traditional house itself "is not always primarily, or even at all, a place of residence" but more a ritual site of the clan and family.[39] Within this framework, the question of whether it is still called rumah gadang if it is built without the presence of the cultural process becomes valid.[40]

The presence of the bagonjong roof in the rantau area is also questioned for its fit with the natural context. The high-pitch roof is deemed inappropriate for strong coastal wind.[41] Kajang padati's lower pitch roof, conversely, is seen as more reasonable in the coastal area. The wall decoration is also different, and kajang padati's lattice wall is perceived as more suitable for the coast, whereas the rumah gadang's solid carved wall is apt in cold-weathered areas.

Another criticism pertains to the fact that West Sumatra is a disaster-prone area because of its position on megathrust lines. The major earthquake in 2009 was a wake-up call for the community to promote safety in building construction. After the disaster, people began to develop an awareness of the necessity of strengthening their houses.[42] The destruction of many modern bagonjong roofs in the event created concerns about the safety afforded by a massive roof with a complicated structure that can be vulnerable if not well maintained. The trend of adding such a roof on a building entrance poses another danger as it will block the main exit if the structure collapses during earthquakes. For this reason, during the post-earthquake reconstruction, some buildings abandoned their bagonjong.[43]

Looking at who built rumah gadang houses in the past, it is evident that only wealthy families could afford to construct this identity house due to its pricey material, the construction process, the rituals that preceded and followed and subsequent maintenance. In the South Solok area, for instance, many rumah gadang were built and are owned by people with royalty names such as Datuak. This reflects the broader trend in the country, whereby the traditional houses selected as the identity building of a region usually represent the elites' palaces or residences. Identity representation in the country is thus dominated by a certain social class, representing those who can pay for shaping and decorations for their house. This, therefore, begs the question of whether the bagonjong constitutes a commonality of the Minangkabau community. Furthermore, the excessive presence of the bagonjong on the city skyline also leaves some minor ethnicities unrepresented. Consequently, other communities of different ethnic groups, such as the Chinese and Nias people, expressed a negative sentiment as they felt disturbed by the dominance of the representation of the Minangkabau identity in urban spaces. Some even consider the use of the bagonjong on many buildings to be excessive and a significant waste of money.[44]

Despite 'bagonjongisation', local regulation does not require the presence of a bagonjong on façades. Padang's building code (Chapter 65) states that the construction and development of buildings in the city "may use traditional symbols and elements" to strengthen the local characteristics of the buildings, and the symbols must be suited to the local culture and consider "the appearance and fitting of the building with its environment."[45] In this case, the building code does not explicitly mention particular traditional elements that must be presented on a building's façade. This, therefore, should provide an opportunity for Padang's government to be more inclusive and explorative in its architectural identity representation.

Architects and architecture academics in Padang also voice their objection to 'bagonjongisation' in architectural design. All our interviewees agreed to incorporate the Minangkabau identity signifier into a building and emphasised the importance of 'localising' architecture by presenting elements and symbols of the Minangkabau culture. What is difficult, however, is deciding what can be called a 'representation of the Minangkabau culture.' For some, using the bagonjong as an inspiration is still acceptable as long as the translation involves transformations, modifications and abstraction processes and is hence not literal.[46] However, other interviewees underlined the need to move on from relying on the bagonjong and start delving into other cultural resources

in the area for inspiration (e.g. wall decorations, traditional fabrics, traditional headpieces).[47] The translation can also be distinct from the original pieces, probably following what Charles Jencks termed as 'the enigmatic signifier,' which allows people to develop various interpretations of a building.[48] In the interviewees' opinion, it becomes the architects' responsibility to search for alternatives in representing identity, despite difficulties since some clients expect the literal bagonjong on their buildings.

Despite expressing a rejection of the common practices in the area, these statements still portray traditional elements and decorations as the 'only' source of ideas to localise buildings. Culture remains a synonym for tradition, therefore the discussion that follows perpetually returns to the traditional representation and has not touched on modern and urban culture, with its problems, which has become part of West Sumatran people's everyday lives. This is a common 'trap' in Indonesian identity discourses as the position of the 'authentic' culture is still considered prominent in representing regional identities. The perspective is debatable because identity discourses in the present time should also represent the contemporaneity of culture and the social-political complexities in urban contestation. Therefore, it is reasonable to move on from the dominance of the bagonjong and, further, from the overarching cultural and traditional perspectives that are limiting rather than deliberating.

Closing Remarks

This paper discussed the domination of the bagonjong in identity imagining in West Sumatra. The paper briefly analysed the beginning of this trend, including who initiated it and the socio-political context that allowed it to flourish. The long history of making the bagonjong the icon of the West Sumatra region proves that collective identity imagining is a long and intricate process. The bagonjong trend in Padang shows that a cultural identity seen as pre-existing has multilayer complexities as an underlying background that is constantly constructed and deconstructed. From the colonial era to the present, the initiation of the bagonjong trend was very political, making the bagonjong itself a political tool.

The history of the bagonjong trend proves that power plays a significant role in identity contestation. Just like 'history is written by the winner,' people in power have the privilege to decide how identity should be represented. Although they are driven by complex socio-political tensions, the leaders' preferences might heavily influence how identity is constructed, whether for a region or even for a country. This orchestration demonstrates

that no identity is pre-given. Identity representation, especially collective ones, involves an intricate internal and external contestation; it is not singular and cannot be flattened or simplified.

In the case of Padang, the Minangkabau culture dominates the look of the architectural identity representation. Despite the simmering but persistent opposing voices, the bagonjong trend lives on. Its reproduction continues in public places, and a new method was developed to transform and modify the original shape. The issue of identity in Padang is rather sensitive as prolonged exposure to this pointy silhouette has caused local people to develop an attachment to it, making it part of their identity imagining. Because of their strong connection with the bagonjong, some people are somewhat resistant to other identity representations. This, then, ignites a further discussion: if the literal translation of identity is what people need, should architects offer other forms of translation for the sake of the development of the architectural discourse? Is it architects' and academics' duty to 'educate' people in the government and the broader public to not champion the literal translation of identity?

This paper does not aim to draw a definitive conclusion on the complicated story of the Minangkabau's identity imagining. Instead, it seeks to provoke further discussion, especially on how to make contemporary identity imagining more inclusive of marginalised people and escape the restrictive box of the traditionalist framework.

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