

# Mediating Indonesian Islamic Center in the Era of Post-Islamism

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## Abstract

Islamic centers emerged when Muslims in the West had difficulties to build a mosque. As a majority, Indonesian Muslim communities do not need to adopt the concept of Western Islamic Center. Nevertheless, establishing Islamic Center is quite popular among Indonesian Muslims. This paper argues that the establishment of Islamic Center is a practice of post-Islamism in Indonesia, in which Islam is interpreted in a specific way that juxtaposes religiosity and leisure, mixes between 'the sacred' and 'the profane'. Taking the Mataram Islamic Center as a case study, this study explores how discourse of the Islamic Center shapes its establishment. Applying critical discourse analysis, this study takes several units of analysis, i.e. the mediation practices of the center and the visiting practices of the visitors. This study finds that there are two prominent discourses, namely the center as a religious space and the center as a tourist space, both of which do not defeat each other.

**Keywords:** *Islamic center, critical discourse analysis, post-Islamism, space mediation.*

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## Introduction

Nowadays, we can find many Islamic center buildings in every region of Indonesia. The first Indonesian Islamic Center was Pusat Dakwah Islam or called by PUSDAI (Pusat Dakwah Islam) located in Bandung, West Java province. The discourse of PUSDAI development was emerged in 1978, precisely during the reign of Governor H. Aang Kunaefi. This idea was then approved on 11 September 1980. It was agreed that the main function of the PUSDAI is an instrument in developing and spreading Islam and Islamic culture in West Java (Kustianingrum, Dwi; Rozi, Awang; Firdaus, Faizal; Mulyanidya, Fiky, 2013) Starting from the

establishment of PUSDAI in West Java, many Islamic Center was developed in Indonesia.

Actually, Islamic Center in Indonesia is an adoption from Western societies. In the West, it is a place for Muslims to carry out Islamic activities. It is a substitute for the mosque (masjid) because the mosque was difficult to build. Prof. Syafii Karim wrote that the Islamic Center is a term that comes from Western countries where muslim is a minority, ".. to meet all the needs of Islamic activities they find it difficult to find a place. For this reason, Islamic activities are centered in a forum called the Islamic Center" (Muis, 2010). However, western writer usually did not differ between the

mosque and Islamic center, both of two is a same entity (Farrag, 2017)

Indonesian society seems to have its own interpretation toward Islamic Center. That means that the Islamic Center, as a discourse, is understood differently by the Indonesian people than the Western society. 'NTB Islamic Center' which was located in Mataram, Lombok Island, Nusa Tenggara Barat is the best example for this. Although Lombok is known as 'the island of a thousand mosques' (Pulau Seribu Masjid), and Muslim is become major population, ironically, NTB provincial government still needs to build an Islamic Center. In 2010, the government build the Islamic Center which has an area of 7.6 hectares with the great and majestic Hubbul Wathan Mosque as its main building. It also has ballroom facilities, meeting rooms, and several other VIP rooms.

Furthermore, NTB Islamic Center instead became the 'icon' of Lombok, the island of a thousand mosques. Of the many mosques in the city of Mataram, NTB Islamic Center has the largest and most luxurious mosque. Unlike the mosque, it has not only for religious purposes (such as praying, religious gathering with Ustadz and UIama) but also for 'leisure' such as an art market, procurement of events, as well as a tourist destination that opened to the public, both the local and foreign (Effendi, 2016).

NTB Islamic Center has been researched by Mustain (2018). From a political perspective, Mustain wrote that the Islamic Center is a symbolic instrument of power from many actors in Lombok. He stated that Tuan Guru Bajang (TGB), as the Governor of NTB, has a significant role in building it as a symbol of Islam. That is, Musta'in's research was based on the belief that the Islamic Center is a symbol of Islam. Research on the Islamic Center with the same tendency was also written by Saprillah Syahrir who connected the Islamic Center

Muadz bin Jabal in Kendari with salafism (Syahrir, 2017).

However, many researches tended to see Islamic Center as site of tourism, not from its religious dimension. For example, there are two research on tourist motivation to going through Masjid Agung Islamic Centre Kabupaten Rokan Hulu (Amalina, 2017; Wulandari, Ayu; Erianjoni, 2018). Rida Mardia (2017) who researched the Islamic Center of Dato Tiro in Bulukumba city argued that the Islamic Center nowadays is not only a symbol of religion/Islam. Mardia stated that the Islamic Center function has been changed to be a tourist destination or a place for taking a picture/selfie. So the Islamic Center is not only about religious purposes but also leisure since it is a center for all activity for Muslim society

Recognizing this problem, we believed that the Islamic Center in Indonesia is an example of post-Islamism practices. With the definition of the Islamic Center rather than a mosque, the Islamic religious place has flexible meaning, that is, what can and what cannot be done in this place becomes ambiguous or unclear.

NTB Islamic Center, in particular, is a post-Islamic space where there are efforts to showing Islam is not secular, not so much idealistic and also not rigid. This concept popularized by Asef Bayat who stated that 'Post-Islamism' has a characteristic where Islam tended to be pragmatic, realistic and willing to make peace with other realities, while 'Islamism' is a reading about Islam as a complete social, political, economic, and moral system that has answered all human problems (Bayat, Asef; T M, Faiz, 2007, p. 97)

Bayat took Tehran, the capital city of Iran, as an example for a post-Islamic place. Tehran was originally a city that was divided into two; the southern region which is traditional and poor and the northern regions which rich and

westernized. Then in 1989, President Rafsanjani appointed Ghulam Husein Karbaschi to neutralize all Tehran's chaos. Karbaschi created many public parks, built a cultural complex in the south, and a connecting road between north and south. Tehran has had a new character and turned into a city that hard to be characterized as 'Islamic city'. Its symbols, toll roads, billboards, malls, shopping centers have become the first signs of the emergence of Post-Islamism in Tehran. According to Karbaschi, Tehran public park is a central park that has a view of the landscape as a door to social security where social class, ethnic differences mingle with a morally safe recreation space (Bayat, Asef; T M, Faiz, 2007, p. 99).

Space/place itself is not essential or permanent. It is formed and constructed by many things. Space according to Lefebvre (1991, p. 33) is a social space that is the accumulation of social practices. Meanwhile, scholars of geography argue that communication/mediation of a space/place greatly influences how space/place is interpreted by a human (Burgess, J., & Gold, J. R., 1985; Adams, 2009). Mediation is a communication/media subfield of study related to symbols that represent a space then, now and in the future. This field of study will further explain how space is constructed by the mediation as well as the act of communication (Dhona, 2018, p. 13)

Therefore, this paper aims to see how the mediation of NTB Islamic Center constructs this place as a post-Islamic space. The research questions raised are: 1) How the NTB Islamic Center was constructed in mediation activities? 2) How is the NTB Lombok Islamic Center as a practice of post-Islamism?

## **Method**

The data of this research collected by a one-month observation & interviewing several

informants such as NTB Islamic Center, the traders around the place and also the tourists. In addition, we collected text data, especially those relating to Islamic Center mediation on social media. Several media have been analyzed, including pamphlets, websites, Islamic Center accounts on social media and several online articles that contain news about the Islamic Center.

To analyze the data, we use Michel Foucault's discourse analysis which emphasizes the constellation of power that occurs in the process of production and reproduction of meaning. In this research we follow Dhona (2020) suggestion that Foucaultian discourse analysis is not textual-linguistic analysis, but rather a historical analysis of discourse which is known as archeology/genealogy. However, this paper itself cannot be called an archaeological study, but only treats texts as statements, the smallest unit of discourse (Dhona, 2020).

It is called a statement to be distinguished from the meaning of text in linguistic studies. Statement analysis is usually directed at how a set of statements forms an object (for example how the particular text defines something; whether NTB Islamic Centre is a tourist place or religious space); how statements determine the enunciative modality (who speaks and in what capacity); how statements compile the accompanying concepts (for example the concept of 'halal tourism'), and doing strategies (how a statement can be connected to another statement) (Foucault, 1972).

We define the discourse as all practices that systematically shape or construct the objects discussed by those practices. The object here include actions and events. Dhona (2020, p. 194), quoted Sara Mills, argued that the discourse construct a particular action, so that an action can be understood as an action that is serious action and real. By treating the data as

discourse, we interested in subjectification in the discourse of NTB Islamic Center or how the discourse of NTB Islamic Center construct post-Islamic subject.

### **A Brief History of NTB Islamic Center**

The development of NTB Islamic Center building officially began in 2009. At that time the Detail Engineer Design (DED) developed by PT. Penta Engineering from Bandung had already finished. Based from the design plan, the Islamic Center will consist of several buildings including, the mosque building, the main minaret of the mosque, the meeting/multipurpose building, the center of Islamic studies, the library and the museum. The first erection was carried out in 2010 with the laying of the first stone carried out by the Tuan Guru Bajang and attended by former regional development minister Helmy Faishal Zaini, Ir. H. Badrul Munir (the deputy governor ), Chairperson of the NTB Provincial DPRD, several leader of NTB government institution, government officials, religious leaders, and community leaders. Since its erection in 2010, the construction of the Islamic Center complex has been carried out gradually and continuously until now.

Many questions raised at the beginning of NTB Islamic Center development, especially about the function of the Islamic Center. Lombok is the island of a thousand mosques where mosques can be found in every village there, so there is no need to build another big mosque. The main question that raised is why the Islamic Center was built next to the previous Central mosque or 'Masjid Raya' namely At-Taqwa Mosque (Najamudin, 2018).

The first building stood in NTB Islamic center area is the Hubbul Wathan Grand Mosque. The inauguration of the use of Hubbul Wathan Mosque was held on Monday, 12

September 2016 by the Governor of NTB at the time, M. Zainul Majdi or Tuan Guru Bajang. It marked by drum beating after the Eid al-Adha prayer 1437 H and the signing of the inscription.

It was claimed by the head management of the Islamic Center as the first Masjid Raya in Mataram, even it is only a successor to the previous Raya mosque, the Attaqwa Mosque. Attaqwa Mosque was planned to be used as a library and museum. This replacement caused a lot of controversies, especially from Jamaah Tabligh community who has made the At-Taqwa Mosque as the center of their activities.

Masjid Raya or the Great Mosque itself is a mosque located in the Capital City of the Province, stipulated by the local Governor based on recommendations from the Head of the Provincial Ministry of Religion office. It imagined as the center of religious activities in a particular province and funded by the Provincial Government (APBD) and Community funds. Hubbul Wathan Mosque becomes Masjid Raya of NTB Province based on the NTB Governor's Decree Number: 451.7-91 of 2017 (Source: a pamphlet of NTB Islamic Center)

According to an interview with the head management of the Islamic Center Management, there will be other buildings in NTB Islamic Center area. One of them is the Education Building which is still being planned. Other buildings to be built are Sharia hotels and parks in collaboration with NTB Syariah banks to support and coordinate various activities at the Provincial level (Jamsuri, S. 2018)

The Syariah hotel is a practice of the discourse of 'halal tourism' in Lombok. On November 9th, 2018, NTB Province was awarded by Republika as a favorite halal tourist destination in the Republika Syariah Award (ASR). NTB has also been awarded Indonesian the best halal destination in 2019 according to Indonesian Muslim Travel Index (IMTI) (Puspita, S; Prodjo Wahyu A. 2019) and also

best tourist destinations Halal Honeymoon in the world in 2015 (Junita, N. 2016). Halal Tourism is a kind of Islamic discourse engaged in tourism. It is defined as a system of tourism based on sharia rules and Islamic standards. That means that NTB Islamic Center as a religious place is connected to the discourse of tourism/leisure. By this discourse, the practice of recreation/having fun legitimated to carried out in a transcendental place.

## Mediating and Constructing NTB Islamic Center

The mediation of NTB Islamic Center in Lombok is carried out in various forms of medium. Figure 1 shows one of the pamphlets produced by the management of NTB Islamic Center which aims to provide information related to management, facilities, services, activities and a brief history of the Islamic Center. This pamphlet was made as a Company Profile by the UPT Islamic Center from NTB Provincial Government. The pamphlet is a way for managers to sell facilities and services in the Islamic Center.

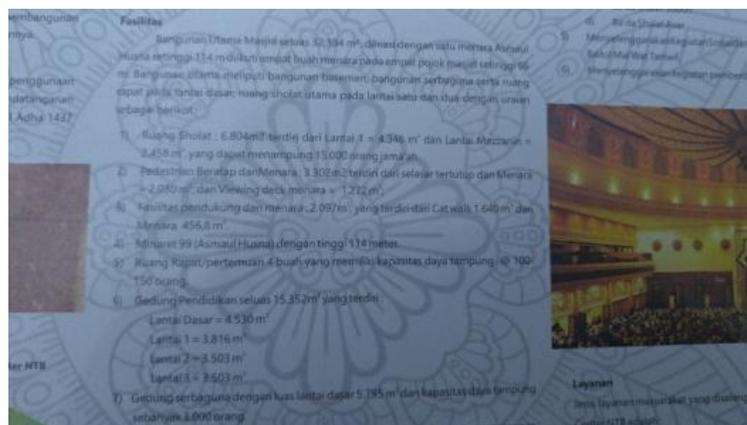


Figure 1. Company profile of NTB Islamic Center

This pamphlet described the information about services provided by NTB Islamic Center. The mosque as the main building represented as a place of the marriage event. The multipurpose building described as a place that can be rented out for meetings, workshops, seminars, wedding receptions and so on. The pamphlet also represented NTB Islamic Center as a religious tourist destination for school children at all levels. From these representations, this pamphlet positioned NTB Islamic Center not only as a religious space but also a tourist place and even a versatile place that can be used and enjoyed for those who could pay. It is, then, a tourist

object/destination and positioned who come pilgrim as a tourist.

Pamphlets, as a communication medium, are usually used to promote something. We often encounter these kinds of pamphlets at tourist destination as a tool for marketing. The existence of this medium and its contents positioned NTB Islamic Center as an inclusive and commercialized space.

In addition to the pamphlet, the NTB Islamic Center also uses a website. The Islamic Center website has been visited 46,531 times since its first posting covering the Khazanah Ramadhan in 2017 and posted on May 25, 2017.

It is very active in posting their activities, especially the activities on the national level.



**Figure 2. The front-page of NTB Islamic Center Website**

This site mostly contained from NTB Islamic Center activities, mostly religious activities. It was produced by UPT Islamic Center to provide information daily activities such as the schedule of praying, the schedule of dialog after praying, the Friday praying and also yearly activities like Khazanah Ramadhan, Bazaar, several exhibitions, Tabligh Akbar, Idul Fitri and Idul Adha praying and so on. But, the front page of this site shows some familiar logos that identify NTB Islamic Center as a tourist destination. They were logo of Pesona Indonesia and Pesona Lombok Sumbawa.

Pesona Indonesia is Indonesian brand for tourism. This brand was initiated by Indonesian Ministry of Tourism. In addition to the Pesona Indonesia logo, there is also the Logo of Pesona Lombok Sumbawa, that is an annual event held by the West Nusa Tenggara Tourism Office. This event aimed to attract tourists through several activities held in several tourist destinations in Lombok and Sumbawa. This event has entered its fifth year in 2018. So, these logos positioned the religious activities contained by the website as the activities in term of tourism.

Other NTB Islamic Center mediations are carried out through social media. The Islamic Center used several social media tools

that are popular in Indonesia; Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. The Official Facebook of NTB Islamic Center doesn't describe much about NTB Islamic Center even though this page has been loved by 8,413 accounts and followed by 9,656 Facebook users since it was first created on May 31, 2017. This account contains a lot of lecture documentation. The information that can be obtained in this account includes lecturers at prayer times, imams, discussion or studies. Most of the content displayed contains lectures filled by ustadz, as well as large guests from home and abroad. In contrast to the website which has not been actively posted, so far the Islamic Center Facebook account is still actively posting lectures. The last posting was conducted in May 2019 where the content contained Live Prayer activities during the month of Ramadan, Prayer Time and other religious activities.

Instagram is one of the very active media used by Islamic Center administrators in mediating their activities. The activities that posted was include both religious activities to non-religious activities. The first posting was done on May 12, 2017. It was the photo Competition and VLOG competition with prizes of millions of rupiah. It held by collaboration between NTB Islamic Center with

Republika Online. This first post was an invitation from the Islamic Center Manager so that the community could participate in the competition and to introduce the Islamic Center in NTB through Republika Online.



**Figure 3. Instagram of NTB Islamic Center**

Figure 3 is one of picture published in Instagram of NTB Islamic Center. It was not a picture of religious activity; it was captured students with UNRAM (University of Mataram) uniform and captioned by a confirmation of NTB Islamic Center management that the Islamic Center was ready and safe to be used again. Although the sentence shows that the Islamic Center is safe for religious activities, tower tours and other activities, but the photo displayed was a photo of a student taking a photo on the minaret, meaning that this medium has legitimated the Islamic Center as a tourism space

In this post, it can be seen that the manager wants to allay travelers' fears of coming to the NTB Islamic Center due to the 2018 earthquake that caused severe damage to the Islamic Center. The post indicated that the NTB Islamic Center was ready to be used again, both as a place of worship, tourism, marriage or as a place for other activities. In the official Instagram account, the content posted tends to be an activity around the Islamic Center mosque where the discourse of tourism space becomes

more prominent. Confirming that the Islamic Center is ready to be used again after inspection means inviting worshippers and tourists to coming again to the Islamic Center.

Various kinds of mediation can be found through several official accounts from the Islamic Center of Mataram. Some mediation represented NTB Islamic Center as a tourist destination with the texts shown as on Instagram accounts and also online media, but there are also some texts mediated (YouTube and Facebook accounts) which legitimizes Islamic Center discourse as a place of worship by only posting religious activities.

Mediation constructed NTB Islamic Center as a tourist destination as well as religious place. This means there is a contestation in interpreting NTB Islamic Center. Apart from the contestation, this space could be explained by the Post-Islamists concept as an inclusive, open and morally safe space where the user of the room carries out a safe and happy fun activity, meaning without fear of losing their faith.

As a result, the subject formed in such a space is ambiguous. Some people understand that the NTB Islamic Center is a place of worship. For example, Raden Amir Hamzah who was met during the observation argued that he felt the Islamic Center more as a place of worship. Meanwhile, Muhammad Sofiyuddin, a student at the University of Mataram, believes that the NTB Islamic Center is a tourist spot, "For me...this place is merely like a tourist destination" (Sofiyudin, M. 2018). Nina Nurwaida Anggita Pradani, a children's book writer from Bima, received information about the Islamic Center through an article she got from the Internet that discussed the Islamic Center as a tourism destination. "The article ... mm the article continued say tourism in Lombok, yes it was about tourism, then the Islamic Center is one of tourist destination " (Pradani, N. 2018)

### **NTB Islamic Center as a Post-Islamism Site**

Post-Islamism that is meant by Asef Bayat is a project and conditions. The condition of Post-Islamism is about how the social and political conditions where 'Islamism' starts to run out of resources. 'Islamism' in this sense is a social movement that wants to maximize the application of Islamic law and teachings in all aspects of life. In post-Islamic condition, even those who are passionate about Islamism themselves begin to leave Islamism. So, the people involved in the post-Islamism project are not secular, not anti-Islam and not too non-Islamic (Heriyanto, 2015, p. 59). In this sense, Islamism has begun to be abandoned and the community has become part of the Post-Islamism project where it is not secular. The community has begun to enjoy its freedom.

However, according to Bayat, the emergence of Post-Islamism did not rule out the possibility that we could witness the process of

Islamization and Post-Islamization going together (Heriyanto, 2015, p. 60). Such is the case in seeing the NTB Islamic Center as a space for Post-Islamism. The Post-Islamism space in this study is seen as a space that is not at all exclusive, not secular and open to other ideologies. The discourse of NTB Islamic Center as a place of religion and tourist attractions is a manifestation of an inclusive space because it brings together transcendent religious activities with "leisure" activities or what we called by 'tourism'.

Not only that, the Islamic Center opened its gates to the public including for non-Muslim tourists, but with the condition of closing 'aurat' (the part of our body that have to be covered under Islamic law). We can see both of Islamism and post-Islamic tendencies going together at the NTB Islamic Center when tourists are allowed to enter the Islamic Center to travel (post-Islamization) but on the other hand they must obey the prevailing Islamic law, which is closing the *aurat* (Islamism).

In this condition, the Islamic Discourses in tourism such as "Halal Tourism", "Islamic Tourism" legitimize the NTB Islamic Center as a post-Islamic space. Travelers who come to the NTB Islamic Center are free to choose whether he comes as a congregation of the Hubbul Wathan mosque who is obedient to God or a tourist who wants to enjoy the beauty of the building and fulfill his pleasures. However, halal tourism is a practice of Islamism when tourism activities are carried out based on Islamic law. Graburn (2001) wrote that modern tourism is equivalent to religious activities (pilgrimage) carried out by traditional communities, that is, people who are afraid of God.

To put NTB Islamic Center as analogous like Teheran post-Islamic space may be dangerous, as there are many contextual different between NTB and Teheran. But there

is one significant condition in which we could rely our argument. In 2016, NTB was marked by BNPT as the red zone of terrorism. This red zone predicate was conveyed by the Head of the Indonesian BNPT Inspector General of Police M Tito Karnavian during a Working Visit to the NTB in last March, 2016. Meanwhile, NTB Police Chief, Drs. Umar Septono confirmed what was conveyed by the Head of the BNPT RI, Inspector General of Police. Tito Karnavian, is quite evident from the many terrorists arrested in Poso, some of whom are from Bima Regency (Arifin Zainal. 2016).

## Conclusion

Islamic Center in Indonesia is the adoption of Western culture. We argue that the rise of Islamic Center discourse in Indonesia allows a religious place to be multifunctional

place, that is post-Islamic place. This study takes the case of the NTB Islamic Center where it was developed into a religious place as well as a place of leisure. Space/place is depended on how it is mediated and this study proves that mediations activities has constructed NTB Islamic Center as Post Islamic space.

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